

## **Ephesians**

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

by

Walter C. Wright

Moody Colportage #258

Copyright © 1954 by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago

### **CHAPTER NINE**

#### **AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER**

AFTER THE PARENTHETICAL INTERRUPTION, 3:1-13, we come at last to the prayer. "**For this cause**" (v. 14). That takes us back to verse 1. The mind of the writer has been so full of the revelation which has been entrusted to him concerning the Church, that he has been diverted from his prayer.

"**I bow my knees.**" Postures do not make prayers, but they stimulate the devotional spirit. From the references in the New Testament Scriptures to prayer postures, we might suppose that in the days of the apostles, the usual practice was to stand for public prayer, and to kneel in private devotions. The hypocrites loved to "**stand**" and pray in public (Matthew 6:5; see also Mark 11:25).

Of Peter we read that in the home of Dorcas he "**kneeled down**" (Acts 9:40); when Paul was taking leave of the Ephesian elders, "**he kneeled down, and prayed with them all**" (Acts 20:36); and at Tyre, as he parted from his friends, they "**kneeled down on the shore**" (Acts 21:5).

"**I bow my knees.**" I am thinking of the picture by Hofmann of CHRIST in Gethsemane. The form is in the kneeling posture; the arms rest upon a boulder; the hands are clasped the one over the other; the face is averted. No one asks what that representation is intended to suggest. The attitude defines the act. If we would stimulate the devotional spirit it is well to cultivate devotional postures. But if the devotional spirit is sufficiently intense, it will initiate its own postures.

The apostle did not bow his knees as a religious exercise; he prostrated himself because he was filled with a passion of desire. His body was under the sway of his spirit.

"**Unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named**" (v. 15).

The words "**the whole family**" suggests a thought. Every conception and expression of

fatherhood has radiated from GOD. The idea of a divine fatherhood did not originate in the human heart; it was a disclosure - we may feel sure of that. In other words, man has not thought back from his own relationship and expressed GOD to himself as best he could in those terms; but the relationship is a miniature of the Fatherhood of GOD; and the divine fatherhood is the archetype of all other fatherhoods. Are you a father? Your fatherhood is a faint reflection of the Fatherhood of GOD. Are you called "father"? You have taken your name from Him.

Nevertheless I do not think that this is the thought which the apostle is trying to express. The emphasis, I think, is upon the families rather than upon the father. There is a similarity in the Greek between the word for father and the word for family which we cannot reproduce in the English. "*Pater.*" "*Patria.*" Perhaps we might think of it thus: "The father from whom every family . . . is named."

The idea may be of groups of families in connection with a common fatherhood. The word is used in two other places in the New Testament. Joseph, we are told, was of the lineage of David (Luke 2:4). David was the common father of many families that went up. In addressing a crowd in the temple area, Peter quotes from the book of Genesis where GOD had said to Abraham: "**in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed**" (Acts 3:25).

The idea may be this: GOD has many families - some of them in Heaven and some on earth. This same Epistle hints at some of them by name. There are "**principalities**" and "**powers**" in the heavenly places (3:10; cf. Colossians 1:16; I Peter 3:22). It may be that such orders of intelligent beings are in mind when he speaks of heavenly fatherhoods; and whether these designations indicate spheres of dominion, or the beings exercising dominion, the idea is essentially the same.

And GOD has families on earth, and they are named after Him. The people of Israel are one family who are called by His name (Isaiah 43:6, 7). And the Church is another family which takes the name (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:16; 19:5). And does not James suggest that the "**residue**" of men, and "**all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,**" are also a family - a part of the "**whole family**"? (Acts 15:17).

At last we are reaching the petitions. Revelation registers a progressive and changing emphasis. The experience and expression of prayer follows this changing emphasis. Take the prayers of two dying men by way of illustration of this. The one of these men died eleven hundred years before CHRIST: the other one died about A.D. 33. Samson was the one: Stephen was the other.

Recall how Samson met his death. The Philistines had captured him and had put out his eyes, after his wife had betrayed him. But the hair had grown again. And in process of time, the Philistines held a great feast in honor of Dagon their god, and to celebrate the capture of Samson; and they called Samson in to make sport. They led the blind man in by the hand, and he said: "**Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.**" And the house was filled with people; and there were about three thousand men and women on the roof watching Samson as he made sport. And Samson prayed; and this was his prayer: "**O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.**" And the prayer was answered. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and leaned upon them with his two hands; and he said:

**"Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell"** (cf. Judges 16:26-30).

Now listen to the prayer of another dying man. More than one thousand years have elapsed between the two prayers.

Stephen, one of the deacons of the Jerusalem church, is surrounded by a religious rabble who are stoning him to death. **"And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep"** (Acts 7:60).

But between these two events, the death of Samson and the death of Stephen, another Man had died: and this was His dying prayer: **"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."**

And now we come to the prayer:

**"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith"** (vv. 16, 17).

This might of which he speaks, and for which he pleads, is indeed mighty. It is **"the exceeding greatness of his power"** (1:19); it is the **"effectual working of his power"** (3:7); but marvelous miracle - it is **"the power that worketh in us"** (3:20).

It is resurrection power (1:20); but it is secret and silent power, **"in the inner man."** And observe that his thought is back at the temple again. He is speaking in temple terms. **"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."**

It links up with the end of chapter 2. The temple had been GOD's place of abode. When Solomon dedicated the temple, we read: **"Then spake Solomon, The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in forever"** (I Kings 8:12-13). And the glory of the Lord filled the house. \*

**"That Christ may dwell."**

The declaration of the apostle John will be remembered, where he says: **"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."** But the word which he uses there indicates a temporary dwelling place. It speaks of being *"tabernacled."* The earth is not GOD's permanent abode. Even in Revelation 21:3 the word used is the one which indicates a temporary abode. It would read literally: "The tabernacle of GOD is with men, and he will tabernacle with them." It is the word of a temporary sojourning, of an intermittent abiding place. But the word which is used here in the Epistle means to "settle down." And here is a threefold wonder:

- (a) that CHRIST should desire to settle down in a human heart;
- (b) that human hearts should hesitate to take Him in;
- (c) that it should be possible for Him to so reside.

\* We never read of the cloud, which symbolized the divine Presence in connection with the second temple: and we know that the holy of holies in Herod's temple was an empty shrine.

And notice that once again in this Epistle we have the three Persons of the Trinity.

He is praying the Father that the Spirit may strengthen their hearts, that CHRIST may dwell in them, "**That ye, 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 passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God**" (vv. 17-19).

Here then is the end in view of the "settling down" of CHRIST in the heart. He uses two figures of speech, one of a tree, the other of a building. "**Rooted**": that is of a tree; "**grounded**": that is of a building. But whether building or tree, it is planted in the soil, and GOD's foundations are all deep. (Connect Hebrews 11:10 with Revelation 21:14.) And there is no soil foundation which is so gripping, so binding, as divine love.

This rooting and grounding in love is with a view to an all-embracing comprehension of the love of GOD. But observe that it reads "**with all saints.**" It seems to be a corporate comprehension of which he speaks. All that the Apostle is asking for may indeed be beyond the grasp of one individual believer, but each one may grasp some portion; and each believer contributes by his own apprehension to the sum total of the comprehension of "**all saints.**"

This comprehension has four dimensions: he does not say to what these dimensions apply. The context of the preceding and of the following verse suggests the love of GOD. The breadth of that love knows no racial boundaries (v. 6), and embraces "**things in earth, [and] things in heaven**" (Colossians 1:20); the length reaches back "**before the foundation of the world**" (1:4) and forward "**throughout all ages, world without end**" (v. 21); the depth he is to show us in the next chapter taking CHRIST down into the deep abyss of death (4:9); and the height is where CHRIST is exalted above all conceivable rivals, and the Church in Him (1:19-23).

The apostle is not a visionary: he believes that the prayer can be realized.

**"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages"** (vv. 20, 21).

~ end of chapter 9 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*