

The Secret of His Purpose

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Introduction: Ephesus

What we know of the foundation of the Ephesian assembly is contained in the 18th, 19th and 20th chapters of Acts. Ephesus today is but a solitary ruin, but in the time of the Apostle Paul it was a flourishing seaport and compared with Corinth as a centre of trade and commerce. It was also the centre of the fanatical worship of the goddess Artemis, or Diana of the Ephesians as she is called in Acts 19:28, and contained a temple whose magnificence and extravagant wealth brought world renown.

The constant flow of religious devotees into the city proved a good market for the wares of local craftsmen, and Luke tells us of one, Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines for Diana, remarking that he 'brought no small gain' (Acts 19:24).

It is not surprising that Ephesus, its commerce and temple a continuous source of wealth, was noted for luxurious living; nor is it surprising that the city was equally noted for sin and loose moral standards. Its trade drew together a population of many nationalities similar to that of any modern seaport, a community bent simply on material gain and pleasure, while the fanatical worship of Artemis, the personification of the life force, gave added licence for immoral practices.

It is significant that in Ephesus, of all places, God should have raised up a testimony so unsullied by the degradation of its surroundings, a testimony of which in the fullness of its first love for Christ, the Spirit of God could say, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false: and thou hast patience, and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary" (Revelation 2:2-3). To the Ephesian assembly, the clamour of sin and materialism in the midst of which it dwelt served as a clarion call to holy living; rampant opposition was a means of increasing their strength and taught them spiritual warfare; the squalid emptiness of heathenism set their hands to labour and their hearts to rejoice for the glorious hope which is the inheritance of the people of God. Here was a people eager to know more of God's ways and, above all, eager to obey. Thus it is that Paul embarks upon a letter whose scope is as wide as the purposes of God themselves. The Epistle to the Ephesians takes us from eternity to eternity, from God, "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," (1:4) to His "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (3:21). All is summed up in the church which is His fullness (1:23).

The epistle reveals the church as something vital and intensely practical, not as a mere theoretical number of the elect with little relevance to the circumstances of everyday life, but as the place of communion between God and His people, the source of spiritual strength and sustenance, the medium through which God expresses Himself in the world. What is the church? What is its purpose? How is it maintained? How does it relate to the problems of living? These are all questions answered for us in the Ephesian letter. Its message is, therefore, one of paramount importance.

In the Acts we are told that Paul paid two visits to Ephesus, the first, a brief one of which we read in ch. 18, and the second, of which we read in ch. 19, entailing a stay of some three years. It was during this latter period that the assembly came into being. How it came into being is of more than general

interest, for therein lies a principle of great importance in the foundation of any work of the Spirit.

Into the third year of Paul's stay at Ephesus he was 'reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus' (Acts 19:9), and it was as a result of this faithful and steady presentation of the gospel that hearts were stirred, sin was confessed and put away, and the word of God grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:20). Here was the birth of the Ephesian church. Nowhere is there any suggestion that it was organised into being by Paul, although he was the instrument used to convey God's message; it was born in a spirit of divine compulsion to obey the Word, in a divine urge to walk in light received. "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel," said Paul (I Corinthians 9:16). "Woe is unto us if we obey not the Word of God," was the imperative that brought the Ephesian believers together. God had worked in their midst through the preaching of His word. They had to obey. They had to come together. Not a persuasive Paul, but a divine constraint laid the foundation. The Lord said to Peter that the gates of hell should not prevail against the church, but the condition of its strength was that He Himself should build it (Matthew 16:18). This divine constraint, this energy of the Spirit must be the church's source and sustenance, otherwise its testimony will soon fade and die. The Scriptures allow of no other sustaining factor in the body of believers than the life of the Spirit. The tragedy of so many systems of church organisation is that they often serve as a scaffolding to hold up an edifice from which the Spirit has departed and which ought to be allowed to collapse.

The Ephesian church had its duly recognised elders, and in Acts 20 we read of Paul's meeting with them at Miletus. At some point after Paul's departure from Ephesus these men emerged as overseers in the assembly. Exactly how they came to occupy this position we are not told. From what we know of the circumstances it is by no means conclusive that they were appointed by Paul. The indications of Scripture are that they emerged naturally from the company of believers as men whose spiritual stature and qualifications marked them out to all as God's obvious choice for the oversight of the assembly. "Take heed....to all the flock in which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," Paul exhorts them (Acts 20:28). They were the Holy Ghost's appointment. Here again we see the initiative in the building of the church coming from the Lord Himself. This, however, does not mean that Paul stood passively by till the Spirit should move. Far from it; it was precisely this hope and vision of the Lord's working through the proclamation of His Word which demanded his uncompromising declaration of 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27).

In the light of the prevalent confusion of understanding on the nature of the church, a word must here be said on this subject if we are to grasp clearly the meaning of the Epistle. Christianity today is a vast conglomeration of so-called churches, some of which are large federations of local groups, diverse in many respects. It contains much that is good, and much also that is evil; those who are truly the people of God and those who are not; rival creeds and rival practices. What relation has all this to what the Scriptures call the church or the assembly?

The fact of historical and organised Christianity, and its obvious difference from the simplicity and spiritual vitality of the churches of the New Testament, has given rise to the widely held distinction between the 'church visible' and the 'church invisible.' The 'church visible,' we are told, is all that appears in the world as Christianity with its mixture of good and bad, righteousness and corruption, truth and error, children of God and children of the world. On the other hand, the 'church invisible,' we are told, is the sum total of God's children, those regenerated by the working of the Spirit, whatever their connections in the 'church visible' may be. This distinction, which has no foundation in scripture whatsoever, has effectively relegated the church to a place of powerlessness in the minds of many of

God's people. The 'church visible' is a testimony to man's fallen nature rather than to the glory of God, and the 'church invisible' is a mere theory whose consummation awaits eternity.

But the church, in the mind of God, transcends the ages. It is a great and powerful fact, not only of eternity but also of time. It is no mere theory. It is a visible reality, and can be known now as surely as it will be in an eternity to come. Our Lord, in that striking series of parables recorded in Matthew 13, likens the church to a pearl. A pearl increases in size with the passage of time, but at whatever stage of its development it may be found it is no less a pearl, a thing of glory and beauty. It is true that there are many yet to be added to it, but wherever and whenever it is found it is complete, and an expression of the glory of God. The layers of nacre which compose a pearl must be together. Crushed to a powder and scattered to the four winds their beauty is gone. So it is with the church. The only expression of the church on earth recognised by the Scriptures is the coming together of the people of God, the *local* church, a visible company of people through whose actual and practical relationship with the Lord and with one another the glory of God can be expressed. It is with this local church that the epistle to the Ephesians deals. The force of this truth will become more clear in subsequent chapters, but what has been said will suffice to emphasise that any mention of the church or assembly in succeeding pages should be taken to mean not some theoretical company of the elect, but an actual and visible company of the people of God.

Chapter 1: In Christ

The first three chapters of Ephesians outline for us God's aim and purpose. In chapter one, God, in wisdom and grace, fashions and moulds the character of His people; in chapter two He fuses them into an indissoluble unity; in chapter three He reveals the breadth and length and height and depth of His counsels. Each of these chapters finds its climax in the church (1:22-23; 2:20-22; 3:20-21), for it is in the church that Christian character finds its full expression, the purpose of our unity is revealed, and the revelation of God is completed. In the church is the consummation of all (1:23).

But what is the basis of the church or assembly? The basis of the church or assembly is simply being 'in Christ.' By this phrase Paul addresses the Ephesian Christians in the first verse of the epistle, and it occurs a number of times in the course of the first chapter alone. Its meaning is clear. In Christ, we that were once far off are made nigh (2:13) through the work of the cross; we are accepted of God and brought into a relationship with Him as children (1:5-6). To use the words of Peter, we are 'made partakers of a divine nature' (II Peter 1:4), and the outward indication of this new relationship is that we live changed lives. "If any man is in Christ there is a new creation: the old things are passed away: behold, they are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

The basis of the assembly, then, is our relationship with Christ. This simple fact is all too little understood. Present-day Christianity is a confused and conflicting mass of groups which have been established on every conceivable basis of doctrine and practice, ignoring the fact that the church is simply a family relationship. Yet this relationship should be the most compelling of all reasons why God's people should meet together, and forms a bond of unity stronger by far than any other.

This relationship is brought about, Scripture tells us, through faith (Galatians 3:26). Faith contains two factors, dependence and knowledge. Through knowledge alone is dependence possible. We can only trust a person whom we know either personally, or on the authority of someone else, to be trustworthy. In Matthew 18:3 when our Lord tells the disciples that unless they turn from their own will to complete and childlike dependence upon Him, they cannot enter His kingdom, He is emphasising the absolute

necessity of dependence upon Him for salvation. The knowledge on which this dependence is based, however, can be the product of understanding, or it can be purely instinctive. Of the first type is our knowledge of Christ through the Scriptures. As we believe the facts contained in the Scriptures concerning Him, we can understand His redemptive work, we can understand our need of Him, and on the basis of that understanding can place our trust in Him to accomplish the work of salvation in us. Different from this is the instinctive knowledge of a young child who, while unable to reason out the love of his mother, knows that with her he is safe and instinctively commits himself to her care. Dependence may be based on either of these two types of knowledge or on a combination of both. They have, of course, a common source in the revealed Word of God.

There are many people who might find great difficulty in explaining the process of redemption who, without any shadow of doubt, know Christ, and whose lives are ample testimony to the reality of their experience. Their lack of understanding does not exclude them from the church. There are some who do not have the capacity to enter into a full understanding of divine truth, yet whose understanding of personal need and of the fact that Christ could meet that need sufficed to bring them to a place of faith and relationship with Him. It might in fact, be said of all who have committed themselves to Christ that their initial understanding was rudimentary or even faulty, but faith in Him was nonetheless real, and relationship with Him nonetheless assured.

The converse of this is equally true. Just as a poor understanding does not exclude a person from the family of God, neither does a great understanding assure a person of a place in the family relationship. A mere statement of belief, the right answers to questions on the way of redemption is, therefore, no adequate test of spiritual life. The only test is in a life which is obviously lived in relationship with Christ.

The basis of the assembly is life 'in Christ.' A recognition of this simple fact at once demonstrates the inadequacy of believers meeting on any other ground, for every other basis of gathering can be maintained quite independent of life in the Spirit. The full and carefully worded doctrinal statement, although completely correct, can be implicitly believed yet unknown in experience, just as the Pharisees held rightly to the letter of the law but knew nothing of its spirit. The observance of baptism and the Lord's supper, bereft of true devotion to the Lord, can become as much a ritual as the God-instituted sacrifices of the Old Testament became to the Jews, and can earn like condemnation (Isaiah 1:10-15). What may be a simple and scriptural pattern of gathering can become as much a ritual as that of Rome. God would have us all study and understand His Word to the measure of our capacity; baptism and the Lord's table are clearly taught in the Scripture and can be a means of both spiritual blessing and testimony; likewise do we need to enquire into the Lord's pattern for His church. But none of these things are the basis of the assembly. The basis of the assembly is life in Christ and that alone.

The church, however, reveals more than the simple fact of relationship with Christ. Paul links this fact of relationship with submission. The Ephesians were not only 'in Christ,' they were the 'faithful in Christ.' They were not only children of God, they were also obedient, submissive to their Father's will. It is from this submission that the authority of the believer and of the church stems. In the same first verse, Paul says that he is an apostle 'through the will of God.' His authority was solely due to the fact that he himself was under authority, as an ambassador's authority depends upon his own complete loyalty and allegiance to the country he represents. So it is with the church. The church is meant to represent Christ, to be His fullness (1:23), but that is only so as it remains under the authority of Christ. When disloyalty supervenes, the authority is removed.

This combination of authority and submissive humility is something which is largely foreign to the world, yet it should be one of the salient characteristics of the church. It was much in evidence in the life of the apostle as we see from his exhortation to the Ephesian elders at Miletus recorded in Acts 20. On the one hand he testifies to how he served the Lord 'with all lowliness of mind, and with tears and with trials' (v. 19); on the other hand he affirms how he 'shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God' (v. 27). In the Christian walk authority and submission are inseparable. The believer who would bear the authority of representing Christ must live in subjection to Christ. The church which would reveal the authority must likewise be completely subject to Him.

What is the source and character of this new life? "God hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing," Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:3, "in the heavenly places in Christ." The relationship which God's people enjoy with Christ and the life which has been imparted through faith in Him is not of an earthly but of a heavenly character. Its quality is different from anything the world knows, and the church is, therefore, something unique and distinct from every other association known to men. At the same time it is life of a higher order. When our Lord was preparing His disciples for the time of His departure, He strengthened them with the assurance that the peace of His own life which He left with them would triumph over every fear or trial which the future might hold. "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful" (John 14:27). That peace, which was an inseparable part of His life, was something the world could not give. It was of a divine and heavenly quality, and that quality of life was to indwell the church, making it victorious and also distinct. The record of the Acts and of the early Christians, a record of triumph in trial unparalleled through the centuries which have followed, is adequate testimony to the supreme character of the life in Christ which was known in the churches of those days.

A company imbued with such a heavenly character must, as we have already noted, be distinct. If the church is, in fact, based on this divine life, it is inevitable that it be different from the world around, and separate. The holy character of God cannot but stand out in stark contrast to the heedless ways of men. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession," says Peter (I Peter 2:9). What stronger indication can we have than these words that the church is to be something different, separate, distinct?

God's holy character forms the essential revelation of the Old Testament Scriptures. It was shown in the minutest details of law and order which governed the lives of the children of Israel, in the strict injunctions which determined the order of the sacrifices, in the meticulous instructions given for the erection of the tabernacle. All these combined to produce a way of life completely foreign to the nations around, a way of life immeasurably holier and higher. Israel's separation from heathendom was not an imposition by an arbitrary-minded God; it was the inevitable distinction between people owning opposite allegiances and opposite standards.

God manifest in the flesh was likewise separate. He was despised and rejected of men not because of sin, but because of holiness. He loved the world and poured out His life in the service of the crowds that followed Him, but he was not of this world, and, because He was different, these same fickle crowds were later to be found in the forecourt of Pilate's hall screaming for His crucifixion. "Let us, therefore, go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach," writes the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 13:13). Church history is a grave warning that as the church increases in worldly goods and ostentation, it decreases in spiritual power. The church is not simply a convenience

for a people bearing a Christian label, giving a perfunctory recognition to God and organising what material and mental resources it can for the temporal comfort of its adherents. The church is a testimony to a heavenly life dominated by the standards of a higher and better world. It both illuminates the depravity of man and lightens the way to salvation and fellowship with God through Christ. It may be hated by those whose god is this world. It may be loved by those who would seek the Lord. Always it is distinct.

This path of separation from the world led our Lord ultimately to the cross. There could be no other end. The holiness of God that put the lie to the veneer of rectitude which is the world's best could only end in being denounced by the world whose standard it rejected. But the cross was the gateway to life eternal. God calls the church to tread the same path, and the path of life for it will, like its Lord's, be the way of inevitable rejection because it delights to do the will of the Father.

We tend to ignore the fact that this life of separation and distinction is one of the conditions which God demands before He can use the church for the fulfilment of His purpose. This is the grave warning of the message to the Ephesian church in the second chapter of the book of the Revelation. However much the Ephesian assembly may have been used in the past, it was not proof against the creeping paralysis of spiritual degeneration when its devotion to the Lord was found to flag. The assembly was commended on many counts. It was a church which toiled in the Lord's service. It was a church which did not bear with evil. Sin was recognised and judged, unlike the situation in the assembly at Corinth where party strife had led to an indifference even to blatant moral evils. There was also a considerable measure of spiritual discernment. The company was well grounded in the truth and was quick to recognise error in whatever guise it appeared. Ephesus, in fact, had all the outward appearance of a model assembly. But there was one lack. That deep heart devotion to the Lord which had been the foundation of the church had, in course of time, ebbed away. The superficial fervour of work and witness still remained, but the first love of delight in the will of God which is the source of a separated testimony had gone. The Spirit of God calls them to repentance on the penalty of His withdrawing their privilege of being a witness to Him.

God never hesitates to set aside what can no longer be of value to Him. The church is dependent for its usefulness upon a spontaneous spiritual life, and when that life ebbs away, although the outward form may be preserved, it ceases to be the church in any scriptural sense. It may not be possible to determine, or profitable to try to do so, at exactly what point this change takes place, but we would do well to take to heart the fact that, alongside the love of the Lord extended in grace and long-suffering, there is His judgement which ever begins at His house. In the life of any assembly there may come that stage of degeneration when God will leave and start afresh, leaving a once enlightened and vital group a castaway.

God's people are much more hesitant to start afresh than is God Himself. Man always tries to conserve what God rejects, as church history adequately demonstrates. The result is seen in the bulk of present-day denominationalism, much of it a lifeless monument to glories that have long since disappeared. Let those, however, who meet on surer ground and know something of the Spirit's moving in their midst, take heed and beware lest someday they too become but another stark reminder of a glory that has departed.

This distinct nature of the church indicates the unique purpose for which it is called, 'that we should be holy and without blemish before him' (v. 4). God, in infinite understanding has, before the very

foundation of the world, chosen us in Christ as His church to mirror His character upon the earth. Yet even this is but ancillary to a much greater and eternal aim, 'to sum up all things in Christ' (v. 10), and 'that we should be unto the praise of His glory, we who had before hoped in Christ' (v. 12). Of the first part of this objective we are told comparatively little in Scripture. What we do know is that one day 'in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth' (Philippians 2:10), and that it pleased the Father 'through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself' (Colossians 1:20). No aim that God had in creating man is to be left unrealised. No purpose will be unfulfilled. The blight of sin on this stricken world is a reality; judgement is a no less solemn and inevitable fact; but grace will triumph. This is the purpose of God viewed from His own divine standpoint.

In verse twelve, however, we look at it from the standpoint of the church. God knows the potential of His children through grace, and the day of His praise and glory will be when every limitation is overcome, and all the vast potential of spiritual life is fully developed, when we shall know even as also we are known. This is the realisation of the church's hope.

Hope is the energy of life. Paul tells us it is one of the three things that abideth (I Corinthians 13:13), yet how little do we realise the importance of hope in the life of the assembly. On a purely physical level, life without hope is impossible. When the hope to survive departs, the victory of death in its inexorable pursuit is sure. The whole of life is an unquenchable thirst to know more, an insatiable desire to accomplish greater things. This is vividly seen in childhood. What child does not long to be a man? He plays at it; he thinks about it; he hopes for it. With great anticipation he welcomes every year. He is a year older; he is growing up. Each year brings fresh challenge. More childish limitations are left behind. New vistas of knowledge open up before him, new possibilities of mind and body, and with it all new energy to meet the demands of this constant thrill of living. And yet newer hopes and greater aspirations lie ahead. This same spirit of quest, ever pressing forward towards the mark, is another characteristic of the church of Jesus Christ. Weaknesses there may be, but where this hope is absent the church cannot exist; it is but a soulless corpse.

Chapter 2: Child Training

Who is this God who has such high and lofty purposes for His people? Paul goes on to explain, drawing from both revelation and experience to portray some of the characteristics of the One he has learned to love and serve. To apply our minds to an understanding of some of the attributes of God is no empty mental exercise. Just as we may know that a man of serene character and just ways will run an ordered and happy household, so from our knowledge of the character of God we can learn much concerning His desires for His children and also how He will deal with them that these desires be fulfilled.

In three verses of Ephesians 1 (vs. 4, 5, 11), Paul emphasises the fact that God has chosen a people. This choice, he tells us in Romans 8:29, is in accordance with His power and foreknowledge, and is a choice dictated by a divine purpose (Ephesians 1:11). Here again we have the picture of a God who knows all the potentialities of His creation and has set apart those in Christ that He might fully develop these potentialities in them. This sense of a divine purpose filled the believers in the early church. It determined and ordered the whole course of their lives. Their material wants and their social position were all subject to it. It united them together in a deep sense of responsibility to one another, and in a bond of mutual love and respect. In this unity of purpose lay the power so signally demonstrated from

the time of Pentecost, a power which gave the church, however despised and rejected, a witness that could not be ignored, and an authority which irresistibly drew into its fellowship those who truly sought the Lord.

A second aspect of God's character which Paul particularly mentions is 'the riches of His grace' (v. 7). We will have further cause to look at this subject in connection with the giving of gifts recorded in chapter four, where this same grace of God is transferred to His people. Here, however, we are dealing with grace as revealed in God Himself in His dealings with His children. John tells us (John 1:14) that Christ was 'full of grace and truth.' These two things summed up the character of God manifest in the flesh: grace, the practice of love; and truth, the practice of holiness. Love is the attitude of mind; grace is the outflow of that attitude. God loved the world. The result was that He gave His only begotten Son. That was grace. Grace is the expression of a love which is poured out for the good of others. God loves His people not merely with a passive benevolence, but with a love in which He is constantly pouring out of Himself that His purposes might be fulfilled in them.

Furthermore, He is a God of wisdom and prudence (v. 8) which overshadow all His dealings with His people. Every experience or trial through which we pass is allowed or determined by His infinite understanding of our need and by His desire to make us what He wants us to be. However we may fail to see the reason for the adverse circumstances with which we are sometimes surrounded, the wisdom and prudence of God lie behind them all. His thoughts and ways are higher by far than ours, and His ways are perfect.

This, then, is the God who has adopted us as His sons (v. 5). On the one hand, He has brought us into the security and privileges of His own family; on the other He has committed Himself to the responsibility of bringing us up under His own nurture and care. In this relationship all His characteristics of foreknowledge, grace, wisdom and prudence are brought into play.

There are many precious lessons which we can learn from the fact of being the children of God. Firstly, God has not brought us into a spiritual orphanage where our outward needs are mechanically catered for, and little thought can be given to individual differences and requirements. God takes a personal family interest in each one. He does not treat all alike. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of each character, the idiosyncrasies and temptations, the capacities and capabilities. His dealings are exactly suited to meet each individual requirement.

Secondly, it is inevitable that the family of God be treated differently from others. A cobbler's highest ambition for his son may be that he will grow up to live by the same trade. To that end, therefore, the discipline of his son's upbringing is directed. He needs little education, so his schooling is neglected. He will never be expected to mix with people of a high social standing, so no time is spent in teaching him the common manners and courtesies of more refined living. His childhood will be free from the restrictions imposed by hours of concentrated study, but that freedom is a measure not of the greatness of the parents' ambition for their son, but of its paucity.

How different is the life of a prince being prepared for a throne. His privilege and position may mean that he is circumscribed by disciplines and restrictions from which he would otherwise be free, but all are imposed in the wisdom of his parents and advisers, anxious that he will be perfectly fitted for the station that he will one day occupy. Many times he may feel impatience at the discipline and, in his boyish ignorance, question the reason for it all, but one day he will look back with appreciation on

every rule that was imposed to make him worthy of his high calling, and will recognise that all was motivated only by love and concern.

The high and holy calling of the children of God offers the explanation for many of the trials and vicissitudes with which they are often confronted. To be fitted for a high calling presupposes a high standard of conduct and discipline, and a stability of life which is the product of experience in sorrow and trial as well as in comfort and ease. God's love for His children does not rule out His discipline. On the contrary, God's love and discipline are inseparable. This is aptly illustrated in His dealings with the two brothers Jacob and Esau. Jacob had faith, but much else besides which was unworthy. God loved him and honoured his faith, but because of that same love led him through many years of discipline and testing till, his old deceit and cunning abandoned, he clung to the Lord in wholehearted surrender. With Esau it was different. A man destitute of faith, it seems that God simply left him to prosper through his own natural abilities, but he was cut off forever from having any share in the spiritual inheritance that was his right. God is committed to His people, committed to lead them along a pathway of holiness, a way unknown to the world. It may mean trial and discipline; it certainly does mean that they will not be allowed forever to go their own fleshly way, but all His dealings are in matchless grace and in a wisdom higher by far than the thoughts of mortal man.

In outlining God's purpose for His people Paul speaks particularly of two things: redemption (v. 7), and the mystery of His will (v. 9). Each of these, he says, we have received in Christ, yet we also find that both embody a continuous process of development. Each has to be worked out in personal experience. Medical science, for instance, has developed through the years till today the precise function of practically every part of the body has been accurately determined. This knowledge has been received into the store of human learning. It does not follow, however, that every person is automatically a doctor, or knows even the elementary laws which govern the working of the body. To reach a stage of proficiency in the practice of medicine requires years of diligent study and experience, and an understanding of the subject will become a progressive reality through continuous and faithful application in learning.

Redemption is one of the great progressive words in Scripture. In this same epistle (ch. 4 v. 30) Paul speaks of being sealed by the Spirit of God 'unto the day of redemption,' obviously referring to a day yet to come. The fact is that man is still beset by limitations of mind and body. The treasure of spiritual life is contained in earthen vessels (II Corinthians 4:7), but God is leading us to that day when spirit, mind and body alike shall know the fullness of redeeming power. As today in spirit we are united with Him who is unseen in love, so then in mind shall we be united with Him in knowledge, knowing even as also we are known, and in body we shall be united with Him in glory, fashioned like unto His glorious body. It is to this end that we press forward, developing in devotion, in understanding, in witness. If anyone could have reached a place of spiritual attainment we would consider Paul to have been that man, yet Paul, nearing the end of his life, wrote to the Philippians that he counted not himself yet to have apprehended, and that he was still pressing on towards the goal (Philippians 3:13-14).

Development is a mark of the church. It is just at this point that so much of formal Christianity has missed the mark. The need for development of devotion and witness is recognised, but development in an understanding of God's divine principles is limited to the bounds of some carefully thought out and worded doctrinal statement. It may be argued that, theoretically, this is not the case, and that such statements are meant only to guide, yet it cannot reasonably be disputed that they do, in actual practice, impose arbitrary limits on the thinking of the majority of ordinary Christians. No doctrinal statement,

however accurate and helpful in itself, can contain God, and whatever would act as a barrier in the minds of devoted men and women to their development in spiritual understanding must be discarded.

With man's passion to systematise the truth of Scripture there has come much light and blessing. No one must decry the devoted labours of men of God down through the ages which have brought to countless thousands a deeper appreciation of their inheritance in Christ. No human systematisation of divine truth, however, has any place as a basis for the church. To accept such is the way to spiritual stagnation, and is a prelude to further division among the people of God. The church is the school of the Spirit; its place is to learn, not to teach. When any assembly takes upon itself to teach a restricted code of doctrine as a church, then it has left the ground of the church entirely and has entered the domain of sectarianism. The call to teach is extended to individuals according to the gift given by the ascended Christ, the Head of the church (Ephesians 4:8). The place of the church is to discern what is of the Lord and to learn. This is God's plan for the development of the church in devotion, understanding and witness.

It may be remarked that the reason normally given for the drawing up of a precise outline of doctrine as the basis of a church, namely, that it will protect the church from error, is not valid. The only safeguard against error and spiritual degeneration is love for the Lord. Every doctrinal statement is more than matched by man's ingenuity at interpreting it as he pleases, or at accepting the letter while denying the spirit it is meant to guard.

In God's making known the mystery of His will there is also assumed the faithfulness of His people and their diligent application to understand His ways. The mystery of His will is fulfilled in the church, and it is an exposition of this truth that principally occupies Paul in his writing to the Ephesians. In the epistle to the Colossians he again uses the same phrase 'the mystery' in the same connection. An understanding of this mystery, however, is not vouchsafed to every believer automatically on his becoming part of the family of God. There may be those who enjoy the privileges and fellowship of the assembly for years, who yet may know practically nothing of God's true purpose in the church. It is not to be assumed that where there is little understanding of this subject on the part of the general body of the believers there is no church. As we have already seen, the basis of the church is relationship with Christ, not the measure of understanding of His ways, but there should certainly be a progression towards a greater appreciation of the mystery on the part of all, as indeed there should be progression in an understanding of every realm of spiritual truth. This, however, as has already been stated, is dependent upon diligence and faithfulness. We will never, on this side of eternity, fully understand God's great purpose for the church, but the measure of understanding will be given according to each one's measure of maturity.

A father in business may have the ambition to bring his son into partnership, but the fulfilment of that ambition has to await his son's reaching a sufficient age to understand the intricacies of the trade, and is also dependent upon his son's developing into a worthy and responsible individual. While he is a child, he can know little of the work in which his father is engaged and will be content to observe simply what is bought and sold. Later, however, through careful teaching and experience he will be able to gauge the quality of the various goods and their relative value in terms of profit and loss. Ultimately he may become an adept trader and be fully acquainted with the most complicated aspects of the business. This goal, however, will be reached only after years of development and faithful service, first of all in small ways, and then in positions of increased responsibility. If a son shows himself incapable of handling a transaction worth a few rupees, it is unlikely that his father will continue his painstaking

tuition and entrust him with transactions worth thousands.

God does not lightly cast the secrets of His ways before His children. Every step into an understanding of the mystery must be won by diligence and faithfulness in a life tested and proved in the school of the Spirit. We are not to be servants only, but friends (John 15:14-15), labourers together with God (I Corinthians 3:9), His partners in the fulfilling of His divine will. Should not God demand consistency and loyalty in those called to such a position of honour?

How is this work of fitting frail men and women for their place in the church practically accomplished? Verses thirteen and fourteen tell us it is through the Spirit. The subject of the Holy Spirit is surrounded with misunderstanding. The result is that many of the people of God know practically nothing about it, while others imagine that any mention of the Spirit has only to do with an emotional copy of the incidents which occurred on the day of Pentecost and at a few other times mentioned in the book of Acts. This, of course, is very far from the truth. "Having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise," says Paul (v. 13). Here we find the Spirit's place right at the beginning of the life in Christ. It is, in fact, through the operation of the Spirit that the work of regeneration takes place (Titus 3:5). Moreover, Paul goes on to say that the seal of the Spirit is 'an earnest of our inheritance unto the redemption of God's own possession' (v. 14). Not only is birth into the family of God wrought by the Spirit, but His continued presence and working is the distinctive mark of God's children unto the day when every aspect of redemption is fulfilled.

"He abideth with you and shall be in you," said our Lord Jesus Christ speaking to His disciples of the Spirit's coming (John 14:17). The Word made flesh, by reason of the limitations which He took upon Himself, was not omnipresent with the disciples, but the Spirit would know no such limitation. He would, in all places, and at all times, be part of their very lives. The strength, advice, comfort, and rebuke which the disciples received from the Lord were dependent upon their being bodily present with Him, but when He left, another came who was to be with them forever (John 14:16). The absence of Christ's visible presence was to be no lack to the disciples; rather it was to be a blessing (John 16:7). Through the Spirit they were to receive all the blessing and benefit that Christ had been to them, and in addition, they were to learn to live not by sight, but by faith. The book of the Acts is adequate demonstration of what the presence of the Holy Spirit meant to the lives of the early believers. God's order is the same today. The Holy Spirit has taken the place on earth of Christ. He is the constant companion of every believer, and it is through Him alone that God works.

"He shall bear witness of Me," said Jesus (John 15:26). Through experience, through fellowship, through ministry, and always in accordance with the written Word, the Holy Spirit reveals and applies the standard of Christ to His people in every aspect of daily living as they are wholly subject to Him. In this way they are prepared to fulfil their place in the church.

The seal of the Spirit is the constant assurance to those who are in Christ, of a work of reconciliation that has been completed, and of their safe custody throughout a spiritual journey in which they are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. It is well to emphasise, however, that assurance belongs to those who are faithful in Christ. A person travelling by ship to a foreign land may have every assurance that at the end of a certain time he will reach his destination, but that assurance will vanish should he decide to jump overboard in mid-ocean when the journey is only half completed. Apart altogether from any discussion on the eternal security of those who once put their trust in Christ, there is no scriptural ground for personal assurance of redemption apart from the fact that a person is *now* in living

relationship with the Lord.

Chapter 3: Faith and Love

From verse seventeen to the end of the chapter we have one of two great prayers contained in this epistle, a prayer that all the blessings already enumerated might be received, and that the aim of all might be realised, the fullness of the Lord in the church which is His body.

Paul prefaces his words of intercession by telling the Ephesians that he is able to pray for them at all in the manner he does because of two things in which their spiritual experience has become solidly grounded, the 'faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and the love which ye show towards all the saints' (1:15). We often pass by these two qualities as common marks of those who are devoted to Christ, without recognising how seldom they are found together in Christian experience, and how superficial expressions of them can sometimes be. It is significant that Paul couples them together again in writing to the Colossians. "Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have towards all the saints" (Colossians 1:4), and also in his short letter to Philemon, "Hearing of thy love, and of the faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and towards all the saints" (v. 5). Like the epistle to the Ephesians, the Colossian letter is concerned with the subject of the church, and Philemon, as we know, was a brother of considerable spiritual standing in the Colossian assembly.

Devotion to the Lord and devotion to His people form the basis of any understanding of the church. Unless there is a sense of committal in both of these loyalties together, the purpose of God in the church will ever remain an unfathomable mystery.

The root of sin is self. The basis of sin is self-will. This was the sin of our first parents when they chose to do as they themselves pleased, instead of what God had commanded, and from this same self-will have sprung even the most heinous crimes which are perpetrated in the world around us. Self-willed independence is deeply ingrained in the nature of man. Regeneration, of course, demands a surrender of the will to Christ, and where there is no surrender of the will there can be no salvation. Yet how the remnants of the old nature cling to us, and how the arch-enemy strives to see that they ever remain. Surely the last thing of all to relinquish its hold is our independent spirit. We will give up property, money, health, life itself, as long as we can cling to the right to determine our own way, or can be allowed to pass the final sanction on God's will for our lives. Self is what we prize more than anything else, and so subtle is the human heart that even the devotion we give unto the Lord can be purely because of what He has given us. We love Him not because of a desire for His glory, but because we personally are benefited. If God's people took to examining themselves honestly, how much of their devotion would they find to be motivated absolutely by self?

When all is said and done, this is a mark of the religion of the heathen. The idolater bows before his image of some spiteful deity oblivious to any relationship with others around him. His concern is that he himself will, by some means or other, gain his god's favour, and that his own soul will be safe. In Christ there certainly is personal safety, but much more than that. Salvation is not simply freedom from hell, it is the entrance into a new life of fellowship with God and His people where the seat of all sin, self, has been dealt with, and those who are born of the Spirit learn to give themselves for one another as Christ gave Himself for the church (5:25).

Devotion to the Lord and devotion to His people go together. Neither can find its full expression independent of the other. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God: and

whosoever loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (I John 5:1). It is this to which we are supposed to testify when we meet round the Lord's table, a relationship established not only with God through Christ, but with one another (I Corinthians 10:16-17). It may be remarked how the latter significance of the Lord's table has become largely lost in present-day Christianity, and the whole weight of emphasis is laid on the aspect of fellowship between God and the individual. Is this not a pertinent indication of the prevalence of a faith whose devotion has never really reached out beyond self? Regeneration means being born into the family of God, and into a realm, therefore, of concern and responsibility for one another. The joy, unity and solidity of the family relationship is not in each one's concern for his own welfare, but in a concern rather for the other members which will not shun any personal sacrifice that might bring about their blessing and their good. Apart from this, the whole concept of the family is practically meaningless.

Devotion to the Lord and devotion to His people coupled together in a divine harmony are the essential prerequisites of an understanding of the church. It is on this basis that Paul prays for the realisation in the Ephesians of the fullness of Christ. To this end he makes request to God for 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him' (v. 17).

An entrance into the mind of Christ requires both an application of our mental powers and a readiness to receive the enlightenment which comes by the Spirit of God alone. It is precisely this combination that Paul now brings before us. It has always been the tactics of the devil to push God's people to one extreme or the other, to emphasise the intellectual appreciation of the Word till it becomes a dead letter, or so to emphasise the Spirit's revelation that the Word is ignored. God's way requires both. God has given us our minds and expects us to use them. We must never despise the plain, down-to-earth study of the Word of God and the mental appreciation of its contents. Bible knowledge can never be other than good, and there is a greater need today than ever there has been to apply our minds to the Scriptures. We can expect little from God if we are unwilling to use the facilities He has placed at our disposal. Nothing worthwhile either in the physical or the spiritual world can be gained without persistence and effort. God has ordained that it should be so, and we would be wise not to seek an effortless way to spiritual blessing.

While the 'spirit of wisdom' is important, however, it is the Holy Spirit who finally interprets the Word to our hearts in granting the revelation of God. Knowledge of the Word alone will ever remain dead without subjection to the Spirit. The intellect by itself can never grasp the secrets of divine revelation. Yet it must also be remembered that revelation is according to the written Word and not independent of it. The day of completely independent revelation is past. That we find in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The New Testament Scriptures themselves are almost entirely dependent upon what was already written, or upon the Word as it was actually spoken by our Lord. A notable exception to this is, of course, the last book of the Bible, but even here the symbolism used is deeply rooted in the Old Testament writings. Even the revelation to Paul of 'the mystery' (Ephesians 3:3) may not have been wholly independent, but a lightening up by the Spirit of God of the amazingly clear types of the church in the Old Testament with which, of course, Paul was very familiar. Certainly in this present age direct revelation has been entirely superseded by the written Word which was completed, as Paul tells us, by the revelation to him of 'the mystery' (Colossians 1:24-26).

Revelation is now dependent on a knowledge of the Word, and is granted to the people of God according to their measure of spiritual maturity. It is sometimes overlooked that Paul was one of the most highly learned Jews of his day, a man steeped in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and it was

on this basis of knowledge that God was able to reveal by His Spirit the glorious truths which crowd Paul's epistles. The same is true in varying degrees of the other apostles. We do read in the book of the Acts that the multitude perceived Peter and John to be 'unlearned and ignorant men' (Acts 4:13), but this does not mean that they were illiterate. The humblest of Jewish children were taught in the Scriptures which were given a place of great importance in their upbringing. Peter and John, though 'ignorant men,' probably had a knowledge of the law and the prophets that would put to shame many of God's people in these days who have had every advantage of a liberal education. It was because of this fundamental knowledge that God was able to impart further revelation by His Spirit, and both wisdom and revelation developed apace. The claim to revelation without a corresponding knowledge of the Word of God is both dangerous and unscriptural. It has been the cause of much of the false teaching that has marred the testimony to Christ down through the centuries. To the extent that a person is not firmly grounded in the Word of God, he is particularly open to the delusions both of self and of Satan.

This combination of wisdom and revelation, then, leads to that spiritual enlightenment whence the whole vista of God's purposes opens up before us. The hope of our calling, His inheritance in the saints, the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe (vs. 18-19) all become clear. God is a God of purpose, and He desires not to hide the hope of their calling from His people. That hope is not simply that we should have an inheritance of eternal safety in Him, but that He should have an inheritance in us, that His eternal love and divine skill should be manifest as He saves and purifies His people, bringing them together under His complete control, till they are fashioned and moulded to reveal the fullness of His glory. Nor does God lack in power that one whit of His purpose should be left unaccomplished. The Lord who raised Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand far above all rule and authority and power both in this age and ages to come, shall He not bring to pass everything He has set out to do in us His children?

Chapter 4: The Church - His Body

All that has been already explained is now summed up for us in the last two verses of chapter one. "He hath put all things in subjection under His feet," says Paul (v. 22) and rules as 'head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all' (v. 23). The consummation of all God's working is found in the church. All His dealings with us, His children, in redemption and sanctification, are that we might be able to take our place effectively in His body. A gospel which does not see beyond personal and individual salvation is only half a gospel. Paul's ministry of the gospel was but the prelude to his ministry of the body (Colossians 1:23-27). He saw clearly that unless an appreciation of the gospel led to an appreciation of the church, the whole witness of Christ would be stunted and insecure. It is for this reason that he expressed his great burden for the Colossians and Laodiceans, 'that their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all richness of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden' (Colossians 2:2-3).

The condition of entering into this fullness, however, is subjection to Christ. "He hath put all things in subjection under His feet," says the apostle (1:22). If the church is to show forth His fullness, it must be composed of a people who know what it is to bow to His authority, to accept the disciplines which He imposes in His grace, wisdom and prudence, and to welcome the moulding and fashioning of His skilful hands. Says Paul to the Thessalonians, "The God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you who will also do it" (I Thessalonians 5:23-24). Here once more is

the condition upon which we can know His fullness in the body, that God, by His Spirit, should dominate every aspect of our beings, spirit, soul and body, and that we readily allow them to remain under His control in that sanctifying and developing process which He accomplishes in the church. The spirit is our will dominated either by God or by self, the soul is the seat of our emotions which would ensnare us in the reputation-seeking vanity of the world, the body is that sum of fleshly desires and aptitudes which would bind us to things material. We can be ruled by any or all of them--self, the world, or the flesh--and be kept from ever entering into anything of the knowledge of the mystery. All must be willingly subject to Christ. He, not they, must rule. The only place for self, the world and flesh is the cross (cf. Galatians 2:20; 6:14; 5:24).

Scientists tell us that if a human body could be reduced to the various basic materials of which it is composed, it would be worth only a few rupees. From the material point of view, it is of very little value. Apart from the life which vitalises it, it is practically useless. A very obvious fact which seems, nevertheless, to need to be continually restated, is that the church of Jesus Christ is a living body, not a corpse. The imposition of a pattern has never yet made a church: not that pattern is unimportant as we shall see, but the church is inseparable from spiritual life; it is not pattern alone. Present-day Christianity is a vast spiritual graveyard. One of the few doubtful compliments that can be paid to modern ecumenicalism is that it is making this graveyard look a little more tidy (at least, from a distance). It is still a graveyard nevertheless. Bodies from which the Spirit has long departed are today called 'churches.' They are certainly not the church of the New Testament. It has already been emphasised that the basis of the church is life in Christ. The church as His body again brings this fact very strikingly before us.

What is the purpose of the body? The body's whole object is to give expression to the life it contains. The controlling member is the head, and every other member is organised to give exact expression to the thoughts of the mind. The simplest of actions originates in the mind. From the mind impulses make their way through the nervous system to the particular part of the body concerned and thus cause it to act in the predetermined way. If any thought is to be put into practical effect, the co-operation of the body is absolutely essential.

Suppose, for instance, an accomplished artist or engineer suffers from an illness which causes complete paralysis. He is unable to move. His vocal organs are also affected and he is unable to speak. Yet his mind is perfectly clear. The expression in his eyes shows that in no way is his mental faculty impaired. During his illness he may be inspired with the thought of a new musical composition, or with a plan for some remarkable new building. He is totally unable, however, to communicate his thoughts to others. He cannot speak them; he cannot write them down. He is capable neither of translating them into practice himself nor of instructing others that they might do so. His body is out of action, so all his wonderful thoughts remain useless, no more than a dream.

The body without the spirit is valueless, but, likewise, the spirit without the body is incomplete, lacking the one means whereby it can give adequate expression to itself. Body and spirit are both important. It is no accident that our bodies are designed the way they are. We are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' as the Psalmist says, and the Great Designer has designed us to fulfil a particular function for which no other design would be adequate. Within recent years the importance of good design has become increasingly recognised in many realms. In aircraft engineering, for example, there are certain principles of design which must not be violated if the products are to give maximum efficiency. We can never expect to see an aircraft made to look like a ship, as such a pattern would make it incapable

of flight.

The same principle carries over into the spiritual realm. It is remarkable to find so many devoted Christians who tend to look down upon any mention of church pattern or order. Life, they say, is all-important; the pattern matters little. This attitude has largely succeeded in disembodifying the church and thus curtailing the effectiveness of the Lord's testimony through His people. We have no more right to think that the pattern of the church is unimportant than we have to think that the pattern according to which we ourselves have been created does not matter. For an expression of the life of the Spirit, a spiritual body, the church, is an absolute necessity, and that life can only be fully expressed through the body designed by God to contain it. Of God's pattern for the church we shall see more in Ephesians chapter four.

The church as the body of Christ is more than a figure; it is reality. If God is to reveal His thoughts and purposes fully upon the earth, He requires a body through which to do it. It was for this reason that there was no complete expression of God's mind until He took upon Himself the form of man and Jesus came. All the types of the Old Testament, wonderful as they were, were incomplete. It required God's life clothed in a body not only to explain but to work out His purpose of redemption.

This fact was first publicly proclaimed at our Lord's baptism when the Spirit of God descended on Him as a dove and a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son; My beloved in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). There was no other way for God to manifest His glory upon the earth than through the incarnation, but that way was perfect. When people looked upon Christ they looked upon God.

This great subject is further developed for us in the epistle to the Hebrews, "Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst Thou prepare for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:5-7). Here again we see the will of God accomplished only and supremely in the body of Christ. God has revealed Himself fully in no other way, and the method of His manifesting Himself is still, of necessity, the same today.

In preparing His disciples for His departure our Lord assured them, "I will not leave you desolate: I will come unto you" (John 14:18). These words referred particularly to His coming through the Spirit at Pentecost, yet they referred also, and no less really, to *His* coming, to the return of His body to the earth--not the body that was put on the cross, but His spiritual body, the church. It was precisely this that was revealed at Pentecost when the church was established. The Lord Jesus Christ was the body of God. The church today, vitalised by the life of Christ, is the body of God. Christ's body is still with us to express the fullness of God even as He did when He trod the dusty roads of Judaea and Galilee. The key to the body's functioning is subjection to the Head. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ." His subjection to His Father's will has meant our salvation. The church is Christ's body, but Christ Himself is the Head, and it is in the same spirit of abandonment and submission to Him that He showed to the Father that the church will reveal His will and His glory. As the Lord offered His body, the church has to offer itself in like surrender. The alternative is spiritual sickness and confusion, just as physical illness ensues upon any member of our human body's refusing to be controlled by the mind.

The body of Christ also demonstrates very clearly the church's oneness as an actual and functioning unit. Apart from the members functioning according to their several capacities in the closely knit unity of the whole, any talk of the body is meaningless. There can be no body at all if all the members are severed one from the other. The church is not a theoretical company, but the local gathering of those who are born again of the Spirit, are subject to Christ the Head, and function together to the revelation of His will and glory.

The body is 'the fullness of Him' (v. 23). Dare we believe that the Scripture means just what it says, that there is no aspect of the character of God which should not be revealed in His church? The Lord Jesus Christ in His life on earth revealed not only God's holiness but also His authority. "They were astonished at His teaching," says Mark (Mark 1:22) "for He taught them as having authority." It was this quality in our Lord's life that both commanded the devotion and roused the ire of those who listened to His ministry. A voice without authority can be ignored or passed off with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulder; it is so much empty sound. An authoritative voice cannot; it demands a response, either of obedience or defiance.

A so-called 'church' without authority is a dead, pitiable thing. The world holds it in disdain, and laughs quietly at its desperate efforts to accommodate itself to the prevailing circumstances and to please. We need not look far in any country today to see this exemplified. Modern Christianity throughout the world is largely bereft of spiritual authority. It is bogged down in the empty wordiness of a polite diplomacy calculated to smooth out every offence and merge every conviction into a lifeless uniformity. How different from the early church and the church as it is still meant to be. The world may scoff at the authority of the church as it did in the times of the apostles, but behind the jeer will be a troubled heart and a pricked conscience.

The subject of the authority of the church is largely ignored. One of the reasons for this may be that this great truth has been so perverted by the Church of Rome which has reduced the spiritual authority of a holy and loving God to a human despotism which holds many of its followers in abject fear and subservience. This is the very antithesis of the authority of the Lord revealed in His church which produces not fear, but joy. There is a yoke to be borne, but, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," said Christ. The authority of the church is not a legal domination to which all must bow willingly or unwillingly, but a spiritual compulsion which commands a willing subservience.

The authority of Christ in His church is also the means whereby the assembly is kept pure, for in it the people of God are living a life where an active response to His will is a constant demand. There is no legal compulsion to obey, but disobedience and the continued fellowship of the church are impossible. It is when the church is reduced to a lifeless form or ritual demanding no subjection to its Lord and no response to His word that there is a free entrance for every imaginable type of error and evil. There is but one safeguard, the Lord's dwelling in His church in supremacy and authority. This fact brings us back again to the truth with which Paul commenced the epistle. The church is a company of people who are 'faithful in Christ Jesus,' related to Him and subject also to His will.

It is on this same note that chapter one ends. The church is 'His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all' (v. 23). We are His fullness, but it is He, Christ, who is the source of that fullness. The church can never be proud in the great position it occupies. Pride in any shape or form means death to the body of Christ. We, of ourselves, have exactly nothing which we can contribute to the glory of God. We owe our very existence and our sustenance alike to Him. "Our sufficiency is from God" (II

Corinthians 3:5). "In Him ye are made full" (Colossians 2:10). The church is brought into being through submission to Christ. It must be sustained by submission to Christ. It is in that spirit of faithfulness to Him that His glory and authority are manifested.

Chapter 5: Corporate Unity

The fusion of chosen and prepared persons into the one body, the church, is implicit in the thought of the last two verses of chapter one. Now, in chapter two, Paul goes on to explain the unifying process in greater detail and to show that this sense of corporate oneness is in the very essence of salvation. The whole force of the contrast between past and present, the old life and the new, the life in the flesh and the life in Christ, is the contrast between crass individuality and fellowship. The change wrought in Christ is no mere superficial adjustment to a more spiritual way of thinking. It is a radical upheaval of which there can be no other suitable parallel than the one Paul draws, that of life and death. "And you did He quicken, who were dead through your trespasses and sins" (v. 1).

The principle of life contains a mystery which has baffled the mind of man for millenniums and still remains unsolved. It can be said, however, that life consists of the capacity of animated things to respond to one another. Life in the human body consists of a series of mutual responses and reactions to the functions of the various members. Social life likewise consists of the response of individuals one to another. Death, the cessation of life, is the opposite. It is complete passivity, the inability to communicate or receive, the locking up of a living thing in its own individuality. This, says Paul, is precisely the result of sin. The ability to respond to the spiritual has been killed. Man has been trapped in the circle of his own little mind to be a blind slave to his own will. God created him for much more than this. "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27), with a capacity like His own, to receive from God and to give unto God, to be loved and to love, to know the fullness of fellowship. That is life.

But all that remains in the world is but a travesty of that great purpose. Relationships in modern society are scarcely ever other than a problem. Even the relationship of the family, the most sacred that this world knows, outside of Christ is but a mockery of all that God intended. The reason is, of course, that man is spiritually dead, that capacity for vital and spontaneous response has gone. He is capable only of reacting to the reflection of his own selfish desires. Self has become the great motivating force in human existence. This is the course of the world. It is to this community of death that the people of God once belonged. In verses two and three Paul describes the whole sordid, selfish circle that is their pitiful prison of a home. What can God do but judge the whole thing? His love demands it. What love is there that wants to preserve a slum and all it contains? "By nature children of wrath" (v. 3). Yet let us never forget the reason for it all. 'Sons of disobedience' (v. 2), Paul describes this fallen race. The heart of the matter is rebellion, a denial of the rights of God and an exaltation of the will of man, the self that dominates and must disavow everything that cannot be drawn into its own orbit. This is the basic sin, the death that afflicts mankind.

What is the answer? The answer is the mercy and the love of God (v. 4); there can be no other. Man has neither the ability to seek Him nor the desire to do so. He is engrossed in his own way, and knows nothing else. The love of God will ever remain unfathomable. 'When we were dead through our trespasses' (v. 5), it was showered upon us. Can man love a stone? Yet God loved a dead thing, not simply to forgive it the reason for its being a stone, but to change the stone into flesh. "You, I say, did He quicken together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses," writes Paul to the Colossians (ch. 2 v. 13). Scripture never disparages the grace of divine forgiveness, but the emphasis is always upon

life to which forgiveness is but the prelude. Eternal life is that sphere of spiritual response into which we are born through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The bounds of the old self-circle are shattered on the entrance to a new and heavenly plane. "Dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus," says Paul to the Romans (ch. 6 v. 11). "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world," says John (I John 5:4). Since the crux of the world is self (v. 2) and in self lies the basic sin, it follows that life and victory over the world must be the negation of self, which is fellowship and fusion with the people of God. The church then is the inevitable corollary to regeneration. In the light of what has already been said regarding the identification of self with sin, a so-called salvation which leaves people at one and the same time their own masters and their own slaves is meaningless. Nor does the Scripture teach that they are delivered from this bondage to be lost in a 'nirvana' of nothingness. Deliverance is to a life of quickening in Christ, a life of resurrection, a new and heavenly order of things. The centre of that heavenly relationship on earth, as we have already seen in the first chapter, is the church. Where else can the judgement on self and the triumph of the divine nature be evidenced if it is to be revealed on earth at all, as surely it is? If bonds of blood are to be superseded in eternity by bonds of the Spirit, is not our part in the establishment of that spiritual relationship upon the earth of all things most important? What is salvation without it? Relationship is life, and divine relationship is divine life in the church.

The pattern of this new life is resurrection. The Lord demonstrated the victory over sin and death by taking upon Himself the limitations of flesh and blood. "Since the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in the same manner partook of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). He laid His life down of Himself. His earthly life was not conditioned by spiritual death which alone causes the human vitality of this physical body to peter out, but of His own love and grace He identified Himself with fallen mankind in this ultimate penalty of bodily extinction to show that His own life is new, and different and triumphant over it all. By faith He takes us with Him through the cross into resurrection. It is of this tremendous experience that Paul speaks in Romans 6:5-9. "For if we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection: knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin: for he that hath died is justified from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." The old things of self and the world have no legitimate place in the life of the regenerate person. He has been born into a new capacity to adjust to God and all that is of God, and it is that capacity that God is going to foster and develop in the church.

We have been made 'to sit with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ' (v. 6), says Paul. Here is our new place of power, privilege and authority, where first and foremost there is victory over self and we can see things from the vantage point of Christ. Everything of the world is subject to this heavenly position, and all is the object of the grace of God, that 'in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace' (v. 7), in that chosen and separated company which has tasted of His grace, the church.

Lest any should be tempted to pride through the magnitude of this purpose, Paul reminds us in vs. 8-10 that all we have is of God. Grace, salvation, and faith are all alike His free gifts. For reasons implicit in His own nature and unfathomable to man, He poured out Himself in the gift of grace; when man was bereft of any capacity whatsoever to respond to Him, He freely gave that capacity in the gift of faith; He led those who would follow in faith through the cross into the gift of salvation. Works have no part whatever to play. From start to finish 'we are His workmanship,' and only when He has made us are we

fit for anything in which He can have pleasure. David aptly expresses this fact in his prayer of dedication for the materials contributed for the building of the temple. "But who am I and what is this my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee and of Thine own have we given Thee" (I Chronicles 29:14).

This great relationship, however, has a very practical outworking. 'Good works' must obviously be an inherent part of the new life, for God Himself is good. So Paul says, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (v. 10). Then follows an exhortation to 'remember' coupled with a very down-to-earth explanation of the association of the people of God in the assembly, and illustrated by four most illuminating pictures of the church: the new man, the heavenly citizenship, the household of God, and God's house.

The Ephesians are straitly reminded never to forget the pitiful and hopeless condition from which they had been rescued. They certainly had possessed no spiritual advantages any more than the rest of mankind, but neither had they so much as possessed a merely temporal gain in belonging to the people of Israel who were the subject of God's direct revelation. Nevertheless, God has delivered them out of it all and they have entered a new relationship with Him. We need to remind ourselves continually, however, that this regenerate life, this capacity to respond to the divine, must be the subject of constant development. For a person born and bred in one country to go and live in another requires radical adjustment. Some people simply do not have that capacity of adjustment, everything to them in a foreign land is wrong, or senseless, or both; but for those who do there is required, particularly in the initial stages, a period of constant effort to understand and to conform to new patterns and new standards. Sometimes it may be easy, sometimes it may be difficult. Often there may be questionings of 'why' and 'to what purpose,' and with these also may be the temptation to abandon the whole effort and go back to the old ways which are familiar even if they be inferior in every respect. There must be a constant awareness of the superiority of the new over the old, a resolute choice to pursue it, and the purpose to attain it. The will which is now bent in God's direction must be maintained in that attitude by the power of deliberate choice. This power of choice is a faculty which God will never remove. Fellowship is dependent upon it. Love, likewise, is dependent upon it, and can never be mechanical. The willingness to respond in fellowship and love is the very root of their existence. Yet where there is freedom to choose the good there is freedom also to deny it. Where there is freedom to choose the way of life there is also temptation to slip back into the way of death.

One of our safeguards against the tragic return to the old death is in a constant remembrance of the magnitude of the grace of God. When people forget the kindness of the Lord in the past, they are in grave danger of slipping back into the lethargy of self-sufficiency. The need to keep in mind the lessons of the past is one of the reasons for the importance of giving testimony in the assembly or in informal exhortation. Our human memories are very short. The deep spiritual experiences which form the foundation of our Christian lives are too quickly relegated to the past; the invaluable lessons we ourselves once learned are forgotten and are lost to the generation that follows. While too much emphasis cannot be laid on the progressive nature of spiritual experience, we yet need to make sure that the blessings of the past are conserved and the principles which we learned never cease to become part of our daily walk. A student of mathematics may, through the years, progress in various branches of his subject, but he can never afford to forget the simple laws of addition and subtraction, multiplication and division which he learned as a child, for it is upon these things alone that the whole structure of mathematics can be developed.

If we look back into the Old Testament Scriptures we find that a very important place was given by God to the recounting of His dealings through successive generations. The classic example of this is, of course, the Passover. In Exodus 12:14 we read, "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever." The people of Israel were never to forget the mighty hand of God which had redeemed them from the slavery of Egypt. Even today wherever one finds orthodox Jews, the great day of the year is the day of the Passover. The observance of this feast has been kept intact down through the centuries.

On the crossing of Jordan into the land of promise we find another remembrance set up. Twelve stones taken from the midst of the river were set up as a pillar in Gilgal to be a specific reminder to generations to come of a divine power and victory which they had not personally experienced. In the life of the assembly, as well as in our individual experiences, we cannot under-rate the value of recounting the stories of battles fought and victories won in the power of the invincible God. Sooner than we realise, a generation will have arisen whose only incentive to continue in the spiritual warfare is our recounting of the promises of the past and our pointing steadfastly to the goal which lies ahead. The basic things must never be forgotten. The promise of the inheritance must ever be held fast and pursued. This is God's order. "The things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2).

Not only the blessings of the past, but the disciplines and defeats can be salutary reminders of our dependence upon the Lord. Our testimonies of how the Lord has triumphed would often do well to be seasoned with the admission of how man has failed, and thus provide a not infrequently necessary discouragement to our innate self-confidence. It was to this end that the people of Israel were warned, "And thou shalt remember all the way that the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no" (Deuteronomy 8:2). "Hold fast that which thou hast" (Revelation 3:11) is a key exhortation to the people of God not only to ensure their spiritual progress, but also to maintain their strength knit together in the unity of the Spirit.

Verses thirteen to eighteen now deal more explicitly with this unity, Paul showing how that unbridgeable gulf between Jew and Gentile has been bridged in Christ. We can hardly over-emphasise the magnitude of the gap that existed between these two peoples. We may think of many factors which divide humanity today, factors of race, class, language, creed, and community, but all these are weak and insignificant when compared with the reasons which arrayed Jew and Gentile in implacable opposition one to another. Even a cursory reading of the Old Testament will at once make this evident: the strict injunctions imposed by God against any association whatsoever with the heathen, and the severity of the penalties often meted out to those who disobeyed. And this, mark you, was imposed by God, not by some class-conscious human leader seeking to enforce the supremacy of a particular race. This separation, we might say, was innate in the birth of Israel as a nation, and has characterised the Jew down to the present day. Lapses there have been, and grievous ones at that, but few more miraculous things can be shown than the preserved identity of the Jewish people. Dispersed among the nations, and at times hounded into the caves and holes of the earth, they have yet maintained their identity as a separate race. Wherever you may go throughout the world, there is no mistaking a Jew.

No wonder the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. No wonder the Gentiles were 'unclean.' A 'wall' existed between them, says Paul (v. 14), an 'enmity' (v. 15). But that wall has been broken down (v. 14), that enmity has been slain (vs. 16-17), and peace reigns in the cross of Christ. God through His

Son has preached the tidings of peace both to them 'that were far off,' the Gentiles, and to 'them that were nigh,' the Jews (v. 17)--nigh to God, of course, through the unquestionable superiority of the revelation which had been entrusted to them as a nation. "Through Him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father" (v. 18). The life of the Spirit is one, and in the power of that common life we have been reconciled unto God in one body. What could be closer than this? If God could thus fuse Jew and Gentile into one, there is not a barrier on earth that can stand against the power of the life of the resurrected Christ.

In the past in India, so-called 'churches' have been raised up on the basis of old caste distinctions. Whether or not this was done with a good motive is not our concern here, but such a practice is certainly a denial of the very work of the cross of Christ. It may be true that these distinctions die hard, but they can never live in the light of Calvary. To the natural man who clings to every puny distinction that might act as a fillip to his pride, that all this must and can be broken down may seem incredible, but the gospel, the power of God, can do no less than bring the pride of man crashing to the ground. That is the miracle of God's grace, the grace which saves through faith and reconciles the irreconcilable.

The miracle of the church was something which never became ordinary or commonplace to Paul. Again and again at the beginning of his epistles he thanks God for the very existence of the church. "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all," he writes to the Romans (Romans 1:8). That in any place there should be, gathered in from the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the religious and the blasphemer, the Jew and the Gentile, a company of people united at the feet of Christ, was a fact Paul could never get over. The wonder of it filled his soul, and it cast him and the church alike in ever-deepening dependence upon the grace to which they owed their very existence. The church is a miracle of the grace of God.

Chapter 6: Sons of the Kingdom

In each of the four great figures of the church which must now claim our attention--the new man, the heavenly citizenship, the household of God, and the house of God--there is a very clear and practical expression of the unity which has been Paul's main subject in the preceding verses of chapter two, and also of that mutual responsibility which is implicit in any true oneness and is likewise a mark of the assembly. If, as has already been pointed out, self is the centre of sin, then the opposite of self, subjection, and in mutual subjection, fellowship, must be the centre of salvation; and that subjection to the Lord and His people and fellowship, its outworking, finds its full expression in the church. Being born again is being translated from a realm which is essentially selfish, into a realm which is essentially self-renouncing.

It is this that the assembly pre-eminently reveals, and it is for this reason that the assembly has such an important place in the purpose of God. Not a collection of saved individuals are going to be presented to the Lord in the last day, but the church, as Paul clearly tells us in Ephesians 5:27. Why and how it should be so is, of course, the subject of the epistle, and the great basic factors which compose the assembly, relationship to Christ, subjection, faithfulness, unity and others, Paul comes back to again and again in the course of the letter, approaching them each time from a different standpoint and emphasising and re-emphasising their importance. If, in each of the four figures found in this chapter, the same things are repeatedly stressed, it is the Spirit of God who does the stressing, and we would do well, therefore, to pay heed to the implications of such emphasis.

The new man to whom Paul introduces us in verse fifteen is, in some respects, a figure closely akin to that of the body which we have already touched upon at the end of chapter one. It is also taken up again and further explained in chapter four, verse thirteen. The expression itself, 'one new man' (v. 15) is remarkable. Here is the result of God's unifying those who are in Christ. Paul does not say that God makes of them a very happy company of people who agree very well among themselves. It is not simply that Jew and Gentile are brought to a place of mutual understanding. It is much more than that. It is that there is no Jew or Gentile any longer, no company of individuals, but *one* new man.

Unity is a term much misused in our modern world, and it has, therefore, in some senses, become inadequate to express what God is really after in the church. The church is the fusion of God's people into one. In His last great prayer our Lord prayed for his disciples and for us, "And the glory which Thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22). Here is another expression of the oneness of the new man--one as God is one, yet in His oneness remaining three. The trinity will ever remain something beyond the understanding of mortal man while the limitations of body and mind remain, yet we know that these two apparently irreconcilable things combine in the Godhead, God's oneness and God's trinity. Most emphatically we know that God is but one, yet, on the other hand, the personality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not swallowed up in one another. It is the same in the church. The varied personalities which God has given to His people are not lost, rather do they find their consummation in their contribution to the great new personality of the new man, the assembly.

A man is not simply body, but the life also to which the body gives expression; so here once more we find Paul's returning to re-emphasise a fact which has already been stressed, that the existence of the church is dependent, not simply upon its outward form, but upon the vitality of the Spirit within. It can never be too strongly or too often emphasised that the imposition of a pattern, or simply the gathering of people together, does not bring the church into being. A church cannot be organised, it has to be born.

The great contrast between the old and the new man is taken up by Paul again in his letter to the Colossians. In ch. 3:9-10 he says, "Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings; and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him." The self-seeking old nature is lost in our incorporation in the new man, and, having been born into this new plane of living, we must inevitably grow and develop in it. In the latter verse Paul draws our attention in particular to two things, firstly, the new man's 'development unto knowledge,' and secondly, his likeness to the One who created him.

Many of our individual characteristics are inherited from our forebears. "Like father, like son," says the proverb, and this likeness may be passed on down through the generations. We are begotten of God, and His likeness is passed on to us, not to us as individuals separated from one another, but to us as the new man, the church. It is in the assembly, therefore, that we see the complete image of our Creator. Why this is so is explained for us more fully in the third chapter of Ephesians, so we shall return to the subject in due course.

But let the magnitude of this fact sink into our hearts. God is not content that the church should be merely a pale imitation of His greatness, but that it should be in His very image. "The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," is God's purpose (Ephesians 4:13). What could be more clear? "Ah, yes," the wise will remark, "but it is merely an ideal and can never be worked out while man is man." Is

not the whole of life a striving after an ideal? and the measure in which we are given over to it will be the measure of our attainment of it. When we really understand the greatness of our inheritance and our right in Christ, we will not be slow to abandon the petty things which prevent our possessing it. Man may still be man, but God is still God, and it is this fact above all that dominates the lives of those who are in Christ and changes also the old man into the new. The trouble is not that the ideal is too high, but that God's people have so often set it aside to wallow in the slough of human personality entanglements and material considerations. "They looked unto Him and were lightened: and their faces shall never be confounded" (Psalm 34:5). Whether or not we enter into the purpose of God is dependent upon the direction in which we are looking. "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4).

Implicit in an understanding of the new man is the thought of progress and development. Admiring friends gather round the new son of the family, and all agree that 'he is just the image of his father.' His father, however, is six feet tall; the little boy has a long way to go before he will be like him in that respect. His father is also a very highly educated man; the son cannot articulate even the simplest of words, and from an educational point of view he knows exactly nothing, yet in some years' time he may well equal his father both in stature and accomplishments. Just as the life of the Spirit in regeneration imbues the believer with a divine potential, so does it imbue the church. The birth of the church does not any more imply perfection than does the experience of the new birth imply immediate maturity in the things of God. The new man has to be born and to grow, and it is this process of development which forms the basis of Paul's thought when he says that the new man 'is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him.' Latent within the frame of a new-born babe are all the potentialities of the full-grown and developed man or woman. Latent within the frame of the new-born church, the new man, are all the potentialities of the glory of God. Development there must be with all its attendant disciplines and difficulties, but at every stage it is the character of the divine parent which will shine forth and be ever more clearly seen. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), the character of God in the church, may be expressed in much human limitation, just as a person's expression of hospitality may fall far short of his desire because of the limitations of his circumstances; it is hospitality gracious and unmistakable nevertheless. Similarly, where the church exists God's character cannot be absent. It is there, evident, and growing daily more clear as spiritual weakness gives place to spiritual strength, and human ignorance gives place to spiritual knowledge. One day the 'full grown man' will emerge in the 'measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13) but it is here on earth, in the new man, the church, that the birth, the process of growth and development takes place. The assembly is God's spiritual son, a witness to the world of what He is like, and of a hope and purpose higher by far than the thoughts of man.

The second of the figures to which Paul likens the church in chapter two is found in verse nineteen, "But ye are fellow citizens with the saints." In writing to the Philippians he uses a similar expression when he reminds them, "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20), and Peter uses practically the same metaphor when describing the people of God as 'a holy nation' (I Peter 2:9). Each of these phrases is used to mark the contrast between man as he was in his old unregenerate state, and man as he is in Christ, brought into a new plane of living where the heavenly so completely supersedes the earthly.

But once again the main point of the contrast is the antithesis between the old selfish individualism of human nature, and the corporate responsibility of a spiritual 'nation.' Paul would emphasise that the fact that sin is really dealt with, is demonstrated, and can only be fully demonstrated in the church. Where a person balks at the claims of the fellowship of the saints and, instead, seeks to enjoy the fruits of

regeneration in spiritual isolation, there can only be grave doubts as to the nature of his spiritual experience. The life of the Spirit is so completely different, and the very meaning of salvation is that we are translated from that isolation from God brought about by sin, into a heavenly community which owns Him as Lord.

Life in any community entails certain loyalties and responsibilities, and it is our attitude to these that in turn determines our conduct. Our existence as members of a certain class of people, whether nationally, in a given locality, or any otherwise, is a social fact determined for us by our birth, and it is from this related position that the ordinary man of the world adjusts his mode of conduct to meet, as he thinks, the demands of living. His earthly relationships in a particular sphere determine his likes and his dislikes, his joys and his fears, in fact the whole conduct of his livelihood. But in Christ, Paul tells us, we are raised above this, to a plane far higher than an existence conditioned by natural circumstances and earthly loyalties. We now look upon life, not from the point of view of self, or of a particular community or race, but from the point of view of God. The believer is given a new focus to life, a new norm by which to judge. Every action is determined by this great new fact, that he is now a citizen of a heavenly country whose king is Christ. Nor can this loyalty ever be other than in the best interests of all men. "The powers that be are ordained of God," Paul tells the Romans (Romans 13:1). Human government, on every level, is a God-recognised institution, and where it remains true to its legitimate purpose it can never contradict the standards of God by whose ordination it exists, just as individual states in any country cannot have laws which are contrary to the constitution. Loyalty to our heavenly citizenship, therefore, as revealed in the church, offers an infallible rule of conduct in every aspect of living, and a rule which contradicts no other lesser loyalty which is not a usurpation of the rights of God Himself.

This loyalty to Christ is mandatory to every believer, yet not as an imposition upon an unwilling subject. It is the law of the Spirit of life written upon the hearts of God's people. It is part and parcel of regeneration. This leads us naturally to a consideration of the place of law in the fellowship of the church, for the thought of law is inseparable from the thought of an ordered and stable life such as is pictured in our relationship as 'fellow-citizens with the saints' under the kingship of Christ. Yet, on the other hand, "The Jerusalem that is above is free," says Paul to the Galatians (Galatians 4:26), again describing the relationship of grace into which Christ has brought us. Freedom and law, are they not contradictory?

Freedom is one of the great topics of the age in which we live. It embodies the aspirations of nations and individuals alike, yet what freedom really means is probably understood by very few, and the word is used as often as not as little more than a convenient term to cloak the whims of comfort and pleasure-seeking selfish men. What is freedom?

To begin with, the Bible indicates very clearly that no man is free in an absolute sense. As we have already seen, life itself consists not only in the capacity of man to respond, but in his actually responding to things around him. Life means activity; freedom, in an absolute sense, means passivity, inactivity, for once a person acts (that is, responds to either good or evil) he is no longer free, but his life becomes conditioned by the choice he has made. This is the situation in which man finds himself simply because he is man. To remain completely detached from every circumstance is just impossible unless he dies. He is, therefore, inevitably in bondage, either to his own self-interest, or to the interests of God, so whatever we are to understand by freedom must come within the limitations of one or other of these two allegiances. It is this that Paul states when he writes to the Romans about 'being made free

from sin, and become servants to God' (Romans 6:22). Freedom from one means bondage to the other. Accept freedom from God and bondage to sin, or freedom from sin and bondage to God. That is the choice that is before us, and there is no third alternative. Just because God is God and man is man, man is in no position to sit in a place of detachment outside God and His creation and claim that he is obliged to choose neither. Yet this is just what man wants to do, and he actually thinks he can do it, so blinded is he by sin and so completely corrupt is his nature. But it is a monstrous deception of his own proud heart. There is no such possibility.

Still the Scripture tells us that the country of our heavenly citizenship, 'the Jerusalem that is above is free.' What is a free country? It is certainly not one without any laws or government; that would mean anarchy and confusion, and would consign everyone to live under the bondage of the unscrupulous. Freedom is the rule of good law. Bondage is the rule of bad law or no law. Were all traffic regulations in a large city to be removed, the result would be chaos. The alternative, which would allow traffic to move freely, is law, and law which is strictly observed. Freedom, in the real and Biblical sense, is impossible apart from law, and the person who is, above all others, free, is the person who is subject to the law of God. Paradoxically, freedom is subjection to Christ, subjection to His Word which is truth, and Christ Himself is both the Word (John 1:1) and the Truth (John 14:6). "If ye abide in my Word, then are ye truly My disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Here, then, is the crux of the whole question of freedom: subjection to the truth through the Word.

It is in the assembly where Christ the Word dwells, God's order and standard are revealed, and it is there, therefore, that His people have the opportunity of subjecting themselves to Him, the Word and the Truth, and to one another, in conformity with the law of the Spirit written in their hearts. This is the freedom of the 'Jerusalem that is above,' a recognition of the control of God and a bowing humbly before it.

Citizenship, of course, implies not only a recognition of the head, but in the relationship of the community, a sense of responsibility and subjection to one another. In a well-run state, a good citizen will exemplify the law of the land, and will himself command the respect of others as a person whose word must be given careful heed, and whose life must be accepted as an example. All this has its counterpart in the assembly. Spiritual freedom is dependent upon subjection to the Truth, the Word, and God's Word must be accepted and bowed to wherever it is found.

What is meant when we speak of 'the Word'? Speech, that is, our words, is the one way by which the thoughts of the mind can be fully expressed. A person suffering from some illness may go to a doctor. He is able to tell why he has come and to explain his symptoms. A very small child, on the other hand, cannot, because, not yet having learned to speak, he has no words with which to express himself. If he is a little older he may be able to give some idea of what is wrong with him, but still, his limited vocabulary will mean that the expression of his thoughts is incomplete. Down through the history of the world God has never left Himself without some expression of His mind. The law, the Tabernacle, and the Prophets have all been God's Word to creation, for through them God has revealed His mind to man. All of these, however, were limited expressions. The full expression of God's mind was to come in Christ. He, therefore, was *the Word*. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," said the Lord to Philip (John 14:9). The Bible is the written expression of Christ; for this reason we call it the Word of God. It is also a complete expression of Christ, 'fulfilled' as Paul tells us, through the revelation of the church (Colossians 1:24-25) and is the norm whereby every other expression of Christ must be judged.

It is, however, not a dead thing, but something living and vital, and as such, must reproduce itself in the hearts and lives of those in whom it takes root. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:63). It is this great fact that the Lord brings out so clearly in that very familiar parable of the sower. In the account of the parable given by Luke it will be noticed that the seed is explained as 'the Word of God' (Luke 8:11). In the Gospel of Matthew, however, the seed is explained as 'the sons of the Kingdom' (Matthew 13:38). These two interpretations are not contradictory but complementary. They express the fact that through the generation of the Word of God in the heart of man, the Word produces in its own likeness men and women who are themselves an expression of the Word. They in turn are sowed into the field of the world to reproduce after their own kind. The people of God are themselves the Word of God to the extent that Christ is formed in them. Paul gives expression to this same principle when he writes to the Corinthians, "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (II Corinthians 3:2).

Spiritual freedom is dependent upon subjection to the law of God, the truth, the Word, and to the extent that God's children themselves personify the Word, to that extent is our spiritual freedom dependent upon subjection one to another. "Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ," says Paul later on in this same epistle (Ephesians 5:21). Wherever the Word of God is evidenced, be it in the written revelation or in the lives of His people, it must be bowed to with equal reverence. It is very often the refusal to recognise the Word of God in His people, a refusal which can only be born of pride, that is the cause of the bondage and fruitlessness with which assemblies are assailed. Freedom in the heavenly city of the church will become a reality when Peter's exhortation becomes part of our experience, "Gird yourselves with humility to serve one another" (I Peter 5:5).

One other aspect of our relationship as citizens of a heavenly kingdom deserves mention. It emphasises once again the distinction of the people of God from every other earthly society. This separation, as a mark of the church, has already been pointed out, but it is of sufficient importance for Paul to bring it yet once more to our notice, implicit in his mention of our heavenly citizenship.

The people of the world are divided into many nationalities, each with its distinctive features. Ancestry, environment, climate, culture and various other factors have all helped to mould the characteristics of different races, and from the accident of a person's birth in any particular part of the globe he automatically becomes heir to certain physical or temperamental characteristics which immediately distinguish him from a person of other nationality. Our relationship in the kingdom of Christ has brought to bear upon our lives spiritual influences far more powerful than any of the influences of this earthly existence. In fact, "there is a new creation," says Paul (II Corinthians 5:17). A new spiritual race has been brought into existence through the regenerating and unifying power of the Spirit. How can it be other than distinct from all the world around? Nor will this distinction be simply in the church's attempts to be different; it cannot help it. Separation is in its very life, and it is this separation which provides one of the most important aspects of the assembly's testimony upon the earth.

Chapter 7: God's Household and the House

Paul does not elaborate on the statement made in ch. 2 v. 19 that the church is 'the household of God.' The implications of this figure, however, are obvious, and reflect the two facts which were brought before us right at the beginning of the epistle: relationship and faithfulness. In Christ we are adopted as sons (1:5). God is our Father, the Head of the family and of the household.

The terms 'family' and 'household' may sometimes be synonymous, but not always. The family especially indicates relationship, and the relationship continues to exist whether the members are together or separate from one another. A household, on the other hand, implies a group of people living together, accepting a common rule, and with a sense of mutual responsibility. If any of the members leave, they cease to belong to the household although their family ties will still remain.

The church is a spiritual family living as one household. In this the local nature of the assembly is made very plain. Regeneration does not automatically bring a person into the privileges of the church, although related to Christ, the privileges of the church have become his right. In that sense he does belong to the church, because it is the place where he ought to be, but should he refuse to accept his responsibilities, he may live outside his privileges all his life. There are many people who belong to the family of God who yet do not belong to God's household, and to whom, therefore, the church is of little practical significance. While our relationship with Christ is, as we have seen, the basis of the church, yet it is by no means the only aspect of the assembly. That relationship is not itself the church, and it is this mistaken idea, current among so many of God's people today, which has reduced the church to a mere theory with but little practical expression.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" asked Cain (Genesis 4:9) when God questioned him regarding his brother Abel. The result of sin was that Cain felt he had no responsibility other than for himself. The reversal of this attitude through regeneration is what our position in the household of God gives us the opportunity of demonstrating. We are linked together in Christ, and we do have a responsibility for one another, in difficulties and temptations, in the need of instruction and encouragement, in sympathy and reproof. Loyalty is a mark of the happy household, and without a mutual loyalty and sense of responsibility no household can ultimately continue to function. These qualities are also a reflection of our attitude to the Head of the household, God. It is, as John so forcibly reminds us (I John 4:20) idle to protest our devotion to God when that devotion is conspicuously absent towards those who are as dear to God as we are ourselves. God's household must also be a place of order, and a place where we gladly recognise His discipline along with His commendation. It is the ordered household, not the disordered one, that is happy and content, and exactly the same applies in our spiritual life in the assembly.

Above all, it is in the church, the household of God, that we really get to know Him. We may come to know very well a person with whom we work day by day, but we can never know him as do those of his own family with whom he lives. It is in the assembly alone, in God's practical relationship with those for whom He feels a prime concern, that the different aspects of His character will be given full scope for expression, and can be stimulated by the response to His grace as His people return His love to Him and to one another.

But not only are we God's household, we are God's house. It is this great figure that occupies Paul for the last three verses of the second chapter.

'The house of God' is a phrase which is often used very loosely, and its exact equivalent is sometimes used in other languages merely to indicate a Christian meeting place. That this is very far from what the Scripture means is obvious from the writings both of Paul and Peter. As Paul explicitly explains to the Athenians, God 'dwelleth not in temples made with hands' (Acts 17:24). The house of God has nothing to do with bricks and mortar. There is no particular spot on earth which can in any sense be said to be God's dwelling place. There is no one building which, in God's eyes, is any more holy than any other, and to use the phrase 'house of God' for any material structure is always liable to be

misleading and harmful.

In v. 20 Paul tells us that the church is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.' Apostles and prophets, as we shall see, are two of the five gifts mentioned later on as given to the church by the glorified Christ. These we shall examine further in our consideration of chapter four. The two mentioned here, however, are described as having a particular place in the establishment of the assembly which is brought together on their 'foundation.'

What exactly does this mean? In the following chapter of the epistle, Paul shows how the apostles and prophets of his time were the recipients of what he calls 'the mystery.' This phrase has already claimed a little of our attention. It is used only by the apostle Paul, and that to describe the fullness of the purpose of God through Christ and in the church, with which He completed His revelation to mankind. Paul specifically states this in his epistle to the Colossians (Colossians 1:24-27). Here then is the foundation upon which the church is built, God's revelation to man, and the vehicle of its expression in the days of the apostles were the persons of the apostles and prophets themselves. Thus what they spoke and wrote was the final Word of God, and these words have come down to us today in the pages of the New Testament which is to us what the apostles and prophets were to the people of their own age, the vehicle of God's revelation. The spoken word today must all be judged according to the written standard, and it is from this written revelation that the assembly is established. Wherever God's Word is faithfully proclaimed in complete dependence upon the Spirit, there are the ministries of apostleship and prophecy manifested, and conversely, apostleship and prophecy do not exist today independent of the written Word of God.

Writing to the Corinthians of the establishing of the assembly in Corinth Paul says, "I laid a foundation" (I Corinthians 3:10). Yet Peter, also referring to the raising up of the church, quotes from the prophet Isaiah where God says, "I lay in Zion a chief corner stone" (I Peter 2:6; Isaiah 28:16). Both are true. God's means of operation upon the earth is through His people, yet behind and overshadowing the means must be the obvious working of God Himself. The church is God's; the plan likewise is His. We are but His workmen. The great lesson we have to learn is that man can never establish the church simply through the imposition of a pattern or technique. The first requisite for church building is total dependence upon the Lord. This we have seen at the very beginning of the work at Ephesus. Humility as well as authority was a salient feature of Paul's life, and it was through the humble yet powerful proclamation of the truth as it is in Christ that the Ephesian believers felt the compelling power of the Spirit drawing them together. Nowhere is there any suggestion that the assembly at Ephesus was organised into being by the apostle.

We are living in an age of perfected techniques. The world is arrayed with a growing army of 'experts' on every conceivable subject. The world-wide company of God's people too has its 'experts,' those whose job it is to probe into every spiritual failure and find an answer to every problem. Such probing is, of course, good. Most of us need to be much more concerned than we are at the spiritual impotence and lethargy that is around us. Too easily are we content with a few spiritual shibboleths, and a standard of spiritual conduct that is a shame to the name of Christ. Let us never criticise a spirit of enquiry. It is something most valuable. There is a tendency, however, to reduce the answer to every problem to the discovery of the correct technique. Man's spirit of enquiry has so often led him, not to a place of greater subjection to the Spirit of God, but to trust all the more in his own human ability to carry through God's purposes. But the truth is that God's pattern is basically a spiritual one, and He alone is the one who can put it into practice. The extent to which God can use us to the establishing of

the church is the extent of our subjection to Him, and our freedom from the bonds of tradition and other human entanglements which would hinder His working. Then the church will not need to be cajoled into existence. The Spirit Himself will bring to birth the urge that brings an assembly into being.

Verse 21 shows us that not only the foundation, but the whole superstructure of the church is dependent upon Christ. It is in Him that 'each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.' Peter, who develops this figure still further in his first epistle, emphasises this same point. The analogy of stones used in the erection of a building is incomplete. The church, as we have already seen, is something alive, and stones are dead things. Peter, therefore, vitalises them with life. We come unto Him, the Living Stone, and ourselves as lively stones are built up a spiritual house (I Peter 2:4-5). The material in each case is the same, hewn, as it were, out of the same quarry. Peter was, no doubt, thinking of his conversation with the Lord of which we read in Matthew 16. "Thou art Peter," ('petros' a little piece of rock) said our Lord, "and upon this rock ('petra' a great rock, referring to Himself) I will build my church." It is only as Christ is formed in men and women, making them of the same nature as Himself, that the temple of God is built up. This fitting together of the living stones is the house of God upon the earth. Wherever the Lord's people meet, be it in great building or humble, on a mountainside or in the shade of a tree, there He is in the midst of them, and there is His house.

Once again this figure brings clearly before us the practical nature of the unity of the Lord's people in the church. A scattered pile of bricks is not a house, although they may be united in appearance; one brick looks very much like another. Similarly, a scattered company of regenerated people all claiming that they are one in Christ is not a church. They must be 'fitly framed together,' each one contributing his particular place in the spiritual building, and conscious of the bond of life and mutual responsibility which binds all of them together. The purpose of this unity is to form 'a habitation of God through the Spirit.' The church is God's house upon the earth, and the place, therefore, in which and from which He supremely expresses His mind and purpose. Yet this figure too reminds us that the church grows in the capacity to express God. It 'groweth into a holy temple.' There is nothing automatic or mechanical about God's expressing Himself through the assembly. It is conditioned upon the assembly's spiritual development and growth in understanding of divine things.

In India, many people live in houses which are incomplete. They may have planned a very elaborate structure, but the plan may be many years in being carried out. Nevertheless, as soon as the walls have been erected and a roof put on they will settle in. In many ways it is an imperfect and incomplete dwelling place, neither does it give a very adequate idea of the intention of the owner in building it, but as the work of construction continues, the use and beauty of the place will become increasingly evident until one day, when the last finishing touch has been added, what was in the mind of the designer will be fully and clearly expressed. God sometimes has to live in a very imperfect dwelling place. The important thing is that we should frankly recognise its imperfections and go on, as labourers together with Him, to see the spiritual house completed.

The Lord, in preparing His disciples for His leaving them, speaks of His dwelling place. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2-3). This is a Scripture commonly quoted at funerals as a comforting assurance of the certain existence of a heavenly home, but its prime application is to a completely different question. The Lord is explaining to His disciples, not what is going to happen to them after they die, but what is going to take place after He has ascended to the Father. The Lord, by His Spirit, is going to come and will receive His people unto Himself. (It should

be noted that the Lord in this chapter, John 14, uses the word 'I' in reference to the Spirit, cf. v. 18). The fulfilment of this Scripture, therefore, is found at Pentecost when the Spirit came and established the church. In that great event God took up residence in the midst of His people. The house of God is at one and the same time His dwelling place upon the earth, and the spiritual home of His people. This fact is reflected in the construction of the temple which contained the 'court of the priests' (II Chronicles 4:9) and Peter also says, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house for a holy priesthood" (I Peter 2:5 R.V. margin).

As pilgrims and strangers upon the earth, our home is a heavenly one, yet the Lord has not left us without a place of rest on our journey. The church is our home here on the earth, the place where the Lord and His people live together, and the source of our strength and guidance. It is, however, a 'spiritual' house. We do well to hold that fact in mind. The companies of the New Testament were held together by the Spirit. Where some of them met we do not know, nor does it seem to matter since the Scripture is silent on the point. The apostles certainly never mention in any of their letters anything which would indicate that the assemblies were occupied in buying lands or building buildings. They had to meet somewhere, of course, but their emphasis was in moving forward to enter into their spiritual inheritance, and since they looked upon the return of the Lord as imminent, anything that would lend an aspect of permanence to their sojourn on this earth was the least of all their concerns.

There is something strangely incongruous in the way Christianity has developed over the centuries with its huge and magnificent buildings. Some of them are exquisitely beautiful, no doubt, but it would be interesting to find out how many of them today are still centres of vital spiritual life and testimony. The great majority of them are but monuments to a glory that has long since departed, the tombstones surmounting the remains of something that has long since died.

When the Spirit of God gave His terrible warning to the Ephesian assembly in Revelation 2, He said, "I come to thee, and will move thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent" (Revelation 2:5). He did not threaten simply to extinguish the light, but to remove from its place the very indication of the assembly's existence. Once the Spirit had gone from their midst nothing was to remain that might be a shame to the name that had once been exalted. This principle has certainly not continued in operation down through the centuries. Is it possible that God's people, in erecting 'lampstands' of bricks and mortar which have had to be kept up long after the light of the Spirit has gone out, have thwarted God's purpose?

God's house is a spiritual house, a company of people that owes its continued existence to one thing alone, the life of the Spirit who dwells in their midst. Anything that would serve to hold them together once the Spirit has departed can only be of the flesh. Let His presence in our midst be the one and only factor that unites, and should He leave, let the church which is no longer a church pass quietly away unmourned.

Chapter 8: The Revelation of the Mystery

In chapter one of the epistle Paul has been concerned primarily with God's dealings with the individual believer, and has shown that the fulfilment of our individual spiritual experience is found in the church. In chapter two we are taken a step further. Paul shows that personal salvation means, above everything else, death to self, and that the church alone gives full expression to that unity of mutual love and corporate responsibility into which we have been drawn through God's abounding grace. In both these chapters, therefore, the emphasis has been on the assembly as the fulfilment of God's work of grace in man. The purpose of God is viewed from a subjective angle. In chapter three, however, we see the assembly, not only as the fulfilment of man's greatest good, but as the fulfilment of the character of God Himself. In the assembly it is not simply that spiritual life in man finds its consummation, but God Himself is glorified. The church then is something unique, and the opening verses of chapter three lay emphasis on that fact.

The first thirteen verses are taken up with an explanation of 'the mystery.' This, as we have already seen, is a phrase used exclusively by the apostle Paul. It sums up the ultimate in God's purpose, all that He has meant to do through Christ and in the church. It has the character of a 'mystery' since, as we are told in v. 5, it has remained hidden through the ages. Not that God has ever had a desire to withhold His revelation from man, but in His wisdom He saw that it would require many centuries of preparation before the full light of His purposes in Christ could be made manifest. All was given over and over again in type and symbol in Old Testament times, but the complete understanding of what it all meant had to await the time appointed by God Himself when He sent His Son. Says the writer to the Hebrews, "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son....the very image of His substance" (Hebrews 1:1-3). The shadow of things to come had given place to the 'image of His substance' Christ. The mystery, the riddle locked up in all God's dealings with the Jews in a past dispensation, had been brought to light.

In the following verses Paul explains how the mystery was given to him, what constitutes the mystery, the opposition which it arouses in man, some of the responsibilities accruing from it, and the reason for the mystery's being revealed. This is not the order in which Paul deals with these questions, but it is the order in which we will consider them in the following pages.

In v. 3 "As I wrote a little before" (marg.), Paul hearkens back to the mention of the mystery he has already made in ch. 1:9 and explicitly states that the mystery was given to him of God by revelation. In this connection we should keep in mind what we have already learned in ch. 1 v. 17, namely, that revelation along with 'wisdom' combine to bring us into an understanding of the knowledge of God. It is the illumination of the Spirit which finally enlightens the truth of God to our hearts, but that illumination is based squarely on a willingness and capacity to understand what God has already said in His Word. It is true that the truth of the church is a revelation fresh to the New Testament. Paul states this in v. 5. On the other hand, it was not a fresh idea to God, but 'from all ages hath been hid in God.' Inasmuch as all God's dealings in Old Testament times foreshadowed Christ and His eternal purposes, the mystery of the church is all there locked up in the Old Testament Scriptures, to be brought to light by the revelation of the Spirit in God's own time. This is the meaning of the parable of the Treasure recorded in Matthew 13:44. God, in creation, saw the potential of His divine order being revealed through the church, and 'hid' it in His dealings with Israel till such time as He 'buyeth the field.'

Paul's statement that the truth of the church was granted unto him through revelation, therefore, does not mean that, at some time, he was the object of some supernatural visitation in which God told him things which were completely independent of anything he had, up to that time, known of God's ways. He could hardly so flagrantly deny a principle which he had already emphasised in the same letter. There can be no doubt whatsoever that all of Paul's background as a Pharisee and his wealth of understanding of the Old Testament Scripture formed the basis upon which God was able to grant him the revelation of the mystery. When he states simply that it was given to him 'by revelation' he is in no wise denying the place that his knowledge of God's Word played in his being brought into an understanding of the church. He is, however, making a humble admission that all of his learning, of itself, was insufficient to enable him to penetrate into the depths of the divine purpose. Great as he was, from a human and intellectual point of view, he could never boast. His understanding of the mystery was due to the enlightenment of the Spirit, not to the facility of his own mind. At the same time, he could not boast that God had imposed upon a listless and empty mind the treasures of His knowledge. This would have been the most deadly and dangerous boast of all. Paul was no dullard. A reading of his epistles will quickly show how his quest for further revelation stimulated his agile mind to range far and wide over what he knew of the Scriptures.

Of what is the 'mystery' composed? Briefly, it is composed of two things: the gospel and the church. As Paul explains in v. 6, "To wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." To the Gentiles and, therefore, to all men, is open the door of relationship with God through Christ; on the strength of that relationship they are united together as one body, the church; the peace and eternal hope which all this personal and corporate blessing entails is their inheritance.

It will be remarked that these two aspects of the mystery have really been the subjects of the first two chapters of the epistle. Chapter one has dealt pre-eminently with the gospel of redemption, God's working in the individual in preparation for His use. Chapter two has dealt with the church, the gathering together of the body of Christ. Even in the figures of the church which we have been considering, we have seen a combination of these two vital factors: spiritual life and the means through which that life is expressed. It is these two elements which Paul sums up in chapter three as the mystery.

The importance of the mystery lies simply in the essential combination of gospel and church. In fact, in its fullest sense, the gospel must be said to include the church also. Paul obviously uses the term inclusively when he speaks of "the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" at the end of v. 6. Yet in speaking of the mystery to the Colossians he separates the two and claims that God has made him a minister of each. In the eyes of God, however, there can be no divorcing of these two aspects of His purpose. The gospel of individual redemption must inevitably lead to the expression of the church, otherwise it is incomplete. We have already seen this demonstrated in chapter two. Since self is the basis of sin, there can be no true salvation which still leaves man to pursue his own isolated existence, making himself the centre of the little world in which he lives. The importance of this fact Paul brings out very clearly in his discussion of the mystery in his epistle to the Colossians. Although as already stated, he claims that God has made him a minister both of the gospel (Colossians 1:23) and the church (Colossians 1:24-25), he does so obviously not to emphasise their independence, but in order to emphasise that the first must essentially lead to the second.

Paul recognised very clearly that unless his preaching of the way of redemption resulted in the calling together by God of the church, his ministry was only half complete. It never seems to cross his mind that his commission was to be limited to the setting forth of the way of personal escape from divine judgement. In all his writings a place is given to the purpose which underlies God's work of redemption, namely, the gathering out of a special people, the church, to display the workmanship and glory of God. With what poignancy he exclaims to the Colossians his concern for them that 'their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the fullness of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ' (Colossians 2:2). It was for this that Paul longed and laboured, not simply that man himself might be safe, but that God might be glorified, and that glory was to be revealed only in the church. This, surely, is the force of the great ascription of praise with which Paul ends Ephesians 3: "Unto Him be glory in the church."

On meeting the elders of the Ephesian assembly at Miletus Paul reminds them, "I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God." This is a remark from which we could learn much in these days. There is a lamentable lack of fullness in the teaching of the things of God, and there are certain truths of the Word which, down through the centuries, at times seem to have been almost completely lost. Surely one of Satan's most successful ruses has been to keep people content with half a gospel, a most important half maybe, but only half nevertheless. Christianity has suffered for many centuries from an uncomplemented emphasis on the negative, escape aspect of the gospel, that the work of Christ means deliverance from the penalty of sin. The criticism of this is not that it is wrong but that it is incomplete. If salvation means anything at all, it must be more than relief at an escape from the consequences of the past; it must set our eyes on the goal of the glory of God which is to be realised in the establishment of God's order among the redeemed. God's emphasis to Abram was not that He wanted to take him out of Haran, but that He wanted to take him into Canaan.

Evangelism, in the commonly accepted meaning of the term, is not an end in itself, and it is because this fact has been practically, if not theoretically overlooked, that the result of so much preaching of the gospel remains unconserved. People make a profession of faith in Christ, so they are left 'to the churches,' and it is becoming increasingly evident that 'the churches' have very little idea what the church is all about. The feverish activity of ecumenicalism has brought very pointedly to the fore the question, "What is the church?" This question may be very far from being scripturally answered within the ecumenical circle, but its being asked at all has demonstrated the extent to which, in the past, the conception of the church has been buried under a mountain of human tradition, and it is also a tacit admission to the possibility that maybe much that goes by the name of Christianity in these days is not the church after all. It can hardly be said that Paul's ministry suffered from this lack of clarity. On the contrary, his understanding of the 'whole counsel of God' was clear and full. The ultimate purpose of preaching the gospel of redemption was not the emergence of a human organisation, but that God Himself should fuse together those whom He had redeemed, and work out His will in and through them. That fusion is the church, and the sum of God's great purpose is the mystery.

The very first verse of chapter three shows us something of the implacable opposition which the revelation of the mystery arouses in the heart of man. Paul in fact, writing from Rome, states that it was the reason for his imprisonment. In his letter to the Colossians he repeats this assertion. "Withal praying for us also that God may open unto us a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds" (Colossians 4:3). How this actually came about we can easily see from the account of Paul's experiences in Acts 21-22.

Dragged out of the temple in Jerusalem and almost beaten to death, he was rescued by the Roman authorities and, from the steps of the castle, made his defence to the Jews. When the crowd heard that he spoke in Hebrew there was silence. He recounted to them his experience as a Jew, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of his day, and zealously persecuting the followers of Christ. They listened attentively as he told how he had been present at the martyrdom of Stephen, how then he met, on the Damascus road, the Lord whom he had been persecuting, and how that same Lord had commissioned him to be a witness of what he had seen and heard. It was when Paul stated that the commission included also the Gentiles that the uproar broke out again with even greater fury, and the Roman soldiers quickly hustled their captive indoors to ensure his safety (Acts 22:21-24). This was the beginning of the imprisonment which led Paul ultimately, as a Roman citizen, to exercise his right of appeal to the Emperor Caesar, for which purpose he was eventually taken to Rome.

The Jews were ready to listen attentively to much of the apostle's experience, but immediately he touched their pride of community, their opposition was fierce and relentless. They would listen with respect to the recounting of his own experience, but they could not tolerate the thought that, through that experience, God was laying an axe at the root of all their proudly and jealously guarded traditions.

Opposition to the church may take different forms today, but it is no less widespread and no less fierce than ever. One of its main strongholds is within Christendom itself which, from early times, has accommodated itself to man's pride in giving place to heathen traditions and in some places has even allowed the growth of congregations on the basis of community distinctions. But this is what man, by nature, wants. The so-called church in the world today is based largely on tradition of one kind or another, of ritual, of community, of the ministry of some great man, tradition of which it is inordinately proud. Yet the basis of the true church, as the Ephesian letter is continually showing us, is life in Christ, before which no human tradition can stand. It is little wonder, therefore, that the proclamation of the mystery is resisted on every hand. It must inevitably be so. The church, the mystery as set forth in the Word of God, can never find a popular place in the gallery of human religion, because it can never exist where man wants to exert his human ideas and control; it can only exist where there are people who are totally cast upon the grace of God, and who recognise that the best in human nature (and what is tradition but man's attempt to crystallise what he feels to be the best in human nature?) is a complete failure. The basis of tradition is pride; the basis of the church is Christ. The two can never go together.

A secondary but related reason that the presentation of the church is always destined to opposition is that it curtails, as man thinks, his liberty. The church, as we have already seen in some of the illustrations used in chapter two, means responsibility and service. Not only, man instinctively feels, will regeneration through Christ fuse him with people with whom he does not want to be associated, but it will bring him into a place of inevitable responsibility towards them. To the ordinary person of the world this adds injury to insult. Is not this, he thinks, bondage of the worst order? A person may willingly subject himself to every conceivable type of inconvenience in order to render service to a man of status, and consider it all a privilege. If, however, he is asked to undergo a fraction of that inconvenience for some poor and unknown person who yet may have a much greater need and be much more deserving of service, he will consider it an imposition on his time, resources and freedom. There are many who are willing to serve God and others provided they themselves lay down the conditions of service. The church is where God's people serve Him and one another on His conditions of service. Man thus has no choice in the matter. Choice is relegated to God, and it is in subjection to Him that real freedom lies. Because this subjection is so foreign to man, he must ever oppose the church so

vehemently. It seems to turn every human law which has been the stay of human society from time immemorial upside down. Natural man has no alternative but to array himself against it, which of itself only shows again that the church must be brought into being by the grace and mighty power of God.

Paul's being entrusted with the revelation of the mystery was a privilege which brought along with it an increasing sense of his own unworthiness. That such an honour and responsibility should be granted to him only leads him to exclaim, "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given." The heart of a humble Paul was a ready and fit lodging place for God's greatest treasure. Paul was under no illusions as to his own ability to be a guardian of spiritual truth. He had none. His sufficiency was all of God and would vanish the moment he took his eyes of dependence off the divine Guide. As a steward, therefore, he would handle with a measured care and purpose what had been committed to him, mindful ever that the purpose of his stewardship was that it should produce a like attitude of responsibility in others.

Paul makes two mentions of the stewardship of the mystery in the present passage: the first in vs. 2-3, the second in v. 9. Stewardship implies not a gift to be used as one pleases, but a trust to be guarded and used to a specific end. This trust had been given first to Paul himself as he says in vs. 2-3, and his duty was 'to make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery,' v. 9. Having accepted the responsibility of this trust, it was his duty to pass on that same sense of duty and responsibility to others. Knowledge is not an end in itself. A teacher teaches not to display how much he knows, nor simply to pass on what he knows to his students, but in order that his students might develop what they have received and pass it on to another generation for further development. The revelation of the mystery given to Paul was not something to be learned automatically, committed to memory and finished with; it was something to be worked out, and in its being worked out, to develop as the expression of Christ on the earth. This could only take place in a spirit of complete dependence upon the Lord. The spirit of 'I know it all' is death to any form of knowledge. To learn means to be dependent upon the source of instruction. Those who would be stewards of the mystery, therefore, must before anything else be endowed with a spirit of humility and subjection to Christ which in turn they pass on to God's household; otherwise the knowledge of the mystery will die out and the church cease to exist.

From whatever angle we view the question, pride in any form spells death to the church. Christ must be exalted, and where His rightful place is taken by another, the assembly cannot exist. How Satan contests the Lord's place of pre-eminence in the midst of His people! It was no doubt pride in some subtle form that ultimately became the downfall of the Ephesian church, maybe pride in the very light which God had given to them. Pride demonstrated in the guise of authoritative spiritual teaching will produce pride and insufferable bigotry as a result. Such an atmosphere is not conducive to the presence of the Lord who dwells 'with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit' (Isaiah 57:15).

In his parable on the subject of stewardship recorded in Luke 12, our Lord lays down some basic principles for those who are charged with the custody of divine things. A steward is first faithful and wise (Luke 12:42) and according to his capacity receives authority to dispense what is given into his charge. Faithfulness and wisdom, that is, subjection to Christ and spiritual understanding, however weak it may initially be, are the marks of those who are in Christ, and bring with them the responsibility to dispense these same qualities to the household of God. Faithfulness in this responsibility in subjection to Christ brings greater understanding and an increase in spiritual authority (Luke 12:42). Here we have the circle of divine activity, responsibility, faithfulness, authority, all born

and fostered in the unquestioning acceptance of Christ as supreme.

The stewardship of the mystery leaves us with a picture of the assembly growing together in the knowledge and likeness of Christ, each member both giving and receiving, and all under the authority of the Lord. Paul gives beautiful expression to this spirit when introducing himself to the Romans. "For I long to see you," he says (Romans 1:11-12), "that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I with you may be comforted in you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine." The great Paul was not going to Rome to dominate the assembly scene and to impart to the poor Romans who knew so little something from his own vast store of knowledge. He was but a steward of what God had given him, as they also were stewards of what God had given them. He was going to edify and to be edified. If the Romans needed him, he needed them just as much, and his sense of the stewardship of the mystery had taught him that we are able to teach in proportion to our willingness to be taught.

What is the purpose of the revelation of the mystery? It is that principalities and powers in heavenly places might know the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 2:10). Peter tells us that we are heirs to an inheritance in the gospel 'which things angels desire to look into' (I Peter 1:12). The church is to be a witness before powers both earthly and heavenly of God's skill and wisdom. It is not simply a testimony to what man has received, great though that may be, but to what God has done, the greatest of His power and majesty. It is He who receives the glory in the church.

Chapter 9: Fellowship and Witness

The latter section of chapter three is taken up with another great prayer in which Paul gathers together what he has already said and prays for its fulfilment in the Ephesian assembly.

All that has already been explained may appear to be so humanly impossible, yet if it is impossible today it was no more possible in the times of the apostles. 'The riches of His glory' (v. 16) provided an inexhaustible supply to meet every spiritual need. Is God, who has lavished grace and mercy upon His hapless and hopeless creation in order to bring them back from the dead, going to allow them to flounder forever in the confusions and uncertainties of a spiritual adolescence? Not at all. He longs to 'make known the riches of His glory' (Romans 9:28). Full stature is the Lord's aim, and He has made every provision for spiritual growth that we might be 'strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,' v. 16.

Spiritual health means spiritual renewal. The physical body has a remarkable capacity for renewing itself. Why this renewing process ultimately slows down and the body dies is a phenomenon for which medical science has been able to discover no adequate natural reason, and it is to this capacity that the body owes its span of continued vitality. In the spiritual realm, however, there need be no such decay. "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day," says Paul to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 4:16), and no less in the spiritual realm is our spiritual freshness dependent on this constant renewing work of the Holy Ghost. So Paul again draws attention to the need of development which is a factor so vital to the whole life of the church. Not a past experience but a present consciousness of God's moving within is the key that unlocks the door into the fullness of God's purposes.

This spiritual renewal must manifest itself in two ways: in individual stability, and in a love and concern which is the root of our relationship in the assembly into which we have been brought through

grace. Personal loyalty and obedience to Christ is the prelude to His dwelling in our hearts through faith (v. 16). "If a man love Me he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (John 14:23). Nothing can take the place of that inner devotion to Christ through which the course of our lives remains settled and established in Him. A life bereft of communion with the Lord must be an unspiritual life, joyless, empty and barren.

Already in Paul's prayer of chapter one we have heard his thanksgiving that the Ephesians were a people of personal faith and love to the saints. It is the establishment of these same two things which forms the subject of his intercession in ch. 3 v. 17. God's people must be wedded in their devotion to the church, not bound by a loyalty so frail as to snap at the slightest provocation. Whatever the trials, the difficulties, the adjustments, the church is our place. It is the one means through which God desires to reveal Himself to us and to the world; He has bound us together in the assembly and we are committed to it even as to God Himself. In the strength of that devotion to the Lord and to His people we are made ready to 'be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length, and height and depth' (v. 18).

Just as Paul concluded his argument in chapter one with the fullness of Christ, so again here he reminds us that a comprehension of that fullness will be entered into only 'with all the saints.' The context makes it perfectly clear that 'all the saints' were those whom God had gathered together in a particular locality, in this case Ephesus, to form a working relationship in the local church, or those, of course, whom the Lord should bring into their midst in the course of the ministry and from whom the assembly could receive practical profit. This is further substantiated in the great ascription of praise with which the chapter concludes: "Unto Him be the glory in the church." The only church known upon the earth to the New Testament was the local body of believers. Where allusion is made to more than one company, the plural 'churches' is used, as when Paul addresses the churches of Galatia: "Unto the churches of Galatia: grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:2-3). The word 'church' is never used as it so commonly is today, to denote the sum total of all who profess allegiance to Christ. Whatever the end may be for which Paul prays, it is an end to be realised wherever people meet in relationship and faithfulness to Christ.

Why is the assembly so important for the revelation of the fullness of the Lord? There are two main reasons. Firstly, no one individual, however saintly, can contain the glory of God. One day, Scripture tells us, we shall be like Him, but that day is not yet. The limitations of human nature are all too evident even in those most advanced in the way of truth. It is not in one individual but in the company of saints that we can see all the graces of God.

Secondly, and most important, however, is that any of the virtues of the indwelling Christ we may possess through the Spirit's work of regeneration can only be expressed in our relationship with other people. If God by His grace has, in regeneration, imparted the nature of Christ to His people, that nature can never be revealed in isolation. The grace and truth that filled our Lord were expressed in His relationship with those amongst whom He lived and walked, and pre-eminently in His relationship with His disciples, for in them He found not only a willing acceptance, but also a response to the grace and truth which flowed out from Him to them. Suppose some believer, anxious to devote his life to the things of God, were to cloister himself in some mountain cave and spend his years in solitary meditation, it were meaningless to call him either gracious or truthful. Neither has he anyone upon whom to bestow his grace nor anyone whom his words of truth can edify. Whatever his inner nature may be, all his good qualities are left without the possibility of expression. They remain hidden,

because he is cut off from all relationship with others. Drawn together with the family of God in the fellowship of the assembly, the varying needs make their different demands upon the nature of Christ imparted to us. Forming the background of this opportunity for the expression and development of the spiritual life is a unity and sense of responsibility to one another which is impossible in the foreignness of any worldly association, and which fosters the response and joy of a full-orbed family relationship.

One who travels soon finds that there is a glory and fellowship amongst the Lord's people which is to be found nowhere else, and from this quality of divine life has little difficulty in distinguishing what is the church from what is not. Wherever one may go, even amongst people of different race, language and custom, the child of God who has learned to appreciate the fellowship of the saints will always feel at home in the church. Down through the ages men have sought to formulate statements of belief and practice in order to define the church, but leaving all these aside, there is an indefinable witness of the Spirit which immediately draws together those who are in Christ, and immediately separates those who are not. It is a witness that seldom errs, and does so only when some human factor is brought in to confuse dependence upon God. "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

The end of this relationship in the assembly is two-fold, as Paul points out in v. 19: to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and to be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Love of one another is but a prelude to our entering into a deeper appreciation of the love of God. The love of God must win a response in the hearts of His people. "We love because He first loved us," says John (I John 4:19). Here is probably the greatest of all reasons for the existence of the church: that God should find a response to His love which will be returned to Him again. Without such a response, love is incomplete. God loved the world, but that of itself is not the end; it cannot be. If it were, it would be a love which accomplishes no purpose and is joyless and static. Parents may love a rebellious son, but their love is received with coldness and no return of affection. Their love, therefore, brings not joy and satisfaction, but sorrow and frustration. It is so far purposeless for it has found no response in the one upon whom it is lavished. Only when it has found that response will it be full and joyous. Such also is the love of God. It cannot remain defeated, and it finds its victory, its response, in the church, where God reproduces His love in the hearts of His own people and it is returned to Him again. In the assembly the Lord finds a place where He and His people dwell together, where both love and are loved. To describe this relationship in the assembly Paul has, as it were, to go beyond the bounds of words. "Which passeth knowledge," he says (v. 19), giving but another indication of a quality of life which is so far beyond the attainment of this world but is possible in the Spirit.

What has been said of God's love and its finding a response in the assembly is true also of every other spiritual grace. Every virtue, unless it be purposeless, must find a response by reproducing itself in the lives of those to whom it is shown. The fruit of the Spirit, therefore, finds in the association of the assembly not only a means of giving expression to itself but also ground in which it can reproduce itself. The means of expression it may find in its relationship to the world, but the ground of response it can find only in the church. It is here alone that every spiritual quality can find its consummation, and the glory of God can be revealed.

The second aim of the assembly, as we have already noticed in v. 19, is that we 'may be filled unto all the fullness of God.' To whatever heights Paul may take us, he never takes us beyond the need of further spiritual progress. The church may reflect the glory of God, but it is a glory which requires to

be reflected ever more perfectly. To the Corinthians Paul writes, "but we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Spirit which is the Lord" (II Corinthians 3:18 marg.). A mirror will reflect the light of the sun, but if the glass is soiled it will do so very imperfectly. Given a cursory rub it will reflect light a little better, washed the reflection will be brighter still, polished the sun's rays will be reflected with yet greater intensity. The church is in a very similar position. At times its reflection of the Lord's glory is very poor indeed, yet the Spirit is never absent from His cleansing and polishing work. The assembly, as it progresses in divine things under the hand of God's Spirit, must reflect the image of Christ from glory to glory, till one day, when the last spot and blemish is removed, the fullness of the Lord will shine forth in all His greatness.

The chapter closes with Paul's great and familiar ascription of praise. He is quite aware that after the great and lofty purpose which he has set before us we might be tempted to fall back in despair, so he presents us to 'Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us' (v. 20). What he has told us may be more than we would care to ask or even dream to be possible, but after all, are our lives still dictated by the powerless power of man, or are they under the control of God? If He worketh in us, is He unable to fulfil His purposes, or are all our protestations of faith but empty words? Wrote Paul to the Colossians, "I labour also, striving according to His working, which worketh in me in power" (Colossians 1:29). We have seen over and over again how one of the salient features of Paul's life was his humility and dependence upon the Lord. Yet the realisation of his own weakness never engulfed the working of God in him. God's power dominated his thinking and stirred him up to labour alongside his invincible Master. A powerless vessel, he did not pull into land, but thrust himself into the stream of the power of God which would carry him on to the goal.

"Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (v. 21). The church transcends the ages. There is something in the relationship of the assembly which is timeless; it is never going to pass away. What we see on earth may be a faint glimmer of what will be revealed in heaven, but it is light nevertheless, and it is the fullest light of the glory of God that this world can know. Our Lord Himself prayed that the oneness of His people might be the witness to Him in the world (John 17:22-23) and it is in the assembly that that oneness is expressed.

In modern Christianity the scriptural concept of the church has largely been replaced by denominationalism and sectarianism, a great, mixed multitude of religious professors very far removed from the assembly we have been considering in this epistle. While some children of God are fully aware of the difference between the true and the false and how far the present systems are a departure from the simplicity of the Scripture, yet they feel that, rather than see God bring the church together as He did in New Testament times, the main responsibility of those who are born again is to remain as a savouring influence within the systems which have a name to live but are dead. How shall they receive the witness of the gospel otherwise, runs the argument, and cannot the Lord use the testimony of His people to bring life where there is death? With such reasoning, the church as revealed in the Word is relegated to a place of little importance, as something impractical in the present age, and the individual believer is established as the Lord's sole means of witness to the world.

A cursory review of church history would show that while there have certainly been revivals within established Christianity, these have burned brightly for a time, usually a comparatively short time, and have died down again, leaving everything much as it was before, with little permanent effect on the

groups in which they originally took place. The general principle of God's working has been different, nearly always involving a separation from the 'church' which has fallen into declension, and it is through this continually separated testimony down through the ages that one can trace the main stream of God's purposes. The church separated may have lacked the spectacular effect of revival outpourings, but, on the other hand, it has been characterised by a solidity and consistency of testimony through which countless numbers have been brought into a deep and lasting experience of regeneration, an experience which has gone on to reproduce itself in others. Separation is a very unpopular word these days, but as we have seen amply demonstrated already in this epistle, if the church contains the life of Christ it cannot be other than different from everything else around it, and if organised Christianity is so far divorced from the Spirit of our Lord that it demonstrates only the ingenuity of man to popularise himself in a godless world, then the church must be separate from that also.

That the individual believer is meant to be a vital witness to his Lord is a fact that no true child of God will dispute. Yet the Scripture gives a very special place to the church as the supreme testimony to Christ in the world. Why this is so has just been the subject of our examination. That this should so largely cease to have been recognised and the so-called church become, as in the majority of cases it has, simply a field of evangelism, can only be regarded as a most serious loss to the whole cause of Christ. Organised Christianity is, no doubt, a very needy field for the proclamation of the gospel, but that is not what the church was ever intended to be. The church is the spiritual powerhouse from which the whole impetus of evangelism in the world is to be directed; it is itself the light and witness of God's power and God's order, and nothing else can take its place.

That the vast and needy field of organised Christianity would remain untouched by the witness of the gospel should the people of God feel the urge of the Spirit gathering them together in the fellowship of the assembly is borne out neither by history nor by present-day facts. This would certainly be so if the church were only a comfortable little clique living unto itself, but this is just what the church is not, as we have seen clearly from what we have already considered of the Ephesian epistle.

It is recorded of our Lord, "And He could not be hid" (Mark 7:24). Spiritual life cannot hide itself. It will have an inevitable effect on its surroundings. This is abundantly clear in the life of the early church as we read through the Acts of the Apostles. It is clear also from the history of the church down through the ages. The voice of Martin Luther was not silenced because he at times stood alone, a renegade from the Roman system to which he had once owed allegiance. The early followers of John Wesley did not at once lose their witness when they were ostracised from the established 'church.' A small group of godly men who met quietly round the Lord in an insignificant little room in the city of Dublin early in the last century did not remain long in obscurity. The life of the Spirit was in their midst, and it spread like a fire throughout the country and ultimately throughout the world. The life of the Spirit cannot be hid, and the testimony of brethren dwelling together in unity has a potency and an effect which can reach behind doors most securely closed against the gospel of redeeming grace. The same can be demonstrated today in not a few parts of the world.

Man, even regenerated man, alas, may recoil at the thought of being ostracised by those who give lip-allegiance to Christ, yet our Lord suffered outside the religious camp of His day, and we are called upon to follow Him there, bearing His reproach. His separation unto the will of God brought about the triumph of the gospel. Our separation unto the will of God will be the road to a like victory. The principle of the Lord remains, "Unto Him be the glory *in the church.*"

Chapter 10: Principle and Pattern

Every privilege brings with it a corresponding responsibility. So far in Ephesians we have been concentrating on our spiritual privileges. From chapter four to the end, Paul deals with our responsibilities. Truth is meant to be obeyed, and if faith remains untranslated into practical living, it is worthless. As James so pointedly reminds us, "Faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). In chapters four to six Paul ranges over practically every aspect of human relationship, demonstrating how the life of Christ must radically affect our walk. First of all, however, he deals with the working of the church. This important section extends to the sixteenth verse of chapter four.

As we have already seen, Christ's life must be practically expressed through His body which is the church. Principle and pattern are both important in the fulfilment of God's aim, so it is fitting that, after expounding the spiritual principles which underlie all of God's dealings, we should move on to a consideration of the pattern which gives them expression. We should note that Paul deals with the principle first and the pattern afterwards. Unless there is a firm basis of spiritual life and understanding, the pattern can be worse than useless. Man's tendency is to work in the opposite direction, and even the persistent question, "But how does this work out practically?" can be dangerous if, as it so often does, it fixes our concentration upon the mechanics of church building instead of upon the Lord. The New Testament pattern for the church is not something that can be applied by anyone with the technical 'know-how.' It is something that grows in the Spirit in proportion to light and obedience. Erecting a building or establishing the observance of the Lord's table or a certain mode of gathering has never yet made a church. Without a burning vision of the Lord's way, and the urge of the Spirit to obey, any pattern will remain but an empty sham.

If therefore, the work of the cross has gripped us, the work of personal regeneration, the work of reconciling the irreconcilable in the assembly, the prospect of Christ's glorifying Himself in the midst of His people--if that is so, the apostle would tell us, then walk and strive in that light. "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (ch. 4 v. 1).

Walking means effort and exercise, but it produces health and stamina. This is equally true of physical exercise and the spiritual walk. The young Christian who learns early to practice and witness to what he knows of Christ will quickly develop; otherwise he will remain a spiritual weakling. But above all else, the walk in the Spirit means a fixed purpose. Already we have seen something of this in considering the hope which is so essential a part of spiritual progress. Yet so many believers have little or no conception of the purpose of their salvation. How our lives need to be vitalised afresh by an understanding of the great goal which lies before us, and by that resolute determination in the Spirit to press on towards it. "This one thing I do....I press on toward the goal," writes the apostle Paul (Philippians 3:13) in what, for all he knew, would be the last letter he would ever write, cast into a Roman gaol to wait the call of martyrdom.

Then follow some of the characteristics of the spiritual walk: lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and love. They were characteristics abundantly portrayed in the life of the apostle himself. How Paul emphasises the need for humility, not only in this epistle, but throughout his writings, for well he knew that the root of every carnal division, every dissension, every evil, is pride. "Put on....humility, meekness, longsuffering," he exhorts the Colossians (Colossians 3:12). The force of these exhortations comes out as we go on to consider God's order for the assembly with which Paul deals in succeeding verses. If humility is absent, the whole of God's order becomes a mockery or a shambles. The

testimony of a humble life pursuing the goal of God's glory in the church will do more by far to promote the divine order for the assembly than all the self-assured, though accurate, declarations of scriptural principle. Paul never shunned a forthright proclamation of the message committed to him, nor hesitated in a downright condemnation of error wherever he encountered it, but he knew that unless, first of all, the vitality and fellowship of the church was declared by his life, or his life itself was a judgement of any sub-spiritual standard in the assembly, his preaching would simply produce hypocrisy, and his judgements would produce a like censorious and bitter spirit which would rebound on him again.

Humility and love are inseparable. A proud spirit is immediate death to mutual forbearance, love's practical expression. This is the reason for the order in which Paul mentions the graces of verse two. It is all the more important to recognise this when we understand what love really entails. Love is not simply a blind acceptance of one another which overlooks every sin and weakness. On the contrary, love must have as its background a standard of the character of God, and have as its aim that one another be conformed to that standard. Love entails judgement as well as grace. Thus the gospel of redemption means not only the salvation of those who accept Christ, but also the judgement of those who reject. Love, at one and the same time, means the exaltation of good and the condemnation of evil. Paul explains this precisely to Timothy when he writes, "But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." That means to say, love must be the product of a heart free from self and pride and any ulterior motive; it must be the product of a conscience which will be satisfied with nothing less than the righteous standard of a holy God; it must be characterised by strength and persistence of faith to see that standard realised, whatever difficulties may be encountered. Nothing less will maintain life and stability in the assembly.

Paul was well aware that the unity of the assembly would be contested by Satan with every means at his disposal. He also fully recognised that the unity of the Spirit is not something which is automatically preserved. Our individual spiritual lives, or our relationship with one another, are not in the nature of a machine which God winds up and mechanically ticks over till it runs down. In every sphere of life God's order is that the full realisation of His purpose should be found in co-operation between man and Himself. A simple flower growing wild on the hillside can be developed into something of exquisite beauty through the co-operation of man with nature. Similarly in the spiritual realm, the practical realisation of the church and the maintenance of its oneness requires effort and the very fullest co-operation by God's people in His purpose. "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit," says Paul (v. 3). If God's people were only more aware of the importance of the church and the Satanic opposition arrayed against it, they would be in a much better position to resist the subtleties of the accuser of the brethren.

It is significant that the occasion for the writing of so many of the epistles was the threat of actual division, if in fact division did not already exist, at least in heart. Corinth, Philippi, and the assemblies of Galatia were all assailed in this manner. Another significant fact is that Paul should have thought it necessary to give such an elementary warning to the assembly at Ephesus which was probably one of the strongest and most mature of all. In doing so he gives salutary recognition to the insidiousness of the enemy who is not deterred from his efforts to foster division even by the strength and solidity of the children of God. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12).

In vs. 4-6 Paul deals with the unifying factors of the body, beginning with its heavenly and eternal aspects, and then coming down to the practical working of the body in its local character on earth.

We have already emphasised that the only church known upon the earth to the New Testament is the local congregation of believers. Similarly the body, in its earthly expression, is local and practical. "Now ye are the body of Christ," says Paul (I Corinthians 12:27), writing to the company which gathered in the Greek city of Corinth. Yet, another fact which has also been mentioned already, the church or the body transcends time. It is a great heavenly and eternal fact which it has pleased God to express upon earth. The church or body, therefore, upon the earth, is not earthly; it is the expression of something whose origin is in heaven--the incarnation, as it were, of the eternal body, just as God's people are meant to be the incarnation of the indwelling and eternal Word, Christ. If we recognise this clearly, we shall be kept from falling into the fatal error to which so many children of God are a prey, that of regarding the body as purely spiritual, a tie of common allegiance which theoretically unites those in Christ, but has little, if any, practical expression.

From the heavenly view, God's view, there is one body, and included in that body is every regenerate soul of every age. On the other hand, wherever that heavenly body is expressed on earth in the gathering together of God's regenerate children, there is still one body. This expression of the body is local, real, practical and complete. It is not less than the body; it is the body. For the human mind to reconcile completely these two aspects of the church is impossible. We must accept them as another of the great paradoxes of Scripture, just as we find it impossible to reconcile God's foreknowledge and man's free will, yet must agree that both find an unmistakable place in the Word of God.

Our recognition of the heavenly body has a very decisive effect upon our outlook within the local church. "There is one body," says Paul (v. 4) and that means both that there is one heavenly body and also that there is one legitimate expression of that body upon the earth. It will be noted how Paul links together the fact of the body and the Spirit. The Spirit of God is a person and indivisible, and cannot be the originator of a divided testimony. The work of the Spirit is, on the contrary, always to unite. "In one Spirit were we baptised into one body," we read in I Corinthians 12:13, and Paul recoils at the very thought of the divisions of Corinth portraying a Christ who is divided. The consciousness of the life of the Spirit, as we have seen in so many different ways, is the ground upon which the church is established, and all who belong to the heavenly body should find their place in that practical expression of the body upon the earth. The church must always be looking beyond the circle of its gathering to those who are unquestionably part of the eternal body and who, therefore, ought to be part of the local expression. With all who are alike bought with the precious blood of Christ we are one; we belong together. But that is not sufficient; we must also *be* together, drawn into oneness by the power of the Spirit in the joy of the possession of a common life.

In Ephesus we find this practically worked out. There, there was one church established upon the basis of life in Christ, and no other, for God neither knows nor recognises any other. Paul vividly demonstrates this in writing to the Corinthians who were divided over their allegiance to different teachers or doctrines. His point in writing was not that what Apollos, Peter or he himself had taught was wrong (I Corinthians 1:12-13) but that none of these things were a legitimate ground for Christian gathering. Paul, therefore, condemns the whole situation in the strongest possible terms. The spirit of sectarianism or denominationalism can never contain the body, neither can it contribute anything to the building of the body, for it is the complete antithesis of the spirit of life in Christ. Once we have known something of the vision of the body, the spirit of 'my fellowship,' 'our group,' or differentiating between the Lord's people becomes abhorrent. To those who have tasted the fellowship of the church, sectarianism and the constrictions of denominationalism are intolerable. The basis of the church is the

consciousness of a common life in the Spirit, and the Spirit gathers together on no other ground.

Denominations cannot be organised together to make the body, neither can rival factions in what was once a church be cajoled into uniting on a basis of life. The establishing of the church is, from the first to last, the work of God through the Spirit, and the church exists where men and women know they have received spiritual life and for that reason alone come together, welcoming all whom the Lord should add unto them as part of the eternal body and, therefore, belonging to its one expression upon the earth, the assembly. There is one body, vitalised and united by one Spirit. Are we part of that expression of the heavenly body? This is the question we must ask ourselves. To come onto the ground of the church is our foremost privilege and responsibility. Then we must see God add to the church. It is not the commission of God's people to try to change into expressions of the heavenly body the multifarious groups that men have built, any more than it was the duty of the disciples to make assemblies out of the congregations in the synagogues of their day. The Lord is the founder and builder of His church; our part is to be labourers together with Him in it.

In the final section of v. 4 Paul further adds, "Ye were called in one hope of your calling." Already we have seen something of the importance of hope in the life of God's people and of the assembly. Our hope, the consummation of our redemption, is directed to that day when God will have fulfilled in us all that He has purposed in order that we might be fitted to share His glory. Our hope is the final emergence of the new man in the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, or as Paul says in writing to the Thessalonians, "that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 1:12).

But as the body is one and the Spirit is one, so also is the hope. There is but one hope, vitalising and unifying, which must be found within the assembly. This alone is a resounding condemnation of sectarianism, for all sectarianism is based upon some objective which is secondary to the hope to 'win Christ' which was the passion of the apostle Paul and of the early churches. Those secondary aims may not, of themselves, be wrong. On the contrary, they may be completely worthy and scriptural objectives, but how often they form within devoted groups of God's people an occupation with something good which hinders the attainment of something higher. The good is often the greatest enemy of the best. In the church there is room for all that is of the Spirit, be it an emphasis on holy living, the constant need of the Spirit's working, the testimony of baptism, or a multitude of other precious truths, but immediately people start gathering round one of the facets of the faith, and consider their particular gathering as a special testimony to a particular truth, the expression of the church as the body of Christ becomes impossible.

From these three great and eternal facts--one body, one Spirit, one hope--which give the church its inner power and impetus, Paul moves on in v. 5 to three things which characterise the church's outward life and testimony--one Lord, one faith, one baptism. In chapter two we have seen how surrender to the lordship of Christ is one of the prerequisites of new life. Here we see that a life lived in constant surrender to the lordship of Christ is a mark of the assembly. Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, significantly gives precedence to the title 'Lord' when he says, "God hath made Him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Every aspect of our spiritual lives, individual or corporate, is dependent upon our recognition of Him as supreme, and where Christ is owned as Lord there is no room for any display of human ability. The lordship of Christ should so overshadow the life of the church that the humble dependence of God's people upon Him should be an open testimony before the world. In a surrendered will we have the essential basis of spiritual progress. "If any man willeth to do His will he

shall know of the doctrine," said Christ (John 7:17). We are in a position to discern the things of the Spirit and to respond to God's revelation in faith only when our wills are subjected to Him. Faith, therefore, is a direct result of yielding to the lordship of Christ.

Faith is the manward side of our relationship with God. It itself is a gift, as Paul has already told us in ch. 2 v. 8. The writer to the Hebrews tells us (Hebrews 12:2) that God is its author and perfecter. The confidence of faith should characterise our every action. This is the meaning of what must appear to some to be one of Paul's most sweeping statements, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Here is the point at which faith becomes a testimony. To act in faith is simply to do something implicitly believing that God will honour what has been done. We can easily see how practical an effect faith should have on the smallest details of daily living. How many of our actions would stand condemned if we were to apply the simple test, "Is this being done on faith?" Yet a walk characterised by this faith should be the normal experience of the church. Besides this, faith is spoken of in the Scriptures as the source of boldness in witness (II Corinthians 4:13), as the exclusion of all pride and boasting (Romans 3:27), as our victory over the world (I John 5:4), and as our protection against Satanic wiles (Ephesians 6:16). Each and all of these, the fruits of faith, are a testimony to the world around of a life on a higher plane.

A recognition of the lordship of Christ and the resultant walk of faith leads naturally to the third characteristic of a Christian testimony, 'one baptism.' Baptism, of course, means much more than the outward symbolic rite. The rite of itself is pointless unless it leads to a deeper understanding of its meaning and implications. We know that baptism speaks of identification with our Lord, death to the old ways, burial, and resurrection in newness of life, but what does that mean in terms of our practical, everyday walk?

A number of times our Lord spoke to His disciples of His baptism, meaning not the ceremony which he had accepted at the hands of John, but signifying His rejection and suffering. "Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?" He asked them. "And they said unto Him, We are able. And Jesus said unto them, The cup that I drink ye shall drink; and with the baptism that I am baptised withal shall ye be baptised" (Mark 10:38-39). The life of our Lord was the scene of an implacable spiritual conflict. His subjection to the will of the Father and faith cut across every standard of the world, and the resultant baptism of rejection and suffering was inevitable. The divine life of Christ meant spiritual warfare. Our identification with Him will mean the same. "Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division," He said to His disciples (Luke 12:5). The work of Christ both unites and separates. It unites those who are in Him; it separates His own from the world. 'One baptism' implies the readiness of the church to be separate, identified with her Lord in His rejection and conflict with the forces of earth. It implies also a willingness to be identified with Christ in His victory over carnal forces which would divide and would bring the differences of earth right into the midst of the assembly. "As many of you as were baptised into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28). To cling to the distinctions of community and class which the world holds dear, or to plead these distinctions for some temporal advantage, is a sin against the cross of Christ, and a denial of the very life which we have in Him. As Paul so emphatically tells us, in Christ there are no such distinctions. The work of the cross has banished them all and brought victory by fusing the children of God into one man in Christ Jesus. To stand firm on that ground will, without doubt, bring the condemnation and rejection of the world, but there is no other stand possible for the redeemed, and 'one baptism' signifies that we are

ready to stand just there, with Christ, outside the camp, bearing His reproach and shame and, if need be, His sufferings also.

Verse 6 brings a further echo of this same subject, demonstrating the sheer impossibility of God's people giving any recognition to human distinctions in the fellowship of the assembly. There is 'one God and Father of all.' God, the creator, made this world a harmonious whole for the revelation of His glory. This harmony was destroyed at the fall, but is restored in the new creation in Christ. The church, the manifestation of the new creation, should exemplify the harmony of God's creation which was His original purpose. Anything which tends to disharmony is abhorrent both to God and to the purpose of the assembly. It is a denial of the whole intention of God in making this world. Similarly, the fatherhood of God unites us in relationship to Him, and the acceptance of human distinctions is a denial of the relationship we profess to own. Where this is not clearly recognised and accepted as an intrinsic part of our spiritual lives there can never be blessing within the church. The Lord is over all, and through all, and in all, but this pre-eminence of the divine will in every aspect of our being is possible only on the basis of our recognising 'one God and Father of all' with all that implies in our relationship with one another as God's people.

The latter section of v. 6 gives remarkable testimony to the sovereignty of God, dominating also the external circumstances which affect the church's testimony. Gamaliel, in advising the council on their treatment of the apostles, aptly warned them that it is impossible to overthrow the purposes of God (Acts 5:34-42). To this testifies the history of the church over nearly two thousand years, in spite of the persecutions and trials to which the church has constantly been subjected, and to which it continues to be subjected in different parts of the world. God rules the world in the interest of His church. He is above all, and nothing can ultimately thwart His plans. Neither are the circumstances of our daily walk beyond His control. "A man's goings are established of the Lord" (Psalm 37:23). This is the divine principle, whether it be in the life of the individual believer or in the life of the new man, the church. The answer to many of our problems comes when we reach that place where, in however adverse circumstances, we can say with assurance, "The Lord has brought me here for His glory. What does He want to teach me in this trial?" The presence and purpose of the Lord is manifest 'through all.' Furthermore, He is in active control of our beings, our inner sufficiency, whenever we recognise the total bankruptcy of self. "Our sufficiency is from God" (II Corinthians 3:5). Thus the life of the assembly is conditioned to perform its function in the world, pervaded, taught and protected by the Spirit of God in His own eternal interests.

Chapter 11: Grace and Gifts

Chapter 4:7-16 brings us to a most important and practical section of the epistle. Here we have the divine provision for the upbuilding of the assembly, and also the foundation upon which alone that provision can function effectively. Gift of itself is not sufficient. The Corinthian assembly came behind in no spiritual gift, but the life of the church was in a sorry state of degeneracy and confusion. What then is it that must come first? Paul tells us in v. 7. It is grace. Where there is gift there must also be grace, otherwise gift is useless. Grace is the foundation of our salvation. Grace is the foundation of the life of the church.

Grace was one of the two things which summed up the character of God manifest in the flesh. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us full of grace and truth," says John (John 1:14). Grace is the practice of love; truth is the practice of holiness. God, looking down upon the sin of the world, did not

love the world with a mere passive benevolence. His love moved Him into action. He so loved that He gave His Son. He poured out of Himself that we might be redeemed. He did not cling to the heavenly splendour which was His right, but emptied Himself of the last vestige of glory. He gave all that He had and was for us, for grace takes no account of self. The self-emptying of Christ, His suffering and death, is the supreme manifestation of the grace of God. Grace is selfless and triumphant. In his letter to the Romans Paul elaborates on the grace of God triumphing over the sin of man.

But the end of the grace of God is not simply that it should express His love to a fallen world. As we have already seen in our consideration of chapter three, any of the characteristics of the Christ life are incomplete unless they reproduce themselves in others. The love of God had to produce love in others or end in frustration and defeat. Love which does not find an echoing response in another heart brings not joy but sorrow. The purpose of God's grace, likewise, is not only to lift man out of the mire of sin, but to reproduce in him that same grace towards others. This is what Paul means in writing to the Corinthians when he says, "God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything may abound unto every good work" (II Corinthians 9:8). Unless the abounding of God's grace unto us produces in us an abounding of grace unto the household of faith, the use of the gifts becomes a fiasco, and the functioning of the assembly in life an impossibility.

How much havoc can be wrought in the church by gifted people who feel their talents can be useful to God, but who have never come to a practical realisation of His grace, who have never learned to spend and be spent for God's people. When our hearts yearn for the assembly as the Lord yearned over Jerusalem, when every sacrifice becomes a joy as the Lord rejoiced in going to the cross, when the grace of God fills us and, by divine compulsion, floods forth in a thirst-quenching, life-giving torrent, then and then alone can spiritual gift have any meaning, and the assembly be built up to fulfil its divinely allotted function. To use God's gifts we need to have God's character of grace transferred to us.

Not infrequently, people attempt to draw too hard and fast a distinction between natural and spiritual gifts, a distinction which Scripture never attempts to make. God, after all, is our Creator, and every natural talent we owe to Him. Each human ability in itself is a gift of God. We can never, therefore, afford to discount natural capabilities as of no account in the service of God. On the other hand, we know that human talent of itself is not equal to spiritual gift and can never do the work of God. The missing and all-important factor is grace. Natural gift plus grace may equal spiritual gift, but where grace is absent spiritual gift is dead.

The direct speech of v. 8 is a quotation from Psalm 68:18 to which Paul obviously refers as prophetic of the work of Christ. The parenthetic verses 9 and 10, inserted as a comment on v. 8, directly refer to the incarnation. The point here is that Christ, the Head of the church, is supremely equipped to give gifts unto men, since He knows the need from actual experience. The writer to the Hebrews deals with this subject at length, describing how our Lord became subject to all the limitations of mankind, and does, therefore, know every temptation with which His people may be confronted. Moreover, He fought and conquered Satan on his own ground and, having gained the victory, ascended to the right hand of the Father from where He rules as the church's Head. Thus God does not look down upon this earthly scene from a completely 'detached' standpoint. He feels for us as one who has been in the situation Himself. He has an intimate understanding of the needs of the assembly, and knows exactly what is necessary that the church might develop and be victorious in a world in which every power of earth and hell is arrayed against it. The Lord's provision is to 'fill all things' (v. 10) and in the gifts

which follow we have everything that is required to meet the need of the growth of the church in every age. God has not left the church half equipped. If only we learn to use aright what He has given, we will find there is no lack.

There are three passages in the New Testament which deal specifically with the giving of spiritual gifts: Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Of these, Ephesians 4 occupies a special place, for here we are dealing with a principle which is good for all time. The ascended Christ, as Head of the church, is establishing the spiritual pattern whereby the church is meant to function. The gifts of Ephesians 4 remain as the essential foundation upon which the superstructure of the assembly must be built. At varying times and in varying circumstances the Spirit may adapt these gifts to meet peculiar needs, but the five gifts enumerated in v. 11 form the complete and basic provision of God for the growth of the assembly. Nothing more is required, and nothing less is sufficient.

Romans and I Corinthians, on the other hand, deal with different aspects of spiritual gifts. In Romans, the emphasis is not on the nature of God's provision, but on the way in which the gifts can function effectively in the assembly. In I Corinthians the gifts are given not as directly from the ascended Lord, but as from the Spirit through whom God actually accomplishes His purposes on the earth. The gifts of I Corinthians 12, therefore, are the application of God's eternal provision by the Spirit to meet specific needs in a particular situation. This explains the long and varied list of gifts recounted in this latter epistle, and also explains their impermanence which Paul specifically states in I Corinthians 13:8.

The Spirit of God is not bound. He is ever ready to work in fresh ways in order to meet the varied requirements of any given situation. But we must not assume that an enabling granted by the Spirit to meet a particular need constitutes a spiritual gift which must be evidenced for all time. This is not so, and it is precisely here where many of God's people have gone astray. God, in the Ephesian epistle, has revealed the basic provision He has made for His church, and the Spirit of God can apply that provision in any way He pleases. (A cursory comparison of Scripture will show that every one of the gifts mentioned in Romans or I Corinthians can come under one of the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4). We are on safe ground only when we do not seek more than the Lord Himself has provided, and that provision, as the Word itself tells us, is 'to fill all things' (v. 10). It is complete.

Of the five gifts mentioned in v. 11 we need to be careful against attempting to draw too hard and fast lines of distinction between them. There are aspects of them all which are included in the others. While it may be obvious that one brother has a special gift of evangelism and another a gift of teaching, yet there is also a sense in which evangelism includes teaching and teaching includes evangelism, and the development of one gift may lead to the development of the other. We shall see more of this and its application a little later.

The five gifts can be divided into two groups: the first two, apostles and prophets; and the last three, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The authority we have for making this distinction is in ch. 2 v. 20 where we are told that the church is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,' and also ch. 3 v. 5 where Paul says that the apostles and prophets were the special recipients of God's revelation. To understand aright the place of these two gifts, therefore, we must keep in mind their connection with the foundation of the church and the completion of the canon of Scripture with the revelation of the mystery. Paul obviously gives them a special place as foundational ministries, and it is equally obvious that, in this respect, they do not exist today. The principle of I Corinthians 13:10 comes into operation, "but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." That does

not mean, however, that apostleship and prophecy are dead. By no means. They still have a very important place in the divine plan as we shall see more clearly as we go on to consider the nature of the individual gifts more specifically.

In seeking to determine the separate ministries of the apostle and the prophet we need to remember the warning sounded in the previous paragraph, for there is considerable measure in which the functions of both overlap. On the other hand, they each emphasise a distinctive and important facet of God's order.

The word 'apostle' means 'one sent forth.' It had a particular reference to the twelve as we read in Luke 6:13. "He (Christ) chose twelve, whom also He named apostles." Yet Paul was also an apostle although he had not been personally chosen by the Lord. "Am I not an apostle?" he exclaims to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 9:1) and on more than one occasion he rises in strong defence of his claim to this title. What pre-eminently distinguished the apostles was their calling and authority. There is no mistaking the ring of authority in Paul's writing, for example, to the Corinthians or to the Thessalonians (cf. I Corinthians 5:3; II Thessalonians 3:6). The exercise of this authority was accepted and brought life because it was of God. It was no blustering despotism. It was an authority wielded in much humility as we have already amply seen from Paul's experience.

But what we must particularly note is that what the apostles said and wrote (or that amount of it which is set down for us in Scripture) was directly from God. It was God's word, and God spoke directly through man until His revelation was completed in the unfolding of the mystery of the church (Colossians 1:25). Now that completed revelation has been recorded for us in the Bible, and this book, therefore, has superseded the apostolic position as the basis of divine authority. The fact is easily illustrated. A servant of God may write a letter of exhortation to a local assembly. It may be a good letter and a means of spiritual blessing, but however true and profitable it is, it can never be placed on a par with any of the New Testament epistles as God's Word in the same way. Its worth has to be judged by the standard already laid down in Scripture, and its only authority is the authority which Scripture allows. Thus the place of the apostle today is taken by God's Word, and we must ever look beyond man to the written revelation which is the basis of his calling, for no man's word is final; finality rests only with Scripture, and it is God through His Word who founds the church, not the human vessel, however much he may be used. We have already remarked how the Ephesian assembly was not built around the man Paul, apostle though he was. (If it had been it would have soon faded out.) It was built in a spirit of divine compulsion to obey the Word.

Although apostles do not exist today in the same manner as we find them in the New Testament, yet the ministry of apostleship is very definitely with us. It is, however, inextricably linked with the written Word. The apostolic authority and calling are seen wherever there are servants of God who are completely abandoned to His will and who give undivided allegiance to His Word.

The ministry of prophecy is familiar to the Old Testament, "He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began," says our Lord (Luke 1:70) showing how prophets have existed from the very beginning. In Scripture, people whom we do not normally consider to be prophets are reckoned as such, for example Enoch (Jude 14), Abraham (Genesis 20:17), and Moses (Deuteronomy 24:10). There is a popular idea that prophecy has to do with the foretelling of the future, but this has very little to do with the prophecy of Scripture, apart of course from the fact that any understanding of the will of God must also bring with it a realisation of the future consequences of obedience or disobedience. The prophet was not a foreteller of the future, but a forth-teller of the Word

of God.

One of the clearest Old Testament pictures of the function of a prophet is found in Exodus 7. Moses, in an attempt to side-step God's commission for him, pleads his lack of eloquence, but God gives him Aaron, his brother, as his spokesman (Exodus 4:10-16). In the narrative that follows, all the speaking is actually done by Aaron, yet under Moses' direction. "And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet" (Exodus 7:1). The prophet is to God what Aaron was to Moses. He is God's spokesman.

The heathen had their prophets--for example, Balaam--and Scripture also records instances of a debased form of prophecy among the people of God as, for example, with Saul (I Samuel 19:24), and of prophecy which was a result of dreams and visions. Prophecy at its highest, however, was the result of close communion with God. Again we find this most clearly expressed in the life of Moses. God specifically reveals His dislike of the revelation communicated through visions and dreams as over against the revelation granted through close communion with His servant. "And He said, Hear now My words: if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, he is faithful in all mine house: with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches: and the form of the Lord shall he behold" (Numbers 12:6-8).

It is also well to remember that prophecy is more than simply an expression of God's will. It is a revelation of God and has, therefore, a depth beyond the prophet's own understanding of it. Peter makes this clear when he tells us that the grace of salvation was revealed through the prophets, who yet never themselves entered into the full enjoyment or understanding of it (I Peter 1:10-12).

The characteristics of true prophecy, then, are a spirit of revelation along with a spiritual insight into the mind of God. As we have shown, this once came directly from God Himself, but now it is dependent upon the written Word. There can today be no revelation or spiritual insight apart from the completed revelation of Scripture. What we have found true of the apostles is true also of the prophets. The prophet of the Old Testament or of New Testament times exists no more, yet the ministry of prophecy is still with us, inseparable from the written Word, apart from which no true word of prophecy can be spoken. The spirit of prophecy exists wherever there is a servant of God imbued with the gift of spiritual insight into Scripture.

It is easily seen how these two ministries overlap. The calling and the authority of the apostle are an essential part of the prophet, and the spiritual insight of the prophet is an essential part of the apostle. The prophet must also be an apostle, and the apostle a prophet, yet each of the two ministries carries with it a distinctive emphasis on a particular facet of truth.

If, as we have seen, no man can of himself today be called an apostle or a prophet, but apostleship and prophecy are ministered primarily through the written Word, what part do these two gifts actually play in the building up of the church? It is this. The spirit of apostleship and prophecy, the call and authority, the spiritual insight, all in relation to the Scriptures, are the life-giving factors in the three following gifts through which God's spiritual order for the church is completed. Without the spirit of apostleship and prophecy, the ministries of evangelists, pastors and teachers will remain cold and ineffective. These three gifts form a complete provision for the establishing, nurture and growth of the church, provided each one of them is based upon apostolic calling and authority, and prophetic insight,

through the Word.

Evangelists, pastors and teachers belong to the ministry in every age. The word 'evangelist' means literally 'to announce' and has particular reference to the preaching of the gospel of redemption, which is the first stage of church planting. The proclamation of the great facts of redemption from sin and reconciliation with God through Christ constitutes a particular commission specially given to some of God's servants. Paul had this spiritual commission of an evangelist. Timothy also was an evangelist, as we can gather from Paul's exhortation to him in II Timothy 4:5, "Do the work of an evangelist, fulfil thy ministry." A reading of the book of Acts, especially chapters sixteen to twenty-one, will give a good picture of evangelism in action.

The word 'pastor' means 'to shepherd' and has particular reference to fatherly nurture and care. Both Paul and Peter use this term in their exhortations to elders. "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers," says Paul at Miletus to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28). "The elders, therefore, among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you," says Peter (I Peter 5:1-2). This does not mean to say that the gift of pastors was limited to the use of elders in local assemblies, but elders did need to have the heart and concern of a shepherd in the fulfilling of their spiritual duty.

It should be emphasised that the terms elder, overseer or bishop, which are used interchangeably in Scripture, are always found in the plural. Never do we find that any local church or group of churches was presided over by one bishop or overseer. (Incidentally, the notes appended to II Timothy and Titus in the English authorised version of the Bible, and which denote Timothy as 'ordained the first bishop of the church of the Cretians,' are no part of inspired Scripture. They are later additions.) Pastors, in the setting of the local church, were part of a plural eldership. It must be strongly stated that there is no scriptural foundation for the almost universal one-man pastoral system of today, or for the heading up of the government of a number of local congregations in one 'bishop.' This was completely unknown to the New Testament, and has been recognised by later Christian teachers as an interpolation. The great teacher Jerome who died in A.D. 420, commenting on the epistle to Titus in reference to the times of the apostles says, "Elders were the same as bishops, but by degrees, that the plants of dissension might be rooted up, all responsibility was transferred to one person."

The three examples most often brought forward in defence of what we might call the 'pastoral system' are all misplaced. First there is the case of Paul. Did he not, we may be asked, stay at Ephesus for three years as pastor of the church? That he remained in Ephesus for approximately that period is clearly stated in Acts 20:31, but when we read the more detailed account in Acts 19 of how he spent these three years, it becomes obvious at once that the ministry he exercised was very different from that of a modern pastor. Paul was, in fact, exercising the ministry of an evangelist, first for a short time in the synagogue, and then for about two years in the school of Tyrannus. It was not till practically the end of his stay in the city that, through the power of the Word, the assembly really took shape at all. Paul left, and the church, although from exactly what point we are not sure, was administered by elders.

The remaining two examples often quoted in defence of the pastoral system are those of Timothy at Ephesus and Titus in Crete. The position of these two men was unique and has no other parallel in the Word of God. There is uncertainty as to the order of events during the last few years of the life of the apostle Paul, but after his departure from Ephesus as recorded in Acts 19 Timothy was with him for a

period during his imprisonment some few years later in Rome. This we see, for example, in Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, and Philemon 1, where these letters, written from prison, are addressed as from both Paul and Timothy. It is clear, therefore, that during this period the Ephesian assembly was functioning under the oversight of the elders chosen of God, and the strength and maturity of the assembly we can gauge from the Ephesian epistle itself, another of the letters written by Paul during his imprisonment. It was after this time that Timothy went to Ephesus because of difficulties and declension which had set in. Paul besought him to remain at Ephesus for a while in the hope that God might use him as a means of spiritual blessing, and to put right some of the evils into which the Ephesians had been trapped. There is no indication that he was ever 'pastor' of the Ephesian church.

The case of Titus is largely similar. He was, in fact, not sent to any particular congregation, but for a ministry among the already existing groups throughout Crete. His efficiency had already been proved in the blessing which had attended his visits to Corinth (II Corinthians 8:22-23). The reason for his going to Crete is clear from Titus 1:5. Paul writes, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge." This gives no indication of Titus exercising the ministry of a 'pastor' or 'bishop' in the modern and traditional sense. Actually, it could hardly be said that churches existed in Crete at all. How the groups came into being we do not know, but the work certainly never prospered, and it may well be questioned whether Paul was right in sending Titus to Crete with the commission to appoint elders, for it does not appear that it was attended with God's blessing. We need to remember that although Paul was an apostle, he was not infallible. He made mistakes.

This picture of Paul, Timothy and Titus which emerges from Scripture, rather than being one of men who for certain periods remained in sole 'pastoral' authority over a local church, is one of men with evangelistic, pastoral or teaching gifts who, under God's guidance, moved among churches functioning according to the divine spiritual pattern, and exercised a ministry of edification according to the various needs. There is one simple way by which any doubtful ecclesiastical practice can be put to the test. We can ask of it three questions. Was it instituted by our Lord? Is it recorded as practised in the book of Acts? Is it taught in the epistles? When we can answer each of three questions in the affirmative, we have every right to feel that the practice is well founded on solid scriptural ground. If we apply this test to the modern pastoral system it will at once be evident that it rests on a very poor foundation.

Pastorship is the second stage of church building. It is the work of 'upbringing,' giving the instruction, exhortation, advice and rebuke which go along with parental care, or the encouragement, comfort and sustenance which is required in times of particular trial or spiritual sickness. It leads naturally to the ministry of teaching.

The gift of teachers refers to the building up of the church through the strong meat of the Word. It is the third stage of assembly building, and corresponds largely to the ministry of the church which Paul claimed in Colossians 1:24-25 was given to him. We have already examined the nature of this ministry in a previous chapter.

As with pastorship, so also with teaching, an aptness to teach is recorded by Paul as a mark of eldership. To Timothy he says, "The overseer therefore must be without reproach....apt to teach" (I Timothy 3:2). To Titus he writes, "The overseer must be blameless as God's steward....holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound teaching, and to convict the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7-9). Again, this does not imply that the gift of

teaching is limited to the use of elders in a local assembly--it has a very much wider application than that--but the ability to teach the Word of God must be found permanently within the local church if it is to be built up according to the divine intention.

It will be well to repeat once more that the functioning of the three gifts is based on the apostolic calling and the prophetic insight. Otherwise they become simply a mechanical recitation of spiritual truth which is devoid of life and vitality. As we go on to look a little more closely at the relationship between these three gifts, the fullness of God's provision for the church in them will become increasingly evident. The general terms used for those who function in the capacity of evangelists, pastors and teachers within a local church are 'episkopos' and 'presbuteros,' meaning 'elder' or 'bishop.' These terms are interchangeable, but there is also a much wider sphere of ministry for such gifted people where they do not own the position of eldership in any local assembly. In this latter sense, they are the gifts of God to the churches, and belong to the body of Christ wherever it is expressed. Vs. 12-13 set no arbitrary limit to the sphere of their ministry, but rather indicates the reverse. Any ministry of edification, however, in however wide a field the servant of God may exercise his gift, must contribute to the upbuilding of the local church as the only expression of the body of Christ upon the earth, so it is here that our attention must centre in the practical outworking of the principles laid down for us.

Chapter 12: Unto Edifying

In the plurality of eldership we have an example of the divine wisdom of God's plan for the church, for the working and effectiveness of this scriptural order is completely dependent upon spiritual life. Where carnality enters there will be division, and the whole structure of the church will collapse. "If a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand," said our Lord (Mark 3:25). This, in respect to the local assembly, is precisely what our Lord intended should happen. True and effective fellowship cannot function apart from a continual flow of spiritual life. Where there is no life, there can be no spiritual eldership, and where there is no spiritual eldership there can be no assembly. This is God's order. The great tragedy of Christianity is that so very soon it side-stepped the divine plan. Today the existence of a 'church' is no longer dependent upon God's order being maintained in life. A system has been evolved which will still keep the thing going whether there be life or not. God is gracious, and in spite of an unscriptural order, wherever and to whatever extent He is honoured He will grant His blessing, and there will be an outflow of spiritual vitality though it may be limited in its compass, but the fulfilling of His order means so much more than this. It means a realisation of all with which we are concerned in this Ephesian epistle, and it also means an effective end to a bad testimony when there is no life in the Spirit to maintain fellowship. It means that God will have the opportunity of removing the lampstand when the light has been extinguished (Revelation 2:5).

The different ecclesiastical systems which have emerged down through the centuries have been based rather on convenience than on the Word of God. "But eldership does not work. You *need* one person in charge," is a common protest. Are we at liberty to disregard God's Word when we feel that its principles are impractical? Is it God's fault? Or do we ever look inside to see whether the fault does perhaps lie in ourselves? Expediency is a most dangerous criterion upon which to judge any action in the spiritual realm, and has been the reason of untold harm to the cause of Christ down through the ages. Again and again when spiritual life has ebbed away and true fellowship has become no more possible man has stepped in with some system of organisation which has served to hold up what God would have allowed to collapse. This, of course, is an innate human tendency. Pride cannot conceive of

admitting failure, although it is only on the admission of human failure that God will pour in His life once more. So man conserves what God would reject.

In our consideration of chapter two we saw in the figure of the 'new man' how God, through Christ, has broken down every barrier and fused His people together in the church. God's order for the government of the local church gives yet another opportunity to portray the oneness of the new man. Surely, of all places, it should be portrayed most vividly in the relationship to one another of those of spiritual maturity. One of the conditions of being an elder is that he should not be a novice (I Timothy 3:6). The eldership, therefore, should above everything else be an example of the unity of the new man to the whole assembly. Some may abandon the scriptural principle of eldership as impractical, but if fellowship is impossible amongst those who are supposed to be mature in the things of the Lord, it is difficult to understand how fellowship can be fostered amongst those who are less advanced in the way of truth. God lays down no principle except He also grants the enabling to see it fulfilled. To sacrifice the truth of the Word on the altar of convenience can lead only to spiritual impotency. God's way may seem difficult. It can hardly be otherwise, for the flesh always resists the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit there is a price to be paid--the price of human pride and self-sufficiency--but it is the way of life.

God is not limited in granting but one gift to each of His servants, yet it is also clear that practically never do we find the three ministries of evangelism, pastorship and teaching equally developed in one man. This is true of the lives of the apostles, each of whom, we can see, was usually specially gifted along one particular line. Peter was an evangelist, John a pastor, Paul a teacher. Again, these ministries overlap, and all three were exercised by all the apostles to some extent, but the full development of each is required if the assembly is to function with full strength and vigour, and this is possible only when God's order is maintained.

While it is true that the three gifts are given to be developed separately in those of the Lord's choice, yet they also indicate a progression in the Christian walk. We enter the kingdom through the ministry of evangelism; we are built up through the pastoral gift; we are led on in maturity through the gift of teaching. We can probably trace this same progression in our own service for the Lord. At the outset of our Christian experience we began by witnessing simply to others of the Saviour we had found. Later we were able to encourage others in their spiritual growth from our own experience. Later still we may have been able to impart some of the deeper things of God. Even then we have not come to the end, for the gifts themselves are not of fixed measure, like the possession of so many gramophone records which can be played over and that is the end. An entrance into an understanding of the deeper things of God will bring us back again to our redemption to see more of its depth and wonder, and will give us a greater insight into the problems of spiritual growth and God's answer to them. So the process of development goes on as the gifts are exercised, and this process of development itself has to take root in the assembly.

Verse 12 tells us the purpose of the gifts, "For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ." The word 'perfect' is used a number of times in the New Testament and means variously 'full grown,' 'complete' or 'repaired.' A child may have perfect mental and physical health, but he still grows, he still has to be equipped through advice and discipline for the exigencies of living, and when he is ill he has to be cared for and built up into health once more. The gifts are given to cover this whole course of development in the spirit.

Yet there is even more to it than this. The development must be '*unto* the work of ministering.' As we have repeated a number of times, one of the salient features of life is that it is reproductive, and it reproduces in its own likeness. The gifts, operating in spiritual life, will reproduce themselves in others; otherwise their real purpose remains unfulfilled. If a child develops normally, there comes a stage where he is able to look after himself, and able also to help those younger than himself in the same way as he was helped. The ministry of evangelism is to produce evangelists. The ministry of pastorship is to produce pastors. The ministry of teaching is to produce teachers. There are, of course, those who are called to exercise their ministries in a special capacity, devoting their lives entirely to the calling, but in another sense these gifts are to be developed in all the Lord's people, and in the whole assembly there should be evidenced the progression from evangelists to pastors to teachers. This is the church in action '*perfected*' unto the work of ministering.

This does not, of course, mean that all are going to develop into able public ministers. Those for whom the Lord reserves a public ministry will be comparatively few, but wherever a soul is won to Christ, wherever a believer is comforted or encouraged, wherever a deep experience of Christ is shared with another, there are the gifts of evangelism, pastorship and teaching in evidence. Many and varied are the ways in which they can be exercised.

Many people seem to have the impression that the assembly consists of a few who have all the gifts, and the rest who receive all the benefits, a constant giving out on one side, and a constant taking in on the other, resulting in no more than personal and selfish profit. Nothing could be further divorced from the thought of Scripture. While none of us on this side of eternity will ever outgrow the need of further spiritual ministry, yet we should always be outgrowing the need of that which we have already received. Having heard the gospel and found new life in Christ, we do not expect that we should be the continued objects of the same exhortations to repentance. On the contrary, we ourselves should be exhorting others to turn to the Lord whom we have found. Likewise, there is something wrong with the believer who feels that, year in and year out, he must be receiving the constant attention and encouragement of elementary pastoral care. He has not grown up, or else is spiritually sick. If he has reached any stage of spiritual adulthood, he should be encouraging those who are younger than himself in the faith instead of expecting the attention accorded to a child.

In an assembly where God's order is honoured there will always be adequate scope for the expression and development of the gifts. Through evangelism the Lord will add to the church. Those added will be in need of pastoral care. Those more advanced will profit from the ministry of teaching. And in the exercise of these gifts within the assembly God's people will find within themselves the development of one gift from the other.

The edifying of the body of Christ, therefore, is dependent not only on the exercise of the gifts by a few, but also on the response which their exercise finds in the assembly as a whole. In the church we are dealing not with a machine which is passive in the sense that it can do nothing to aid its own development, but with a body which is active and capable of response, and cannot grow at all unless it does respond. The exercise of the gifts must produce divinely directed activity. This is what Paul means when he writes to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). Ministry is the source of light and faith, but light must be accepted and walked in, and faith must lead to practice if the body is rightly to express the mind of Christ. This essential relationship between faith and works is the subject of James' epistle. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding

your own selves," James says (James 1:22). Knowledge without obedience leads only to deception. Because of what we know we may think we are specially favoured of God and have a special place in His purposes, when in fact, the lack of response to what light we have received makes it impossible for God to reveal Himself through us.

We have already seen that there are two spheres in which the spiritual gifts are to be exercised: the limited sphere of the local assembly where the three ministries are linked with the eldership of the church, and the wider sphere of all the churches of God, wherever there is an expression of the body of Christ. In this latter sphere, evangelists, pastors and teachers fulfil their ministries apart from any local responsibilities of eldership, yet are recognised by the churches because they possess the spiritual authority and insight which are inseparable from a divine commission. It should be understood in this connection that the authority of any of God's servants is spiritual and not legal, and cannot, therefore, stand independently of spiritual life. No servant of God can demand obedience because of his position. If, through humility and subservience to the will of God, he has not earned the right to minister to God's people, and his life, therefore, does not command obedience from those who are truly seeking to walk in the way of the Spirit, the attempt to assert authority because of his position as a servant of God will lead only to confusion and death. The history of the church is a sad testimony to this fact. When spiritual life ebbs away and spiritual authority vanishes, the temptation is always to replace it with a legal system, a system which no doubt works, since flesh in man will respond to the natural when he will cast the spiritual aside, but a system in which the full functioning of the body becomes an impossibility.

Paul now leaves the immediate aim of God's order in the church and points us to the ultimate goal. Verse 13 speaks of that which will be realised not on earth but in heaven, "Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Our life on earth is beset by limitations, yet these very limitations should become less and less through the Spirit's working in us, till one day, the last enfeebling trait will be removed. Two sides of our spiritual lives, mentioned in this verse, are particularly marked by imperfections: our faith and our knowledge. How little we realise the extent to which our faith is mixed with self-seeking, and it is this latter which divides asunder child of God from child of God. Here lies the root of a vast majority of our spiritual problems--lack of full allegiance to Christ--for allegiance to Christ is what faith really is. The day will come, however, when all of God's people will at last recognise that they have but one duty and that duty is to follow Him. Every other loyalty will vanish, and we will stand together as one because Christ alone fills our vision.

How many secondary things claim the faith and allegiance of the child of God! Pride, often religious pride, lies behind them all--pride in a tradition, pride in a denomination, pride in a pattern. The Spirit of God in the fellowship of His people is seeking to wean us away from these things, and He will succeed in doing so only when He has turned the full focus of our attention upon Christ our one and only Head. The measure of the attainment of this undivided allegiance may well be imperfect as long as we remain upon this earth, yet this is God's aim--to establish in us a faith uncontaminated by any mixture of pride or self-seeking. Let us never resist His working in us to that end.

Knowledge may form a basis of unity. Recognising this fact, men have for centuries sought to form a church through uniting people in understanding. This is the basis of the bulk of denominationalism. Assent to a certain interpretation of divine truth or to certain practices is accepted as the bond which unites. Whether or not the interpretation is right or wrong does not affect the point at issue which is, as

v. 13 so plainly implies, that if unity in knowledge is the consummation of the Spirit's work to be realised only when we go to be with the Lord, then knowledge cannot possibly be the basis of our unity down here on the earth, and to make it so is to move completely off the ground of the church, which is life in Christ.

One day, however, every limitation of understanding will be removed. "For now we see in a mirror, darkly: but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I have been known," says Paul (I Corinthians 13:12), and with what urge he presses forward towards that day. "Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ," he writes to the Philippians (Philippians 3:8). Not our understanding of Christ unites the church, rather does our lack of understanding join us together in the great hope that is set before us, that one day we will know Him fully.

The removal of these limitations is summed up in the revelation of the 'full grown man,' the attainment of 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' We have already dealt with the subject of the new man in our consideration of chapter two. The unity, the potential of the new man will find its ultimate consummation when all born again of the Spirit of God gather together around Christ. Every vestige of self gone, every limitation removed, the church, the child of God, will have grown up into the glorious image of its divine parent.

"That we may be no longer children," says Paul (v. 14). In some respects this may seem rather a strange exhortation to give to the mature Ephesian assembly, yet Paul was well aware of the inborn childishness and instability of human nature. Children are pliable, and if left without proper guidance, easily imbibe any kind of teaching. It is for this reason that so many political organisations lay such stress on the teaching of children and youth, an emphasis, of course, which has been carried down from ancient days. Spiritually we must grow up if we are to enter into Christ's fullness instead of being 'carried about with every wind of doctrine,' and a prey to every subtlety of the evil one. "Whom will He teach knowledge?" asks Isaiah, "and whom will He make to understand the message? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts" (Isaiah 28:9). There is a stage when milk is necessary, but it is not the diet of adulthood. Yet how many Christians never seem to outgrow spiritual childhood. The reason is an unsundered will at the outset of their spiritual experiences. A surrendered will is essential to spiritual growth, for it is this alone that delivers us into the hands of God and allows Him to do His work of fashioning and moulding. In the realm of the Spirit we must either be childlike or childish. The alternative to a childlike dependence upon the Lord is a never-ending immaturity.

Nothing is more ruinous to the health of the church than spiritual childishness. We can see something of the havoc it wrought in the Corinthian assembly. To the Corinthians' childishness Paul squarely attributes the strife and division which had rent the church asunder (I Corinthians 3:1-3). But it was the cause of much more than this. It was the reason for the Corinthians' completely misplaced preoccupation with the spectacular, in this case with tongues. "Brethren, be not children in mind," says Paul pitifully, as he exhorts them, "Howbeit in malice be ye babes" (I Corinthians 14:20). Malice or suspicion is foreign to a child; it is a vice which develops only with years, yet suspicion was ruining the assembly as it always does. Unfortunately, spiritual childishness leaves full scope for the evil traits of grown up flesh.

It is significant that Paul should have associated the Corinthian occupation with the spectacular with a childish understanding. One still finds that these two things often go together. The miracles which our Lord wrought were a natural expression of His grace. They were never performed as signs to convince people into faith. In fact, our Lord adamantly refused to grant a sign when asked. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign," He said (Matthew 12:39). Subsequent events amply justified His attitude. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jews, who had demanded a sign, sought to take His life. The disciples did not follow the Lord because they saw Him perform any miracle. Faith cannot rest alone on an outward sign; it rests on the unseen reality of the Spirit. An occupation with the spectacular is a mark of spiritual immaturity, or spiritual childishness. Offer a small child the choice between a shiny new silver rupee, and a rather grubby ten rupee note. He will invariably choose the former. His sense of values has not been developed. Yet he is sure he has chosen well, for children seldom recognise their limitations. How much damage can be done when a believer, maybe of many years' standing yet with this impaired sense of values, seeks to assert his authority in an assembly in a matter which requires mature spiritual judgement. Discernment comes only with spiritual maturity. "Every one that partaketh of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe" (Hebrews 5:13). Too often do people assume a place of judgement when, spiritually, they have never grown up. The result is chaos.

The reasoning of a child is based on self; he has to be taught to share and to think of others. This is the very antithesis of the life in Christ. Childhood is also petty. Our Lord brought this out very pointedly in the homely illustration recorded in Matthew 11:16-17. Two groups of children are playing in the market place. "Let's play weddings," says one. "No, funerals," says the other. "That's too sad," says the first group, "we're playing weddings," as they muster the procession and the 'band' strikes up. "Then we're not playing," says the second group, sulking. A little later, the first group breaks in again, "All right, we'll play funerals now," and they raise the funeral wail. "We're not going to play with you any more," says group number two, hurt and unforgiving. We smile at such childish petulance, remembering the time when we ourselves took part in it; but the question is, do we still take part in it? Again and again, we find the life of the assembly characterised by just such pettiness, and fellowship at its lowest ebb. Offence and perversity are both of the flesh. The root of offence is pride because *my* feeling are hurt, because I do not have my own way, and offence leaves the door wide open for the devil, the accuser of the brethren, to do his worst.

A little boy comes home with the complaint, "Johnnie hit me." Johnnie had been his best friend till today, but that is not the end, "he hit me last week too, and he bullies his little sister, and one time, in school, he stole my pencil, and he always copies from other boys." Johnnie has suddenly become one of the most undesirable youngsters in the neighbourhood. We know it so well, childish offence, but are we ever guilty of the same thing? A little disagreement leads to an offended spirit upon which we allow Satan to work till fellowship has been shattered, and the church has become a shambles. How we need to grow up.

The thought of v. 16 is based upon the attainment of that measure of spiritual maturity which we have just been considering, a life free from that spiritual childishness which is no part of the life of Christ. If we are to develop in subjection to Christ and in His likeness, we must learn to speak the truth in love, and, we may add also, to accept the truth in love. Notice that Paul says, "Speaking the truth *in love*." A child will speak the truth in order to hurt, or on the other hand, in his affection for an older person, he may not speak the truth for fear of causing hurt. To combine both truth and love requires a little more maturity. "Sanctify them in the truth: Thy Word is truth," prayed the Lord (John 17:17). But the truth of

the Word is often unpalatable; it is not always pleasant. "The Word of God....is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Speaking the truth means the pronouncing of judgement upon evil as well as the commendation of the good. This openness and honesty of spirit was alike a concern of God for His people in Old Testament times. Says the Lord through the prophet Zechariah, "These are the things that ye shall do: speak ye every man the truth with his neighbour, execute the judgement of truth and peace in your gates" (Zechariah 8:16). There can be no true spiritual progress unless we are willing to face unpleasant facts along with the pleasant, but if the unpalatable truth is to be ministered in life, it must be ministered in love.

Our Lord was 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). His revelation of truth went alongside the revelation of His love. In His dealings with men He was ever straightforward, and His love won a glad and humble response to the truth wherever there was a truly seeking heart. Christ formed in the hearts of His people will use the truth to build up, not to break down, and will accept His revelation of truth without offence. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in Me" (Matthew 11:6).

Christ is the Head, and under His control the body 'is fitly framed and knit together' (v. 16). The unity that we enjoy in Him is not a precarious oneness. We are joined together 'fitly.' The spiritual body, as God's creation, is exactly suited to fulfil its purpose of revealing Christ. It is God's order that each part should affect all the others, and that every joint should supply its contribution to the whole.

Membership of the body involves each one in a grave responsibility, for the ineffectiveness or immaturity of one member inevitably hinders the functioning of the whole. Paul's writing to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 12:14-27) is a commentary on the declension which follows spiritual irresponsibility in the matter of fulfilling our purpose in the assembly.

The increase which follows upon the effective functioning of the assembly is not only of knowledge, but of love. We learn to appreciate Christ in others when we see the Christ life being worked out in everyday living, and that, in turn, produces the Christ life in us. Love begets love. "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us" (I John 4:12). Our expression of love in a concern to fulfil our function in the body is itself the power which 'maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love.' Love, the 'bond of perfectness' is reproduced, and the church is established in its indissoluble and eternal unity.

Chapter 13: Walk in Love...Light...Wisdom

Paul now leaves the subject of the functioning of the assembly and embarks upon some general and very practical exhortations on the believer's walk. This occupies the remainder of chapter four and the first twenty-one verses of chapter five.

In vs. 17-24 we have a contrast between the old life and the new life in Christ. The old, unregenerate life is based on the 'vanity' of the mind (v. 17) and it is from this hard core of conceit that the most blatant evils which Paul enumerates in the following two verses are produced. The vanity of human nature will stop at nothing to gratify self. It will stoop to the very lowest in order to have its own way. We must flee vanity as the plague. Nor were the mature Ephesians beyond the need of such an exhortation. Paul recognised that it applied also to himself, and that the surrender of a moment to self-gratification could put an abrupt end to his years of fruitful service and leave him but a castaway. This is the force of his words to the Corinthians, "But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage; lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (I Corinthians 9:27).

Vanity, pride and self-pleasing are from the source of the old, unregenerate nature, and compromise with it in any degree will lead to ultimate disaster. Pride goeth before destruction. A little indulgence may lead to a great fall. A little stone can start an avalanche.

"Ye did not so learn Christ" (v. 20). The life of Christ is the exact opposite, a complete denial of the 'former manner of life, the old man' (v. 22) and a choosing of the new. "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (v. 23), is the key to the Christian walk. Spiritual renewal, as we have already seen, does not consist merely of one dynamic experience, but is a constant process whereby our spiritual lives are kept vital and active, just as the vitality of the human body is dependent upon the remarkable process of renewal which goes on within it. Spiritual renewal, however, demands the unceasing exercise of the will. The power of choice is never withheld from God's people. We enter into fellowship with God only when we will that it should continue. The spiritual life is a life of daily denying the world and choosing Christ. Otherwise, what would be the point of Paul's urge in v. 24, 'Put on the new man'? Were not the Ephesians already part of the new creation? Had they not already put on the new man? Had they not been fused together in the body of Christ? Yes, indeed, but constantly they had to reaffirm the fact, "Today, I still choose Christ. I deny the world."

Paul further confirms this in his writing to the Romans. "Be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). As Christians we have to accept a completely new set of standards, a set of standards which will inevitably come into conflict with the world around, and which will continuously confront us with a choice between the worldly and the divine. The choosing of Christ is the way of spiritual renewal, and as the verse also tells us, is the way of being kept in the assurance of the will of God. Let the urgency of this exhortation sink into our hearts. We are living as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign world, enveloped in an alien atmosphere, and surrounded by alien practices. In the trials and temptations of the circumstances with which we are daily confronted, are we ever ready to accept the way of Christ? Can we commence each day with the affirmation, "I deny the world. I choose Him"? Our Lord Himself supplies for us the example of steadfastness. The cross was faced unflinchingly. The world was denied. The choice was made. "The Lord God will help me: therefore have I not been confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (Isaiah 50:7).

The remaining verses of the chapter (vs. 25-32) leave us with some very plain and pointed words of advice and warning. 'Putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour: for we are members one of another,' writes Paul (v. 25). Falsehood consists not only in the spoken word of untruth, but maybe even more often in an attitude or an evasive answer. The standard of truth in Christ is a standard of transparent honesty. "But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one," are the words of our Lord (Matthew 5:37). The atmosphere of the world around us is charged with meaningless words, and glib and meaningless promises. Alas, how much of the world may be in the church. Where would we be today if the Lord had not meant exactly what He said, if the Word of God were undependable? Yet so often we expect the assembly to prosper and the work of God to grow although we, as children of God, have not learnt the elementary lesson of being dependable and of meaning just what we speak. How important this is in our relationship in God's family. When members of a family wish to hide things from one another, are evasive and not straightforward, it is unavoidable that disharmony should result. The church is no exception to this rule.

The Lord is 'slow to anger' says the Psalmist (Psalm 103:8) yet the whole of Scripture is a testimony to the indignation of God against sin, a wrath which, nevertheless, is revealed in love. Anger without sin (v. 26) is a revelation of the character of God, for in the world anger and sin practically always go together. Verse 26 is based on Psalm 4:4, "Be ye angry and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still." For a child of God to stand in the presence of sin unmoved and unconcerned is a denial of the holiness of the new life into which he has been born, but every observation of sin should be an incentive to examine his own heart. If he stands victorious, it is because of the grace of God, and the same grace is able to triumph over the sin which is justly the object of His anger. But the anger is constructive. Its aim is the destruction of the sin and the preservation of the person who has been its prey. "Let not the sun go down upon your provocation." Here we see the great difference between divine wrath and human anger. God forgives and forgets. Man harbours his anger in resentment. The wrath of God, having accomplished its purpose, is over and gone forever, and it is this type of indignation against sin which alone has any place in the life of the believer. To be otherwise, as Paul goes on to point out in the following verse, is simply to 'give place to the devil.'

Resentment is of the flesh. Its basis is pride. Its instigator is the devil. Here something of the insidiousness of Satan's wiles can be seen. He would use the very hatred of sin which is a mark of the Christ life, as a means to producing a spirit of resentment which breeds darkness and death. How we need to be aware of the ways in which the enemy attacks. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Paul still further pursues the contrast between the old life and the new in v. 28. The old man steals for self, the new man works 'that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need.' This is but another example of the grace which should be an intrinsic part of the life of the assembly. God's people have been carried far beyond the realm of self, and the very work they do should not be simply for their own comfort, but for the good of the whole household of faith.

Verse 29 is a warning against gossip, one of the most prevalent of all sins, and maybe also one of the most deadly. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt," writes Paul to the Colossians (Colossians 4:6). Is our conversation seasoned with the vitality of the Spirit, which makes what we have to say palatable and edifying? Does it minister grace? Or does it minister resentment, distrust and suspicion, these most effective destroyers of assembly life?

A refusal of these straightforward exhortations is a grief to the Holy Spirit and a denial of His power. He has sealed us unto the day of redemption (v. 30) and is, therefore, with us to grant every needed strength and grace to overcome. Paul sums up what he has been saying by drawing a final contrast between the maliciousness of the world and the grace of Christ (vs. 31-32). If we are asked to bestow grace upon one another, it is because grace has first been bestowed upon us. In all, Christ is our supreme example. For our Lord to reveal His holiness meant humbling Himself to become a man, it meant suffering unto the death of the cross, but He suffered rather than deny Himself. To do that would have been impossible. What is the price we are willing to pay that the life of Christ might be revealed in us? Are we willing to pay the price of our pride, the price of our ease? God demands no less. This is the cost of the glory in the church.

Chapter five opens with Paul's stressing the Lord's pre-eminence as our supreme example. "Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children" (v. 1). Children are great imitators. They are also hero-worshippers, but this latter is a trait which Paul does not commend. The Lord is our example, not

man. True, the Scripture contains many exhortations to a godly life which may be an example to others, but the example is still and only Christ, whether His life be clothed with the body of one of His people, or be known through the account we read of His life in His Word. To fail to look beyond a man to Christ who is his life brings many snares. "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ," wrote Paul to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 11:1) and we may add, "And not one inch further." If we see Christ in a brother, let us follow him, but let us be looking only for Christ. The most godly men fail, and many are the people who make the weaknesses of another an excuse for their own low standard, on the pretext of following a godly example. They have not looked beyond the man to the example of Christ.

When an assembly is dependent upon a man instead of upon the Lord, the same dangers present themselves. When the man, the example, falls away from the standard of Christ, the assembly follows suit. When the man is taken away, the assembly flounders. God's people have not looked beyond the example of the man to Christ. All of us have received great blessing through different servants of God, but the time will come when our faith will be put to the test as to whether it rests upon God or upon man.

This time of testing came to Israel on the death of Moses. The editor of the book of Deuteronomy tells us, "There hath not risen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10). This outstanding man was removed from Israel just at the point, it would seem, where he was needed most. How could the people go on without him? "Moses my servant is dead," said the Lord, "Now therefore arise; go over this Jordan" (Joshua 1:2). God was leading them. Even Moses was not indispensable.

Our example is Christ, and in the three aspects of our walk which Paul enumerates in the following verses, He is there to show us the way: a walk in love (vs. 2-7), a walk in light (vs. 8-14), and a walk in wisdom (vs. 15-21).

We have already noticed how our Lord's life was characterised by grace and truth (John 1:14) which are the practical expressions of love and holiness. Holiness is inseparable from love, for unholiness causes damage and destruction, while love builds up. Christ's love for us meant the giving of Himself as a holy sacrifice for us (v. 2). Likewise, our walk in love before our brethren and before the world, if it is to be a testimony to Christ, must also be a walk of holiness, denying the world and everything that would be a means of stumbling. All the vices which Paul lists in vs. 3-5 can be the product of small, selfish beginnings, of a lack of concern, of a lack of thought, of a lack of love. They produce ultimately in others a lack of holiness and God's judgement. The walk of love is a walk of carefulness wherein the criterion of our actions is not their effect upon us, but their effect upon our brethren.

Christ is our light. "I am the light of the world," He said (John 8:12). Yet, "Ye are the light of the world," we read in Matthew 5:14. Christ is the light of the world through His people. "Walk as children of light," says Paul (v. 8). That is to say, walk in the standard of Christ, deviating from it neither to the right nor to the left. The standard of Christ is an absolute standard. Our Christian walk is not to be affected by how we think it might react on the world around us. While our walk must be without offence to the people of God, it can never be without offence to the world, for holiness is an offence to sin. We can never accommodate the life of Christ to the demands of the unregenerate. The life of heaven cannot be put on a par with the life of earth. There can be no compromise. The life of Christ is meant to be a reproof to the life of the world (v. 11). The standard of the world is variable; the standard

of Christ is settled and absolute.

"The fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness, and truth" (v. 9). The purpose of this fruit is not to placate the conscience of the world, but to be a testimony to a higher and different life, and to convict. "All things when they are convicted are made manifest by the light" (v. 13). This is our commission, one of the reasons God, in His grace, has awakened us out of the sleep of death (v. 14) that we should walk as a witness in this world of the light which is Christ.

The third aspect of our walk mentioned by Paul is really the first in importance. The walk of love and of light stems directly from the walk 'not as unwise but as wise' (v. 17). The Psalmist tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do thereafter" (Psalm 111:10). The wisdom which must characterise our walk is not the wisdom of the flesh, but simply and plainly the respect of the Lord which leaves us subject to Him in everything. In the realm of the Spirit there is no other wisdom. Christ again is our example as He subjected Himself completely to the will of the Father, and through His subjection brought to light all the will of God in His great plan of eternal redemption. Being subject to Christ means seeking Him, for we can hardly come under the rule of a person whom we completely ignore, and seeking Him means finding Him (v. 17). Our Lord Himself had need to cultivate the life in the secret place with His Father. We can do no better than to follow Him, 'buying up the opportunity' (v. 16) of entering into a discernment of the will of God, for such discernment comes in no other manner. Here then is the source of our walk in light and in love. Who can come out of God's council chamber to walk without the dignity of the one whose presence he has enjoyed, or without the divine imperative burning in his soul to love as he has been loved?

"Be filled in spirit," urges Paul (v. 18), to commune with one another and with the Lord in a thanksgiving which embraces all things (vs. 19-20). Having emerged from an audience with a king, will not what we have seen and heard fill our hearts and our conversation? Will not every trial, and every sorrow, and every disagreement be drowned in our thanksgiving that it should ever have been made possible for us to approach the throne? But more than this, will the greatness of the privilege we have enjoyed not unite us together in respect and awe that He, God, should have allowed us to approach Him, and should even have drawn us into the confidence of His will? Will we not lament our own unworthiness, and long that we might become more worthy of the One whose we are? But how can this be? By 'subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ,' says Paul. See Christ in one another and learn from Him.

The majesty of His presence has taught us that not one has whereof he can boast. What little we know, through the grace of His indwelling, we will share, but we want to learn more. We are each one but the very least of all His servants. We will vie not for the highest place, the place of authority, but for the lowest, the place where we can sit at the feet of Christ revealed in our brethren and learn more of Him. This is the walk of wisdom.

Chapter 14: Nor Spot, Nor Wrinkle

The final section of chapter five (vs. 22-23) brings us to a consideration of the last of the five great figures of the church which Paul uses in his epistle, the church as the bride of Christ. These verses also form a very valuable and practical exhortation on relationship in the home. In fact, the principles enunciated have pertinent application to all questions of relationship, but as Paul states, the issue with which he is primarily concerned is that of Christ and the church. "This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (v. 32).

Paul would seem to suggest in those words that what he really wanted to say about the church has defied his ability to explain it. No figure is adequate to convey everything that is in God's mind. No finite words are sufficient to portray the meaning of what is infinite and eternal. As we shall presently see, there are aspects of the church's life which contradict the laws of human reasoning, but it is well to remember that the logic which governs the life of the church is God's, not man's, and it is man's reasoning that will ultimately be found to be wanting.

The figure of the bride of Christ brings out very clearly seven aspects of the relationship which exists between the Lord and His people: subjection (vs. 22-24), love (v. 25), choice and responsibility (vs. 25-26), joy (v. 27), union and communion (vs. 28-31).

Subjection is necessary in any relationship if it is to prosper. If two partners in a business cannot listen to what the other has to say, and each insists on having his own way, the partnership will inevitably break up. The key to this whole subject is, of course, the subjection of Christ. "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God," writes Paul to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 11:3). Our Lord Himself said, "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), and it is because of His subjection to the Father that the church has been made possible. What is more, this subjection of the Son to the Father is eternal. It is a constant fact of their relationship. Paul states this precisely in I Corinthians 15:28, "Then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all."

Does this then reduce the Son to an inferior being? In no wise. "I and the Father are one," said our Lord (John 10:30) and in His last prayer for His disciples His petition was that they should be one as were His Father and He (John 17:21-22). These two great facts, the pre-eminence of the Father, demanding subjection, and His unequivocal equality with the Son, are another of the paradoxes of Scripture, irreconcilable to the human mind, yet plainly stated in the Scripture as an example and parallel of the relationship between Christ and the church, and of the relationship also between a man and his wife.

Subjection, to the mind of the worldly person, conjures up a picture of master and slave, yet this is precisely what it is not in the realm of the Spirit. The subjection of the church is subjection no less, but subjection is a divine partnership. "We are God's fellow workers," says Paul (I Corinthians 2:9) which is but an echo of our Lord's own words to His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). Thus do these two irreconcilables meet in the church, the partnership between God and His people, and the over-ruling lordship of Christ to which our unswerving subservience is due. It is in this wholehearted allegiance and subjection alone that the dignity of the church, the dignity of Christ who begot her, and her power are preserved.

"Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for it" (v. 15). In the love of Christ we have the most potent of all reasons for the subjection of His people. We have been raised up to the position of co-workers with God, but the love which made this possible was initiated by Him and not by us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us," says John (I John 4:10). Of everything good in the assembly God is the initiator. The fruit of the Spirit revealed in the church is but a response to the initiative of God revealed in His irresistible love. Likewise, in the family relationship, as Paul points out, the duty of the wife is subjection, but the responsibility of the husband is to initiate this love and respect which deserves subjection. In v. 5 we see too something of the magnitude of Christ's love. It counted no cost too great to attain its objective. Christ gave Himself. There was nothing that He withheld, either of heavenly glory and position, or of effort and sacrifice when He took upon Himself the form of man. The cost was greater than anything we can ever conceive, yet this cost is the measure of the love of the Lord who dwells in the church as its Head. "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all," wrote Isaac Watts. To those who have tasted anything of the grace of God, can such love go without response? Can it fail to win the devotion and subjection of the assembly?

The whole object of the love of God is to win this end. Love, as we have already seen, is purposeless unless it have an objective, and it is incomplete unless it gains that objective. So in Christ's love we have His reason for choosing the church, and in choosing the church He also accepted a responsibility towards it. He has chosen us that we should bear fruit in His likeness, that we should be sanctified, set apart and holy (v. 26), and the method He uses to fulfil His responsibility towards us is 'the washing of water with the word.'

Already we have looked into the meaning of the Word of God, and have seen that it has various expressions. The main and complete expression which we have today, however, is a book, the Bible, and the knowledge and right use of this book play a most important part in our spiritual lives. Outlining the purpose of Scripture to Timothy, Paul states, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17). The Word of God has a reproving and correcting power which leads to righteousness, or, to use the terminology of Ephesians 5:27, the Word of God, like water, cleanses.

Water is used in many places in Scripture to symbolise the Word of God, and under this symbol we can find a number of pertinent confirmations of the importance of the cleansing which is the object of Christ's working in the assembly.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, two conditions are laid down as essential for full communion with God. Says the writer, "Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). The sprinkling of the conscience and the washing of water both, of course, refer to Old Testament rites which were themselves types of the work of Christ. The former is a reference to the sacrifices of the great day of atonement, when the blood of the bullock, slain as a sin offering, was sprinkled upon the mercy seat by the high priest (Leviticus 16). This sacrifice looked forward to Calvary where Christ, through the shedding of His blood, offered Himself as an eternal sacrifice for the sins of the world. It is through the merits of His sacrifice that we are born into the family of God and cleansed eternally from the guilt which had shut us out from His presence. There is no approach to God possible other than on this ground of redemption.

Yet the sacrifice of the great day of atonement did not mean that priests and people were automatically fitted for fellowship with God for another year. It did mean that fellowship was their right, but there were many things which could hinder that communion, such as ceremonial defilements and uncleanness contracted in the course of daily living. From all these they had to be cleansed whenever the necessity arose, and this cleansing was by water. Numbers 19 shows us how this was carried out. A red heifer was sacrificed, and the blood was sprinkled 'toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times' (v. 4) indicating to us that, whatever means God uses to accomplish His purpose, all is based on the sacrifice of His Son. Then the carcass was burnt and the ashes mixed with water which was used as a water of purification. When a person contracted any defilement, this water had to be applied, otherwise he was cut off from Israel.

The same principle is revealed in the ministrations of the priests in the tabernacle. Between the tent of meeting and the altar was a laver made of brass and filled with water. At the laver the priests had to wash their hands and feet each time they approached the tent to offer sacrifice. Fellowship with God was possible on the ground of a cleansed relationship and of a cleansed walk.

In each of these ceremonies the water is symbolic of the Word which cleanseth. Our Lord Himself illustrated this principle in the incident of which we read in John 13 when, girding Himself with a towel, He took water and began to wash the feet of His disciples. On Peter's protest, the Lord replied, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me," and in answer to yet another remark of Peter said, "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (John 13:8,10). The illustration is a very simple one. A man has gone to the well for his daily bath. He washes and is clean, but in walking back to his house his feet become soiled. On reaching home he does not need to bathe all over again, but once the dirt has been washed from his feet, is clean once more.

Our hands and our feet are the parts of our body which come most often in contact with things around us. There can be no excuse for sin in the lives of the children of God. The grace of Christ is sufficient to meet every need and to deal with every temptation. Yet the fact of sin, however inexcusable, cannot be ignored. Through the subtlety of Satan and of the flesh and of contact with the world around, God's people become defiled. The thought of malice, or jealousy, or pride, or a host of other things defile and cloud the fellowship between us and the Lord which is our right. From such defilement we must be cleansed if fellowship is to be restored and if our lives are to reflect that holy and separate testimony which is the object of His choice and responsibility. The cleansing is accomplished through the water of the Word.

The standard of God's Word must ever be before us. The Israelites were enjoined, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein" (Joshua 1:8). The standard of the Lord must be part of our very lives, to lighten our thoughts and actions, to judge and condemn, and to cleanse. To what extent are we ready to subject all that makes up our daily lives to the searching scrutiny of the Word of God? When the Word pronounces judgement, are we ready to accept its condemnation? Are we ready to wash in it and be cleansed? This is God's provision for the necessities of our daily walk, that no sin should mar His purpose, that we should walk the sanctified walk before Him and before the world, and the assembly should be prepared for the day when Christ will present her unto Himself.

Christ, having loved and chosen the church, and having fulfilled His responsibility towards it in cleansing and sanctification, will 'present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or

wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish' (v. 27). What must be the attitude of our Lord as He makes this presentation, and what must be the attitude of the church? Surely one of great joy. The shepherd, after his long and weary search for the missing sheep, 'when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing' (Luke 15:5). We may assume that, as far as it was able, the sheep rejoiced too. A mother prepares her little girl for a party. With great care she attends to every item of her dress; her frock has been laundered to perfection; her hair is carefully groomed and gathered together with a bright ribbon tied into a neat bow; and her shoes have a shine fit for a queen. The job is completed. Will not her mother be happy at the result? Will not her little daughter be happy also? This is the joy of the church, the joy of a faithful Lord, and the joy of a grateful people.

Two aspects of the relationship between Christ and the church remain, communion and union. "As Christ also loved the church....even so ought husbands also to love their own wives" (vs. 25, 28). The word 'ought' here is important, because it shows that Christ's love for the church was not mechanical, but was entered into by a conscious act of His own volition. He loved because He wanted to love. It was this love that invoked a response of subjection and love in return. This, then, is communion, the conscious and voluntary flow of love between the Lord and His people.

But v. 31 tells us, "They two shall be one flesh." The Lord and His church are one. One life flows through them both. When the world looks upon the church, the world should see Christ. In praying for the unity of His people, the Lord made two requests, "that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21), and "that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22). These two requests illustrate the relationship between union and communion in the church. The oneness of the Son with the Father was not a passive unity, but a unity which produced an actual, voluntary co-working, a divine co-operation or communion.

With the advent of the ecumenical movement, the hierarchy of a large section of organised Christianity has started to echo the cry of 'unity.' It does not seem to have been recognised, however, that union without communion is meaningless. Whereas union, on an earthly level, can, with however much difficulty, be worked out by the application of appropriate techniques, given a modicum of human goodwill, understanding, and readiness to compromise, communion is totally dependent on a life which is born of God. The 'communion' of a united participation in ceremonies and ritual by diverse, united groups is but a game, a poor make-believe. Where there is not a heart that feels for one another, a crucifixion of self, and an entrance into 'body consciousness' which is the product alone of regeneration and the continuous flow of the life and vitality of the Spirit, there can be no communion in any spiritual sense, and unity is but a meaningless relationship in death.

It should always be remembered that the foregoing seven characteristics of the relationship between the Lord and His people are not simply matters of personal blessing and privilege between the individual and His Lord. They are characteristics which must pervade the life of the assembly, and the relationship of believer with believer. The whole nature of the church means that, what we are to God, we must be to one another. To know subjection, love, and joy towards Christ means also to know these things towards Him in our brethren, for He is not detached from them. He indwells them. This is what John meant when he wrote, "Whosoever loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (I John 5:1). It follows, therefore, that if we know anything of the meaning of the church as the bride of Christ, it will inevitably result in a practical sense of responsibility to nourish and cherish the body of which we are an intrinsic part, even as Christ also nourishes and cherishes the church (v. 29). We have already examined the means whereby this building up of the body is accomplished, through

the grace of God expressed in the gifts enumerated in chapter 4:11. Chapter five ends on a note of mutual responsibility. "Nevertheless do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she fear her husband" (v. 23). The Lord has a responsibility towards us. We have a responsibility towards Him, a responsibility fulfilled in the assembly.

Chapter 15: Spiritual Defence

In the last chapter of the epistle Paul leaves the immediate sphere of the church to draw our attention particularly to two aspects of our life in the world which can make or mar our testimony, and can make or mar the testimony of the whole assembly: our homes and our work. Then he sums up with a statement of our spiritual warfare, showing the forces against which we are in constant combat, and the resources at our disposal to meet every possible need.

The subject of ch. 6 vs. 1-4 is the Christian home. A home in which the standard of God's Word is upheld can be one of the most effective witnesses for Christ. On the other hand, a home in which the standard of the Lord is not honoured can be one of the most damaging of all things to a clear testimony. Paul exhorts both children to obedience and parents to a recognition of their responsibility. While the laxity of parents is not an excuse for the disobedience of their children, yet parents are under obligation, as in a position of authority, to see that their children perform their duty towards them and the household. "Nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (v. 4). The Lord, once more, is our example in the exquisite balance of love and discipline with which He deals with each one of us, loving as no one else can love, yet never digressing from the absolute standard of His own holiness, never failing to administer the necessary rebuke and correction.

How often God's people fail in this most acid of all tests, their relationship in their homes with those to whom they are most close, their own families. Scripture places great importance on the right ordering of the household. In the life of Abraham it is stated as one of the reasons why he was brought into the intimate counsels of God. "And the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do? For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement'" (Genesis 18:17,19). In the life of the church too, it is of paramount importance, and laid down decisively as a condition of eldership, or of holding a deacon's position, in the assembly. Writes Paul to Timothy, "An overseer then must be....one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (but if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)....Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." These may well be the most neglected of all conditions laid down for elders and deacons, yet the logic of Scripture is unassailable, and the standard is unmistakable. When it is ignored, the confusion of a disordered household is not long in entering the church.

While we are not of the world, we are in the world, and God's people, as everyone else, have to earn their livelihood, usually in business or trade which is very much bound to the things of earth. Inevitably, a large proportion of their day is occupied with concerns which may seem to be very far removed from the things of God. Yet this also can and must be a means of testimony. The indwelling of the Spirit who sets us apart as a people holy and separate unto the Lord likewise sanctifies the commonest things of everyday life and the most earthbound of tasks as a means of revealing His life. When the priests of the Old Testament were set apart for the service of the tabernacle by the touch of the anointing oil, the vessels of the tabernacle and the articles even of most common use by the priests

in their daily duties were set apart also (Exodus 30:25-30). God had to use all in order to give full expression to His purpose.

In vs. 5-9 Paul lays down the very important principle that all service is 'unto the Lord' (v. 7). In each of these five verses he actually repeats the same thing in a slightly different way. The life of Christ must permeate our work for earthly masters and give evidence of a standard far above what the world would accept. The Christian should in all respects be more faithful and more efficient, since he works not for earthly gain but for God's glory (v. 6).

Our relationship to Christ redirects the whole motive of our lives, and changes, therefore, the motive of our service in the world. Paul further states this in writing to the Colossians. "Whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men," he says (Colossians 3:23). It follows, of course, that what cannot be done 'heartily, as unto the Lord' must be rejected. In the modern world there are many spheres of employment which are little more than organised godlessness--the entertainment world, the liquor trade and a host of others. In such things the Christian has no place. While from an earthly point of view they are often the most remunerative occupations, the person whose heart is set upon the things that are eternal will have no difficulty in passing them by.

It is a great privilege to be called to preach the Word of God, but it is no less a privilege and responsibility to be called, as we all are, to practice the Word of God. Whether master or servant, life consists of one great opportunity for showing forth whose we are and to whom, above all others, our allegiance is due. The greatest impact upon the godless world around is made when the standard of the life of Christ is revealed in alien circumstances through the faithfulness to the Lord of His people. The extent to which we take Christ into our daily work or leave Him out can make or mar the witness of the assembly.

In connection with each of the two foregoing subjects, there is one other factor which deserves our attention. Paul exhorts children to obey their parents 'in the Lord,' and servants to obey their masters 'according to the flesh' (vs. 1, 5). Absolute authority belongs to one only, God, and in no sphere of living, be it in the home, in business, or anywhere else, should our duty to man bring us into conflict with our duty to God who is above man. Where there is this conflict, man is overstepping his authority and ascribing to himself a position which is not his by right. The head of a department in a firm has complete authority within his own sphere, but he has no authority to instruct those under him to do what is inconsistent with the policy framed by the directors of the firm or with the laws of the land, for he himself is in a position of subjection to them both. Theirs is an authority higher than his own.

The principle of human government is recognised in Scripture, and of the powers that be Paul goes so far as to say that they are 'ordained of God.' Subjection to them is straitly enjoined as the duty of God's people (Romans 13:1-5). It is also well to remember that Paul wrote at a time when most of the known world was under the despotic power of Rome. Palestine was but a vassal state in the heathen, Roman empire, and followers of Christ, who were considered a new and heretical sect, had little sympathy from any section of the community. But the unmistakable duty of the early Christians was to recognise the legitimate authority of the power under which they lived. When that power, however, sought to dictate their relationship to God, their duty was again unequivocal. Their duty was to God first. "We must obey God rather than man," said the apostles (Acts 5:29). Our Lord Himself, in example and precept, left us an unerring guide. When asked whether He, as a Jew, should pay tax to the Roman power, He took a penny. "Whose is this image and superscription?" He enquired. "Caesar's," His

tempters replied. Then said Jesus, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:16-17).

In this epistle we have been concerned not with things earthly but with things heavenly. The church, as we have seen, belongs not simply to time, but to eternity. The blessings of God's kingdom into which we enter during our lifetime upon earth are but a foretaste of the much greater that is to come. The fellowship of the Lord and His people in the assembly is but the beginning of a communion whose measure is the measure of God Himself. It is to be expected that the purpose of God through His church will be contested by the powers of earth and hell which have always stood in implacable opposition to Him. This is precisely what Paul states as he draws our attention to the great spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (v. 12). Here is our foe, a spiritual foe, and our defence must be a spiritual defence.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might," says Paul (v. 10). He ends his letter where he began it, with our complete and utter dependence upon Christ. From this we must never get away. One of the most insidious temptations which assails the people of God comes at a stage of spiritual maturity where they feel that they can win through in the spiritual struggle by virtue of what strength they themselves have already gained in Christ. One of the dangers of spiritual experiences is that it will lead to a self-assurance which presages a fall. This was the subject of one of Paul's strongest words to the Galatians. "Are ye so foolish?" he asks, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?" Here is a very salutary warning for all who would serve the Lord. When we have known the grace of God's blessing upon our ministry, let us beware lest, at that very moment, we take our eyes of dependence off the Lord, we ourselves become a hindrance to His ways, and what was once the work of God ends up as a work of the flesh.

God has provided, in His spiritual armour, a full resource with which to 'stand against the wiles of the devil' (v. 11), a supply to meet the need of 'the evil day' (v. 13), and the strength, having overcome all, 'to stand' (v. 13). We should remember that the defence which the Lord affords is an assurance against spiritual defeat, but not necessarily a protection against the loss of material and earthly things. The 'evil day' of which Paul speaks in verse thirteen no doubt indicated the storm of intense persecution which was so soon to descend upon the churches. The Lord had already promised such to His disciples, but Paul's assurance was that, should everything of temporal value be removed from them, those things which were of eternal value could never be taken away. We often take for granted that the Lord's protecting care means that we should forever be shielded from material hardship; in fact we sometimes seem to lay greater store on the things of earth than on the safekeeping of our faith, yet Scripture leaves little warrant for such an outlook. Our Lord, in the supreme victory which won our salvation, died bereft of everything that this world considers of value. This is the victory promised to us, His followers. Whether God wills to bless us materially or not, in Christ and the armour of God we have a defence against the temptations of riches or poverty, health or sickness, joy or sorrow--a defence which can bring us through with a faith and a witness unimpaired.

"The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds" (II Corinthians 10:4). Here they are: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. Truth is indicative of what we are. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts," said the psalmist (Psalm 51:6). Truth is the unalterable characteristic of a life of which Christ is the centre. Righteousness, our breastplate (v. 14), is the practice of truth, the works that must follow

faith. If our profession of faith is bereft of anything of the righteous character of Christ revealed in our daily walk, then we are defenceless indeed. To publish the gospel of peace is the commission the Lord Himself has given us. It should be one of the greatest incentives of our Christian walk in the world. Let us be ever pressing forward to make Christ known. This, our work, is also our defence. Inactivity always leaves a way open for Satan to attack. The beginning of David's decline was when, 'at the time when kings go out to battle,' he was idly whiling away the evening walking on the roof of his house (II Samuel 11:2).

To these three aspects of Christian testimony Paul adds another three, all of which increase in effectiveness in proportion to our faithfulness in walk and witness: faith, that confidence in the Lord which experience of His grace can increase, but never diminish; salvation, that demonstration of victory and power over sin which is an inalienable part of a life lived under His control; the Word of God, which the experience of ages has demonstrated as the sure and only weapon to combat sin and the forces of evil. If we but learn to use these weapons of our spiritual warfare, every power that would exalt itself in opposition to the purposes of God must bow in defeat.

But the armour of God relates pre-eminently to the church. If we are to understand the message of this epistle aright, we must view everything in its relationship to the body, for the church, the body of Christ, is the burden of the letter. As we have seen, salvation takes us out of the realm of self, and into the realm of fellowship, of body consciousness, and it is the church which is the dwelling place of God and the seat of His power. It is against the body, therefore, that all the attacks of the enemy are directed, and it is for the body, the new man, that God has provided an armour. Satan has little fear of the individual. If he can isolate one of God's children, he will quickly do his worst. But he dreads the body, for against it he is powerless, and in opposing it he suffers inevitable defeat. All of us have experienced the strength of fellowship in times of trial, and have, in some measure at least, therefore known the protection of the body in the enemy's attack, but do we simply seek the shade of the assembly in a time of storm, and then desert it when we feel the storm is past? Do we know what it is to stand constantly in the strength of the body, to know the strength of God's overcoming power in the active witness of the assembly? This is what God desires. He desires that always we should be found as part of the new man, protected by the divine armour, and armed to fight the battles of the Lord.

Just as no individual can contain all the fullness of God, so in no one individual can be seen the full strength of 'the whole armour of God.' The armour is the armour of the new and corporate man. Another brief review of the different parts of the armour will at once make this clear. Take the first three parts-- truth, righteousness, and the gospel of peace. One believer is totally inadequate to reveal the measure of truth and righteousness which was revealed in our Lord. Moreover, we have also already seen that these qualities only find adequate expression through the relationship of God's people one with another. Likewise, the only complete witness to the gospel of peace is the church, for it is only the assembly that demonstrates the most important fact of all in our salvation, namely, that we have been lifted out of the realm of self and fused together in the body.

Similarly, faith, salvation and the Word of God find their true and most effective place in the church. While we do not in the least disparage the preciousness of individual faith, yet there is an authority of faith repeated in the assembly which is revealed nowhere else, and which is never promised to the isolated believer. This is plainly brought out in the words of our Lord in Matthew 18:19-20, "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My

name, there am I in the midst of them." The triumph also of a full salvation is made real in our lives through the working of the body, and not least of all through the agreement of faith of which we have just been speaking in appropriating the full victory of Calvary. Lastly, it is in the church that the Word of God takes on its full meaning as we see it expressed in the lives of God's children, and it is in the relationship of the church, therefore, that we are brought into an ever-deeper understanding of the Word and of its implications.

There may certainly be a very precious application of the armour of God to our individual spiritual lives, but its full might and power are revealed in the church, and it is there that we can know the fullness of its protection. It is pre-eminently the armour of the new man.

The exhortation to intercession of vs. 18-20 is a challenge to enlarge our horizons and widen our vision. Paul urges that the scope of our prayers, 'in all perseverance,' should extend from our 'supplication for all saints' (v. 18) to our remembrance of the lone, individual witness for Christ, as he was himself, a prisoner in Rome. We must never allow our vision of the universality of God's purpose to divert our interest and sense of responsibility from the needs of those alongside whom the Lord has placed us in the fellowship of the gospel. On the other hand, we must never become so parochial and limited in vision that we lose our sense of the greatness of God's purpose which embraces those of every clime and tongue and race. We, all of us, have an inescapable obligation one to another.

In our consideration of this epistle, we have seen how the church in any locality is complete in itself. Yet at the same time, the church transcends every geographical barrier, even as it transcends time. It transcends also race and human culture, and while within a local assembly there may be, by the grace of God, a completely adequate supply of spiritual gift to meet the need, it remains true, paradoxically maybe, that where such an assembly, in a spirit of self-sufficiency, closes its doors to an extra-local ministry, it loses something vital that can never be regained; it loses a true sense of the greatness of the purposes of God. The same applies to self-sufficiency in the church on any level. The assembly which looks upon itself as Indian, or British, or Chinese, or belonging to any one race is an anomaly. It has moved off the ground of the church as we find it in the New Testament, for the church is not national. Neither is it admissible to feel that there must be self-sufficiency of ministry within one national group, for in Christ we are a new and spiritual nation, and it is on the basis of that new and separate people alone that the Lord gives the gifts which will build up and edify the church. A desire for self-sufficiency in any sphere which is narrower than the compass of the heavenly citizenship is pride, and pride cannot be honoured of God.

Paul asks for prayer that, prisoner though he is, he might speak boldly as he ought (v. 20). Whether bond or free, he was a constant witness to what God had revealed. To the great truths we have seen in this epistle, the truths of the gospel and of the church, we likewise are to be a testimony.

It is fitting that, as Paul greets the Ephesians in bringing his letter to a close, he should make this request for prayer, for it leaves him and us in our rightful place of subjection and dependence upon Christ our Lord. Throughout the six chapters we have seen Him in the position of pre-eminence. He can occupy no other place. He is the One who lays the foundation of the church, who builds, who sustains.

The Lord is still building His church, and may deign to use us as His instruments, but except He direct the work of our hands, all our labour will be in vain. Let this be our fervent prayer, "Establish *Thou* the

work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish *Thou* it." And unto Him will be the glory in the church.