

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 TEN

VOCATIONAL STANDARDS

"THEREFORE." The Epistle is a unity. The beginning of each chapter takes us back into the one before. And so it is all a part of a connected whole. **"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called"** (4:1).

The approach to the practical part of the Epistle suggests the intimate connection between Christian doctrine and Christian practice; between Christian character and Christian conduct. The most exalted doctrinal truths relate themselves to the commonplaces of daily life.

The Apostle occupies the first part of this Epistle with a rapturous and ecstatic disclosure of a supreme spiritual secret which had been committed to him to dispense. The secret was this:

GOD had inaugurated a new economy, the blessings and privileges of which they were already beginning to share. It was an economy which was conditioned upon the exaltation of CHRIST. It was an economy which was independent of time, and it concerned itself with the building up of a new mystical spiritual body - the Church.

This body is made up of an election from humanity - from all humanity, and so identified with CHRIST that when He died they died; when He arose they arose; when He ascended they ascended. And in this letter as well as in the Colossian letter, and in that letter as well as in this, after soaring to these spiritual heights he descends at once to the consideration of such practical questions as purity of speech, truthfulness, anger, chastity, theft, the right relations between husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant, man and man.

And the Epistle takes this form because there is a close and intimate connection between deep spiritual truths and everyday daily duties. Christian morality is not independent of rules, although it is something far above and beyond the mere observance of a code of ethics. It is the expression of a life, and that life is CHRIST.

Christian morality is the life of CHRIST brought into touch with human relations on their ethical side.

"With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (v. 2).

"With all lowliness." **"Mind not high things,"** says this same Apostle, **"but condescend to men of low estate"** (Romans 12:16). But lowliness is something lower than that. Lowliness does not condescend. It does not stoop to the low place. It lives there.

"With all lowliness and meekness." **"Blessed,"** says CHRIST, **"are the meek"** (Matthew 5:5).

Meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness; it is not forever clamoring for its rights. But someone says: The man who is not self-assertive will get nowhere. Every man will get somewhere; it is a question of destination.

"Lowliness and meekness." The reader will recall the general drift of Matthew 11. After the messengers of John the Baptist have gone away, JESUS commences to upbraid the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done. I quote the denunciations that they may stand in contrast to what follows them.

"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sack-cloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matthew 11:21-24).

But the evangelist no sooner concludes the denunciations than he gives us a glimpse into the heart of CHRIST. And the heart which he exposes to our view is one in which there is no trace of resentment, but a perfect acquiescence in the divine ordering of everything.

"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matthew 11:25-26).

And then, after soliloquizing with Himself, He turns His face to the world in that all-encompassing invitation with which the chapter concludes.

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:28-29).

"Meek and lowly in heart." **"I am meek and lowly."** What an astonishingly wonderful statement! The One who made the worlds, who flung the stars into space and calls them by name, who preserves the innumerable constellations in their courses, who weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance, who takes up the isles as a very little thing, who holds the waters of the ocean in the hollow of His hand, before whom the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers, when He comes into human life finds Himself as essentially meek and lowly in heart. It is not that He erected a perfect human ideal and accommodated Himself to it; He was

that **"With longsuffering, forbearing one another."**

There are implications in this entreaty which we must not miss. Human nature presents many sharp corners and rough surfaces. There would be no need for the longsuffering and the forbearing were it not for the **"one another."**

It is we who are the occasion for it; the injunction would be unnecessary but for us. But could this Apostle forget that in this exhortation to longsuffering he is urging us to imitate God? Repeatedly he speaks of the divine forbearance.

He says that GOD **"endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction"** (Romans 9:22); he urges his readers not to despise **"the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering"** (Romans 2:4); and he says it was in him pre-eminently that JESUS CHRIST manifested **"all longsuffering"** (I Timothy 1:16). And this takes us back to GOD's own words concerning Himself, **"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth"** (Exodus 34:6).

What was it that was beneath and behind this longsuffering of GOD? It was divine love. That same disposition must animate us. It must be **"in love."**

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3).

"Endeavoring." The word has almost a spring in it; it suggests eagerness. Observe that it is the unity of the Spirit which is to be sought. Not the unity of a creed; not the unity of an ecclesiastical organization; not the unity of a common apprehension of truth. These all may be wanting or deficient and there may yet be the unity of the Spirit; on the other hand, these may exist and the unity of the Spirit be lacking. This unity is to be cultivated and preserved in **"the bond of peace."** We know by experience that inward friction and restlessness of spirit react upon the physical organism; so also is it with the Body of CHRIST. The whole organism is affected by disharmony of spirit in the members that make it up. But each member has his personal responsibility for **"endeavoring"** to preserve the unity.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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