

MEDITATIONS
ON
EPHESIANS

By

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PREFACE

—Wide and diversified is the work belonging to the Church of Christ. In the household of God there is no pillow for the indolent. The term, 'an idle Christian', involves a contradiction. It has scarcely more meaning than a rayless sun—a waveless ocean—a noiseless waterfall—a rose without perfume. In this community each member has his appointed place. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," is the universal rule. The final welcome is, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

But my present object restricts thought to pastoral work. The selection of its subject arose from desire to sanctify Family Worship. He is the best of friends who helps his friend to pray. It may be presumed that such worship is an established institution in every Christian household. Countless are the resulting blessings. Its neglect would be grievous shame—base ingratitude— and sad loss. It is scarcely possible to conceive an exercise more sweet—more happy—more edifying. Many and loud are the calls to it. For what spiritual joy can be greater than for the members of a house to unite in offering grateful praise for the common blessings which each morning and evening should commemorate, and to combine in joint supplication for protection from the perils which the day and night may bring. Especial needs will continually occur. Rich is the mercy that we are permitted with united cry to bring such need before the Throne of Grace.

Family Worship is not restricted to prayer and praise. Spiritual instruction should be sought—a portion of the Word should be read and opened out in simplicity and reverence. The Bible should have its due place. Here is a Book suited for every age and every station. No period can say that there is no further room for its instructions. The AGED have not advanced beyond its sacred teaching. The YOUNGEST should be like Timothy, early instructed in the truths

which are able to make wise unto salvation. The RICH may gather here treasures of knowledge surpassing all earthly pelf. The POOR may receive wisdom which may enrich them to eternal life. The highest GENIUS may find revelations which no intellect of man could have devised. The SIMPLEST in mind may learn the story of redeeming love. Ignorance of Scripture is the malady and the misery of this age. It is alike its peril and its shame. The man who is a walking Bible is a grand power. Thus there is no household which does not need Bible-teaching; and there should be no Family Worship in which such is not imparted.

This volume is designed to contribute aid to these readings. It is therefore needless to say that its method and arrangement are most simple. It is confined to impressing in familiar terms the grand themes of the text. It strays not into diffuse amplification. It only solicits attention to what the Word declares. All attempts to 'display of learning', if such had been possible, are utterly rejected. Here is no show of erudition; nor controversial discussion of profound doctrines. The main desire is to open out and enforce what God has been pleased to reveal. There may be seeming repetition, but the repetition only reflects the revelations of the text. May the Holy Spirit bless the portion here selected!

SECTION 1

Ephesians 1:1-14; Spiritual Blessings in Christ

Ephesians 1:1. "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

Two main considerations meet us in this verse. (1.) The designation of Paul, "An Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." (2.) The designation of the converts whom he addresses, "The saints and the faithful in Christ Jesus." While each is examined may the Spirit by His mighty power and love pour light into our longing souls!

Here in the vestibule, a preliminary thought occurs. Scripture here in the forefront places the ever blessed Jesus. In this verse He stands forward as the grand object on which faith should gaze. Of whom is Paul an Apostle? Of Jesus Christ. Who are the saints? The faithful in Christ Jesus. Take Christ from this verse, and the Apostle and the saints alike sink into insignificance. To remove Him would be to blot the sun out of the skies. Let Him therefore always be foremost in our view. Let it be our firm conclusion that apart from Him faith could not live. Without Him we would be without God in the world—without hope—without light—without foretaste of heaven.

We begin with PAUL'S DESIGNATION OF HIMSELF. He speaks of his office and of his call to it.

(1.) His office. He is an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He was called distinctly and directly by immediate voice from heaven to give himself to the blessed work of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, and bearing testimony to the glorious truth that Jesus is sent by God to seek and to save that which was lost. The direct commission from God Himself, without the intervention of human instrumentality, constituted Him an Apostle.

Let a brief digression turn our thoughts to our own position. The study of Scripture, without personal improvement, is vain. To grow in grace—to advance in life-giving knowledge, should be our aim in all this study.

While we adore God for having thus raised up and enabled Paul to gather in His people and to instruct His Church to the last times, and while we read with reverence his writings as immediate revelations from the Father of Lights, let us bear in mind, that there is a sense in which *every believer is called and appointed to be a minister of his God*. "You shall be named the Priests of the Lord—men shall call you the Ministers of our God." It is written, "You shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." Believers are "built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ." They are "a chosen generation—a royal priesthood." Jesus has made them "kings and priests unto God and His Father." Let us then walk worthy of our high vocation, and live always ministering at our Altar, who is Jesus Christ. On Him let us present our bodies living sacrifices; on Him let us offer the calves of our lips, hallowed praises; and let our whole life be a proclamation of His truth.

(2.) Let us advance now to Paul's appointment to apostleship. He was called by the will of God. He continually insists upon the truth, that he took not this honor upon himself. He was "an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." This will of God is eternal love to the Church. It is the originating cause of the everlasting covenant of grace. It foreordains every blessing which that covenant contains for the heirs of promise. To do this will, Christ came. "By this will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." By this will Apostles and Prophets, and Evangelists and Pastors, and Teachers, are called and qualified and arranged. By this will their word is made effectual, and we receive grace to believe. If we are thus blessed with all spiritual blessings, let us adore that deep source from which these precious streams flow.

What volumes of unspeakable comfort are treasured up in the truth that God's will is unchangeable! To the considerate mind it seems almost self-evident that God must be "without variableness, or shadow of turning." This constitutes that infinite serenity which is one of the grand elements of Deity. It is an essential attribute of the Governor of the universe. While mutability, fluctuation, uncertainty, and change miserably appertain to the inhabitants of this fallen world and all their concerns, the inscription over the Palace of the King of Kings is, "I am that I am." It is blessed to know and realize this truth. Happy are the hours passed in giving thanks for the faithful sayings—"I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever." "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

Ephesians 1:1. "To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

We proceed to the designation of those who are here addressed. They are termed saints, and faithful in Christ Jesus. It is highly important to obtain clear views of all Gospel-terms—and not least so of those which describe the state and character of true believers. Ignorance may here lead to fatal self-deception. Many cry "Peace, peace, when there is no peace;" and "feed on ashes, and cannot deliver their soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in our right hand?" May we be delivered from all such error, to the glory of God in us!

(1.) The word "saints" imports people who are *set apart and consecrated to the service and glory of God*. They were fore-ordained from all eternity in the counsels of heaven to this blessed state. Their predestination is the cause of their call in due time by the Spirit of God to come out and to be separate, and to be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." When Paul addresses the believers at Rome as "beloved of God, called to be saints," he places the love of God as the precursor of calling. We learn a similar truth from the arranged teaching of the following text. "God, who has

saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Hence it is evident that the heirs of eternal love are partakers of this distinguishing benefit.

When the fullness of the time is come, the Spirit of God brings them as willing subjects into the kingdom of grace. We may, without violence to truth, apply to them the prophetic words, "I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise."

As this call of God is by the Spirit of holiness, so it is unto a life of holiness. Concerning the former conversation, the old man is put off, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and the new man is put on, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Hence believers are manifested to their own consciences, and to all around them, as the saints of the Most High. They are no more of the world. They reject its hollow and selfish principles—they scorn its debasing maxims—they turn from its ungodly ways—they despise its vain pursuits—they rise high above its mis-called pleasures. It is evident that they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" that their one desire is increasing conformity to the will and image of God.

(2.) We now advance to the second term. They are "the faithful in Christ Jesus." Three ideas are here involved. Believers are no more in the Wicked One—no more in the world—but in Christ—engrafted into Him as a branch into the stem of the tree; rooted in Him as the tree in the earth; built into Him as the superstructure into the foundation; one with Him as the members with the head. They are faithful, inasmuch as they have received the precious gift of faith, and "abound therein with thanksgiving." They look to the

atoning blood, and to the justifying righteousness of Christ as the alone ground of their salvation. They are faithful, inasmuch as they no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. They gladly and unreservedly devote their bodies, souls, and spirits to His service. The humble and honest enquiry of each is continually, "Lord, what will You have me to do?"

Are we saints and faithful in Christ Jesus, according to the scriptural meaning of these terms? Blessed are they who can respond that though miserable sinners in themselves, yet by the grace of God they have this fellowship with His people! Soon shall the saints shine forth in glory, and they who are faithful unto death shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Ephesians 1:2. "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Apostle proceeds to express the desire of his soul for the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. He prays that they may be enriched with "grace and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the commencement of every Epistle to the Churches; these gifts, therefore, must be of pre-eminent and incomparable value. Though Paul grew in spiritual attainment and experience, still, to his last hour, his aspirations did not rise higher than "grace and peace." It is good to be thus taught what are the most excellent blessings which we should seek for ourselves and others. May the Lord grant that we may give Him no rest until they reign in us and all for whom we utter prayer!

Before we examine these gifts separately, it is important to observe the part which the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity bear in them. Though the Holy Spirit is not directly named, He is distinctly included. There can be no work on the soul but by His presence and effectual power. When grace is given, He implants it—when peace

exists, He creates it. All spiritual blessings, and therefore grace and peace, are the effects of His inworking. The existence of spiritual life proves the agency of the life-giving Spirit. This Spirit is from Jesus, and from the Father through Jesus; so that in each spiritual gift the love and energies of the Triune Jehovah co-operate. How greatly are our thoughts of grace and peace enlarged, when we reflect that all the Omnipotence of heaven is exerted in their bestowal!

(1.) Grace. This is a large term; in its length and breadth it is co-extensive with the infinitudes of the Giver. It comprehends both the source and the streams of salvation. In its origin it is the springing up, in its effects it is the going forth, of free love to bless undeserving, ruined sinners. It is the spontaneous goodwill of God towards the unworthy and undone, manifested by His good work for them and in them. But when we pray for grace, we assume His goodwill towards us, and we mainly desire His good work in us. Rightly to estimate the extent of this work, we should estimate the extent of our need. For instance, we need to have our faith in Christ strengthened and invigorated—we need to have the eyes of our understanding enlightened that we may see the eternal love of God—the preciousness of Jesus Christ—the glory of His finished redemption—His suitableness to our ruined state. We need to have our trust confirmed in His faithful word, and sure promises, and unerring guidance. We need power to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, that we may trample them beneath our feet. We need sanctification in body, soul, and spirit, that we may be entirely conformed to the image of Jesus. We need help in prayer and praise, and ordinances and duties—in the family, in private, at home, abroad, in every hour of our lives, in the solemn period of our dying. Such, and manifold more, are our necessities. For all these there is a supply provided in the Everlasting Covenant, and we ask for this supply whenever we pray for grace. Let us supplicate more fervently, for *we have a God of all grace, seated on His throne of grace, waiting to be gracious*. If we open our mouths wide, He will fill them.

(2.) Peace. This is the precious fruit which grows on the tree of grace. It is the calm repose of the soul realizing reconciliation with God through the blood of the Lamb, and led forth in paths of righteousness by the constant guidance of the Spirit. Hence it cannot exist among the graceless. It instantly vanishes under apprehensions of wrath and terrors of conscience, or when the outbreakings of iniquity prevail, and it cannot be restored until a voice is heard from the Cross, "Your sins are forgiven—go in peace." Its abode is within the deep recesses of the heart, far beyond the reach of external troubles. "In Me you shall have peace," is an assurance not cancelled by the counter-saying, "In the world you shall have tribulation." Outward distress to the believer is as the raging billows to Noah within the Ark. Paul was serene while pain-stricken in the dungeon, and Stephen was unruffled beneath the crushing stones. It is an eternal truth that there is "joy and peace in believing."

Need I warn, that the world knows not this blessing? "There is no peace to the wicked, says my God." Therefore, be separate from the world. Need I warn, that there is a counterfeit? Therefore examine the foundations of your peace. He who cries not in spirit, "Abba, Father;" he who glories not in the Cross; he who abhors not all evil, has not received grace, and is a stranger to peace. Beloved, may grace and peace be with you, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 1:3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

The Apostle enters upon the subject of his Epistle through the vestibule of ADORATION. His soul is so filled with gratitude that copious streams of thanksgiving must find vent before other thoughts can have utterance. It is a happy state when each thought of God kindles the flame of holy rapture in the heart. They know not God as the God of their salvation who delight not in Him as their "exceeding joy." This song is heard throughout the kingdom of

grace, "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."

Let us now consider, (1.) To whom; (2.) For what, blessings are here ascribed. May our hearts burn within us while we thus meditate!

(1.) To WHOM are blessings ascribed? The answer is ready. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the chosen title, by which God would be known and loved, and addressed, and praised in the Gospel. Our elder brethren adored God as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob; the Lord God of their Fathers." Such titles are indeed full of consolation. They speak of Covenant-relationship, of faithfulness, and truth; and they awaken confiding trust. But our title teaches deeper and more precious truth.

Our God is announced as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ." The God who appointed Him to the Mediatorial work, and sustained Him and accepted Him. Our God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; Father, not by creation, not by adoption, but by eternal generation; therefore Jesus must be one in nature with the Father, and consequently God over all, blessed for evermore; able to deal with God in the work of atoning for all our sins; able to save us to the very uttermost. In addition to these consolations, we know that we are one with Christ, very members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. His God, therefore, must be our God—His Father our Father. And thus spoke Jesus, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."

(2.) For WHAT are blessings ascribed? Because He "has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Oh! for an outpouring of realizing faith, to enable us to grasp tightly this glorious assurance! The believer is blessed with all spiritual blessings. Such is his present portion. As to temporal gifts, such as health, worldly possessions, and distinctions, he may be poor and needy; the absence of these may be the riches of the inner man. But

one treasure, even all spiritual blessings, is surely his. Do you ask, How can this be? The reply is at hand. When God gave the heirs of salvation unto Jesus, He gave Jesus unto them. "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." He gave Himself unto them. "This God is our God forever and ever." He gave the Holy Spirit unto them. "Know you not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, who you have of God?" Moreover, He gave unto them all things contained in the Everlasting Covenant of Grace. Is it not evident that he, who has the Triune Jehovah as his property, is blessed with all spiritual blessings? What is his spiritual need? Let him ask, and he has a supply; let him open his hand, and it is filled. But all believers do not realize this. Why? Because their faith is weak; the hand hangs down which ought to be extended to receive. The inheritor of vast estates who will not be persuaded of, or will not use his wealth, is the picture of the man who has all blessings as his own, but wilfully languishes in ignorance and blindness.

These blessings are in heavenly places. This expression tells us that our storehouse is heaven. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights." The Father is in heaven, in whom they originate; Jesus is in heaven, through whom they descend; the Spirit is in heaven, by whom they are bestowed. They are heavenly-place blessings, because they uplift the thoughts and affections and desires above the filth of earth, and bear them far away to regions of celestial purity. They are heavenly-place blessings, because they fit us daily for the "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for us."

Being thus in heavenly places, they are SECURE. Satan cannot storm that fortress; our own evil hearts cannot betray it to the foe. Oh, my soul, seek you heavenly-place blessings—seek them with the persuasion, that they are your own inheritance.

Finally, this blessedness is all in Christ. All salvation, and all appertaining to it, is in Him. Without Christ—apart from Him—there is nothing but misery and the curse. In Him we possess a

blessing God, exalting us to a blessed heaven. To Him let us ascribe blessings forever and ever. Happy the day which finds the believer thus employed!

Ephesians 1:4. "According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

Deep and copious is the spring from which the blessedness of the saints flows—grand is the tree which yields this fruit. If the question be put, why are they inheritors of all spiritual blessings? an inspired reply is thus given by the Apostle—Because God has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world. Their eternal election is thus distinctly announced as the foundation on which the goodly superstructure is raised. Believers are blessed because chosen. They are chosen to be blessed. This truth lies at the root of all God's dealings with His people. Let there be no surprise, then, that it receives a prominent place in this Epistle.

Similarly we find that Peter's first words tell the Church that they are "Elect according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." We are, also, prepared for the bitter hatred of Satan against it, and the violent rage with which the ungodly in every age have assailed it. But how can we account for the slowness of believers to receive it—their timidity in avowing it—their cowardice in frequently surrendering it without defense to ignorant gainsayers? It is a fearful thing to be ashamed of any truth of God. O my soul, do you give to it, in your meditations, this Apostolic prominence—conceal not in a corner what the Spirit places in the first rank of His faithful sayings.

This verse states (1.) the doctrine of Election, "He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." (2.) Its purpose, "that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love."

(1.) The DOCTRINE of election is among the deep mysteries of our God— but the meaning of it is as clear and precise as language can render it. God has, from all eternity, before the foundations of the world were laid, in the counsels of His wisdom and love, selected out of the mass of mankind a portion to be unto Himself vessels of mercy, honor, and glory.

It is impious trifling with the words of God, to object that Gospel-election is merely the election of the Gentiles to privileges hitherto confined to the Jews. The passage before us contains the refutation—for here Paul, himself a Jew, speaks of himself as concerned with the Gentile-saints of Ephesus in God's eternal choice. The choice, therefore, must be of certain individuals from among the Jews, together with certain individuals from among the Gentiles, to effectual calling and the glories of heaven.

It is likewise a strange folly to maintain that Election is only to national privileges and external advantages. Is it not on the contrary written here, and on almost every mention of the truth, that the choice is unto internal, separating, and distinguishing grace? Are all in Christian lands—are all the members of pure Churches—are all the partakers of divine Sacraments "holy and without blame before God in love?" Far from it. But such is the distinguishing character of the elect. Hence Election is the foreordaining of a definite remnant to be brought through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth unto life eternal.

We are chosen in Christ. As Jesus was chosen of the Father to represent Him unto His people, and to represent His people unto Him; so believers are chosen to be the members of His body—the Spouse to whom He is united—to be washed in His blood, clothed in His righteousness, sanctified by His Spirit, conformed to His image. *Thus every thought, and every act of redeeming love, from first to last, centers in Christ.*

(2.) The PURPOSE of election is "that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love." Holiness is the nature and essence of God. Everything which proceeds from Him must be perfect and unblemished holiness. The decree to save is a decree to make an end of all iniquity, and to beautify with the robe of righteousness. We have then an infallible test by which we may make our calling and election sure. The test is our inward delight in God's law, and utter abhorrence of all evil. If we are not assured that the Spirit of love, which is the fulfilling of the law, reigns in our hearts, we can have no comfortable evidence that we belong to His chosen people. If we love Him, it is because He first loved us. If we choose Him as our chief joy, it is because He first chose us as His portion. But if the affections of our souls do not follow hard after Him in love, we have no cause to hope that we have part or lot in His eternal choice. It is only through the links of personal holiness that we can trace our way back to the first link of Election, and onward to the last link of glory.

Happy are the servants of the Most High God, who realize that they are holy and without blame before Him in love! Let them receive to their comfort the blessed testimony of this verse.

Ephesians 1:5. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

There is admirable symmetry in the structure of Gospel-truth. The beautiful harmony and connection proclaim the heavenly Craftsman. This is clearly exemplified in the passage now before us. There is no statement in the sentence disjointed or detached—perfect order unites the whole. All spiritual blessings are ours, because we are chosen by God unto holiness, and we are chosen unto holiness because "we are predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

It is evident that predestination unto sonship secures the inheritance of all spiritual blessings, and includes election unto holiness, and blamelessness in love. Here we see the unity of truth throughout this remarkable announcement.

Let us proceed then to the grand point of the verse, "predestination unto the adoption of children." Behold our condition when we are born into this world. We are children of wrath, because in the curse denounced against disobedience all the family of Adam is involved. We were in his loins when he sinned, and when the righteous sentence was passed upon him. Hence we drew our first breath in the prison-house of Satan, awaiting the execution of the holy decree against our imputed sin. And can it be, that we shall be called forth from our dungeons, and the chains shall be removed from our hands, and that we shall be arrayed in royal garments of spotless purity, and be received as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty? Yes, verily, for it has pleased God to predestinate us unto this adoption.

Behold again our natural condition. Every trace and feature and lineament of the Divine image in our souls is utterly defaced. Righteousness is expelled, and corruption universally prevails. The inner man is hatred to God and all His ways; it is in vile allegiance to Satan and all his lusts. And can it be, that this old man shall be crucified, and that a Divine nature shall be implanted, and that the likeness of God shall be restored, and conformity to the image of Christ wrought in us? Yes, verily, for it has pleased God to predestinate us unto this adoption.

As the result of this eternal purpose, in due time the life-giving Spirit is sent into our hearts, the heavenly nature is conferred, and we are adopted into the family of God. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Again, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." They are predestinated to be sons, and therefore the Spirit takes them under His holy guidance.

They, however, must not rejoice in this decree who cannot find in their souls indubitable proof that they are true children of God. The proofs cannot be mistaken. One is FAITH—"For as many as receive Jesus, to them gives He power to become the sons of God; even to those who believe on His Name." Again, "We are all," that is, we are all manifested to be, "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Another is PRAYER—"We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Also LOVE to God, and devotedness to His glory—"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." If these lovely features do not shine forth in our souls, let us refuse comfort, and rather tremble exceedingly, lest our sad lot should be in the family of the unbelieving, the prayerless, and the unrighteous. Let us not turn from the warning of Jesus, "If God were your Father, you would love Me—but you are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He who is of God, hears God's words; you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God."

But on the contrary, with what unspeakable comfort should they rejoice, who can realize that "the Spirit bears witness with their spirits that they are the children of God." Great is the PRESENT privilege—great beyond conception the future exaltation! "*Now* are we the Sons of God." Therefore in all our infirmities and sins we are pitifully spared. "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him." "I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him." Therefore all our prayers for grace and help are answered. "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." Therefore, we shall never lack. He is an unnatural parent who provides not for his offspring. The Lord, who is our Shepherd, is our Father; need is far from us. Let us cast away all undue anxieties. Our heavenly Father knows that we have need of all these things.

Great, also, will be the FUTURE exaltation. "It does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall

be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Like Him now we are in spirit—like Him then we shall be in glorified body; fit to sit with Him even on His throne. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." May the Lord hasten the day, when He shall come to be thus glorified in His saints, and shine forth amid adoring Hallelujahs, as "the firstborn among many brethren!"

Ephesians 1:6. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

Paul delights to trace every spiritual blessing to its true and only source—the free, unmerited, sovereign grace of God. He is exceedingly jealous of, and zealous for, the honor and supremacy of the gracious Giver. He well knew that man's best righteousness was but a filthy rag—and his holiest thought not better than abomination in the sight of Him who could not look upon imperfection. The highest merits of fallen creatures could not claim more than place among the lost. Therefore he cannot speak of any part of the wonderful work of salvation, without exclaiming "Grace to it! Grace to it!"

The present verse affords a notable instance. He has proclaimed our election in Christ before the foundation of the world, and our predestination by Him unto the adoption of children to Himself; but he cannot relinquish these themes without adding, "to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

Among the many thoughts which instantly spring from these words, let us select the following— (1.) God has made us accepted in the Beloved. (2.) This, as well as every other thought towards the redeemed, is an act of glorious grace. (3.) This grace is entitled to our praise. May the Spirit reveal to us the amazing mysteries!

(1.) God has made us accepted in the Beloved. Who is this Beloved? A voice from heaven designates Jesus. "This is my beloved Son, in

whom I am well pleased." The Spirit declares that "God has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son," or 'the Son of His love'. Jesus Himself says, "I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." And again, "Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." Jesus is the Beloved of heaven, because of His own essential and perfect holiness and oneness with the Father, and also because He is the Mediator of the new covenant, and the Redeemer of the chosen seed.

He is also the Beloved of His people. They each exclaim, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." They add, "whom having not seen, we love." They sincerely appeal to Him, "Lord, You know all things—You know that we love You." O my soul! do you love Jesus? He is worthy to be entwined with the cords of love round every fiber of the heart. He is worthy to occupy its every recess, and to move in its very motion. Happy is each one who can add, "Lord, I love You, and adore—Oh! for grace to love You more!" In the beloved Jesus, God makes us accepted.

By nature our state calls for rejection. Everything in our original condition is vileness and sin, and deserves wrath and condemnation. If we had power to help ourselves, we have not the will. We hate the light—we love our evil ways, and after them we will go. Such is our condition, when God makes us accepted. Because we are sons in His eternal purpose, He sends the Spirit of His Son to take away the heart of stone—to give the heart of flesh—to convince of sin and need and danger—to show us the preciousness of Jesus—to draw us to the fountain of His purifying blood—to lead us, enrobed in His righteousness, to the arms of our reconciled Father.

Can He reject such as approach Him in this Name, and in these merits? Oh, no! Ready acceptance awaits them. He accepts their persons, because they are cleansed and sanctified in His Beloved. He accepts their services, because they are freewill offerings on the altar of His Beloved. He accepts their prayers and praises, because they are perfumed with the incense of His Beloved's merits. By the

faith which is given them, they become one with the Beloved, part and parcel of Himself. Therefore they take their place in heaven as accepted children.

(2.) This, as well as all other dealings towards the redeemed, shines forth "to the praise of the glory of His grace." What contrived the means of acceptance? What fixed upon the persons of the accepted? What made them willing in the day of love and of power? Say, O my soul, can you discover any other motive which could influence God thus to bring you home to embrace of His acceptance, but the grace which is His glory? Has not all His work for you, and in you, been to the praise of the glory of His grace?

(3.) It follows immediately that this grace is entitled our praise. Let us lift high the voice of adoring thanksgiving. It becomes us to be thankful. God should inhabit the praises of Israel. We praise You, O blessed Lord God, for so freely loving us before the foundation of the world! We praise You for writing our names in the Lamb's Book of Life! We praise You for giving us to Jesus, as His portion and spouse forever! We praise You for accepting His blood as our ransom, and for enrobing us in the garments of His righteousness. We praise You for calling us by Your Spirit, and opening our eyes to see the full provisions of redeeming love! We praise You for keeping us by Your power, through faith, unto eternal life! These blessings are all to the praise of the glory of Your grace, wherein You have made us accepted in the Beloved!

Ephesians 1:7. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

It is a heavenly exercise, under the light of the Spirit, to review the blessings which are freely given to us in Christ Jesus. We thus anticipate the hallowed joys of our eternal home, and are alike refreshed and sanctified in our progress there. The blessing of blessings is before us in our present verse—redemption through the blood of Jesus—the forgiveness of our sins. Let it be opened out by

the enquiry (1.) why it is needed, and (2.) how it is obtained. While we advance, may we realize in our souls that the glorious blessing is our own!

(1.) Who needs redemption? The reply is "those who have forfeited their inheritance." Is not our inheritance lost? Yes.—As natural descendants of Adam, we are outcasts and aliens from the family of God; our right and title to every spiritual gift, to every heavenly hope, is forfeited. We are the poorest and neediest of all the creation of God—a withering curse has blighted every faculty and power—we live wretched among the wretched for a few days, in the downward course which leads to "the blackness of darkness forever." Thus we need redemption.

To understand how we obtain it, we should clearly see how our inheritance was lost. The ruin was entirely through sin. God cannot look upon an unclean thing. His countenance is averted from all who are defiled by iniquity. The sin-soiled cannot enjoy the light of His countenance, nor stand in His presence. Thus it is through sin that we are disinherited. To obtain redemption sin must be removed. This is accomplished by our Redeemer, through the shedding of His blood. The right of redemption belonged to Him, because He is our nearest kinsman—the elder brother of our family—the first-born among many brethren. Thus qualified as bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh, He pays the only price which could avail, His own most precious blood. This blood cleanses the guilt and defilement of our every iniquity—the sins which were as scarlet become white as snow—the crimson-dye becomes white as wool. Thus the redeemed of the Lord have forgiveness of their sins, and regain their inheritance of present and eternal favor.

Another illustration is at hand. The question is repeated—Who needs redemption? The reply is, "They who are taken captive by a mightier foe." This foe is the Devil, who has succeeded in casting his iron chains around our whole race. His fetters hold us fast in his prison-house, and we are alike without strength and desire to burst

the bonds. These fetters are sin. Sin gives the Devil his power over our souls and bodies. Until this be removed, we cannot come forth from the misery and torment of his dungeon.

(2.) Redemption from this bondage is effected by the removal of sins. Again behold Jesus our Redeemer. "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." He is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all," and He has carried the whole load of sin into a land of forgetfulness. Thus the chain is broken by which the Devil held us, and we obtain redemption through the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sins.

Let us notice the holy assurance with which Paul claims this redemption as his own. He knew that God had made Jesus unto the Church "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." He knew that he had received the gift of the Spirit, by which he had been translated from captivity into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Hence he could realize that the inheritance of reconciliation and all blessedness had been made his possession. Hence he could rejoice in deliverance from the thralldom of Satan, who no longer had dominion over him; and he could triumph in hope of bruising him under his feet shortly. Oh! that believers would understand the liberty with which the Redeemer has made them free, and live as those who are ransomed unto eternal life, and made more than conquerors over spiritual wickedness in high places. This abiding persuasion would give them a noble exaltation above the paltry trifles of this ruined world, and arm them with heroic boldness against the assaults of an enemy who has lost all power to prevail.

Paul cannot speak of this redeeming work without giving glory to the grace of God. He adds, this deliverance is "according to the riches of His grace." How blessed is the thought that God is rich in grace! His throne is a throne of grace. His scepter is a scepter of grace. His covenant is a covenant of grace. His thoughts are thoughts of grace. His ways are ways of grace. His word is the word

of grace. His treasure-house is stored with grace. Hence all His gifts and manifestations to His people are results of grace. Grace called Jesus to His work. Grace found the ransom. Grace accepted it. Grace determined who would be redeemed. Grace made them willing in the day of power. Grace keeps them through faith unto salvation. Oh! the riches of the grace of our God! While we have breath let us extol and magnify it.

But some dislike and reject the term. Let such consider their need as banished, despoiled, imprisoned sinners. Can they restore or deliver themselves? If not, how can they be redeemed except by grace? There is redemption only through the blood of Jesus, which is according to the riches of God's grace.

Ephesians 1:8. "Wherein He has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence."

Paul knew that salvation was by grace, therefore he never wearied in proclaiming this truth. It was the work to which he was called, and from which nothing could deter him; a work far dearer to him than life itself. Speaking of bonds and afflictions, he says, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." In our present verse he renews the theme.

May we delight in hearing, as he did in speaking—may we feast upon the testimony as the very joy and rejoicing of our souls!

Having mentioned the riches of God's grace, he now adds, "Wherein He has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." Three topics here claim attention. (1.) God's grace is abundant. (2.) We are the subjects of it—it abounds toward us. (3.) Its actings are in all wisdom and prudence.

(1.) God's grace is ABUNDANT. This follows directly from His nature. Infinity is His essence. There are limits to every created intelligence. Every object in the universe around us is confined within measure and bounds— but He, who inhabits eternity, is without breadth, and length, and depth, and height. We should divest our minds of all contracted thoughts of God. They are dishonoring to His majesty, and rob our souls of enlightened comfort. We are too prone in our ignorance to measure His love, and mercy, and pardon, and grace, and all His other attributes by what we see and experience in our own sphere. This is a miserable error. We should take the enlarged delight of knowing, that when God loves, He loves like God, infinitely—when He shows mercy, He shows mercy infinitely—when He pardons, He pardons infinitely—when He exercises grace, He exercises it infinitely. He is "abundant in goodness and truth."

We read, "there is no searching of His understanding." The same is true of His grace. Is it not incessantly pardoning countless multitudes of sins in us, and in countless multitudes of our fallen race? If it could be surpassed, would not the hourly iniquities of our lives exceed it? But it is so abundant, that the deep floods of our ungodliness cannot overwhelm it. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. As there is "plenteous redemption," so too, there is plenteous grace. The treasury is inexhaustible—the Giver never wearies in distributing. Oh! that we were never weary in hastening "boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Oh! that we were never weary of meditating on that faithful saying, "If by one man's offence death reigned by one—much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."

(2.) We are the SUBJECTS of grace; it abounds towards us. The fallen angels are not ignorant of God's grace, but their knowledge only aggravates their misery. They see fallen man freely recovered from the lowest depths of vileness, while they are "reserved in

everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Christ-rejecting worldlings hear of grace, but they revile the term, and "do despite to the Spirit of grace." The language of their hearts and lives is, 'If salvation be of grace, away with it! away with it! we leave it for the dreaming enthusiast and visionary fanatic.' But the saints of the Most High say not so. Rather, they bless Him who has made them to differ, and they gratefully ascribe every step, from first to last, in their Zionward ascent, to that "grace of our Lord, which is exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

(3.) The ACTINGS of grace are in wisdom and prudence. If we would learn the glories of God—the only-wise and all-wise—we must read them in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the wisdom of God, as well as the power of God.

How does God reveal to the principalities and powers in heavenly places His manifold wisdom? By His provisions for, and dealings with, His Church. And all these provisions and dealings are in Christ Jesus. Let us briefly glance at a few particulars. The whole theme of salvation is the offspring of Divine wisdom. Not all the intelligence of angels and men could have devised a plan to save the guilty soul, and still retain inviolate, no, greatly magnify, all the attributes of Jehovah. But God in His wisdom called Jesus to the work, who as God and man is able to make full satisfaction for all iniquity, and to bind in harmonious ties justice, mercy, holiness, and truth. In His atonement they all shine forth in redoubled splendor, and each reflects and multiplies the luster of the whole. Let us consider how perfectly the Law is satisfied, and every promise, and every threat established, and we shall see that in Christ Jesus grace abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence.

Divine wisdom also is displayed in the gracious dealings with each individual soul. Man is a very complex machine—made up of countless passions, inclinations, appetites, desires, motives, lusts; the heart is wily and treacherous—Satan at first reigns there with

vigilance and power. But when the fullness of the time is come, God in Christ casts out this enemy, and wins this heart, and retains it to Himself. But how great is the wisdom displayed in adapting and applying the means! Providential dispensations, the timely warning, the preacher's voice, the treasures of the Word, the friendly counsel, the affectionate interest—all in order are used to accomplish the end. Thus, under the Spirit, life is imparted and maintained. What saint, reviewing God's ways, will not exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Ephesians 1:9. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself."

Paul here speaks of the revelation of a mystery which God had purposed in Himself. It is a profitable task first to ascertain the mind of the Spirit in the passage, and then to seek improvement for our souls. Lord! for Your Name's sake, teach us!

The following verse declares, that the will, so long hidden from men, was God's purpose "to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him." The main point here intended is, that the Gentiles should be included in the call to the knowledge and faith of Jesus Christ. This truth from of old was plainly announced in the Scriptures, but scales were on the eyes of all the Jews, and they saw it not. The very notion of it seems never to have approached their understandings. Elated with their high privileges and distinctions, they regarded the poor heathen as scarcely partaking of the same flesh and blood with themselves— they believed that God had placed an eternal barrier of separation between them. On the one side were the chosen of Israel—on the other the strangers, foreigners, aliens, outcasts of the Gentiles. They reviled these Gentiles as dogs, and were persuaded that no crumb of mercy could be cast to them.

We see the indignation with which the bare idea of Gentile conversion was received, when Paul on the Castle stairs related the Lord's commission. "He said unto me, Depart, for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live." Hear too, Festus, when Paul declared to King Agrippa, "But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen-- that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

Let us refer to two other passages, in which Paul is particularly emphatic in declaring that this mystery had heretofore been wrapped in impenetrable darkness. "By revelation He made known unto me the mystery, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto the holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel." Again—"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Hence we distinctly learn the prominent thought in the Apostle's mind, when he wrote, "having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself."

Can we contemplate this mystery without devout adoration? For who are we by nature? Not the descendants of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; not of the stock of Israel, "to whom pertained the

adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." On the contrary, we spring from these outcast Gentiles. But, blessed be God, Christ has come, a light to enlighten the Gentiles! We might have been left in the condition of our early fathers, blind idolaters, bowing down to wood and stone; but upon us the true light has shone, and we are called to hear and obey the Gospel of God's grace. Oh! that to the external call might be added the soul-touching voice of the Spirit, so that we might indeed be brought from darkness to light, and translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son!

But alas! many who are Christ's followers by name are as dead to the life of God, and the saving indwelling of Jesus, as the worshipers of wood and stone. It matters not that the name is changed, if the heart remains untouched and unenlightened. "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

Let us not, however, pass from the words, "the mystery of His will," without extending our view to the whole of God's will in the sinner's salvation. Every part of it is a mystery, before which we should fall in lowly adoration. Wonderful is the appointment of Jesus to be the Surety, Substitute, Representative, Head of His Church. Wonderful is the shedding of His blood for the remission of sins. Wonderful is every provision in the covenant of grace. Wonderful is the sinner's conversion in the fullness of time. Wonderful is the approach of the weary, sin-sick soul to the blood of sprinkling.

Wonderful is the change of the nest of every unclean bird into the temple of the Holy Spirit. Wonderful is the preservation of the saints amid all the trials and temptations of this world, the hate and rage of Satan, and the treachery of their own hearts. Wonderful are their consolations and joys amid persecutions, in sorrow, sickness, death. Wonderful is their resurrection from the dead—their investiture with a weight of glory—their eternal position before the throne of God. How great the wonder that these truths should be made known to us! Many hear with the ear, but never apprehend with the mind. What

obstacles must be removed, what prejudices vanquished, before the happy believer can testify, "He has made known to me the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself."

Ephesians 1:10. "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him."

We have in this verse a glimpse of that blessed scene which shall be revealed in God's appointed time, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be manifested as the Head of His collected Church, and all the redeemed of His blood shall be assembled in one gathering around Him. Two brief observations seem needful preparatory to this spectacle.

(1.) How is this verse connected with the preceding, which declares God's purpose of calling the Gentiles to the knowledge of the Gospel? The link which unites them is not obscure. God had given many out of the heathen world unto Jesus as His jewels, and sheep, and children. The whole body of Jesus could not be complete in all its parts, until these were brought by faith into union and fellowship with their Head. The Gospel must be preached unto the Gentiles, that these might hear the glad tidings of the Savior, and come unto Him. Thus "in the dispensation of the fullness of times, God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him."

(2.) It is here said, that God will gather together in one ALL things in Christ. Is the word "all" to be taken in unlimited extent? Does it express that all who ever breathed the breath of life shall be brought into vital oneness with Christ? The dreadful contrary is among the plainest declarations of Scripture. To many will He say in the great day of the Lord, "I never knew you; depart from Me, all you that work iniquity." "Go, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." "Whoever was not found written in the

Book of Life, was cast into the lake of fire." The truth, therefore, stands confessed, that multitudes of immortal souls will not be gathered together in Christ, but being strangers to Him in time, will be punished with everlasting destruction, away from His presence forever. The conclusion, therefore, cannot be escaped, that the word "all" is to be taken in the restricted sense of all to whom it was given to believe in Christ; of all who belonged to Him by the Father's appointment; of all who became one with Him by vital, saving, purifying faith. Now, if it cannot be denied, that the word "all" in this passage does not mean universality, it follows that its meaning may be similarly confined in other sayings of Scripture. If the principle of interpretation is clear in one case, it will hold in others also. Instances need not be quoted.

From these prefatory observations we pass to the blessed, glorious announcement of the verse. In the dispensation of the fullness of times, God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him. Let us mark what a day is coming! What a gathering will speedily take place! What a gathering there will be of all that is bright, and blessed, and heavenly, and glorious! One vast, boundless company shall surround the throne of the Lamb. All the redeemed who are now in heaven—all the saints who are now on earth—all the heirs who are now in darkness—all the children of the kingdom who are yet unborn—all the myriads who have interest in the covenant of grace—all the countless multitudes who were bought by Jesus' blood—all the hosts of the angelic choir who have kept their first estate, shall be congregated into one mass of glorified beings. They shall stand extending in circle beyond circle around one center—that center Jesus, blessed for evermore. In Him they found salvation upon earth—in Him they enjoy salvation in the realms above. To Him they looked in time—on Him they look forever.

Let each enquire—Will it be MY happy portion to take my station amid this celestial throng? Is a place for me made ready in this family above? Deal honestly with conscience, and the reply is

quickly given. Do you love Jesus with all your powers? Do you count all things but loss for the excellency of His knowledge? Do you, abhorring yourself and your own righteousness, look only unto Him for pardon and acceptance? Are you one with Him by regenerating grace, loving what He loves, hating what He hates? If so, bless God, take courage, and look up. These are the features which shine in the countenance of His children. You will soon join this general assembly of the church of the first-born. You will soon sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace which shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." For this joy set before you, *think little of the troubles and sorrows of this brief pilgrimage.* "Yet a little while, and He who shall come, will come, and will not tarry." Then all sufferings will forever cease, and your eyes shall see the King in His beauty, and your voice shall join the universal chorus, ascribing "Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

Ephesians 1:11. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will."

The life and soul of religion is the realization of a personal interest in the things belonging to the kingdom of God. The grand comfort of the Gospel is not to hear that Christ has loved His sheep, and given Himself for them; but to feel privileged to say, "He has loved ME, and given Himself for ME." This truth was well known to Paul. He was not content to see afar off the rich provisions of redemption; he had drawn near and tasted that the Lord is gracious. He knew, too, that the saints at Ephesus participated in the same experience, and therefore after speaking of the general gathering together of the whole church in Christ, he could boldly remind them, "In whom also WE have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will."

He here speaks in no terms of doubt and uncertainty, but avows the assurance that the inheritance was theirs. He also distinctly adds, that to this inheritance they were predestinated and fore-appointed in the purpose of God from all eternity. On this truth we need not again enlarge. We have already seen its certainty, and the prominent place which it occupies in the revelation of God's will, as the basis of the whole structure, the spring of all the streams which flow down from heaven. Let us therefore proceed to contemplate (1.) The inheritance which believers have obtained. (2.) The grand truth that "God works all things after the counsel of His own will."

(1.) The inheritance. We enter upon this blessed state altogether by virtue of faith in Christ. When we thus become united to Him, when our oneness is established, it follows that we are savingly interested in, and inseparably connected with, all that Christ is, and all that Christ has. The Spirit bids us open our eyes wide, and survey our boundless possession. He says, "All things are yours—whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas; or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours—and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Again—"We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

Let us strive for an increase of faith, to believe fully the glorious blessedness into which we have admission. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." As sons we receive in this present time all that our Heavenly Father knows to be good for us. His eye of love always watches over us. His hand of power always guides and protects us. We journey onward through a waste howling wilderness, amid snares and temptations on the right hand and on the left, but we are encircled by invisible guards—even "the Mahanaim," the Host of God." We are never left; we are never forsaken. It is, alas! too true that we continually stray from our God, and restrain prayer, and remit communion—and sometimes we so listen to the vile suggestions of the Tempter, that we openly transgress and wantonly

offend. The smile of our God for a season is withdrawn, and we are brought low into the darkness of desolation, misery, and shame.

But our inheritance remains secure. "He restores my soul." The voice is heard, "Return, O backsliding Israel, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you. Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you. Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." The reply is ready, "Behold, we come unto You; for You are the Lord our God." Thus the Lord deals, as most of His true servants can testify; for "He hates divorce," and "with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

But we must look onward beyond this earth, if we would even now understand the extent of our inheritance. It is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fades not away; reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." We do not therefore enter upon full possession until we are admitted into heaven, and this corruptible puts on incorruption, and this mortal, immortality— then the saying is brought to pass which is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Then, with spirits perfect, pure, and holy, even as God is perfect, pure, and holy; with bodies spiritual and immortal, like unto Christ's glorious body, we shall see Him as He is; and participating in all His incomprehensible perfections, we shall inherit the glory which the Father gave unto Jesus, and receive the kingdom which He has prepared for us from the foundation of the world. This is "the inheritance to which we are predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will."

(2.) The grand truth that "God works all things after the counsel of His own will." Let us conclude with seeking comfort from this assurance. God's providential arrangements often seem very mysterious. We are shut out from opportunities which seem favorable to the promotion of His kingdom within and around us—we are deprived of circumstances or associates which seemed needful for our growth in grace—we have sickness, poverty,

distresses, reproach, persecution, hatred—when we think we could serve God better in health, competence, ease, honor, tranquility, and love. But we are short-sighted; we are of yesterday, and know nothing. All these things are ordained for us in the deliberate arrangements and counsels of His will. There is neither chance nor mistake in the kingdom of grace. Let us, therefore, not only contentedly acquiesce, but adoringly rejoice in His wise orderings. His good hand is in all our matters. Let us therefore give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:12. "That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ."

Jehovah's glory is the end of all His works. This is the first truth which we are taught by the verse before us. In the preceding, the Apostle tells us that we have obtained an inheritance because we are predestinated; he here adds, we are predestinated for the purpose that, trusting in Christ, we might be to the praise of God's glory. The ultimate design of the everlasting covenant is, that glory should be ascribed to God. He orders all things, that He may be glorified.

Very many are the blessed consequences which flow to us from predestinating love. We trace to this source the gift of our souls and bodies to Jesus—the gift of Jesus unto us—our effectual calling in time—our apprehension of Jesus by faith—the renewal of our hearts—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—our perseverance unto eternal life—and all the joys and triumphs which are reserved for us in the heavenly kingdom. But these consequences, so full of significance and blessedness unto us, seem to disappear as fading stars before the splendor of God's glory, which is so magnified and exalted by our being set apart to trust in Christ. Let us now then draw near to the truth before us, and consider how our trust in Christ conduces to the praise of God's glory.

(1.) By trusting in Christ we utterly renounce self. Before a sinner can make Christ and His righteousness the entire stay and confidence of his soul, he must have proved his own insufficiency to help himself. Christ is the last refuge of man. When a man first becomes troubled in conscience, and trembles before God's law, he is tempted to go the round of reformation, repentance, duties, and many external observances, seeking to find forgiveness of sin and rest of soul, in the merit of some self-performance. By degrees and frequent disappointments, he is beaten off from everything of his own devising and doing, and at last he is brought to cast himself unreservedly, with all his good deeds and bad deeds, body, soul, and spirit, for time and for eternity, to be saved altogether by the free grace and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He now pours contempt upon self— all boasting is excluded—he glories only in the salvation of God. Seated beneath the Cross, his song is, "Glory to God in the highest." Hence his trust in Christ is to the praise of God's glory. God only is now exalted.

(2.) By trusting in Christ we magnify and glorify each attribute of God in particular. Take for example His JUSTICE. This requires that all be rendered unto Him which is strictly His due. Now we owe Him the obedience of every thought, word, and work. Whenever our thoughts wander from His love, and our words from His praise— whenever our deeds are defiled by self-seeking, or self-righteousness, or ungodliness, we contract a debt which we are utterly unable to pay. But when we fly unto Jesus, and claim His precious blood-shedding as the ransom of our souls, and His righteousness as our fulfillment of the requirements of the Law, we exalt His justice, we acknowledge its righteous claims, and we enter the kingdom of heaven to the praise of the glory of this attribute.

The same reasoning applies to His TRUTH. His word is gone forth, that the soul which sins shall die—that without holiness no man shall see the Lord— that whoever believes in the Son shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. How are these words, and every word of God, to be glorified in us? Surely by putting our trust

in Jesus. In Him we die; in Him we are sanctified; in Him we receive life eternal. Thus when we draw near by faith unto Him, we are to the praise of the glory of His truth.

Once more—behold His MERCY. This lovely attribute delights in rescuing from misery, in crowning with blessings, in raising to joys, in doing the greatest good to the miserable and hell-deserving. When we cling to the Cross, mercy has free scope to pour out the whole heaven of loving-kindness into our souls, and to bring us to the whole heaven of enjoyment forever. Hence, trusting in Him, we are to the praise of the glory of His mercy. In the same way, faith exalts every other attribute of Jehovah.

(3.) The humble, holy, self-denying, consistent walk of those who trust in Christ, redounds to God's glory. Hence He calls His people "His glory." "I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory." Again, "I will glorify the House of My glory." *By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit they are separated from the world, they renounce its vanities, follies, and pollutions; they are exalted far above the children of the Evil one*—and all who see them take knowledge of them, that they live as heaven-born. Thus God is glorified in them. Moreover, with their lips they are continually worshiping and adoring Him, as it is written, "Whoever offers Me thanks, and praise, he honors Me." The incense of gratitude ascends day and night from the altar of love in their hearts. Thus God is glorified by them. When Christ shall return to earth, it will be to be glorified in His saints. And when the end comes, and He delivers up the kingdom to God, even the Father, then shall the faithful lift up their voices, which shall never cease, and every note and sound shall be glory to God and to the Lamb. Thus we who trust in Christ are to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:13. "In whom you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation—in whom also after you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise."

There is an important chain in this verse which is worthy of much observation. Faith in the Lord is here linked to the means which precede it, and to the grace which follows it. We hear "the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation," before we believe; we believe, before "we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." Hence we have three distinct gradations—we hear, we believe, we are assured. Let us then examine these truths. (1.) Faith follows hearing. (2.) Assurance follows faith. Lord! send forth Your light and Your truth, that they may lead us!

(1.) Faith follows hearing. The proclamation of "the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation," is the Lord's appointed ordinance for drawing souls unto Himself. His parting injunction is, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." The preaching of the Cross is indeed unto those who perish foolishness; but unto us, who are saved, it is the power of God. "After that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe." How can we believe in Him of whom we have not heard? Faith only can come by hearing. It is when Jesus is distinctly uplifted; when His grace, and love, and finished work are clearly and affectionately unfolded, that the Spirit draws the enlightened sinner to the wounded side and the pierced hands. Then he, who is perishing under the malady of sin, feels that here is a remedy which is all healing—he who is shuddering under the curse of the Law, finds refuge—he who sees himself nothing but vileness and pollution, discovers a spotless robe of righteousness to conceal his deformity—he who was afar off from God, draws near through the blood of the Cross; he who was blind, sees—he who was dead, lives. Oh! what wonders follow when Jesus is fully uplifted! Dry bones arise to life—the wilderness blossoms like the rose. Jesus is always true to His word, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

We hence discover the cause why Satan is so industriously opposed to the preaching of Christ. This ordinance delivers the captives whom he held bound, and subverts his kingdom. He little cares for

the zeal and diligence of the minister who insists only on sacraments, and outward forms and reformatations—he knows such weapons will never injure his cause. But when the Cross is simply proclaimed, he is all alarm, and ceases not to use his devices to stop the testimony. Let us then pray the Lord to arise, and multiply the number of His faithful heralds, and maintain His own cause, and put His soul-destroying adversary to perpetual shame. Even so, "Put on your sword, O mighty warrior! You are so glorious, so majestic! In your majesty, ride out to victory, defending truth, humility, and justice. Go forth to perform awe-inspiring deeds!" Psalm 45:3-4

(2.) As faith follows hearing, so assurance follows faith. "After you believed in Him, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." It seems to be very clear that the seal of the Spirit is assurance. It is nothing external to the believer; so they err who suppose it to be the eternal purpose of God sealing His people as His own forever. It is some work accomplished by the Spirit within. It cannot be conviction of sin, nor conversion, nor illumination, because these graces precede faith—whereas the seal of the Spirit is consequent upon faith. What can this be but assurance?—a deep abiding persuasion of real interest in the covenant of grace—a realizing knowledge of restoration to God's favor—an undoubting recumbency of the soul on the work of Christ for eternal life.

The same conclusion follows from examining the term "seal." For what purpose are seals affixed to deeds and documents? Their purpose is to ratify and confirm them, so that they may be acknowledged as valid and unalterable. When we see the seal we have no more hesitation or doubt; we point to it as final evidence that the deed is sure, and can no more be cancelled. Just so, when the Spirit stamps His seal on the heart, the believer is assuredly certified, that he is called, and chosen, and saved. Fears and doubts vanish, and he can say, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." He realizes the truth, "Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies—who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This assurance is a divine work. Man cannot obtain it for himself. Man cannot confer it on man. It is the deep impression which the Spirit alone can imprint. Hence it must be a holy work, and productive of holiness. Indeed, nothing more conduces to sanctification than this seal. He who lives steadily realizing that he is a child and heir of God, is dead to the world, and raised high above the range of Satan's darts. We never consent to sin except when we forget "whose we are, and whom we serve." Let us, therefore, covet earnestly this high and sanctifying grace. We know it is to be obtained at the throne of grace, by earnest supplication. The Spirit is more willing to seal, than we are to receive this privilege. Oh! that we were wise, and steadfastly purposed to give Him no rest, until the evidence of the seal proves that we are indeed "passed from death unto life."

Ephesians 1:14. "Which is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory."

In our love to God, and trust in the Lord Jesus, we should greatly magnify the mercies and work of the Holy Spirit. Without Him we would still continue dead in trespasses and sins, ignorant of the blood of atonement, without one ray of comfort, without the power to pray and praise. One portion of His important work is mentioned in the preceding verse, in which He is said to "seal" believers. In the present, He is said to be "the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." Let us inquire (1.) In what sense He is the pledge of our inheritance. (2.) What is meant by the redemption of the purchased possession. May He, who only has light, reveal Himself to our souls, and teach us the wonders which He performs for the children of men!

(1.) In what sense is He the pledge of our inheritance? This blessed state is not on earth, it is in heaven—we are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. It consists of perfect knowledge, purity, peace, joy, and glory in the eternal kingdom above, in the presence of God, our Redeemer, the whole company of the saved, and the angels of light. The pledge of this blessedness is a portion of it already conferred, which is not to be recalled, but which is to continue ours until we receive the full possession, and are admitted to the perfect consummation. Hence the Spirit dwelling in the heart of each believer, is the first dawn or commencement of heavenly knowledge, purity, peace, joy, glory. He is heaven begun, in all the bright and good perfections which heaven contains.

Hence heaven will be no new place to the child of God. It will indeed be an immeasurable, and infinite enlargement, expansion, and amplification of the spiritual gifts which he has been privileged to enjoy during his pilgrimage; but it will reveal nothing to him, of which he has not previously had some glimpse and foretaste. Then indeed he will see God face to face, and know even as he is known; but now he knows God in part as his Father and the concentration of all excellence. Then he will see Jesus as He is; but now by faith "he sees Him who is invisible," and "knows the love of Christ, which passes knowledge." Then he will be pure, even as God is pure, and holy as He is holy; but now he is "a partaker of the divine nature," which "cannot sin, because it is born of God." Then his peace shall never be disturbed by any doubt or any assault of Satan; but now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keeps, like a watchful garrison, his heart, through Jesus Christ. Then shall his joy be a vast ocean, which knows no shore; but now he "rejoices with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Then he shall be invested "with an exceeding weight of glory," even the very glory which the Father gave unto Jesus before the foundation of the world; but now, the Spirit dwelling in him is the rising beam of all this surpassing brightness.

Hence the Spirit of promise, working knowledge, purity, peace, joy, glory in the believer's heart, is a pledge of the heavenly inheritance. How much then might we enjoy of heaven, even while we are pilgrims in the flesh! We are called to be "temples of the Holy Spirit," and to be "filled with the Spirit:" that is, we are called to be filled, even to overflowing, with pledges of heaven. O gracious Savior! fulfill in us Your precious promise, and send the Comforter from on high, that He may dwell in us, and abide with us forever!

(2.) We proceed to enquire, what is meant by "the redemption of the purchased possession." The Lord's portion is His people—they were given unto Him by His Father as His jewels—His peculiar treasure. The Church, though it is composed of a mass of vile earth and miserable sinners, is still the possession which Jesus prizes. In the immensity of His power, He might form worlds upon worlds, and people them with beings enabled to show forth His praise; but in His marvelous grace He chooses a collection of poor rebels, and regards them as His beloved possession. Are we His? Let us see to it, that no other lord has any dominion over us—let us reserve to Him the undisputed possession of our souls.

Moreover, this possession is purchased. With what a price! Even by the price of His most precious blood. "He loved me," said the Apostle, "and gave Himself for me." Is property valued by its cost? What, then, must be the value of believers in the Lord's estimate! How dear they must be to His heart, if for them He was willing, no, delighted, to endure the extremities of divine wrath, and to stand before God as an accursed thing! O my soul, think how Jesus loved you—think by what costly sacrifice He purchased you, and learn to trust Him more and serve Him better!

What is the day of redemption unto which the Spirit seals us? It is that great, fast-coming day, when the Lord, with His mighty power, shall raise our dead bodies from the dust of death, and change them, that they may be like unto His own glorious body. Already we are redeemed from the curse of the Law, the damnation of Hell, and the

dominion of Satan; but there remains an enemy, even Death, who for a little while will seem to triumph over us. But he shall be annihilated. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death." He must, at the voice of Jesus, give back his captives. Then shall redemption be wholly and finally complete. Then shall be the perfection of redemption both in body and soul, and the shout shall be heard, "O Grave! where is your victory? O Death! where is your sting?"

May the Holy Spirit seal us unto this great day! May He be the pledge in our souls until its brightness "dawn, and mortality be swallowed up of life!"

SECTION 2

Ephesians 1:15—23; Thanksgiving and Prayer

Ephesians 1:15-16. "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you."

The preface is now ended, in which thanksgiving has been rendered to God for the wonders of His grace to the Church. Who can ponder these glorious truths without exclaiming, "Oh! the breadth, the depth, the length, the height!" What faith, what illumination of mind is required to embrace their grand reality! Wherefore the Apostle immediately proceeds to declare, that after he knew the Ephesians to be interested in God's decrees, he ceased not to give thanks for them, and to pray that divine teaching might manifest these things to them. "Wherefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers," and then follows the subject of his petition, "that God would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." Without this light from heaven, these truths can never be discerned. We must have eyes to see the sun—we must have heaven-born sight, or God's Word is all darkness. "O Lord! open You our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of Your law."

But the subject now before us, is the features of divine life which existed in the Ephesians. (1.) Faith in the Lord Jesus. (2.) Love unto all the saints. Where these graces are not, there is no spiritual life—where spiritual life exists, these are invariably manifested. Let us contemplate them in order.

(1.) Faith in the Lord Jesus. This grace justly claims precedence in all the gifts of the Spirit. It is essential to the being of a child of God, and it is the foundation on which all his other graces are laid.

Without faith, we cannot know God, or have admission into His family—without faith, we cannot possess any other spiritual attainment. With good reason, therefore, faith occupies the foremost position. It is the captain under whom all other graces range. Hence such glorious things are testified of faith in the Word. It is the adopting grace. "We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." It is the justifying grace. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." It is the sanctifying grace. "Purifying their hearts by faith." It is the conquering grace. "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." It is the wonder-working grace. Saints "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Time would indeed fail to tell of all its wondrous exploits. Ask the company above how they prevailed, and endured, and overcame, and at last entered heaven. You will have one reply—"By faith in the blood of the Lamb."

The faith of God's elect, which is the Spirit's work, has the Lord Jesus Christ for its object. It is the going forth of the soul laden with sin unto Christ, and embracing Him with adoring rapture. It is the whole inner man closing with Christ—clasping and clinging unto Him. It is the eye which sees Him—the ear which hears Him—the hand which holds Him fast—the feet which follow hard after Him—the appetite which feeds on His broken body—the thirst which drinks of the stream from His side—the heart which loves Him—the head which knows Him—the memory which retains Him—the affections which are entwined around Him—the trust which trusts in Him—the hope which hopes in Him. Indeed, faith is the entire man loving Jesus, looking only unto Him, swallowed up in Him, making Him the All in All. How precious is this gift of faith! Lord! grant "that the life which we live in the flesh, may be by the faith of the Son of God!" Lord, increase our faith! May it "grow exceedingly," until the work of faith be ended, and we see You face to face. Let

each exclaim, O my soul, "be you faithful unto death, and He will give you a crown of life."

(2.) The next feature in the divine life is love unto all the saints. This grace is inseparably connected with faith. More easily could you eliminate light and warmth from the sun, than love from faith. The grounds of their union are obvious. Faith reverences the Lord's word, and renders strict obedience to it. The especial command of Jesus is, "Love one another." "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one towards another." Again—Faith delights in the image of Jesus, wherever that image can be discerned. Every humble believer reflects some rays of the Sun of Righteousness, and this similitude attracts and draws out love. Again—All believers are fellow-members of one body. "You, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Strange would it be for a man not to regard his own flesh; but more so for a saint not to love his brethren. This love is a grand evidence of spiritual being. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Alas! that in these latter days this grace should be so feeble. In a world where all hate the saints, it is sad that they should not enjoy the comfort of each other's love. O Lord, hasten the time when Your prayer shall be accomplished, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us."

Ephesians 1:15-16. "Wherefore I also after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."

After mentioning the distinctive features of the divine life, which were conspicuous in the Ephesian saints, and by which they were evidenced to be translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Paul proceeds to declare his incessant exercise in their behalf—"I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." What a noble instance have we here

of enlarged, comprehensive love! Without doubt, he gave thanks fervently, day and night continually, for his own marvelous mercies—the incense of adoration would ascend perpetually to God, who had delivered him from going down to the pit, having found a ransom for him. His whole life would be an act of personal praise. But his holy desire was to give God all the honor due unto His name; and great honor was due to Him for His distinguishing goodness to, and life-giving work in the saints; and therefore He carried them in the arms of His love to the mercy-seat; he presented them to the God of their salvation, and he blessed and magnified God for all that had been done in them. Let us hence learn the believer's privilege, (1.) To give thanks for the saints; (2.) To pray for them. May the Lord the Spirit make us diligent and earnest in this exercise!

(1.) It is our privilege to give thanks for the saints. Even among the children of this world, it is common for a parent, a brother, a friend, to express thankfulness for the smallest temporal benefit conferred on a member of his family, or one endeared to him by ties of affection. But believers are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Therefore, when one prospers all prosper; when one suffers, all suffer. Hence the blessings poured down upon the collective Church are common family blessings, for which each member is called to utter praise.

The saints are the glory of God on earth. "I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory." Is it not the fervent desire of our souls, that this glory should be increased? Are we not therefore bound to testify our gratitude when the saints shine brightly amid the darkness of sin, when they reflect the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, and bear witness to the truth of the Gospel, and the love and power of Jehovah? Do we not desire the subversion of the empire of Satan—the exaltation of the Cross of Christ—the reign of holiness—the increase of spiritual peace? Do we not long for the time when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever?" Each saint

quickened to newness of life accelerates the coming of His day—each saint, therefore, should awaken fresh notes of praise.

When, too, we bear in mind, that each saint is an immortal soul, rescued from endless perdition, and made a vessel of glory in the kingdom of heaven forever—when we estimate the infinitudes of happiness which each will enjoy—the rapturous Hallelujahs which they will never cease to chant—do we not feel that it is a worthy exercise to give thanks for them? O Lord Jesus Christ, accept our praises for the whole company of Your Redeemed. We desire to bless Your glorious Name for every jewel which sparkles in Your mediatorial crown, for every sheep of Your beloved flock, for every soul for which Your blood was shed. We thank You that there is a remnant among the children of men to whom Your Name is as ointment poured forth. Oh! that "the little one might become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation!" Good Lord, hasten it in Your own time!

(2.) It is also our privilege to pray for the saints. The spirit of prayer is never given to a believer for himself alone—it is a great treasure placed in the hands of the Lord's children, to be used and expended for the common advantage of the whole family—it is property conferred by the Holy Spirit, charged with strict conditions, that out of it daily provision should be made for others—if this payment be not made, the property is insufficiently employed. Did not Jesus pray for the whole Church? "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word;" and should not the same mind be in us which was also in Him? Surely we never pray more acceptably than when the same Spirit is in us, which was in Him.

The duty and privilege of praying for the saints among whom we live and worship may be readily allowed, but should our prayers extend to them who are strangers to us? Behold the example of Paul. He says to the Colossians, "I would that you knew what great conflict," that is agony in prayer, "I have for you, and for them at

Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." He could realize, that they were all fellow-heirs, and of the same body, exposed to the like perils and temptations, fighting the same fight of faith, witnessing for the same truth, bought by the same blood, journeying to the same home, and therefore he felt constrained to seek for them the same help and blessings, which he needed for himself. Lord, enable us to be fervent and constant in this duty, and do You hear and answer us; and may many saints rejoice, and thrive, and conquer, because we have wrestled with You in their behalf.

Ephesians 1:17. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him."

Paul proceeds to declare the matter of his perpetual supplications for the Ephesian saints. It is important that we should examine this. Next in order to the sublime prayer of Jesus come the Apostolic prayers. Paul was a holy child of God, filled with the Spirit, praying in the Spirit—therefore, he well knew what gifts were most desirable for the saints, and also what God was most willing and ready to impart. We have, therefore, in these spiritual breathings models of what we should seek for our own souls, and also for the souls of others. One prominent petition stands boldly out in this prayer. It is that spiritual knowledge and illumination might be granted—"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." Let us hence consider (1.) The blessedness of the knowledge of God. (2.) The promise of it to the saints. (3.) The Author of it. May He who alone can teach to profit, enlighten the eyes of our understanding, and give us to see the only true God, in the face of Jesus Christ! Lord grant it; for this knowledge is life eternal.

(1.) The blessedness of the knowledge of God. It is sad and dreadful to think what miserable ignorance prevails on this all-important subject. The god of this world miserably succeeds in blinding the

eyes of his deluded captives, so that they live and die utter strangers to the real nature of that High and Holy One, with whom they have to do. Some vague notions of mercy and goodness bury out of sight all the other attributes of justice, holiness, and truth. Satan whispers that God is too benevolent to punish eternally the sins committed in time. The poor worldling, ready to receive the lie, is willingly persuaded, and dwells on this picture of Satanic invention—and thus the God of Salvation is never known. Happy are they, from whose eyes this veil is torn, and who see the nature and glory of Jehovah in the brightness of the everlasting Gospel.

How insignificant are the discoveries of this fleeting world, compared to the announcement that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. The happiest moments on this side of heaven are those which we pass in contemplating the character of God as exhibited in the Cross of Christ. What lessons do we there read of justice! Payment must be made for every sin of thought, word, and deed, which has defiled us in our flesh—but Jesus pours out His own soul an offering for us, and in His blood, precious beyond all price, He makes perfect satisfaction to our offended God. The believer exclaims, I know my God to be a God of inflexible justice—the sword sheathed in my Redeemer's heart proves it—I know Him to be just, and I know that justice has been fully satisfied. Oh! blessed knowledge—it is worth ten thousand worlds.

We pass over the views of holiness and truth which are so conspicuous in the contemplation of Jesus dying—but we must refresh our souls by a transient glance at the eternal verities of love and mercy which are there so brightly effulgent. Ours is no loose, indefinite, unfounded notion of love; we have the most solid proof of its existence, reality, and boundless extent. We see, so to speak, the Father's love for His sinful children manifested in the gift of His holy child Jesus. He spares not His only-begotten Son—He delivers Him up for us all. Peaceful, hallowed rapture pervades the heart while we reason thus—It is clear beyond all doubt, that God loves, and will have mercy on His people. Behold the testimony. Jesus

groans upon the tree; we know His nature and His name to be mercy and love, and we know that this mercy and love illuminate our souls. Oh! blessed knowledge—it is inconceivably precious. He who has received this knowledge can reason further, I know that my God will watch over me, and defend me, and provide for me, and bless me, and make all things work together for my good, until my present knowledge is swallowed up in sight. O you wise of this world, where is your boasted wisdom? Come, lay it down at the foot of the Cross; there "acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace."

(2.) This knowledge is promised to the saints. It is one of the blessings laid up for them in the everlasting covenant. "They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the Lord." Thus we are privileged to come boldly to the throne of grace, and to ask for this blessing as our heritage in Christ, and to urge the irresistible plea, "Do as You have said." The Lord must be true, and the word must be fulfilled, "All your children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children." Let us hasten early daily to the mercy-seat, that we may be replenished with the knowledge of God. Thus may we follow on to know the Lord!

(3.) The Author of this knowledge is the Holy Spirit of promise, here called, "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." How often is He promised as the Teacher of the Church! He teaches to profit. Who teaches like Him? All ignorance and prejudice must vanish before His almighty beams. Oh! that our hearts and consciences may become chambers of heavenly light—that we may have "an unction from the Holy One, and know all things!" May we "arise and shine, for our light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon us!"

Ephesians 1:18. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

Paul continues in prayer for the saints at Ephesus. May the Spirit of grace and supplication teach us to pray in the same mind not only for ourselves but also for others! The petition of this verse is similar to that of the preceding. His enlarged heart has just desired for them the knowledge of God in general—he now desires that "the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened," so that they may particularly "know the hope of His calling, and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Into what a new world of wonders are we introduced, when the Holy Spirit visits us with enlightening grace! We are then indeed translated from darkness to light; and pass from death unto life. We enter upon a new being. Previously sin had fast closed our eyes, so that we saw nothing in the spiritual kingdom of grace. But when He, who said "Let there be light," and there was light in the chaos of nature, says "Let there be light" in the dark chambers of the soul, instantly the scales fall off, and we see ourselves vile and loathsome in the pollution of our sins, and we see that there is One mighty to save us, even Jesus—we see Him in all the beauty of His person and work, chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely; washing out our every transgression in His own most precious blood, and covering our every deformity in the spotless robe of His divine righteousness. Blessed are the eyes which see this enrapturing sight!

But our present verse teaches us to look onward and upward, and to fix our adoring gaze on two especial objects—(1.) The Hope, to which God calls. (2.) The richly glorious inheritance conferred on the saints. As by faith we now strive to realize, may we be fitted for the heavenly enjoyment!

(1.) The Hope to which God calls. The great ones of earth never call to anything which is common or mean. What then must that be, to which "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords" invites His children? It is a possession at present invisible, for "hope which is seen is not hope, for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for." It is nothing less than eternal life, for Paul says he is "an Apostle in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie,

promised before the world began." It is salvation, for we take for our "helmet, the hope of salvation." Its abode is in heaven. Paul gives thanks for the hope which is laid up for us in heaven; whereof we hear in the words of the truth of the Gospel. Hence we learn a little of the nature of our hope. It is the hope of eternal life in heaven; the hope of dwelling with Jehovah forever in the realms of eternal day.

Now, we are taught that we should study and contemplate, and familiarize our minds with this blessed hope, so full of immortality. We should continually draw near and realize it. We should hourly ascend from the prison of this base earth, and enter into our own assured home, and take our seats at our Father's board; and look around on our brethren, and listen to and join in their songs of praise. Heaven should be no strange place to us. When shall we know the hope to which God calls us! Let us pray that the wings of our faith may be strengthened, that our constant flight may be to "the city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

This is a sanctifying hope—the more we know of it, the more we trample down the paltry pleasures of this sin-soiled scene. It is a sustaining hope—the cares and afflictions of life sit light upon the shoulders, while the head is high in heaven. It makes time fly swiftly. Habituated to this hope, we feel that we are almost in heaven, and we can say, "the night is far spent, the day is at hand." It is a rejoicing hope; for it brings all heaven before the eyes, and if that be not joy, there can be no joy. But we must labor to become acquainted with more than this hope.

(2.) Our minds should revel in thoughts of the richly glorious inheritance of the saints. When we become children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, we are entitled to nothing less than all the happiness and glory which our Father can bestow. It is written we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Amazing thought! But it is as surely certain as it is wondrous. "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Is Christ now rich, and rich in glory? Just

so rich, and just so rich in glory will each poor follower of Him soon become. "The glory which You gave Me, I have given them." God cannot give more; God will not give less.

Now we are encouraged to assure our souls of the reality and greatness of our inheritance. Would these glories be revealed, if they were not true? Would they be revealed, if we were not required to believe them? Should we be required to believe them, if the knowledge did not tend to comfort and strengthen our souls? Oh! then let us no more walk with downcast eyes fixed on the mire of this miserable world. Let us gaze on the pure and bright scenes to which we are hastening. If we thus pass much time in this precious study, we shall soon find the love of Jesus burning more and more in our hearts. We are indebted altogether to His blood for all the riches and glory which we shall so soon enjoy. Can we realize this and not adore? It cannot be. Heaven is perfect love; the anticipation is fervent love—heaven is perfect holiness; love is the mainspring of it. Hence the study of our purchased home increases love, and every holy word and work.

Ephesians 1:19-20. "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead."

Paul continues to desire an increase of knowledge for the saints at Ephesus. Heavenly knowledge is indeed a precious gift. The more we know of God, and of the hope of His calling, and of His work within us, the more we shall love, and trust, and delight ourselves in Him. Spirit of light, give us light! You great Teacher of the Church, come into our souls with all Your teaching energy! Give Your unction from above, that we may know all things! Especially teach us now "what is the exceeding greatness of God's power toward those who believe."

This is the point to which our attention is brought. Let us consider what a work that must be, which requires the exertion of "the exceeding greatness of God's power." The work is vast, and embraces many particulars. We will confine our thoughts to (1.) The regeneration of the dead soul. (2.) The preservation of the living soul. (3.) The glorification of the entire man.

(1.) The regeneration of the dead soul calls for the exertion of exceeding great power. We are born into this world with dead souls. Our bodies live, but our souls are lifeless. Sin fastened upon the life of Adam's soul, and gave it a death-wound—it utterly expired beneath the fatal blow. From that day all his descendants at first move about this earth as walking sepulchers of expired spirits. And what power can quicken and vivify inanimate souls? Nothing less than Omnipotence can make the body live. But the soul is far more precious than mere earthly matter—therefore the exceeding greatness of divine almightiness is required to call it from the sleep of death. It is indeed a wondrous work to create a living soul—a work far greater than to stud the heavens with countless orbs of brilliant light. What is the sun—what are shining hosts of stars compared to one soul! They soon must hide their heads in darkness, and drop as withered leaves from their lofty stations. But the soul endures forever and ever, its being is eternity, its continuance is endless.

Well, then, may the Holy Spirit describe its regeneration in such strong language. It is a "new birth"—a "new creation"—a passing "from darkness to light"—from "death to life." Hence, to accomplish this, God must Himself arise, and gird Himself with power, and stretch forth His mighty arm, and send forth His all-efficient voice. It is much more than to say to the widow's son, "Young man, I say unto you, Arise;" or to the entombed brother at Bethany, "Lazarus, come forth." This is the vast power which is exercised in the case of each believing soul. What believer will not say, Have I life? Are mine eyes opened to see the most precious, the most lovely, the most enrapturing of all sights, even Jesus loving me, and made a

curse for me? Are my ears opened to hear His constraining voice of gentle affection calling me to Him, and bidding me trust Him forever without one fear? Is my mouth opened to praise and bless Him, and with filial confidence to cry before the mercy-seat, "Abba, Father?" Are my feet strengthened to ascend with gladness the heavenward way, and to run with enlargement in the holy path of God's commandments? Happy, blessed soul! be assured that God has put forth all His almightiness to befriend you—doubt not that the energies of the triune Jehovah have conspired to give you this life. Will not you go on your way rejoicing? Will not you devote all the power which is thus quickened in you, to the one glory of the great Father and Creator of your being? Pray that you may know the exceeding greatness of God's power in thus giving you spiritual birth—and learn that you shall never die.

(2.) For this power secures the preservation of the living soul. This needs constant protection. A wily adversary, whose name is Legion, watches for its ruin with deadly and with sleepless hate. He sits down before it with all his troops of temptations, lusts, allurements—he keeps all his poisoned arrows directed against it. How, then, shall the poor soul escape destruction? It seems like the weak lamb in the midst of ravenous wolves. Its preservation is here—"the exceeding greatness of God's power" encompasses it as with a shield. "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield." It is not, I will provide a shield for you; but I, the omnipotent Jehovah, Myself am your shield. Every foe must conquer omnipotence before it can destroy you.

Every weapon must pierce omnipotence, before a deadly wound can touch you. The bush may burn, but it cannot be consumed, because the Lord God is in the midst of it. "Your life is hid with Christ in God." "The Lord is your keeper." Oh! for grace to realize that we are thus "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

(3.) The exceeding greatness of God's power will ultimately glorify the entire man. The voice which said to the dead soul "Live," will

call the dead body from the chamber of the grave. Then, at His omnipotent bidding, this mortal shall put on immortality, and the glorified spirit, re-united to the glorified body, shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with all the redeemed in the kingdom of our Father. May we strive to learn more of the exceeding greatness of God's power, as put forth towards those who believe!

Ephesians 1:19-20. "According to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places."

Paul's prayer closes with the petition that the Ephesians might know the exceeding greatness of God's power towards them who believe. But though he ceases to pray he continues the subject. He strives next to show how vast, how wondrous, is the almightiness exerted towards the saints. He points to the Lord Jesus raised again from the dead, and exalted to God's right hand in heaven—he seems to bid us measure and weigh the omnipotence thus put forth, and he proclaims, that power precisely the same, in no degree weaker or inferior, is used to quicken each dead soul. Did God in all His might arise to break asunder the bands of death which enfeathered Jesus? Did He extend the right hand of His excellency to uplift Jesus to His lofty glorious throne? The same God uses the self-same might, the self-same right hand of excellency to confer spiritual life to all believers. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus are the triumphs of omnipotence over the grave. The rising again to newness of life from death in trespasses and sins, is the work of the same strength. Having thus stated the grand illustration, by which Paul exemplifies the subject, let us proceed to draw comfort (1.) From the might used in our regeneration. (2.) From the fact, that our Forerunner is raised from the dead, and exalted to God's right hand. May the same almighty power teach us!

(1.) What comfort is there in the thought of the power used in our regeneration! If we see a man straining every nerve, using every

effort to accomplish some object, we justly infer that his heart is set on it—that he esteems it of some great importance to himself. So God must dearly prize that soul in whose behalf He puts forth such energy. The life of that soul must be matter of the deepest interest to Him, or such efforts would not be made. O believer, can you realize what vivifying grace has been imparted to you?—Can you say, One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see— whereas I was dead, now I live? If so, what cause have you to rejoice, and to adore! God has exerted more might to accomplish this work in you, than He did when He made the worlds. What wondrous love therefore must He entertain for you! How dear must Your existence be in His sight! Fear not. There may be storms and trials near you, but "He will keep you as the apple of His eye." Satan may rage and assault, but all is vain—the might which quickened shall preserve you—the ungodly can more readily pull down the sun from his path on high, than injure you.

What encouragement have we in this thought to expect more grace—yes, the fullest, richest supplies! There is more difference between a dead soul and a living soul, than between a living soul and a soul in glory. The grand work was to kindle life—it is far less to fan it into the brightest flame. Therefore, hope all things—be not disheartened because your present stock seems small, but go in undoubting confidence to Him in whom all fullness dwells. He is willing and able to enrich you until you can contain no more. We are not straitened in Him. Let us open wide the mouths which He has made, and He will fill them.

(2.) Let us draw comfort from the fact that our Forerunner is thus exalted. The might which accomplished this work in Him, has already exalted our souls; and soon, too, it will exalt our bodies. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He who raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you." As Jesus, our great Lord, bowed His head and gave up the spirit; so, too, our heads must bow beneath the stroke of death, and our bodies must return to the dust,

and lie in silence in the darkness of the grave. But, "O Grave! where is your victory? O Death! where is your sting?" Soon shall the Lord, who was dead, but now lives—the Lord Himself, even our exalted Jesus. "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Then shall this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and "the saying shall be brought to pass which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

This great day of God draws near. Each moment which flies—each breath which we draw, hastens it on. In a few more days or hours the number of the elect will be accomplished; this terrestrial scene shall have fulfilled its appointed end, and the resurrection-life shall commence. Let us realize these verities. Let us look on the things around as perishing and almost perished, and shall we set our affections on them? Let us look on the things eternal as even now about to break on our enraptured gaze, and give them the estimation to which they are entitled. Let us live as if this were our stranger-state for a few more moments—and as if heaven were even now opening its blessed portals to receive us. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Ephesians 1:21. "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

May the exemplification which Paul here enlarges conduce greatly to our comfort! May our souls become persuaded, that the same almighty power has been exerted to quicken those who raised Jesus from the dead, and set Him at God's right hand in the heavenly places; and may the strong consolation, and abiding strength, which this knowledge gives, be ours!

This argument and illustration having led Paul to mention the exaltation of Jesus, his ardent spirit seems to soar directly to heaven, and to behold Jesus on the throne of His glory. He sees Him uplifted

"far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Very far below Him are the highest angels, the brightest, the purest intelligences which inhabit the courts of heaven. Let us now draw near with all humility, and gaze on the pre-eminence of Jesus, and thence deduce two reflections—(1.) The present security; (2.) The future prospect of the believer.

The pre-eminence of Jesus is a glorious sight, of which at present we can see but little; but it is a sight to which we should often direct the eye of faith. The more we gaze, the more we shall comprehend. We know that our beloved Lord is very and eternal God. If the strength and essence of Jehovah had not been His, how could He have endured the wrath of God, and made sufficient satisfaction for our infinite iniquities? But He is God. "In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." For a little while He "was made a little lower than the angels." He veiled His Deity in the poor rags of mean mortality. But the period of humiliation ceased when He arose from the dead. He said in His prayer, "I have finished the work which You gave Me to do. Now, O Father, glorify You Me with Your own self, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." And now has God highly exalted Him, and given Him "a name which is above every name." He who was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His Person, and who upheld all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." He has returned to His own seat—He has resumed the robes of His own Deity—He is enthroned on high, as the Lord God Omnipotent. "which is, and which was, and which is to come." No glory can exceed His. The Seraphim veil their faces while they worship Him.

Did He once lay aside all this majesty for you, O believer? Did He so long to redeem you, and to have you with Him forever, that He condescended to divest Himself, and to become a servant, and to be

nailed by wicked hands to the accursed tree, and to stand before God as an abomination? Oh! wondrous thought! How unspeakable must have been His love! What returns of gratitude can we make? Let us draw near to Him now on His mercy-seat, and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, a reasonable, holy, lively sacrifice unto Him forever. Two reflections flow from His pre-eminence.

(1.) Our security. He holds His people in the right hand of His might, and who is able to pluck them out of His hand? Satan doubtless will strive—we know it—we feel it—but his efforts are all vain. If God be for us, who can be against us? "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus is thus exalted, but not for Himself only—He "is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior," and therefore He is able, even as He is willing, to save us to the uttermost. Seeing that He is thus high above all angelic powers, indisputable it must be that He is much higher above all the hosts of darkness. Therefore, let us bless Him, and take courage. He will bruise Satan under our feet shortly.

(2.) Our future prospect. We rejoice in the truth, that Jesus is gone "to prepare a place for us, and that He will come again to receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also." We know that "we shall ever be with the Lord." His will is, that they who are given to Him, be with Him where He is. The glory given unto Him, He has given unto them. Can it be that such sinful worms shall share all His pre-eminence, and be seated with Him "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named?" As truly as He is thus exalted, so truly will He thus exalt us. May we now live worthy of God, who has called us to His kingdom and glory! May our conversation now be in heaven! May the paltry trifles of this world be far beneath our feet!

Ephesians 1:22. "And has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church."

We are called to prolong our contemplation of the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God, He is King of kings and Lord of lords. The government is upon His shoulder. May the Spirit of the Lord reveal some glimpses of His glory to us, while we consider from the words before us, (1.) That all things are under His feet. (2.) That He is Head over all things to His Church. How truly blessed are they who call Him Lord, and know that they are one with Him forever!

(1.) All things are under His feet. The Holy Spirit declares this in Psalm 8, in which these words first occur, and where Jesus is called the Son of Man. Hence it is apparent that this supremacy is assigned to the God-man, our Mediator, our Surety, Christ Jesus. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Holy Spirit thus enlarges on the words, "In that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him." Therefore, O glorious and blessed Savior, You who were made a inhabitant of earth for us poor sinners, and did groan and bleed upon the Cross to redeem us from the curse of the Law, we adore You as supreme and universal Sovereign of all things, as reigning with might, omnipotent over all that is, and was, and is to come!

Satan, the great enemy of Your kingdom and our souls, is low beneath Your feet. In the days of Your suffering He was bold to assail You; but it was easy with You to drive him vanquished from the combat. On the Cross he ventured to make a desperate struggle—but how vain! By dying, You did destroy him that had the power of death, and did shiver into atoms the foul scepter of his wretched reign. And now, behold, how powerless he lies! At Your command, he is constrained to let each captive go—his chains fall off when Your word is uttered, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." O Lord, You who have all this power, put it forth, we beseech You, more and more in our behalf—suffer not Your enemy

to occupy the least portion of our hearts—permit him not to harass us with hateful temptations, but drive him from us into outer darkness. Hasten the appointed time when he shall be cast into the bottomless pit, and universal holiness shall reign throughout the realms of peace!

O Lord, our souls are under Your governance. Be pleased, then, to keep them true and faithful to Your service. Bind Your sweet chains of love around them, and suffer them not to wander from Your rule. O Lord, the world, too, and all within it, is under Your dominion—we pray You, disappoint all adverse designs, frustrate rebellious malice, over-rule all evil desires and attempts, and make all events conduce to the good of Your Church, and the glory of Your holy name. Take to Yourself Your great power—claim the kingdoms as Your own—bring in the longed-for day when shouts in heaven and earth shall proclaim, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" May our feeble voices join in the blessed chorus which crowns You Lord of All! Thus we adore You as having all things under Your feet.

(2.) Jesus is Head over all things to His Church. How close is the union which exists between Christ and His people! The Spirit delights to proclaim this reality under many striking similitudes, that the full comfort of it may refresh our souls. Let us welcome it, and feast upon it. He is the foundation—sure, strong, elect, precious—we are the living stones of a spiritual house, laid upon Him, and cemented into Him. He is the Tree of Life, full of vivifying juices—we are the branches, engrafted into Him, and receiving fruitfulness from Him. He is the Bridegroom, full of love and tender solicitude—we are the spouse, whom He has chosen for Himself, and made the partners of His throne forever. He is the everlasting Father—we are the children whom He has begotten unto Himself by spiritual regeneration. He is the Elder Brother of our family—we are conformed unto His image, and are called to sit down with Him at His board, and to be joint-heirs of His inheritance. Finally, He is the Head; we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

What peace flows from the assurance that He is Head over all things unto us! In every difficulty, the head thinks, and reasons, and takes precaution, and directs—just so, Jesus is always thoughtful for us, and will surely guide us in a right and safe path, until we reach the city of eternal habitation. The head rules every member; each moves and acts in submission to the controlling will—just so, Jesus moves and reigns in each child of grace. The man is esteemed great, whose head is full of wisdom, and prudence, and skill. How great, then, is the believer, who is thus influenced by the all-wise, the only wise God! Jesus! move ever in us, as a head guiding its members!

Ephesians 1:23. "The Church which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all."

The saving truths of Scripture are always expressed in the clearest language. There is neither ambiguity nor mysticism. The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. But alas! how few understand and receive the simple declarations! Why is this? The reason is obvious—the truths are spiritual, and therefore can only be apprehended by spiritual discernment. The sun brightly shines, but the blind man is in nothing but unbroken darkness. The Word distinctly speaks, but he, whose spiritual ears are not unstopped, hears nothing. What can be plainer than the saying before us? "The Church is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all." But to every natural man this seems a fond and foolish dream, from which he turns either with utter indifference, or the sneer of ridicule. Blessed Spirit of the living God, enlighten our darkness, that we may see and delight in this precious truth, to the exceeding joy and refreshment of our souls! (1.) Believers are the Body of Christ. (2.) They are the fullness of Him that fills all in all. We have already contemplated Jesus as the Head. We proceed to the immediate consequence.

(1.) Believers are His Body. May an increase of grace and faith be granted to realize this truth! The comfort which seems most prominent from this assurance, is the persuasion of close union.

Wherever we are, under whatever circumstances of distress, or trial, or suffering, we are verily part of Christ. No man can deny or reject his own members, though disease may prey upon them, and deformity disfigure them. Thus sin, with all its leprous pollution, may contaminate; still, Christ will not cast off. He has joined His Church to Himself forever. When any limb is in pain, we know how the head sympathizes. Thus in all our afflictions He is afflicted—and he that touches us, touches the very apple of His eye. It is a groundless fear, that Christ is indifferent to our troubles and anguish. He participates in every pain, and is truly touched with the feeling of our infirmities. We hence learn the true dignity of the child of God. It utterly exceeds all present power to conceive or express. The Lord help us ever to bear it in mind! The contemplation is sanctifying, and has direct tendency to elevate.

If all my members are part of Christ, shall I make them instruments of sin? God forbid! Shall my tongue, which is part of Christ's tongue, join in vain and trifling converse? Shall my eyes, which are part of Christ's eyes, look on vanity? Shall my ears, which are part of Christ's ears, listen with complacency to the ungodly communications of the world? Shall my feet, which are part of Christ's feet, carry me to scenes and companies from which my Head is excluded? Shall my heart receive any affection, my mind any impression, which is not full of Christ? Lord, of Your mercy forbid it! I am Your—keep me, use me as Your forever. May all who see me take knowledge of me, that I bear Your image—in every place may I be a living witness to Your truth—may it be seen in me that You have living members upon earth, even as You are a living Head in heaven! Blessed Lord, grant that Your Body may no more be disjointed and disorganized—may all Your members be knit together as one holy, compact frame—may one Spirit of love animate the whole, and may Your prayer have speedy fulfillment, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us; that the world may know that You have sent me, and have loved them as You have loved me."

(2.) Believers are "the fullness of Him that fills all in all." Great is this mystery. Christ as God is omnipresent. He fills all heaven, and all the universe which His power made. As an indwelling Spirit He pervades the whole Church. He is present in all assemblies, and occupies every heart. But while all things are thus full of Him, His fullness is the Church while all would be one vast vacancy without Him, He would be incomplete without His people. What shall be said to this truth? We marvel and adore. With what love must He have loved us, when He took us into such union with Himself, that He can no more be entire apart from us! Oh! that we might similarly feel, that we cannot live or move one moment without Him!

Who can consider these things, and gainsay the truth, that His sheep shall never perish? The absence of one would destroy the entirety of the body, and would render Christ deficient, imperfect. The very thought must instantly be rejected; and we must delightedly embrace the sure conclusion, that all who are His, are His forever. What comforts should fill our souls! what prospect brightens before us! what gratitude should burn in our hearts! what debtors are we to the grace which gave us to Jesus, and Jesus unto us!

Section 3

Ephesians 2:1—10; Dead in Sin—Alive in Christ

Ephesians 2:1. "And you has He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

This verse presents a striking contrast. It exhibits our natural condition, and tells us into what state we are brought by the gracious power of God. (1.) We were dead in trespasses and sins. (2.) We have been brought from death unto life by the quickening Spirit. Heavenly Father, shine now into our hearts, and give us to feel what wondrous mercy has been extended towards us!

(1.) We were dead in trespasses and sins. Let us never forget, that in Adam we lost all spiritual life. Satan seized upon his soul, and inflicted a mortal wound. He was created with the light of heaven in his heart, but sin gained entrance, and utterly extinguished every spark. He became corrupt and depraved in every faculty, perception, and power. It is indisputable that Adam could not impart to his descendants that which he no longer possessed. A holy being cannot spring from an unholy; neither a clean from an unclean. Darkness cannot produce light; the grape cannot bud forth from the brier. Thus no descendant of fallen Adam could bring a living soul into this world. All who are naturally born of him must be born dead as to God.

How humbling is this thought! What can be more pitiable than to see natural men swelling with haughty pride, and vaunting as if endued with great and noble faculties! Alas! what are they? Fleshly sepulchers of expired souls. There is no life within, and the moving clay must soon crumble into dust. Yet such men will oppose God, and dispute against His truth, and openly revile His new-born children. Such, however, were we; but we are quickened. Blessing

and glory be unto Him, who in the multitude of His tender mercies, has wrought a change!

But we were not only dead by nature, we were dead also in practice. The life within us, not being the life of God, was the life of the Evil One. Therefore, every movement of the inner man, being utterly apart from God, was only animate towards Satan. Whatever we did, having no reference to God, was sin. All our deeds, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, were evil. Every thought was sin—and, therefore, every word and every work was sin, and that continually. Death to God is life to sin. Every step which we took was in sin towards hell. Every moment which passed over our heads witnessed an aggravation and accumulation of iniquity, and brought us nearer to endless perdition. The dreadful description of the prophet exactly belonged to us. "Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they are gone away backward. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores." Is this our present state? Thanks be unto God! we now live unto Him. "While we were in our blood, He said unto us, live; yes, while we were in our blood, He said unto us, live."

(2.) This brings us to our second truth—We have been brought from death unto life by the quickening Spirit. When we had no power to look towards God, or cry unto Him—when we had no inclination or desire to seek His face—He drew near unto us, and raised us from the grave of our iniquities. He caused the dry bones to live. Can we doubt who is the first mover in the work of regeneration? It is our God, in the plenitude of His love. Shall we enquire what motive constrained Him? It could be nothing in us, for we were dead in trespasses and sins—all that we did and had was vileness and abomination in His sight. Nothing moved Him but the love which is His essence. He quickened us because He loved us—He loved us because He would love us. Let us adore this love, which brought life

and light into our souls; and let us love Him, who first so loved us. If He so loved us, while our whole nature was enmity to Him, will He cease to love us, now that He has made us partakers of the divine nature, and has given us new powers to know, worship, and serve Him? It cannot be. He has loved us with an everlasting love, and never will He cast us off.

We may now plead with Him, that we are His workmanship, the temples of the Holy Spirit; and we may beseech Him for His glory's sake, to forsake not the work of His own hands—and we may rejoice in the assurance, that He who has begun this good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Let the new-born exclaim, Have we received this life from heaven? Oh! then, let us live as redeemed from the death in trespasses and sins, and as quickened unto the life of God. It is true not of the Jews only, but of all God's children, "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." Remember what Spirit dwells within you—cease altogether from the world and the flesh—walk in the Spirit—be not carnally-minded, which is death, but be spiritually-minded, which is life and peace. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

Ephesians 2:2. "Wherein in time past you walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience."

Dark and dreadful is the picture which this verse presents. It withdraws the veil, and shows us more distinctly our miserable and lost condition by nature. We have just been told that we were "dead in trespasses and sins." It is now added, "wherein in time past you walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." Let us consider these fearful declarations in the following order. While we walked according to the course of this world, (1.) We walked in sins. (2.) We walked according to the Devil, who is called the prince of the power of the air. (3.) Let us ponder the truth, that the Devil is the spirit that now works in the

children of disobedience. While we advance, may our hearts overflow with gratitude at the thought that the quickening Spirit of God has delivered us from this horrible pit, from this mire and clay, and has set our feet upon a Rock, even our Savior Jesus Christ.

(1.) While we walked according to the course of this world, we walked in sins. There are two kingdoms in direct opposition—the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of Christ. We were all born subjects of the former; God's own children are translated in His good time by the power of the Spirit into the latter. The former is all darkness, ignorance, and sin. God is utterly unknown in it—all its laws, and rules, and maxims, and desires have reference to the things of time and sense. The thought of eternity and the invisible world seldom enters, and if it presents itself it is instantly expelled as an unwelcome guest. The prevailing notion in it is the indulgence and aggrandizement of self.

While we walk in this world, we do nothing but sin. What is sin, but a violation of the righteous law of God? This law requires, that God should be the object of our supreme love, and should occupy every thought; that self should be completely cast out and annihilated; and that God should reign without a rival in every movement of the soul. But oh! how different from this is the course of this world! Here every step is without God; yes, rather, is against God. How little do the men of this world consider their true condition! They are employed from morning until night in the one work of rebellion against God, their Creator and Preserver; from whose bounty they receive their every faculty and enjoyment. Their seeming approaches to God in outward worship are only fearful mockeries; for they utter what they do not believe; they profess what they do not feel; they promise what they never purpose to perform. Thus they treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Hence it appears, that while we live according to the course of this world, we walk only in sin. But believers "are not of the world, even as Jesus is not of the world."

Blessed be God, who through His Son Jesus Christ has delivered us from this present evil world!

(2.) While we walked according to the course of this world, we walked according to the Devil, who is "the prince of the power of the air." The world has its king. The Devil is called "the ruler of the darkness of this world." Again—he is "the God of this world, who blinds the minds of those who believe not." Again—Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of this world—now shall the prince of this world be cast out." Hence we learn distinctly that the men of the world are under his vile yoke; that he rules them with his iron scepter; that his chains enthrall them; that they receive their laws and commands from his mouth. What, then, is their boasted liberty? It is abject slavery. They cannot do what they please—as the horse obeys the bridle of the rider—as the ship is moved by the will of the pilot—so these men move here and there as Satan guides them. "The lusts of their Father they will do." What state can be more pitiable, what drudgery more vile! In these chains we too worked in former days; in these chains we would be working at this time, if the Lord had not looked in compassion on us. We knew not our misery, we hugged our fetters, we had no wish to escape from our captivity, when Jesus came and set us free. Shall we allow the prince of the power of the air to regain his sway over us? The Lord forbid. In His name, through His blood, let us resist, and we shall tread down this enemy under our feet shortly.

(3.) The verse tells us, that this evil spirit still "works in the children of disobedience." He is a spirit, and therefore can enter into the secret chambers of the heart, and erect his throne, and give his laws in the recesses of the soul. Here he sits, directing the thoughts, and prompting the inclinations, and fanning the embers of corruption into a flame. Hence in all the desires, and plans, and schemes, and words, and works of the children of the world, Satan is the author and originator. O blessed Jesus! restrain this adversary! Trample him beneath Your feet! Cast him utterly out of us! Drive him into outer darkness!

Ephesians 2:3. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Our original state is again represented. Dark and hateful as the picture is, the contemplation is most profitable. It silences all boastings; it utterly strips us of all self-righteousness; it excites self-loathing and self-aborrence; it loudly proclaims the sentence of just condemnation in our ears; above all, it exalts the glory of God in His free grace and unspeakable mercy in Christ Jesus. May these blessed effects be wrought by the Spirit in our souls, while we fix our eyes on the portrait before us! It exhibits to us "our former conversation:" we "fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind." (1.) Let us consider this truth; (2.) Let us proceed to the fearful consequence, we "were the children of wrath, even as others." Heavenly Father, enlighten our darkness!

(1.) We fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Before the Spirit of God enters the soul, the whole nature is carnal and corrupt. The mind, in its various operations, only lusts after evil; the flesh is one mass of depravity, greedy after low and base gratifications. The mind suggests, and plans, and invents; the flesh is eager to obey. The mind is enmity to God; the flesh never can become spiritual. Hence the old man is given to works of unrighteousness. The mind is the nest of every unclean bird—the fountainhead of polluted streams, and the flesh is the instrument of unholy indulgence. In this Epistle, the Gentiles are described as "walking in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;" and then it immediately follows, that being thus "past feeling, they gave themselves over to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Here we have the mind desiring and devising, and the flesh executing, all evil. Hence the Spirit so continually represents the

flesh or carnal nature as the enemy or opposing principle to Christ. "The carnal mind is enmity against God—because it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be—so then those who are in the flesh," or carnal state, who have not received the Spirit, and become partakers of the divine nature, "cannot please God." This is their one conversation—"they fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind." They offer no restraint to their ungodly propensities; they are carried rapidly down the destructive stream of sensual indulgence. Their one desire is to crowd the largest portion of worldly pleasure into the narrow speck of this little life. They know no higher desires—they are ignorant of God—they tremble not at His Word—they are utter strangers to His fear—they are blind to the real character of sin—they are reckless of the dreadful consequences—their eyes are closed to the realities of eternity, the approach of judgment, and the appalling terrors of the wrath to come. Such were we— so we walked, having no holier object than to fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind. But believers are "renewed in the spirit of their minds," and strive now to "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." It is their privilege to give blessing, and praise, and thanksgiving to God, and to the Lord Jesus, and to the quickening Spirit! We ascribe all inward life, all spiritual power, to the free grace of our God, who loves us and has such mercy on us!

(2.) The fearful consequences of such conversation. We were "the children of wrath, even as others." God abhors all evil—it is infinitely repugnant to His holy nature—His wrath burns like fire against it. So while we were thus wholly given to work iniquity, God's pure anger was against our every word, and thought, and work. We were every moment treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. This is the way of all the generation of the ungodly. We differed not from their principles and proceedings, and therefore we were rapidly hastening to the endurance of the wrath to come. But who can tell what that wrath is? Then will it be known, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the

Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ—who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power."

But though in ourselves we were thus "the children of wrath, even as others;" yet in the secret purposes of God's grace, we were the children of His love, and given unto Jesus, and appointed not unto wrath, but to obtain salvation. Therefore Jesus came, and drank the cup of wrath for us; and "has delivered us from the wrath to come." Lord Jesus, we adore You! Give us grace to know that no wrath remains for us.

Ephesians 2:4. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us."

How beautiful is this ray of cheering light, which breaks in upon the gloomy darkness of the preceding verses! In them man appeared "dead in trespasses and sins;" "walking according to the course of this world;" "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind;" "the children of wrath, even as others." We beheld the hideous features of Satan's progeny; we trembled at the prospect of the smoke of the torment ascending up forever and ever, which is justly prepared as their portion. But now all is brightness and celestial joy. God appears—not as a consuming fire—not in the garments of fierce indignation and vengeance—but as the God whose name is Love, arrayed in the riches of His gracious mercy. Blessed Lord, help us by Your Spirit, to see and know You as here revealed—the very God of our salvation! Send out Your light and Your truth, to give us light, and to lead us into all truth! The points for consideration are (1.) God rich in mercy; (2.) God loving us with great love.

(1.) "God is rich in mercy." Mercy is that tender attribute which looks with compassion on the wretched, and hastens to their relief. Who is more completely wretched than man in his natural condition? Ignorant of God, he knows no real enjoyment; for all real joy consists in likeness to, and communion with God—a slave of the

Devil, he toils throughout all his days in the vilest drudgery; and the wages at the end is the blackness of darkness forever. This is real wretchedness. This is the state which mercy flies to alleviate. Mercy ceases to be mercy, if no efforts are made to rescue these sufferers from perishing. But our "God is rich in mercy." When He proclaimed His great Name to Moses, what a precious train of graces seem pressing for the foremost place! But mercy outstrips her fellows, and the first sound we hear is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." Again we are told that "He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in mercy;" that "He is plenteous in mercy and truth;" that "as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him." He has said, "Mercy shall be built up forever;" and we are encouraged to trust in "the multitude of His tender mercies."

Surely then Mercy will not leave us in our low abyss of misery! It cannot be. See God sparing not His own Son, but delivering Him up for us all; putting Him to shame and grief—being pleased in bruising Him—sheathing the sword of vengeance in His heart; taking of Him the full payment of our countless iniquities; and say, has not mercy yearned over us to help us? God is rich in mercy! Where we abound in sin, He far more abounds in mercy. Let believers put all their trust in God, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." When their sins rise up in dreadful crowds against them, let them think of Jesus, God's mercy of mercies—God's mercy in the highest—and hasten to the fountain opened, and wash them all away. When conscious of infirmity, and terrified by Satan's assaults, let them go quickly to the mercy-seat, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. When conscience accuses, let them go to God, and plead with Him that "He is rich in mercy," and they will find indeed that "with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption."

(2.) Next, let us consider God as "loving us with great love." This is the precious truth so inconceivably dear and supporting to believers. Their God is Love. His whole nature, His entire essence, His every

feeling, His every dealing towards His people, is pure, unmixed, infinite love. His love gave them to Christ before all worlds; His love gave Christ unto them; His love called them in time; His love sends out the teaching Spirit to enlighten them, and to excite the cry, "Abba, Father," in their hearts. His love keeps them amid their many perils, through faith unto eternal salvation. His love sustains them daily looking unto the Lamb slain, whose meritorious blood cleanses them from all sin. His love sends out His rod to chasten and correct them—to humble them—to keep them low in dust and ashes. His love binds up their wounds, and pours in heavenly consolation, and whispers unto them, "Be not afraid." His love is from everlasting to everlasting. Nothing can separate the believer "from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Ephesians 2:4-5. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ."

Such is the full and glowing statement of Paul. It calls for our adoring admiration. We have already considered "the great love with which God loved us." This love is marvelously enhanced by the consideration now before us. Let us (1.) Ponder this truth—He loved us "when we were dead in sins." (2.) Proceed to the result of this love, "He quickened us." (3.) This is said to be "together with Christ;" that is, after the model of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and by virtue of our eternal oneness with Him. May the Spirit of our God be with us!

(1.) God loved us when we were dead in sins. There is no fact which seems to be so staggering to faith. Such action is so utterly at variance with all the feelings which we experience, or witness in others. Our love is excited by what we deem lovely; our hearts are warmed by the charms of extraordinary worth and grace; we turn with disgust from the hideous deformities of vice and iniquity; we loathe and reprobate the dark features of undisguised evil. Who ever loves that which is altogether hateful? Our love lies dead and

dormant until aroused and kindled by something from without. Such is the manner of man. How different the manner of our God! He loves us with a great love before one particle of divine grace enters our souls; while we are one mass of loathsome iniquity; while we hate Him and His holy law, and manifest our complete alienation from Him by every word and work. What a wondrous thought is here! Oh, for more grace to see it distinctly, and to realize it abidingly! God has greatly loved us, when we were nothing but sin, when we did nothing but sin. Whence then sprang this love? All in us tended to estrange from it. Whence then did it originate? Surely from nothing belonging to us. It sprang entirely from His own nature, which is Love. "God is Love." He loved us, because it was His will to love us. We may search and reason until all our powers fail, and we shall find no motive or cause out of God Himself. Let us then adore our God, and the freeness and the riches of His love! Who is a God like unto Him, who so greatly loved us, vile, hateful sinners! What an instance of God-like grace! But our God is infinite, and unspeakable, and unsearchable, and inconceivable in His nature! We cannot fathom, or understand—we can only marvel, give thanks, and adore.

We should not be content with a general view of this amazing love. Each believer should single himself out of the whole company of the redeemed, and take his seat alone before the light of this truth, and calmly bring it home to his individual case. God has thus loved you, even you, when you were thus detestable and unclean. It is so, it is really so, it must be so; therefore believe it. Lift up the eyes of faith, and see God's eternal love yearning over you, when in the lowest depths of your degradation, misery, and filth, and say, Will not you now love Him? Can you withhold your love from Him?

Are you disposed to ask, Wherefore me? What fixed this love on me? Here ignorance must check conjecture. This secret knows no man. But is it not enough to be assured that you truly are the object of His distinguishing favor? To realize this is salvation, heaven, glory. Is not this enough? Be content, then, and let your life be a life

of love and praise. For what is the immediate consequence of the freeness of this love? If you were loved when dead, will you not still be loved now that you live? If all the sins of unregeneracy did not prevent love, surely all sins after regeneration cannot quench it. His love is like Himself; therefore it is without variableness or shadow of turning.

(2.) The immediate result of this love is our divine birth. Because He loves us, therefore He quickens us. Because we are sons, He sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Hence we have new powers conferred from heaven, enabling us to see, and know, and love, and serve Him. Let no man rejoice in God's free and eternal love of him, who cannot testify from inward experience, I am created anew in Christ Jesus—"old things are passed away; all things are become new."

(3.) This spiritual regeneration is "with Christ." We have already seen, that it is "according to the mighty power which God wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." Our souls are quickened with Christ, being brought from the death of sin by the same omnipotence which brought Christ's body from the grave. Our regeneration is also with Christ, because it is by virtue of our oneness with Him. "Because I live, you shall live also." A living Head must have living members.

Ephesians 2:6. "And has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

We have already considered the words, "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ." Marvelous indeed is this act of grace and unspeakable this goodness. It breathes divine life into our dead souls! But superadded blessings fill up the cluster. The Apostle carries us onward to the contemplation of a wondrous work. "He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Gracious Spirit, magnify Christ

before the eye of our faith, while we examine these truths! (1.) We are raised up together with Christ. (2.) We are sitting in heaven together with Him. How can such blessedness be? It is even so, Lord, for it has seemed good in Your sight to make this revelation.

(1.) We are raised up together with Christ. Wonderful is the Person of Christ! It not only represented, but, so to speak, it contained all His people. His punishment was their punishment—His sufferings their sufferings—His death their death—His righteousness and obedience their righteousness and obedience. So that each child of God is privileged to say, By virtue of my eternal oneness with Christ, I have in Him suffered all the wrath of God, which my sins deserved—I have in Him fulfilled every requirement of the Law. When He hung on the cross, I hung on the cross; when He rose again from the dead, I rose also; when He ascended into heaven, I ascended together with Him. Christ and my person can never be parted. He received me as portion of Himself forever.

This is that blessed truth which explains the language of our text, and tells us that "we are raised together with Him." This resurrection is true mystically in the purposes and counsels of heaven. It will shortly be so in our actual and joyful experience. God now looks upon us as the conquerors of death and the grave. When His Son burst the bands and came forth trampling the chains of hell beneath His feet, God saw the whole Church sharing in the triumph. Shortly shall we realize the victory which is now mystically ours. It is true that our bodies must for a little while lie in the grave; "our earthly house of this tabernacle must be dissolved;" unto dust we must return. But we are one with Him who proclaimed, "I am the resurrection and the life;" and soon shall the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God be heard, and then "this corruptible shall put on incorruption; and this mortal shall put on immortality. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Then shall be the full accomplishment of the prophecy, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death! I will be your plagues—O grave! I will be your

destruction—repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." Let believers realize this truth—In Christ they have conquered death and the grave—in Christ, God sees them already delivered from this power and clad in the garments of new and eternal life. Let them then cease to tremble at this foe. Let them rather view him as prostrate and subdued beneath their feet—let none of his terrors make them afraid, but let them go on their way adoring their Lord, and singing, "We are raised together with Christ."

(2.) We are "sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Our exaltation to glory is as sure as our resurrection from the dead. The union which secures the latter secures also the former. Christ entered into heaven representing the whole company of His redeemed. He took His seat on the throne of His glory, not in His own name only, but also in their name, and as their Surety. Believers may lift up their eyes to heaven, and not only behold Jesus on the right hand of the Majesty on high, but may also see their own thrones already prepared, and their own people already in occupation. Our Proxy has taken possession for us. God sees us in Him established and settled in the mansions of eternal blessedness. Shall we realize this, and not rejoice in the Lord! O my soul, know your real blessedness, and sing, rejoice, and give thanks! Heaven is your, because you are inseparably one with Christ. Care nothing then for the trifles of time and this miserable world—it is neither your home, your rest, nor your portion. Live above it. Look down upon it as being an inhabitant of a heavenly abode. Habituate your thoughts to dwell on high. Fix them on your true estate. Become more familiar with God, your Father—with Jesus, your Redeemer—with the Holy Spirit, your Sanctifier and Teacher—and with the spirits of the just made perfect, and the whole company of the ransomed, who are your brethren and your associates forever. Learn more and more the language of the better country. Converse more uninterruptedly with the citizens of light. Cease more from the ways and words of the children of darkness. So shall you have the present enjoyment of heaven, and find by experience that you are sitting in heavenly places together with Christ.

Ephesians 2:7. "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Do we enquire for what purpose God is pleased to quicken our souls, to raise us up together with Christ, and to make us sit together in heavenly places? The present verse supplies the answer. "That in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." It is the intent of God to display throughout all eternity the amazing abundance of His grace, as evidenced by His work in His people. To this truth let us now direct our thoughts, and may light from above shine into our souls! Our theme carries us beyond the limits of this perishing scene. We are introduced into the heavenly inheritance. What do we there behold? God is manifested in all the plenitude of His glory. He who is "eternal, immortal, invisible, who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen, or can see," is now clearly revealed. Jesus is now seen as He is. Who are they who stand around the throne, and encircle God and the Lamb? They are "a great multitude, whom no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." What is their employment? They cry, "Salvation unto our God, which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." They will never rest throughout all the ages of eternity, in ascribing the glory of their full redemption to the exceeding riches of God's grace, in His kindness toward them through Christ Jesus.

This salvation consists in their spirits being made perfectly pure and holy; even participating in the nature of God Himself—in their bodies being redeemed from all the filth and pollution of earthly corruption, and being rendered immortal, incorruptible, bright, perfect, spiritual—exactly in every circumstance similar to our Lord's glorious body, and in their exaltation to sit down with Him on His throne, even as He has taken His seat on the Father's throne. They are glorified in body, soul, and spirit, and they share the throne of God and the Lamb. They well know that they are indebted for all

their greatness and joy to God's free, sovereign grace in Christ Jesus— and now with one ceaseless hymn of adoration they laud and magnify its exceeding riches. No other note disturbs the harmony of eternity. One God, by His one grace, in the one Savior, has brought this vast company to their one home—and one song is now heard blessing and praising the freeness and the riches of this grace. Thus it is that by our regeneration, resurrection, and exaltation, God will show "in the ages to come the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." From this explanation of this verse, let us proceed to a few reflections.

(1.) We see how God has purposed to display the riches of His glory in the ages to come, and shall we not now commence the song which is so pleasing to His ears? Let us glorify now in the house of our bondage the exceeding riches of His grace. When we draw near to the mercy-seat through the blood of Jesus, let us confess unto God our utter misery, and vileness, and corruption, and pollution, and iniquity by nature—let us strip ourselves of the filthy rags of our own righteousness, and bless God that He has condescended to look upon us in our low estate, and to give us grace and glory. Let us tell Him, that when we merited nothing but hell, He has been pleased to give us freely all things, even all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Let us never be ashamed to confess before men, that we are debtors to grace for all things. While worldlings boast that they "are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," let us avow that in ourselves we "are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" but that God, in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, has quickened us, and raised us up, and made us to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus—and openly declare, that He has so blessed us in the exceeding riches of His grace.

(2.) Let us look forward to the ages before us. God's kindness toward us through Christ Jesus is kindness for never-ending ages. Let this thought enable us to rise high above the afflictions and troubles of this brief day. For the endless joy set before us, let us

endure these short-lived trials, and "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Let us look less "to the things which are seen; and more to the things which are not seen—for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Let us remember our high calling. God has quickened us, and raised us, and exalted us, that we might be the monuments of His grace throughout all the ages to come.

(3.) Let us warn others, who are trusting in themselves, and despising the grace of God. Let us tell those who "merit" is the inscription over the gate of hell; "free grace" over the portals of heaven; that all who enter the latter, enter leaning on the arm of Jesus, and boasting in His righteousness; that they know but one language, and sing but one song—Grace to it! Grace to it!

Ephesians 2:8. "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves—it is the gift of God."

The verse before us is one of those plain declarations of God's Word which no sophistry can gainsay. It is sad evidence of the determined infatuation and dreadful blindness of the natural mind, that after reading this faithful saying, difficulties should exist concerning the fundamental truths of our Gospel. Let us draw near to this text, and humbly enquire (1.) What is the originating cause of salvation? (2.) What is the instrumental cause? (3.) What part belongs to man—what part to God? Lord, give us to receive Your truth more deeply in the love of it, and may its sanctifying power more sweetly constrain us!

(1.) What is the **ORIGINATING** cause of salvation? It is grace. This truth has been examined and unfolded in many of the preceding verses. It is the note which sounds aloud in every part of this Epistle. It is the corner-stone which holds the whole fabric together. To write the same things, however—to hear the same things—is not grievous, but rather profitable and pleasant. That is no gracious heart which

wearies of contemplating the grace which is the song of the Redeemed, the glory of Heaven, the destruction of Satan. Let us then recapitulate. The plan of salvation is of grace. This plan is wonderful in wisdom and love, and was framed and arranged in the counsels of heaven before the foundation of the world. It was grace which selected Christ as the Redeemer, and called Him to the blessed work. Grace consented to receive His blood as the full and sufficient payment of all the sins of His people, and His obedience as their complete fulfillment of all the law's demands. Grace determined the number and people of the saved, and gave them unto Jesus, and Jesus unto them. Grace united them as one forever. In the fullness of time, grace opens their eyes to see Christ as chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely; opens their hearts to receive Him as all their salvation and all their desire. Grace supplies them through their earthly pilgrimage with all things needful for life and godliness; and when all is accomplished in them and by them, grace receives them to the heavenly inheritance, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fades not away. Thus every link in the whole chain, which extends from eternity to eternity, is a link of grace. All believers exclaim, "By grace are we saved."

(2.) What is the INSTRUMENTAL cause of salvation? It is Faith. "By grace are you saved, through faith." Faith is a free-grace gift—it is wrought in the heart by the Spirit. This conveys the soul of the sinner utterly out of self, and leads him up to Jesus, and enables him to discern His worth—His suitableness—His all-sufficiency to save to the uttermost. This gives him power to receive with grateful gladness His offers of mercy, and to repose with undoubting confidence on His finished work. Hence faith is the instrument by which the awakened sinner becomes acquainted with his Lord in all His offices and in all His love, and becomes interested in His work of redemption and intercession. He who is without faith rejects Christ. He who partakes in this precious grace embraces Him, and becomes one with Him forever. Now this instrument comes directly from God—He freely bestows it—consequently, salvation through

faith is altogether consistent with salvation by grace. This evidently appears from the next head.

(3.) What part has man in the work? He has none. "Not of ourselves." How true is that testimony of the Spirit, "Salvation belongs unto the Lord!" The Lord alone wills it, and bestows it. "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." Man freely and fully partakes of the exceeding blessedness; but man is utterly excluded from any share in the design or the accomplishment. What part could belong to him? He was dead in trespasses and sins—a willing captive of the Devil, loving his darkness, and the chains which enthralled him. Hence he had no desire for salvation, and therefore could make no effort. But supposing the desire to be kindled in his heart, what power had he? All the angels and principalities on high were weak to hold back the right arm of God's just vengeance, or to rescue a sinner from the iron grasp of Satan. What, then, could impotent man perform? How could he stand against God, or plead and treat with Him as fellow with fellow? The very thought is folly. Salvation is "not of ourselves." Every enlightened and gracious soul will devoutly confess this truth.

(4.) The whole is God's; it is His gift. We must not limit the words of our verse, "It is the gift of God" to faith. True it is that faith, like every other grace, is freely given to us of God. But the words refer to the whole work of salvation, in all its parts and provisions. This is an absolute, sovereign, unmerited, unsought gift of God. When we deserved nothing, desired nothing, expected nothing—of His own love and mercy He gave us full and eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. O you saints! will you not love the Lord, and praise and magnify His holy Name? Where are your hearts—where is your gratitude? Live to His glory, who has thus freely given you salvation.

Ephesians 2:9. "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

The Apostle has clearly affirmed that salvation is the free-grace gift of God. The experience of every child of God confirms this truth. Grace originates— carries on—perfects the whole. From first to last we are debtors to covenant mercy alone. But as this doctrine is of deep importance to the well-being and comfort of the believer, the Apostle proceeds to a negative statement, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." This follows, of course, from the preceding; for if God alone is admitted to the work, man, and all his doings, and merits, and pretensions are excluded. Let us hence consider (1.) That works have no share in procuring salvation. (2.) The cause of their exclusion, "lest any man should boast." Lord, enlighten our understandings and sanctify our hearts!

(1.) Works have no share in procuring salvation. "Not of works." All who have received the Spirit of God well know this. They are convinced of sin. They see their whole lives to be one continuous stream of transgressions, backslidings, short-comings. What did they in their state of unregeneracy? This one thing, and this one thing only—they openly and daringly rebelled against God—they trampled His commands beneath their feet—they followed the devices and desires of their own corrupt hearts—they worshiped and served the god of this world. Can a believer bring any work out of all the period of this blind ignorance, on which he can look with complacency? He loathes—he abhors them all. He sincerely would wash them out in tears of bitter penitence; but knowing that his very tears are not clean, he brings the mass of his former iniquities in the arms of faith, and plunges them in the all-cleansing fountain which issues from the side of the bleeding Lamb. Ask him, Do you rely on any deed of your early life for acceptance? The thought fills him with horror—he cries, Away with them all, they are anguish to my heart, and abomination in the sight of my God—away with them all—nothing but the blood of Jesus can cleanse their crimson dye. Ask the believer, Is this the price with which you hope to purchase heaven? and he confesses, that their just reward is the bottomless pit forever.

But it may be said, Is there no merit in works after conversion? Are not believers then guided by the Holy Spirit, and do they not walk before God in newness of life, and is not Christ their very life, and do they not abound in fruits of righteousness to His glory and praise? Supposing these works to be perfect and holy, even as God is perfect and holy; still, not unto man, but unto the Spirit would be all the merit, for He works in the believer to will and to do that which is well-pleasing in God's sight.

But will the believer admit that his works after conversion are thus blameless? Far, very far from it. He complains, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." He still smites upon his bosom and cries, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" He daily feels that he is prone to err, and acknowledges with Paul, Of sinners, I am chief. His hourly transgressions seem now to have a darker complexion of evil. There is so much of base ingratitude in them—there is such despite to the Spirit of grace—there are so many wounds inflicted on the heart of Christ—that very heart which bled to save; so that the believer increasingly feels, that he has daily more cause to cling to the cross, and to hide himself in the wounded side. With sincerity he prays "Enter not into judgment with Your servant, O Lord, for in Your sight shall no man living be justified." With humility he confesses, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." With thankfulness he acknowledges, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." With gratitude he professes, "This is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." His boast is, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit,". "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

(2.) We thus come to our second point, the cause of the exclusion of works— "lest any man should boast." If the hand of man added one single stone to the fabric of salvation, he would be able to point to it and say, See what I have done! Some glorying would belong to him, because the entire work would not be of God—it would not have been complete without the addition which he had made, and therefore part of the praise would be his due. But God cannot share His glory with another. "No flesh may glory in His presence." The law of heaven is, "He that glories let him glory in the Lord." The ceaseless hallelujahs of eternity must sound alone the praises of our God and of the Lamb. Where is the believer who would rob God of the honor of redemption? Boasting cannot consist with faith. Bless the Lord, O my soul— be telling of His salvation from day to day— bless you the Lord, O my soul.

Ephesians 2:10. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."

In these words Paul concludes his argument in favor of salvation without works, by the free grace of God. Three truths are here announced. (1.) Our new nature is the workmanship of God. (2.) We are created anew, that we might perform good works. (3.) These works are fore-ordained as the path in which we must walk. After examining these truths, let us observe how effectually they close the door against works as having any share in meriting salvation. May the God of truth for Jesus' sake instruct and sanctify us!

(1.) Our new nature is the workmanship of God. We cannot too strongly or too repeatedly contemplate the fact, that by Adam's transgression every spark of spiritual life was utterly extinguished in the soul of man. It became dark, dead, corrupt, alienated from the life of God; entirely given up to Satan and his lusts; in every faculty and power and desire hating God and resisting His holy will. Such were we, when we were born into this world. But a new nature has been conferred; old things are passed away, all things have become

new. Who can create a new nature? Surely God alone. This new creation is entirely the work of His power and will. It is the putting forth of the same omnipotence which called this beautiful universe out of nothing into its present being. It is the operation of the same Agent which said, "Let there be light, and there was light." As the dead can neither will nor stir, so lifeless souls can make no effort of their own to obtain spiritual existence.

The new-born soul is indeed a grand and lovely fabric, participating in desires and faculties altogether divine—capable of knowing, loving, and serving God expanding in thought even into eternity—and aspiring after the largest perceptions and fullest enjoyments of God forever. But it is not of earth, earthy—it is of heaven, heavenly—it is not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but absolutely and exclusively the workmanship of God. Happy, blessed, favored are they, who are thus made partakers of the divine nature! How wondrously do they differ from the world around them! How infinitely do they differ from their former selves! How can they adequately adore Him, whose sovereign grace has thus distinguished them! How can they sufficiently love Him who first so loved them!

(2.) We are created anew, that we might perform good works. The new nature is the immediate offspring of God, and therefore is divine in essence, principles, and desires. It is therefore holy and spiritual, even as God is holy and spiritual. Hence we read, "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." And again, "We know, that whoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that Wicked One touches him not." The heavenly workmanship loves good and abhors evil—seeks good and flees evil. The law of God is the rule and delight of the man thus created anew in Christ Jesus. His language is, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

But let not this blessed truth dishearten or discourage the child of God, who still finds, and who will always find in this world, "another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which is in his members." For the old nature expires not when the new nature is implanted; but in the same person of the one believer they co-exist. The one is of God, and cannot sin—the other is carnal, and cannot but sin. Hence the constant struggle, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." But good works is the path in which the new nature is always striving to walk, the very course along which it pursues its way to heaven.

(3.) These good works are "fore-ordained that we should walk in them." He who appointed the end, which is endless glory, appointed the way, which is holiness—and never can we reach the end, unless our feet are set in the only right direction. It is an eternal law of God, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Sanctification as the road is invariably connected with sovereign grace as the cause, and glory as the consummation. He "has chosen us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." "God has from the beginning chosen us to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

We are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Hence the highest doctrines of grace are the truest incentives to good works; and except we abound in the latter, we can have no assured hope. Our calling and election is made sure by adding to our faith every godly work. The Apostle states that we are thus formed and created in Christ unto the fore-appointed path of holiness, to establish that salvation is not of works. For if God gives the new nature—works the works in us—sets them before us—guides us to them—supports us in them, He is the Author. We are the clay; He is the potter—and to Him must all the glory be given.

SECTION 4

Ephesians 2:11—22; One in Christ

Ephesians 2:11. "Wherefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands."

The preceding statements of the Apostle concerning God's eternal election in Christ—salvation entirely of free grace, the sovereign gift through faith, and not of works—and the riches of His mercy and greatness of His love—and His quickening power towards those dead in sins, have been of a general character. Such observations are often disregarded. A man may think that they apply to others and not to himself—he may feel no personal address to his heart and conscience. To obviate this deficiency in faith, Paul now bids the Ephesians take these truths home to their own hearts. He would have them single themselves out of the family of man, and come alone and take their seats under the direct rays of these blessed doctrines, and examine closely into their own cases, and see how graciously God had dealt with them. He bids them look to their former state, and realize how dark, dismal, forlorn, dead, hopeless, it was—and then view in contrast their union to Christ, their life and recovery in Him, and their reconciliation through Him to God. The conclusion cannot be escaped. They must each individually feel that God has made them monuments of electing love and distinguishing grace—they must each individually ascribe all glory to Him so rich in love, so great in power.

He commences this personal application by saying, "Wherefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands." He says, Call to mind what was your state by birth—you were Gentiles, utterly dark and ignorant of the true God and only way of life—looked upon with scorn and contempt

by those who were chosen by God to have knowledge of His law. By realizing this humiliating condition they would be better prepared to estimate and magnify the exceeding riches of the mercies, which had so freely abounded towards them. Let each believer follow the precept of the Spirit—come apart for awhile from the whole Church of God; enter into the secret chambers of solemn retrospective meditation, and under the rays of heavenly light review his former state.

Now, through grace, he is light in the Lord; but formerly he was darkness, and how great was that darkness, how thick those scales which covered his spiritual vision! He had no knowledge of God as the Father of mercies and God of all grace. The Book of Life was to him a sealed book. It brought home to his feelings no moving, melting testimonies of redeeming love—the record of the Savior's cross and passion seemed as some idle tale in which he had no interest, and in which, therefore, he took no delight. He did not believe that there was deep and solid reality in the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to enlighten, renew, sanctify, and lead to Jesus. He regarded the humble professions of the saints of God as mere hypocrisy or delusion—neither heaven nor hell excited in him affecting thoughts of hope or fear. Darkness— gross darkness—enveloped all his perceptions of things invisible and eternal. He had no true knowledge of God—of Jesus—of the Spirit—of the Word—of holiness—of sin. He lived only for the things of time and sense; and so was rapidly hurried along the downward stream of time, to meet an unknown God in an unknown world, and to enter upon an unknown eternity.

O my soul, such was your former darkness! How dreadful, how terrible! Forget it not, set it distinctly before you; it will help you to rejoice more in your present light, for the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon you with healing in His wings. Therefore, arise, shine, and reflect from your bright armor of light the rays which fall upon you. Remember, that in former days not only utter darkness covered you, but that all your ways and works, all your thoughts and deeds,

were one unbroken mass of iniquity and rebellion. Paul reminds the Colossians, "You, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has God quickened together with Christ, having forgiven you all trespasses." Oh! think seriously of this dreadful state—dead in sins. How humiliating the thought, that in those days, hatred to the holy, gracious God of your salvation filled every corner of your heart—that the ways of vital godliness were deliberately rejected by you—the ways of foul evil were deliberately chosen—that the language of your feelings was, Away with Jesus! I will not have Him to reign over me. Crucify Him! crucify Him! release unto me Barabbas. You joined with the children of Satan, who raised their haughty hands against the God of heaven, and who would gladly have torn Him down from His throne of righteousness. Remember, O my soul, such was your former state. But now you are alive unto God, and loves Jesus, and rejoice in His salvation. How great the change! How great the grace! Give thanks with all the heart.

Ephesians 2:12. "That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

The Apostle, from his desire to bring the Ephesians into a deep and grateful sense of their obligations to sovereign grace, continues to direct their minds to the dark and desolate condition from which they had been delivered. He had exhorted them to remember, that formerly they were Gentiles, whose very name was a reproach among the Jews. He proceeds, and bids them remember that "at that time they were without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." What an dreadful picture of destitution and misery! Here is a state closely bordering on the wretchedness of the lost. Let us make this matter personal. Let us call in our thoughts from the mass of the heathen, or of the world around us, and realize that such was our own condition before God in the riches of His

mercy removed the blindness from our eyes, and revealed Christ to us as the hope of glory. Let us take up in order the several points.

(1.) We were "without Christ." We had no knowledge of Him beyond the sound of His name, or some common facts of His history. We were utterly ignorant of our need to be cleansed from the filth of destructive sin by the merits of His blood. We knew nothing of His power and willingness to save to the uttermost. We had never heard the sweetest of all sounds on earth, "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven you." We knew nothing of the calm delight of sitting down at the foot of the cross, and reading in His wounded hands and feet the blessed assurance that our every debt was paid. We knew nothing of the peace of taking shelter in His pierced side, and realizing that we were safe from the appalling thunder of the law, and the uplifted arm of almighty vengeance. We had never put on the robe of His righteousness, and felt that it not only covered all our impurity and loathsomeness, but was a garment worthy of the admiration of God and all heaven forever. In those days of gloom we had no endearing communion with our beloved Lord. We did not know Him as "a Friend that sticks closer than a brother;" a Bridegroom united to us in loving-kindness, faithfulness and truth; a Surety, to discharge all our dues; an Advocate, ever pleading our cause on the ground of His complete satisfaction; a Shepherd, to watch over us, making us to lie down in green pastures, and leading us beside still waters; we did not delight ourselves in Jesus, as all our salvation and all our desire—our light and life— our joy and peace—our hope and confidence—the first and the last of our constant thought—and our portion forever. We were without Christ, and therefore joyless and lifeless.

(2.) We were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." The people of God form a blessed community. They constitute one family, they are children of the same Heavenly Father, heirs of the same glorious inheritance, fed at the same board of spiritual ordinances and promises, partakers of the same faith and of the same divine nature, called by the same Spirit, bought by the same blood, loved with the

same love, and rapidly hastening to the same home. Hence their hearts are knit together in brotherly affection; they feel for each other as fellow-members of one body; they hold sweet fellowship together, and talk one to another of their common Lord, and of His precious redemption, and of His dealings with them and their brethren around. Sweet indeed is this communion—strong these bonds of uniting love. But at that time we were aliens from this commonwealth. We did not seek nor delight in the society of God's children—rather we shunned them as gloomy and morose and forbidding—we were disposed to revile them as hypocrites and deceivers, and to scorn them as the filth of the earth and the offscouring of all things.

(3.) We were "strangers from the covenants of promise." When we are brought home to God in Christ, we find Him a God engaged by covenant to bless and save us. We find Jesus engaged by covenant to redeem and present us faultless before the throne of His glory. This covenant contains exceeding great and precious promises, which are all Yes and Amen in Christ. Oh! how blessed to feel that we have a covenant-interest in all these promises—that they are our heritage forever—that we may plead them before the mercy-seat, and cry, O Lord, do as You have said—be it unto us according to Your word. But we were strangers to these promises—we had not tasted their sweetness. God was to us only a God afar off. We only heard the voice of threatening.

Consequently we had "no hope." Believers have "a good hope through grace." They have the God of hope as their God forever—they rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Happy indeed is it to be thus saved by hope, and to enter on a state founded on such a covenant, obtained by such a price, extending to such a boundless prospect of happiness. Once we were strangers to this hope—the prospect before us was blackness—no ray illuminated the unbroken gloom—there was a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. To the question, What is our hope? the reply was, We have none.

It could not be otherwise, for we were "without God in the world." They who have God, have all things. But God can only be known and appropriated in Christ. There is no other access to Him. Christ is Emmanuel, God with us. Christ is the center in which God and man meet, and become one. We were once without God—now, in Christ, He is ours forever. Oh! joy of joys! mercy of mercies! Grace has made the difference. Let us adore the God of grace.

Ephesians 2:13. "But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ."

We now turn from the dark picture of the preceding statement, and are permitted to behold a bright and lovely contrast. "The wilderness and solitary place is glad; the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose; it blossoms abundantly, and rejoices even with joy and singing." "Now in Christ Jesus, you who sometimes were far off, are made near by the blood of Christ." We no longer hear of being without Christ, having no hope, and being without God in the world. The Spirit of God has breathed upon the slain—the dry bones have started up into life—the believers of Ephesus were now in Christ, and as such, by His blood are made near to God. It is impossible for us too often to dwell upon the truth, that the most close and vital and indissoluble union exists between Christ and each member of His flock. They are emphatically "in Christ:" they are truly members of His body—engrafted by the Spirit into Him as branches into the parent stem; cemented into Him as the building into the foundation. From this union all their life and all their privileges proceed. Believers should often realize that such is their state. Christ has not only called them to His knowledge, and revealed to them His love, and exhibited in them His power; He has, moreover, taken them into Himself. Let them realize this union. Its sanctifying efficacy is great; for who can be persuaded that he is thus part of the holy Jesus, and consent to any sin? Also, its comfort is unspeakable; for this union forbids the possibility of separation. They who are thus united to Him shall be with Him where He is; that they may see His glory, and sit with Him on His throne forever.

The grand point, however, of the text before us, is the present privilege of those who are in Christ. They "are made near to God by the blood of Christ." Once they were far off; sin had made a wide breach—a deep chasm of separation parted them. But Jesus by His blood takes away all the iniquities of His people; and thus He opens a new and living way by which they may draw near, and find wrath appeased, justice satisfied, every impediment gone, and God as a God of love extending His arms to welcome them, and bidding them pour out their souls unto Him. Let believers know assuredly that it is their privilege thus to have access to God. He regards them not as aliens and outcasts—as strangers and foreigners—but as His own children through grace—as heirs of His own kingdom.

It is not His desire that they should stand afar off. He commands them to draw near, and assures them by every tender and affectionate promise, that He will welcome and rejoice over them. "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." How striking are the words which the Spirit sent to Asa! "Hear you me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin, the Lord is with you while you be with Him—and if you seek Him, He will be found of you—and if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."

Draw near in constant communion. Our citizenship is in heaven—our thoughts should encircle the throne. Wherefore do we ever cleave unto the dust, and let our imaginations too frequently rove amid the vanities and trifles of this evil world? Why do we not rather mount on high, and enter by faith into the holy of holies, and meditate on the glories of our heavenly home? Say not, I am dull, and heavy, and drowsy, and I cannot ascend—it may be, that by long-continued indolence and inactivity the upward flight is contrary to habit, and the stream may strive to flow on in its customary channel; but make the effort, persevere in it, check each thought which strives to wander, and the Lord will surely help, and yet a little while you will find that the new nature will joyfully and habitually seek its proper home; and the Lord will be your meditation all the day long.

Draw near in frequent, earnest prayer. Be diligent to banish far all deadness, coldness, and formality in this exercise. Set God closely, immediately before you—speak as to One bending over you to hear each word—be conscious of His actual presence, and plead as one who is pleading for things of unspeakable value, and pleading with One glorious in majesty, mighty in operation, doing wonders. How fearful is the hypocrisy of men who seem to honor God with their lips, while their drowsy spirits are in the torpor of indifference, or carelessly rambling amid projects of sin and folly! Let the believer in prayer draw near. He has liberty and boldness of access with confidence. Let him use diligently this precious privilege, and great will be his joy and peace.

Draw near in the study of His blessed Word. Always remember whose Word it is, and that Jehovah here holds converse with us. The Scriptures are as surely His revelation as if the heavens were now opened over our heads, and an audible voice proclaimed the wondrous truths. Is it not a shame that we should so long have possessed this treasure, and have been so scantily enriched by it? Lord, of Your mercy pardon us—and help us by Your mighty Spirit to draw nearer and nearer, and thus listen with all attention to Your glorious Word!

But in all our approaches let us be mindful of the blood of Christ. This clears the way—this is the key which unlocks the palace-gates of heaven—this is our only title of admission—this secures our welcome. God loves the blood of His Son, and delights to honor it. When He sees it sprinkled over the person of a sinner, He loves that man and can withhold nothing from him. When He sees that blood sprinkled over any of our services, those services are an odor of a sweet smell—a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing in His sight. This blood is ours by the faith of Jesus—we may take it, and use it, and plead it. Holy Spirit! give us power to avail ourselves of our mercies, and to live near to God by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:14. "For He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us."

These words declare the union of believing Jews and believing Gentiles in Christ. In Him both are one. They had been far apart. The Jew regarded the Gentile with bitter scorn; he refused all communion; and thought it pollution to partake of the same bread. There was a high wall of partition which utterly divided them. But Christ has removed all external and separating distinctions, and having united each unto Himself, and having made each members of His own body, He has brought them into close fellowship in Himself. This truth is full of instruction. May the Spirit of peace and love teach us to deduce some lessons of profit from it!

(1.) Believers are all one in Christ. In this world they are scattered abroad and divided by many external circumstances. Some live in one age, some in another; some in one country, some in another. Some speak one language, some another. Some live under one form of polity, some under another. Some prefer one form of religious worship, some another. But notwithstanding all these external differences, they are all one. They meet and embrace in Christ. In Him as a common center, all the rays from east to west, from north to south, are collected. God the Father loved them all with everlasting love— chose them all out of the mass of mankind—gave them all to Christ as His portion, spouse, jewels, sheep, and body—to be redeemed by His blood from all their iniquities—to be clothed with the pure righteousness of His obedience, and so to be faultless, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. The Holy Spirit calls, teaches, strengthens and sanctifies them all. The same Spirit dwells in each, reveals to each the same precious truths, leads each to wash in the same purifying fountain, to sit down under the same cross, to lean on the same arm, to profess the same faith, to glory in the same name, to feed on the same truths. They all are journeying along the same road to the same heavenly rest. They will all soon be brought together to share the same glory, and to sing the same song. In these and many similar particulars, they are all

one in Christ. He is their common peace, who has utterly taken away all essential separation and difference.

(2.) Believers ought now to live in this unity. Doubtless there are differences of station which God has wisely ordained for the common good of the family of man. Some are called to rule, others to obey—some direct, others serve; and these lines of separation may not be rashly trampled down. The foot may not claim the place of the eye; nor the hand murmur, because it is not the head. There are also differences of gifts. Some have more enlarged outpourings of the Holy Spirit—some are endued with more acuteness of mental perception, or more soundness of discriminating judgment—and hence some are qualified to give a tone to opinion, while it becomes others to hear and to submit. But still one feeling of brotherly love ought to pervade the whole family. Few things are more emphatically enjoined than this unity and godly harmony. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus—that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affections and mercies, fulfill you my joy, that you be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind—in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves." Many other passages might be added, all enforcing the same duty. May the Lord then hasten the time, when envies and jealousies, and suspicions shall utterly be put away from us, with all surmisings and evil-speakings; and when all Christian hearts shall be knit together in love; and men shall take knowledge of us that we love one another with pure hearts fervently. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

(3.) This union would greatly strengthen the cause of Christ. Our blessed Lord, in His divine intercession, declares what gracious effects would follow. "That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in me, and I in You; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that You have sent me." The ungodly and sneering world are continually enquiring, Where are the children of God? We discern but little difference; worldliness and divisions seem as common among them as among the professed votaries of pleasure; we see no unity of spirit or of purpose. There is too much ground for this reproach, and much injury results to the cause of Christ. On the contrary, if all believers stood firm in one rank against error and ungodliness, they would be "terrible as an army with banners" against the hosts of Satan. The world could not gainsay their power. It would acknowledge the reality of the truth of their principles, and see that God was with them of a truth. Thus, "they who are of the contrary part, would be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of us," and the Word of the Lord would mightily grow, and have free course, and be glorified.

(4.) This union would greatly increase the joy of believers. In this world we cannot escape the enmity and reproach of evil men. The servant is not greater than his master. If they called Christ, Beelzebub, and crucified Him, we may not expect kind words or kind usage. Sad, then, indeed, is our outward case, if we have not the love of our brethren. But there is a comfort in their love which solaces in all trials. The Lord grant that this may more abound, and sweeten each bitter cup which He gives us to drink!

Ephesians 2:15. "Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

Paul in these words further establishes the entire reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Christ

(1.) We here learn that the ceremonial law, which he calls the law of commandments contained in ordinances, placed enmity between Jew and Gentile. On this point it is needless to enlarge. It is well known that the ceremonial law contained numerous external rites, which separated the Jews from the rest of mankind. The diversity of observances created an alienation of feeling, and precluded all social communion. Thus mutual dislike existed, and the enmity of which the Apostle speaks produced estrangement.

(2.) We next learn that Christ has abolished in His flesh this enmity. These observances had all some reference to Jesus, and were mostly typical of Him. They were ordained to prefigure Him, and to keep the mind of the observer in constant expectation of Him. In the fullness of time He came in the flesh, made of a woman, made under the law, and by the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross, and by the shedding of His most precious blood, He perfectly fulfilled everything which these ceremonies had for ages been foreshadowing.

Thus the design of the law being answered, its further use terminates. Hence it is abolished in Jesus. These ritual forms being thus removed, the separation ceases, and the believing Jew and Gentile are no more apart.

(3.) We learn that Jesus thus makes of twain one new man, and establishes peace. Let us now advance to the contemplation of this reconciling work of our beloved Lord, and meditate on some of the blessings which result from His grace. Each of His children He makes a new man. Old things pass away—behold, all things become new. A new nature is implanted—the Holy Spirit Himself descends, and takes up His abode in the heart. His people are temples of the Holy Spirit. The promise is fulfilled—He receives gifts for men, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Oh! the surpassing dignity of a disciple of Jesus! Wherever he moves, He carries with Him the power of the Holy One. How diligent we should be to stir up the gift which is in us! We should earnestly strive to cause the light which is

given to shine brightly around. May the Lord grant that the fruits of the Spirit, the evidence of the new nature, may increase, and be more abundant! The fruits are these. "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." In this beautiful train, love leads the way. Where God is, there is love; for God is love. Where Christ is, there is love; where the Spirit is, there is love. The truth is realized, If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. Love is the fulfilling of the law.

If Christ has made Jew and Gentile one in Him, removing all distinctions—much more should believers of one nation, and kindred, and place, be one in Him. Satan is well pleased—and his work prospers when schism and discord spring up among the saints of the Lord. Such things should not be. They are the offspring of pride, and show that the old man is allowed still to prevail. Let us strive to realize the oneness which pervades all heaven; and this thought will show us the oneness which should reign on earth. Around the throne there is no discordant feeling nor sound. Every pulse beats high with love. The very atmosphere is love. Then the saints realize how God has loved them from all eternity with love free and infinite. They then know how Jesus has loved them, for they fully understand the value of the price which He paid for their souls—the preciousness of the endless glory which He thus purchased for them. They see and feel how the Spirit has loved them; for they see how He strove with them in all patience—taking no denial until He had subdued and softened their stubborn hearts—broke down the barriers of enmity and self-righteousness—and established Jesus as King and Savior on the throne of their hearts. With this clear view of all Jehovah's love, every redeemed one rejoices in the feeling of infinite love; and pours forth the song of ceaseless adoration.

When each, too, looks around, and beholds the vast multitude of brethren—loved with the same love, and bought by the same blood, and brought to the same glory—how are they all united in the same blessed bonds! Whenever we see a child of God, let us remember

how fervently and eternally we shall love him in heaven, and this will cast out each uncharitable thought, and cement even now our hearts in holy oneness.

Ephesians 2:16. "And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

Who can conceive the wonders of the Cross of Christ! How amazing is the work accomplished by the dying Savior! Every joy which the believer experiences on earth springs from the blood then shed. All the adoring songs of eternity proclaim, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." If Jesus had not died upon the Cross, what would be our present state? No atonement being made—no reconciliation effected—we should be hated and accursed of God; and hating Him, we should be fearfully looking for judgment and fiery indignation to devour the adversaries. But, praise to the grace of God, Christ has died, and has reconciled all His people, whether Jew or Gentile, in one body unto God.

Let us consider from these words (1.) The reconciling power of the Cross. (2.) That believers are reconciled in one body, and therefore should realize their oneness. May the Spirit of God hear our prayer, and take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us!

(1.) The reconciling power of the Cross. It is unsound doctrine to suppose, that God becomes reconciled to us by the death of His Son. On the part of God there is no enmity to remove. He has loved His people from all eternity with infinite love in Christ. The gift of His Son to bear our sins in His own body on the tree, is the result and evidence of His love. His giving us unto Him—His willingness to receive His death and sufferings as ours, and to impute His righteousness unto us—are all the results of the same divine attribute. He is all love towards us, but we by nature are all hatred to Him. But by the Cross of His Son He removes our enmity, and effects our reconciliation unto Him. How tenderly and compassionately He implores us by that blood no longer to stand

afar off, but to draw near and cast ourselves into the arms of His saving mercy! Hear the Apostle, "All things are of God, who has reconciled us unto Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God."

Let us draw near, and contemplate the reconciling efficacy of this Cross. What tender sounds of mercy issue from it! We there hear in facts, more loud and convincing than all professions, that God is ready, willing, no, most anxious to save us. Hard indeed are those hearts which can resist the moving, melting, winning persuasions which are addressed to us at Calvary! God here assures us that our salvation is dear to Him. I do not desire your ruin, says a mighty voice, I do not will your destruction; far otherwise; I give mine only-begotten Son—my co-equal and co-eternal Fellow—to become a curse in your stead—to make full satisfaction for all your iniquities—to make reparation for all the insults to mine honor—to open a clear path for your return to my presence and kingdom forever. Let us not then hesitate. Let us approach. All enmity is slain. "Fury is not in me, says the Lord." Wherefore should there be reluctance on our part? What more could I have done for my vineyard, which I have not done for it? Come, now, and let us reason together. Could I have opened heaven's gates wider? Could I have sent a more complete redemption? Does not Christ's blood cleanse from all sin? Is not all manner of sin forgiven to all who trust in Him? Is not His righteousness a robe of such glorious beauty that all heaven cannot sufficiently admire it? Does not all fullness dwell in Him; not only fullness to redeem, but fullness to help at each moment—fullness to supply every want, and to present you holy and without blame before me? See what I have given—see what I have done to save you to the very uttermost—and will not you be reconciled unto me? is the language of God's work.

When the Spirit of God applies these truths with power, how quickly the opposition of the natural heart ceases! The sinner no longer sees God only as clothed with vengeance, and stern with wrath, and prepared to consign him to the punishment which his sins deserve. He sees Him rather as the God of mercy, grace, and love, in the Cross of Jesus—he sees only His compassionate and endearing smile—hardness no longer continues hard—tears of penitence and love flow from a subdued heart—reconciliation is effected, and he cries, My Father, and My God! Such is the reconciling power of the Cross. Nothing else can make peace. But when the Spirit reveals this blessed sight, the God who has so loved us becomes the God of our boundless love. We now love Him who has so loved us.

(2.) Believers being thus reconciled in one body, should realize their oneness. This is the argument that the Apostle is now endeavoring to press. The Gentile as well as the Jew is thus softened, and subdued, and reconciled, and brought home to God. The same Cross allures and saves them both—therefore all strangeness should pass away, and they who both love God as their common Father, should love each other as co-partners of the same benefit. Heavenly Lord! knit together as one the hearts of Your reconciled children!

Ephesians 2:17. "And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to those who were near."

The Apostle, still prosecuting the argument, that Jew and Gentile should live and love as one, proceeds to add, that the blessing of peace, through the work and mediation of Christ, is equally bestowed on both. The grand subject before us is, that the Lord Jesus is the sinner's peace. There is great emphasis in the expression, "He is our peace." It implies more than to say, He procures, or proclaims, or bestows it. This He might do mediately and instrumentally, and by intercession—but in a far higher sense, He Himself is our peace. In a similar sense He is declared to be our life, our strength, our shield, our resurrection.

Now the Lord Jesus is our peace in reference (1.) to God; (2.) to our own consciences; (3.) to the world around us. While we proceed with the enquiry, may the Lord manifest Himself more and more as our peace!

(1.) He is our peace in reference to GOD. How dreadful is the state of that soul which is not one with God! But naturally enmity exists. Sin has occasioned a wide separation. God cannot look upon an unclean thing. Every holy feeling of His nature rises in wrath against it, and burns with fierce indignation, and calls for eternal destruction. But by nature we are all sin; every faculty of soul and body is only an instrument of sin—whatever we do, wherever we go, we sin. What a mass of vengeance is treasured up against us! Can we remove it? Impossible. Not all the powers of earth—not all the armies or hosts of heaven—could take away the slightest speck of sin, or make reconciliation to God for it. How fearful the contemplation of this state! The just God—the mighty God—most righteously burns with wrath, and prepares to cast His adversaries into unutterable woe.

But Jesus comes and makes peace. How? By removing that hateful thing, which stirs up the indignation of the Most High. He takes upon Himself the sins of His people, and suffers in their stead to the very uttermost all the miseries which were denounced against them. Thus justice, truth, and holiness are completely and forever satisfied. They can allege no charge against any sinner for whom Christ died. "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ that died." His precious blood washes out every crimson dye, and renders the soul pure and spotless from every stain of pollution. So the omniscient, penetrating eye of Jehovah can discern no blot; but pronounces the washed sinner to be pure and clean, and unproveable in His sight. Thus the whole cause of the enmity on the part of God disappears. No cause remains why He should not be at peace. He loves the sinner in Christ, and delights over him to bless him and to do him good. Thus the chastisement of our peace is on Christ, and by His stripes we are healed.

But other difficulties yet remain. Before peace can be mutual, and love reciprocal, the dark, deep-rooted hatred of God which obstinately broods in man's heart, must be eradicated. Who can effect this? Alas! no human power. Far easier to tear up rocks and mountains, or to bring down the sun from the skies, than to uproot this enmity. He only can accomplish it who can renew and create afresh the heart. But this Jesus wonderfully effects by the Spirit as the Agent, and by the preaching of the Gospel as the means. He sends forth His ministers, who tell of His dying love—of the power of His blood—of the beauty of His righteousness—of the perfect reconciliation effected by it in the courts of heaven—of the willingness and readiness of the Father to welcome all who draw near to Him pleading this saving Name, and casting down the arms of their rebellion before His Cross. The wonders accomplished in the day of God's power are worthy of all admiration. The sword uplifted against God falls from the sinner's hand—the stoutest heart is melted like wax—the hard rebel becomes pliable and easy to be won—tears of penitence are followed by tears of love—cries for mercy are succeeded by songs of praise. Thus Christ is our peace. He removes enmity from God, and enmity from man. God loves, and man loves; and both in Christ are one forever.

(2.) Christ is peace in our CONSCIENCES. When we feel and know that we have sinned grievously against our God—when our many and our mighty iniquities raise up their hateful heads, and each cries for condemnation—when Satan the accuser brings days and years of ignorance and rebellion to our view, and shows us that the very holiest thought of our holiest hour is utter pollution before God, who can prevent terrors, anguish, and dismay from invading the soul? Who can silence the voice that calls for wrath? Who can quench the flames that begin to lay hold of the mind? None but Jesus. He alone can speak peace by assuring that His blood is complete and everlasting pardon for every sin, and His righteousness perfect acceptance before God. When the eye of faith thus sees Him, all is peace.

(3.) Christ is peace as regards the WORLD around. Where Jesus reigns as Peace-maker, there love is in full exercise. It is foretold of Gospel-times, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." Where enmity or ill-will appears, Christ is cast out. Rule in us, great Lord, as universal peace!

Ephesians 2:18. "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

This verse reveals to us the Three People of the Godhead who are concerned in the great work of salvation, and it specifies the distinct office which belongs to each. Herein indeed we have a wondrous mystery, which at present our limited faculties are weak to apprehend. We cannot understand or explain how Three People constitute one indivisible Deity. But shall we doubt a truth, because it is above and beyond the reasoning powers which God has been pleased to assign to us? Far be such folly and such sin. It would be as reasonable to question the existence of God or our own souls, because they are not the objects of actual vision. It is in wisdom that our present faculties are circumscribed, that we might exercise faith and walk humbly with our God. In all matters it is sufficient for us to know that He has spoken—our only province is to hearken, to believe, and to adore. It would be interesting to collect and examine the many declarations of Scripture which testify of the Trinity in Unity. Such investigation, however, would carry us far from our immediate subject. Let us therefore confine ourselves to this plain record, and consider that access to the Father is (1.) through the mediation of Jesus—(2.) by the instrumentality of the Spirit. And may the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with us in teaching love!

(1.) The mediation of Jesus. At present we cannot estimate the infinite separation which sin made between God and the sinner. The All-holy could not be approached by the unholy—the All-pure by the impure—the All-clean by the unclean. The High and Holy One dwells in the highest heavens, and no sin-soiled could find

admission into His presence. Heaven would cease to be heaven, if sin could enter. God would cease to be God, if He could look upon iniquity. Let the sinner consider this! He bears upon him mountains upon mountains of iniquity, the very least atom of which so firmly bars the gates of heaven that admission seemed to be impossible. But through grace, there is a ready, open, new and living way to God's embrace now, and to His kingdom forever. That way is the blessed Jesus. "I am the way—no man comes unto the Father but by Me." How is He the way? By washing out every stain of iniquity in His most precious blood, and by covering us with the heavenly robe of His perfect righteousness. Sprinkled with this blood, clothed with this clothing, no hindrance impedes our approach. Will God cast out His only-begotten Son? Will He banish Him from His presence? Impossible. Neither can He reject any sinner who draws near in Him.

Let the believer realize his privilege, and know his blessed estate. By faith in Jesus, he becomes one with Him. Thus at each moment he may enter heaven's gates, and draw near to the throne of the Eternal. The blood—which is the blood of His own Fellow—His own co-equal and co-eternal Son—must be honored. No slight can be put upon it. All who are sprinkled with it may stand before God. It is because of the worth of this blood that the believer may ask any blessing according to His will, and cannot be refused. He may supplicate for pardon, and that is a great gift. He may ask life eternal—that is still more. He may ask to sit on God's throne—that is still more exceeding. He may pray for all this, and he shall succeed, for every petition bears the prevalency of Jesus's name—and for every gift the believer pays down a full and sufficient price, even the blood of God. Thus through Jesus we have access. He is the way. He is the Mediator. He is the Arbitrator, who makes both one, and unites God and the sinner forever.

(2.) This access is by the agency of the Spirit. By nature, we are blind; how then can we see the way? By nature we are dead; how then can we stir to walk in it? By nature our hearts hate God, and

desire anything rather than to return to Him. So then, vain would be the Father's gift of a Mediator— vain the Son's blood opening a direct passage to Him—except our hearts be softened, our eyes opened, our longings for return kindled. This can only be effected by the Spirit. This is His peculiar work, and this He lovingly and omnipotently accomplishes. He takes away the heart of stone. He teaches us our lost and ruined state. He causes us to tremble lest we perish in hell forever. He then sets Jesus in all His love and beauty before the eye of faith. He assures us of His willingness and power to restore us to God. He shows us that all things are now ready. He overcomes our fears and reluctance. He brings us near to Jesus, and through Jesus unto God. Thus the Spirit is the leading, teaching, constraining Agent, by whom through Christ, we have access unto the Father.

Yes, it is unto the Father, as our rest, and portion, and delight, that we are thus mercifully brought. To see Him, and to know Him, and to love Him, is our privilege now—to enjoy Him forever will be our heaven—and approaching in the Spirit through Jesus, we find Him all love—forgiving us every trespass—casting behind His back every sin—delighting over us to do us good—and blessing us with all spiritual blessings. Are we thus brought home to our Heavenly Father, through Jesus, by the Holy Spirit? We are saved, then, with an everlasting salvation, through the wondrous work of the Triune God.

Ephesians 2:19. "Now therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

Paul continues to unfold the blessedness to which the Gentiles were called. We have here again a contrast which cannot be too often pondered. (1.) Their former state, "strangers and foreigners." (2.) Their present privilege, "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God." How amazing is the difference! What wonders

are accomplished by the free grace of God! May the Lord give us power from on high to profit by the contemplation!

(1.) We have to consider their former state, "strangers and foreigners." By nature we are all strangers to God, to the Lord Jesus, and to ourselves. Until the enlightening rays of the Holy Spirit shine into our hearts, we are utterly ignorant of the nature and grace of God. If we think of Him at all, our thoughts stray widely from the truth. Ask the man of the world what he thinks of God, and his vague reply will manifest the most dreadful ignorance. But even if there should be something like head-knowledge, there is nothing like spiritual acquaintance and holy communion. All mankind, except the believers in Jesus, are utter strangers to God as the God of all grace, and mercy, and peace—the covenant-keeping God in Christ—their reconciled Father—the God who so loved them as to take pleasure in bruising His only-begotten Son to make a way for their pardon and acceptance.

If they are strangers to the Father, so also they are to Jesus. They have heard that He laid down His life for the sins of the world; but they have had no dealings with Him for the salvation of their own souls—they have never approached Him in faith and love—they have never fled for refuge to His wounded side, or washed in the fountain of His all-cleansing blood. They are strangers to His voice, "Your sins are forgiven you;" they are strangers to the smile which fills with peace and joy.

So too they are strangers to their own hearts. Little knowledge have they of the depths of their corruption—the mountains of their iniquities—the just deservings of their ungodly lives—the sure end of the broad road in which they are walking. In this and many other senses, they may well be termed "strangers."

Similarly, they are "foreigners." They have no title to the privileges and possessions of the commonwealth of Israel—they do not recognize Jesus as their King, or pay homage to His laws—they

know nothing of the customs and language of the people of God. They belong altogether to a distinct community, even that miserable division of our race who bow before the throne of Satan, and yield obedience to his iron scepter!

Mark the difference. When the set time of mercy is fully come, God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts—darkness passes away, the true light sweetly shines. They are delivered from Satan's power, and are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Now they "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God."

(2.) This brings us to their present privilege. "fellow-citizens with the saints." The saints can truly testify, "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." In this city they dwell under the gracious government of God. He reigns among them, seated on a throne of grace, to which they have access at all times. He ever extends to them the golden scepter of His love, to which in faith they draw near with boldness, and obtain the desires of their hearts. In this city the voice of praise and thanksgiving is continually heard, and all the happy inhabitants are bound to each other with the ties of love. They mutually rejoice and weep with each other. To this blessed citizenship all are admitted who receive the enlightening and adopting grace of God.

Such are not only "fellow-citizens with the saints," they are, moreover, of "the household of God." There is something peculiarly endearing in this expression. It represents the Church as one family, over which God presides as a Father. Such is a pleasing and just view—how full, too, is it of encouraging consolation! Does an earthly parent anxiously watch over the interests of his offspring? Does he labor to provide for them? Even so our Heavenly Father, whose will is law through the whole range of nature, orders all things for the real good of His children. It is round His board that they all sit—His smile and blessing they all share. As all the members of one household are bound together in mutual harmony,

so should it be on higher grounds among the family of God. They should love as brethren—they should delight to promote each other's interests. What is more distressing to an earthly parent, than disunion in his house? So how justly must God's displeasure be excited when His children bite and devour one another!

Ephesians 2:20. "And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone."

The Church of God is here compared to a building, resting upon a foundation laid by the Apostles and Prophets, which foundation is Jesus Christ, and having a chief Corner-stone, which also is Christ. Let us consider these two supports—and may the Lord give us enlightening grace!

(1.) Jesus Christ is the foundation laid by the Apostles and Prophets. Throughout all the ages of the Church there has only been one saving truth, which is Jesus—one only way of salvation, which is Jesus. To Him give all the Prophets witness. From the day when God gave the first promise of redemption, all who have been taught and commissioned of the Father have uniformly delivered the same message. They have proclaimed remission of sins only through the blood of the Lamb of God, and righteousness only through the faith of Him. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and the Lamb preached from the day when sin entered it. The Prophets appear one after the other, and they all point to the same sacrifice, and cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world!" The Prophets are succeeded by the Apostles, and they point to the same Savior, and reiterate the same truth. Thus Jesus is the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

We may rest our souls and all our hopes on Him, for He is appointed by the Father to this especial work. What says Jehovah? "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." What solid comfort do we derive from this truth, when we draw near to Jesus! God, who knew what all His

attributes required, selected Jesus for this work. "I have laid help upon One that is mighty—I have exalted One chosen out of the people." He is also a tried Stone. He was tried of God, who laid upon Him the iniquities of us all; and He was found able to bear the heavy burden, and to carry it away, so that it can no more be found.—He was tried of the Devil, who assailed Him with every temptation, and brought all his wiles to turn Him from His work. But it was utterly vain—he found nothing in Him.—He is tried of His people. Do not believers continually try His patience—His love—His faithfulness—His sufficiency? And cannot they testify that He is sufficient? He is the only foundation. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Vain men, in their weak imaginings, have devised many foundations on which to raise the superstructure of salvation. Some fancy they can rest for pardon and eternal life on their own deservings or penitence or reformation. These and all similar fancies are but sand and rubbish. When the wind of God's wrath shall arise, and the storm of His indignation shall descend, quickly will they be carried away, and swept into everlasting perdition. Let believers be thankful that God has ordained for them a rock which is strong and high as God Himself—which can never be moved, but abides forever— and let them rest on Him the whole burden of their sins, and the whole weight of their cares. He will support and sustain them. "Truly my soul waits upon God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense, I shall not be moved." All the saints from the beginning have been building on Him, and shall continue to do so until the top-stone is brought forth amid shoutings of "Grace to it! Grace to it! Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

(2.) Christ is also the chief Corner-stone of this spiritual building. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." Now the use of this stone differs from the use of the foundation; though it is very important for the security, stability, and beauty of the structure. It holds the sides together, and closely

cements and compacts the whole. So Jesus is the bond of union of all parts of the Church. He brings them together, and keeps them one. In Him, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, meet and form one body. Thus we see how Jesus is all to His Church. Without Him it could not stand one moment. Without Him it would part asunder, and fall into disjointed pieces.

O Lord, Heavenly King, how much are we indebted unto You! How can we enough adore Your mercies, and show forth Your praise? Give us grace to adhere more closely to You, and to realize our union! May we lean on You, and rest on You; and may no assaults of Satan, no storms of ungodly passions, no undermining insinuations of unbelief, for one moment separate our souls from the Rock of Ages! May we be tightly bound to You, in time and through eternity!

Ephesians 2:21. "In whom all the building, fitly framed together, grows unto an holy temple in the Lord."

We know what building the Apostle speaks of. It is the Church of God, which He loved from all eternity, and purchased with the blood of His own Son, and calls and sanctifies with His grace. Concerning this building some important truths are here declared. Let us consider them in order. (1.) The building is fitly framed together. (2.) It is a growing building. (3.) It is designed to be an holy temple. (4.) Its every part is united to the Savior. It is a blessed subject—may it be blessed unto us! May the Lord, even the Spirit, mercifully teach! O Lord, fulfill Your work, and glorify Jesus before our longing eyes!

(1.) The building is fitly framed together. This we are prepared to find, from the skill and power of the Architect. The great Jehovah planned, designed, and elaborates the Church. In the counsels of eternity the whole scheme was arranged, and every separate stone selected—and the grand object is that unto the principalities and

powers in heavenly places might be made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God. Therefore we must expect all the perfection which infinite wisdom can accomplish. It is in time that the work is carried on. All the materials of it lie in the quarry and rubbish of sin, and there Jesus finds them, and thence by His Spirit He draws them forth. The building consists of various parts, and for every place the fit and proper stone must be prepared. Hence the Lord finds at the proper moment the exact material which He requires. He shapes and frames it until it is of the precise dimensions which are needed. He aptly conjoins it to the compartment prepared for it, and orders it so wisely that the whole becomes perfect, and beautiful in harmony. No stone is mis-shaped or out of place—each has the very form and position in which it can best support and adorn the whole. The slightest alteration of a single atom would injure and disarrange the method and appearance of the entire fabric. Let us take comfort from this thought—all things are ordered rightly for us. We are called into being—we are taken out of the filthy mire of nature—at the very moment when there is need of us. Now it is that our places are ready. Now it is that the heavenly Builder executes His design. What, if some of His dispensations are trying and afflictive—they are all designed to fit us exactly for our appointed place, and to give us the face and polish which is needed for the general harmony of the whole. Let us not repine—let us not be disheartened—let us not mistake the dealings of the all-wise Jesus. The file and the chisel may seem to be applied with a severe and unsparing hand, but let us not flinch from them—hard blows of the hammer may be needed, but they will not destroy or shiver to pieces—they will only firmly and fitly fasten us in the spot in which we can best adorn the fabric. Be assured that Jesus is fitly framing the Church together.

(2.) It is a growing building. He is an idle builder who suffers his work to stand still. If no progress is made, there must be some want of skill or means. But our Architect has infinite wisdom, and has all resources at His command. Hence the Church never ceases to grow—it daily rises and daily expands. At first it was a very low

building, when the martyred Abel was laid as the first stone on the appointed foundation. But from that day it has been surely and steadily increasing. Many souls—for every stone is an immortal soul—have been brought from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. The Ministers of the Gospel, who are the tools and instruments used under the Spirit, are always at work to bring in new materials. And yet a little while, the building will reach its ordained elevation, and the top-stone will be brought forth. Hence we should learn our duty to accelerate the rise of the Church by striving with all diligence to bring stones unto the Living Stone. We should pray the Lord to add to the Church daily such as shall be saved. We should use all endeavors to send the truth to the people sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. And let us remember that each stone in this building grows. Let us, then, see diligently to it, that we are continually expanding and enlarging in every holy word and work.

(3.) It is designed to be an holy temple. As every stone in this fabric is beautified by the cleansing blood of Jesus, and adorned by His righteousness, so it becomes a living stone by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. All are righteous through the work of Jesus—all are holy through the power of the Spirit. If any be not holy, the heavenly Architect will cast it away as rubbish, and it shall be trodden under foot of man. Let us, therefore, strive to be holy as God is holy. Let us implore the God of peace to sanctify us wholly, and preserve us pure and blameless unto the day of God.

(4.) Every part is united to the Savior. This union is twice repeated. The very existence of the believer depends on his oneness with Jesus. "Without me," says Christ, "you can do nothing."

Ephesians 2:22. "In whom you also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

The Church is again exhibited as a building. This expressive image teaches us many important truths. Jesus is the foundation—immortal

souls are the superstructure—God is the indweller—the Holy Spirit is the effectual agent by whom the stones are brought in and managed. To these last truths our attention is now directed. (1.) The Church is built for the habitation of God. (2.) It is built through the Spirit. Lord, make Your Holy Word quick and powerful unto us! May it work effectually to purify and fit for the heavenly inheritance!

(1.) The Church is built for the habitation of God. Will God indeed dwell in the hearts of sinners, such as we are? Yes, verily. It is the throne which He desires, and on which He delights to sit. Oh! wondrous thought! Amazing condescension! Let us strive to think—but we cannot realize—how high and holy is our God. From everlasting to everlasting has His seat been prepared in the heaven of heavens. "He only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto—whom no man has seen or can see." "The heavens are not clean in His sight, and He charges His angels with folly." Alas! how very few of our fallen race have clear and deep views of the infinite wisdom of God! Hence they ignorantly imagine that they may approach Him as, and when, they please. This is a vain fallacy. There is no possibility for the sinner to meet the holy God but in Christ Jesus. "No man comes unto the Father but by Me." In Christ only can there be union.

But when, through abundant grace, we become one with Christ, then every obstacle and hindrance is removed. Then constant communion and sweet communion is established. We dwell in God, and God in us. Jesus has given the gracious assurance, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Precious promise! O Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with the love of Jesus, and so write His laws in our inward man that we may be blessed with these heavenly Guests! Jesus and the Father promise to come, not for a few and transient visits, but to set up a perpetual indwelling in the soul.

Happy the man, who, wherever he moves, carries with him the King of kings and Lord of lords! who can say with the loving disciple, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." Again, Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." Can we conceive words which more sweetly and distinctly declare the willingness and anxiety of Jesus to hold the most endearing communion with His children? What more free and unreserved than the converse of friends at their evening board? This is the very intimacy which Jesus seeks with us. Shall we exclude Him? Let us think what joy and peace and pledges of heaven He brings! Shall we not always have His seat made ready—shall we not always be listening for the approach of His footsteps, that we may open unto Him immediately? When the indolent spouse delayed to arise, Jesus, wearied with tarrying, departed. Hear how bitterly she bewailed her folly! "I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn Himself and was gone—my soul fainted when He spoke—I sought Him, but I could not find Him—I called Him, but He gave me no answer." Beware of this anguish—exclude Him not for a single moment; but rather be always inviting and watching for His coming.

There is another word which should not be overlooked in this consideration. We read, "You are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Do we realize this truth? Is God dwelling in us, and walking in us? At all times, and in all places, are we conscious of His presence? Do we hear His voice, and hold hallowed companionship with Him? If it be not so, there is something wrong and low in our state. We are not exalted to the full privilege and enjoyment which the Lord has provided. Let us not be content so to remain. Let us well mark our holy vocation, and contemplate the enjoyment prepared for us, and never rest until we feel and know that God is dwelling in us, and that we are built for His habitation.

(2.) We are reminded that we are thus built through the Spirit. How much we need—how much we are indebted to—the Spirit of God! Without His powerful operation our hearts must have continued all vileness and pollution—the nest of every unclean bird. But when He comes with light and power, and the revelations of Jesus, how marvelous is the change which He effects! He prepares and makes us ready for the indwelling of these heavenly Guests. How diligent, then, we should be in supplication to be filled with the Holy Spirit! Then we should become temples of the Triune Jehovah.

SECTION 5

Ephesians 3:1—13; Paul, the Preacher to the Gentiles

Ephesians 3:1. "For, this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles."

We are permitted by our gracious Father to commence another portion of this sublime Epistle. May His teaching presence be mercifully granted to us, that our souls may see more of His great salvation, and be "made vessels unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." Lord, hear our cry, and multiply Your mercies towards us!

Paul began this letter by designating himself as "an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Thus he would claim attention by announcing his high authority and commission. He reminds those who he is an Ambassador sent from and instructed by the King of kings. It would therefore be daring impiety not to listen with submission and reverence to his words. When he arrives at this portion of his letter, he presents himself to their notice under a different title—"I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." It might at first seem strange, that he, who was called to be an Apostle, no, the chief of the Apostles, should be allowed to be deprived of his liberty, and be manacled, and immured in a jail. But the Lord's ways are not our ways. He leads and guides each one of His children by the right path, though often that path is dark and mysterious, and contrary to our expectations. Among the many lessons which we are taught by a contemplation of Paul in prison, let us consider the following. (1.) The Lord's servants are called to suffering. (2.) In their sufferings they should seek opportunity of glorifying God. (3.) Satan's contrivances against the saints are sure to be defeated.

(1.) The Lord's servants are called to suffering. This seems an immutable law of the kingdom of grace. Believe in Jesus, and suffer with Him. Faith and affliction go hand in hand. Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. He could not call them brethren without participating in their heritage. The great Master was pre-eminently a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief—and His servants must in all things be made like unto Him. Strange would it be for a crucified Head to have members entirely exempt from suffering—strange for the Brow to be pierced with thorns, and spit on, and the limbs to be honored and caressed. Hence "we must go through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven." There is no exception; and we generally find that advance in grace, and perfection in the faith and love of Jesus, is proportionate to the heat of the furnace in which we are placed. Whose trials have exceeded those of Paul? "In stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths often." And who, among the saints, have been more dead to the world, and more filled with the Spirit? He could indeed speak of exceeding tribulation, but he could add, "To me to live is Christ." "The life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." And when his earthly trials are brought to their close, he could exclaim, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith—henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Hence we see that the peaceable fruits of righteousness were the result of the chastenings which he endured.

(2.) In their sufferings the saints should seek opportunity of glorifying God. Such was the conduct of Paul. We do not find him uttering one word of complaint, or murmur, or making his confinement an excuse for remitting his exertions in the cause of the Gospel. It would have been natural to have reasoned, "I am deprived of liberty; I can no longer go from place to place preaching the kingdom of God; my commission therefore is cancelled, my mouth closed, my work finished; nothing remains for me but in quiet silence to await my deliverance from the burden of the flesh." But

very different were his feelings. He instantly considered what doors were still open through which he might communicate the knowledge of his Lord. He soon found, that though he could not address multitudes by word of mouth, yet still he could by letter make known to them the unsearchable riches of Christ. So he penned in his prison some of those precious Epistles which have been the instruction and consolation of the Church in all generations. To this hour, how many have cause to bless God that Paul was a prisoner! Hence in sufferings the saints may glorify God. Let each believer remember this—and whatever afflictions may be his, let him be careful to consider that some means remain, by which the glory of the Lord may be promoted by him. If he cannot be active, he can endure with such humility, patience, and joy, as will evidence to all around the reality and power of the grace of God.

(3.) Satan's contrivances against the saints will surely be defeated. He thought that he almost extinguished the Gospel, when he locked up Paul, even as he thought he annihilated religion when he accomplished the death of Abel. But he is short-sighted and cannot see the end from the beginning. Paul commits to writing the precious truths of the Gospel—these winged and imperishable messengers fly abroad throughout the whole world, and descend through all ages. Wherever they come, Satan's locks are opened, his bars drawn back, and his prisoners made free. Hence Paul's confinement has been spiritual liberty to multitudes. Thus Satan was made to defeat himself.

Ephesians 3:2. "If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward."

Paul having declared his present condition, as a prisoner of Jesus Christ, subjoins the cause of his being thus bound. It is, he adds, "for you Gentiles." His avowal that the way of salvation, through the mercies of God in Christ, was open to every sinner, whether Jew or Heathen; that the distinctive privileges of the covenant were abrogated by the Cross; and that he was commissioned to call the

Gentiles to behold the Lamb of God and live, excited the hostility which deprived him of liberty, and sent him chained to Rome. He here reminds the Ephesians of this fact. "I am the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." He then adds our present verse. "If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward."

We have here another instance of the settled habit of the mind of Paul to ascribe all the Lord's dealings with His people to His sovereign grace. Oh, that more of this mind were in us! All that we have been taught—all that we have received—has resulted from free grace. Our knowledge of ourselves, our faith in Christ, our separation from the world, our desire to glorify God, are all of grace. Every attainment in the divine life, every perception of truth, flows from the same source. We should deeply feel, and we should devoutly confess, "By the grace of God, we are what we are." Paul here especially declares, that his commission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles was grace given unto him.

Let us illustrate this truth by showing that (1.) Grace disposed him. (2.) Grace enabled him. May our meditations be sanctified!

(1.) Grace disposed him. What prejudices must have been removed before he could believe that God could regard with mercy and call into His kingdom any except the descendants of Abraham! This exclusive feeling had been imbibed from his earliest years; and the natural ardor and determination of his temper had rendered him especially zealous for all the traditions of the fathers and distinctions of his nation. It would be a marvelous shock to his prepossessions to find that a people, who were called no people, were now to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. He would have to do violence to his cherished feelings before he could go forth to persuade those who they had an interest in the Redeemer's kingdom.

But, as darkness flies before the rays of the rising sun, so the most deep-rooted ignorance vanishes before the teaching of God's Holy

Spirit. Have we not experienced this in the case of our own spiritual life? Do we not now clearly see, and warmly embrace, truths which once we bitterly disliked and resolutely rejected? This teaches us how unwearied we should be in making known to others the pure doctrines of our Gospel. We may have to encounter determined prejudice, and the effort may seem foolishness. So indeed it would be, if our arguments or our reasonings were the instruments to effect illumination or conversion. But nothing is to be accomplished by our unaided might or power. The grace of God is the only agent to effect a spiritual change; and this grace which disposed the heart of Paul to preach Christ to the Gentiles, is able to soften any heart, and apply with overcoming efficacy any word. Oh! that this grace would stir us up to more lively interest in the souls of vast multitudes of our race who are perishing in ignorance and sin— perishing for lack of that Gospel which is in our hands, and which we might communicate! O Lord Jesus Christ, behold the expanse of this dark earth, still in captivity to Satan, still ignorant of Your precious, Your saving name. Arise, O Lord, put on Your power, and awaken Your people to be zealous and diligent in diffusing Your knowledge. The grace, which caused Paul to ask, "What will You have me to do?" is still the same grace—all-sufficient to remove each doubt, and to make willing for the mighty work.

(2.) Grace enabled Paul. It is a blessed thing to have the will to labor in the cause of Christ—but the will alone is insufficient without the power. Many qualifications are needful; especially patience, resolution, unwearied industry. All these gifts were wrought in Paul. After the example of his great Master, "he set his face like a flint," and was never discouraged by opposition, by persecution, by sneers, by seeming failure, by the falling away of the unstable. He went forward unmoved, immoveable. But this was not the fruit of nature, it was the grace of God. Oh! that the same grace might help our infirmities, and strengthen us to work with power and perseverance in our Christian calling! How short our day is! The night is fast coming, when no man can work. How little do the most laborious accomplish! At the close of the longest life who will not bewail

unprofitableness and unemployed time! The Lord have mercy on us, and qualify us by His Spirit to trade diligently and ably with the talents entrusted to us!

Ephesians 3:3. "How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words."

The truth that the Gentiles were to be partakers of God's promise in Christ Jesus is here declared to be a mystery, which had been long hidden in the secret purposes of God, and was now announced to the startled and wondering Jews. It is added, that by revelation God made this mystery known unto Paul.

Let us commence our meditation on this verse by examining the relation which is given of this fact. When Paul addressed the multitudes from the stairs of the Castle at Jerusalem, he says, "It came to pass, that when I came again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the Temple, I was in a trance, and saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get you quickly out of Jerusalem—for they will not receive your testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those who believed on You—and when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the clothing of those who slew him. And He said unto me, Depart—for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles." Paul thus relates one of the intimations which the Lord gave to him, that he was called to proclaim salvation in the name of Christ to the heathen world.

There is, however, a remarkable passage in connection with the conversion of Paul, in which this truth is mentioned. It is the Lord's announcement to Ananias. He seemed incredulous, and was inclined to oppose, when he was sent to Saul of Tarsus. He replied, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Your name. But the Lord said unto him, Go your way—for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name

before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

This is in accordance with what the Lord revealed to Paul when He appeared unto him in the way to Damascus, and which is thus declared in his defense before Agrippa—"At mid-day, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and those who journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecute you me? it is hard for you to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But rise, and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto you—delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send You. To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Hence we learn by the statements of Paul himself, that it was not by any man's instruction, but by direct and immediate revelation from heaven, that the marvelous truth was revealed to him, that the Gentiles should hear from him the way of life. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" Upon the lands which had been so long lying in darkness and the shadow of death, at last the great and marvelous light was to arise. The wilderness, so long overgrown with briars and thorns, was at last to blossom as the rose. The abodes and habitations of cruelty and every inhuman rite,

were at last to resound with praises in the name of Jesus, and adorations of the true and living God.

But now, O believer, it is time for you to come apart, and realize your own individual interest in the fact which was thus revealed to Paul. You are not a Jew by nature, but a sinner of the Gentiles. What, then, would have been your case, if the middle wall of partition had not been removed, and the command from heaven gone forth, "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel unto every creature!" Admire and adore the riches of God's love in choosing for Himself a people out of the midst of this despised quarry of filth and ignorance! And oh! admire and adore the incomprehensible, the unspeakable riches of this love, which has selected you individually to be a monument of redeeming power, and has brought you into the family of the saints, and has given you a name and a place among the heirs of everlasting glory. How great our obligations to sovereign grace! Oh! for more of the indwelling and constraining power of the Holy Spirit, that we might in every word and work show forth His praise, and testify to all around that we who were dead now live!

Ephesians 3:4. "Whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."

The same subject is continued. The call of the Gentiles is the mystery of Christ, of which Paul here speaks. And truly it was a mystery, for it was so utterly concealed from the Jews, that the bare thought had never occurred to them; and it was a mystery of Christ, because it was part of His mediatorial work to redeem them. They were a portion of the inheritance given unto Him by the Father, and by His blood they were purchased, and by His Spirit they were to be sanctified, and in His faith they were to walk. Hence the call of the Gentiles was a mystery of Christ, in which Paul had knowledge by immediate revelation from heaven, and to which he directs the minds of the Ephesians. But as we have already said much concerning this mystery, and as other verses will bring it again

under consideration, it may not be a misplaced exercise to devote this present meditation to other mysteries of Christ, in which Paul had intimate knowledge.

(1.) The mysteries of the everlasting covenant of grace through the Spirit were revealed to him. He names this covenant distinctly in that remarkable benediction, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." He knew, then, that from all eternity, ages before the foundation of the world, a distinct covenant existed between the Father and the Son; that a clear, definite scheme of redemption was arranged, to the performance of which each party was pledged. He knew that by virtue of this covenant, God the Father promised eternal life to as many as were given to Jesus for redemption. This he thus testifies—"Paul, a servant of God, and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began." This promise, which was antecedent to all creation, could only be made to His own co-equal and co-eternal Son; and therefore this must be one of the promises of the everlasting covenant. Let us pause here. Do we believe in Christ? We reply, through grace we believe. Help, O Lord, our unbelief! Then we have an interest in this covenant, and this promise of eternal life is ours. Before the foundation of the world God included us in this wondrous word. Oh! then, let us rejoice, and realize the blessed prospect which is before us. Who or what can harm us? No storm can destroy the bark which must surely reach the port. No temptation or affliction can destroy us, for it is pledged that we shall reach the land of eternal life.

(2.) Another remarkable feature in the mystery of Christ, is His Person. Would that we had more intimate knowledge of this mystery! Well might Paul exclaim, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." Jesus is perfect God and perfect man. He is Jehovah's Fellow as touching the

Godhead; He is our brother as touching flesh and blood. How wondrous this union! The possibility of it could never have occurred to thought of man or angel. But to effect our salvation, God became man without ceasing to be God, and the manhood was taken into Godhead still continuing to be manhood. Thus Jesus, as being very flesh and blood, was qualified to represent man, to stand as his substitute, and to be his surety—and His Godhead imparting infinity to all His doings and all His sufferings, enabled Him to bear to the very uttermost the unutterable torments due to each transgression. As God-man, He stands between Jehovah and the sinner. He puts one hand on each, and draws them into one in Himself. Let us study to become more acquainted with the glories of the Person of our Lord. Let us make daily and hourly use of Him as qualified to stand in our stead, and able to bear away the iniquity of all our transgressions. Let us make use of Him as mighty to redeem and tender to sympathize.

(3.) Let us next advert to a wondrous mystery of Christ which Paul preached—the willingness of the Father to impute to Christ the sins of His people. As individuals we are all debtors to the justice of God. The penalty of disobedience is due from our own people. It is a mere act of grace on God's part to allow Christ to stand in our stead, and to take of Him the payment due from us. Without this mercy, in vain would have been the willingness of Christ to suffer. But hear how Paul proclaims this grace—"All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ—and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation." Thus where sin abounded, grace has abounded much more. It is impossible for thought to conceive, or word express how much we owe to this unspeakable grace! Let us magnify the love of God, which delighted to remove every spot and speck of foul and hateful iniquity from our people, and to transfer them to His own dear Son—and thus finding them on Him, to visit them with the full punishment which they merited. "He that spared not His own Son,

but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Ephesians 3:5. "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit."

Paul here declares that a long period of darkness and ignorance was permitted to envelope the earth, during which the heathen were kept entirely excluded from all knowledge of the true and living God. During this time, the Jews, who had the light of His countenance and the teaching of His servants, regarded all other nations as doomed to eternal alienation, and heirs of death unto death. The notion that an outcast heathen could ever be reconciled to God's favor, and called to His service and delight in His love, had never approached the threshold of their minds. But during this long night of spiritual gloom, the Lord had purposes of mercy towards them, and now in His own appointed time, He revealed this unto the holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit.

We perceive that the Jew entirely abandoned the heathen as a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction; but in this judgment he was wrong. A practical lesson of much importance may hence be learned. There is a strong tendency in our minds to pass the sentence of condemnation upon others. We see them living long in total disregard of God, blindly following the devices and desires of their own evil hearts, resisting all the warnings of His word and providence, rebelling against the light which shines around them, and reviling His faithful servants. These indeed are sad and fearful signs. This is the mark of those who are in perilous condition. Much cause have we to tremble for such. But still we greatly err when we exclude them in our minds from all hope of pardon and reconciliation. While there is life, there is hope; for while there is life, there is access to the Cross of Christ, and "whoever believes in Him shall not perish." While there is life, grace may be given to call upon the name of the Lord—and "whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

There are indeed a few notable instances of those, who after a long life of iniquity and unbelief have found mercy. These are sufficient to forbid our despair of any. There is nothing too hard for the Lord to do. The Jews thought it impossible for the Gentiles to be saved. But now, while the natural branches are broken off, how many branches wild by nature are grafted in! The Lord has secret purposes unknown to us. Let us, therefore, in the spirit of lowly, persevering patience, never cease to warn the ungodly to seek the Lord while He may be found, and to provoke Him not by continued impenitence, lest He swear in His wrath "They shall never enter into My rest." Thus doing, we shall sometimes be cheered by finding the withered branch putting forth the blossoms of faith and love, and bearing the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God.

Paul further declares in this verse, that the mystery of the call of the Gentiles was now revealed unto the holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit. We have here an intimation of a great truth, which we should always keep before our eyes—that the Spirit is the revealer of spiritual light and understanding to the soul. Man, by the natural powers of intellect with which he is endued, may make marvelous progress in the investigation of abstract truth, and discovery of the wonders of science and the phenomena of nature. But here is the limit—beyond this the highest order of mental ability cannot soar. These gifts are all earthly, and they cannot get beyond the narrow region of earth. Spiritual attainments belong altogether to a different class. They are the direct gift of God, by the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit.

No man ever yet learned the true nature of God—the value of his immortal soul—the real defilement and deformity of sin—the preciousness and the beauty of Christ—without the enlightening aid of this Spirit. Hence the Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. Hence of Him it is said, "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth—for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatever He shall hear, that shall He speak, and He will show you things to

come. He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, enlighten our hearts more and more, we meekly beseech You, that we may grow in grace, and in the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 3:6. "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel."

Paul here specifies in three distinct expressions the great blessings to which the Gentiles were now called. They were to be (1.) fellow-heirs; (2.) of the same body; (3.) partakers of God's promise in Christ. Let us humbly consider what important truths are contained in these expressions—and may the Holy Spirit help and teach us, that we may hereby be enabled more fully to appreciate the blessed privileges which are our portion in Christ!

(1.) We are "fellow-heirs." What is it to be an heir? It is to stand in a position which legally and rightly entitles us to succeed to the inheritance. But the inheritance which is here meant is no earthly property—no worldly title or distinction—no wealth to be possessed only for the short, uncertain tenure of this fleeting life. It is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away; laid up for us in heaven. It is the inheritance of eternal life in the kingdom of God. It is to sit upon the throne of God's glory; to enjoy the greatness, the pleasures, and the dominion of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our souls are lost in wonder, when we strive a little to imagine the exalted, glorified state of the Lord Jesus. We know that "He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God—angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." Now, great as His glory is, such will be the glory of His saints. His own words are, "The glory which You gave me, I have given them." And "the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and jointheirs with Christ." Thus the inheritance to which the Gentiles

are called, is nothing less than to be co-partners for ever with Christ in the happiness and glory of heaven.

O my soul, is such your position? Are these the joys before you? Live, then, worthy of this high vocation. Trample beneath your feet the sordid pleasures and worthless vanities of time, and keep looking onward—looking upward—to the fullness of joy, the pleasures for evermore which are at God's right hand.

(2.) We are "of the same body." There is a marvelous union among the true disciples of Christ. "We being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." And again—"We being many, are one bread, and one body." Of this mystical body Christ is the Head. From Him all life proceeds, and is diffused through the several members—and His people being thus connected with Him, become likewise connected and interwoven with each other. This truth teaches us the sympathy and love which we ought to bear towards each other. The hand delights not to injure the foot. The tongue proclaims not the defects of the eye. So believers ought to be tender and compassionate in all their communion with their brethren. "Bear you one another's burdens" is the Gospel-rule—and again, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with those who weep." And the warning is, "But if you bite and devour one another, take heed, lest you be consumed one of another."

(3.) We are "partakers of God's promise in Christ." The Gentiles being called to union with Christ, and mystical oneness with His body, become entitled to all the privileges of this fellowship. Among these privileges, Paul here particularizes the inheritance of God's promise. We know that God has given us many and exceeding great and precious promises in Christ. But the promise here especially intended is the promise of the Holy Spirit. We infer this from the parallel passage to the Galatians—"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us—for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree—that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might

receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Jesus commanded His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, but to "wait for the promise of the Father, which, says He, you have heard of me." This promise God fulfils to His elect among the Gentiles; pouring into their souls this heavenly power, by which they are taught their need, filled with conviction of sin, and brought to the Cross for salvation. All these mercies are communicated through the Gospel. It is through the preaching of the Word that the Spirit descends. Wherever this Word is proclaimed, the footsteps of Deity may be traced. This thought should make us diligent to hear and to propagate the glorious Gospel.

Ephesians 3:7. "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power."

Paul recognizes his high vocation. He sees his grand commission. He realizes the glorious work entrusted to his charge. Gratitude and love swell in his heart. But to what does he ascribe the mercy thus given? He feels that he is wholly indebted to free and sovereign grace. His feeling would be, I am a Minister of Christ—but I became so by the effectual working of free and unbounded grace. For all that I am—for all that I have been privileged to do—I bless and adore the God of all grace. Paul knew that by nature he was a child of wrath—a transgressor from his mother's womb—that the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually. He knew, too, that he had been devoted to all the forms and services of a typical creed, which had expired when Jesus hung upon the accursed tree, and the veil of the Temple was rent from the top to the bottom. He knew how great had been his zeal in furtherance of the twilight system—with what hatred he had persecuted believers in the blessed Jesus—how he had gloried in dragging them in bonds to slaughter. But now he counted all things but loss for the excellency of this saving knowledge—now his one delight was to proclaim the finished work of Christ; and to bring sinners to receive Him as all salvation and desire. Now he was bold and valiant before princes and rulers to

preach Christ and Him crucified. Whence this change? Whence this marvelous light? Whence these heroic resolves? One only can be the reply—I am a Minister of Christ by the effectual working of God's sovereign power. From the expressive way in which this truth is conveyed, we are led to contemplate—(1.) God's grace in providing Ministers for His Church. (2.) The grace by which they are formed and called and blessed. (3.) The estimate in which Ministers should be held.

(1.) We see the gracious love of our Heavenly Father in providing Ministers for His Church. He would not have His people to be wandering and straying in the wilderness of this world without the guidance and the care of shepherds. He would not that they should languish in the maladies and miseries of sin without physicians to tell them of a saving cure. He would not that they should be tossed and imperiled amid storms and billows without some pilot to direct their bark. He would not that they should be harassed with cares and sorrows without some friend to alleviate and bring solace. He would not that they should mourn without someone to sympathize and comfort. Therefore in His mercy he has ordained that faithful pastors should be ever near. Grand and glorious indeed is the pastor's work. The blessed Jesus in His communion with His Father says, "As You have sent Me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world." Hence in pulpits they take their station as ambassadors for Christ, to proclaim the mysteries of redeeming love—to be witnesses to the grace of Jesus—to tell of the covenant of grace—to declare the finished work of Christ. Not only to be in public the unfolders of divine truth; but also in private tenderly to warn of the miseries of sin—its dreadful penalties and its final doom—and to entreat the rebels to lay down their weapons, and with meek contrition to seek life and pardon. But time would fail in all attempt to traverse the whole region of ministerial work. Let it suffice to add, God has appointed Ministers for the edifying of the Church—for the perfecting of the Saints—until the work of grace is wholly finished and the glorious kingdom is complete.

While we adore God for His guardian care over His beloved flock, let us mark the instruments employed by Him and fitted for the heavenly work. He sends men to minister to men—men of like passions and infirmities with ourselves—men who have hearts to sympathize with our need, and qualified with intelligence of our burdens. If He had sent Angels from the courts of heaven, trembling and awe would have been our state. Their brightness would have dazzled—their greatness would have overawed—their powers would have alarmed. But the message of love—of peace—of reconciliation is entrusted unto those who come as members of our own race—as brethren unto brethren.

(2.) Mark how God enables them. To have a fellow-feeling with us, they must themselves have realized their lost and ruined and wretched state by nature. The Holy Spirit therefore has entered their hearts—mightily convincing them of sin, and causing them to tremble before the wrath of God. But the spirits thus wounded have been mercifully healed. Their eyes have been opened to see the fullness of Christ's saving work—the power of His blood to cleanse from all iniquity—the glory of His righteousness to enrobe them for the courts of heaven—His willingness to receive all who flee to Him for refuge, and to present them faultless before His Father's throne. These precious truths are not regarded by them as cunningly devised fables, nor as a recital in which they have little interest. They have thoroughly embraced them, and therefore from deep experience they can call—invite—allure—strengthen—comfort, and build up. They have a word in season for every member of their flocks.

(3.) What is the estimate in which they should be held? They are entitled to all respect as messengers from the courts of heaven, as ambassadors for Christ—to all love, as those who feel so tenderly for us, and devote their lives to promote our good. We should strive in all things to promote their comfort—to arrange that they have leisure and ease for preparation for their work, and earnestly and diligently and incessantly should we pray God to have them in His constant care—to enrich them with supplies of grace—to bless them

in all their work. Happy the Minister who has such a flock! Happy the flock that has such a Minister!

Ephesians 3:8. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Paul's eye continues to be fixed on his high calling to be a Minister of Christ, and on the glorious subject which it was his privilege to unfold. He speaks of himself and of his Lord. His view is twofold. When self appears, he sinks into the lowest depths of humiliation and of shame. When Jesus is discerned, his mind ascends with rapid wing to the heights of unbounded praise. Thus two points are before us. (1.) The Minister as viewed by himself. (2.) Jesus as a treasury of celestial gifts.

(1.) Paul calls upon His followers to be clothed with humility. He here shows that this was the clothing in which he was clad. He appears as the follower of Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart. Humility is indeed a precious grace. It thrives not in nature's rank soil. The heathen had no term to depict it. How could they speak of that which to them was utterly unknown! It is a grace which the Spirit deeply implants, when He reveals the misery and filth of indwelling sin. It grows with the growth of faith, and ripens as the celestial home is approached. Paul is a notable example. With what shame he viewed himself when writing to the Corinthians! He says, "I am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." When writing to the Romans he humbles himself as the very bond-slave of iniquity. He states that when he would do good evil was present with him. He finds a law in his members bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members. In the passage before us he gives precedence to all the people of God, and by invention of a new word in language, he calls himself "less than the least of all saints." Can he sink lower in self-estimation? When his long career of service had reached its close he casts his eye along his life of labor, and humbly bewails that of

sinner he is the chief. Far be from us the thought that he did not recognize God's gracious work within. He truly felt, by the grace of God he was what he was, and with ascending step he pressed toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. His was no mock humility. He did not disparage self that he might win applause. But the more the light of heaven shone inwardly, the more it revealed the continuance and the vileness of inbred corruption. The more he knew God the more he loathed himself. The branch laden with abundance of fruit bends beneath the load. The barren twigs shoot upwards. Thus Paul deeply felt and humbly avowed that he was less than the least of all saints.

(2.) From these depths of humility he uplifts his eyes to Christ. He strives to behold unsearchable riches. What an object here meets our gaze! We approach hallowed ground. Let us take off earthly sandals and approach with hallowed minds. Angels veil their faces when they contemplate the heavenly glory. Into what abasement and reverence should we poor sinners sink! But we are bid to search the field in which Christ the boundless treasure is hid. He is indeed a treasure-house in which all-surpassing wealth is amassed. Who can measure the infinitudes of thought contained in the revelation, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily!" He is great as God can be, He is Jehovah's Fellow; co-equal, co-eternal with the Father—God of God—Light of light—very God of very God. Mark the attributes which are revealed to us. His power is omnipotence. His wisdom is omniscience. His presence—it is everywhere—without center, without circumference. Vain is the imagination which strives to embrace such object—vain the utterance, which would venture to depict it! These riches are indeed unsearchable.

But He takes the manhood into God. He humbles Himself and becomes bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh. What motive urges Him to such condescension? It is zeal for His Father's glory, and love for sinners of our vile race. Behold again these marvelous riches! They are verily unsearchable. Shall we think of the merits of His cleansing blood, which obliterates forever the crimson-dye of

our iniquity—the beauteous robe of perfect righteousness in which He decks His bride, and presents her faultless in the courts of heaven? Shall we speak of His prevailing prayers which solicit and obtain all the blessings which heaven can bestow? Shall we speak of His coming glory? Vision indeed is dazzled. We can only exclaim, The riches of Christ are unsearchable. But though the search can never reach an end, for while upon earth we can only see through a glass darkly, we should daily strive to advance more and more in the pursuit—to dig more deeply in this field—to draw water more and more from these unfathomable wells. Let too the truth be devoutly pondered that all that Christ is, is for His people—all His possessions are for them—His riches are their inheritance. True is His Word in supplication to the Father, "The glory which You gave Me I have given them." He reveals that His Gospel is for them—that the love with which the Father loved Him, may be in them, and He in them. Such is the subject which Paul was called to preach unto the Gentiles, and which the faithful Pastor is privileged to unfold unto his flock. What a subject is here before us! How vast—how boundless—how limitless—how inconceivable—how inexhaustible—how infinite! Let it not then be thought that matter for the pulpit is scanty and barren. Let not the preacher speak of littleness—of frivolity—of earthly speculations. Let him preach Christ—Christ only—Christ fully. The theme will be ever new. Hearers will never weary. They will be cheered, and gladdened, and saved.

Ephesians 3:9. "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."

The eyes of Paul were widely opened to his wondrous call. He deeply felt what mercies had been given unto him. He realized the blessed work committed to his diligence and care. There was a time when he was dead in trespasses and sins; but now he lives unto God. His eyes had been fast locked in darkness; but now he saw Christ in all the glories of His finished work. His heart had been hard with

enmity and rebellion; but now he loved the Savior who had loved him before the world began. He realized still higher blessings. He knew that it was his privilege to testify of Jesus to a world lying in the wicked one. Not only the darkness of unregeneracy was past, but the darkness of contempt of the Gentile world. As a Jew he had regarded all other members of the human race as odious, contemptible, vile—scarce worthy of the name of men—the off-scouring of all things. But this prejudice had vanished before the revelation of Gospel-truth. He now knew that the wall of partition was broken down—that an unseen hand had rent the veil from the top to the bottom, and that the Gentiles were admitted to direct communion with God through the knowledge of His Gospel-love. He knew that God from the very stones beneath his feet could raise up children unto Abraham. He knew that all severance had ceased, and that God was the God of the circumcision through faith, and of the uncircumcision by faith. He realized the amazing grace which now commissioned him to cry unto every human being, Look unto Jesus and be saved. Flee unto Him and find refuge. Receive Him, and accept the privilege of adoption. Come unto Him, and be translated from darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan to the happy family of faith. He realized his station as standing between the living and the dead, that the plague might be stayed. Thus he went forth enlightened by super-abounding grace—strong in the Lord and in the power of His might—to call men everywhere to the saving Cross; "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."

(1.) We see Paul's estimate of his high commission. It leads to a general contemplation of all ministerial work. This is the noblest work to which the faculties of man can be devoted. It is the grandest employment which earth can witness. It is to follow closely in the footsteps of our Lord who said, "As You have sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them." The pulpit is the highest throne on earth. No monarch has a seat so glorious, or wields a scepter of such potency. The faithful minister of Christ is called to

make men see the wonders of the Gospel of God's grace—to remove scales from the benighted eyes—to cause the blind to see the wonders of redeeming love. The ministers of Christ are thus employed by God the Holy Spirit to give light to them who sit in darkness and the shadow of death—to cry in the regions of spiritual gloom, "Arise, shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon You. Awake you that sheep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

The means which the faithful pastor uses are very simple though they are omnipotent. It requires little strength to use them—but much strength goes forth from them. The statement of Paul is very clear. "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto those who are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." The mandate is "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Success will surely follow. The Word of God can never go forth in vain. It shall prosper in that whereto He sends it. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name—for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Converts shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. They shall fly as doves to their windows. Many an enlightened soul shall testify, I was blind, but now I see. We see then the happiness of those ministers who make the blessed Jesus and His finished work, and all the wonders of redeeming love, and the unsearchable riches of the covenant of grace their main proclamation. They are not called to elaborate new thoughts and invent another Gospel. There is woe, indeed, unto them who practice such folly, and occupy time in searching for man-wrought wisdom. The Gospel is a proclamation. All its waters flow in the broad, deep channel, "Thus says the Lord."

It is true indeed that this Gospel has existed from all eternity in the purpose of God. It originated in Christ before the world began. But now it shines forth in ineffable brightness, and men are called with open eye to view it—with open hand to receive it—with open heart

to embrace it. It is not their work to fabricate a new sun, but with open eye to gaze on the Sun of righteousness, which has arisen with healing on His wings.

Paul sweetly adds when stating that the Gospel was hid in the ages past in the purposes of God, that He created all things by Jesus Christ. We learn hence that He is conjoined with the Father, as Creator of the whole human race. Hence the Ministers of the Gospel cease not their labor of love, but strive to approach every woman-born, and to cause all to hear the glad tidings of salvation. Hence, too, the fervent missionaries go forth into the dark places of the earth, calling the poor benighted heathen to cast their idols to the bats—to turn from them to serve the living and true God—to wash out all their sins in expiating blood—to hide all their iniquities beneath the covert of justifying righteousness, and to receive Jesus as all salvation and desire.

Ephesians 3:10-11. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God—according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The spread of the Gospel may be viewed with sad indifference on earth. It is not so in heaven. Cold hearts may hear of conversions to the faith of Christ, and still may be frozen as ice. It is far otherwise with the angelic hosts. Intently they watch—lovingly they adore. In the verses before us, they are described as principalities and powers in heavenly places. Mark their power—their pre-eminence—their dignity. Such is their strength that one slew in the Assyrian hosts a hundred fourscore and five thousand men in one night. What must be their united strength when their number is innumerable? But with tender interest they view our sinful race, and rejoice when one is brought home to the family of faith. We should bless God for their sympathy and their support. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Do they not surround us as unseen guards encamping around the

Christian pilgrim? From what countless dangers do their overshadowing wings protect, to how many blessings does their guidance lead! Over the living—over the dying— they keep anxious watch.

But their admiration mainly rests on God's marvelous work in the scheme of redemption. They ponder His wisdom in the arrangement of the scheme before the foundation of the world, and in calling His beloved Son to undertake the blessed work. They marvel at the Son's love in freely consenting to bear our sins in His own body on the accursed tree, and in every step in redemption's path. They marvel when they behold Him on the Cross—when lying in the grave, when rising with all power, when ascending to His seat at God's right hand; and in the foresight of His coming glory.

They marvel at God's wisdom in His dealings with every ransomed soul. In these cases there is no circumstance which is not designed by infinite wisdom. Shall Angels admire God's wisdom in the path by which He leads us, and shall not our eyes be open! Let us be assured that nothing befalls us by blind chance. The whole scheme of the redemption of each saved soul was planned and pre-arranged before time was. Angels see this and admire. Let us pray for enlightening grace that we may see it more and more. So shall we trust and not be afraid. He who has begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Christ. We are assured that He will perfect that which concerns us. He called Abram from the land of idolatry, and into Canaan he safely came. Angels desire to see God's wisdom in His dealings with the Church. Let each one strive to see too God's wisdom in his own particular case.

It is a precious truth that eternal purpose regulates all matters in the Church. The Spirit in His mighty love gives frequent repetition. He would write it deeply on the tablets of our hearts. He would keep it shining brightly before our eyes. Sweet is the comfort which it never fails to give—mighty is the strength which it plenteously supplies. The believer is oftentimes brought into grievous trials—troubles—

afflictions. The way seems to be dark, and to be hedged up with barriers. It seems to be long—and weary are the steps. The trembling heart is disposed to say, "All these things are against me." But when faith can see the Gospel-assurance, sweet peace pervades the heart—the tender voice is heard. "It is I—be not afraid." The path was foreordained. It leads safely to the foreordained mansions. Thus they are kept in perfect peace who rest on the unchangeable decree. It is said to be eternal. As it commenced in God, so in Him it constantly abides. Outward circumstances may vary; but in the purpose there is no instability. It is firm as God is firm. It is immovable as God is immovable. It is eternal as God is eternal. Blessed are they who dwell under the shadow of this glorious tree. They are sheltered from all storms. They know that they repose in safety; therefore they repose in perfect peace. In the days of their pilgrimage they can take up the everlasting song of praise. They never weary in the sublime ascription, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

But while we contemplate the glories of the everlasting covenant, let it be ever before our eyes that all arrangements are made in connection with Christ. He is declared to be the substance of the covenant. All the unchangeable purposes are yes and amen in Him.—Let Him then be the sum of our faith—the channel through which all blessedness flows down to us. While we see the glories of the Gospel-scheme, let us see their origin— progress— consummation in the Lord. He will work for His people—He will work in them until the pyramid is wholly completed, and the top-stone is brought forth.

Let us pause with blessings on our lips. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. Thanks be to God for ordering all things for His glory in us through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 3:12. "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him."

Who can count the mercies which encircle the child of God! Gales of love waft him towards his heavenly home. He floats along a stream of eternal loving-kindness. He is seated high on a throne of blessedness. Time and thought fail before effort to unfold the goodness by which he is encompassed. The days of eternity will be too short to enumerate. Hallelujahs will not exhaust the theme. But the text before us bids us contract our roving thoughts and fix them exclusively on one signal blessing. The believer has boldness and access with confidence to God on His mercy-seat. The gate is ever open. At each moment he may enter, and claim celestial audience. He may draw near unto God, and God will draw near unto him. He may cry, "My Father;" and hear the reply, "My Son." Let us contemplate this wondrous privilege. This is not man's natural birthright. He was not born a member of this happy family. There was a time when he was afar off. Sins and iniquities had raised an apparently impassable barrier. A wide gulf parted him from the gates of heaven. But now the way is cleared. No obstacles block the path. He may come with boldness. He has access with confidence. How is this? Because he is one with Christ the firstborn among many brethren; because a Heavenly Father is pledged to give ready welcome; because the blood of Jesus has washed him clean from every stain of evil; because a robe of righteousness, in which the eye of omniscience can discern no blemish, renders him a meet inhabitant of the courts above. He may come boldly, because he pleads the infinite merits of Him with whom he is one; because he can plead the unanswerable argument, Christ died; because he brings in his hand the countless promises which are all yes and amen in Christ, and humbly asks, Do as You have said. Fulfill Your gracious word. He may thus come and plead boldly—with no fear of repulse he can reason with his heavenly Father. He can point to God's beloved Son bearing all his sins into the land of everlasting forgetfulness. He can point to justice and can urge that this attribute has no claims against him, because Jesus has given full satisfaction. He can point to truth and maintain that it would cease to be truth if petitions in the name of Jesus were not heard. He can point to mercy and show how tenderly God's mercy yearns over him. He can look

to God's honor and glory, and show how they are all magnified in his uttermost salvation. Thus the believer may boldly plead.

He is confident of ready access. Heaven's gates are never closed. God's ears are never stopped. Whatever be his need, whatever be his circumstances, he may fly upward, and cast down his every care at the footstool of the mercy-seat. When he is in doubt, he may seek direction—when he is in perplexity he may ask guidance—when he is weak, he may supplicate strength—when his foes sorely press, he may sue for deliverance—when he is prone to faint, he may cry for support. He may ask grace for a living hour, and grace for a dying hour. Who can estimate this privilege of free access to the mercy-seat!

Did Sheba's Queen count Solomon's servants happy who were near his throne, and heard his wisdom; and are not believers happy among the happiest, who while they are detained on earth may still live in holy communion—in incessant converse with their God? O my soul! close not your eyes to this grand blessedness. Diligently use your privilege—never be long absent from the mercy-seat. What blessings you may there obtain for yourself, your relatives, your friends, your country, the world! Happy they who realize by experience that they are thus the children of a prayer-hearing God. Happy would be our land if such believers multiplied in number, and waxed stronger in the exercise of their privilege!

This text concludes not without distinctly exhibiting the door by which we enter into this boundless region of blessedness. The means of this happy access and this approach with confidence is faith in God's co-eternal and coequal Son. Faith is that precious grace implanted by the Holy Spirit, by which we become one with Christ, and the new-born children of our heavenly Father. It cannot be too often repeated that faith is the eye that sees Him and all the glories of His finished work; the ear that hears the proclamation of His truth, and all His melting calls; the feet by which we run towards Him, and nestle in His wounded side, and wash in His all-cleansing

blood; it is the hand by which we grasp Him, and hold Him so tightly that we cannot let Him go; the heart which welcomes Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and which beats warmly in the ecstasy of love. Faith makes us one forever, and binds us to Him with indissoluble bonds. Faith which thus unites makes us heirs of His kingdom and His glory. By faith we enter, and abide, and never more are willing to depart. How thankful should we be if this precious grace has been imparted to us! With what earnest zeal and unwearied diligence should we cultivate it! It is a growing grace. There are no bounds to its expanse. The more we possess the more we shall gain; and the more we shall realize its power to enter the courts of heaven, and boldly claim communion with our Lord.

Ephesians 3:13. "Wherefore I desire that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."

An earnest exhortation follows an exhibition of Gospel-truth. Holy precepts should spring from holy teaching. The truths of the Gospel should be the parent of Gospel-walk. As a tree is known by its fruits, so trees of righteousness planted in the garden of the Lord should present branches laden with righteous produce. When good seed is plentifully sowed, a good crop should plentifully spring up. The truths which Paul proclaimed should be prolific in abundant godliness. The exhortation here urges to steadfastness—firmness—unflinching courage—indomitable valor in the cause of Christ. They who draw the Gospel-sword cast the scabbard far away. Fears and timidities should be strangers to the christian heart. They who follow Christ fully march boldly forward. They who flee may be wounded unto death. There is no armor prepared for the back. Believers must stand fast in the Lord. They must quit themselves like men. "Only be you very courageous," is the mandate unto Joshua.

Exhortations to heroic walk abound. Jesus concealed not from His followers that as the world had hated Him, so surely it would hate them. To bear this enmity was their calling, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the

world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." Expect not smiles where Jesus encountered frowns. If He, whose whole life was love, failed to melt hearts, but rather provoked the hostile cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him," can His followers expect different treatment? But they are taught to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. The prize of their high calling sparkles before their eyes, "Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Paul preceded in the path to which he calls his followers. When it pleased God who had separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by His grace to reveal His Son in him, he was not told of the glories of his heroic course—of the triumphs which his preaching would effect—of the multitudes who would be saved through his word—of the power of his writings throughout all ages—no, rather the blessed Jesus warned him what great things he must suffer for His sake.

Did he draw back—did he shrink from the noble work—did he supplicate to be left in the obscurity of ease and peace? Far otherwise! He set his face like a flint—he bravely advanced to encounter all perils and foes. In the service of his heavenly Master he was immovably resolved to bear ridicule, reproach, and shame. His one desire was that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. Mark his brave words, "I go unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." And again he enumerates in striking terms the trials and the miseries which he has encountered. The history is a volume written within and without of anguish, persecution, and sufferings of intensest bitterness. He was oftentimes beaten with rods. He was in perils by water and by land—in watchings, hunger, and thirst—by false friends and cruel foes. He was regarded as the vilest of the vile—the most contemptible of the contemptible—the filth of the earth—the off-scouring of all things.

Hence he warned, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven." Hence he sent to ascertain the steadfastness of the Thessalonians, fearful lest some of them should be moved by the report of his endurances. He reminds those who he had given them previous warning, and that all which occurred was in accordance with premonition.

Hence his present desire, that the Ephesians should not faint because he was so tried, and such cruelties beset him. Let us not think that the exhortation has no voice for us. We may not be exposed to the same cruelties—to the horrors of the Inquisition, or the agonies of the stake—but there is bitter trial in the sneer—in the scoff—in the ridicule—in the contempt to which the cause of Christ has ever been exposed. The offence of the Cross will never cease, while Satan rules the God of this world. But let us look up for help and boldly march onward. Let us fight the good fight of faith. Fierce may be the conflict; many and smarting may be the wounds, but the victory is secure.

Paul adds, "which is your glory." Double may be the interpretation. Briefly contemplate each. It is a glorious thing to be firm, and bold, and valiant, even as it is base to be timid and cowardly. Let praise be given to those who never flinch, or flee. "But the God of all grace, who has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered awhile, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you." Let then this unwavering, unhesitating course be always ours.

But possibly Paul here points to the issue of his own manifold sufferings. In the multitude of his tribulations he boldly proclaimed the Gospel-truth. Hearers heard the glad tidings. They embraced the gracious Savior. They fled to His wounded side. They became through faith heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. They entered the kingdom of grace, and journeyed onward to the kingdom of glory. Thus the tribulations of Paul became the instrumental cause of their glory. May many see in us that the Lord still has a people—

steadfast—unmovable—always abounding in the work of the Lord!
May they be led to follow Christ as we do, and to rejoice in hope of
the glory of God!

SECTION 6

Ephesians 3:14—21; Paul's prayer for the Ephesians

Ephesians 3:14-15. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

Paul deeply felt the value of untiring prayer. He highly prized and duly used his privilege of free access to the mercy-seat. Well did he know that never could he sue in vain. If not the exact petition, surely some other blessing would be granted. Here he was a close follower of his beloved Lord. The early morn—the mountain-brow—the solitary hill—the midnight hour—witnessed the communion of Christ with God. His sojourn upon earth was converse with His Father. Thus Paul constantly implored his converts to petition for him. What he asked he largely gave, and gave with wrestling importunity. Mark his words to the Colossians, "I would that you knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." When he writes his first epistle his earliest words bear testimony to his fervent zeal. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in my prayers." To quote only one additional evidence, hear his words to the Philippians, "I thank my God on every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy." The epistle before us gives repeated proof. May the Holy Spirit by these examples, and by frequent precepts, make us diligent in this heavenly work!

To pray is to prosper. But let not prayer be selfish. Let it not be limited to our own need. Boundless is the need before us. Let boundless supplications spread it all before the mercy-seat. In the present passage Paul teaches us that though he drew near with boldness, it was the boldness of the most lowly reverence. He falls

humbly in prostration before his God. He bows the knee before his lips make known his requests. Let the like reverence fill our hearts, and make us meek and reverential suppliants. We are permitted indeed to speak—no, to wrestle and cease not. But let us remember that our dealings are with Jehovah on His mercy-seat—the omnipotent Sovereign of the universe—the infinite and eternal God. Paul knew this; and he humbly knelt.

But he adds wondrous words descriptive of his near relationship to God. Let us duly ponder them—and may the Spirit render them strength and encouragement in our approaches to a prayer-hearing God! Precious are the calls to this exercise. May we listen to them and thoroughly obey! Precious are the encouragements which assure us of a gracious audience. Let each administer strength and boldness to us in this holy exercise! Among these encouragements none shine more brightly than that which is here exhibited. We are invited to draw near to God as the Father of the blessed Jesus, and as the Father of the family of faith.

To whom do we draw near? The Father of the blessed Jesus. Will not He hear those who cry in His dear Son's Name; who plead the merits of His only begotten; who present all their supplications as one with Christ? When we thus cry, Abba, Father, surely His ears will be open—surely a smile of welcome will beam lovingly—surely answers rich in fullness will be granted. Jesus said, "I know that You hear Me always." This truth flows down to all the members of His mystic body. We come as they who are the Father's gift unto Jesus. We come as the bride of the Heavenly Bridegroom—as the members of Him who is the Head of the body—as the sheep of His pasture—as the jewels of His mediatorial crown—as they in whom He had delight before the worlds were framed—as they whom He will love while endless ages roll. We come as they whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life—as they for whom the blood of God was shed—as they whom celestial righteousness enrobes—as they for whom thrones in heaven are provided—as they for whom Jesus testified, "The glory which You gave Me, I have given them."

Thus we approach the Father of the blessed Jesus. Let all fears and doubts and hesitations vanish! God would as soon deny His Son as those whom His Son represents.

But in this verse there is a superadded encouragement. We come to God as to our own Father. The expressions in the verse which reveal this truth lose much of their force by the insufficiency of translated language. A name is here given to believers which implies that God is their Father. We trace it in the declaration that believers constitute one family. But there can be no family without a presiding Father. Hence in Christ we are privileged to cry directly to God, Abba, Father. O blessed family! Who can depict their privileges and their joys! This family has existed from all eternity in the counsels of heaven. It will exist through never-ending ages. The elders of this family have already passed through the grave and gate of death to the happy mansions of the redeemed. Their race is run—their fight is fought—their struggle is endured—their victory is won—their triumph is secured. We now are prisoners in the flesh. But soon we too shall be conquerors through the blood of the Lamb, and help to contribute to the blessed company. We shall be presented through our Elder Brother, who will recognize us as given of the Father unto Him. But while we tarry, let us tarry at heaven's gate, daily and hourly crying, Abba, Father.

Ephesians 3:16. "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man."

How precious is the Word of God! how fervently should we give thanks for this inestimable treasure! how devout should be our constant use of it! What lessons are here inculcated to guide us in the upward road, and to fit us for the heavenly home! Not only are we taught the value of prayer, and encouraged in its exercise; but abundant models are set before us to direct our supplicating voice. Jesus heard the petition, "Lord, teach us to pray," and has given a pattern to supply our need. We know not indeed what to pray for as

we ought, but in countless models, suitable thoughts and words are suggested. We have a blessed proof in the prayer which now claims attention. The petition which presses to be foremost in the list, is for rich abundance of spiritual strength. Greatly do we need this blessing. Spiritual life may indeed have been revived in our souls—but it is a flickering spark, and we have frequent cause to tremble lest it should be extinguished. It is as the feeble lamb amid devouring wolves. It is as the timid dove beset by cruel hawks. It is as the little bark amid engulfing billows. Many indeed are our perils and our foes—and weak is our own strength to resist our adversaries. We wrestle not only against inborn corruptions, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world—against spiritual wickedness in high places. The devil as a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour—as a fierce dragon he watches to destroy. How shall we resist—how shall we escape! We must look upward to Him who is mightier than the mightiest—who can give indomitable support—and make us more than conquerors over all the hosts of darkness. We must pray unto Him, who according to the riches of His glory can strengthen us with all might by His Spirit in the inner man! He is always ready to hear—always able to give needful strength. We have indeed to fight a good fight—to wrestle against mighty foes—and vain would be our efforts if left to our unaided strength. But He who gives the sword will give too the arm to wield it. In all our conflicts He will stand by our side—upholding when we are prone to fall—giving power to the faint, and to those who have no might increasing strength. But not only have we to fight and struggle, we are called to bear heavy burdens, and to do arduous work.

Soon would we be crushed beneath the overwhelming load—quickly should we faint before the constant toil, if we trusted only in our own resources. But He will endue us with patience, and arm us with holy endurance. He will teach us to look upward, and to go on our way rejoicing. How arduous, too, is the work to which we are called! It must be our constant effort to adorn His doctrine—to call men to His faith—to teach the ignorant—to reclaim the backslider—

to strengthen the irresolute, and in countless ways to win to the knowledge of the faith and love of Jesus. What gifts—what knowledge—what wisdom—what perseverance are here required! And in ourselves what weakness, and ignorance, and sin! How shall we succeed and prosper except strength be supplied from heaven? The lamp would soon go out except replenished with the needful oil. So we should be soon vanquished except the Lord should strengthen and uphold. But we are taught to pray that He, according to the riches of His glory, would strengthen us by His Spirit in the inner man.

Let us bless the Lord for the warning—and bless Him for the ready aid—and seek by constant prayer to be thus upheld in the Christian race. The question may arise, Whence is this strength derived? What is the deep spring from which these waters flow; what the tree on whose branches such fruit blossoms? The text supplies immediate answer. God the Holy Spirit, the author and giver of all spiritual life, He maintains, and nourishes, and strengthens, and ripens the power which He imparts. Hence should be the constant prayer, Come, Holy Spirit, our souls inspire! We are assured that this aid is never sought in vain. It is a mighty and a glorious truth, "If you then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

We are taught, too, what is the field in which this culture is brought. It is not outward and carnal. It is inward and spiritual. It is largely described as the inner man. Hence it comprises all spiritual faculties. The intellect is brightly illuminated, that it may have a clear view of things spiritual and eternal. The mind is strengthened to understand and embrace them. The heart is strengthened to love and adore them. The soul and spirit are strengthened to soar high above all that the world contains, and to become transformed into the very image of God's dear Son. Thus the Holy Spirit strengthens with all spiritual strength.

His work, too, is never meager, slender, or in small degree. It is large and mighty, even as the mighty Agent. It is here described as being proportionate to the riches of God's glory. And when similar work is described, similar terms are used to enlarge our faith and to amplify our assurance. Thus to the Colossians, we have the prayer that they may be strengthened according to His glorious power. To the Philippians we have the promise, "God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Measure if you can, the abundance of glory which are the attributes of God. The effort baffles thought. Estimate if you can, the abundance of spiritual strength which the Holy Spirit is ready and willing to impart. The effort fails. But let us be taught, that as there are no limits in the gift, so there should be no limits to our supplications for it, and expectations of it.

Ephesians 3:17. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."

Prayer continues. Grace never ceases to prompt it. The Father ever waits to hear it. Answers are on the wing to come. But what a petition now breaks forth! O my soul! contemplate it—ponder it—use it! What is its purport? Not that we in spirit should fly up to heaven, but that heaven should descend to us. "That Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith." Whom do we supplicate to become this indwelling inhabitant? It is Christ Himself—not in mere notion—not in contemplations of His truth—not in realization of His grace, but in His very person—received in His real though invisible presence. Can it be, that Christ will really come and take up His abode within us! He is the mighty God. He is Jehovah's Fellow. He appears in the omnipotence of creation. He is co-partner in all God's glory. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. His center is everywhere. His circumference is nowhere. No bounds can limit Him. Angels veil their faces while they worship Him. He charges them with folly. They are all less than nothing in comparison of His might and power and glory. Will He inhabit the heart of man? Marvel of marvels. But we are dealing with Him whose name is Wonderful. Though His

throne is in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all, yet His delights have ever been with the sons of men, and His chosen throne is the sinner's heart. Can it indeed be so! Have we faith in His pledged word? Let us then hear it. "Behold I stand at the door and knock—if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." He here professes His readiness and His desire to hold most close and familiar communion with His people. My soul, hear His voice. Throw widely open the portals. Give Him welcome. Implore Him to come in and occupy the seat, and never more to quit it, but to reign supreme amid all opposing foes.

In the Canticles how tenderly He chides the reluctant spouse for negligence— indifference—unwillingness to receive Him! "Open to Me my love, my dove, my undefiled. For my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." All reluctance is on man's side. He patiently endures our hardness and contempt. He will not depart until admittance be obtained.

He warns us that it is in the path of obedience to the Gospel-rule that we obtain His presence. "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me—and he who loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Marvels increase. May our adoration similarly swell! He will not come alone. All heaven follows in His rear. The Father quits not His side. If Jesus enters the Father enters with Him. Let us listen to His call. "Come out from among them—and be you separate and touch not the unclean thing—and I will be a Father unto you— and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Thus the believer dwells in God, and God in him.

Need I add that the Holy Spirit is not parted from this company? We are told that our bodies are the temples of His constant presence. This text clearly informs us that the heart is the throne on which the triune God is seated. It is not the head—the mind—the intellect. It is no difficult task to obtain correct understanding of the Gospel and its

glorious scheme. Many may mentally understand the purposes of heavenly grace, and still be far removed from vital apprehensions of an indwelling God. They may speak boldly but with no fervor—correctly but with no zeal. Christ as a Savior is enthroned in the affections. He is encircled with the ardor of intense love. His dwelling is the heart. "My son, give Me your heart." "The kingdom of God is within you."

But the teaching of this text is not yet exhausted. There are more depths in the expression "Christ dwells in the heart." He comes not as the morning cloud, or as the early dew that passes away. He flows not as the summer-brook which is soon exhausted. He springs not up as a tender plant to be dried up when the sun arises. He is not as a wayfaring man who merely lodges for the night. He is not as the stranger who pays a passing visit. When He enters He takes up His abode forever. Other guests may seek admission— but they cannot dethrone Him. He takes His seat in love. In love He steadfastly maintains it. All the powers of darkness may be in league against Him—but they may as easily hurl Him from His high throne in heaven, as from the heart which has once given Him true welcome. The question has been put, "Who shall separate from the love of Christ?" The reply is clear. It is not in the power of all the catalogue of trials—pains—persecutions— troubles, to induce Christ to recede, where He has once reigned as an indwelling God.

Oh, that believers would realize their blessings—their dignity—their power—their privilege! In the eyes of the world they may be base and low— but they are caskets in which all treasure dwells. When trifling thoughts— when frivolous desires—when debasing allurements tempt—when the world comes with all its fascinating baubles, let the reply be, Away—away. This is not your home. There is no room for you here. The throne is occupied, and occupied forever. "Christ dwells in the heart by faith."

Here again we see the mighty power of faith. It hears the Savior's call for admission—it removes every bar and hindrance—it opens

wide the door—it conducts Him to His throne—it retains Him there. The more that faith expands the more we realize the indwelling Savior. Let then our constant prayer be, "Lord, increase our faith."

Ephesians 3:17-19. "That you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge."

Prayer strengthens by exercise. The more we use it, the more the sinews become firm. Indolence ever weakens. What an example meets us in the present petition! Paul prays for his converts that they may comprehend that which is incomprehensible—that they may obtain knowledge of that which passes knowledge. At once we learn that there is nothing too hard for God to do—nothing too great for God to give—and therefore nothing too vast for suppliants to implore.

What is this mighty gift for which supplication is here made? It is for advance in the knowledge of Christ's love. But before we proceed to consider this gift, two preliminary thoughts occur. Believers are exhibited as trees and as buildings. "They are rooted and grounded." The tree cannot stand except rooted in a congenial soil. Then it flourishes—puts forth strong branches—and bears rich fruit. It expands in beauty, strength, and usefulness. Thus the believer must have deep roots. The soil in which he grows is the knowledge—the perception—the experience of the love of Christ. The believer here too appears as a building. Weak and tottering is the fabric which has not a firm foundation. We know the weakness and probable downfall of a house, which rests on sand. What then is the believer's foundation? It is the knowledge—the perception—the experience of the love of Christ.

Stable indeed are they who rest on this firm basis. Storms may descend—raging winds may batter, but it presents an immovable

front. Grounded in Christ believers are built up a spiritual temple acceptable unto God through Him.

Paul prays that his converts might partake of this blessedness in company with all saints. This knowledge is their universal glory. They all are taught the preciousness of Him in whom they believe—they all realize that He loved them before the foundation of the world—they all know that because He loved, He died to save them—they all are assured that, because He loves He lives to bless them—they all are persuaded, that because He loves He will return to receive them to Himself.

Language is now strained to portray the immensities of the love of Christ. But every effort fails in weakness before the theme. If the vocabularies of earth were thoroughly exhausted they would give insufficient insight. It is enough to fill the endless ages of eternity. But the effort is made to exhibit an object which has four dimensions—breadth—length—depth—height. In the realm of nature no such object can be found—no discoveries of science can reach it—no flights of imagination can conceive such immensity. This love is breadth-infinite—it is length-infinite—it is depth-infinite—it is height-infinite. Let us fall low, and wonder, and adore.

We are thus prepared for the concluding assertion, "It passes knowledge." It is not only unspeakable—it is unsearchable—it is inconceivable. But we may know the reality, though we cannot know the fullness. We may know the spring, though we cannot measure the full flood. We may know the dawn, though we cannot gaze on the unclouded sun. We may know in part, though we cannot know in full extent. We may see something at present, though it may be through a glass darkly.

But let us daily and hourly strive to advance in this pursuit. With this object let us search and ponder its records in the Word of Life. Let us meditate on all its evidence in the work of Christ—His assumption of our nature—His birth into our family—His death in

our stead—His rising for our justification—His present session at God's right hand on our behalf—His many precious promises, which are all yes and amen in Him—His near approach to receive us unto Himself forever—to enrich us with the glories of salvation—to put us in possession of the purchased inheritance. Let us wrestle without intermission with the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to glorify Christ and to reveal Him unto us. He will not be slow to come, in the plenitude of His love, to enlarge our faculties—to enlighten our minds—to add revelation to revelation. O believer, until you shall see Him as He is, grow in this grace and in this knowledge—bathe in this ocean of intelligence—draw water with joy from these deep wells—expatiate in these wide fields—revel in these boundless joys. Count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord!

Ephesians 3:19. "That you might be filled with all the fullness of God."

Paul had made prayer for his Ephesian converts with earnestness and zeal unlimited. Strength he sought for them to the extent of God's power to give. He well knew that less would not suffice. So many were the foes—so great the obstacles—so less than weak their own innate strength, that the omnipotence of God alone would make them more than conquerors over the enemies of their salvation. Then that the strength might be a never-ceasing supply, He supplicates that the God of all strength may inhabit their hearts, even Christ Himself; that so they might in some measure comprehend His immeasurable love. And in this clause he reaches the climax of all desire, and concludes his petition in the marvelous expression, "that you might be filled with all the fullness of God."

The first thought which here forcibly arises, is that the heart must be rendered meet to receive this heavenly occupant. There must be the expulsion of self—the dethronement of Satan—the exclusion of the world.— Have you a longing desire for the presence of Him in your heart, whose coming shall be with satisfying fullness? See to it, that

there is no rival to dispute His entrance. Let this be the all-absorbing desire, and then the fulfillment of the Apostle's prayer shall be a delightful experience. The believer shall be filled with all the fullness of God. Let us consider how this blessedness is to be attained, and the dignity and honor which result therefrom. The prayer is not for an impossibility—therefore the fullness of the Godhead inhabiting the heart is attainable. And the method by which it is secured is clearly revealed. The believer in Jesus, who has come to Him in all the simplicity of a living faith—who has heard His voice pleading for admission, has verily received Christ Jesus as his inhabitant. The Lord has taken possession. He has claimed as His property the purchase of His precious blood. He has entered the believing heart, and there abides. Christ dwells in the heart by faith. When He thus enters all Deity bears Him company. "For in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell."

This is one of the expressions which the Apostle delights to repeat. He speaks of the Church as the fullness of Christ. And he tells us that "Christ is the fullness of Him that fills all in all." Nor is Paul alone in this expressive phrase. The Apostle John too in his Gospel speaks thus of Christ, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And then he adds, "And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." God is love—and the fullness of divine love pervades the believing heart. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. The believer is brought out of darkness into marvelous light—the Sun of righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings. God is Almighty—and the believer is made strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. God is holy—yes holiness in its essential qualities— and the believer through faith and patience and the Spirit's sanctifying influences, is made partaker of His holiness. This is a feeble expression of what is the blessedness of him, who is filled with all the fullness of God.—Receive Christ, and in the reception of Him all is yours.—Faith then

is the receiving grace. By believing in Jesus we realize the fullness of the blessedness which the Apostle prays for in this petition.

O my soul, have you that living principle within—that faith, which overcoming the world—working by love, and purifying the heart, makes it a fit receptacle of Him who in Himself is God over all, blessed for evermore?— If so, then never forget the dignity and honor to which you are called— Wherever you are, there Deity is present. You are enriched with a presence before which all earth's greatness and splendor fade into nothingness—you are ennobled beyond the rank of the noblest of this world—you are a living temple of the living God; for it is written, "I will live in them and walk in them—and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."—The thought will sanctify—elevate—ennoble.—It will be on earth a foretaste of the happiness of heaven. Like Enoch we shall walk with God. Like Abraham we shall be accounted His friends. Like John we shall lean on His bosom—and live in closest communion and fellowship. We shall reflect in our daily conversation some rays of the heavenly likeness here; and in privilege hereafter we shall be nearer than the angels, which dwell in His presence— yes, we shall take our place as the most highly favored of all the creatures of His love. All the longings of the heart too will forever be satisfied when we awake with His likeness. Then shall we realize, as we cannot here and now, the depth of truth in the Apostle's prayer, that we may "be filled with all the fullness of God."

Ephesians 3:20-21. "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

This sublime prayer ends with sublime praise. Let this example ever guide our supplications. Praise is lovely for the upright. "Seven times a day will I praise You" was the Psalmist's resolve. This exercise will fit for the songs above. When prayer shall be hushed

forever—when the necessity for its utterance in the realms of perfect purity shall be no more—the strains of thanksgiving shall still swell. The Hallelujahs of the blessed shall never cease.

(1.) Mark to whom adoration is here ascribed. It is to our Heavenly Father. Let praise be given to Him to whom all praise is due. But especially here is He presented to us as the God who hears and answers prayer—and the assurance is added, that however large our requests may be, they will fall short of the infinity of His power to respond. Blessed are they who have this deep persuasion, that he to whom they pray is able to answer not in proportion to the widest expanse of petition and desire—but abundantly—yes exceeding abundantly, above all that they can ask or even think. Vast were the petitions of this heaven-inspired prayer—so vast that apparently more could neither be conceived nor desired—but for our encouragement we are taught that if our prayers were infinitely more comprehensive, they could not exceed the granting power, which exceeds infinity. Proofs might have been multiplied to show how God has exercised His power at the voice of His children's cry. From the beginning such has been His grace. At times when the case of the Church has seemed desperate—and recovery to be hopeless, He has been seen to arise in the greatness of His might, and has gotten to Himself a glorious name. Let the thought of this ability urge us to be more importunate. Alas! too often poor and defective are our prayers. Unbelief clips the wings of supplication. We ask and receive not, because we ask amiss. But answers are promised. Let us then be encouraged. Those who by prayer have prevailed, have been men of like passions with ourselves. The Church in the darkness of unbelief sometimes has bemoaned, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me." The wail has often gone forth, "Will the Lord cast off forever, and will He be entreated no more? Is His mercy clean gone forever—does His promise fail for evermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious, and in anger has He shut up His tender mercies?" Where is the remedy? The Psalmist gives reply, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." Happy is

he, who has the assurance that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

(2.) The Apostle adds, "According to the power that works in us." Let no believer rest without the experience of this inworking power. Thus when we are weak, then are we strong. By it difficulties are overcome—temptations are resisted—afflictions are endured, and the profession is made, not in self-complacent pride, but in meek dependence and simple faith, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengthens me."

(3.) But mark next, who are they who ascribe praise to God? "Unto Him be glory in the Church." From none others can these notes ascend. The world is silent—the Church only is vocal with thanksgiving. This is the song of every member of the same, "O Lord, I will praise You, though You were angry with me Your anger is turned away, and You comforted me." God has abundantly blessed, and the ultimate design is, that in His Church His praises may abound. Thus He inhabits the praises of His Zion. "This people have I formed for Myself—they shall show forth My praise." They praise the love that bought them—they extol the grace that visited them in the days of darkness, and chased the gloom away. And in their every note there is an intelligent appreciation that all things are theirs through Jesus Christ. Therefore He is the theme of all their songs. Moreover they well know that it is only through His mediation and intercession that prayer and praise are accepted. He is our Great High Priest. For us He has entered within the veil—and in every age and climate, praise makes melody in the ear of God, only as it is perfumed with the incense of His merits. As in the Church below, so in the Church above, His Name is as ointment poured forth. As in time, so in eternity, throughout all ages, world without end, the song shall be forever new, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

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