

**THE  
BUILDING  
OF  
THE BRIDE.**

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**As seen in the Epistle  
to the Ephesians. . .  
By P. R. Morford.**

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LONDON :  
G. MORRISH, 20, PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

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# THE BUILDING OF THE BRIDE.

(EPHESIANS I. 18-23 ; II. ; GENESIS II. 21-23.)

THOUGH fully alive to the greatness of the truth as unfolded in the Epistle to the Ephesians, yet I would seek grace from the Lord to enable me to bring out a few thoughts which are matter of present exercise with me. It is with no thought, were it within my power, of expounding the epistle as a whole, but rather that we might dwell together on some of those distinctive features of the church as here presented. I had before me to-night to say a little on what might be called the building of the bride. Naturally, we do not connect the thought of building with a bride, but in scripture the original thought of the woman, as a fit companion for the man, is that she is wholly of divine workmanship. She is first taken out of the man, and then as the subject of divine workmanship she is presented to the man. We are familiar with the thought in Genesis ii. 22, "The Lord God . . . made [lit. builded] a woman." (See margin.)

What is unfolded in Ephesians lies properly outside all types, save indeed this one exclu-

sive pattern given previous to the fall. It is unique, it stands wholly alone, and is marked by this great difference to all that comes after in the way of type and shadow, that it has its place before the entrance of sin into this world; it connects itself with the purpose of God outside all question of sin and death as penalty. It expresses in type the divine thought of the church, as taken out of Christ. There is the "Ish," the man; and he names the one taken out of him the "Isha," as taken out of man. You cannot conceive of the woman apart from the man, nor can you conceive the divine thought as to the church apart from Christ; it is as set over all things, and having all things under His feet, that He is given the place of Head over all to the church, His body. As being raised from the dead by the operation of God's mighty power, in which He has set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named"—then it is that we find brought in the thought of the "church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." She is the complement, the fulness of the risen and ascended Man.

It is a remarkable grace that God should have permitted this one type to be given us

outside our state as fallen; it is apart altogether from the fallen condition in which we are by reason of sin having come into the world, and presents the eternal purpose of God with regard to the man and the woman, as setting forth the truth of Christ and the church. There is that taken out of the Man which is of Himself, and of such material the Lord God can form an helpmeet for Him; the church in that way springs from the death of Christ; she is *of Him*, and as such is the subject of divine workmanship, a creation of God. It is of all-importance for us to apprehend the bearing of the type in Genesis on what is brought out in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

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It might be asked, Where are we to find the church to-day? Is there anything that answers now to this marvellous figure? Is it not unreal to speak of what cannot be verified in fact? That would be a perfectly natural question to raise if we had only those faculties which are common to us as men in flesh to judge by. Men with their natural vision can take account of the ruin of the church outwardly; any man of the world can tell us practically that the church is a failure; that it is split up into factions and parties—that is patent to all. But if we are

to gain a divine view as unfolded to us in this epistle we must use something other than natural sense or natural sight. What the Christian sees with is not his eyes but his heart: "That the eyes of your heart being enlightened; that ye may know." There is no way to divine knowledge and divine sight but through the heart. A word has been used sometimes, for want of a better, to express this divine vision, and that is "abstract." It has proved a difficulty to some, and to-night I would like to substitute for that word the thought we get here, the eyes of our heart being enlightened, and that is only as we are given the "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him."

We all know what it is to have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offences—there is no possibility of salvation otherwise; but then as sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise other thoughts come in: we are led on to the truth of the church. But for all enlightenment we are dependent upon the Spirit, and what the Spirit is engaged with, what He can do, is to enlighten the eyes of our heart, and thus bring us into full knowledge.

Let us note in passing that the moment we come to the contemplation of this divine

mystery, it is no longer a question simply of what is individual. The work of God goes on in us individually, but it is to fit us for our place in the body of Christ. We are to be occupied with something greater than what is individual. We have ability and title in the Spirit to take account of the full result of God's mighty operation, and to view the church according to divine purpose as the "body of Christ"—the completed vessel of His fulness. So here the Spirit of God credits the saints with one heart. He says, "The eyes of your heart being enlightened." He credits the saints with one heart, and that heart has to be enlightened by divine power, that it may see the effect of the mighty operation of God which He has brought about in Christ and the saints. That will shew what we must be prepared for if we are to view things as they are presented here; God presents to us what is under His eye, for His pleasure.

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Now the prayer of the apostle properly ends in the middle of verse 20, with the words, "when he raised him from the dead"; then Paul reverts to what is historical: "and he set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." He goes on

to detail the magnificence of that position, and then it states: "and gave him to be head over all things to the church." If we were reading Colossians, we should not come across such a sentence as that: "and gave him," &c. There, all is His in the right of His own Person; it goes further than here, because He is viewed as man. All through, His Godhead is assumed, but it is essential to see that it is the Man that is presented to us, and the church is the helpmeet for the glorified Man; she is united to Christ in manhood. All this is of the deepest importance to see, else truth would be greatly perverted in our souls, and the dignity and glory of the person of the Son would be appreciably lowered in our hearts. He is viewed as given to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

One word as to His being raised from the dead. We, on the one hand, being dead in trespasses and sins, the Lord Jesus on the other, having taken our place vicariously on the cross, entered into death actually in the grace and truth of His own Person in order that, as Man, He might be raised from among the dead. At that moment God put forth His power in the glory of resurrection. He put it forth once for all



when He wrought in raising Christ from the dead. He wrought in the magnificence of a power which will never require to be repeated, because it is continuous in its efficacy, and in that very power He will raise the saints from the dead. To raise a man from the dead meant the whole question being solved between the great enemy of man and God, and in that connection His work can be viewed in its entirety and its result. That will form a key to what I want to say about the next chapter.

Now having seen Christ as given to be Head over all things to the church, we are told that the church is "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." It is a very wonderful verse. The church, the saints viewed collectively as His body, is presented as that by means of which He will put Himself in touch with the whole universe of God. The church is the expansion of Christ. When the Lord Jesus was here He placed Himself within the condition of manhood. As to His Person, He was limitless, but He had come into the condition of manhood here. Now, glorified as He is as man, the church is that in which, in the future, He will put Himself absolutely in touch with everything that is of God in the universe; it is His filling out. It is marvellous that God is going to use the

saints for that—that they should be the helpmeet of the glorified Man.

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I come now more nearly to what is before me, that is the thought of the building of the bride, which I take from Genesis ii. Let me say at once that the building of the bride is connected wholly with grace, and we shall understand nothing about it if we do not know what grace means. We get both expressions, mercy and grace, in these two chapters, and it has often been an exercise with me to distinguish between the two. It seems to me that mercy applies to God's saints of any dispensation in regard to their condition here in flesh and blood, whereas grace refers entirely to a new order of things, and has reference to what is connected with another order of manhood brought to light in Christ and made available to us through His death and resurrection. I am quite aware that we have the expression grace in the Old Testament, but it certainly could not be unfolded there, because grace and truth are come to pass by Jesus Christ, and their full expression is in Him in glory. If we can but once see that grace involves the work of God in connecting us with another order of man and in connecting us with another place, as well as

bringing us into new associations, we shall perhaps touch the fringe of the thought of grace. It is essential to see that, while it meets us where we are, it meets us there in order to connect us with another order of man and place, and bring us into entirely fresh associations. If that is seen, it will make quite clear that the building of the bride is wholly connected with grace. She is formed in grace for her place in connection with Christ.

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If we were to look down chapter ii., we should see that there are seven great features relative to the building of the bride which give us some sense of her greatness and of what she is to Christ. I will enumerate the seven, and though I may be unable to unfold them, yet we can turn to God in prayer that He may help us to reach the truth according to the need of our souls.

We have first of all in verse 6 that He has "made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." That I take to be the first; the second is in verse 10: "We are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus"; the third is in verse 15: "having abolished in his flesh the enmity . . . . for to make in himself of twain one new man"; the fourth is: "that he might

reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross"; the fifth would be: "through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father"; the sixth is seen in verse 21: "in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord"; the seventh would be the great thought contained in the last verse: "in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through [lit. in] the Spirit."

There may be other ways of looking at the chapter, but these are seven great traits which help us in regard to the magnificence of the work of God in building the bride, and not only in building her but in gracing her. If God is going to bring forth such a masterpiece as the bride He would have her graced beyond conception. In chapter i. we read: "He hath made us accepted [lit. graced us] in the beloved." It is a very beautiful thought. If you view the bride as graced in the Beloved, it is that she is graced—taken into favour—in another order of man. The professing church outwardly has put on very beautiful ornaments, but they have no beauty for Christ. What is of value to God is that she should come forth in the grace of the Beloved. When the servant of Abraham in his search for a bride for Isaac meets

Rebekah he finds her marked by grace, and then he immediately graced her. He brought forth jewels of silver and jewels of gold and put them upon Rebekah. She was to be graced in suitability to the one to whom she was to be united, in type, to a heavenly and risen man. That I use as illustrating the way in which the bride is viewed as graced in the Beloved.

In order to see the beautiful putting together, the lovely completeness of this picture, one must view it as the work of God seen in result. You may say, "We do not see it." True, but God does. Past and future are not with God; He dwells in eternity, calling things that be not as though they were: all is one eternal now with Him. In the Spirit we also can view things in result; it does not bring in unreality, for it all lies in the Spirit, and the mighty operation of God alone can bring us into it.

Whether Jew or Gentile, both were alike away from God and sunk in trespasses and sins, and subject to the prince and power of the air, "wherein in time past ye walked according to the age (literally) of this world." I take that to refer to the period of Christ's rejection. I do not think it refers to any previous dispensation, for the world had not

then come under judgment—it had not been manifest. Here, viewed from the side of man's rejection of Christ, is the age of this world; we kept pace with it, and the mighty work of God has come in to deliver us. There is no credit to us in being right, in knowing God, the power is all of Him.

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Now I return to the first feature of the building of the woman, and that culminates with the thought that we are seated with Him in heavenly places. We could not contemplate such a thought were it not that God has first "quickened us with the Christ, and has raised us up together, and made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." We must view the three thoughts together, culminating in our being seen in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And it all flows from the great love wherewith God has loved us. First of all we are quickened, we are made to live, and in regard to that we read, "By grace ye are saved." Twice in this chapter grace is emphasised in that connection. In regard of the very first move of divine work, we read, "By grace ye are saved." It emphasises the fact that the building of the bride is entirely by grace. The first thing is, then, that He has made us to live; and

then it says He has raised us up. I do not think that is exactly resurrection, although there is not the slightest doubt that it is resurrection morally, but He lifts us outside the order of death in which we were, He raises us in that way morally and brings us into a new position where we can come into rest. It is the mighty power of God following upon making us to live. Then He "has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." It is the first and highest effect of God's work in the building of the bride. I want you to contemplate the wonderful place of dignity and eminence and calm to which God has raised those who were once dead in trespasses and sins. Nothing could exceed the grace of it! He has quickened, raised and made them to sit down in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; they are viewed as seated in the order of man set forth in Him risen.

In that very act I think God contemplates the future. He anticipates the moment of presentation. John can conduct us on and name the bride; Paul never names the bride in his writings, but we have to learn the bride in her moral features in Paul. He presents the saints as a chaste virgin to Christ, while John, in the end of the Book of Revelation, takes us to the future moment,

when the church will be presented as the bride of Christ and her heavenly origin and position displayed, and when every moral trait that she has in Christ will shine out in magnificence to lighten this earth below. From thence she will exercise her benign influence over men, and they will walk in the light of the church. The fact that we are made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus anticipates that; it shews us the proper place of the bride, and what is more, it involves union with Christ. That is a great thought! It is a word we use which does not literally occur in scripture, but the truth of which comes out blessedly in the church seen as identified with Christ in the most intimate relationship. It is not simply individual ("he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" is that), but the church is viewed as united to Him and seated *in* Him in the heavenlies. When that thought is introduced we read: "For by grace are ye saved [or have been saved] through faith." We come to the top-stone of grace; the beginning of it is connected with how He has quickened us, but when the height is reached and we are viewed as seated in heavenly places in Him, it says, "By grace ye are saved." The top-stone is brought forth with divine shoutings, crying, "Grace,



grace unto it"! Do we know that in our hearts? It lifts us above the noxious vapours of this world, and its depressing influences. The power of God is commensurate with what is connected with God's own delight. God has set Christ "at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and has put all things under his feet"—and if He has done that in a Man, He can effect the moral work in you and in me which befits the glorious position He has given to the bride.

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I pass on. I have tried to develop the first thought as presenting the full scope of the work of grace: the others one can afford to touch upon and leave for more individual research. The second thing is: "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." To understand the thought of the bride we must connect it with workmanship or formation. The bride is the culmination of the divine workmanship; it is the masterpiece. I am sure it is so in Genesis; we are not told that God builded anything else in Genesis than the

woman. She was to be a setting forth of this masterpiece of new creation, the church—His workmanship. What it shews us is that if we are to understand the church in any way we must view it as a new creation, wrought by the power of God. "For we are his workmanship, created"; the thought is that of new creation, and it is what God is effecting to-day in the souls of His people. We are created "in Christ Jesus"—that again shews that the bride is formed in connection with another Man, and after an entirely new order. It gives us a sense of how we as His workmanship are created in Christ Jesus that there can be positive formation in new creation of what is wholly new and connected with God; it is not formed in man as he is. If you take a prominent man to-day, that man is really formed, he is the product of the wisdom of men and their experience, he is built up in all that is most esteemed among men. But when you come to God's new creation, it is outside that order of man; it is God's workmanship, created to good works. It is wonderful how good works are the outcome of that new creation. In connection with the present creation God never received any good works: indeed the very first act was a lawless one involving the fall. Take David:

his hands were so soiled with blood that he could not be allowed to carry out the work of building a house to the name of the Lord. Well, the church is set here in regard to "good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them." God has laid down, so to speak, the royal carpet on which the church is to walk to His glory here. Christ came out in the holy graces of His Person in good works, and the bride is wrought by God to come out in those very good works which God has prepared. It would keep us from restlessness if we had the sense of the royal dignity and largess with which God has graced the church. The woman in the house of Simon the leper initiated the good works of Christianity—"She hath wrought a good work on me"—and with that very act the Lord connects a perpetual testimony: "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

The thought of the new man now comes in. I do not go into the detail of the chapter but just touch on these few thoughts. "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one

new man, so making peace." The "two" refers to Jew and Gentile, but He creates (that is the word) in Himself one new man, so making peace. How the very sense of that would lift us above all that is national. Here we are confronted with, it may be, a national church, but that will not fit into Christianity. Or we may take a wider scope in our minds, and embrace something that assumes to be international, but that will not fit in in this chapter. It is far more than what is national or international, it is moral and so beyond any human distinction. One new man has been created; God has a different character of man under His eye, and in that way peace has been made, and there is no other way in which it ever could be made. Christ has accomplished it by bringing in a wholly new order of man formed out of Jew and Gentile, but it is a new man "in Himself," to set forth God; it is Christ, morally, here.

I pass on to the fourth thought: "That he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." The thought of one body may be viewed in different aspects. Here it is in regard to the unity that has been brought to pass by the cross; nothing but the cross could have swept aside the disunion among men and have brought in one body. In

Corinthians we have also the one body, though the bearing of it there is that the light of God should be set out to men, that men might come under the light that would scintillate through the church. But the context in Ephesians shews that it is Godward, and it involves that God gains what is for His own heart and complacency. The divine eye can rest upon the church as one body and find perfect complacency, and I think you will agree with me that that thought is confirmed by what comes in under the next blessed feature of the building up of the bride.

“For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” This fifth feature brings in the great thought of access, and that will shew the bearing of the one body in this passage—it stands in relation to access. I do not know a higher verse in scripture than this. It takes us even beyond what Hebrews does as to boldness for entering the holiest, and lifts us into direct access in connection with divine persons. The Godhead comes in: it is through Christ, by one Spirit, to none less than the Father. There is to be nothing between the saints and the Father Himself; all distance is effaced. The One in whom all is effected in manhood is there, and a changeless, perfect complacency can rest upon those who are intro-

duced into access. Do you want ritual? do you want an intermediary? No; the saints here are brought into immediate access by one Spirit to the Father. How one would like to be enlarged in it! It is only the Spirit who can expand it in our souls.

Verses 20, 21. We see here how easily the Spirit can pass from the thought of a woman or bride to the thought of building, because the two ideas in scripture are cognate. In the Revelation He can speak of a bride and a city in the same breath. "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord." The "access" is in view here; the thought of the bride must involve entrance into the immediate precincts of the divine presence, and it is viewed here as growing unto a holy temple in the Lord. It is not in connection with man's religion or man's order of things, but all that is growing up there, silently, forms a perfect shrine outside of all that is of man, it is "in the Lord."

Then we come to the seventh thought, in verse 22. "In whom" again—it holds us to the thought of grace—"In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." God dwelling there in Spirit—that is what marks Christianity. The

blessings of chapter iv. of this epistle flow from the fact that God is dwelling here in Spirit. What a stupendous fact that is for us if we take it in! It is not simply that the Holy Ghost is there; but God is there, in that character. Everything in Christianity is viewed subjectively in the Spirit, and objectively in Christ. The Spirit does not present Himself as an object for the affections of the saints; He presents God in Christ as the Object of the affections. God is not here manifest in flesh as He was when Christ was here, but He is dwelling here to-day in Spirit, and that comes out in connection with the gracing of the bride in Christ.

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We might say we are poor things. So we are, but when we come to the Ephesians we can afford to view the mighty power of God to effect everything, but it is very certain that whatever the heights to which the saints are raised in connection with their position in Christ Jesus, they will never be placed in such a position as that the sense of grace will be lost. „That is why, in this chapter, we have the words “wherefore remember.” We take account of the work of grace. We take account of what God has secured for Himself and for Christ by His own power.

The rest of the epistle opens it out more and more, but this is, so to speak, the beginning of it in connection with the church. Our minds are so dimmed by the failure around and within, yet if we can but retreat into the region of the Spirit, and accept the cutting off of things here, then we shall get the eyes of the heart enlightened and our souls expanded in that heavenly and out of the world order and condition of things where love, joy and peace abide.

May the Lord grant us to respond to all that comes out here in the gracing of the bride!

*Park Street, 5/1/12.*

*—end—*



# THE HEART OF THE BRIDE.

(EPHESIANS III.)

I WILL very briefly summarise what was before us last week. We read together the end of the first chapter of Ephesians and part of the second chapter, and the subject I sought to bring before you was what I ventured to call the building of the bride. These are two terms which to the natural mind would have no relative significance, but we see from the only type in the Old Testament on which the truth as found in Ephesians is based, that of the rib which the Lord God took from the man He *buildded* a woman, and they are called Ish and Isha. There is a definite work on the part of God in regard to the helpmeet for the man. That is before the entrance of sin into this world I suppose we all accept that the teaching of the deep sleep which the Lord God caused to fall upon Adam is that this wonderful helpmeet for the glorious Man could only come into being through death. It involves, for the fulfilling of the type, the death of Christ, though looked at according to the divine purpose the church is viewed as out-

side the question of sin. The moment we think of ourselves as individuals redemption must come in, redemption through His blood.

I sought to view the bride as the subject of divine formation; she is entirely of new creation, "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus."

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There are seven great features in connection with the church viewed as the bride. They form in that way the gracing of the bride, and I would again recall them. She is the culmination of God's workmanship in grace—she is entirely formed in grace. The gracing is wholly connected with another order of man, and involves a new place. Mercy meets us, grace meets God. Grace is love in activity in connection with another order of man—a heavenly order. Mercy will meet man on the earth in the world to come; grace always involves that another order of man is before the eye of God, and the bride is built up in grace, she is formed in grace. Ephesians takes account of us as "graced in the beloved."

First, viewing God's work in the full result, she is seated together in the heavenlies in Christ. It is the culmination of being quickened together with Him and raised up to-

gether ; it culminates in a new position as seated together in Him. The divine work in the saints takes place when they are dead—it takes effect in them at that point, and they are made to live, and they are raised up. That is the place of exaltation in accord with that granted to Christ. Christ went into death ; He has entered into that condition actually, and there the mighty power of God came in and raised Him out of that actual condition of death, and the same power that raised Him is able to raise us out of the moral condition of death in which we were. It is not a further putting forth of power, it is in the same power.

Then we get that we are God's workmanship ; then Christ is our peace ; then He has reconciled both in one body by the cross. Fifthly, we have access by one Spirit to the Father. The thought connected with the body is life and vitality : it is the vitality of affection which characterises the bride. Then it is a holy temple in the Lord ; and then the habitation of God in the Spirit. That is how God is dwelling here—in Spirit. These things really form the great constituents of the gracing of the bride, just as the unnamed servant in Genesis xxiv. placed upon the bride of the heavenly man golden earring and bracelets, so here we get the

gracing of the bride in connection with the great thoughts of God expressed in Christ and made good in the saints by the Spirit of God. There is a building up in the counsels of grace. If we were to endeavour to touch these things with our natural minds we should wholly fail. It is the Spirit of God who is working in the souls of the saints, and in whose power alone we can enter upon these wonderful mysteries. They are not mysteries to the eyes of our heart. Whatever we come to see divinely we see with the eyes of our heart—it is the heart of the saints viewed as one.

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Now I want to go just a step further and speak of the heart of the bride. This chapter introduces the thought of the mystery, and the administration of the mystery which was especially committed to Paul. I take it the truth of the mystery is really the key-stone to the great arch of God's purposes, and what that means to us practically is that if we have not a divinely inwrought knowledge of the mystery we have not got that which alone can hold in our hearts the great divine arch in place. We may have very much knowledge of Scripture, but unless the mystery be known in our souls we may depend upon it things will be more or less

out of position and very largely in confusion with us. It is what the Spirit of God drops into place in our souls that we may get the interpretation of the whole of God's purpose, and that every element of God's purpose may be held in place. Not only is it essential in order that we may be in the good of God's purpose, but for the appreciation of the whole of God's creation. In this very chapter we are told that God "created all things" (the words by Jesus Christ should be omitted). The mystery has its bearing toward the whole creation. While people delve into the secrets of creation they will never get the proper key to them until they are near enough to God to gain light through the truth of the mystery. It is God's key to all knowledge. I think that shews the very great place the church will have. The mystery is the absolute union of the church with the glorified Man, and hence we can see that the church viewed in connection with the truth of the mystery is the key-stone to the creation of God. As to Christ, Ephesians tells us that God is going to head up all things—the whole universe—in that blessed Man.

What Paul is seeking to unfold here is the administration of the mystery. It was not made known in other ages. You may search

the whole scriptures of the Old Testament and you cannot find in them the revelation of the mystery. You may find that one supreme type which points forward to it, and of which we have spoken, and others which in a lesser degree illustrate it, but you cannot find the revelation of it. It is only as we get the light of the New Testament that we can see what lay hidden in God. Paul received a divine revelation to bring that mystery into full view ; he unfolds it in a very few words : " That the Gentiles should be co-heirs and a co-body and co-partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus." Christianity is no national religion. What we suffer from in this Christian country is the existence of a national religion. Now any religion which aims at being national, or any form of Christianity, must instantly militate against the truth of the mystery. If it were national or international it could not be in accord with the truth of the mystery, for that is the joining together into one body of Jew and Gentile, so forming a wholly new creation, and that lifts us completely outside all that is national. The truth of the mystery will lift us outside that into the greatness of the unity of the church.

The church ought to be our prime interest. Let me say this—it is absolutely inseparable

from Christ, because it is "the Christ," it is that of which He is Head; that is the wonderful truth of the mystery, that the church is united to the glorified Man. It is His fulness.

That is what we may call a corporate truth, but to be in the good of it we must lay hold of it individually. I have first to learn that *I* am united to Christ; the Epistle to the Corinthians gives us that aspect—"He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." But when we come to Ephesians, it is not how I am individually united to Christ, but it is how the church, as His body, is united to the glorified Man. That truth was given to Paul by revelation, that we might be enlightened as to it. Grace was given to him that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and make all see what was the administration of the mystery. It should form our choicest inheritance and possession, that as lifted outside the realm of all that is natural we should have our eyes opened in the Spirit to contemplate the whole scope of God's counsels. We should be able to comprehend with all saints, what God has secured for Himself in the church as the body of Christ, the expression of His eternal purpose—the display of His manifold wisdom.

The effect of being enlightened as to the administration of the mystery would be to put all into its proper place and order in the souls of the saints. That was committed to Paul, it was not committed to John. John brings in divine affections, which enable us to enter into the enjoyment of the truth when things are in ruin. We shall never have the truth in right proportion in our souls unless we see the administration of the mystery. The moment the light of the union of Christ, the glorified Man, and the church, enters our souls the truth falls into shape, and Christ gets His proper place in our hearts. It is the day in the souls of the saints which antedates the day of the nuptials of Christ; when an individual gets the deep sense in his soul of the union of the church to Christ, it is a day in which the soul is crowned with joy. The heart can leap as it sees what God has secured for His own pleasure. It gives you an immensely wide outlook; you see not only divine truth in its place, but you see all created intelligences in their place; you see how everything in God's great universe falls into place. There are mighty heavenly intelligences far greater than man, and to-day in the church they learn God's manifold wisdom—*to-day, now!* Where, you may say? All I can say



is, angels *do* see it : by divine power, I doubt not, they can apprehend what lies outside the ruin and the breakdown, they can take account of the carrying into effect of God's purpose. They do not look into nature to see God's wisdom. Angels doubtless can view the mighty constellations which perhaps the most powerful of man's telescopes can scarcely discover : we might expect them to look there to see the wisdom of God. But no, what interests the angels is the simple work of grace that has broken men down, and enables them to walk here in the grace of Christ. It is there they read the manifold wisdom of God. They see the reproduction of Christ as the result of the work of grace in men. It shews how immensely greater is the moral work of God than what is physical.

In verse 11 we find the manifold wisdom of God as seen in the church is "according to the purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." We must always bear in mind that the church lay in the eternal purpose of God : we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world ; in Christ the glorified Man. What the angels read in the church to-day is according to the purpose of the ages. As the soul simply loves Christ, so it is the work of God progresses. The result of it

is, that in Christ Jesus "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." Faith goes right up to the top in Christianity. You get nothing without faith, and everything one gets is connected with the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it all reposes in His Person. Many souls get troubled between "objective" and "subjective." Objective knowledge means that Christ is my Object, and true objective knowledge is properly the result of the subjective work of the Spirit of God in my soul forming me so that I may lay hold of Christ in my affections. It is in this way "we have access to the Father." The body presents the living character of the dwelling-place of God; it is the thought of all that is vital here outside of the failure. The transition from that to the vitality of affection in the bride is not difficult. Paul does not name the bride, but he shews the position and affections which are proper to the bride of Christ.

"Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." That ought to affect us, we are just Gentiles as they were. Paul was a prisoner simply on account of his administration to the Gentiles. It is these very prison epistles which give us the widest scope of Christianity,

and which bring before us the distinctive truth of Christianity—the mystery. It is the great central truth of Christianity. We may well have a very warm place in our hearts for that beloved servant, for Paul's shame was our glory. He was not occupied with his tribulations, his prayer was for them. There are thoughts in this prayer which are deeply touching and affecting to us. I have no doubt that this prayer distinctly presents his desire that there might be in them a spiritual capacity in keeping with the heart of the bride—the affections of the bride. The test is during the absence of Christ. We get here the deep interest proper to the heart of the faithful bride, and in such an one He can safely trust. It has been said, and it is a very beautiful thought, that the woman of Proverbs xxxi. is the culminating work of the wisdom that comes out in that book. But the church is the masterpiece of new creation—the other may point forward to it in moral traits and in type, but the church is the bride of God's building. The church loves Christ; she is built up in divine affections, that is why He can safely trust in her.

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Paul introduces this prayer with the name of the Father. We see the wide scope of it, it takes in every family in the heavens and

on earth. The thought of every family being named of the Father is, that they all derive from Christ. The moment we get the light of the administration of the mystery we see how everything in the universe of God falls into place, and how every family takes its proper place. We read of many families in the Psalms, and the Book of the Revelation brings into view many families, but they all derive from Christ. The Father is the name of grace. There is one family which is pre-eminently formed in grace—"By grace ye have been saved"; and by grace it is seen seated in the heavenly places. It is the unique family in that it has been granted to be strengthened with might by the Spirit of the Father; and to it has been granted the revelation of the Father's name. Christ has made known the Father's name not to the other families, but to the church. The importance of that is, that it shews us what the church is being educated for at the present moment; it is in order that by it should be made known the Father's name in grace to every other family. All the exercises through which we pass are to build us up in the knowledge of the Father, in order that we may be able to enlighten every other family in the grace of the Father. It is a great cluster of families

named of the Father and rejoicing in the common bond of grace. The truth of the mystery ought not to be too high for the Christian, but an altogether new power is necessary to apprehend it. We need an entirely heavenly, divine strengthening; that is why the Spirit of the Father comes in. It begins with this, "that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his [the Father's] Spirit in the inner man." When it was a question, under the old order, of making a divine revelation as to God's future ways with the earth to one who was greatly beloved, to Daniel, Christianity not having come, and the Spirit not being here, Daniel was incompetent, wise and intelligent as he was, of supporting the weight of the divine revelation. The effect was that his comeliness was turned to corruption. It needed an angelic strengthening in order that he might be empowered by Jehovah to receive the divine revelation. But now the Spirit of the Father is here, the Spirit that is working in pure grace, and the apostle's prayer for the Christians of Ephesus is that they might be strengthened in the inner man. Now the measure of that is to be according to the "riches of his glory." I think that shews us that the goal in Ephesians lies in a wider

sphere than in the world to come. The ways of God would answer to the riches of His grace, and will find their answer in the world to come. But nothing else could answer to His nature but the great wide bearing of the unchanging state; that is brought into view in the thought of the riches of His glory.

It is that I should be brought into accord with the very nature of God as rooted and founded in love. The thought of what Christ and the church are takes possession of the heart of the saints viewed as the bride, and shuts out every false motive, and every false allegiance, and His interests dominate our hearts; they are our supreme interest. If Jerusalem was the great interest of the saints of old, how much more should the love of Christ dominate our hearts, and all that the church is as united to Him; it should be that which we teach our children, and what we bring them up in—the love of Christ and what the church is to Christ, that which is so precious to the heart of Christ.

“Rooted and grounded in love” is the effect of the Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. Many of us, alas! may be rooted and grounded in self-complacency: we have all the light of this, perhaps had it twenty years ago, but the Lord has to take an outside

place with us. The moment we lose touch with the living Lord and give ourselves credit for what His grace alone has effected, we become rooted and grounded in self-complacency. But, as the effect of being rooted and grounded in love, we get a wide apprehension, a wide outlook; mark the deep importance of it, "that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints," it is not here of a few Christians who walk together, it is the heart of the bride in connection with "all saints." If our affections are narrower than the affections of Christ, we shall never know the truth of the mystery. It is not a question of my walk here, it is a question of my heart. In days of outward ruin and failure I must have a very narrow walk, but I must have a very large heart. I must embrace in my affections all saints if I would know the truth of the mystery. I am to apprehend *with* all saints. If divine affections are at work, if we are established in love, we shall all get great help in the truth of the mystery: we shall begin to appreciate the breadth and length and depth and height. And then we shall "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

Christ is indeed Man, but in person He is ever divine, and there are in Him inexhaustible depths which the church will never

fathom. He is divine, but what He is as the Christ is brought within the range of our affections and knowledge. He can bring the affections of the bride to know His love as the Christ. It is not the love of God—the love of God has its bearing towards man generally, but the love of Christ is an unique love. It is the love for His own, and it is a love known and shared only by His own. Christ loved the church, and He loves His own as being the Father's gift to Him. To know the love of Christ in this character we must have known something of what the heart of the bride is, and then we shall be "filled into all the fulness of God." What an ocean it is! It is just to be enjoyed; it is to sit down and to have the sense that we are filled into all the fulness of God, because we are encompassed by the love of Christ. We have not a need.

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The apostle at the close ascribes "glory to God in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of the ages." Well, we are very poor things, but he says, "Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Are we ready to let the Spirit of God lead us into it? God has secured for His glory an entirely new vessel, the bride of Christ, in



which His glory can be sustained and set forth for ever, and that is why I said that what is presented to us in the Epistle to the Ephesians is what is formed in new creation, and is what will support His glory to the eternal ages. It is "the church in Christ Jesus." Our translators could not rise to the magnificence of it. It is the church in another order of man altogether, a new vessel outside of all that man could produce or earth could furnish. It is the church formed in grace, in another order of man, which alone could bear the glory of God, for it will irradiate the glory of God in its purity to all the generations of the age of the ages.

It is a remarkable fact that, so far as I know, Scripture does not mention eternity as one word. Eternity is no supine forgetfulness, nor does that which is eternal suggest wearied repetition, but an ever fresh activity in delight, in the apprehension of the blessedness of divine Persons, ceaseless outgoings in worship, life expressed morally, in ever varying glory and magnificence. As the entranced heart of the saint looks forward into this there will be always fresh vistas of glory in occupation with the inexhaustible Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Park Street, 12/1/12.*

# “UNTO A PERFECT MAN.”

(EPH. IV. 7-END; PSA. CXXXIX. 1-18.)

I do not think any of my audience will feel more incompetent than I do personally to attempt to set forth what is in such a wonderful chapter as we have read together, still I would like in simplicity, as the Lord may help me, once more to touch on the fourth chapter before we pass on to the fifth. We have, as it were, travelled two main roads in this epistle which perhaps we have not trodden before. Certain marked features have come under our notice, for all scripture is God-given and it is like a great city. One may take many and various roads in it from north to south or from east to west, getting a fresh view of things by each route and there yet remain unrecognised beauties.

So on a previous occasion we had before us the thought of the building of the bride (the church is the masterpiece of divine workmanship), and last week we looked at the truth of the administration of the mystery which puts the truth in order in our souls. The distinctive point in Christianity

is the union of the church to the glorified and exalted Man, and that brought us to the thought of the heart of the bride.

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What I would like to speak about to-night is: "Till we all come unto a perfect man." The greatness of the thought need not appal us. Evidently the whole central part of this chapter hangs upon grace. The church is the vessel of grace down here at the moment, and she will be the vessel of glory for ever. Whatever her position, it is all of grace. No dignity to which the church can be exalted will ever obliterate the sense that she is entirely formed out of grace. She is connected with another order of man and another place. "By grace ye are saved." That is said at the bottom and it is said at the top. The verse with which we started begins with it. Grace comes from the top; grace always flows down. We could not possibly get what we have in this chapter were it not for the grace that is given to us in Him. The Lord Jesus Christ as ascended is pouring forth grace to every member of His body here: He pours it forth according to the measure of His own free giving. One cannot read Ephesians without seeing that it brings everything into proportion. Giving is in proportion; the gift is in pro-

portion to the individual needs as set in relation to the whole. A skilful engineer will so arrange the lubricating gear of his engine that just that amount of oil may be distributed to each part as will be needed for the complete working in harmony of the whole. This may illustrate to us the meaning of the measure of grace given. Christ proportions the grace, not that we should be occupied with what will be accorded to us, but that we may seek to come under the grace which is in His Person as another order of man altogether, in another place.

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Then we are introduced to the thought of His ascension straight away: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high," &c. Now the next two verses are parenthetical: they present the greatness of His Person in manhood, and the way God has measured everything in man. Great astronomers measure almost incalculable distances, but they can never give the moral value of distance. The distance to the sun is some ninety-three millions of miles, and at the distance to the fixed stars one stands aghast, but none of these facts can help us morally. God has measured everything in the universe *morally*, and He has measured it in man. He might have measured it in angels but He

did not—angels are not exactly moral beings as men are. They are wholly obedient, they hearken to His commandment, and they carry it out to the full. But we must come to man in order to get the divine conception of what is really of moral value. God can kindle affections in a man, an answer to His own Being. The measurement of God's great moral universe, and the measurement of it all in love, is what I would like to get into my own soul, and I think you will admit how deeply important it is that we should lay hold of it. We can afford to pass away from what is material and from the thoughts of man if we have the measure of the moral universe of God in the thoughts of divine love in a Man.

“Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” That identifies the One who has ascended with Him who has descended into the lower parts of the earth. Does not that give the real measurement of moral distance according to God? I have no doubt the expression refers to His death, but then it brings death before us in a way in which it does not apply to us. We may die if God permit, but that is not descending into the lower parts of the earth—that was unique to Christ. It was only in divine love that He

could possibly measure the distance that the fall had brought in ; He takes account of the full moral distance of death. The lower parts of the earth bring in His death according to divine purpose. He is viewed in this passage as Man, and being searched and known in the place of the judgment of death, perfection only is found in Him. He takes man's place in every particular, and He presents Himself in full subjection under the divine eye.

In John iii. we get rather the converse of this ; the blessed Lord, speaking to Nicodemus, says, "No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven"—He presents Himself as having come down out of heaven. But here, in Ephesians, we see Him as Man in the moral greatness of ascension ; He ascends up on high as Man ; but what precedes His ascension and gives it its value is the fact that He descended first into the lower parts of the earth. That is always the great lever that moves our souls ; He descended ; He came where we were ; He came into death itself. What a contrast to man and to Satan ! Man's desire is to ascend, but he can produce no moral basis for it, and he has to learn that "he that exalteth himself shall be abased." Satan

will seek to scale the heights of heaven ; he says, “ I will ascend into the heights ; I will be as God,” but in the end he finds his place in the bottomless pit. In contrast, the blessed Lord Himself went down into death—I doubt not, that the church might be formed there ; that the answer to the one great type of the woman as taken out of the man might come about ; and, too, that these might be fashioned in the lower parts of the earth that which should completely respond to the heart of Christ, and also be capable of arriving at the knowledge of the Son of God.

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I would refer now to Psalm cxxxix., since the expression in verse 15, “ the lower parts of the earth,” is evidently borrowed from it. It is a remarkable psalm, involving, I suggest, in a way, the truth of the mystery ; hence, though viewing Christ in connection with Israel, it evidently goes beyond that. The main point of the psalm is : the speaker is Christ, and He speaks in regard to what will form His church, His body. Though hidden here, it is all under the divine eye. He shews that wherever He goes, in heaven or in sheol, in darkness or in light, *God is there*. How blessed for us to know this ! It could only be known to us, it could only be bear-

able to us, as God has measured everything in man. It is a wonderful thing to come to that, that God can fill all things now in a Man! There is one Man in whom He has measured everything; one Man who has found God behind all things. There is no spot to which the redeemed can flee now but what he finds God there, God expressed in Christ. We are brought to the sense that there is nothing now that God has not measured up in Christ, and that according to divine love.

Let us pursue the psalm for a moment. In verse 13 He says, "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." The speaker here, of course in anticipation, is taking account of divine workmanship: the bride is the divine workmanship. I have no doubt that verse 14 involves the bride. So, too, "We are his workmanship," though the church was wholly hidden in the Old Testament. Now the church as such is entirely a new creation. It is great light to the soul when the truth of the church first dawns upon it as it exists in the divine mind, and as it really is according to God. It is a blessed reality, there are "all saints"—and the church is composed of "all saints," and though I cannot walk with them all, I can embrace them all in my affections



as I recognise them as the subjects of God's workmanship.

In verse 14 the Lord Jesus begins to take account of what the divine work is in the lowest parts of the earth, “marvellous are thy works.” The outcome of it is that which Christ loved—the church—His substance. It was the divine conception of what was formed in the lowest parts of the earth: that which could, as it were, come forth from His death. It is described here in most marvellous language; He recognises that it is covered in that way in death. He identifies Himself with the divine workmanship—“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” We must view the speaker here as distinct, because Christ is no creature, He is not made; but He is looked at here in connection with His bride, as all of one with His bride, and what a survey we get! The church as such sprang from the death of Christ—the death of Christ was the womb in which the church was begotten. Viewed as such, it is a wholly new and divine creation, and has no previous history. Yet even in Ephesians we must begin with “in whom we have redemption through his blood,” we can never leave that out. Do we discount forgiveness of sins? Never! It occurs in the highest church

epistles, Ephesians and Colossians. We shall never forget it through eternity. Do you think the Spirit of God will ever let us forget the very first link we have with Christ as individuals—the place where He met us and covered us? But when I come to the church according to purpose, it is viewed as in new creation. The Spirit leads the soul of the Christian right away from all difficult words, He is independent of language. He helps us to see with “the eyes of our heart” that which exists before God. He inspired the language of scripture, and scripture is inimitable.

Now the Lord describes here this mighty operation of God, and we see how wonderfully the Lord Jesus identifies Himself with the divine workmanship. The deep sleep that fell upon Adam was a divinely forced sleep, it was outside the question of death as penalty, and it shews that while the church can be considered even apart from the question of sin, yet the death of Christ was a necessity. The church is not formed out of the man that is, it is formed out of a new order of man on the other side of death, One who can ascend and descend. The heights and depths are reserved for another order of man than the one who fell. We need the light of the New Testament on this. “My

substance was not hid from thee." It was hidden from man, but not from God. "I was . . . . curiously wrought"—outside everything that was of man. During those days that the Lord was in the grave the world was keeping high day, but God was working there in the realm of death, and there He was forming the bride of Christ. It was wrought in those depths. You have not a link with Christ but what was forged in those depths: the church is the product of His travail in death, the outcome of the very birth-pangs of His death.

"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect"—not *imperfect*. The divine eye could see His substance, being yet *unperfect*; everything was there in embryo. All with which God will fill the universe of bliss is taken out of Christ; Christ as searched and known is the glorious Man in whom God is going to fill His universe, and into the full knowledge of whom He will bring us even now.

"How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" It was necessary that Christ should be searched in that way to prove that there was no possibility of iniquity in Him (vers. 23, 24); but the result of His path only proved His perfection, tested in every

sphere He finds God in all, and He passes into death in full confidence that in awaking He will be still with God. He has been searched in the heights of heaven, and He has been known in the "bed of hell," by day or by night, in darkness or light, only perfection has been found in Him, and God will fill all things in Him. His character shall be written on all.

He has been down into sheol, and there the church was formed, and then we get God's mighty triumph: "When I awake." That is the triumph shout of resurrection! That Man has come forth and the bride with Him. He has come forth in resurrection, with all the travail of His death, and its blessed results and fruits. He it is, beloved friends, to whom our hearts are attached; He is the One who has come from the lowest parts of the earth.

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I would now refer to Ephesians iv. 9: "Now that he ascended." He does not stop at that, and I would like to go a little step further—"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens." Nothing has changed Christ, the love in which He went into death is exactly the same which marks Him now that He occupies the highest place in the universe. The love

that carried Him through His pathway of sorrow and scorn here, the love in the deepest self-sacrifice which took Him to the cross, and down into the lowest parts of the earth, is the same now in Him ascended and glorified. He has ascended up "far above all heavens"—we know not how many heavens there are, but Christ has mounted up above them all, and He is the very same One who loved His own unto the end.

You see how He has endowed the bride; you get the dowry of the bride in the next few verses, it is a livingly endowed bride. There is not a thing lacking for the care and building up, and setting in perfect articulation, the placing of every limb, so to speak, in this marvellous creation which is formed out of Him. The apostles are not dead, the prophets are not dead to the saints; pastors and teachers and evangelists each work but to the one end, the putting of everything into its proper place: "For the perfecting of the saints." How blessedly all that works together, you cannot for a moment conceive that there can be any competition between the gifts which Christ has given; they are the gifts of His love, nothing less, nothing more, and there is nothing official about them. If we do not hear the apostles, we have no foundation whatever. We are neglect-

ing the very gifts which Christ has given to abide. Then we get the prophets and the evangelists, they are not on a different line, they are as much for the edification of the saints as the others. Then the pastor and teacher: the pastor helps to bring the souls of the saints to rest, and if souls are not in a place of rest they cannot enjoy their food. The church is endowed by His love for the perfecting of the saints, with a view to the work of the ministry—that which constantly keeps Christ under view. I take it that is ministry, it is that which brings Christ before us.

“Till we all come . . . . unto a perfect man.” Here we get the divine goal for all saints—they will all be brought into the unity of the faith, the faith as to God. He will not have a little one left out. God puts the little one first when it is a question of His knowledge, and we cannot get beyond it. I take it that it is the Christian faith. There are no two languages in Christianity, it is the unity of the faith. It is not that you think this and I think that. Christianity is a life, and you do not think anything, and you have not got anything that is not a result of divine work in the soul. It is the knowledge of a Person, and the question is how much you and I know of that Person

It is not doctrine : it is the unity of the faith. It is that which is living and operative ; the faith which was set forth in the Lord Jesus Christ in its perfection Godward. We shall only understand the measurement in man of the moral universe of God when we see that it involves sonship. It must lead us up to the full knowledge of the Son of God ; only the Son of God could bring us the knowledge of God. That is the putting of things into place in connection with the divine thought as to sonship—the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God.



In Psalm cxxxix. the speaker says : “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.” If you are trying to attain to it by any other means than the eyes of your heart and in the power of the Spirit you will not reach the thought. It is in the apprehension of the Person of the Son of God—then what do you come to ? To a perfect man. That explains it. I cannot say much about perfection ; you cannot qualify it ; what is perfect is perfect. I know it is Christ, but it is Christ viewed as the One in whom God has measured everything morally, and what we come to and see set out in Him for God and for us is an order of man which is perfect as to intelligence and perfect as to affections. I do not think you

can get beyond that. It is new creation there, it is for God, and it is for us to arrive at.

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If I might for one moment digress I would say that Satan is working to head things up in a man of might and intelligence, yet no affection; but in this scripture perfection is in intelligence equally with affection—nor could it be less for “sonship” is God’s purpose. In this sense Adam was not a perfect man, being under limitations, though filled with all human wisdom. But in the verses read God’s goal for us is “unto a perfect man. . . .” In the Spirit there is no limit, and so it says, “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” We see all that God is morally set out in Christ, and He fills all things from depth to height, there is no void there. The object is that we should not be any longer babes, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, but it would occupy us with a greater world than the present one; it would entirely help us against the methodized working of error in this world. You cannot go out on level terms with the world. Satan plays with loaded dice (the word used here involves it); you cannot win for it is a system of unprincipled cunning. The anti-



dote is “speaking the truth in love,” it is “truthing it in love.” It is neither speaking the truth alone nor acting it ; it is both, and it is in love, the divine nature. That is impregnable to Satan, and nothing else is. He cannot touch that. John tells us, “He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” He lives in connection with another sphere, where Christ fills all things with the love of God.

“That we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body fitted together,” &c. It is the articulation, the development in particular, of what is of Himself. It is putting joint and limb together in its perfect working, and that is what this new creation is. Every joint is a joint of supply, they are a most exclusive company. The joints in the human body are perfect in their working, but they are not joints of supply. When we come to the divine workmanship every joint is a joint of supply. You have the key to it all ; everything is filled and measured now in a Man. It makes “increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” The human body from birth is dependent for existence on what is outside of it. The Head is all to this wonderful body. It makes increase to the building up of itself in the

divine nature. How very practical this is to us when we lay hold of it. If you want to be interested where would you turn? The company of highest dignity on earth is the company of the saints of God. It is self-contained, and all flows from the Head, and we are placed here in regard of that wide outlook outside of all that is merely material, or that is of man's mind, but in touch with the moral depths and heights which have been measured and filled in divine love in His blessed Person.



## THE PURIFICATION OF THE BRIDE.

(EPH. v. 24 to end; also ESTHER I. 20; II. 12-15.)

OUR subject to-night, in continuation of what has been before us, is the purification of the bride. We spoke first of the building of the bride in connection with Ephesians ii., and next of the heart of the bride in connection with chapter iii., and last time of "unto a perfect man." The subject is a very great one, for it brings before us pre-eminently the present love of the Lord, and we often fail in apprehending the present activity of the love of the Lord to His church. Its application is then put off to the future, but we can afford to look more closely at the unvarying love of Christ that we may not miss the unique character of the present moment. To-day we have in Christianity everything to affect our hearts, and what should touch us very closely is His present love. All this comes in a kind of side way, to extend the thought as to "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ" (as it should read), and then to particularly give a lever for holding in its right place the relationship of man and wife. The

word used as to "fear" is identical with that in verse 33, "the wife see that she fear [or reverence] her husband." The thought is fear or reverence for the person we love.

It is wonderful to think of Christ in that relationship. We shall hardly get a true estimate of the love of Christ if we do not know what the fear of Christ is. It is that which will keep us from any thought of familiarity; it will alone maintain the saints in the dignity of the affections of Christ for His church, so that nothing should be allowed to come in which is not in accord with the dignity of the church's position. In Ephesians the church, though on earth for the moment, is viewed in its own particular exaltation, "seated in the heavenly places" —in the place of royal dignity: therefore in our conception and thoughts of the church, we should ever seek to maintain the dignity with which Christ has invested it. All this is brought in as a lever here to the maintenance of our relationships one with another. If the fear of Christ were operating with us, our approach to one another, and our conversation with one another, would be in Christian dignity. When the disciples were in Christ's presence speaking about who should be the foremost, they doubtless hid it from the Lord. So in our relationships with

one another, if we took the fear of Christ into account it would very greatly affect our bearing toward one another.

The bridal relationship is what I would call the source relationship—that from which every other relationship springs, and yet in a sense it is not a relationship; I use it for want of a better word. The type of the man and the woman is the only one on which Ephesians hangs and it was introduced before sin entered the world, while what is here presented is to shew the man how he ought to love his wife, and how the wife should fear or reverence her husband; it is not so much of that but of the love of Christ that I would speak, and of the present activities of that love in fitting the church for Himself.

Now, verse 24 tells us, "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ." We might say, were we to use our natural vision, that we do not see the church subject to Christ; but the eyes we have to use in Ephesians are those of our heart. They are only given to us by the power of the Spirit; if we are to understand or see the church, or to see the place that the exalted Man has in regard to the church, the Spirit must open our hearts and form in us a state in which we can lay hold of divine realities, so that we may see

them as they are in the divine eye. "As the church is subject unto Christ." How exquisite the picture! It is a divine fact, and not merely what is going to be. This forms the only antidote, as known in the soul, for the lawless condition of things which has come into the professing church. All light and direction is to be had from Christ—"even as Christ is the head of the church." Now in this we have a complete divine picture, but one involving the work of the Spirit in our souls to enable us to lay hold of it. Let it be noted, too, that when we speak of the church it is always in its relation to Christ, not exactly the Lord.

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Let us revert for a moment to what was before us last week. "Christ also loved the church"—how could Christ love what was not there? That confirms us in looking at the church, as the Spirit may help us, as a divine conception. Christ could take it into account. Psalm cxxxix. is purely illustrative. The words on the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself are, "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written." That is what the love of Christ, the sensibilities of Christ could discern, the divine work which was to be effected in His death, here of course as

the subject of purpose. The church was in the mind of God before the worlds were created. The church took form in the death of Christ. Before this it was in His mind, and this is evident since He gave Himself for it. It will greatly help us if we can gain that view of the church. I confess for myself the joy was great when I was enabled to lay hold by the Spirit of the truth as to the divine origin of the church : that it is taken out of Christ.

The church is viewed not as having a past sinful history (as we as individuals have all, alas, had), but entirely as a new creation. Christ could mark in the lowest parts of the earth, lower than death itself, lower than we could ever go, He could mark out the divine workmanship there. The church was taking form in the lowest parts of the earth. That is its birthplace, the death of Christ, and see, when Christ comes forth in resurrection-He brings into view that which was begotten in His death. "When I awake!" Now, I think, the Spirit would enable us to see the church in that way as a reality, not having a history previous to the death of Christ. Christ saw it and Christ loved it. Now what did He give for it? If we read in Matthew xiii. the parables of the kingdom of heaven, the thought of the church is illustrated in the

treasure and the pearl. On the one hand He desires the treasure and He sells all that He had to purchase it. But this is more than that, He gave *Himself*. You may say that was stupendous. Yes it was, because it involved the giving up of a non-forfeited life. You may say a man may give himself for those he loves. Yes, but at the best he gives up a forfeited life. Christ gave up a life upon which death had no claim whatever. All that He was as man He laid down, He surrendered in death.

What is the value of the church? how can we estimate its value? Do we make too much of the church? Its value is Christ, that is the value of the church. I am prepared to abide by the divine valuation. It is Christ, it is of Him, He gave Himself for it, nothing less. That should greatly affect us, especially so as to the light it sheds on this relationship of man and wife.

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“That he might sanctify it.” The thought in scripture of sanctification I take to be entire setting apart to the one who does it. Now the church in its nature is that; its very name, “the church,” conveys the thought. The thought of the “ecclesia” is the “called out”—what is called out of this world by divine calling. It is separated



and divinely sanctified in being called out. The church, viewed as such, has no roots here; it is a heavenly stranger, heavenly in its origin, heavenly in its character. We need to be on the top of the mount to be able to take account of what Christ sees.

Now He cleanses it "by the washing of water by the word." Let us dwell a little on that. I would venture to substitute the word "purify" for cleanse, the thought of purification by the washing of water. Now we should not think the church needed intrinsically to be cleansed, for the church never was anything but the church, and it never could be anything less; but the Lord viewed it here in a contrary scene altogether, and in a scene of defilement, and the great thought is that the Lord might purify it.

To gain light on the scriptural thought of purification, let us turn to the Book of Esther, which, although it does not mention the name of God, gives us many moral lessons. I allude to Esther only as illustrative, not as a type of the church. God was arranging through a remarkable set of circumstances that a decree should go forth that the woman should obey her husband, reverence her husband, and God allowed the circumstances to come about in connection with a Gentile emperor, just as this

Epistle to the Ephesians was written to a Gentile nation. Now a queen was to be chosen, and she must be suitable; therefore purification must come in. It is more in the spirit of Esther herself that the illustration holds good. Being chosen, she comes under the good hand of Hegai, the chamberlain, and he appoints for her the necessary things for her purification. May we not gather from this that the thought of purification in scripture is not exactly cleansing from evil or defilement, but rather a positive work, a fitting for the royal presence. Now we find the maiden pleased the chamberlain, and he speedily gave her her things for purification. Twelve months elapsed, signifying a complete period such as that during which the church is here in this scene, and then the moment of presentation came.

The idea of purification was connected with fragrance—the bringing in of positive graces and fragrance. Now we must acknowledge that the church is under the personal care of Christ Himself in the way suggested, and during those twelve months, the complete period, of her sojourn here, there are the two applications; there is that which answers to the six months with the oil of myrrh, and also to the six months with the sweet odours. There are equal

distributions in the Lord's care for the church—first of the sweet fragrance of His death, and then of the pure grace of His life here for God. The church is to be formed in the abiding sense of the fragrance of His death. She is to go in in the savour of it; myrrh no doubt has reference to the death of Christ. Then there were six months with sweet odours. These are evidently to form her in the inherent graces of Christ Himself. Esther might have asked more, but an exceedingly affecting thought comes in. When the turn of Esther came she required nothing to fit her for presentation but what Hegai, the king's chamberlain, had provided. Nothing!

Now is the church satisfied with the provision of Christ for her at this moment for her purification? Is she satisfied that she should be formed in the fragrance of His death, that this should form the unalterable basis of His tender care for her here? If we were to turn to the professing church, we should have, alas, to say No! She has adorned herself with many a borrowed glory, but the church as such, I believe, is satisfied with the appointment of Christ Himself.

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I desire to shew that the thought of His love in cleansing by the washing of water by

the word is that there may be a positive fitting in His own blessed work, in the way He displays Himself in the constant value of His death, and then in the blessed fragrance of His own life, so that the church may be properly suited for Himself—"purifying it by the washing of water by the word." Washing has not always the thought of cleansing from defilement, and here it is "by the word," the Spirit of God employing a term which shews that it is not limited to the Holy Scriptures, nor even to the revelation which Christ brought: it is the washing of the water in divine "utterance" or word, that is, by word of mouth. It is not simply that one reads the Bible, but it is that Christ holds Himself, in this wonderful purifying grace, in living touch with the church, and His voice should be heard at any moment by the church. It is in living touch, not in letter, but in spirit. Now do we know Christ in that way? It is all in view that it might be presented to Himself. Love is jealous—divine love can afford to be jealous. "That he might present it to himself a church in glory." The moment of presentation has not come, the forming is in time, in view of that moment when the heart of Christ will be satisfied in that which will be His bride.

There is the blessed formative work which

is going on at this moment, in order that it may be presented without a blemish—no spot, no wrinkle, nor any of such things. No divine offering of old could be presented which had a blemish in it; how much less could there be anything of that nature in that which is to form the absolute and positive delight of Christ? How will He accomplish it? Will there be no marks of old age in the church through its sojourn here on the earth? None! Because of His care for it, because of the energies of His blessed service for it. How is it preserved? Chapter iv. tells us: "Being renewed in the spirit of your mind." It is a wonderful word used there; it is not made new in the thought of new creation, but it is the renewing in which the saints are maintained in unflagging freshness. Their mind does not flag, they do not grow old. That will be the effect of the service of Christ; the result will be the presentation of the church in glory without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. No one, not Satan himself, will be able to find a flaw in what Christ presents to Himself. We should have our hearts lifted above the failure and see how Christ is working to effect it all by His present living, moment-by-moment, service to us.

The church is not united to Christ viewed

as the Son, but it is united to Him as the glorified Man, and as Man Christ has length of years for ever and ever. As divine, He is eternal in being and person, but as Man He has years for eternity. Man thought fit to cut Him off with a third part of a century, but He lives in the freshness of perpetual youth as Man, and the companion of the glorified Man can have nothing less—she is necessary to His heart, and is to be the perpetual partner of His throne.

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Then Christ nourishes and cherishes it. How exquisite are the two words! Christ becomes the sole source of supply for the saints—*He* nourishes. It may be that we turn, as Israel did from the manna, to other sources of supply, but Christ still nourishes the church. We have nothing outside Him; He is all to us. And then He cherishes—there is sympathy in all the weakness of our present condition; we can count on a love that can cherish when perhaps there is little to attract His heart; in moments of weakness the cherishing still goes on. There is never a moment when Christ is not deeply interested in the church. Difficulties come, and perhaps we even attempt to undertake for ourselves, but "We are members of his body," bound to Him in this close and most

intimate sense. We are *of* Him, the church is of Him, formed out of Him!

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Now we come to another thought. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother," &c. Those words are quoted from Genesis ii. They are used by Adam when he receives from the divine hand the blessed workmanship of the woman, his bride. They are very remarkable words. I cannot doubt that Adam was divinely inspired to utter those words that the Spirit might through them enlarge to us what Christ has done for the church. One would seek not to be literal in suggesting that this is properly true of Christ and the church. Is not this what Christ has done? Has He not left His estate in glory? Has He not come into manhood perpetually that He might cleave to His wife? That is just what He has done. He did not esteem it an object of rapine to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation. He came down here into manhood, no mere manifestation of the divine in human form. Incarnation is no incident, it is a divine reality, and in that sense our Lord Jesus Christ has left all to come into manhood. He is man for ever, though never less in Person than divine. When we see what is true of Christ

and the church it makes our hearts leap with joy that Christ has become man for ever, that the church might be eternally united to Him. For this involves His incarnation, it involves His going down to the lower parts of the earth, it involves His ascending up where He was before that she might share with Him in every position He fills. It is the light of Christ's love to the church that alone can enable us to take up the relationship of man and wife and to carry it through. The glory of the Lord has formed a sphere here in which this relationship can be held, and held inviolate in the light of the Lord. That is why it says, "Let marriage be held in honour in every way." We may absolutely depend upon this—as Christ has come into manhood perpetually, so surely will He love the church for ever, for it is of Him. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh . . . . even as Christ the church."

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My earnest desire is that on the one hand we may gain an enlarged apprehension of the constant, moment-by-moment love of Christ to the church, of which by grace we form part. On the other hand, that the church, the great masterpiece of God in new creation, may become increasingly our interest, and that it may influence every rela-



relationship in which we are set. If we are parents let us instruct our children in the divine formation and constitution of that which is so great that Christ gave *Himself* for it.

*Park Street, 21/1/12.*

LORD, I know the mighty secret  
Of the work of grace :  
Know that God has willed it—done it,  
Given us *Thy* place.

From the chaos and the darkness  
Of our land afar,  
He has set us in the heavens  
Where Thy glories are.

Now already, Lord, we know it,  
Deep and sure and true ;  
For Thy Spirit brings Thy purpose  
Livingly in view.

And we see Thy bride irradiate,  
Sharing bliss with Thee ;  
Blest and glorious and perfect,  
Competent and free.

Not a memory of failure,  
Never spot nor stain  
Shall bedim the holy splendour  
Of her bridal train.

But the work—the mighty tracing  
Of redemptive power—

Lies unfolded to our vision,  
God's rich marriage-dower.

This the marvel of His kindness,  
That to-day and here  
He can share with us His purpose,  
Bring His heaven near.

