

# STUDIES IN EPHESIANS

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*Blackburn's in-depth study of Ephesians exploring concepts like 'heavenly places' as the realm of spiritual blessing and conflict, using Old Testament parallels with Canaan to illustrate the Christian's spiritual inheritance and warfare.*

5 Chapters

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## 3. Introduction

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### Introduction

Twelve men, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, had been sent by Moses to reconnoitre the Land. Forty days later they returned, two of them staggering under the load of an enormous bunch of grapes, brought back as an earnest of the produce of Canaan. Then there ensued the most astonishing scene. This great host of people had migrated from Egypt (with overpowering evidences of God's might on their side), for the clear purpose of entering into possession of the Land of Promise; but they now refused to proceed. Four men stood for going ahead; the rest clamoured to return. For the time being the majority prevailed against the four, and they all turned their backs on the land flowing with milk and honey and set their faces to the wilderness. The few saw that country as the land of true delight which was their possession by gift of God, and were all for courage and obedience. The many were blind to the delights of Canaan under divine gift and therefore were not urged forward by its appeal; but they did see the difficulties and thought it not worth while. So for many years (in the cases of the individuals concerned, for ever), they missed God's best, which was life in the land of promise, and chose instead death in the desert.

"Now these things happened to them for ensamples, and they were written for our learning," and in order to learn our lesson, we, as Christians, have to turn to the Ephesian Epistle, for there we learn what is God's best for us, and are warned of the danger of missing it.

Every Christian knows the story of our salvation from the point of view of our own experience. It all began with the awakening of a sense of need. There followed the confession of the need, and the acceptance of Christ by faith, and the realisation that the need was met in Him. This experience is epitomised in the words "repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." Thereafter, like Israel in the desert, we have experienced God's daily care and guidance. All this is great and good, but can anyone really think that God is satisfied merely with meeting our need, or even that God's activity in blessing toward us began with the object of meeting our need? In the Father's home He has His own delights and concerns in which His own heart is satisfied and the object of this Epistle is to tell how God has acted, out from His own delight before the foundation of the world, to plan and create a world in perfect accord with His own good pleasure, then to allocate to us a place with Himself in that world. This is the bearing of the phrase "according to the good pleasure of His will" (1:5). From the opened heaven God spoke, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom is all My good pleasure."

It sometimes happens that a girl - perhaps engaged to be married befriends a little boy, to the great pleasure of the little boy. From time to time she presents him with a model Deltic Locomotive, or of Stirling Moss in an Aston Martin. This pleases him beyond measure, and he thinks of her as the best of all friends. But after all, when evening comes she returns into her own world of delights from which he is entirely excluded, and so it must be in the nature of things. What God has done is something quite different from this. He has not given us good gifts and then returned to His own world. The thought is staggering when once seized. It is that when God began

the story, long before our need arose, and indeed before our existence, "before the foundation of the world," He reached out from His supreme delight in His Well-Beloved to create a world to be headed up and filled with the fulness of that wonderful Person, and to predestinate His elect to a place in that world as their everlasting home. The thought that God has His own centre of delight and action is further illustrated from the Gospels. Christ came to reveal the Father, and quite early in the gospel story He began to speak to the disciples about the Father. The contrast between the first and last words recorded concerning this revelation are highly instructive. According to Matthew 6:1-34 our Father in heaven stoops down to be concerned with His children's needs in their homes. He knows that they say "What shall we eat?" and "Wherewith shall we be clothed?" He makes the concerns of their homes His concern, so that they do not need to be anxious about them. See the contrast in John 14:1-31; John 15:1-27; John 16:1-33; John 17:1-26. Their thoughts are taken away to the Father's house in heaven. There is a home which has its own interests and joys, and His prayer is that their hearts might be there, as indeed, spirit, soul and body they will in the end be there. When the moment came for God to put into execution what He had purposed before the world's foundation, His elect were spiritually dead and distant from God. This is the subject of the second chapter, which tells how God "who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us," has dealt with this death and distance, through the death and resurrection of Christ. When we were dead He has given us life in that we have been quickened, raised and seated with Christ. For our distance He has given nearness to Himself in that we are "made nigh by the blood of Christ."

It is, however, in the third chapter unquestionably that we come to the heart of what the Spirit of God is bringing before us in this epistle; and few would question that it is in verses 17 to 19 of this third chapter that we reach, in the apostle's prayer, the heart of the matter: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; 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 fulness of God." Thus to know the love of Christ is the corn and the wine, the milk and honey, the wealth and plenty of the Christian's Canaan. It is the pure delight of a day which will know no evening shade.

Paul's ministry was to preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ," and this prayer was for the possession by the saints of the true riches. It has been said that the world is like a shop window. We are to imagine a certain day on which the most extraordinary purchases were being attempted in a large store. It all started with what they saw in the windows. Someone had been round crossing the prices. Here was a mink coat marked at £5. Here was a camera with every conceivable refinement offered at 10p. There is a piece of tinsel decoration priced at £250, and a toy motor car at £800. Only in so far as people have an informed knowledge of the true values of things from a worldly point of view could they be preserved from making fools of themselves in a case like this. The world is like a shop window in which someone has reversed the prices. Things which have in themselves little or no power of lasting satisfaction are valued highly and sought diligently. No value is put upon the things which are the true wealth, the real riches. With one voice this as well as other epistles declares that the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord is the real treasure. "The exceeding riches of His grace:" "the unsearchable riches of Christ." And to the Colossians: "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ we have this treasure in earthen vessels."

What can we do about this great matter? We can do as Paul did: we can pray: and the very words we need are here put into our mouths. We shall learn that just as Israel had to fight for the possession and enjoyment of Canaan, so we shall have to fight for our Canaan. The closing words of the epistle deal with the fight, and at the end of Paul's enumeration of the weapons of our warfare comes the weapon of "all-prayer," as Bunyan called it.

One of the Christian's first steps in light is to learn what God in Christ has done for us, and his first prayers will always include request for our daily bread and for all our ordinary needs. We soon learn also the need for prayer concerning what God can do through us and others. But how slow we are to learn that so much Bible prayer is about what God can do in us, and the prayer in Ephesians three is one of the greatest of these: "now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Let us purpose now to pray often this prayer for a knowledge which passes knowledge, to know the love of Christ, to be filled with all the fulness of God, to possess God's best.

Since it is not the intention in these studies to go through the epistle chapter by chapter, a brief synopsis will provide a basis for tracing selected themes.

1:3. Title. God's activity in blessing toward us.

1:4 to 3:21: TEACHING.

1:4 to 14. God's acts according to His Purpose.

1:15 to 2:22. The Church. The organism in which we are united to Christ.

1:15 to 23. Prayer for knowledge leading to the Church, Christ's body.

2:1 to 10. The consequences of union with Christ.

2:11 to 22. In the Church all saints are one with each other.

3:1-12 The Mystery. Finality in the unfolding of God's plan.

3:13 to 21. The Fulness of God prayed for.

4:1 to 6:20:CONDUCT 4:1 to 6. The Unity of the Spirit.

4:7 to 16. The Growth of the Body.

4:17 to 5:21. The Old and the New Man.

5:22 to 6:9. Relationships.

6:10 to 20. The Fight. The third verse of the first chapter is a kind of inspired title for the epistle, indicating that the subject is God's activity in blessing toward us. This verse also specifies the realm in which our blessings are located - "heavenly places" - and the Person in whom they are bestowed - Christ. All the dominant themes of the epistle gather naturally under this head. This activity is according to purpose. In this purpose, the

Church is the organism in which we are united to Christ. The Mystery, or Secret, signifies the distinct advance made when Christ was ascended and the Spirit given, so that the full plan,

hitherto hid in God, could be revealed. The intention in the pages which follow is to trace some of these threads through the epistle, with the prayer that the Spirit Himself may guide us into all the truth, and that we may find ourselves, as we tread these paths, in the living experience of dwelling in Canaan.

## 4. Heavenly Places

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### Heavenly Places

It was a gruesome experience for me, many years ago, to see a man fall from the top of an eighty foot building in course of erection. One can imagine three bodies of equal bulk falling through the air, a piece of rock, a dog, and a man. All three obey the laws governing material substances, including the Newtonian laws of motion. At this level man is the feeblest of the three and is likely to sustain the greatest damage. The dog and the man but not the stone, would be capable of emotional reaction. They would find this a terrifying experience, and could cry out with fear and shock. The man alone would be capable of spiritual response, could think of the consequences of such a fall, and even, in the brief seconds available, could think of meeting God. These thoughts illustrate the truths, first, that man is unique in the scale of creation, in that he has a footing in all three levels of being, body, soul and spirit, and second, that alone among earthly creatures he is capable of spiritual activity. In this particular he is like God and all other spirits. These thoughts in turn lead to the suggestion that at least an important part of the meaning of the phrase "heavenly places" must be the spiritual arena, the realm of spiritual activity, and where the spiritual conflict is waged.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." This is the first of five occurrences of the phrase "heavenly places" in this epistle, although the last is translated "high places" (1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12). It is possible that the same expression occurs in John 3:12, but apart from this possibility, the phrase is characteristic of Ephesians, and therefore careful study is warranted. An understanding of the phrase is necessary to understand the epistle. That even unregenerate man is capable of spiritual activity is clear since conscience is active in him. Yet in the realm of spiritual things unregenerate man is dead in trespasses and sins and yet walks under the influence of the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. The epistle is, however, explicit regarding what exists in heavenly places. Our blessings are there. Christ exalted is there. The saints are already seated there in Christ. Principalities and powers are there, and the rulers of the darkness of this world.

While, doubtless, bodily conditions react on spiritual things, and vice versa, the great emphasis in this letter as we shall see, is that by virtue of being spirit, man is accessible to spiritual influences, both good and evil, from God, from other saints, and from the devil and other evil spirits. Our blessings are spiritual and in the spiritual arena, or heavenly places. We are alive with life in the spirit, and above all can be open to the action of the Spirit of God, and also of the adversary the devil. Hence arises the conflict, and our actions are thought of in terms of grieving and hence hindering the work of the Spirit of God, and giving place to the devil and helping his baleful influences. The latter truth is particularly to be seen in the fourth chapter. From 4:17 to 5:21 the epistle considers the conduct of the saints from the point of view of general principles, as distinct from the particular relationships and hence duties dealt with in 5:22 to 6:9. The lives of the saints are to be different from the lives of other Gentiles because a different spirit animates them. The

two kinds of life as seen in their actions and habits are called the old man and the new man. Intensely practical matters of conduct are dealt with in 4:25 to 5:5, and it is here we are taught that evil conduct gives place to the devil (v. 27) and grieves the Holy Spirit of God (v. 30). Action and habit are considered here in the light of which spiritual influence to which we are accessible they encourage or discourage, help or hinder. Especially is this concept elaborated in the sixth chapter where the writer deals with the spiritual conflict in the spiritual arena. The Old Testament shadow of heavenly places is the land of Canaan. Long before Joshua, God had chosen a people for a land, Israel for Canaan, a land of corn and wine, a land of milk and honey. When the time came for God to put into execution His promises, the chosen people were slaves in Egypt under Pharaoh. God stepped in and rescued them and across the great barriers of the Red Sea and Jordan, brought them into the land of promise. They were by promise of God not only to be in the land, but possessors of it. In fact, they found hostile nations in possession, and they only possessed it in the measure in which they conquered it. When they acted in the strength of Jehovah they were invincible, and the only thing which rendered them liable to defeat was disobedient conduct, as at Ai. Nevertheless they never possessed it in more than a partial sense in the past. Yet Scripture is unanimous that they will, in the age to come, possess it, not in the measure of their faithfulness, but in the full measure of the promise of God, from the river to the ends of the earth.

All this is the clearest shadow cast beforehand of the Christian's Canaan, heavenly places. All begins with God, before all worlds: God, rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us: God, in the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us: God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Out of the sovereign pleasure of His will He chose a people for a place, the saints in Christ for heavenly places. He predestinated them, not only to be there, but to be in Christ supreme, to possess all spiritual blessings, to know the love of Christ. When the moment came for these purposes to be put into execution, the people were dead in trespasses and sins (yet walking according to the spirit which works in the children of disobedience). In the exceeding greatness of His power toward us, He has given us life in Christ, supreme in heavenly places. Other spiritual beings are there: they see in the saints the manifold wisdom of God, yet they are hostile and a struggle ensues. An explicit contrast is probably intended in 6:12 - our struggle is not like Israel's, against human foes, but against spiritual powers, striving to make us fall. We have to reckon not only with our own feebleness, but also with strong enemies.

God's actions in the spiritual realm are to give spiritual blessings there, to choose, to predestinate, to accept in the Beloved, to seal with the Spirit, by whom we are united to Christ. Christ, ascended up on high, in this realm of action gives gifts unto men, and imparts, in the power of His might, strength to stand in the conflict. The prince of the power of the air takes occasion by the failures of the saints, by his wiles to hinder their enjoyment of their blessings in Christ. The action of the saints in the spiritual realm centres on prayer, as in 1:15 to 19 and 3:14 to 21, and conduct which does not grieve the Spirit of God or give place to the devil. Above all, donning the whole armour of God, it is to withstand the wiles of the devil in the evil day.

Victory in chapter 6 is equated with standing. Our standing is in spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, and these enemies aim to bring us down. The real victory will be achieved if, when the evil day is done, and we have been subjected to the wiles of the devil, we shall be found standing. There is a good deal in Scripture about another kind of fight described in the words, "the

flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other." This kind of conflict is not what the Word of God calls "the good fight", and was never part of the intention of God for us. The good fight is to lay hold of eternal life, to retain our standing in the wonderful world of spiritual blessings. When the wiles of the devil come to us, they do not appear as pink devils labelled "wiles of Satan". They come in forms dictated by a great wisdom, designed to deceive. Our struggle is against those great and mysterious spiritual beings, of whom we know so little, called in Scripture "principalities and powers". Their method is like that of the Philistines with Samson. He only saw Delilah, and probably never heard of or imagined the secret conference, "Entice him. Entice him, that we may bind him." Another hint as to their methods is in 6:16: the shield of faith is needed to quench "the fiery darts of the wicked one." At times, when all seems calm and bright, a thought, a word, a sight, suddenly sets us on fire. It may be the thought of distrust of God, or something that sets alight an evil temper. From whence come such thoughts? They are the fiery darts of the wicked one. The Romans used arrows and darts carrying fire when attacking a camp, with the intention of finding and igniting inflammable material within, and so distracting and confusing the defenders. We certainly have inflammable material within, and therefore we need the shield of faith. In face of this fight and these foes, the watchword is, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." How strange it is that any Christian is ever overcome, when we remember that the dominant fact about heavenly places is that Christ is supreme there. The exceeding greatness of the power of God has been shown in Christ's resurrection from the dead and in His exaltation; and it is explicitly in terms of His being far above these same principalities and powers, placed under His feet, that we learn of His present position in heavenly places. In face of this fact, how can any Christian be overcome? It can only be through neglect of the warnings and admonitions of a passage like this, and especially of this verse 10, "Be strong in the Lord." The real idea here is a passive one. "Be strengthened in the Lord." There can be no real difficulty in understanding this. Who has not had the experience of speaking to a human friend of the difficulties and problems, and coming away strengthened by his sympathy and advice? In how much more full and abundant measure is it true that when we come constantly to the Lord, there flows into us from Him, power superior to every power that can be against us in the spiritual arena. "She only touched the hem of His garment," says the gospel story, and immediately virtue flowed out of Him. If we came to Him more constantly, realising our weakness and need, and His love and the greatness of His power, then we would be strengthened in the Lord, and in the might of His strength. The next direct exhortation regarding this fight is to put on the whole armour of God. The armour of God does not grow like feathers on a bird. If this were the figure intended, the Spirit of God would have used it. It has to be put on, and this indicates a purpose (still only in the strength of the Lord) to act in truth (not lying), righteousness, peace, faith, and to learn to use the offensive weapons of the assurance of salvation, the Word of God, and prayer.

We have considered in this paper the meaning of the expression "heavenly places" as the spiritual arena. We have learned that it is the realm of spiritual things, spiritual blessing, spiritual action, and spiritual conflict. We can be active there because we, like God and His angels, the devil and all demons, we are capable of action, and accessible to influences in that realm. Perhaps the greatest impress we should take away is the privilege and importance of prayer, especially in terms of the prayers in this epistle, so that we may see the glorious Christ, live in His love, and be strong in His strength.

## 5. The Holy Spirit

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### The Holy Spirit

"Christ. in whom, on believing, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Ephesians 1:13, Moule). "The Holy Spirit of the promise": this name immediately takes us back to John 14:1-31; John 15:1-27; John 16:1-33. The Holy Spirit was promised to the disciples. Without Him they would indeed have been orphans. On December 9th, 1934, in a deserted house in the town of Miaosheo in China, a baby, not yet three months old cried and slept alone through the night and on into the next day. On the hillside outside the town lay the bodies of her young American father and mother, cut down by the swords of a band of Communists. None dared to come near the house, for the Reds were still only three miles away. Could there have been a more complete embodiment of the word orphan than this helpless little life, so powerless in itself, surrounded by brutal enemies, and with no friend near? In the context of the new life within, the disciples would indeed have been orphans, except for the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit of the promise. What was the promise? The answer is relevant to Ephesians, for in 1:13 we are so distinctly referred back to it. "The Father . shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (14:26). "He will guide you into all truth: .and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you" (16:13-14). Where shall we find words to present the life, the peace, the blessing which are the potential of this unction from the Holy One? It lies behind all that follows about the gift and office of the Holy Spirit.

First, then, we need to know when we receive Him. We need to have assurance about this, for there is no part of the teaching of Scripture regarding the Holy Spirit on which there is greater diversity of view than on this question. When does a person receive Him? The definite answer is here in this verse in Ephesians we are now considering. In the Acts there is in fact a considerable variety as to the stage in the experience of individuals at which the Holy Spirit was given, and also as to the human instruments and their part in the gift. It is necessary to believe either that such varieties were intended to continue throughout the Church's history, or that some of them were special cases appropriate to the introductory phase of Christianity. We only need to hear the united voices of the epistles to understand that all but one were special cases, not to continue. There are two real questions. Is the Holy Spirit received at the moment of faith in Christ, or before, or after?

Note (biblecentre):A third question which may usefully be asked is whether there are individuals who are born again but have not yet believed the full gospel of salvation (such as the Ephesians themselves, in Acts 19:1-41). Such have a new nature and therefore the right desires but are still in the state of Romans 7:19-22). This is not the normal state of a Christian which is considered in 1 Corinthians 12:13 etc. But, unfortunately, many may be in a state which is not

normal. You find good teaching on this subject here and here. Is the laying on of hands necessary? In Acts 8:17 at Samaria, the Holy Ghost was given through the laying on of hands, and likewise at Ephesus in Acts 19:6. In all other recorded cases, the Spirit was given without laying on of hands. At the first preaching to the Gentiles the Spirit was given at the moment of belief, but in all other instances as a distinct event subsequent to belief. The usage of the epistles shows that the first preaching to the Gentiles provided the pattern intended to be permanent, and the rest were exceptional events for special reasons connected with the introduction of the new faith. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 "are we all baptised by one Spirit". Who is this "all"? All that in every place invoke the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Galatians 3:2 the fact that the Galatians (who had fallen from grace, and were not running well) had received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, is made the ground of the argument as to how they were to be made perfect. But here in Ephesians 1:13, quoted in opening, is the most definite passage on the subject. They were sealed with the Holy Spirit "on believing". The promise of John 14:1-31 contains the words, "that He (the Holy Spirit) may abide with you for ever". The irrevocable nature of this immense gift is emphasised here also in the reference to seal and earnest, and especially "until the redemption of the purchased possession". The Holy Spirit as seal gives final certainty to the covenant of salvation. The matter is finalised and settled and nothing can ever open again the question of salvation once a person is sealed with the Spirit. The thought of the Holy Spirit as earnest contains at least three elements. That He has been given is the certainty of our final entrance into the fulness of the life with God in heaven. The Holy Spirit is also the foretaste of that fruition: and this involves the fact that what is given with Him is the same in kind with what the saints will enjoy in heaven. What He gives (especially strength with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith) will, in quality and kind, never be surpassed in heaven. It will, thank God, be surpassed in the measure of our appreciation and response. The grapes of Eschol were only in part a picture of the earnest. They were the very fruit of Canaan itself and therefore a true foretaste. But they did not involve the certainty, for the individual concerned, of entrance into the land. In this respect they fall short of being a true picture of the earnest. In 2:22 we have the consequences for the saints collectively, of the gift of the Spirit. "In (the Lord) ye also are being built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit". The truth that God has ever desired to dwell amongst His people, and what was required before this could be true, is a thread which runs through Scripture. It was first known as an immediate consequence of redemption. "The Lord. is become my salvation. and I will prepare Him an habitation". "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established" (Exodus 15:2; Exodus 15:7). This was true in an outward and ceremonial sense. Since an accomplished redemption has been achieved by the blood of Christ, then there can be in an inward, spiritual, true and final sense, an habitation for God. God now dwells in His people as His house by the Holy Spirit. The central thought here is nearness to God, both for those who were distant and for those who were nigh only in the old outward sense, for we have access through Christ by one Spirit to the Father. In these verses we have the church as the temple in verse 21 and as the habitation or dwelling-place in verse 22, and it is with the latter that the activity of the Holy Spirit is especially connected. In the Psalms the meaning of these two figures in the experience of God's people becomes clear. The temple is connected in the thoughts and experience of the saints with that distinctness and separateness of God in His holiness, in which He is the object of worship. The

house is connected, on the other hand, with His people's experience of joy in nearness to Him. "I went. to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day" (Psalms 42:4). "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." (Psalms 26:8). "How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures" (Psalms 36:7-8).

Still considering the positive gain of what the Holy Spirit has established, we come to Ephesians 3:5. The new things, hitherto secret and hidden from the sons of men "are now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." These are the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; they have not entered into the hearts of men, but God hath prepared them for those that love Him. The same Spirit who has sealed each believer, and by whom God dwells in the church, thus makes available in this place and to these people the knowledge of the depths of God. This super-abounding wealth of activity by the Spirit of God fills out the concept that the saints are accessible to spiritual influences in heavenly places, and it is manifestly of the greatest consequence that we should also learn how our actions can affect our reception of such spiritual activity on the part of God by His Spirit.

Before leaving the doctrinal part of the epistle behind, however, we find another element in the positive result of the Spirit's work, and this is the unity of the Spirit in 4:3. This idea really arises from chapter 2, the intervening chapter being parenthetical, though supremely important. Note again the reiteration of the fact of unity in chapter 2. Jew and Gentile believers have been made one (verse 14), reconciling both unto God in one body (verse 16): and both have access by one Spirit to the Father. The first call by which the saints are to make effective their response to God's blessing is to remain faithful to this unity. We are not called to make a unity. God has done this, and we are called to translate into practice the unity which God has formed by His Spirit. No modern cleavage threatens the maintenance of this unity so deeply as that between Jew and Gentile. Everything in race, history, aspirations, diet, worship and habits tended to separate: but to maintain it, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

It might have been expected that the call would be to keep the unity of the body: but it is evident from the next few verses that the unity of the Spirit contains other elements than the unity of the body: there is the unity of the faith and the unity of the children of God. The "unity of the Spirit" also emphasises the inwardness of this oneness in essence, and hence that action in the moral rather than in the organisational realm is required to keep it. Lowliness and meekness, longsuffering and forbearance on the part of individuals can and do meet God's desire here, rather than the efforts of religious politicians to recreate an external and organisational unity. The evidences of the fact of the presence and activity of God by His Spirit in the church appear in the Acts. Acts 5:3 shows the fact of the presence of God by the Spirit: "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Acts 13:2 illustrates the activity of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The references to the Holy Spirit in the hortatory part of Ephesians very strikingly underline that the central requirement from the believer is behaviour which does not hinder the Spirit in His mighty works in. the saints, but rather forwards them and co-operates with Him. There are four:

Grieve not the Spirit (4:30).

Be filled with the Spirit (5:18).

Take the sword of the Spirit (6:17).

Pray in the Spirit (6:18).

I think I can see a connection between the first of these and the Lord Jesus being grieved in the Gospel. "And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matthew 13:58). In another place He was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. The mighty works of that Mighty One were diminished ("not many") by His being grieved. If no less a miracle than this has taken place, that the Holy Spirit of God has taken up His dwelling in and amongst the saints, where are His mighty works? We humbly thank God that we do see something of His mighty works in the saints. Why not more? It is because our behaviour grieves Him. If we put away lying, let not the sun go down upon our wrath, the stealer steal no more, the Spirit could take the things of Christ and show them to us. If kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness displaced bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking, then more of His mighty works would be seen.

"Be filled with the Spirit" is not, like Romans 12:1, a crisis in the believer's history and experience, nor does it denote a moment when he "arrives". It is a constantly repeated or habitual thing. By the contrast with being drunk with wine, there seems to be a reference to our intake in spiritual things. If our intake is in the things of the Spirit, that is, the things of Christ, then behaviour will be dictated by the Spirit and not by wine. Read again how this also is illustrated in the Acts. It was when they forgot themselves and were full of enthusiasm for Christ that they became "filled with the Spirit" (Acts 4:31). Who could have conceived that in such circumstances their prayer should not have contained a single hint of concern for the safety of their own skins? They prayed for boldness in the cause of Christ, and for signs and wonders in His Name. These are the conditions when men and women, with the eye away from themselves, and filled with Christ, are filled with the Holy Spirit. In what sense is the Word of God the sword of the Spirit? Akin to the fact that the Holy Spirit has been the Revealer, the Word of God is in a sense forged by the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit is Scripture as the Word of God. 'Observe that the Lord Himself, in His temptation, the history of which should be compared with this whole passage, used exclusively verbal citations from Scripture as His sword. No suggestion could be more pregnant than this as to the abiding position of the written Word under the dispensation of the Spirit' (Moule). "Taking" the sword of the Spirit involves knowing it, and the deliberate recognition that without it the enemy cannot be overcome.

"Prayer and supplication in the Spirit" seem to say that all true prayer is the outcome of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit poured out on Israel will be the Spirit of grace and supplication, and then only will their prayer be true prayer and reach the throne. Of ourselves we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but in and with our prayers the Spirit Himself makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. It is because God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts that we cry "Abba, Father".

## 6. The Saints Union with Christ

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The Saints' Union with Christ The Church as the Body of Christ is a subject, not only of Ephesians, but also of Romans, 1 Corinthians and Colossians. In Romans 12:1-21 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 the purpose is to illustrate the saints' union with each other, and the members of the human body to portray the differing occupations of the saints. In these two epistles there is no mention of the head as such, and in particular, no statement that Christ is the Head. In Ephesians the purpose of the use of the figure of the human body is different. Although the oneness of the saints with each other, and the diverse functions of the members is emphasized, the prime purpose is to present the exaltation of Christ, and yet the vital union of the Church with Him. This truth of the union of the saints in the Church with Christ, stated, illustrated and worked out in its practical consequences, is a principal theme of the epistle. The splendid position given to the raised and ascended Christ is the theme when the words occur, "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Are we about to be told that principalities and powers are the powerful enemies of the saints? Are there great names "of wisdom, love and power" borne by men and angels? Christ is far above them all. With the Greeks the expression "all things" was a technical term for the universe, and there was perpetual speculation about its nature and destiny; the universe is under His feet! and He is its Head: and He fills it. That Christ fills all things has been likened to the sun filling the solar system with its warmth and light. A better illustration preserves the idea of a Man and His world. One of the greatest names named in the world of the New Testament was that of Augustus. He is named in Luke 2:1 : "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." This great man was the architect of the Roman Empire, which gave the majesty of the Roman peace to the world in a system which endured for half a millennium. Some later emperors were, of course, evil men, but in his own day there was no corner of the inhabited earth which did not enjoy in good measure the fruits of the wisdom, mercy and power of Augustus. So, multiplied in the ratio of divine perfection to human limitation, when the glorious Christ fills the universe, there will be no corner of it where His wisdom, love and power in all their divine perfection, will not be a living reality: and this is the glorious Being with whom the saints are united in His body which is the Church. The Church is His fulness. According to Lightfoot, this word means "the filled condition of a thing, whether a rent to be mended, an idea to be realized, a prophetic plan to be fulfilled". How can the idea be tolerated of something needed to be the complement of so glorious a Being? At least a part of the answer must be to note that Christ is here a Man. The quotation from Psalms 8:1-9 confirms this: "all things under His feet." This brings us close to the thought that in the counsel of God it was not good that man should be alone, and Eve was taken from his body. In accepting manhood, Christ accepted this also, that He needs the Church to be His body, and later His bride. As we contemplate these themes, let us recall that the words form the closing part of a prayer which asks that the saints may have divine illumination to receive them.

Some of the consequences of our union with Christ are then developed. In human affairs the fruits of victory are not enjoyed only by the persons who sustain the battle and gain the day. In a sense

they gain the victory for the benefit of those who come after. Every good enjoyed by the individuals comprising a nation is the fruit of previous victories. A person alive in Britain's heyday stood on ground and enjoyed privileges (as well as responsibilities) determined by every event in the nation's long history, events through which the individuals in question did not live. By the fact of birth into the nation, all its previous victories - Ramillies, Trafalgar, or the Battle of Britain - are put to their account, in the sense that they are in a situation determined by these events. This is a faint picture of the way in which the fruits of Christ's victory are enjoyed by the saints in virtue of their union with Him by the Spirit. They receive the benefit of events which they themselves never experienced, and which involve victory over death and all evil, resurrection to a new life with God, and a settled place with Christ in heavenly places. These events, according to Ephesians, are Christ's awakening to a new life after death (quickenings), His resurrection, and His present session at the right hand of God. From the moment they believe, and by receiving the Spirit are made one with Him, they are on ground determined by His resurrection and ascension; they are quickened with Him, raised with Him, and seated with Him in heavenly places. In the original language, the verbs used here incorporate the preposition "with". God has co-quickened us, co-raised us, and co-seated us together with Christ. In addition to the "with" incorporated in the verbs, however, the Holy Spirit adds in verse 6 "in" Christ Jesus. The "with" is true because the "in" is true. The saints are seated with Christ because they are in Christ. These decisive events are behind us because of our union with Christ, and we are now alive in a world of which He is the centre, shedding on every part the beams of His love and perfection. The advance of Ephesians over Romans and 1 Corinthians in respect of the truth of the Body of Christ has already been noted. A very instructive light is also cast on the relative doctrinal positions of Galatians, Romans, Colossians and Ephesians by the selection made in each epistle from the whole sequence of these sacred events: crucified, dead, buried, quickened, raised, seated, all with Christ. In Galatians, only the first occurs, crucified with Christ; and the truth of that epistle is in accordance with this, emphasizing our deliverance from this present evil world. In Romans, the first three occur, crucified, dead, buried with Christ. In Colossians, for the first time the resurrection side is reached, dead, buried, quickened, raised with Christ. In Ephesians, like the stones taken out of the bed of Jordan, there is only the resurrection side, and here only the final height is reached, quickened, raised, and seated with Christ, because in Christ. The question might arise, that the phrase does occur, "dead in trespasses and sins". This however, is a very different thing from being dead with Christ. To be dead in trespasses and sins is the disease. To have died with Christ is the cure, and this truth we have in Romans and Colossians, but not in Ephesians.

It is striking that, since the truth of Ephesians, "seated in heavenly places in Christ", was true all the time, the apostle withheld it in the earlier epistles. It would appear that either the revelation or the distinct understanding of these profound truths came to him progressively, as the need and inspiration arose.

Continuing our consideration of the union of the saints with Christ in His body, two points of interest appear in chapter 3. One is that the body is involved in the Mystery (v. 6) and the other (v. 9) that part of Paul's ministry was to explain how the mystery is being worked out in practice, the administration of the mystery (J.N.D.), and this leads directly to the functioning of the body in 4:8-16. There is found a description of the means employed by the ascended Christ for the making good in their experience of the fruits of the union of the saints with Himself in His body. And the

means employed is giving gifts.

He that descended is the same who ascended. All the wealth of the grace of His down-stooping goes with Him and shines from the place to which He has ascended. As the spoils of His victory, He gives gifts unto men. In this case the gifts are not, as elsewhere, divinely given capabilities for teaching and other forms of service, but these gifts to the whole Church are the men who have received these capabilities, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The form of the words seems to suggest that the last two are one gift.

What follows can be thought of as supplying the answers to certain questions about the gifts. The first question would be: What is their purpose? "For the equipment of the saints for ministering work, for the edifying of the body of Christ".

Much has been said on the subject of the true aim and intent of the use in Scripture of the figure of the body. Many have thought that, just as the human body is the means whereby the head acts and expresses: its will on the outside world, so the members of the body of Christ are the agency whereby He acts and effects His will externally to the body. That this would be a logical and just deduction from the use of the figure is not denied, nor that it is the privilege of Christians to give expression in their actions of the will of Christ; but Scripture itself always interprets its use of the figure, and always interprets it as having for its aim the growth, development, and building up of the body itself. There is not one explicit interpretation bringing in the action of the Head effecting His will outside the body. The building up of the body is effected by the ministering work of the saints, and they are equipped for this by the functioning of the gifts, and these in turn are the outflow of the grace of Christ (v. 7) as the living power achieving such result. Nothing could so magnify for us the wonder of our union with Christ as this picture of the grace of Christ as a fathomless sea, flowing out, giving gifts, equipping the saints, and so building up His body. A second question is: For how long will these gifts, this flow of grace, continue to be effective? "Until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ" (v. 13). They will continue, that is, until the Church is completed in heaven, until the building up of the body has reached finality in the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ. No intermediate, present and partial perfection can possibly fill out the meaning of this verse. It refers to the final perfecting of the body. Four goals are specified, at which all the saints simultaneously arrive. First, in that glorious day, we shall arrive at the unity of the faith. We have read "there is one faith". If there is one faith, why do saints disagree? The answer is that now we know in part; we have not yet arrived at the unity of the faith. "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion" (Isaiah 52:8). Second, the unity at which all the saints arrive is also the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. This knowledge is full knowledge, to be attained when we know as we are known. Thirdly, the knowledge of the Son of God is Christian perfection, and hence the third goal is a grown-up man. Fourthly, this is shown to mean, not a collection of full-grown men, but one full-grown man, in that it is the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ. There can be little doubt that here (as in 1 Corinthians 12:12, "So also is Christ"), so imbued is the epistle with the oneness of His body with Christ, the expression "the Christ" means Christ and the Church, one body. These then, are the final ends to be brought about by the grace Christ has given. Until then the effect of the gifts will not be withdrawn. We have them today, either in Scripture (apostles and prophets), or in living activity.

This verse is one of the great provisions for the continuance of the faith "till He come". The saints are to break bread and so show the Lord's death "till He come". The Lord disposes of the lives of His own "till He come" (John 21:12). His servants occupy "till He come". And to these we have here added that the grace of Christ expressing itself in the gifts to the Church, will continue "till He come". A third question is: What is the immediate effect of the gifts? "That we be henceforth no more children, . but . may grow up into Him in all things . even Christ, from whom the whole body . maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (v. 16). In connection with the truth of the Church as the Bride of Christ in chapter 5 the idea of union with Christ reaches clear expression: "joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one." It is because the saints are "members of His body" that the Church is the bride of Christ. Eve was first flesh of Adam's flesh and bone of his bone, and afterwards his wife. Just as, when it is a question of His body, the grace of Christ begins all, so here the love of Christ, in its original proof and its present continuing activity, is the fount of blessing. "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

## 7. The Apostles Prayers

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### The Apostle's Prayers

"Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you," was Abner's message to the elders of Israel; "now then, do it." This is the point now reached in these studies in Ephesians. The purpose of concentrating now on these prayers is not only to seek to understand them and their requests, but also to say, "Now then, do it." The two prayers are given in 1:17-19 and 3:16-19, and it should be a help to us in making these our own prayers to note exactly what they ask for. In 1:17, the prayer begins by asking of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Originator of all that is truly glorious, that He will also impart the full knowledge of it. Every word and phrase of the opening section underline the fact that, although this kind of knowledge can be learned, we are dependent on God for this learning by His Spirit. "May give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" is closely parallel with Isaiah 11:2 about Messiah: "the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." God has given His Spirit, but this request is for the wisdom, revelation, and knowledge, which are some of His mighty works. We ought never to be afraid to pray for knowledge, the right kind of knowledge, coming to us from the right source. A very special light is cast on this knowledge by what follows: "the eyes of your heart being enlightened." It is idle to make anatomical distinctions between head and heart and the approximate distance between them. All knowledge must in fact involve the brain, that is, in the popular phrase, be head knowledge. The bearing of "the eyes of your heart" can only be, following the insistence that it comes from God by revelation of His Spirit, that this knowledge is also in a special way bound up with the affections. In other words, the meaning is akin to the condemnation of knowledge in 1 Corinthians 8:2; 1 Corinthians 13:2 as well as in 1 John 4:8. Knowledge separated from divine love in the heart, is knowing nothing as we "ought to know."

Definiteness in praying this prayer will be helped by noting exactly the three points to be seized by this kind of knowledge. They are knowledge of:

- the hope of His calling · the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints · the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward Is it possible to exaggerate the importance and effectiveness in practical life of the maturing and stabilising of knowledge (as implied by "full knowledge") on these three points? Let us attempt a paraphrase:

- the certainty of attainment of what God has called us to · the wealth of the quality of our Canaan · the power of God to effect this in the face of every obstacle, shown already in the resurrection of Christ. In our prayers we can go straight on to 3:16-19 which asks for our heart's response to the knowledge given. It is, of course, not desirable, or indeed possible, to pretend to certainty on such a subject, but it is practically helpful to prayer to see the golden words "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" as the single request of the prayer. What precedes is leading up to this, and what follows are the consequences, and can only be the consequences, of Christ dwelling in the heart. To cast the mind back over the epistle and see the tremendous extent of splendour and

wealth in Christ as there set forth, and then to grasp the fact that the prayer proposes no less amazing an experience than that this glorious Being should take up His abode in our hearts, is indeed sufficient to make this the request. This dwelling in hearts by faith implies the enshrining of Christ in the love of His people. It is an intensely practical matter of conscious experience and in no sense positional only. For this dwelling it is necessary that the inner man (shown to be of God in character in Romans 7:22, but without strength in itself) must be strengthened by God's Spirit. The two consequences of the dwelling are seizing the breadth and length and depth and height and knowing the love of Christ. In this latter, we have seen earlier the heart of the epistle.

It is not difficult to see that if Christ is the centre of God's universe, then those in whose hearts Christ is dwelling are placed at the centre because He is there. This seems to be the bearing of the four dimensions. Only from the centre can the outlook include all four, breadth, length, depth and height. And it is at the centre of all that they know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. The love of Christ, and the extent of His down stooping and of His uprising, as well as the "all things" He now fills, provide dimensions for the thoughts of God. Like a flower unfolding, so the knowledge of the love of Christ opens up out of the indwelling of Christ, and finally these experiences are seen to be the filling into all the fulness of God. Our experience of these great matters will be limited, and therefore even our requests will not reach up to the extent of the thoughts of God, but, God can do above what we ask or think. In addition to all the other motives in all the other epistles, the things asked for in this prayer become from 4:1 the "therefore" of lives lived worthy of the calling. "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, world without end. Amen."

J. S. Blackburn

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