

AN OUTLINE STUDY OF THE FIRST CHAPTER OF EPHESIANS.

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PAUL nowhere thinks more deeply and comprehensively than in Ephesians. His subject is the Christian Calling (cf 4:1); its nature (chs. 1-3), and its obligations (chs. 4-6). Chapter I., after a brief salutation (v. 1-2), gives a comprehensive view of the movement of God in this call. In this statement he not only presents some of his most characteristic conceptions but introduces some of his most pregnant, suggestive, and difficult phrases. The initial ideas are praise and prayer (vv. 3, 15). Paul is never more truly devout and consciously in the Spirit than when presenting the deepest thoughts of God and his work. He never sinks to the low plane of unreasoning sentiment, nor to the yet lower plane of mere intellectuality. His logic, keen, accurate, incisive, is always the logic of life, love, petition.

In our chapter we have; I. Praise to God for spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus (v. 4); which Paul proceeds to interpret (vv. 5-14); then, II. Praise for the saints (v. 15), for whom he prays, giving an outline of his prayers (vv. 16-19), and passing naturally, without a break in the sentence, into an informing tribute to Christ (vv. 20-23), wherein he sets forth the relation of Christ to the church. After the salutation, there are but these two sentences in the chapter and our two-fold division is inevitable. Paul has two main thoughts in which he has bound up this marvelous range of ideas. One of the most remarkable things about this remarkable Apostle is the relation of all Christian ideas in his thinking. For him "the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God"

(4:13) is a very real conception. Let us come to a more detailed outline.

I. Praise for Spiritual Blessings. (vv. 3-14.)

1. Introductory ascription of praise: Blessed the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who blessed us in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly relationships in Christ (v. 3).

(1). The English preserves, in "blessed," "blessed," "blessing," a pretty play of words in the Greek (*Εὐλογη- τὸς, ἐυλογήσας, ἐυλογία*).

(2). The praise is ascribed to the *God and Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us *in Christ*, with every blessing *spiritual*. If this last term includes, as with Paul it well may, a reference to the Holy Spirit, then we have in this verse an initial reference to the Trinity. This exactly fits the situation, as the relation of the three persons in the Trinity to the redemptive call is the ground idea in the first sentence, as we shall presently see. Moreover, this Trinitarian reference is prominent in this epistle. (Cf. 2:18, 3:14-17, 4:3-7, etc.)

(3). The universal statement that God blessed us in *every blessing* is immediately subjected to a threefold limitation: (a) Such blessings as belong to the *spiritual*, mediated to the human spirit by the Holy Spirit; (b) Such as belong to our *heavenly relationships*. The ordinary rendering which supplies *places* with *τοῖς οὐρανίοις* is usually meaningless, so everywhere in this Epistle. Redemption has to do with our heavenly relationships; (c) Such as come to us *in Christ*. This term or its equivalent occurs continuously in this Epistle as elsewhere in Paul. He never allows us to forget for a moment that God moves toward men only in Christ and that in him alone does man move toward God. Every Christian activity has its location in him.

2. The Christian call in the foreordination of the Father. (vv. 4-6.) This includes:

(1) Eternal choice of us for perfection (v. 4), just as he chose us in him prior to the founding (casting down *καταβολῆς*, as from his hand) of the world for us to be holy (positive) and blameless (negative) in his presence. Our God relation is anterior to all earthly conditions.

(2) Divine sonship through Christ (vv. 5-6). Reading *ἐν ἀγάπῃ* with v. 5 rather than with v. 4, we have "in love having marked us off for putting into sonship unto himself through Jesus Christ. *ιοθεσίαν* is not adequately rendered by our "adoption." The basal reason for this divine act was the *good pleasure of his will*, a thought again enforced in vv. 9, 11. It is all to issue in the praise of the glory of that divine grace wherein God was gracious to us (*ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς*) in his (τῷ) Beloved. This thought is also made to run through the whole passage (vv. 12, 14). God planned redemption before the making of man's world and acted in his Beloved. So the glory is all his own.

3. Redemptive mercies realized in the Beloved Son, (vv. 7-13a). The items of this section include:

(1) In him we have (present) the ransom through his blood, viz., the putting away of our trespasses (not the consequences, but the *fallings*); and that in accordance with the divine grace which overran into us in all wisdom and understanding. (vv. 7-8.) The redemption is full in quantity and quality.

(2) The making known to us of the secret (*μυστήριον*) of God's volition (*θέλημα*, not *θέλησις*) and this is in accordance with a specific pleasure of God which he planned in Christ (v. 9).

(3) This plan looked to the working out, by stages appropriate to the progress of events, of the restoration in the Messiah (note the article here) of all things, whatever is subject of redemption in relation to heaven and earth. That this is in Christ is made especially emphatic by the insertion of the tautological *ἐν αὐτῷ* (v. 10).

(4) According to this plan, first of all the Jews were made an inheritance, being marked off beforehand in accordance with a plan of him whose energy accomplishes all things in accordance with the counsel of his own will (v. 11). This making of the Jews his inheritance was with a view of these Jews, with their antecedent hope in the Messiah, accomplishing the praise of God's glory (12). When the Gentiles heard the full truth, the good news of their share in the Messianic salvation, they believed and were marked as God's own (13*a*). Hence this redemption, eternally planned of God, and now made actual in Jesus is universal.

4) The completion of this work of making sinners redeemed sons is the sealing by the Spirit of promise (promised by God and more specifically by Christ), the Holy Spirit whose presence and work in the redeemed is God's assurance of his inheritance until the complete redemption of his purchase which is as yet only progressively his own. The teaching is, not that the Holy Spirit is to the redeemed "an earnest" (*ἀρραβὼν*) than he will be inherited, but to God a guarantee that he will fully possess in complete redemption (*ἀπολύτρωσιν*) the saved. Once more we must bear in mind that all is for the praise of his glory (vv. 13*b*-14).

II. The second sentence sets forth Paul's Prayer for the Redeemed.

1. All that God has done for these saints—chiefly Gentile saints—(*Διὰ τοῦτο*), from the day he heard of it, has been to the Apostle reason for continual praise and prayer (*οὐ παύομαι εὐχαριστῶν*) in their behalf. He is sure in such a case that he is praying in accordance with God's will, and he is encouraged by their faith life which has made reputation throughout the Christian world (vv. 15-16).

2. Next Paul indicates the items of his petition (vv. 17-20). It will help the accomplishment of his petitions

to let the saints know their subject. The burden of the petition is knowledge:

(1) That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge (*ἐπιγνώσει*) of himself (the antecedent of *αὐτοῦ* is *θεός*). This redemption is of God and wrought out in Jesus Christ; hence it is appropriate to use the rare phrase *God of our Lord Jesus Christ* here. And, too, this redemptive work we have been four times reminded is *for the praise of his glory*; hence the *Father of glory* is to make it effective. This is to be by means of wise insight (*σοφίας*) into the plan and further revelation (*ἀποκαλύψεως*) of it. The spirit of wisdom here is ultimately (not primarily, perhaps) the Holy Spirit who would call to mind the words of Jesus and guide into fuller truth, functions corresponding to those named in this passage (v. 17).

(2) The "eyes of the heart" are to be opened so that the saints may know three things: (a) What is the hope of God's calling; (b) What is the wealth of God's inheritance in the saints; (c) What is the transcendent magnitude of God's power in believers which is measured by the energy of the might of his own strength. How great this is we may see by its exercise in the Messiah when God raised him from among dead bodies and exalted him to his own right hand in the heavenly relations.

The Apostle pleads for a heart sympathy in the saints that will enable them to see their redemption from God's side: see what he hoped for in calling them; what he inherits in getting them through Christ; what infinite power he has put into (*εἰς*) them for the realization of his hope and the exhibition of his glory in this inheritance. It will be observed that the use of the terms *ἐκληρώθημεν* (v. 11), and *κληρονομίας* (vv. 14,18) refer to God's getting the saints for himself, not to what the saints inherit from God. It is the Mosaic idea of God's ownership in his

people, made more specific. Paul exhausts the wealth of the Greek vocabulary to set forth the limitless power for accomplishing God's purpose in the redeemed, using six terms (v. 9), and illustrating by the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah (vv. 20-22).

3. The exaltation of the Messiah, introduced to illustrate the power by which God is effecting his purpose in the saints, is now more fully set forth and its practical bearing on the redemptive work is suggested. This was no mere exhibition of power, nor yet was it solely a reward to Jesus for his part in redeeming men, it was an essential part of the consummation of redemption (vv. 21-23). These verses are not to be separated from 17-20 as forming an entirely new division, for they constitute a definite part of the exhibition of God's power manifest in his dealing with Christ. But the new matter they introduce and the bearing of it call for their consideration as a separate stage in the argument.

For all this paragraph Gnosticism stands in the background. This is suggested by the exhaustiveness of the statement of Christ's superiority to all other of heavenly authorities in v. 21, and even more by the use of the term *πλήρωμα* in v. 23. Comparison of this passage with similar passages in Colossians (cf. 1:16-20) confirms the suggestion. Yet one needs to beware of allowing too much to the Gnostic idea in interpreting. The language is so selected as readily to meet that heresy in any mind holding it without suggesting it to one unacquainted with it. For both classes there is a teaching superior to and independent of all refutation of Gnosticism.

(1) In seating the Messiah on his right hand in "the heavcnlies" (20) God placed him clear above (*ὑπεράνω*) every form of rule (*ἀρχῆς*), and authority (*ἐξουσίας*), and power (*δυνάμεως*), and lordship (*κυριότητος*), and made his name superior to every other not only for this age,

viz., of redemption through the Gospel up to the Second Coming, but also for the coming age (v. 21). The place of our Lord is permanent, eternal. Not only is he thus exalted as superior to every form and order of authority but he is universal Lord, for all things (emphatic position) God arranged in order under his feet (v. 22a). In redemption at least Christ is absolute Lord—all in all.

(2) But the chief bearing in all this is on the redeemed saints now. So Paul continues; and him he gave for Head beyond all to the Church which is his body, the fullness of him who in all respects (*πᾶσιν*) fills all the (*τὰ*) things that pertain to the redemptive plan and its realization (vv. 22b-23). He is beyond everything, human or super-human, to the church. There is "one mediator between God and man" exhausting in himself all the needs and functions of redemptive mediation. The Church must seek for and must own no other mediator. He is given to her for Head. The *ἐκκλησία* here, as always in this epistle, comprehends all the redeemed on earth. One cannot say positively whether it embraces also redeemed who have died but apparently not, certainly not distinctly.

But we now come to a new turn in the thought. If Christ has been given to the Church for Head, then it is (*ἦτις*) his body. This is no mere inference but just the climax all along sought. God gave him to the Church (dative, not accusative, interest, not mere outcome). He is Head, it is body. Surely no other mediation can separate them. Each is complement to the other. This brings the Church into vital relationship to the redemptive work. It almost introduces a fourth factor in the work, to be added to the three persons of the Trinity. It does not do this for the reason that the Church is made the Messiah's body. But peculiar honor and responsibility rests upon the Church as Christ's body for it is *the fullness* of him who fills all things in all respects. He alone is God's expression in actualizing the redemptive ideals (the Holy

Spirit which Christ sends not being brought into contrast with him), and the Church is the full expression of the Redeemer. The thought is too high, we cannot attain unto it. All the Messiah's success is found and conserved in the Church. And all his work is now effected through the Church since it is his body, his fullness. He is thinking, willing Head; it is active, effective body in whose members the thought of the Head is accomplished.

Of course apart from its Head this body is nothing but a corpse. From the Head it gets its thought, its life, its action, its energy, all. When it accepts any other head it dies for there can be no artificial head. And this is the more important that the Head, the Messiah perfects his Messianic work only in the perfect development of the body, the Church, and in its complete response to his every impulse. The body must be the perfect instrument of the Head before we see "the fullness of him who in all respects is fulfilling all."

We conclude with this from Moule: "What shall we say then to these things?' Perhaps the first and best response is the Amen of holy silence. * * * These sentences were written first and supremely to be believed, received, and—in worshipping and serving life—lived out. Let us *hear* them, in a hush of soul, without haste, and without talk."