

Ephesians

An encyclical letter from the heart of CHRIST
through the heart of Paul to the heart of the Church of all time

by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE OLD HEART AND THE NEW LIFE

"This I say therefore" (v. 17).

"THEREFORE." There is manifestly a sustained connection between the section which is here commenced and that which has gone before. Indeed, the entire Epistle is little more than an extended and amplified sentence, breaking off and starting again, and all the while seeking to say one thing.

The one thing which the writer is seeking to do in this letter is to spell out the matchless grace of CHRIST, and to urge upon his readers a life which is consistent with such a revelation of grace. It is true that the Epistle contains a special disclosure of what the apostle speaks of as the **"mystery"**; but that is a method and manifestation of grace.

To use the language and the figures of speech which are employed in the Epistle, GOD is taking sinful men, Jew and Gentile alike, and He is lifting them up to the throne, in the heavenly places in CHRIST JESUS; He is building them as stones into a living temple; He is incorporating them as members of the very Body of CHRIST. What wonder that He says **"therefore"**!

As we follow these adverbial expressions through the letter, we find that they take us back, step by step, to the beginning of the Epistle.

We have reached the seventeenth verse of the fourth chapter. The verse reads thus:

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind."

Go back to the first verse of this chapter:

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

It is a sustained appeal. Go back to chapter 3:14.

"For this cause I bow my knees . . ."

But that was a resumption after a parenthesis. We go back to the first verse of chapter 3.

"For this cause I Paul . . ."

For what cause? Turn back to chapter 2:19.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

Observe that we are working back to the originating spiritual ground of his appeal. Go back once more, and this time to the fifteenth verse of chapter one:

"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; 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" (1:15-17).

The whole Epistle pulsates with a double desire - that they may have a fuller apprehension of CHRIST, and that their lives may correspond with the matchless manifestation of grace which it has been the special office of the Apostle to the Gentiles to disclose.

And now let us take up the second section of the fourth chapter in detail. In verses 17-19 he gives us a keen and penetrating spiritual analysis of a depraved and dissolute heathen soul. He is not describing any individual man; he is describing a class. The seventeenth verse has already been quoted: he says that the Gentiles walk **"in the vanity of their mind"**; and the sentence continues:

"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: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (v. 18, 19).

What a contrast with what has gone before! He had been speaking in the previous paragraphs of what they were in CHRIST; now he reminds them of what they had been in themselves. He had been speaking of them in connection with their relation to the mystical Body of which they had come to form a part; now he reminds them that they are also a part of a sordid world. He has been exhibiting the finished product; now he shows them the raw material.

Let us examine it carefully: observe the description in its component elements.

- A vain mind
- A darkened understanding
- An alienated life

- A blind heart
- A hardened conscience

I said it was an analysis: is it not also a history?

Can we not in these five expressions, these five terms, trace the moral history of degeneracy? He says they are walking in the vanity of their mind. That is not the way men start out; it is what they come to. That is not the beginning of the road to depravity; it is the end. The idea of the word which he uses for "**vanity**" is not self-conceit; it is "*emptiness, illusion, unreality.*"

What an immeasurable distance men have to travel from the simplicity of the child to that condition of spiritual insensibility in which life is a hollow mockery and there is no reaction to a spiritual appeal!

I say that we have here not only a keen analysis of a profligate soul; we have also the history of sin.

Look carefully at three of the expressions which are employed.

- Darkened understanding
- Alienated life
- Blind heart

And the resulting ignorance.

He seems to be tracing sin back to its source. The vanity of mind has resulted from a darkened understanding. The darkened understanding is the consequence of an alienated life; and the alienated life has come about because of a blind heart.

He says that men have "blind hearts." But how do men come to have blind hearts? He perhaps gives us more than a hint as to the answer to that question in the next statement. "**Who**," he says, "**being past feeling.**"

What is it in the moral nature of the natural man that "feels"? What is the ethical monitor of the race? Conscience. Men have been trifling with conscience; that is how the spiritual malady starts. It is a perilous thing to stifle conscience. A stifled conscience and then a blind heart. When we refuse to listen to conscience, then presently we lose the keenness of our moral vision. Our hearts become blind. *

A stifled conscience; a blind heart - and then an alienated life.

"Being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."

* Moral blindness is not all of the same kind or degree. There is impotent blindness, and willful blindness, and judicial blindness. Impotent blindness is a moral defection of the race (John 3:3). Impotent blindness, if not arrested, will develop into willful blindness; and willful blindness, if it

continues, may issue in judicial blindness. (Matthew 13:14-15).

A blind heart draws itself away from the only source of spiritual life. The life of the man whose moral faculties are blinded becomes increasingly alienated from the life of GOD. And alienation from the life of GOD is to be cut off also from the light of GOD (John 1:4). And thus a darkened understanding ensues.

Life has no sound basis, and finally it is an empty bubble, a vain show, and men live in the **"vanity of their mind."**

Here then is not only a picture of degeneracy, and an analysis of a profligate soul; here is also a history of human sin. Do not suppose that this is just a picture of dissoluteness and nothing more. It is a disclosure of the sinfulness of the heart of humanity. Buried away it may be, hidden, restrained, suppressed, there are those same possibilities of evil in us. And if we are not that, it is by the grace of GOD.

- A stifled conscience;
- a blind heart;
- an alienated life;
- a darkened understanding;
- a vain mind,
- emptiness,
- unreality,
- illusion,
- vanity.

And finally, he says, they were **"past feeling."**

Their consciences were seared. Moule interprets it: "having got over the pain." How expressive! When conscience is at first denied, there is a twinge of pain; there is a protest that can be heard. But if the voice is silenced, presently the voice becomes less clear and clamant; the protest is smothered; the twinge is less acute, until at last it is possible to "get over the pain."

"Who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (v. 19).

That is an ugly portrait; and yet is it more revolting than some phases of our modern life? **"To work."** The word sometimes has the sense of "making a trade of." Trades are not caught, like chicken pox: they are learned. If we want to master a trade, we must go to school. It may be a school of "learning" or it may be a school of life; but we must go to school.

These Gentiles had learned the trade of wantonness in the school of sin. "But," he says, "you have been to a different school."

"But ye have not so learned Christ" (v. 20).

And then in the next verse, he takes us into the classroom of CHRIST:

“If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus” (v. 21).

And in that verse he introduces us to the Teacher, the method, and the lesson.

The Teacher: You heard Him.

The method: You were taught in Him.

The lesson: The truth as it is in JESUS.

"You heard him." There had reverberated in the halls of their consciences a voice which was not the voice of an apostle or an evangelist: there had been heard in the secret silences of their hearts tones which were not of earth.

"You were taught by him." Such an expression is never used of any other learning. If only the geniuses of the world could impart to others, not only the technique of their art, but their own spirit and ability, what a revolution that would be in the pedagogy of the schools!

But that is what CHRIST does. That is the method in the classroom of CHRIST. He can; He does. He imparts Himself with the lesson. **"You were taught by him."**

And what is the lesson? **"The truth [as it] is in Jesus."**

The apostle Paul uses the human name by itself very sparingly; but by the introduction of it here, he reminds us that there is no true teaching of CHRIST that is divorced from those historical facts that center in the person of the human JESUS.

There were metaphysical teachers in his day, as there are in our day, who need to be reminded of this. There are those whose CHRIST is nothing other than a figment of their imagination, a group of philosophical and ethical ideas which they associate with His name.

No teaching concerning CHRIST is trustworthy which does not rest upon historical foundations; which does not acknowledge that He was born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; and ascended into Heaven, and is set down at the right hand of GOD. That is **“the truth [as it] is in Jesus."**

And now he proceeds to tell us how the new life is to function and express itself.

“That ye put off, concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (vv. 22-24).

He says, in effect, it is like a man changing his clothes. He takes off the soiled suit and discards it, and puts on the new one. It is a common figure of speech. When practices have been so constant and uniform as to be, as it were, a part of us, we call them "habits." That is the same idea. And some habits fit quite tightly to the form!

But CHRIST has some new habits for them, and in the following verses Paul indicates what they are. And he puts them in the form of a series of antitheses, in which he sets before us certain moral alternatives.

“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another” (v. 25).

That is rather blunt for Christians, but they had centuries of paganism behind them; we have centuries of Christianity behind us. If he had written to us, he might have chosen some other sin; but he would have found a place in our armor just as vulnerable.

What is the special reason he assigns for truthfulness? He might have mentioned other grounds, but the reason he gives is this: **“We are members one of another.”**

Mutual confidence is a basic principle of the structure of human society; without this it must fall to pieces. There may be an artificial amalgamation which has all the appearance of cohesiveness, but let sufficient strain be put upon it and it will disintegrate. Every man who lies is striking a blow at the fabric of society.

“Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (v. 26).

This is not a command; it is a permission. But GOD would not permit anything that was wrong.

We ought to be angry. Society would be more wholesome if there were more anger. We often ought to be angry when we are altogether complacent, or mildly displeased. GOD is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). But anger is not to have in it the element of retaliation, the spirit of revenge. And it is to go down with the sun. It is not to smolder in the heart over night. It is to be put out with the evening prayer.

“Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (v. 28).

Paul was not a Socialist; he believed in the rights of private ownership. The law of Moses, which was the law of GOD, charged upon society respect for property rights. The inhibition to theft recognizes these rights. **“Thou shalt not steal.”**

What then? Let him labor with his hands; let him produce useful things. But more than that. He links useful labor up with the highest motives. While he labors at his appointed task, let him keep in mind the needs of others, that he may be able to give from his surplus to meet their necessities.

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (v. 29-31).

These renunciations all have to do with speech. Observe their inclusiveness. "No." "All" **"No corrupt communication"; "all bitterness"; "all wrath"; "all anger"; "all clamor"; "all evil speaking."**

And it is surely not to be overlooked that in the midst of these exhortations as to the use of the tongue there is brought in a reference to grieving the Spirit. **"The tongue can no man tame"** (James 3:8).

What then? Be kind.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (v. 32).

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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