

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 TWO

CELESTIAL SPHERES

WE HAVE REMINDED OURSELVES in the previous chapter that sacred truth comes to us in a variety of forms; and furthermore that revelation is progressive in its character. GOD who had spoken in the earlier ages of the world's history by the prophets spoke at last by His Son (Hebrews 1:1).

In the four Gospels we listen to JESUS CHRIST Himself. He is a fountain of inexhaustible wisdom: His word is the word of ultimate finality. In the matter of authority we certainly cannot advance beyond the words of CHRIST. But we must remember that He not only spoke on earth; He has spoken from Heaven.

He has spoken, as He promised, through the Spirit "**all truth**," and has revealed "**things to come**" (John 16:12, 13). In the epistles (and the Revelation) we have the further and fuller truth of which He spoke; and in them we reach the high-water mark of revelation. And revelation never reaches a higher level than in the Epistle which we are to study now

It commences in the customary way, the way in which every one of this apostle's letters begins - with his own name, Paul. He was an elderly man; he was in Rome, the capital city of the world; he was a prisoner. As he tells us later in the letter, he was a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles. It was his persistent championing of the cause of the Gentile Christian that had provoked the intense hostility which had led to his arrest, trial and imprisonment.

He designates himself as "**an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God**." He was not one of the twelve Apostles, and there is no clear evidence in the Scriptures to indicate that he was chosen to fill up a vacancy in the apostolic band. He received his commission directly from the ascended CHRIST, and he was called as a chosen vessel for a special purpose which was distinctly different from the mission of the Twelve, whose testimony was chiefly to Israel. "**Go thy way**," saith GOD to Ananias, as he sends him to Saul, "**for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel**."

"**Grace be to you, and peace**." Grace and peace. "Peace to you" was the salutation of the street.

He takes the common greeting and relates it to the blessings of the Gospel, and thus elevates and purifies, at least by association, the common speech. But it is a salutation still. He is the bearer of a greeting from Heaven. It is, so to speak, GOD's "good morning" to the Church.

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father." The fatherhood of GOD was not a new conception; it was rather a new emphasis. The prophets had spoken of GOD in the terms of fatherhood: there had been outreachings to the idea of fatherhood through the centuries.

GOD had promised to be a father to one of Israel's illustrious kings. **"I will be his father, and he shall be my son"** (II Samuel 7:14). The Psalmist in Psalm 103 exclaims, **"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him"** (v. 13). GOD had spoken of Himself in the terms of fatherhood to the chosen nation: **"I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn"** (Jeremiah 31:9). And Isaiah had been very bold, and had exclaimed: **"Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer: thy name is from everlasting"** (Isaiah 63:16).

"But now, O LORD, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Isaiah 64:8).

The divine fatherhood was not evolved by the exigencies of human need: it was eternal in the very nature of GOD.

The conceptions of Father and Son are embedded in the constitution of Deity. Why then was there only a fragmentary reference here and there to the Fatherhood of GOD for four thousand years? Because the Fatherhood can only be revealed through the Son.

A father cannot be revealed through a servant. Notice how the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews draws his contrast between Moses and CHRIST. **"And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after: but Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we"** (Hebrews 3:5, 6).

There are some aspects of His character which GOD could reveal through a servant. He could reveal His power; His righteousness, and His holiness; but the Fatherhood must be revealed through the Son.

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ"

"The Lord Jesus Christ." He did not come into the world with that name. It is a name which connects itself with the historical aspects of redemption. **"Jesus"** was the distinctly human name: He was **"Jesus of Nazareth."** It was the name with which He grew up; the name by which He was known in the family circle.

Although it was a common name, it had a spiritual significance, and that significance was accentuated and filled out in bestowing the name upon him. **"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:21).

The name was the Greek equivalent of Joshua (Hebrews 4:8), a contraction of Jehoshua; and Jehoshua was a compound name signifying "Jehovah-Saviour."

So the spiritual implications of the common human name are, as it were, a stepping stone to the official name.

Thus we hear Paul in the synagogue at Thessalonica **"opening and alleging . . . that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ"** (Acts 17:3). JESUS is CHRIST. He is the Anointed One. Messiah and CHRIST are identical terms. It is His official name. But He is more than that. **"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ"** (Acts 2:36). And so we read: **"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"** (Philippians 2:10, 11).

We may bring the four passages together as a sequence into a sustained and continued thought.

"Thou shalt call his name Jesus."

"This Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ."

"God hath made that same Jesus... both Lord and Christ."

"That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

The next verse commences a benedictory ascription of praise which stretches itself out to the end of verse 14.

These twelve verses are one extended sentence. They are "like the preliminary flight of the eagle, rising and wheeling round, as though for a while uncertain what direction, in his boundless freedom, he shall take." We should read the entire sentence before we proceed.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness 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: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:3-14).

Let us come back to verse 3. "**All spiritual blessings in heavenly places.**" No one but a Jew would instinctively appreciate the full force of this statement. Spiritual in contrast to material; heavenly distinguished from earthly.

The apostle was an Israelite. He had been brought up under the Jewish order of things: he was saturated with Jewish thought. The Old Covenant promised material prosperity and earthly blessings. "**And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store . . . The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee**" (Deuteronomy 28:2-8).

How different is that from the Epistle to the Ephesians! And the Apostle represented in his own person the breaking down of the Palestinian covenant. He was a childless, landless, homeless man. Why had the Palestinian covenant broken down? "**Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord**" (Hebrews 8:9).

These spiritual blessings are said to be in the "**heavenly places.**" The expression occurs five times in this Epistle, and nowhere else. Notice the four other passages:

"**He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places**" (1:20).

The heavenly sphere then is that region where CHRIST is enthroned above all conceivable rivals, for he proceeds: "**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.**" It is a region of ideas and of forces rather than of things. But again, observe the third occurrence:

"**And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus**" (2:6).

This incomparable supremacy CHRIST is sharing with the Church, in heavenly places. And once more, in the next chapter:

"**To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God**" (3:10).

GOD's dealings with the Church are designed to be an advertisement to heavenly intelligences of the very varied wisdom of GOD. And finally, in the last chapter:

"**For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places**" (6:12).

This heavenly sphere is invaded by wicked hosts.

Observe that these five passages scattered through the Epistle develop a consecutive train of thought, and may be read as a continuous sentence. **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ: [1:3] 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 [1:19-20]: and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [2:6], to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God [3:10]; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (6:12).**

This opening benediction takes us then at once into the heavenly spheres, and it declares that GOD has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in these celestial regions. The thought of the Apostle is hard to follow as to sequence as he moves about in these altitudes of spiritual ideas. Perhaps the pivotal sentence of this opening section is the tenth verse. Let us pass on to that and then come back again.

"That in the dispensation of the fullness of times [the seasons] he might gather together [or sum up] in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him."

That is a strategic verse, in harmony with GOD's merciful purpose for the government of the world, when the times are ripe for it - the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one head in CHRIST.

"The dispensation." Dispensation means literally "*house management*," but we must expand the meaning to harmonize with the context. The apostle is speaking of "*world government*," nay, even more than that: of *universal government*, and of a purpose which GOD is designing to effect in regard to the administration of the entire universe.

CHRIST is the Steward over the universal household of GOD. **"In the fullness of times,"** that is, when the times are ripe for it, it is GOD's purpose to gather together, to sum up, to recapitulate all things in CHRIST.

Sin has resulted in a disintegration, a scattering. The universe has lost its original cohesiveness, but all the scattered integers are to be brought together again in one sum in Him. Visualize a long column of figures and the total underneath them all. CHRIST is the total: they are in Him. But look at the total. It is a long list of ciphers with just one figure in the front of them. Where have the threes and the fives and the sevens disappeared to? They are in the sum. Perhaps the illustration, drawn from the language of the text, may throw some light upon the expression which so frequently occurs in the epistles - **"in Christ."**

But before GOD gathers together all things in CHRIST, He gathers out an elect people. GOD had already been gathering out an elect earthly people: He was now to gather out an elect

heavenly people.

The apostle in this ecstatic flight of rhapsody, this paean of adoration, this act of praise, proceeds to indicate the principle upon which GOD operates in the gathering out of this heavenly people.

"According as he hath chosen us in him" (v. 4).

The choice was according to a sovereign will. Notice the repeated references to the divine will. It was **"according to the good pleasure of his will"**; **"having made known unto us the mystery of his will"**; **"according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself"**; and so it says we have been **"predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."**

But let us not think of election as an arbitrary or capricious choice upon the part of GOD. We may be quite sure it is not that. And however inscrutable the counsels of the divine will may be, they only become effective through redemptive acts. And those redemptive acts are not our acts: they are, they have been, worked out in His own person at infinite cost. Those redemptive acts the apostle alludes to in the seventh verse.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Through sin we forfeit the right to live. In the economy of grace it was possible that CHRIST could reinstate us by the sacrifice of His own life. This is what He actually did.

I close this chapter with a brief reference to an expression, which, with slight variations, repeats itself three times, and which is indicative of the drift of the Apostle's thought.

To the praise of his glory" (vv. 12, 14).

To the praise of the glory of his grace" (v. 6).

He looks back into the past and contemplates the foreordaining purpose of GOD, and says it was **"to the praise of the glory of his grace."** He looks out upon the Church and contemplates the effects which the revelation of GOD's purpose - the **"mystery of his will"** - is accomplishing in the hearts of believers, and says it is to the end **"that we should be unto the praise of his glory."** He looks into the future, to the ultimate ends of salvation, to the **"redemption of the purchased possession,"** and says that that is to be **"unto the praise of his glory."**

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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