

**FINDLAY
GEORGE
GILLANDERS**

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:
THE EPISTLE TO THE
EPHESIANS

George Findlay

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Epistle to the Ephesians**

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George G. Findlay

The Expositor's Bible: The Epistle to the Ephesians

THE INTRODUCTION

Chapter i. 1, 2

Οὐ μόνον Ἐφέσου ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν πάσης τῆς Ἀσίας ὁ Παῦλος οὗτος πείσας
μετέστησεν ἱκανὸν ὄχλον (Demetrius the Silversmith).
Acts xix. 26.

CHAPTER I. *THE WRITER AND READERS*

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints, who are indeed faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹— Eph. i. 1, 2.

In passing from the Galatian to the Ephesian epistle we are conscious of entering a different atmosphere. We leave the region of controversy for that of meditation. From the battle-field we step into the hush and stillness of the temple. Verses 3–14 of this chapter constitute the most sustained and perfect act of praise that is found in the apostle's letters. It is as though a door were suddenly opened in heaven; it shuts behind us, and earthly tumult dies away. The contrast between these two writings, following each other in the established order of the epistles, is singular and in some ways extreme. They are, respectively, the most combative and peaceful, the most impassioned and unimpassioned, the most concrete and abstract, the most human and divine amongst the great apostle's writings.

Yet there is a fundamental resemblance and identity of character. The two letters are not the expression of different minds, but of different phases of the same mind. In the Paul of Galatians the Paul of Ephesians is latent; the contemplative thinker, the devout mystic behind the ardent missionary and the masterly debater. Those critics who recognize the genuine apostle only in the four previous epistles and reject whatever does not conform strictly to their type, do not perceive how much is needed to make up a man like the apostle Paul. Without the inwardness, the brooding faculty, the power of abstract and metaphysical thinking displayed in the epistles of this group, he could never have wrought out the system of doctrine contained in those earlier writings, nor grasped the principles which he there applies with such vigour and effect. That so many serious and able scholars doubt, or even deny, St Paul's authorship of this epistle on internal grounds and because of the contrast to which we have referred, is one of those phenomena which in future histories of religious thought will be quoted as the curiosities of a hypercritical age.²

Let us observe some of the Pauline qualities that are stamped upon the face of this document. There is, in the first place, the apostle's intellectual note, what has been well called his *passion for the absolute*. St Paul's was one of those minds, so discomposing to superficial and merely practical thinkers, which cannot be content with half-way conclusions. For every principle he seeks its ultimate basis; every line of thought he pushes to its furthest limits. His gospel, if he is to rest in it, must supply a principle of unity that will bind together all the elements of his mental world.

Hence, in contesting the Jewish claim to religious superiority on the ground of circumcision and the Abrahamic covenant, St Paul developed in the epistle to the Galatians a religious philosophy of history; he arrived at a view of the function of the law in the education of mankind which disposed not only of the question at issue, but of all such questions. He established for ever the principle of salvation by faith and of spiritual sonship to God. What that former argument effects for the history of revelation, is done here for the gospel in its relations to society and universal life. The principle of Christ's headship is carried to its largest results. The centre of the Church becomes the centre of the universe. God's plan of the ages is disclosed, ranging through eternity and embracing every

¹ The translation given in this volume is based upon the Revised Version, but deviates from it in some particulars. These deviations will be explained in the exposition.

² The case against authenticity is ably stated in Dr. S. Davidson's *Introduction to the N. T.*; see also Baur's *Paul*, Pfleiderer's *Paulinism*, Hilgenfeld's *Einleitung*, Hatch's article on "Paul" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The case for the defence may be found in Weiss', Salmon's, Bleek's, or Dods' *N. T. Introduction*— the last brief, but to the point; in Reuss' *History of the N. T.*; Milligan's article on "Ephesians" in *Encycl. Brit.*; Gloag's *Introduction to the Pauline Epp.*; Meyer's, or Beet's, or Eadie's *Commentary*; Sabatier's *The Apostle Paul*.

form of being, and “gathering into one all things in the Christ.” In Galatians and Romans the thought of salvation by Christ breaks through Jewish limits and spreads itself over the field of history; in Colossians and Ephesians the idea of life in Christ overleaps the barriers of time and human existence, and brings “things in heaven and things in earth and things beneath the earth” under its sway.

The second, historical note of original Paulinism we recognize in the writer's *attitude towards Judaism*. We should be prepared to stake the genuineness of the epistle on this consideration alone. The position and point of view of the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles are unique in history. It is difficult to conceive how any one but Paul himself, at any other juncture, could have represented the relation of Jew and Gentile to each other as it is put before us here. The writer is a Jew, a man nourished on the hope of Israel (i. 12), who had looked at his fellow-men across “the middle wall of partition” (ii. 14). In his view, the covenant and the Christ belong, in the first instance and as by birthright, to the men of Israel. They are “the near,” who live hard by the city and house of God. The blessedness of the Gentile readers consists in the revelation that they are “fellow-heirs and of the same body and joint-partakers with us of the promise in Christ Jesus” (iii. 6). What is this but to say, as the apostle had done before, that the branches “of the naturally wild olive tree” were “against nature grafted into the good olive tree” and allowed to “partake of its root and fatness,” along with “the natural branches,” the children of the stock of Abraham who claimed it for “their own”; that “the men of faith are sons of Abraham” and “Abraham's blessing has come on the Gentiles through faith”?³

For our author this revelation has lost none of its novelty and surprise. He is in the midst of the excitement it has produced, and is himself its chief agent and mouthpiece (iii. 1–9). This disclosure of God's secret plans for the world overwhelms him by its magnitude, by the splendour with which it invests the Divine character, and the sense of his personal unworthiness to be entrusted with it. We utterly disbelieve that any later Christian writer could or would have personated the apostle and mimicked his tone and sentiments in regard to his vocation, in the way that the “critical” hypothesis assumes. The criterion of Erasmus is decisive: *Nemo potest Paulinum pectus effingere*.

St Paul's doctrine of *the cross* is admittedly his specific theological note. In the shameful sacrificial death of Jesus Christ he saw the instrument of man's release from the curse of the broken law;⁴ and through this knowledge the cross which was the “scandal” of Saul the Pharisee, had become Paul's glory and its proclamation the business of his life. It is this doctrine, in its original strength and fulness, which lies behind such sentences as those of chapter i. 7, ii. 13, and v. 2: “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses – brought nigh in the blood of Christ – an offering and sacrifice to God for an odour of sweet smell.”

Another mark of the apostle's hand, his specific spiritual note, we find in the *mysticism* that pervades the epistle and forms, in fact, its substance. “I live no longer: Christ lives in me.” “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”⁵ In these sentences of the earlier letters we discover the spring of St Paul's theology, lying in his own experience — *the sense of personal union through the Spirit with Christ Jesus*. This was the deepest fact of Paul's consciousness. Here it meets us at every turn. More than twenty times the phrase “in Christ” or its equivalents recur, applied to Christian acts or states. It is enough to refer to chapter iii. 17, “that the Christ may make His dwelling in your hearts through faith,” to show how profoundly this mysterious relationship is realized in this letter. No other New Testament writer conceived the idea in Paul's way, nor has any subsequent writer of whom we know made the like constant and original use of it. It was the habit of the apostle's mind, the index of his innermost life. Kindred to this, and hardly less conspicuous, is his conception of “God in Christ” (2 Cor. v. 19) saving and operating upon men, who, as we read here, “chose us in Christ before the

³ Rom. xi. 16–24; Acts xiii. 26; Gal. iii. 7, 14.

⁴ Gal. iii. 10–13; 2 Cor. v. 20, 21, etc.

⁵ Gal. ii. 20; 1 Cor. vi. 17.

world's foundation – forgave us in Him – made us in Him to sit together in the heavenly places – formed us in Christ Jesus for good works.”

The ethical note of the true Paulinism is the conception of the *new man* in Christ Jesus, whose sins were slain by His death, and who shares His risen life unto God (Rom. vi.). From this idea, as from a fountainhead, the apostle in the parallel Colossian epistle (ch. iii.) deduces the new Christian morality. The temper and disposition of the believer, his conduct in all social duties and practical affairs are the expression of a “life hid with Christ in God.” It is the identical “new man” of Romans and Colossians who presents himself as our ideal here, raised with Christ from the dead and “sitting with Him in the heavenly places.” The newness of life in which he walks, receives its impulse and direction from this exalted fellowship.

The characteristics of St Paul's teaching which we have described – his logical thoroughness and finality, his peculiar historical, theological, spiritual, and ethical standpoint and manner of thought – are combined in the conception which is the specific note of this epistle, viz., its idea of *the Church* as the body of Christ, – or in other words, of *the new humanity* created in Him. This forms the centre of the circle of thought in which the writer's mind moves;⁶ it is the meeting-point of the various lines of thought that we have already traced. The doctrine of personal salvation wrought out in the great evangelical epistles terminates in that of social and collective salvation. A new and precious title is conferred on Christ: He is “Saviour of *the body*” (v. 23), *i. e.*, of the corporate Christian community. “The Son of God who loved *me* and gave up Himself for *me*” becomes “the Christ” who “loved *the Church* and gave up Himself for *her*.”⁷ “The new man” is no longer the individual, a mere transformed *ego*; he is the type and beginning of a new mankind. A perfect society of men, all sons of God in Christ, is being constituted around the cross, in which the old antagonisms are reconciled, the ideal of creation is restored, and a body is provided to contain the fulness of Christ, a holy temple which God inhabits in the Spirit. Of this edifice, with the cross for its centre and Christ Jesus for its corner-stone, Jew and Gentile form the material – “the Jew first,” lying nearest to the site.⁸

The apostle Paul necessarily conceived the reconstruction of humanity under the form of a reconciliation of Israel and the Gentiles. The Catholicism we have here is Paul's Catholicism of *Gentile engrafting*– not Clement's, of *churchly order and uniformity*; nor Ignatius', of *monepiscopal rule*. It is profoundly characteristic of this apostle, that in “the law” which had been to his own experience the barrier and ground of quarrel between the soul and God, “the strength of sin,” he should come to see likewise the barrier between men and men, and the strength of the sinful enmity which distracted the Churches of his foundation (ii. 14–16).

The representation of the Church contained in this epistle is, therefore, by no means new in its elements. Such texts as 1 Corinthians iii. 16, 17 (“Ye are God's temple,” etc.) and xii. 12–27 (concerning the *one body and many members*) bring us near to its actual expression. But the figures of the *body* and *temple* in these passages, had they stood alone, might be read as mere passing illustrations of the nature of Christian fellowship. Now they become proper designations of the Church, and receive their full significance. While in 1 Corinthians, moreover, these phrases do not look beyond the particular community addressed, in Ephesians they embrace the entire Christian society. This epistle signalizes a great step forwards in the development of the apostle's theology – perhaps we might say, the last step. The Pastoral epistles serve to put the final apostolic seal upon the theological edifice that is now complete. Their care is with the guarding and furnishing of the “great house”⁹ which our epistle is engaged in building.

⁶ See ch. i. 9–13, ii. 11–22, iii. 5–11, iv. 1–16, v. 23–32.

⁷ Gal ii. 20; Eph. v. 25.

⁸ Rom. i. 16; Eph. ii. 17–20.

⁹ 1 Tim. iii. 15, 16; 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21.

The idea of the Church is not, however, independently developed. Ephesians and Colossians are companion letters, – the complement and explanation of each other. Both “speak with regard to Christ and the Church”; both reveal the Divine “glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰ The emphasis of Ephesians falls on the former, of Colossians on the latter of these objects. The doctrine of the Person of Christ and that of the nature of the Church proceed with equal step. The two epistles form one process of thought.

Criticism has attempted to derive first one and then the other of the two from its fellow, – thus, in effect, stultifying itself. Finally Dr. Holtzmann, in his *Kritik der Epheser-und Kolosserbriefe*,¹¹ undertook to show that each epistle was in turn dependent on the other. There is, Holtzmann says, a Pauline nucleus hidden in Colossians, which he has himself extracted. By its aid some ecclesiastic of genius in the second century composed the Ephesian epistle. He then returned to the brief Colossian writing of St Paul, and worked it up, with his own Ephesian composition lying before him, into our existing epistle to the Colossians. This complicated and too ingenious hypothesis has not satisfied any one except its author, and need not detain us here. But Holtzmann has at any rate made good, against his predecessors on the negative side, the unity of origin of the two canonical epistles, the fact that they proceed from one mint and coinage. They are *twin* epistles, the offspring of a single birth in the apostle’s mind. Much of their subject-matter, especially in the ethical section, is common to both. The glory of the Christ and the greatness of the Church are truths inseparable in the nature of things, wedded to each other. To the confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” His response ever is, “*I will build my Church.*”¹² The same correspondence exists between these two epistles in the dialectic movement of the apostle’s thought.

At the same time, there is a considerable difference between the two writings in point of style. M. Renan, who accepts Colossians from Paul’s hand, and who admits that “among all the epistles bearing the name of Paul the epistle to the Ephesians is perhaps that which has been most anciently cited as a composition of the apostle of the Gentiles,” yet speaks of this epistle as a “verbose amplification” of the other, “a commonplace letter, diffuse and pointless, loaded with useless words and repetitions, entangled and overgrown with irrelevancies, full of pleonasms and obscurities.”¹³

In this instance, Renan’s literary sense has deserted him. While Colossians is quick in movement, terse and pointed, in some places so sparing of words as to be almost hopelessly obscure,¹⁴ Ephesians from beginning to end is measured and deliberate, exuberant in language, and obscure, where it is so, not from the brevity, but from the length and involution of its periods. It is occupied with a few great ideas, which the author strives to set forth in all their amplitude and significance. Colossians is a letter of discussion; Ephesians of reflection. The whole difference of style lies in this. In the reflective passages of Colossians, as indeed in the earlier epistles,¹⁵ we find the stateliness of movement and rhythmical fulness of expression which in this epistle are sustained throughout. Both epistles are marked by those unfinished sentences and *anacolutha*, the grammatical inconsequence associated with close continuity of thought, which is a main characteristic of St Paul’s style.¹⁶ The

¹⁰ Eph. iii. 21, v. 32.

¹¹ *Kritik d. Epheser-u. Kolosserbriefe auf Grund einer Analyse ihres Verwandtschaftsverhältnisses* (Leipzig, 1872). A work more subtle and scientific, more replete with learning, and yet more unconvincing than this of Holtzmann, we do not know. Von Soden, the latest interpreter of this school and Holtzmann’s collaborateur in the new *Hand-Commentar*, accepts Colossians in its integrity as the work of Paul, retracting previous doubts on the subject. Ephesians he believes to have been written by a Jewish disciple of Paul in his name, about the end of the first century.

¹² Matt. xvi. 15–18; John xvii. 10: *I am glorified in them.*

¹³ See his *Saint Paul*, Introduction, pp. xii.–xxiii.

¹⁴ See Col. ii. 15, 18, 20–23.

¹⁵ *E.g.*, in Rom. i. 1–7, viii. 28–30, xi. 33–36, xvi. 25–27.

¹⁶ See the Winer-Moulton *N. T. Grammar*, p. 709: “It is in writers of great mental vivacity – more taken up with the thought than with the mode of its expression – that we may expect to find *anacolutha* most frequently. Hence they are especially numerous in the epistolary style of the apostle Paul.”

epistle to the Colossians is like a mountain stream forcing its way through some rugged defile; that to the Ephesians is the smooth lake below, in which its chafed waters restfully expand. These sister epistles represent the moods of conflict and repose which alternated in St Paul's mobile nature.

In general, the writings of this group, belonging to the time of the apostle's imprisonment and advancing age,¹⁷ display less passion and energy, but a more tranquil spirit than those of the Jewish controversy. They are prison letters, the fruit of a time when the author's mind had been much thrown in upon itself. They have been well styled "the afternoon epistles," being marked by the subdued and reflective temper natural to this period of life. Ephesians is, in truth, the typical representative of the third group of Paul's epistles, as Galatians is of the second. There is abundant reason to be satisfied that this letter came, as it purports to do, from *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will*.

But that it was addressed to "the saints which are *in Ephesus*" is more difficult to believe. The apostle has "heard of the faith which prevails amongst" his readers; he presumes that they "have heard of the Christ, and were taught in Him according as truth is in Jesus."¹⁸ He hopes that by "reading" this epistle they will "perceive his understanding in the mystery of Christ" (iii. 2–4). He writes somewhat thus to the Colossians and Romans, whom he had never seen;¹⁹ but can we imagine Paul addressing in this distant and uncertain fashion his children in the faith? In Ephesus he had laboured "for the space of three whole years" (Acts xx. 31), longer than in any other city of the Gentile mission, except Antioch. His speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, delivered four years ago, was surcharged with personal feeling, full of pathetic reminiscence and the signs of interested acquaintance with the individual membership of the Ephesian Church. In the epistle such signs are altogether wanting. The absence of greetings and messages we could understand; these Tychicus might convey by word of mouth. But how the man who wrote the epistles to the Philippians and Corinthians could have composed this long and careful letter to his own Ephesian people without a single word of endearment or familiarity,²⁰ and without the least allusion to his past intercourse with them, we cannot understand. It is in the destination that the only serious difficulty lies touching the authorship. Nowhere do we see more of *the apostle* and less of *the man* in St Paul; nowhere more of *the Church*, and less of *this or that particular church*.

It agrees with these internal indications that the local designation is wanting in the oldest Greek copies of the letter that are extant. The two great manuscripts of the fourth century, the Vatican and Sinaitic codices, omit the words "in Ephesus." Basil in the fourth century did not accept them, and says that "the old copies" were without them. Origen, in the beginning of the third century, seems to have known nothing of them. And Tertullian, at the end of the second century, while he condemns the heretic Marcion (who lived about fifty years earlier) for entitling the epistle "To the Laodiceans," quotes only the *title* against him, and not the text of the address, which he would presumably have done, had he read it in the form familiar to us. We are compelled to suppose, with Westcott and Hort and the textual critics generally, that these words form no part of the original address.

Here the *circular hypothesis* of Beza and Ussher comes to our aid. It is supposed that the letter was destined for a number of Churches in Asia Minor, which Tychicus was directed to visit in the course of the journey which took him to Colossæ.²¹ Along with the letters for the Colossians and Philemon, he was entrusted with this more general epistle, intended for the Gentile Christian communities of the neighbouring region at large. During St Paul's ministry at Ephesus, we are told that "all those that dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts xix. 10). In so large and populous an area, amongst the Churches founded at this time there were doubtless others

¹⁷ Eph. iii. 1; Phil. i. 13; Philem. 9.

¹⁸ Ch. i. 15, iv. 20, 21.

¹⁹ Col. i. 4, ii. 1; Rom. xv. 15, 16.

²⁰ "My brethren" in ch. vi. 10 is an insertion of the copyists. Even the closing benediction, ch. vi. 23, 24, is in the *third person*—a thing unexampled in St Paul's epistles.

²¹ Ch. vi. 21, 22; Col. iv. 7–9.

beside those of the Lycus valley “which had not seen Paul’s face in the flesh,” some about which the apostle had less precise knowledge than he had of these through Epaphras and Onesimus, but for whom he was no less desirous that their “hearts should be comforted, and brought into all the wealth of the full assurance of the understanding in the knowledge of the mystery of God” (Col. ii. 1, 2).

To which or how many of the Asian Churches Tychicus would be able to communicate the letter was, presumably, uncertain when it was written at Rome; and the designation was left open. Its conveyance by Tychicus (vi. 21, 22) supplied the only limit to its distribution. Proconsular Asia was the richest and most peaceful province of the Empire, so populous that it was called “the province of five hundred cities.” Ephesus was only the largest of many flourishing commercial and manufacturing towns.

At the close of his epistle to the Colossians St Paul directs this Church to procure “from Laodicea,” in exchange for their own, a letter which he is sending there (iv. 16). Is it possible that we have the lost Laodicean document in the epistle before us? So Ussher suggested; and though the assumption is not essential to his theory, it falls in with it very aptly. Marcion may, after all, have preserved a reminiscence of the fact that Laodicea, as well as Ephesus, shared in this letter. The conjecture is endorsed by Lightfoot, who says, writing on Colossians iv. 16: “There are good reasons for the belief that St Paul here alludes to the so-called epistle to the Ephesians, which was in fact a circular letter, addressed to the principal Churches of proconsular Asia. Tychicus was obliged to pass through Laodicea on his way to Colossæ, and would leave a copy there before the Colossian letter was delivered.”²² The two epistles admirably supplement each other. The Apocalyptic letter “to the seven churches which are in Asia,” ranging from Ephesus to Laodicea (Rev. ii., iii.), shows how much the Christian communities of this region had in common and how natural it would be to address them collectively. For the same region, with a yet wider scope, the “first catholic epistle of Peter” was destined, a writing that has many points of contact with this. Ephesus being the metropolis of the Asian Churches, and claiming a special interest in St Paul, came to regard the epistle as specially her own. Through Ephesus, moreover, it was communicated to the Church in other provinces. Hence it came to pass that when Paul’s epistles were gathered into a single volume and a title was needed for this along with the rest, “To the Ephesians” was written over it; and this reference standing in the title, in course of time found its way into the text of the address. We propose to read this letter as *the general epistle of Paul to the Churches of Asia, or to Ephesus and its daughter Churches*.

But how are we to read the address, with the local definition wanting? There are two constructions open to us: – (1) We might suppose that a space was left blank in the original to be filled in afterwards by Tychicus with the names of the particular Churches to which he distributed copies, or to be supplied by the voice of the reader. But if that were so, we should have expected to find some trace of this variety of designation in the ancient witnesses. As it is, the documents either give Ephesus in the address, or supply no local name at all. Nor is there, so far as we are aware, any analogy in ancient usage for the proceeding suggested. Moreover, the order of the Greek words²³ is against this supposition. – (2) We prefer, therefore, to follow Origen²⁴ and Basil, with some modern exegetes, in reading the sentence straight on, as it stands in the Sinaitic and Vatican copies. It then becomes: *To the saints, who are indeed faithful in Christ Jesus*.

²² Compare Maclaren on *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 406, in this series.

²³ Τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ... καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The interposition of the heterogeneous attributive between ἁγίοις and πιστοῖς is harsh and improbable – not to say, with Hofmann, “quite incredible.” The two latest German commentaries to hand, that of Beck and of von Soden (in the *Hand-Commentar*), interpreters of opposite schools, agree with Hofmann in rejecting the local adjunct and regarding πιστοῖς as the complement of τοῖς οὖσιν.

²⁴ Origen, in his fanciful way, makes of τοῖς οὖσιν a predicate by itself: “the saints *who are*,” who possess real being like God Himself (Exod. iii. 14) – “called from non-existence into existence.” He compares 1 Cor. i. 28.

“The saints” is the apostle’s designation for Christian believers generally,²⁵ as men consecrated to God in Christ (1 Cor. i. 2). The qualifying phrase “those who are indeed faithful in Christ Jesus,” is admonitory. As Lightfoot says with reference to the parallel qualification in Colossians i. 2, “This unusual addition is full of meaning. Some members of the [Asian] Churches were shaken in their allegiance, even if they had not fallen from it. The apostle therefore wishes it to be understood that, when he speaks of the saints, he means those who are true and steadfast members of the brotherhood. In this way he obliquely hints at the defection.” By this further definition “he does not directly exclude any, but he indirectly warns all.” We are reminded that we are in the neighbourhood of the Colossian heresy. Beneath the calm tenor of this epistle, the ear catches an undertone of controversy. In chapter iv. 14 and vi. 10–20 this undertone becomes clearly audible. We shall find the epistle end with the note of warning with which it begins.

The Salutation is according to St Paul’s established form of greeting.

²⁵ See, *e. g.*, ver. 18, ii. 19, iii. 18, iv. 12, v. 3.

PRAISE AND PRAYER

Chapter i. 3–19

Οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν
συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ,
εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς;
οὓς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν;
καὶ οὓς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν;
οὓς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.

Rom. viii. 29, 30.

CHAPTER II. *THE ETERNAL PURPOSE*

We enter this epistle through a magnificent gateway. The introductory Act of Praise, extending from verse 3 to 14, is one of the most sublime of inspired utterances, an overture worthy of the composition that it introduces. Its first sentence compels us to feel the insufficiency of our powers for its due rendering.

The apostle surveys in this thanksgiving the entire course of the revelation of grace. Standing with the men of his day, the new-born community of the sons of God in Christ, midway between the ages past and to come,²⁶ he looks backward to the source of man's salvation when it lay a silent thought in the mind of God, and forward to the hour when it shall have accomplished its promise and achieved our redemption. In this grand evolution of the Divine plan three stages are marked by the refrain, thrice repeated, *To the praise of His glory, of the glory of His grace* (vv. 6, 12, 14). St Paul's psalm is thus divided into three strophes, or stanzas: he sings the glory of redeeming love in its past designs, its present bestowments, and its future fruition. The paragraph, forming but one sentence and spun upon a single golden thread, is a piece of thought-music, – a sort of *fugue*, in which from eternity to eternity the counsel of love is pursued by Paul's bold and exulting thought.

Despite the grammatical involution of the style here carried to an extreme, and underneath the apparatus of Greek pronouns and participles, there is a fine Hebraistic lilt pervading the doxology. The refrain is in the manner of Psalms xlii.–xliii., and xcix., where in the former instance “health of countenance,” and in the latter “holy is He” gives the key-note of the poet's melody and parts his song into three balanced stanzas. In such poetry the strophes may be unequal in length, each developing its own thought freely, and yet there is harmony in their combination. Here the central idea, that of God's actual bounty to believers, fills a space equal to that of the other two. But there is a pause within it, at verse 10, which in effect resumes the idea of the first strophe and works it in as a *motif* to the second, carrying on both in a full stream till they lose themselves in the third and culminating movement. Throughout the piece there runs in varying expression the phrase “in Christ – in the Beloved – in Him – in whom,” weaving the verses into subtle continuity. The theme of the entire composition is given in verse 3, which does not enter into the threefold division we have described, but forms a prelude to it.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: who hath blessed us,

In every blessing of the spirit, in the heavenly places, in Christ.”

Blessed be God!– It is the song of the universe, in which heaven and earth take responsive parts. “When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy,” this concert began, and continues still through the travail of creation and the sorrow and sighing of men. The work praises the Master. All sinless creatures, by their order and harmony, by the variety of their powers and beauty of their forms and delight of their existence, declare their Creator's glory. That praise to the Most High God which the lower creatures act instrumentally, it is man's privilege to utter in discourse of reason and music of the heart. Man is Nature's high priest; and above other men, the poet. Time will be, as it has been, when it shall be accounted the poet's honour and the crown of his art, that he should take the high praises of God into his mouth, making hymns to the glory of the Supreme Maker and giving voice to the dumb praise of inanimate nature and to the noblest thoughts of his fellows concerning the Blessed God.

Blessed be God!– It is the perpetual strain of the Old Testament, from Melchizedek down to Daniel, – of David in his triumph, and Job in his misery. But not hitherto could men say, Blessed be *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!* He was “the Most High God, the God of heaven,”

²⁶ Ch. ii. 7, iii. 5, 21; Col. i. 26.

– “Jehovah, God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things,” – “the Shepherd” and “the Rock” of His people, – “the true God, the living God, and an everlasting King”; and these are glorious titles, which have raised men’s thoughts to moods of highest reverence and trust. But the name of *Father*, and *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, surpasses and outshines them all. With wondering love and joy unspeakable St Paul pronounced this *Benedictus*. God was not less to him the Almighty, the High and Holy One dwelling in eternity, than in the days of his youthful Jewish faith; but the Eternal and All-holy One was now his Father in Jesus Christ. Blessed be His name: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory!

The apostle’s psalm is a psalm of thanksgiving to God *blessing and blessed*. The second clause rhythmically answers to the first. True, our blessing of Him is far different from His blessing of us: ours in thought and words; His in mighty deeds of salvation. Yet in the fruit of lips giving thanks to His name there is a revenue of blessing paid to God which He delights in, and requires. “O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel,” grant us to bless Thee while we live and to lift up our hands in Thy name!

By three qualifying adjuncts the blessing which the Father of Christ bestowed upon us is defined: in respect of its *nature*, its *sphere*, and its *personal ground*.

The blessings that prompt the apostle’s praise are not such as those conspicuous in the Old Covenant: “Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and in the field; in the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the increase of thy kine; blessed shall be thy basket, and thy kneading-trough” (Deut. xxviii. 3–5). The gospel pronounces beatitudes of another style: “Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the persecuted.” St Paul had small share indeed in the former class of blessings, – a childless, landless, homeless man. Yet what happiness and wealth are his! Out of his poverty he is making all the ages rich! From the gloom of his prison he sheds a light that will guide and cheer the steps of multitudes of earth’s sad wayfarers. Not certainly in the earthly places where he finds himself is Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus blessed; but “in spiritual blessing” and “in heavenly places” how abundantly! His own blessedness he claims for all who are in Christ.

Blessing *spiritual* in its nature is, in St Paul’s conception of things, blessing in and of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ In His quickening our spirit lives; through His indwelling health, blessedness, eternal life are ours. In this verse justly the theologians recognize the Trinity of the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. – Blessing *in the heavenly places* is not so much blessing coming from those places – from God the Father who sits there – as it is blessing which lifts us into that supernal region, giving to us a place and heritage in the world of God and of the angels. Two passages of the companion epistles interpret this phrase: “Your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. iii. 3); and again, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. iii. 20). – The decisive note of St Paul’s blessedness lies in the words “in Christ.” For him all good is summed up there. Spiritual, heavenly, and Christian: these three are one. In Christ dying, risen, reigning, God the Father has raised believing men to a new heavenly life. From the first inception of the work of grace to its consummation, God thinks of men, speaks to them and deals with them *in Christ*. To Him, therefore, with the Father be eternal praise!

“As He chose us in Him before the world’s foundation,
That we should be holy and unblemished before Him:
When in love He foreordained us
To filial adoption through Jesus Christ for Himself,
According to the good pleasure of His will, —
To the praise of the glory of His grace” (vv. 4–6a).

²⁷ Vv. 13, 14; Rom. viii. 2–6, 16; 1 Cor. ii. 12; Gal v. 16, 22–25.

Here is St Paul's first chapter of Genesis. *In the beginning was the election of grace.* There is nothing unprepared, nothing unforeseen in God's dealings with mankind. His wisdom and knowledge are as deep as His grace is wide (Rom. xi. 33). Speaking of his own vocation, the apostle said: "It pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb, to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. i. 15, 16). He does but generalize this conception and carry it two steps further back – from the origin of the individual to the origin of the race, and from the beginning of the race to the beginning of the world – when he asserts that the community of redeemed men was chosen in Christ before the world's foundation.

"The world" is a work of time, the slow structure of innumerable yet finite ages. Science affirms on its own grounds that the visible universe had a beginning, as it has its changes and its certain end. Its structural plan, its unity of aim and movement, show it to be the creation of a vast Intelligence. Harmony and law, all that makes science possible is the product of thought. Reason extracts from nature what Reason has first put there. The longer, the more intricate and grand the process, the farther science pushes back the beginning in our thoughts, the more sublime and certain the primitive truth becomes: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

The world is a system; it has a method and a plan, therefore a foundation. But before the foundation, there was *the Founder*. And man was in His thoughts, and the redeemed Church of Christ. While yet the world was not and the immensity of space stretched lampless and unpeopled, *we* were in the mind of God; His thought rested with complacency upon His human sons, whose "name was written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." This amazing statement is only the logical consequence of St Paul's experience of Divine grace, joined to his conviction of the infinite wisdom and eternal being of God.

When he says that God "chose us in Christ *before the foundation of the world*" – or *before founding the world*– this is not a mere mark of time. It intimates that in laying His plans for the world the Creator had the purpose of redeeming grace in view. The kingdom which the "blessed children" of the Father of Christ "inherit," is the kingdom "*prepared for them from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. xxv. 34). Salvation lies as deep as creation. The provision for it is eternal. For the universe of being was conceived, fashioned, and built up "in Christ." The argument of Colossians i. 13–22 lies behind these words. The Son of God's love, in whom and for whom the worlds were made, always was potentially the Redeemer of men, as He was the image of God (Col. i. 14, 15). He looked forward to this mission from eternity, and was in spirit "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. xiii. 8). Creation and redemption, Nature and the Church, are parts of one system; and in the reconciliation of the cross all orders of being are concerned, "whether the things upon the earth or the things in the heavens."

Evil existed before man appeared on the earth to be tempted and to fall. Through the geological record we hear the voice of creation groaning for long æons in its pain.

"Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime,"

grim prophets of man's brutal and murderous passions, bear witness to a war in nature that goes back far towards the foundation of the world. And this rent and discord in the frame of things it was His part to reconcile "in whom and for whom all things were created." This universal deliverance, it seems, is dependent upon ours. "The creation itself lifts up its head, and is looking out for the revelation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 19). In founding the world, foreseeing its bondage to corruption, God prepared through His elect sons in Christ a deliverance the glory of which will make its sufferings to seem but a light thing. "In thee," said God to Abraham, "shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed": so in the final "adoption, – to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. viii.

23), all creatures shall exult; and our mother earth, still travailing in pain with us, will remember her anguish no more.

The Divine election of men in Christ is further defined in the words of verse 5: “Having in love predestined us,” and “according to the good pleasure of His will.” *Election* is selection; it is the antecedent in the mind of God in Christ of the preference which Christ showed when He said to His disciples, “I have chosen you out of the world.” It is, moreover, a *fore-ordination in love*: an expression which indicates on the one hand the disposition in God that prompted and sustains His choice, and on the other the determination of the almighty Will whereby the all-wise Choice is put into operation and takes effect. In this pre-ordaining control of human history God “determined the fore-appointed seasons and the bounds of human habitation” (Acts xvii. 26). The Divine prescience – that “depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God” – as well as His absolute righteousness, forbids the treasonable thought of anything arbitrary or unfair cleaving to this pre-determination – anything that should override our free-will and make our responsibility an illusion. “Whom He did *foreknow*, He also did predestinate” (Rom. viii. 29). He foresees everything, and allows for everything.

The consistence of foreknowledge with free-will is an enigma which the apostle did not attempt to solve. His reply to all questions touching the justice of God’s administration in the elections of grace – questions painfully felt and keenly agitated then as they are now, and that pressed upon himself in the case of his Jewish kindred with a cruel force (Rom. ix. 3) – his answer to his own heart, and to us, lies in the last words of verse 5: “according to the good pleasure of His will.” It is what Jesus said concerning the strange preferences of Divine grace: “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.” What pleases Him can only be wise and right. What pleases Him, must content us. Impatience is unbelief. Let us wait to see the end of the Lord. In numberless instances – such as that of the choice between Jacob and Esau, and that of Paul and the believing remnant of Israel as against their nation – God’s ways have justified themselves to after times; so they will universally. Our little spark of intelligence glances upon one spot in a boundless ocean, on the surface of immeasurable depths.

The purpose of this loving fore-ordination of believing men in Christ is twofold; it concerns at once their *character* and their *state*: “He chose us out – that we should be holy and without blemish in His sight,” and “unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ for Himself.” These two purposes are one. God’s sons must be holy; and holy men are His sons. For this end “we” were elected of God in the beginning. Nay, with this end in view the world was founded and the human race came into being, to provide God with such sons²⁸ and that Christ might be “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. viii. 28–30).

“That we should be holy” – should be *saints*. This the readers are already: “To the saints” the apostle writes (ver. 1). They are men devoted to God by their own choice and will, meeting God’s choice and will for them. Imperfect saints they may be, by no means as yet “without blemish”; but they are already, and abidingly, “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. i. 2) and “sealed” for God’s possession “by the Holy Spirit” (vv. 13, 14). In this fact lies their hope of moral perfection and the impulse and power to attain it. Their task is to “perfect” their existing “holiness” (2 Cor. vii. 1), “cleansing themselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.” Let no Christian say, “I do not pretend to be a saint.” This is to renounce your calling. You *are* a saint if you are a true believer in Christ; and you are to be an unblemished saint.

Thus the Church is at last to be presented, and every man in his own order, “faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy.”²⁹ God could not invite us in His grace to anything inferior. A blemished saint – a smeared picture, a flawed marble – this is not like His work; it is not like Himself. Such saintship cannot approve itself “before Him.” He must carry out His ideal, must

²⁸ εἰς αὐτόν, *for Him*; not αὐτῷ, *to Him*.

²⁹ Ch. v. 25–27; Col. i. 27–29; Jude 24.

fashion the new man as he was created in Christ after His own faultless image, and make human holiness a transcript of the Divine (1 Peter i. 16).

Now, this Divine character is native to the sons of God. The ideal which God had for men was always the same. The father of the race was made in His image. In the Old Testament Israel receives the command: "You shall be holy, for I, Jehovah your God, am holy." But it was in Jesus Christ that the breadth of this command was disclosed, and the possibility of our personal obedience to it. The law of Christian sonship, manifest only in shadow in the Levitical sanctity, is now pronounced by Jesus: "You shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Verses 4 and 5 are therefore strictly parallel: God elected us in Christ to be perfect saints; for He predestined us through Jesus Christ to be His sons.

Sonship to Himself is the Christian status, the rank and standing which God confers on those who believe in His Son; it accrues to them by the fact that they are in Christ.³⁰ It is defined by the term *adoption*, which St Paul employs in this sense in Romans viii. 15, 23, as well as in Galatians iv. 5. Adoption was a peculiar institution of Roman law, familiar to Paul as a citizen of Rome; and it aptly describes to Gentile believers their relation to the family of God. "By adoption under the Roman law an entire stranger in blood became a member of the family into which he was adopted, exactly as if he had been born in it. He assumed the family name, partook in its system of sacrificial rites, and became, not on sufferance or at will, but to all intents and purposes a member of the house of his adopter... This metaphor was St Paul's translation into the language of Gentile thought of Christ's great doctrine of the New Birth. He exchanges the physical metaphor of regeneration for the legal metaphor of adoption. The adopted becomes in the eye of the law a new creature. He was born again into a new family. By the aid of this figure the Gentile convert was enabled to realize in a vivid manner the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of the faithful, the obliteration of past penalties, the right to the mystic inheritance. He was enabled to realize that upon this spiritual act 'Old things passed away and all things became new.'"³¹

This exalted status belonged to men in the purpose of God from eternity; but as a matter of fact it was instituted "through Jesus Christ," the historical Redeemer. Whether previously (Jewish) servants in God's house or (Gentile) aliens excluded from it (ii. 12), those who believed in Jesus as the Christ received a spirit of adoption and dared to call God *Father*! This unspeakable privilege had been preparing for them through the ages past in God's hidden wisdom. Throughout the wild course of human apostasy the Father looked forward to the time when He might again through Jesus Christ make men His sons; and His promises and preparations were directed to this one end. The predestination having such an end, how fitly it is said: "*in love* having foreordained us."

Four times, in these three verses, with exulting emphasis, the apostle claims this distinction for "us." *Who*, then, are the objects of the primordial election of grace? Does St Paul use the pronoun distributively, thinking of individuals – you and me and so many others, the personal recipients of saving grace? or does he mean the Church, as that is collectively the family of God and the object of His loving ordination? In this epistle, the latter is surely the thought in the apostle's mind.³² As Hofmann says: "The body of Christians is the object of this choice, not as composed of a certain number of individuals – a sum of 'the elect' opposed to a sum of the non-elect – but as the Church taken out of and separated from the world."

On the other hand, we may not widen the pronoun further; we cannot allow that the sonship here signified is man's natural relation to God, that to which he was born by creation. This robs the word "adoption" of its distinctive force. The sonship in question, while grounded "in Christ" from

³⁰ On *sonship*, see Chapters XV.–XVII. and XIX. in *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Expositor's Bible).

³¹ From a valuable and suggestive paper by W. E. Ball, LL.D., on "St Paul and the Roman Law," in the *Contemporary Review*, August 1891.

³² See vv. 12, 13, where Jews and Gentiles, collectively, are distinguished; and ch. ii. 11, 12, iii. 2–6, 21, iv. 4, 5, v. 25–27.

eternity, is conferred “through” the incarnate and crucified “Jesus Christ”; it redounds “to the praise of the glory of His *grace*.” Now, grace is God’s redeeming love toward sinners. God’s purpose of grace toward mankind, embedded, as one may say, in creation, is realized in the body of redeemed men. But this community, we rejoice to believe, is vastly larger than the visible aggregate of Churches; for how many who knew not His name, have yet walked in the true light which lighteth every man.

There lies in the words “in Christ” a principle of exclusion, as well as of wide inclusion. Men cannot be in Christ against their will, who persistently put Him, His gospel and His laws, away from them. When we close with Christ by faith, we begin to enter into the purpose of our being. We find the place prepared for us before the foundation of the world in the kingdom of Divine love. We live henceforth “to the praise of the glory of His grace!”

CHAPTER III. *THE BESTOWMENT OF GRACE*

“Which grace He bestowed on us, in the Beloved One:
In whom we have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness
of our trespasses,
According to the riches of His grace:
Which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,
making known to us the mystery of His will,
According to His good pleasure:
Which He purposed in Him, for dispensation in the fulness of the times,
Purposing to gather into one body all things in the Christ —
The things belonging to the heavens, and the things upon the earth —
yea, in Him,
In whom also we received our heritage, as we had been foreordained,
According to purpose of Him who worketh all things
According to the counsel of His will, —
That we might be to the praise of His glory.”³³

Eph. i. 6b–12a.

The blessedness of men in Christ is not matter of purpose only, but of reality and experience. With the word *grace* in the middle of the sixth verse the apostle's thought begins a new movement. We have seen Grace hidden in the depths of eternity in the form of sovereign and fatherly election, lodging its purpose in the foundation of the world. From those mysterious depths we turn to the living world in our own breast. There, too, Grace dwells and reigns: “which grace He imparted to us, in the Beloved, – in whom we have redemption through His blood.”

The leading word of this clause we can only paraphrase; it has no English equivalent. St Paul perforce turns *grace* into a verb; this verb occurs in the New Testament but once besides, – in Luke i. 28, the angel's salutation to Mary: “Hail thou that art highly favoured (made-an-object-of-grace).”³⁴ If we could employ our verb *to grace* in a sense corresponding to that of the noun *grace* in the apostle's dialect and nearly the opposite of *to disgrace*, then *graced* would signify what he means here, viz., *treated with grace*, made its recipients.

God “showed us *grace in the Beloved*” – or, to render the phrase with full emphasis, “in that Beloved One” – even as He “chose us in Him before the world's foundation” and “in love predestined us for adoption.” The grace is conveyed upon the basis of our relationship to Christ: on that ground it was conceived in the counsels of eternity. The Voice from heaven which said at the baptism of Jesus and again at the transfiguration, “This is my Son, the Beloved,” uttered God's eternal thought regarding Christ. And that regard of God toward the Son of His love is the fountain of His love and grace to men.

Christ is the Beloved not of the Father alone, but of the created universe. All that know the Lord Jesus must needs love and adore Him – unless their hearts are eaten out by sin. Not to love

³³ The arrangement above made of the lines of this intricate passage is designed to guide the eye to its elucidation. Our disposition of the verses has not been determined by any preconceived interpretation, but by the parallelism of expression and cadences of phrase. The rhythmical structure of the piece, it seems to us, supplies the key to its explanation, and reduces to order its long-drawn and heaped-up relative and prepositional clauses, which are grammatically so unmanageable.

³⁴ Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη. It is impossible to reproduce in English the beautiful assonance – the *play* of sound and sense – in Gabriel's greeting, as St Luke renders it.

Him is to be anathema. “If any man love me,” said Jesus, “my Father will love him.” Nothing so much pleases God and brings us into fellowship with God so direct and joyous, as our love to Jesus Christ. About this at least heaven and earth may agree, that He is the altogether lovely and love-worthy. Agreement in this will bring about agreement in everything. The love of Christ will tune the jarring universe into harmony.

1. Of grace bestowed, the first manifestation, in the experience of Paul and his readers, was *the forgiveness of their trespasses* (comp. ii. 13–18). This is “the redemption” that “we *have*.” And it comes “through His *blood*.” The epistles to the Galatians and Romans³⁵ expound at length the apostle’s doctrine touching the remission of sin and the relation of Christ’s death to human transgression. To *redemption* we shall return in considering verse 14, where the word is used, as again in chapter iv. 30, in its further application.

In Romans iii. 22–26 “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” is declared to be the means by which we are acquitted in the judgement of God from the guilt of past transgressions. And this redemption consists in the “propitiatory sacrifice” which Christ offered in shedding His blood – a sacrifice wherein we participate “through faith.” The language of this verse contains by implication all that is affirmed there. In this connexion, and according to the full intent of the word, redemption is *release by ransom*. The life-blood of Jesus Christ was the *price* that He paid in order to secure our lawful release from the penalties entailed by our trespasses.³⁶ This Jesus Christ implied beforehand, when He spoke of “giving His life a ransom for many”; and when He said, in handing to His disciples the cup of the Last Supper: “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Using another synonymous term, St Paul tells us that “Christ *bought us out of the curse of the law*”; and he bases on this expression a strong practical appeal: “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.”³⁷ These sayings, and others like them, point unmistakably to the fact that our trespasses as men against God’s inflexible law, apart from Christ’s intervention, must have issued in our eternal ruin. By His death on the cross Christ has made such amends to the law, that the awful sentence is averted, and our complete release from the power of sin is rendered possible.

On rising from the dead our Saviour commissioned the apostles to “proclaim in His name repentance and remission of sins to all nations” (Luke xxiv. 47). It was thus He proposed to save the world. This proclamation is the “good news” of the gospel. The announcement meets the first need of the serious and awakened human spirit. It answers the question which arises in the breast of every man who thinks earnestly about his personal relations to God and to the laws of his being. We cannot wonder that St Paul sets the remission of sins first amongst the bestowments of God’s grace, and makes it the foundation of all the rest.

Does it occupy the like position in modern Christian teaching? Do we realize the criminality of sin, the fearfulness of God’s displeasure, the infinite worth of His forgiveness and the obligations under which it places us, as St Paul and his converts did? or even as our fathers did a few generations ago? “It is my impression,” writes Dr. R. W. Dale,³⁸ “that both religious people and those who do not profess to be religious must be conscious that God’s Forgiveness, if they ever think of it at all, does not create any deep and strong emotion... The difference between the way in which we think of the Divine Forgiveness and the way in which it was thought of by David and Isaiah, by Christ Himself, by Peter, Paul, and John; by the saints of all Christian Churches in past times, both in the East and

³⁵ See Rom. i. 16–18, iii. 19–v. 21, vi. 7, vii. 1–6, viii. 1–4, 31–34, x. 6–9; 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4, 17, 56, 57; 2 Cor. v. 18–21; Gal. ii. 14–iii. 14, vi. 12–14. The latter passages the writer has endeavoured to expound in Chapters X. to XII. and XXVIII. of his Commentary on *Galatians* in this series.

³⁶ It is an error to suppose, as one sometimes hears it said, that *trespasses* or *transgressions* are a light and comparatively trivial form of sin. Both words denote, in the language of Scripture, definite offences against known law, departures from known duty. Adam’s sin was the typical “transgression” and “trespass” (Rom. v. 14, 15, etc.; comp. ii. 23; Gal. iii. 19).

³⁷ Gal. iii. 13; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

³⁸ See *The Evangelical Revival, and other Sermons*, pp. 149–170, on “The Forgiveness of Sins.”

in the West; ... by the leaders of the Evangelical Revival in the last century – the difference, I say, between the way in which the Forgiveness of sins was thought of by them, and the way in which we think of it, is very startling. The difference is so great, it affects so seriously the whole system of the religious thought and life, that we may be said to have invented a new religion... The difference between our religion and the religion of other times is this – that we do not believe that God has any strong resentment against sin or against those who are guilty of sin. And since His resentment has gone, His mercy has gone with it. We have not a God who is more merciful than the God of our fathers, but a God who is less righteous; and a God who is not righteous, a God who does not glow with fiery indignation against sin, is no God at all.”

These are solemn words, to be deeply pondered. They come from one of the most sagacious observers and justly revered teachers of our time. We have made a real advance in breadth and human sympathy; and there has been throughout our Churches a genuine and much needed awakening of philanthropic activity. But if we are *departing from the living God*, what will this avail us? If “the redemption through Christ’s blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,” is no longer to us the momentous and glorious fact that it was to the apostles, then it is time to ask whether our God is in truth the same as theirs, whether He is still the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – whether we are not, haply, fabricating for ourselves another gospel. Without a piercing sense of the shame and ruin involved in human sin, we shall not put its remission where St Paul does, at the foundation of God’s benefits to men. Without this sentiment, we can only wonder at the passionate gratitude with which he receives the atonement and measures by its completeness the riches of God’s grace.

II. Along with this chief blessing of forgiveness, there came another to the apostolic Church. With the heart the mind, with the conscience the intellect was quickened and endowed: “which [grace] He shed abundantly upon us *in all wisdom and intelligence*.”

This sequel to verse 7 is somewhat of a surprise. The reader is apt to slur over verse 8, half sensible of some jar and incongruity between it and the context. It scarcely occurs to us to associate wisdom and good sense with the pardon of sin, as kindred bestowments of the gospel. Minds of the evangelical order are often supposed, indeed, to be wanting in intellectual excellencies and indifferent to their value. Is it not true that “not many wise after the flesh were called”? Do we not glory above everything in preaching a “simple gospel”?

But there is another side to all this. “Christ was made of God unto us *wisdom*.” This attribute the apostle even sets first when he writes to the wisdom-seeking Greeks, mocked by their worn-out and confused philosophies (1 Cor. i. 30). To a close observer of the primitive Christian societies few things must have been more noticeable than the powerful mental stimulus imparted by the new faith. These epistles are a witness to the fact. That such letters could be addressed to communities gathered mainly from the lower ranks of society – consisting of slaves, common artizans, poor women – shows that the moral regeneration effected in St Paul’s converts was accompanied by an extraordinary excitement and activity of thought. In this the apostle recognised the work of the Holy Spirit, a mark of God’s special favour and blessing. “I give thanks always for you,” he writes to the Corinthians, “for the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched by Him, in all word and all knowledge.” The leaders of the apostolic Church were the profoundest thinkers of their day; though at the time the world held them for babblers, because their dialect was not of its schools. They drew from stores of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ, which none of the princes of this world knew.

Of such wisdom our epistle is full, and God “has made it to abound” to the readers in these inspired pages. Paul’s “understanding in the mystery of Christ” was always deepening. In his lonely prison musings the length and breadth of the Divine counsels are disclosed to him as never before. He sees the course of the ages and the universe of being illuminated by the light of the knowledge of Christ. And what he sees, all men are to see through him (iii. 9). Blessed be God who has given to His Church through His apostles, and through the great Christian teachers of every age, His precious

gifts of wisdom and prudence, and made His grace richly to overflow from the heart into the mind and understanding of men!

This intellectual gift is twofold: *phronēsis* as well as *sophia*, – the bestowment not only of deep spiritual thought, but of moral sagacity, good sense and thoughtfulness. This is a choice *charism*– a mercy of the Lord. For want of it how sadly is the fruit of other graces spoilt and wasted. How brightly it shines in St Paul himself! What luminous and wholesome views of life, what a fund of practical sense there is in the teaching of this letter.

St Paul rejoices in these gifts of the understanding and claims them for the Church, having in his view the false knowledge, the “philosophy and vain deceit” that was making its appearance in the Asian Churches (Col. ii. 4, 8, etc.). Our safeguard against intellectual perils lies not in ignorance, but in deeper heart-knowledge. When the grace that bestows redemption through Christ’s blood adds its concomitant blessing of enlightenment, when it elevates the mind as it cleanses the heart, and abounds to us in all wisdom and prudence, the winds of doctrine and the waves of speculation blow and beat in vain; they can but bring health to a Church thus established in its faith.

Verses 9 and 10 describe the object of this new knowledge. They state the doctrine which gave this powerful mental impulse to the apostolic Church, disclosing to it a vast field of view, and supplying the most fertile and vigorous principles of moral wisdom. This impulse lay in the revelation of God’s purpose to reconstitute the universe in Christ. The declaration of “the mystery of His will” comes in at this point episodically, and by the way; and we reserve it for consideration to the end of the present Chapter.

But let us observe here that our wisdom and prudence lie in the knowledge of God’s will. Truth is not to be found in any system of logical notions, in schemes and syntheses of the laws of nature or of thought. The human mind can never rest for long in abstractions. It will not accept for its basis of thought that which is less real and positive than itself. By its rational instincts it is compelled to seek a Reason and a Conscience at the centre of things, – a living God. It craves to know *the mystery of His will*.

III. Verse 11 fills up the measure of the bestowment of grace on sinful men. The present anticipates the future; faith and love are lifted to a glorious hope. “In whom also —*i. e.*, in Christ —*we received our heritage*, predestinated [to it], according to His purpose who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

Following Meyer and other great interpreters, we prefer in this passage the rendering of the English Authorized Version (*we obtained an inheritance*) to that of the Revised (*we were made a heritage*).³⁹ “Foreordained” carries us back to verse 5 – to the phrase “foreordained to sonship.” The believer cannot be predestinated to sonship without being predestinated to an inheritance.⁴⁰ “If children, then heirs” (Rom. viii. 17). But while in the parallel passage we are designated heirs *with* Christ, we appear in this place, according to the tenor of the context, as heirs *in* Him. Christ is Himself the believer’s wealth, both in possession and hope: all his desire is to gain Christ (Phil. iii. 8). The apostle gives thanks here in the same strain as in Colossians i. 12–14, “to the Father who qualified us [by making us His sons] to partake of the inheritance of the saints in the light.” In that thanksgiving we observe the same connexion as in this between our *forgiveness* (ver. 7) and our *enfeoffment*, or investment with the forfeited rights of sons of God (vv. 5, 11).⁴¹

³⁹ Bishop Ellicott, who advocates the latter rendering, objects to Meyer’s interpretation that it is “doubtful in point of usage.” *Pace tanti viri*, we must retort this objection upon the new translation. *To obtain by lot, to have (a thing) allotted to one*, is the meaning regularly given to κληροῦσθαι in the classical dictionaries; and in O.T. usage the *lot* (κληροσ) becomes the *inheritance* (the thing *allotted*). The verb is repeatedly used by Philo with the meaning *to obtain*, or *receive an inheritance*; whereas there seems to be no real parallel to the other rendering. It is true that κληροῦσθαι in the sense of the A.V. requires an object; but that is virtually supplied by ἐν ᾧ: “we had our inheritance allotted *in Christ*.” Comp. Col. i. 12, “the lot of the saints *in the light*,” which signifies not the locality, but the nature and content of the saints’ heritage.

⁴⁰ See Gal. iii. 22 – iv. 7; and Chapters XV. – XVII. in the *Expositor’s Bible* (Galatians), on Sonship and Inheritance in St Paul.

⁴¹ Compare Acts xxvi. 18, which also speaks to this association of ideas in St Paul’s mind, with vers. 4, 5, 7, and 11 in this chapter.

The heritage of the saints in Christ is theirs already, by actual investiture. The liberty of sons of God, access to the Father, the treasures of Christ's wisdom and knowledge, the sanctifying Spirit and the moral strength and joy that He imparts, these form a rich estate of which ancient saints had but foretastes and promises. In the all-controlling "counsel of His will," God wrought throughout the course of history to convey this heritage to us. We are children of "the fulness of the times," heirs of all the past. For us God has been working from eternity. On us the ends of the world have come. Thus from the summit of our exaltation in Christ the apostle looks backward to the beginning of Divine history.

From the same point his gaze sweeps onward to the end. God's purpose embraces the ages to come with those that are past. His working will not cease till the whole counsel is fulfilled. What we have of our inheritance, though rich and real, holds in it the promise of infinitely more; and the Holy Spirit is the "earnest of our inheritance" (ver. 14). God intends "that we should be to the praise of His glory." As things are, His glory is but obscurely visible in His saints. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," – and it will not appear until the unveiling of the sons of God (Rom. viii. 18–25). One day God's glory in us will burst forth in its splendour. All beholders in heaven and earth will then sing *to the praise of His glory*, when it is seen in His redeemed and godlike sons.

Verses 9 and 10 (*which He purposed ... upon the earth*) are, as we have said, a parenthesis or episode in the passage just reviewed. Neither in structure nor in sense would the paragraph be defective, had this clause been wanting. With the "in Him" repeated at the end of verse 10, St Paul resumes the main current of his thanksgiving, arrested for a moment while he dwells on "the mystery of God's will."

This last expression (ver. 9), notwithstanding what he has said in verses 4 and 5, still needs elucidation. He will pause for an instant to set forth once more the eternal purpose, to the knowledge of which the Church is now admitted. The communication of this mystery is, he says, "according to God's good pleasure which He purposed in Christ [comp. ver. 4], for a dispensation of the fulness of the times, intending to gather up again all things in the Christ – the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth."

God formed in Christ the purpose, by the dispensation of His grace, in due time to re-unite the universe under the headship of Christ. This mysterious design, hitherto kept secret, He has "made known unto us." Its manifestation imparts a wisdom that surpasses all the wisdom of former ages.⁴² Such is the drift of this profound deliverance.

The first clause of verse 10 supplies a datum for its interpretation. The *fulness of the times*, in St Paul's dialect, can only be the time of Christ.⁴³ The dispensation which God designed of old is that in which the apostle himself is now engaged;⁴⁴ it is the dispensation, or administration (*economy*), of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, whether God be conceived as Himself the Dispenser, or through the stewards of His mysteries. The Messianic end was to Paul's Jewish thought the dénouement of antecedent history. How long this age would continue, into what epochs it might unfold itself, he knew not; but for him the fulness of the times had arrived. The Son of God was come; the kingdom of God was amongst men. It was the beginning of the end. It is a mistake to relegate this text to the dim and distant future, to some far-off consummation. We are in the midst of the Christian reconstruction of things, and are taking part in it. The decisive epoch fell when "God sent forth His Son." All that has followed, and will follow, is the result of this mission. Christ is all things, and in all; and we are already complete in Him.

⁴² Vv. 8, 9, ch. iii. 4, 5; comp. Col. ii. 2, 3; 1 Cor. ii. 6–9.

⁴³ "The fulness of the time," Gal. iv. 4; "in due season," Rom. v. 6; "in its own times," 1 Tim. ii. 6. These are all synonymous expressions for the Messianic era. Comp. Heb. i. 2, ix. 26; 1 Pet. i. 20.

⁴⁴ Ch. iii. 8, 9; Col. i. 25; 1 Cor. iv. 1; 1 Tim. i. 4, i. 7; 2 Tim. i. 9–11; and especially Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

What, then, signifies this *gathering-into-one* or *summing-up* of all things in the Christ? Our *recapitulate* is the nearest equivalent of the Greek verb, in its etymological sense. In Romans xiii. 8, 9 the same word is used, where the several commands of the second table of the Decalogue are said to be “comprehended in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” This summing up is not a generalization or compendious statement of the commands of God; it signifies their reduction to a fundamental principle. They are unified by the discovery of a law that underlies them all. And while thus theoretically explained, they are made practically effective: “For love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Similarly, St Paul finds in Christ the fundamental principle of the creation. For those who think with him, God has by the Christian revelation already brought all things to their unity. This summing up – the Christian inventory and recapitulation of the universe – the apostle has formally stated in Colossians i. 15–20: “Christ is God’s image and creation’s firstborn. In Him, through Him, for Him all things were made. He is before them all; and in Him they have their basis and uniting bond. He is equally the Head of the Church and the new creation, the firstborn out of the dead, that He might hold a universal presidency – charged with all the fulness, so that in Him is the ground of the reconciliation no less than of the creation of all things in heaven and earth.” What can we desire more comprehensive than this? It is the theory and programme of the world revealed to God’s holy apostles and prophets.

The “gathering into one” of this text includes the “reconciliation” of Colossians i. 20, and more. It signifies, beside the removal of the enmities which are the effect of sin (ii. 14–16), the subjection of all powers in heaven and earth to the rule of Christ (vv. 21, 22),⁴⁵ the enlightenment of the angelic magnates as to God’s dealings with men (iii. 9, 10), – in fine, the rectification and adjustment of the several parts of the great whole of things, bringing them into full accord with each other and with their Creator’s will. What St Paul looks forward to is, in a word, the organization of the universe upon a Christian basis. This reconstitution of things is provided for and is being effected “in the Christ.” He is the rallying point of the forces of peace and blessing. The organic principle, the organizing Head, the creative nucleus of the new creation is there. The potent germ of life eternal has been introduced into the world’s chaos; and its victory over the elements of disorder and death is assured.

Observe that the apostle says “in *the Christ*.”⁴⁶ He is not speaking of Christ in the abstract, considered in His own Person or as He dwells in heaven, but in His relations to men and to time. The Christ manifest in Jesus (iv. 20, 21), the Christ of prophets and apostles, the Messiah of the ages, the Husband of the Church (v. 23), is the author and finisher of this grand restoration.

Christ’s work is essentially a work of *restoration*. We must insist, with Meyer, upon the significance of the Greek preposition in Paul’s compound verb (*ana-*, equal to *re-* in *restore* or *resume*). The Christ is not simply the climax of the past – the Son of man and the recapitulation of humanity, as man is of the creatures below him, summing up human development and lifting it to a higher stage – though He is all that. Christ *rehabilitates* man and the world. He re-asserts the original ground of our being, as that exists in God. He carries us and the world forward out of sin and death, by carrying us back to God’s ideal. The new world is the old world repaired, and in its reparation infinitely enhanced – rich in the memories of redemption, in the fruit of penitence and the discipline of suffering, in the lessons of the cross.

All things in heaven and earth it was God’s good pleasure in the Christ to gather again into one. Is this a general assertion concerning the universe as a whole, or may we apply it with distributive exactness to each particular thing? Is there to be, as we fain would hope, no single exception to the “all things” – no wanderer lost, no exile finally shut out from the Holy City and the tree of life? Are

⁴⁵ Comp. ch. v. 5; 1 Cor. xv. 24–28; Phil. ii. 9–12; Heb. ii. 8; Rev. i. 5, xi. 15, xvii. 14; Dan. vii. 13, 14.

⁴⁶ One wonders that our Revisers, so attentive to all points of Greek idiom, did not think it worth while to discriminate between *Christ* and *the Christ* in such passages as this. In Ephesians this distinction is especially conspicuous and significant. See vv. 12, 20 iii. 17, iv. 20, v. 23; similarly in 1 Cor. xv. 22; Rom. xv. 3.

all evil men and demons, willing or against their will, to be embraced somehow and at last – at last – in the universal peace of God?

It is impossible that the first readers should have so construed Paul's words (comp. v. 5). He has not forgotten the "unquenchable fire," the "eternal punishment"; nor dare we. "If anything is certain about the teaching of Christ and His apostles, it is that they warned men not to reject the Divine mercy and so to incur irrevocable exile from God's presence and joy. They assumed that some men would be guilty of this supreme crime, and would be doomed to this supreme woe" (Dale). There is nothing in this text to warrant any man in presuming on the mercy or the sovereignty of God, nothing to justify us in supposing that, deliberately refusing to be reconciled to God in Christ, we shall yet be reconciled in the end, despite ourselves.

St Paul assures us that God and the world will be reunited, and that peace will reign through all realms and orders of existence. He does not, and he could not say that none will exclude themselves from the eternal kingdom. Making men free, God has made it possible for them to contradict Him, so long as they have any being. The apostle's words have their note of warning, along with their boundless promise. There is no place in the future order of things for aught that is out of Christ. There is no standing-ground anywhere for the unclean and the unjust, for the irreconcilable rebel against God. "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity."

CHAPTER IV. *THE FINAL REDEMPTION*

“[That we might be to the praise of His glory:]
We who had before hoped in the Christ, in whom also ye *have hoped*,
Since ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, —
In whom indeed, when ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit
of the promise,
Which is the earnest of our inheritance, till the redemption of *God's*
possession, —
To the praise of His glory.”

Eph. i. 12–14.

When the apostle reaches the “heritage” conferred upon us in Christ (ver. 11), he is on the boundary between the present and the future. Into that future he now presses forward, gathering from it his crowning tribute “to the praise of God’s glory.” We shall find, however, that this heritage assumes a twofold character, as did the conception of the inheritance of the Lord in the Old Testament. If the saints have their heritage in Christ, partly possessed and partly to be possessed, God has likewise, and antecedently, His inheritance in them, of which He too has still to take full possession.⁴⁷

Opening upon this final prospect, St Paul touches on a subject of supreme interest to himself and that could not fail to find a place in his great Act of Praise – viz., *the admission of the Gentiles* to the spiritual property of Israel. The thought of the heirship of believers and of God’s previous counsel respecting it (ver. 11), brought before his mind the distinction between Jew and Gentile and the part assigned to each in the Divine plan. Hence he varies the general refrain in verse 12 by saying significantly, “that *we* might be to the praise of His glory.” This emphatic *we* is explained in the opening phrase of the last strophe: “that have beforehand fixed our hope on the Christ,” – the heirs of Israel’s hope in “Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.” With this “we” of Paul’s Jewish consciousness the “ye also” of verse 13 is set in contrast by his vocation as Gentile apostle. This second pronoun, by one of Paul’s abrupt turns of thought, is deprived of its predicating verb; but that is given already by the “hoped” of the last clause. “The Messianic hope, Israel’s ancient heirloom, in its fulfilment is *yours* as much as ours.”

This hope of Israel pointed Israelite and Gentile believer alike to the completion of the Messianic era, when the mystery of God should be finished and His universe redeemed from the bondage of corruption (vv. 10, 14). By the “one hope” of the Christian calling the Church is now made one. From this point of view the apostle in chapter ii. 12 describes the condition in which the gospel found his Gentile readers as that of men cut off from Christ, strangers to the covenants of promise, – in a word, “having no hope”; while he and his Jewish fellow-believers held the priority that belonged to those whose are the promises. The apostle stands precisely at the juncture where the wild shoot of nature is grafted into the good olive tree. A generation later no one would have thought of writing of “the Christ in whom *you* (Gentiles) *also* have found hope”; for then Christ was the established possession of the Gentile Church.

To these Christless heathen Christ and His hope came, when they “heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation.” A great light had sprung up for them that sat in darkness; the good

⁴⁷ Exod. xix. 3–6; Deut. iv. 20, 21; 1 Kings viii. 51, 53; Ps. lxxviii. 71, etc. With the above comp. Gen. xv. 8; Numb. xviii. 20; Jos. xiii. 33; Ps. xvi. 5.

tidings of salvation came to the lost and despairing. “To the Gentiles,” St Paul declared, addressing the obstinate Jews of Rome, “this salvation of God was sent: they indeed will hear it” (Acts xxviii. 28). Such was his experience in Ephesus and all the Gentile cities. There were hearing ears and open hearts, souls longing for the word of truth and the message of hope. The trespass of Israel had become the riches of the world. For this on his readers’ behalf he gives joyful thanks, – that his message proved to be “the gospel of *your* salvation.”

Salvation, as St Paul understands it, includes our uttermost deliverance, the end of death itself (1 Cor. xv. 26). He renders praise to God for that He has sealed Gentile equally with Jewish believers with the stamp of His Spirit, which makes them His property and gives assurance of absolute redemption.

There are three things to be considered in this statement: *the seal* itself, *the conditions* upon which, and *the purpose* for which it is affixed.

I. A seal is a token of proprietorship put by the owner upon his property;⁴⁸ or it is the authentication of some statement or engagement, the official stamp that gives it validity;⁴⁹ or it is the pledge of inviolability guarding a treasure from profane or injurious hands.⁵⁰ There is the protecting seal, the ratifying seal, and the proprietary seal. The same seal may serve each or all of these purposes. Here the thought of possession predominates (comp. ver. 4); but it can scarcely be separated from the other two. The witness of the Holy Spirit marks men out as God’s *purchased right* in Christ (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). In that very fact it guards them from evil and wrong (iv. 30), while it ratifies their Divine sonship (Gal. iv. 6) and guarantees their personal share in the promises of God (2 Cor. i. 20–22). It is a bond between God and men; a sign at once of what we are and shall be to God, and of what He is and will be to us. It secures, and it assures. It stamps us for God’s possession, and His kingdom and glory as our possession.

This seal is constituted by *the Holy Spirit of the promise*, – in contrast with the material seal, “in the flesh, wrought by hand,”⁵¹ which marked the children of the Old Covenant from Abraham downwards, previously to the fulfilment of the promise (Gal. iii. 14). We bear it in the inmost part of our nature, where we are nearest to God: “The Spirit witnesseth to our spirit.” “The Israelites also were sealed, but by circumcision, like cattle and irrational animals. We were sealed by the Spirit, as sons” (Chrysostom). The stamp of God is on the consciousness of His children. “We know that Christ abides in us,” writes St John, “from the Spirit which He gave us” (1 Ep. iii. 24). Under this seal is conveyed the sum of blessing comprised in our salvation. Jesus promised, “Your heavenly Father will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask” (Luke xi. 13), as if there were nothing else to ask. Giving us this, God gives everything, gives us Himself! In substance or anticipation, this one bestowment contains all good things of God.

The apostle writes “the Spirit of the promise, *the Holy* [Spirit],” with emphasis on the word of quality; for the testifying power of the seal lies in its character. “Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John iv. 1). There are false prophets, deceiving and deceived; there are promptings from “the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience,” diabolical inspirations, so plausible and astonishing that they may deceive the very elect. It is a most perilous error to identify the supernatural with the Divine, to suppose mere miracles and communications from the invisible sphere a sign of the working of God. Antichrist can mimic Christ by his “lying wonders and deceit of unrighteousness” (2 Thess. ii. 8–12). Jesus never appealed to the power of His works in proof of His mission, apart from their ethical quality. God’s Spirit works after His kind, and makes ours a holy spirit. There is an objective and subjective witness – the obverse and reverse of the

⁴⁸ Ch. iv. 30. The “seal” of 2 Tim. ii. 19 has both the first and third of these meanings.

⁴⁹ Rom. iv. 11; 1 Cor. ix. 2; John iii. 33, vi. 27.

⁵⁰ Matt. xxvii. 66; Rev. v. 1, etc.

⁵¹ Ch. ii. 11; comp. Rom. i. 28, 29; Gal. v. 5, 6; Phil. iii. 2, 3.

medal (2 Tim. ii. 19). To be sealed by the Holy Spirit is, in St Paul's dialect, the same thing as to be *sanctified*; only, the phrase of this text brings out graphically the promissory aspect of sanctification, its bearing on our final redemption.⁵²

When the sealing Spirit is called the Spirit of *promise*, does the expression look backward or forward? Is the apostle thinking of the past promise now fulfilled, or of some promise still to be fulfilled? The former, undoubtedly, is true. *The* promise (the article is significant⁵³) is, in the words of Christ, "the promise of the Father." On the day of Pentecost St Peter pointed to the descent of the Holy Spirit as God's seal upon the Messiahship of Jesus, fulfilling what was promised to Israel for the last days. When this miraculous effusion was repeated in the household of Cornelius, the Jewish apostle saw its immense significance. He asked, "Can any one forbid water that these should be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" (Acts x. 47). This was the predicted criterion of the Messianic times. Now it was *given*, and with an abundance beyond hope, —*poured out*, in the full sense of Joel's words, *upon all flesh*.

Now, if God has done so much – for this is the implied argument of verses 13, 14 – He will surely accomplish the rest. The attainment of past hope is the warrant of present hope. He who gives us His own Spirit, will give us the fulness of eternal life. The earnest implies the sum. In the witness of the Holy Spirit there is for the Christian man the power of an endless life, a spring of courage and patience that can never fail.

II. But there are very definite conditions, upon which this assurance depends. "When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" – there is the outward condition: "when you believed" – there is the inward and subjective qualification for the affixing of the seal of God to the heart.

How characteristic is this antithesis of *hearing* and *faith*!⁵⁴ St Paul delights to ring the changes upon these terms. The gospel he carried about with him was a message from God to men, the good news about Jesus Christ. It needs, on the one hand, to be effectively uttered, proclaimed so as to be heard with the understanding; and, on the other hand, it must be trustfully received and obeyed. Then the due result follows. There is salvation, – conscious, full.

If they are to believe unto salvation, men must be made to *hear* the word of truth. Unless the good news reaches their ears and their heart, it is no good news to them. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. x. 14). The light may be true, and the eyes clear and open; but there is no vision till both meet, till the illuminating ray falls on the sensitive spot and touches the responsive nerve. How many sit in darkness, groping and wearying for the light, ready for the message if there were any to speak it to them! Great would Paul's guilt have been, if when Christ called him to preach to the heathen, he had refused to go, if he had withheld the gospel of salvation from the multitudes waiting to receive it at his lips. Great also is our fault and blame, and heavy the reproach against the Church to-day, when with means in her hand to make Christ known to almost the whole world, she leaves vast numbers of men within her reach in ignorance of His message. She is not the proprietor of the Christian truth: it is God's gospel; and she holds it as God's trustee for mankind, – that through her "the message might be fully preached, and that all the nations might hear" (2 Tim. iv. 17). She has St Paul's programme in hand still to complete, and loiters over it.

The nature of the message constitutes our duty to proclaim it. It is "the word of *truth*." If there be any doubt upon this, if our certainty of the Christian truth is shaken and we can no longer announce it with full conviction, our zeal for its propagation naturally declines. Scepticism chills and kills missionary fervour, as the breath of the frost the young growth of spring. At home and amongst our own people evangelistic agencies are supported by many who have no very decided personal faith,

⁵² Comp. Rom. viii. 9–11; 2 Cor. v. 1–5.

⁵³ Acts i. 4, ii. 33, 39, xiii. 32, xxvi. 6; Rom. iv. 13–20; Gal. iii. 14–29.

⁵⁴ See Rom. x. 14–18; Gal. iii. 2, 5; Col. i. 6, 23; 1 Thess. ii. 13; 2 Tim. i. 13.

from secondary motives, – with a view to their social and reformatory benefits, out of philanthropic feeling and love to “the brother whom we have seen.” The foreign missions of the Church, like the work of the Gentile apostle, gauge her real estimate of the gospel she believes and the Master she serves.

But if we have no sure word of prophecy to speak, we had better be silent. Men are not saved by illusion or speculation. Christianity did not begin by offering to mankind a legend for a gospel, or win the ear of the world for a beautiful romance. When the apostles preached Jesus and the resurrection, they declared what they knew. To have spoken otherwise, to have uttered cunningly devised fables or pious phantasies or conjectures of their own, would have been, in their view, to bear false witness against God. Before the hostile scrutiny of their fellow-men, and in prospect of the awful judgement of God, they testified the facts about Jesus Christ, the things that they had “heard, and seen with their eyes, and which their hands had handled concerning the word of life.” They were as sure of these things as of their own being. Standing upon this ground and with this weapon of truth alone in their hands, they denounced “the wiles of error” and the “craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive” (iv. 14).

And they could always speak of this word of truth, addressing whatsoever circle of hearers or of readers, as “the good news of *your salvation*.” The pronoun, as we have seen, is emphatic. The glory of Paul’s apostolic mission was its universalism. His message was to every man he met. His latest writings glow with delight in the world-wide destination of his gospel.⁵⁵ It was his consolation that the Gentiles in multitudes received the Divine message to which his countrymen closed their ears. And he rejoiced in this the more, because he foresaw that ultimately the gospel would return to its native home, and at last amid “the fulness of the Gentiles all Israel would be saved” (Rom. xi. 13–32). At present Israel was not prepared to seek, while the Gentiles were seeking righteousness by the way of faith (Rom. ix. 30–33).

For it is upon this question of *faith* that the whole issue turns. Hearing is much, when one hears the word of truth and news of salvation. But faith is the point at which salvation becomes ours – no longer a possibility, an opportunity, but a fact: “in whom indeed, *when you believed*, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit.” So characteristic is this act of the new life to which it admits, that St Paul is in the habit of calling Christians, without further qualification, simply *believers* (“those who believe,” or “who believed”). Faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit are associated in his thoughts, as closely as Faith and Justification. “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” was the question he put to the Baptist’s disciples whom he found at Ephesus on first arriving there (Acts xix. 2). This was the test of the adequacy of their faith. He reminds the Galatians that they “received the Spirit from the hearing of faith,” and tells them that in this way the blessing and the promise of Abraham were theirs already (Gal. iii. 2, 7, 14). Faith in the word of Christ admits the Spirit of Christ, who is in the word waiting to enter. Faith is the trustful surrender and expectancy of the soul towards God; it sets the heart’s door open for Christ’s incoming through the Spirit. This was the order of things from the beginning of the new dispensation. “God gave to them,” says St Peter of the first baptized Gentiles, “the like gift as He did also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning” (Acts xi. 15–18). Upon our faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enters the soul and announces Himself by His message of adoption, crying in us to God, *Abba, Father* (Gal. iv. 6, 7).

In the chamber of our spirit, while we abide in faith, the Spirit of the Father and the Son dwells with us, witnessing to us of the love of God and leading us into all truth and duty and divine joy, instilling a deep and restful peace, breathing an energy that is a fire and fountain of life within the breast, which pours out itself in prayer and labour for the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is no mere gift to receive, or comfort to enjoy; He is an almighty Force in the believing soul and the faithful Church.

⁵⁵ 1 Tim. ii. 1–7, iv. 10; Tit. ii. 11.

III. The end for which the seal of God was affixed to Paul's Gentile readers, along with their Jewish brethren in Christ, appears in the last verse, with which the Act of Praise terminates: "sealed," he says, "with the Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance, *until the redemption of the possession.*"

The last of these words is the equivalent of the Old Testament phrase rendered in Exodus xix. 5, and elsewhere, "*a peculiar treasure* unto me"; in Deuteronomy vii. 6, etc., "*a peculiar* people" (*i. e.*, people of *possession*). The same Greek term is employed by the Septuagint translators in Malachi iii. 17, where our Revisers have substituted "*a peculiar treasure*" for the familiar, but misleading "*jewels*" of the older Version. St Peter in his first epistle (ii. 9, 10) transfers the title from the Jewish people to the new Israel of God, who are "*an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.*" In that passage, as in this, the Revisers have inserted the word *God's* in order to signify whose possession the term signifies in Biblical use. In the other places in the New Testament where the same Greek noun occurs,⁵⁶ it retains its primary active force, and denotes "*obtaining* of the glory," etc., "*saving* of the soul." The word signifies not the possessing so much as the *acquiring* or *securing* of its object. The Latin Vulgate suitably renders this phrase, *in redemptionem acquisitionis*, – "*till the redemption of the acquisition.*"

God has "*redeemed* unto Himself a people"; He has "*bought* us with a price." His rights in us are both natural and *acquired*; they are redemptional rights, the recovered rights of the infinite love which in Jesus Christ saved mankind by extreme sacrifice from the doom of death eternal. This redemption "*we have, in the remission of our trespasses*" (ver. 7). But this is only the beginning. Those whose sin is cancelled and on whom God now looks with favour in Christ, are thereby redeemed and saved (ii. 5, 8).⁵⁷ They are within the kingdom of grace; they have passed out of death into life. They have but to persist in the grace into which they have entered, and all will be well. "Now," says the apostle to the Romans, "*you are made free from sin and made servants to God; you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end eternal life.*"

Our salvation is come; but, after all, it is still to come. We find the apostle using the words "*save*" and "*redeem*" in this twofold sense, applying them both to the commencement and the consummation of the new life.⁵⁸ The last act, in Romans viii. 23, he calls "*the redemption of the body.*" This will reinstate the man in the integrity of his twofold being as a son of God. Hence our bodily redemption is there called an *adoption*. For as Jesus Christ by His resurrection was "*marked out [or instated] as Son of God in power*" (Rom. i. 4), not otherwise will it be with His many brethren. Their reappearance in the new "*body of glory*" will be a "*revelation*" to the universe "*of the sons of God.*"

But this last redemption – or rather this last act of the one redemption – like the first, is through the blood of the cross. Christ has borne for us in His death the entire penalty of sin; the remission of that penalty comes to us in two distinct stages. The shadow of death is lifted off from our spirits now, in the moment of forgiveness. But for reasons of discipline it remains resting upon our bodily frame. Death is a usurper and trespasser in the bounds of God's heritage. Virtually and in principle, he is abolished; but not in effect. "*I will ransom them from the power of the grave,*"⁵⁹ the Lord said of His Israel, with a meaning deeper than His prophet knew. When that is done, then God will have redeemed, in point of fact, those possessions in humanity which He so much prizes, that for their recovery He spared not His Son.

⁵⁶ 1 Thess. v. 9; 2 Thess. ii. 14; Heb. x. 39.

⁵⁷ Comp. Chapter VIII.

⁵⁸ For the former usage see, along with ver. 7 and ch. ii. 5, 8; Rom. iii. 24, x. 9; Titus iii. 5; 2 Tim. i. 9; Col. i. 14; Heb. ix. 15; for the latter, ch. iv. 30; Luke xxi. 28; Rom. v. 9, 10, viii. 23; Phil. ii. 12; 1 Thess. v. 8, 9; 2 Tim. ii. 10, iv. 18. It may be doubted whether St Paul ever uses these terms to denote present salvation or redemption without the final issue being also in his thoughts. Perhaps he would have called the redemption of ver. 7, in contrast with that of Rom. viii. 23, "*the redemption of the spirit.*"

⁵⁹ Hosea xiii. 14; Isa. xxv. 8.

So long as mortality afflicts us, God cannot be satisfied on our account. His children are suffering and tortured; His people mourn under the oppression of the enemy. They sigh, and creation with them, under the burdensome and infirm tabernacle of the flesh, this body of our humiliation for which the hungry grave clamours. God's new estate in us is still encumbered with the liabilities in which the sin of the race involved us, with the "ills that flesh is heir to." But this mortgage – that we call, with a touching euphemism, *the debt of nature* – will at last be discharged. Soon shall we be free for ever from the law of sin and death. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come with singing to Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

To God, as He looks down upon men, the seal of His Spirit upon their hearts anticipates this full emancipation. He sees already in the redeemed spirit of His children what will be manifest in their glorious heavenly form. The same token is to ourselves as believing men the "earnest of our inheritance." Note that at this point the apostle drops the "you" by which he has for several sentences distinguished between Jewish and Gentile brethren. He identifies them with himself and speaks of "*our inheritance*." This sudden resumption of the first person, the self-assertion of the filial consciousness in the writer breaking through the grammatical order, is a fine trait of the Pauline manner.⁶⁰

Arrhabon, the *earnest* (*fastening penny*), is a Phœnician word of the market, which passed into Greek and Latin, – a monument of the daring pioneers of Mediterranean commerce. It denotes the part of the price given by a purchaser in making a bargain, or of the wages given by the hirer concluding a contract of service, by way of assurance that the stipulated sum will be forthcoming. Such pledge of future payment is at the same time a bond between those concerned, engaging each to his part in the transaction.

The earnest is the seal, and something more. It is an instalment, a *token in kind*, a foretaste of the feast to come. In the parallel passage, Romans viii. 23, the same earnest is called "the firstfruit of the Spirit." What the earliest sheaf is to the harvest, that the entrance of the Spirit of God into a human soul is to the glory of its ultimate salvation. The sanctity, the joy, the sense of recovered life is the same in kind then and now, differing only in degree and expression.

Of the "earnest of the Spirit" St Paul has spoken twice already, in 2 Corinthians i. 22 and v. 5, where he cites this inner witness to assure us, in the first instance, that God will fulfil to us His promises, "how many soever they be"; and in the second, that our mortal nature shall be "swallowed up of life" – assimilated to the living spirit to which it belongs – and that "God has wrought us for this very thing." These earlier sayings explain the apostle's meaning here. God has made us His sons, in accordance with His purpose formed in the depths of eternity (ver. 5). As sons, we are His heirs in fellowship with Christ, and already have received rich blessings out of this heritage (ver. 11). But the richest part of it, including that which concerns the bodily form of our life, is still unredeemed, notwithstanding that the price of its redemption is paid.

For this we wait till the time appointed of the Father, – the time when He will reclaim His heritage in us, and give us full possession of our heritage in Christ. We do not wait, as did the saints of former ages, ignorant of the Father's purpose for our future lot. "Life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel." We see beyond the chasm of death. We enjoy in the testimony of the Holy Spirit the foretaste of an eternal and glorious life for all the children of God – nay, the pledge that the reign of evil and death shall end throughout the universe.

With this hope swelling their hearts, the apostle's readers once more triumphantly join in the refrain: To the praise of His glory.

⁶⁰ The same incoherence occurs in Gal. iv. 5–7: "that *we* might receive the adoption of sons. And because *ye* are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into *our* hearts."

CHAPTER V. *FOR THE EYES OF THE HEART*

“For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and which *ye shew* toward all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention *of you* in my prayers:

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to that working of the might of His strength, which He wrought in the Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly *places*.” – Eph. i. 15–20.

Because of this: because you have heard the glad tidings, and believing it have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (vv. 13, 14). *I too*: I your apostle, with so great an interest in your salvation, in return give thanks for you. Thus St Paul, having extolled to the uttermost God's counsel of redemption unfolded through the ages, claims to offer especial thanksgiving for the faith of those who belong to his Gentile province and are, directly or indirectly, the fruit of his own ministry (iii. 1–13).

The intermediate clause of verse 15, describing the readers' faith, is obscure. This form of expression occurs nowhere else in St Paul; but the construction is used by St Luke, —*e. g.*, in Acts xxi. 21: “All the Jews *which are among* the Gentiles,” where it implies diffusion over a wide area. This being a circular letter, addressed to a number of Churches scattered through the province of Asia, of whose faith in many cases St Paul knew only by report, we can understand how he writes: “having heard of the faith that is [spread] amongst you.” —*The love*, completing *faith* in the ordinary text (as in Col. i. 4), is relegated by the Revisers to the margin, upon evidence that seems conclusive.⁶¹ The commentators, however, feel so strongly the harshness of this ellipsis that, in spite of the ancient witnesses, they read, almost with one consent,⁶² “*your love* toward all the saints.” The variation of the former clause prepares us, however, for something peculiar in this. In verse 13 we found St Paul's thought fixed on the decisive fact of his readers' *faith*. On this he still dwells lingeringly. The grammatical link needed between “faith” and “unto all the saints” is supplied in the Revised Version by *ye show*, after the analogy of Philemon 5. Perhaps it might be supplied as grammatically, and in a sense better suiting the situation, by *is come*. Then the co-ordinate prepositional phrases qualifying “faith” have both alike a local reference, and we paraphrase the clause thus: “since I heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is spread amongst you, and whose report has reached all the saints.”

We are reminded of the thanksgiving for the Roman Church, “that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.”⁶³ The success of the gospel in Asia gave encouragement to believers in Christ everywhere. St Paul loves in this way to link Church to Church, to knit the bonds of faith between land and land: in this letter most of all; for it is his catholic epistle, the epistle of the Church oecumenical.

In verse 16 we pass from praise to prayer. God is invoked by a double title peculiar to this passage, as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.” The former expression is in no way difficult. The apostle often speaks, as in verse 3, of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

⁶¹ See Westcott and Hort's *New Testament in Greek*, vol. ii., pp. 124, 125.

⁶² Dr. Beet abides by the critical text. He solves the difficulty by giving πίστις a double sense: “the faith among you in the Lord Jesus, and the *faithfulness* towards all the saints.” See his *Commentary on Ephesians, etc.*, pp. 284–6.

⁶³ In 1 Thess. i. 7–9; 2 Thess. i. 4, the same thought enters into Paul's thanksgiving; comp. 2 Cor. ix. 2.

Christ”: intending to qualify the Divine Fatherhood by another epithet, he writes for once simply of “*the God* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This reminds us of the dependence of the Lord Jesus upon the eternal Father, and accentuates the Divine sovereignty so conspicuous in the foregoing Act of Praise. Christ’s constant attitude towards the Father was that of His cry of anguish on the cross, “My God, my God!” Yet He never speaks to men of *our* God. To us God is “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” as He was to the men of old time “the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.”

The key to the designation *Father of glory* is in Romans vi. 4: “Christ was raised from the dead through *the glory of the Father*.” In the light of this august manifestation of God’s power to save His lost sons in Christ, we are called to see light (vv. 19, 20). Its glory shines already about God’s blessed name of Father, thrice glorified in the apostle’s praise (vv. 3–14). The title is the counterpart of “the Father of compassions” in 2 Corinthians i. 3.

And now, what has the apostle to ask of the Father of men under these glorious appellations? He asks “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full-knowledge⁶⁴ of Him, – the eyes of your heart enlightened, in order that you may know,” etc. This recalls the emphasis with which in verses 8 and 9 he set “wisdom and intelligence” amongst the first blessings bestowed by Divine grace upon the Church. It was the gift which the Asian Churches at the present juncture most needed; this is just now the burden of the apostle’s prayers for his people.

The *spirit of wisdom and revelation* desired will proceed from the Holy Spirit dwelling in these Gentile believers (ver. 13). But it must belong to their own spirit and direct their personal mental activity, the spirit of revelation becoming “the spirit of their mind” (iv. 23). When St Paul asks for “a spirit of wisdom and *revelation*,” he desires that his readers may have amongst themselves a fountain of inspiration and share in the prophetic gifts diffused through the Church.⁶⁵ And “the knowledge – the full, deep knowledge of God” is the sphere “in” which this richer inspiration and spiritual wisdom are exercised and nourished. “Philosophy, taking man for its centre, says, *Know thyself*: only the inspired word, which proceeds from God, has been able to say, *Know God*.”⁶⁶

The connexion of the first clause of verse 18 with the last of verse 17 is not very clear in St Paul’s Greek; there is a characteristic incoherence of structure. The continuity of thought is unmistakable. He prays that through this inspired wisdom his readers may have their reason enlightened to see the grandeur and wealth of their religion. This is a vision for “the eyes of the heart.” It is disclosed to the eye behind the eye, to the heart which is the true discernor.

“The seeing eyes
See best by the light in the heart that lies.”

Yonder is an ox grazing in the meadow on a bright summer’s day. Round him is spread the fairest landscape, – a broad stretch of herbage embroidered with flowers, the river gleaming in and out amongst the distant trees, the hills on both sides bounding the quiet valley, sunshine and shadows chasing each other as they leap from height to height. But of all this what sees the grazing ox? So much lush pasture and cool shade and clear water where his feet may splash when he has done feeding. In the same meadow there stands a poet musing, or a painter busy at his easel; and on the soul of that gifted man there descends, through eyes outwardly discerning no more than those of the beast at his side, a vision of wonder and beauty which will make all time richer. The eyes of the man’s heart are opened, and the spirit of wisdom and revelation is given him in the knowledge of God’s work in nature.

Like differences exist amongst men in regard to the things of religion. “So foolish was I and ignorant,” says the Psalmist, speaking of his former dejection and unbelief, “I was as a beast before Thee!” There shall be two men sitting side by side in the same house of prayer, at the same gate of

⁶⁴ This is the emphatic ἐπιγνώσις, so frequent in the later epistles. See Lightfoot’s *note* on Col. i. 9; or Cremer’s *Lexicon to N.T. Greek*.

⁶⁵ See ch. iii. 3–5, iv. 11; and comp. 1 Cor. xiv. 26–40, etc.

⁶⁶ Adolphe Monod: *Explication de l’épître de S. Paul aux Éphésiens*. A deeply spiritual and suggestive Commentary.

heaven. The one sees heaven opened; he hears the eternal song; his spirit is a temple filled with the glory of God. The other sees the place and the aspect of his fellow-worshippers; he hears the music of organ and choir, and the sound of some preacher's voice. But as for anything besides, any influence from another world, it is no more to him at that moment than is the music in the poet's soul or the colours on the painter's canvas to the ox that eateth grass.

It is not the strangeness and distance of Divine things alone that cause insensibility; their familiarity has the same effect. We know all this gospel so well. We have read it, listened to it, gone over its points of doctrine a hundred times. It is trite and easy to us as a worn glove. We discuss without a tremor of emotion truths the first whisper and dim promise of which once lifted men's souls into ecstasy, or cast them down into depths of shame and bewilderment so that they forgot to eat their bread. The awe of things eternal, the mystery of our faith, the Spirit of glory and of God rest on us no longer. So there come to be, as one hears it said, *gospel-hardened* hearers – and *gospel-hardened* preachers! The eyes see – and see not; the ears hear – and hear not; the lips speak without feeling; *the heart is waxen fat*. This is the nemesis of grace abused. It is the result that follows by an inevitable psychological law, where outward contact with spiritual truth is not attended with an inward apprehension and response. How do we need to pray, in handling these dread themes, for a true sense and savour of Divine things, – that there may be given, and ever given afresh to us “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.”

Three things the apostle desires that his readers may see with the heart's enlightened eyes: the *hope to which God calls them*, the *wealth that He possesses in them*, and the *power which He is prepared to exert upon them as believing men*.

I. What, then, is our *hope* in God? What is the ideal of our faith? For what purpose has God called us into the fellowship of His Son? What is our religion going to do for us and to make of us?

It will bring us safe home to heaven. It will deliver us from the present evil world, and preserve us unto Christ's heavenly kingdom. God forbid that we should make light of “the hope laid up for us in the heavens,” or cast it aside. It is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. But is it *the* hope of our calling? Is this what St Paul here chiefly signifies? We are very sure that it is not. But it is the one thing which stands for the hope of the gospel in many minds. “We trust that our sins are forgiven: we hope that we shall get to heaven!” The experience of how many Christian believers begins and ends there. We make of our religion a harbour of refuge, a soothing anodyne, an escape from the anguish of guilt and the fear of death; not a life-vocation, a grand pursuit. The definition we have quoted may suffice for the beginning and the end; but we need something to fill out that formula, to give body and substance, meaning and movement to the life of faith.

Let the apostle tell us what he regarded, for himself, as the end of religion, what was the object of his ambition and pursuit. “One thing I do,” he writes to the Philippians, opening to them all his heart, – “One thing I do. I press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” And what, pray, was that mark? – “that I may gain Christ and be found in Him! – that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain unto the final resurrection from the dead.” Yes, Paul hopes for heaven; but he hopes for something else first, and most. It is through Christ that he sees heaven. To know Christ, to love Christ, to serve Christ, to follow Christ, to be like Christ, to be with Christ for ever! – that is what St Paul lived for. Whatever aim he pursues or affection he cherishes, Christ lies in it and reaches beyond it. In doing or in suffering, in his intellect and his heart, in his thoughts for himself or for others, Christ is all things to him and in all. When life is thus filled with Christ, heaven becomes, as one may say, a mere circumstance, and death but an incident upon the way, – in the soul's everlasting pursuit of Christ.

Behold, then, brethren, the hope of our calling. God could not call us to any destiny less or lower than this. It would have been unworthy of Him, – and may we not say, unworthy of ourselves, if we are in truth His sons? From eternity the Father of spirits has predestined you and me to be holy

and without blemish before Him, – in a word, to be conformed to the image of His Son. Every other hope is dross compared to this.

II. Another vision for the heart's eyes, still more amazing than that we have seen: "what is," St Paul writes, "the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints."

We saw, in considering the eleventh and fourteenth verses, how the apostle, in characteristic fashion, plays upon the double aspect of the *inheritance*, regarding it now as the heritage of the saints in God and again as His heritage in them. The former side of this relationship was indicated in the "hope of the Divine calling," – which we live and strive for as it is promised us by God; and the latter comes out, by way of contrast, in this second clause. Verse 18 repeats in another way the antithesis of verse 14 between our inheritance and God's acquisition. We must understand that God sets great store by us His human children, and counts Himself rich in our affection and our service. How deeply it must affect us to know this, and to see the glory that in God's eyes belongs to His possession in believing men.

What presumption is all this, some one says. How preposterous to imagine that the Maker of the worlds interests Himself in atoms like ourselves, – in the ephemera of this insignificant planet! But moral magnitudes are not to be measured by a foot-rule. The mind which can traverse the immensities of space and hold them in its grasp, transcends the things it counts and weighs. As it is amongst earthly powers, so the law may hold betwixt sphere and sphere in the system of worlds, in the relations of bodies terrestrial and celestial to each other, that "God has chosen the weak things to put to shame the mighty, and the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are." Through the Church He is "making known to the potentates in the heavenly places His manifold wisdom" (iii, 10). The lowly can sing evermore with Mary in the Magnificat: "He that is mighty hath magnified me." If it be true that God spared not His Son for our salvation and has sealed us with the seal of His Spirit, if He chose us before the world's foundation to be His saints, He must set upon those saints an infinite value. We may despise ourselves; but He thinks great things of us.

And is this, after all, so hard to understand? If the alternative were put to some owner of wide lands and houses full of treasure: "Now, you must lose that fine estate, or see your own son lost and ruined! You must part with a hundred thousand pounds – or with your best friend!" there could be no doubt in such a case what the choice would be of a man of sense and worth, one who sees with the eyes of the heart. Shall we think less nobly of God than of a right-minded man amongst ourselves? – Suppose, again, that one of our great cities were so full of wealth that the poorest were housed in palaces and fared sumptuously every day, though its citizens were profligates and thieves and cowards! What would its opulence and luxury be worth? Is it not evident that *character* is the only possession of intrinsic value, and that this alone gives worth and weight to other properties? "The saints that are in the earth and the excellent" are earth's riches.

So far as we can judge of His ways, the great God who made us cares comparatively little about the upholstery and machinery of the universe; but He cares immensely about men, about the character and destiny of men. There is nothing in all that physical science discloses for God to *love*, nothing kindred to Himself. "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" the Hebrew poet pictures Him saying before heaven and hell! – "Hast thou considered my servant Job? – a perfect man and upright: there is none like him in the earth." How proud God is of a man like that, in a world like this. Who can tell the value that the Father of glory sets upon the tried fidelity of His humblest servant here on earth; the intensity with which He reciprocates the confidence of one timid, trembling human heart, or the simple reverence of one little child that lisps His awful name? "He *taketh pleasure* in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy!" Beneath His feet all the worlds lie spread in their starry splendour, our sun with its train of planets no more than one glimmering spot of light amongst ten thousand. But amidst this magnificence, what is the sight that wins His tender fatherly regard? "To that man will I look, that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at my word." Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. The Creator rejoices in His works as at the beginning,

the Lord of heaven and earth in His dominion. But these are not His “inheritance.” That is in the love of His children, in the character and number of His saints. *We* are to be the praise of His glory.

Let us learn, then, to respect ourselves. Let us not take the world's tinsel for wealth, and spend our time, like the man in Bunyan's dream, scraping with “the muck-rake” while the crown of life shines above our head. The riches of a Church – nay, of any human community – lies not in its moneyed resources, but in the men and women that compose it, in their godlike attributes of mind and heart, in their knowledge, their zeal, their love to God and man, in the purity, the gentleness, the truthfulness and courage and fidelity that are found amongst them. These are the qualities which give distinction to human life, and are beautiful in the eyes of God and holy angels. “Man that is in honour and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.”

III. One thing more we need to understand, or what we have seen already will be of little practical avail. We may see glorious visions, we may cherish high aspirations; and they may prove to be but the dreams of vanity. Nay, it is conceivable that God Himself might have wealth invested in our nature, a treasure beyond price, shipwrecked and sunk irrecoverably through our sin. What means exist for realizing this inheritance? what power is there at work to recover these forfeited hopes, and that glory of God of which we have come so miserably short?

The answer lies in the apostle's words: “That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us that believe,” – a power measured by “the energy of the might of His strength⁶⁷ which He wrought in the Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.” This is the power that we have to count upon, the force that is yoked to the world's salvation and is at the service of our faith. Its energy has turned the tide and reversed the stream of nature – in the person of Jesus Christ and in the course of human history. It has changed death to life. Above all, it certifies the forgiveness of sin and releases us from its liabilities; it transforms the law of sin and death into the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

We preachers hear it said sometimes: “You live in a speculative world. Your doctrines are ideal and visionary, – altogether too high for men as they are and the world as we find it. Human nature and experience, the coarse realities of life are all against you.”

What would our objectors have said at the grave-side of Jesus? “The beautiful dreamer, the sublime idealist! He was too good for a world such as ours. It was sure to end like this. His ideas of life were utterly impracticable.” So they would have moralized. “And the good prophet talked – strangest fanaticism of all – of rising again on the third day! One thing at least we know, that the dead are dead and gone from us. No, we shall never see Jesus or His like again. Purity cannot live in this infected air. The grave ends all hope for men.” But, despite human nature and human experience, He has risen again, He lives for ever! That is the apostle's message and testimony to the world. For those “who believe” it, all things are possible. A life is within our reach that seemed far off as earth from heaven. *You* may become a perfect saint.

From His open grave Christ breathed on His disciples, and through them on all mankind, the Holy Spirit. This is the efficient cause of Christianity, – the Spirit that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. The limit to its efficacy lies in the defects of our faith, in our failure to comprehend what God gave us in His Son. Is anything now too hard for the Lord? Shall anything be called impossible, in the line of God's promise and man's spiritual need? Can we put an arrest upon the working of this mysterious force, upon the Spirit of the new life, and say to it: Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther?

Look at Jesus where He was – the poor, tortured, wounded body, slain by our sins, lying cold and still in Joseph's grave: then lift up your eyes and see Him *where He is*, – enthroned in the worship

⁶⁷ In this amplitude of expression there is no idle heaping up of words. The four synonyms for *power* have each a distinct force in the sentence. Δύναμις is *power* in general, as that which is able to effect some purpose; ἐνέργεια is *energy*, power in effective action and operation; κράτος is *might, mastery*, sovereign power, – in the New Testament used chiefly of the power of God; ἰσχύς is *force, strength*, power resident in some person and belonging to him. This is the order in which the words follow each other. Compare vi. 10 in the Greek.

and wonder of heaven! Measure by that distance, by the sweep and lift of that almighty Arm, the strength of the forces engaged to your salvation, the might of the powers at work through the ages for the redemption of humanity.

THE DOCTRINE

Chapter i. 20–iii. 13

Ἵψηλῶν σφόδρα γέμει τῶν νοημάτων καὶ ὑπερόγκων. Ἄ γὰρ μηδαμοῦ
σχέδον ἐφθέγγετο, ταῦτα ἐνταῦθά φησιν.
John Chrysostom: In epistolam ad Ephesios.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT GOD WROUGHT IN THE CHRIST

“He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and He put all things in subjection under His feet, and Him He gave – the head over all things – to the Church which is His body, – the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” – Eph. i. 20–23.

The division that we make at verse 20, marking off at this point the commencement of the Doctrine of the epistle, may appear somewhat forced. The great doxology of the first half of the chapter is intensely theological; and the prayer which follows it, like that of the letter to the Colossians, melts into doctrine imperceptibly. The apostle teaches upon his knees. The things he has to tell his readers, and the things he has asked on their behalf from God, are to a great extent the same. Still the writer's attitude in the second chapter is manifestly that of teaching; and his doctrine there is so directly based upon the concluding sentences of his prayer, that it is necessary for logical arrangement to place these verses within the doctrinal section of the epistle.

The resurrection of Christ made men sensible that a new force of life had come into the world, of incalculable potency. This power was in existence before. In prelusive ways, it has wrought in the world from its foundation, and since the fall of man. By the incarnation of the Son of God it took possession of human flesh; by His sacrificial death it won its decisive triumph. But the virtue of these acts of Divine grace lay in their hiding of power, in the self-abnegation of the Son of God who emptied Himself and took a servant's form, and became obedient unto death.

With what a rebound did the “energy of the might of God's strength” put forth itself in Him, when once this sacrifice was accomplished! Even His disciples who had seen Jesus still the tempest and feed the multitude from a handful of bread and call back the spirit to its mortal frame, had not dreamed of the might of Godhead latent in Him, until they beheld Him risen from the dead. He had promised this in words; but they understood His words only when they saw the fact, when He actually stood before them “alive after His passion.” The scene of Calvary – the cruel sufferings of their Master, His helpless ignominy and abandonment by God, the malignant triumph of his enemies – gave to this revelation an effect beyond measure astonishing and profound in its impression. From the stupor of grief and despair they were raised to a boundless hope, as Jesus rose from the death of the cross to glorious life and Godhead.

Of the same nature was the effect produced by His manifestation to Paul himself. The Nazarene prophet known to Saul by report as an attractive teacher and worker of miracles, had made enormous pretensions, blasphemous if they were not true. He put Himself forward as the Messiah and the very Son of God! But when brought to the test, His power utterly failed. God disowned and forsook Him; and He “was crucified of weakness.” His followers declared, indeed, that He had returned from the grave. But who could believe them, a handful of Galilean enthusiasts, desperately clinging to the name of their disgraced leader! If He has risen, why does He not show Himself to others? Who can accept a crucified Messiah? The new faith is a madness, and an insult to our common Judaism! Such were Saul's former thoughts of the Christ. But when his challenge was met and the Risen One confronted him in the way to Damascus, when from that Form of insufferable glory there came a voice saying, “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest!” it was enough. Instantly the conviction penetrated his soul, “He liveth by the power of God.” Saul's previous reasonings against the Messiahship of Jesus by the same rigorous logic were now turned into arguments for Him.

It is “*the Christ*,” let us observe, in whom God “wrought raising Him from the dead”: the Christ of Jewish hope (ver. 12), the centre and sum of the Divine counsel for the world (ver. 10),⁶⁸ the Christ whom in that moment never to be forgotten the humbled Saul recognized in the crucified Nazarene.

The demonstration of the power of Christianity Paul had found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The power which raised Him from the dead is the working energy of our faith. Let us see what this mysterious power wrought in the Redeemer Himself; and then we will consider how it bears upon us. There are two steps indicated in Christ’s exaltation: He was raised *from the death of the cross to new life amongst men*; and again from the world of men He was raised *to the throne of God in heaven*. In the enthronement of Jesus Christ at the Father’s right hand, verses 22, 23 further distinguish two separate acts: there was conferred on Him *a universal Lordship*; and He was made specifically *Head of the Church*, being given to her for her Lord and Life, He who contains the fulness of the Godhead. Such is the line of thought marked out for us.

I. *God raised the Christ from the dead.*

This assertion is the corner-stone of St Paul’s life and doctrine, and of the existence of Christendom. Did the event really take place? There were Christians at Corinth who affirmed, “There is no resurrection of the dead.” And there are followers of Jesus now who with deep sadness confess, like the author of *Obermann once more*:

“Now He is dead! Far hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on His grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.”

If we are driven to this surrender, compelled to think that it was an apparition, a creation of their own passionate longing and heated fancy that the disciples saw and conversed with during those forty days, an apparition sprung from his fevered remorse that arrested Saul on the Damascus road – if we no longer believe in Jesus and the resurrection, it is in vain that we still call ourselves Christians. The foundation of the Christian creed is struck away from under our feet. Its spell is broken; its energy is gone.

Individual men may and do continue to believe in Christ, with no faith in the supernatural, men who are sceptics in regard to His resurrection and miracles. They believe in Himself, they say, not in His legendary wonders; in His character and teaching, in His beneficent influence – in the *spiritual Christ*, whom no physical marvel can exalt above His intrinsic greatness. And such trust in Him, where it is sincere, He accepts for all that it is worth, from the believer’s heart. But this is not the faith that saved Paul, and built the Church. It is not the faith which will save the world. It is the faith of compromise and transition, the faith of those whose conscience and heart cling to Christ while their reason gives its verdict against Him. Such belief may hold good for the individuals who profess it; but it must die with them. No skill of reasoning or grace of sentiment will for long conceal its inconsistency. The plain, blunt sense of mankind will decide again, as it has done already, that Jesus Christ was either a blasphemer, or He was the Son of the eternal God; either He rose from the dead in very truth, or His religion is a fable. Christianity is not bound up with the infallibility of the Church, whether in Pope or Councils, nor with the inerrancy of the letter of Scripture: it stands or falls with the reality of the facts of the gospel, with the risen life of Christ and His presence in the Spirit amongst men.

The fact of Christ’s resurrection is one upon which modern science has nothing new to say. The law of death is not a recent discovery. Men were as well aware of its universality in the first century as they are in the nineteenth, and as little disposed as we are ourselves to believe in the return

⁶⁸ See the note upon this definite article on p. 47.

of the dead to bodily life. The stark reality of death makes us all sceptics. Nothing is clearer from the narratives than the utter surprise of the friends of Jesus at His reappearance, and their complete unpreparedness for the event. They were not eager, but “*slow of heart to believe.*” Their very love to the Master, as in the case of Thomas, made them fearful of self-deception. It is a shallow and an unjust criticism that dismisses the disciples as interested witnesses and predisposed to faith in the resurrection of their dead Master. Should we be thus credulous in the case of our best-beloved dead? The instinctive feeling that meets any thought of the kind, after the fact of death is once certain, is rather that of deprecation and aversion, such as Martha expressed when Jesus went to call her brother from his grave. In all the long record of human imposture and illusion, no resurrection story has ever found general credence outside of the Biblical revelation. No system of faith except our own has ever been built on the allegation that a dead man rose from the grave.

Christ's was not the only resurrection; but it is the only *final* resurrection. Lazarus of Bethany left his tomb at the word of Jesus, a living man; but he was still a mortal man, doomed to see corruption. He returned from the grave on this side, as he had entered it, “bound hand and foot with grave-clothes.” Not so with the Christ. He passed through the region of death and issued on the immortal side, escaped from the bondage of corruption. Therefore He is called the “firstfruits” and “the firstborn *out of* the dead.”⁶⁹ Hence the alteration manifest in the risen form of Jesus. He was “changed,” as St Paul conceives those will be who await on earth their Lord's return (1 Cor. xv. 51). The mortal in Him was swallowed up of life. The corpse that was laid in Joseph's tomb was there no longer. From it another body has issued, recognized for the same person by look and voice and movement, but indescribably transfigured. Visible and tangible as the body of the Risen One was – “Handle me, and see,” He said – it was superior to material limitations; it belonged to a state whose laws transcend the range of our experience, in which the body is the pliant instrument of the animating spirit. From the Person of the risen Saviour the apostle formed his conception of the “spiritual body,” the “house from heaven” with which, as he teaches, each of the saints will be clothed – the wasted form that we lay down in the grave being transformed into the semblance of His “body of glory, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. iii. 20, 21).

The resurrection of the Christ inaugurated a new order of things. It was like the appearance of the first living organism amidst dead matter, or of the first rational consciousness in the unconscious world. He “is,” says the apostle, the “beginning, first-begotten out of the dead” (Col. i. 18). With the harvest filling our granaries, we cease to wonder at the firstfruits; and in the new heavens and earth Christ's resurrection will seem an entirely natural thing. Immortality will then be the normal condition of human existence.

That resurrection, nevertheless, did homage to the fundamental law of science and of reason, that every occurrence, ordinary or extraordinary, shall have an adequate cause. The event was not more singular and unique than the nature of Him to whom it befell. Looking back over the Divine life and deeds of Jesus, St Peter said: “It was not possible that He should be holden of death.” How unfitting and repugnant to thought, that the common death of all men should come upon Jesus Christ! There was that in His Person, in its absolute purity and godlikeness, which repelled the touch of corruption. He was “marked out,” writes our apostle, “as Son of God, *according to His spirit of holiness*, by His resurrection from the dead” (Rom. i. 4). These two signs of Godhead agree in Jesus; and the second is no more superhuman than the first. For Him the supernatural was natural. There was a mighty working of the being of God latent in Him, which transcended and subdued to itself the laws of our physical frame, even more completely than they do the laws and conditions of the lower realms of nature.

⁶⁹ Πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, Col. i. 18: comp. Rom. vi. 13, x. 7, for the force of the preposition. Hence the peculiar ἔξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν of Phil. iii. 10, 11, – the *out-and-out* resurrection, which will utterly remove us from the sphere of death.

II. The power which raised Jesus our Lord from the dead could not leave Him in the world of sin and death. Lifting Him from hades to earth, by another step it exalted the risen Saviour above the clouds, and *seated Him at God's right hand in the heavens.*

The forty days were a halt by the way, a condescending pause in the operation of the almighty power that raised Him. "I ascend," He said to the first that saw Him, – "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." He must see His own in the world again; He must "show Himself alive after His passion by infallible proofs," that their hearts may be comforted and knit together in the assurance of faith, that they may be prepared to receive His Spirit and to bear their witness to the world. Then He will ascend up where He was before, returning to the Father's bosom. It was impossible that a spiritual body should tarry in a mortal dwelling; impossible that the familiar relations of discipleship should be resumed. No new follower can now ask of Him, "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou," under what roof amid the homes of men? For He dwells with those that love Him always and everywhere, like the Father (John xiv. 23). From this time Christ will not be known after the flesh, but as the "Lord of the Spirit" (2 Cor. iii. 18).

"In the heavenlies" now abides the Risen One. This expression, so frequent in the epistle as to be characteristic of it,⁷⁰ denotes not locality so much as condition and sphere. It speaks of the bright and deathless world of God and the angels, of which the sky has always been to men the symbol. Thither Christ ascended in the eyes of His apostles on the fortieth day from His rising. Once before His death its brightness for a moment had irradiated His form upon the Mount of Transfiguration. Clad in the like celestial splendour He showed Himself to His future apostle Paul, as to one born out of due time, to make him His minister and witness. Since then, of all the multitudes that have loved His appearing, no other has looked upon Him with bodily eyes. He dwells with the Father in light unapproachable.

But rest and felicity are not enough for Him. Christ sits at the right hand of power, that He may *rule*. In those heavenly places, it seems, there are thrones higher and lower, names more or less eminent, but His stands clear above them all. In the realms of space, in the epochs of eternity there is none to rival our Lord Jesus, no power that does not owe Him tribute. God "hath put all things under His feet." *The Christ*, who died on the cross, who rose in human form from the grave, is exalted to share the Father's glory and dominion, is filled with God's own fulness, and made without limitation or exception "Head over all things."

In his enumeration of the angelic orders in verse 21, the apostle follows the phraseology current at the time, without giving any precise dogmatic sanction to it. The epistle to the Colossians furnishes a somewhat different list (ch. i. 16); and in 1 Corinthians xv. 24 we find the "principality, dominion, and power" without the "lordship." As Lightfoot says,⁷¹ St Paul "brushes away all these speculations" about the ranks and titles of the angels, "without inquiring how much or how little truth there may be in them... His language shows a spirit of impatience with this elaborate angelology." There is, perhaps, a passing reproof conveyed by this sentence to the "worshipping of the angels" inculcated at the present time in Colossæ, to which other Asian Churches may have been drawn. "Paul's faith saw the Risen and Rising One passing through and beyond and above successive ranks of angelic powers, until there was in heaven no grandeur which He had not left behind. Then, after naming heavenly powers known to him, he uses a universal phrase covering 'not only' those known by men living on earth 'in the' present 'age, but also' those names which will be needed and used to describe men and angels throughout the eternal future" (Beet).

The apostle appropriates here two sentences of Messianic prophecy, from Psalms cx. and viii. The former was addressed to the Lord's Anointed, the King-Priest enthroned in Zion: "Sit thou on

⁷⁰ Ver. 3, ch. ii. 6, iii. 10, vi. 12; nowhere else in the New Testament. Comp., however, 1 Cor. xv. 40, 48; Phil. ii. 10; Heb. viii. 5, ix. 23, xi. 16, xii. 22, where the adjective has the same kind of use.

⁷¹ Note on Col. i. 16.

my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool!” The latter text describes man in his pristine glory, as God formed him after His likeness and set him in command over His creation. This saying St Paul applies, with an unbounded scope, to the God-man raised from the dead, Founder of the new creation: “Thou madest Him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under His feet.” To the former of these passages St Paul repeatedly alludes; indeed, since our Lord quoted it in this sense, it became the standing designation of His heavenly dignity.⁷² The words of Psalm viii. are brought in evidence again in Hebrews ii. 5–10, and expounded from a somewhat different standpoint. As the writer of the other epistle shows, this coronation belongs to the human race, and it falls to the Son of man to win it. St Paul in quoting the same Psalm is not insensible of its human reference. It was a prophecy for Jesus and His brethren, for Christ and the Church. So it forms a natural transition from the thought of Christ’s dominion over the universe (ver. 21) to that of His union with the Church (ver. 22b).

III. The second clause of verse 22 begins with an emphasis upon the *object* which the English Version fails to recognize: “and *Him* He gave” – the Christ exalted to universal authority – “*Him* God gave, Head over all things [as He is], to the Church which is His body, – the fulness of Him who fills all things in all.”

At the topmost height of His glory, with thrones and principedoms beneath His feet, *Christ is given to the Church!* The Head over all things, the Lord of the created universe, He – and none less or lower – is the Head of redeemed humanity. For the Church “is His body” (this clause is interjected by way of explanation): she is the vessel of His Spirit, the organic instrument of His Divine-human life. As the spirit belongs to its body, by the like fitness the Christ in His surpassing glory is the possession of the community of believing men. The body claims its head, the wife her husband. No matter where Christ is, however high in heaven, He belongs to us. Though the Bride is lowly and of poor estate, He is hers! and she knows it, and holds fast His heart. She recks little of the people’s ignorance and scorn, if their Master is her affianced Lord, and she the best-beloved in His eyes.

How rich is this gift of the Father to the Church in the Son of His love, the concluding words of the paragraph declare: “Him He gave . . . to the Church . . . [gave] the fulness of Him that fills all in all.” In the risen and enthroned Christ God bestowed on men a gift in which the Divine plenitude that fills creation is embraced. For this last clause, it is clear to us, does not qualify “the Church which is His body,” and expositors have needlessly taxed their ingenuity with the incongruous apposition of “body” and “fulness”; it belongs to the grand Object of the foregoing description, to “the Christ” whom God raised from the dead and invested with His own prerogatives. The two separate designations, “Head over all things” and “Fulness of the All-filler,” are parallel, and alike point back to *Him* who stands with a weight of gathered emphasis – heaped up from verse 19 onwards – at the front of this last sentence (ver. 22b). There has been nothing to prepare the reader to ascribe the august title of the *pleroma*, the Divine fulness, to the Church – enough for her, surely, if she is His body and He God’s gift to her – but there has been everything to prepare us to crown the Lord Jesus with this glory. To that which God had wrought in Him and bestowed on Him, as previously related, verse 23 adds something more and greater still; for it shows what God makes the Christ to be, not to the creatures, to the angels, to the Church, *but to God Himself!*⁷³

Our text is in strict agreement with the sayings about “the fulness” in Colossians i. 15–20 and ii. 9, 10; as well as with the later references of this epistle, in chapter iii. 19, iv. 13; and with John i. 16. This title belongs to Christ as God is in Him and communicates to Him all Divine powers. It was, in the apostle’s view, a new and distinct act by which the Father bestowed on the incarnate Son, raised by His power from the dead, the functions of Deity. Of this glory Christ had of His own accord

⁷² Matt. xxii. 41–46, also in Mark and Luke; Acts ii. 34, 35; Rom. viii. 34; Col. iii. 1; Heb. i. 13; 1 Peter iii. 22, etc.

⁷³ The reader of the Old Testament, unless otherwise advertized, must inevitably have referred the words *who filleth all things in all* to the Supreme God. See Jer. xxiii. 24; Isai. vi. 1, 3; Hag. ii. 7; Ps. xxxiii. 5, etc.; Exod. xxxi. 3. “That filleth all in all” is an attribute belonging to “the same God, that worketh all in all” (1 Cor. xii. 6). Comp. iv. 6.

“emptied Himself” in becoming man for our salvation (Phil. ii. 6, 7). Therefore when the sacrifice was effected and the time of humiliation past, it “was the Father’s pleasure that all the fulness should make its dwelling in Him” (Col. i. 19). At no point did Christ exalt Himself, or arrogate the glory once renounced. He prayed, when the hour was come: “Now, Father, *glorify Thou me* with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” It was for the Father to say, as He raised and enthroned Him: “Thou art my Son; I to-day have begotten Thee!” (Acts xiii. 33).

Again there was poured into the empty, humbled and impoverished form of the Son of God the brightness of the Father’s glory and the infinitude of the Father’s authority and power. The majesty that He had foregone was restored to Him in undiminished measure. But how great a change meanwhile in Him who received it! This plenitude devolves not now on the eternal Son in His pure Godhead, but on the Christ, the Head and Redeemer of mankind. God who fills the universe with His presence, with His cherishing love and sustaining power, has conferred the fulness of all that He is upon our Christ. He has given Him, so replenished and perfected, to the body of His saints, that He may dwell and work in them for ever.

CHAPTER VII. *FROM DEATH TO LIFE*

“And you *did He quicken*, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein aforetime ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest: – but God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with the Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up together and made us to sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.” – Eph. ii. 1–6.

We pass by a sudden transition, just as in Colossians i. 21, 22, from the thought of that which God wrought in Christ Himself to that which He works through Christ in believing men. So God raised, exalted, and glorified His Son Jesus Christ (i. 19–23) —*and you!* The finely woven threads of the apostle's thought are frequently severed, and awkward chasms made in the highway of his argument by our chapter and verse divisions. The words inserted in our Version (*did He quicken*) are borrowed by anticipation from verse 5; but they are more than supplied already in the foregoing context. “The same almighty Hand that was laid upon the body of the dead Christ and lifted Him from Joseph's grave to the highest seat in heaven, is now laid upon your soul. It has raised *you* from the grave and death of sin to share by faith His celestial life.”

The apostle, in verse 3, pointedly includes amongst the “dead in trespasses and sins” himself and his Jewish fellow-believers as they “once lived,” when they obeyed the motions and “volitions of the flesh,” and so were “by birth” not children of favour, as Jews presumed, but “children of anger, even as the rest.”⁷⁴

This passage gives us a sublime view of the event of our conversion. It associates that change in us with the stupendous miracle which took place in our Redeemer. The one act is a continuation of the other. There is an acting over again in us of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, when we realize through faith that which was done for mankind in Him. At the same time, the redemption which is in Christ Jesus is no mere legacy, to be received or declined; it is not something done once for all, and left to be appropriated passively by our individual will. It is a “*power* of God unto salvation,” unceasingly operative and effective, that works “of faith and *unto faith*” that summons men to faith, challenging human confidence wherever its message travels and awakening the spiritual possibilities dormant in our nature.

It is a supernatural force, then, which is at work upon us in the word of Christ. It is a resurrection-power, that turns death into life. And it is a power instinct with love. The love which went out towards the slain and buried Jesus when the Father stooped to raise Him from the dead, bends over us as we lie in the grave of our sins, and exerts itself with a might no less transcendent, that it may raise us from the dust of death to sit with Him in the heavenly places (vv. 4–6).

Let us look at the two sides of the change effected in men by the gospel – at the death they leave, and the life into which they enter. Let us contemplate the task to which this unmatched power has set itself.

I. *You that were dead*, the apostle says.

Jesus Christ came into a dead world – He the one living man, alive in body, soul, and spirit – alive to God in the world. He was, like none besides, aware of God and of God's love, breathing in

⁷⁴ For the antithesis of “you” and “we,” comp. vv. 11–18, ch. i, 12, 13; also Rom. iii. 19, 23 (*For there is no distinction*), Gal. ii. 15.

His Spirit, “living not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded from His mouth.” “This,” He said, “is life eternal.” If His definition was correct, if it be life to know God, then the world into which Christ entered by His human birth, the world of heathendom and Judaism, was veritably dying or dead – “dead indeed unto God.”

Its condition was visible to discerning eyes. It was a world rotting in its corruption, mouldering in its decay, and which to His pure sense had the moral aspect and odour of the charnel-house. We realize very imperfectly the distress, the inward nausea, the conflict of disgust and pity which the fact of being in such a world as this and belonging to it caused in the nature of Jesus Christ, in a soul that was in perfect sympathy with God. Never was there loneliness such as His, the solitude of life in a region peopled with the dead. The joy which Christ had in His little flock, in those whom the Father had given Him out of the world, was proportionately great. In them He found companionship, teachableness, signs of a heart awakening towards God – men to whom life was in some degree what it was to Him. He had come, as the prophet in his vision, into “the valley full of dry bones,” and He “prophesied to these slain, that they might live.” What a comfort to see, at His first words, a shaking in the valley, – to see some who stirred at His voice, who stood upon their feet and gathered round Him – not yet a great army, but a band of living men! In their breasts, inspired from His, was the life of the future. “I am come,” He said, “that they might have life.” It was the work of Jesus Christ to breathe His vital spirit into the corpse of humanity, to reanimate the world.

When St Paul speaks of his readers in their heathen condition as “dead,” it is not a figure of speech. He does not mean that they were like dead men, that their state resembled death; “nor only that they were in peril of death; but he signifies a real and present death” (Calvin). They were, in the inmost sense and truth of things, *dead men*. We are twofold creatures, two-lived, – spirits cased in flesh. Our human nature is capable, therefore, of strange duplicities. It is possible for us to be alive and flourishing upon one side of our being, while we are paralyzed or lifeless upon the other. As our bodies live in commerce with the light and air, in the environment of house and food and daily exercise of the limbs and senses under the economy of material nature, so our spirits live by the breath of prayer, by faith and love towards God, by reverence and filial submission, by communion with things unseen and eternal. “With Thee,” says the Psalmist to his God, “is the fountain of life: in Thy light we see light.” We must daily resort to that fountain and drink of its pure stream, we must faithfully walk in that light, or there is no such life for us. The soul that wants a true faith in God, wants the proper spring and principle of its being. It sees not the light, it bears not the voices, it breathes not the air of that higher world where its origin and its destiny lie.

The man who walks the earth a sinner against God, becomes by the act and fact of his transgression a dead man. He has imbibed the fatal poison; it runs in his veins. The doom of sin lies on his unforgiven spirit. He carries death and judgement about with him. They lie down with him at night and wake with him in the morning; they take part in his transactions; they sit by his side in the feast of life. His works are “dead works”; his joys and hopes are all shadowed and tainted. Within his living frame he bears a confined soul. With the machinery of life, with the faculties and possibilities of a spiritual being, the man lies crushed under the activity of the senses, wasted and decaying for want of the breath of the Spirit of God. In its coldness and powerlessness – too often in its visible corruption – his nature shows the symptoms of advancing death. It is dead as the tree is dead, cut off from its root; as the fire is dead, when the spark is gone out; dead as a man is dead, when the heart stops.

As it is with the departed saints sleeping in Christ, – “put to death, indeed, in the flesh, but living in the spirit,” – so by a terrible inversion with the wicked in this life. They are put to death, indeed, in the spirit, while they live in the flesh. They may be and often are powerfully alive and active in their relations to the world of sense, while on the unseen and Godward side utterly paralyzed. Ask such a man about his business or family concerns; touch on affairs of politics or trade, – and you deal with a living mind, its powers and susceptibilities awake and alert. But let the conversation pass to other themes; sound him on questions of the inner life; ask him what he thinks of Christ, how he

stands towards God, how he fares in the spiritual conflict, – and you strike a note to which there is no response. You have taken him out of his element. He is a practical man, he tells you; he does not live in the clouds, or hunt after shadows; he believes in hard facts, in things that he can grasp and handle. “The natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him.” They are pictures to the eye of the blind, heavenly music to the stone-deaf.

And yet that hardened man of the world – starve and ignore his own spirit and shut up its mystic chambers as he will – cannot easily destroy himself. He has not extirpated his religious nature, nor crushed out, though he has suppressed, the craving for God in his breast. And when the callous surface of his life is broken through, under some unusual stress, some heavy loss or the shock of a great bereavement, one may catch a glimpse of the deeper world within of which the man himself was so little conscious. And what is to be seen there? Haunting memories of past sin, fears of a conscience fretted already by the undying worm, forms of weird and ghostly dread flitting amid the gloom and dust of death through that closed house of the spirit, —

“The bat and owl inhabit here:
The snake nests on the altar stone:
The sacred vessels moulder near:
The image of the God is gone!”

In this condition of death the word of life comes to men. It is the state not of heathendom alone; but of those also, favoured with the light of revelation, who have not opened to it the eyes of the heart, of all who are “doing the desires of the flesh and the thoughts” – who are governed by their own impulses and ideas and serve no will above the world of sense.⁷⁵ Without distinction of birth or formal religious standing, “all” who thus live and walk are dead while they live. Their *trespasses and sins* have killed them. From first to last Scripture testifies: “Your sins have separated between you and your God.” We find a hundred excuses for our irreligion: there is the cause. There is nothing in the universe to separate any one of us from the love and fellowship of his Maker but his own unforsaken sin.

It is true, there are other hindrances to faith, intellectual difficulties of great weight and seriousness, that press upon many minds. For such men Christ has all possible sympathy and patience. There is a real, though hidden faith that “lives in honest doubt.” Some men have more faith than they suppose, while others certainly have much less. One has a name to live, and yet is dead; another, perchance, has a name to die, and yet is alive to God through Jesus Christ. There are endless complications, self-contradictions, and misunderstandings in human nature. “Many are first” in the ranks of religious profession and notoriety, “which shall be last, and the last first.” We make the largest allowance for this element of uncertainty in the line that bounds faith from unfaith; “The Lord knoweth them that are His.” No intellectual difficulty, no mere misunderstanding, will ultimately or for long separate between God and the soul that He has made.

It is *antipathy* that separates. “They did not like to retain God in their knowledge”; that is Paul’s explanation of the ungodliness and vice of the ancient world. And it holds good still in countless instances. “Numbers in this bad world talk loudly against religion in order to encourage each other in sin, because they need encouragement. They know that they ought to be other than they are; but are glad to avail themselves of anything that looks like argument, to overcome their consciences withal” (Newman). The fashionable scepticism of the day too often conceals an inner revolt against the moral demands of the Christian life; it is the pretext of a carnal mind, which is “enmity against God, because it is not subject to His law.” Christ’s sentence upon unbelief as He knew it was this: “Light is come into the world; and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.”

⁷⁵ Ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν (ver. 3).

So said the keenest and the kindest judge of men. If we are refusing Him our faith, let us be very sure that this condemnation does not touch ourselves. Is there no passion that bribes and suborns the intellect? no desire in the soul that dreads His entrance? no evil deeds that shelter themselves from His accusing light?

When the apostle says of his Gentile readers that they “once walked in the way of the age, according to the course of this world,⁷⁶ according to the prince of the power of the air,” the former part of his statement is clear enough. The age in which he lived was godless to the last degree; the stream of the world’s life ran in turbid course toward moral ruin. But the second clause is obscure. The “prince” (or “ruler”) who guides the world along its career of rebellion is manifestly Satan, the spirit of darkness and hate whom St Paul entitles “the god of this world” (2 Cor. iv. 4), and in whom Jesus recognized, under the name of “the prince of the world,” His great antagonist (John xiv. 30).

But what has this spirit of evil to do with “the air”? The Jewish rabbis supposed that the terrestrial atmosphere was Satan’s abode, that it was peopled by demons flitting about invisibly in the encompassing element. But this is a notion foreign to Scripture – certainly not contained in chapter vi. 12 – and, in its bare physical sense, without point or relevance to this passage. There follows in immediate apposition to “the domain of the air, *the spirit* that now works in the sons of disobedience.” Surely, *the air* here partakes (if it be only here) of the figurative significance of *spirit* (i.e. *breath*). St Paul refines the Jewish idea of evil spirits dwelling in the surrounding atmosphere into an ethical conception of *the atmosphere of the world*, as that from which the sons of disobedience draw their breath and receive the spirit that inspires them. Here lies, in truth, the dominion of Satan. In other words, Satan constituted the *Zeitgeist*.

As Beck profoundly remarks upon this text:⁷⁷ “The Power of the air is a fitting designation for the prevailing spirit of the times, whose influence spreads itself like a miasma through the whole atmosphere of the world. It manifests itself as a contagious nature-power; and a *spiritus rector* works within it, which takes possession of the world of men, alike in individuals and in society, and assumes the direction of it. The form of expression here employed is based on the conception of evil peculiar to Scripture. In Scripture, evil and the principle of evil are not conceived in a purely spiritual way; nor could this be the case in a world of fleshly constitution, where the spiritual has the sensuous for its basis and its vehicle. Spiritual evil exists as a power immanent in cosmical nature.”⁷⁸ Concerning great tracts of the earth, and large sections even of Christianized communities, we must still confess with St John: “The world lieth in the Evil One.” The air is impregnated with the infection of sin;⁷⁹ its germs float about us constantly, and wherever they find lodgement they set up their deadly fever. Sin is the malarial poison native to our soil; it is an epidemic that runs its course through the entire “age of this world.”

Above this feverous, sin-laden atmosphere the apostle sees God’s anger brooding in threatening clouds. For our trespasses and sins are, after all, not forced on us by our environment. Those offences by which we provoke God, lie in our nature; they are no mere casual acts, they belong to our bias and disposition. Sin is a constitutional malady. There exists a bad element in our human nature, which corresponds but too truly to the course and current of the world around us. This the apostle acknowledges for himself and his law-honouring Jewish kindred: “We were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” So he wrote in the sad confession of Romans vii. 14–23: “I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

⁷⁶ Perhaps this double rendering may bring out the force of *κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου*.

⁷⁷ In the posthumous *Erklärung des Briefes Pauli an die Epheser* – a valuable exposition, marked by Beck’s theological acumen and lucidity.

⁷⁸ The *φύσει* of verse 3 thus corresponds to the *ἐξουσία τοῦ ἁέρος* of verse 2. “Sin entered into *the world*” (*κόσμος*), Rom. v. 12, which signifies more than the nature of individual men.

⁷⁹ I John iii. 8; comp. John viii. 41–44.

It is upon this “other law,” the contradiction of His own, upon the sinfulness beneath the sin, that God’s displeasure rests. Human law notes the overt act: “the Lord looketh upon the heart.” There is nothing more bitter and humiliating to a conscientious man than the conviction of this penetrating Divine insight, this detection to himself of his incurable sin and the hollowness of his righteousness before God. How it confounds the proud Pharisee to learn that he *is* as other men are, – and even as this publican!

“The sons of disobedience” must needs be “children of wrath.” All sin, whether in nature or practice, is the object of God’s fixed displeasure. It cannot be matter of indifference to our Father in heaven that His human children are disobedient toward Himself. Children of His favour or anger we are each one of us, and at every moment. We “keep His commandments, and abide in His love”; or we do not keep them, and are excluded. It is His smile or frown that makes the sunshine or the gloom of our inner life. How strange that men should argue that God’s love forbids His wrath! It is, in truth, the cause of it. I could neither love nor fear a God who did not care enough about me to be angry with me when I sin. If my child does wilful wrong, if by some act of greed or passion he imperils his moral future and destroys the peace and well-being of the house, shall I not be grieved with him, with an anger proportioned to the love I bear him? How much more shall your heavenly Father – how much more justly and wisely and mercifully!

St Paul feels no contradiction between the words of verse 3 and those that follow. The same God whose wrath burns against the sons of disobedience while they so continue, is “rich in mercy” and “loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses!” He pities evil men, and to save them spared not His Son from death; but Almighty God, the Father of glory, hates and loathes the evil that is in them, and has determined that if they will not let it go they shall perish with it.

II. Such was the death in which Paul and his readers once had lain. But God in His “great love” has “*made them to live* along with the Christ.”

How wonderful to have witnessed a resurrection: to see the pale cheek of the little maid, Jairus’ daughter, flush again with the tints of life, and the still frame begin to stir, and the eyes softly open – and she looks upon the face of Jesus! or to watch Lazarus, four days dead, coming out of his tomb, slowly, and as one dreaming, with hands and feet bound in the grave-clothes. Still more marvellous to have beheld the Prince of Life at the dawn of the third day issue from Joseph’s grave, bursting His prison-gates and stepping forth in new-risen glory as one refreshed from slumber.

But there are things no less divine, had we eyes for their marvel, that take place upon this earth day by day. When a human soul awakes from its trespasses and sins, when the love of God is poured into a heart that was cold and empty, when the Spirit of God breathes into a spirit lying powerless and buried in the flesh, there is as true a rising from the dead as when Jesus our Lord came out from His sepulchre. It was of this spiritual resurrection that He said: “The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” Having said that, He added, concerning the bodily resurrection of mankind: “Marvel not at this; for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth!” The second wonder only matches and consummates the first (John v. 24–28).

“This is life eternal, to know God the Father,” – the life, as the apostle elsewhere calls it, that is “life indeed.” It came to St Paul by a new creation, when, as he describes it, “God who said, Light shall shine out of darkness, shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.” We are born again – the God-consciousness is born within us: an hour mysterious and decisive as that in which our personal consciousness first emerged and the soul knew itself. Now it knows God. Like Jacob at Peniel it says: “I have seen God face to face; and my life is preserved.” God and the soul have met in Christ – and are reconciled.

The words the apostle uses —*gave us life—raised us up—seated us in the heavenly places*— embrace the whole range of salvation. “Those united with Christ are through grace delivered from their state of death, not only in the sense that the resurrection and exaltation of Christ redound

to their benefit as Divinely imputed to them; but by the life-giving energy of God they are brought out of their condition of death into a new and actual state of life. The act of grace is an act of the Divine power and might, not a mere judicial declaration” (Beck). This comprehensive action of the Divine grace upon believing men takes place by a constant and constantly deepening union of the soul with Christ. This is well expressed by A. Monod: “The entire history of the Son of man is reproduced in the man who believes in Him, not by a simple moral analogy, but by a spiritual communication which is the true secret of our justification as well as of our sanctification, and indeed of our whole salvation.”

There is no repetition in the three verbs employed, which are alike extended by the Greek preposition *with* (*syn*). The first sentence (raised us up *with the Christ*) virtually includes everything; it shows us one with Christ who lives evermore to God. The second sentence gathers into its scope all believers – the *you* of verse 1 and the *we* of verse 3: “He raised us up together, and together made us sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Nothing is more characteristic of our epistle than this turn of thought. To the conception of our *union with Christ* in His celestial life, it adds that of our *union with each other in Christ* as sharers in common of that life. Christ “reconciles us in one body unto God” (ver. 16). We sit not alone, but together in the heavenly places. This is the fulness of life; this completes our salvation.

CHAPTER VIII. *SAVED FOR AN END*

“That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.” – Eph. ii. 7–10.

The plan which God has formed for men in Christ is of great dimensions every way, – in its length no less than in its breadth and height. He “raised us up and seated us together [Gentiles with Jews] in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that *in the ages which are coming on* He might show the surpassing riches of His grace.” All the races of mankind and all future ages are embraced in the redeeming purpose, and are to share in its boundless wealth. Nor are the ages past excluded from its operations. God “afore prepared the good works in which” He summons us to walk. The highway of the new life has been in building since time began.

Thus large and limitless is the range of “the purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal” (2 Tim. i. 9). But what strikes us most in this passage is the exuberance of the grace itself. Twice over the apostle exclaims, “By grace you are saved”: once in verse 5, in an eager, almost jealous parenthesis, where he hastens to assure the readers of their deliverance from the fearful condition just described (vv. 1–3, 5). Again, deliberately and with full definition he states the same fact, in verse 8: “For by grace you are saved, through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. It does not come of works, to the end that none may boast.”

These words place us on familiar ground. We recognize the Paul of Galatians and Romans, the dialect and accent of the apostle of salvation by faith. But scarcely anywhere do we find this wonder-working grace so affluently described. “God being rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us – the exceeding riches of His grace, shown in kindness toward us – the gift of God.” *Mercy, love, kindness, grace, gift*: what a constellation is here! These terms present the character of God in the gospel under the most delightful aspects, and in vivid contrast to the picture of our human state outlined in the beginning of the chapter.

Mercy denotes the Divine pitifulness towards feeble, suffering men, akin to those “compassions of God” to which the apostle repeatedly appeals.⁸⁰ It is a constant attribute of God in the Old Testament, and fills much the same place there that grace does in the New. “Of mercy and judgement” do the Psalmists sing – of mercy most. Out of the thunder and smoke of Sinai He declared His name: “Jehovah, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth, keeping mercy for thousands.” The dread of God’s justice, the sense of His dazzling holiness and almightiness threw His mercy into bright relief and gave to it an infinite preciousness. It is the contrast which brings in “mercy” here, in verse 4, by antithesis to “wrath” (ver. 3).⁸¹ These qualities are complementary. The sternest and strongest natures are the most compassionate. God is “rich in mercy.” The wealth of His Being pours itself out in the exquisite tendernesses, the unwearied forbearance and forgivingness of His compassion towards men. The Judge of all the earth, whose hate of evil is the fire of hell, is gentler than the softest-hearted mother, – rich in mercy as He is grand and terrible in wrath.

⁸⁰ Rom. xii. 1; 2 Cor. i. 3; Phil. i. 8, ii. 1; comp. Luke i. 78. The οἰκτιρμοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, σπλάγγνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί, rendered in our Version “mercies of God,” denotes something even more affecting, – God’s sense of the woefulness of human life, – “the pitying tenderness Divine.”

⁸¹ Comp. Rom. ix. 22, 23.

God's mercy regards us as we are weak and miserable: His *love* regards us as we are, in spite of trespass and offence, His offspring, – objects of “much love” amid much displeasure, “even when we were dead through our trespasses.” What does the story of the prodigal son mean but this? and what Christ's great word to Nicodemus (John iii. 16)? —*Grace* and *kindness* are love's executive. Grace is love in administration, love counteracting sin and seeking our salvation. Christ is the embodiment of grace; the cross its supreme expression; the gospel its message to mankind; and Paul himself its trophy and witness.⁸² The “overpassing riches” of grace is that affluence of wealth in which through Christ it “superabounded” to the apostolic age and has outdone the magnitude of sin (Rom. v. 20), in such measure that St Paul sees future ages gazing with wonder at its benefactions to himself and his fellow-believers. Shown “in *kindness* toward us,” he says, – in a condescending fatherliness, that forgets its anger and softens its old severity into comfort and endearment. God's kindness is the touch of His hand, the accent of His voice, the cherishing breath of His Spirit. Finally, this generosity of the Divine grace, this infinite goodwill of God toward men, takes expression in *the gift*– the gift of Christ, the gift of righteousness (Rom. v. 15–18), the gift of eternal life (Rom. vi. 23); or – regarded, as it is here, in the light of experience and possession —*the gift of salvation*.

The opposition of *gift* and *debt*, of gratuitous salvation through faith to salvation earned by works of law, belongs to the marrow of St Paul's divinity. The teaching of the great evangelical epistles is condensed into the brief words of verses 8 and 9. The reason here assigned for God's dealing with men by way of gift and making them absolutely debtors – “lest any one should boast” – was forced upon the apostle's mind by the stubborn pride of legalism; it is stated in terms identical with those of the earlier letters. Men will glory in their virtues before God; they flaunt the rags of their own righteousness, if any such pretext, even the slightest, remains to them. We sinners are a proud race, and our pride is oftentimes the worst of our sins. Therefore God humbles us by His compassion. He makes to us a free gift of His righteousness, and excludes every contribution from our store of merit; for if we could supply anything, we should inevitably boast as though all were our own. We must be content to receive mercy, love, grace, kindness – everything, without deserving the least fraction of the immense sum. How it strips our vanity; how it crushes us to the dust – “the weight of pardoning love!”

Concerning the office of *faith* in salvation we have already spoken in Chapter IV.⁸³ It is on the objective fact rather than the subjective means of salvation that the apostle lays stress in this passage. His readers do not seem to have realized sufficiently what God has given them and the greatness of the salvation already accomplished. They measured inadequately the power which had touched and changed their lives (i. 19). St Paul has shown them the depth to which they were formerly sunk, and the height to which they have been raised (vv. 1–6). He can therefore assure them, and he does it with redoubled emphasis: “*You are saved; By grace you are saved men!*”⁸⁴ Not, “*You will be saved*”; nor, “*You were saved*”; nor, “*You are in course of salvation*,” – for salvation has many moods and tenses, – but, in the perfect passive tense, he asserts the glorious accomplished *fact*. With the same reassuring emphasis in chapter i. 7 he declared, “*We have redemption in His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.*”

Here is St Paul's doctrine of Assurance. It was laid down by Christ Himself when He said: “*He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life.*” This sublime confidence is the ruling note of St John's great epistle: “*We know that we are in Him... We know that we have passed out of death into life... This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*” It was this confidence of present salvation that made the Church irresistible. With its foundation secure, the house of life can be

⁸² On *grace*, comp. *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Expositor's Bible), Chapter X.

⁸³ Compare also, on Faith, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Expositor's Bible), Chapters X.–XII. and XV.

⁸⁴ Ἔστέ σεσωσμένοι: for the peculiar emphasis of this form of the verb, implying a settled fact, an assured state, compare ver. 12, ἦτε ... ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι; Col. ii. 10; Gal. ii. 11, iv. 3; 2 Cor. iv. 3, etc.

steadily and calmly built up. Under the shelter of the full assurance of faith, in the sunshine of God's love felt in the heart, all spiritual virtues bloom and flourish. But with a faith hesitant, distracted, that is sure of no doctrine in the creed and cannot plant a firm foot anywhere, nothing prospers in the soul or in the Church. Oh for the clear accent, the ringing, joyous note of apostolic assurance! We want a faith not loud, but deep; a faith not born of sentiment and human sympathy, but that comes from the vision of the living God; a faith whose rock and corner-stone is neither the Church nor the Bible, but Christ Jesus Himself.

Greatly do we need, like the Asian disciples of Paul and John, to "assure our hearts" before God. With death confronting us, with the hideous evil of the world oppressing us; when the air is laden with the contagion of sin; when the faith of the strongest wears the cast of doubt; when the word of promise shines dimly through the haze of an all-encompassing scepticism and a hundred voices say, in mockery or grief, Where is now thy God? when the world proclaims us lost, our faith refuted, our gospel obsolete and useless, – then is the time for the Christian assurance to recover its first energy and to rise again in radiant strength from the heart of the Church, from the depths of its mystic life where it is hid with Christ in God.

You are saved! cries the apostle; not forgetting that his readers have their battle to fight, and many hazards yet to run (vi. 10–13). But they hold the earnest of victory, the foretaste of life eternal. In spirit they sit with Christ in the heavenly places. Pain and death, temptation, persecution, the vicissitudes of earthly history, by these God means to perfect that which He has begun in His saints – "if you continue in the faith, grounded and firm" (Col. i. 23). That condition is expressed, or implied, in all assurance of final salvation. It is a condition which excites to watchfulness, but can never cause misgiving to a loyal heart. God is for us! He justifies us, and counts us His elect. Christ Jesus who died is risen and seated at the right hand of God, and there intercedes for us. *Quis separabit?*

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