

Ephesians - Commentaries by William John Hocking

Christian Marriage, Christian Marriage (5:22-31)

Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-33

Marriage possesses the unique feature of being an institution established by God from the very beginning of human history. Therefore, God's authority is behind the prominent place it occupies in man's social life. The first marriage was ordained in the Garden of Eden for the increase of Adam's comfort and the consummation of his bliss.

Adam was created in sinless perfection, and was surrounded in Eden with everything he needed for his satisfaction and delight. The whole scene, animate and inanimate, was subject to his will and pleasure, but he himself was alone, and the isolation made inevitable by his supremacy was a drawback to his perfect happiness. "And Jehovah Elohim said, it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate, his like (or counterpart)."

Accordingly, the woman was formed by Divine handiwork, not from the dust of the ground as Adam had been, but out of Adam himself, so that literally the woman was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Eve was the Creator's provision for Adam. Discerning the incompleteness of Adam in his solitude, God provided for him a consort designed exactly to meet his deficiencies. Accordingly, in their marriage the two became one flesh, each being the complement of the other.

The marriage of Adam is the prototype of the marriage of all his sons. In every case of true matrimony, God arranges the union. Divine wisdom observes the moment when the loneliness of the man is no longer good for him, and He provides a bride who is the complement of his nature with its personal characteristics. Adam had no choice of brides; there was but the one that would suit him, and she was prepared of God especially for him. Adam had no rivals for the possession of Eve. Nor can such a thing be imagined in Eden, where each of the two found in the other everything required to complete their enjoyment and to perfect their capacities. There was no alternative that either could have chosen or found.

The primitive marriage in Eden was remarkably simple and exclusive. Two only shared the delights of the occasion. And this mutual reserve is a character that marriage still retains. In matrimony two hearts, two lives become one exclusively in each other. At every wedding a new little world is formed with a total population of two numerically, but administratively of one only. How happy the new experience, and how momentous!

It is a fact of the highest significance that the marriage relationship was established between Adam and Eve while they were still in a state of innocence. At the time of their union, sin had not entered the world, nor its just penalty, death, incurred. But the entrance of sin through their disobedience did not set aside the holy character of marriage which its divine origin and sanction had originally imparted to it.

From: An address published as a pamphlet many years ago. This, indeed, was the ground upon which the Lord Jesus long afterwards vindicated the primeval institution and affirmed the abiding sanctity of marriage. It was not a relationship introduced by the law of Moses, for instance; but wedlock was God's purpose for man from the very start of his history. So the Lord in replying to the cavils of the Pharisees said to them, "Have ye not read that He who made them, from the beginning made them male and female?" (Matt. 19:4). And had they not also read in the same connection, "And the two (man and wife) shall be one flesh"?

It is true that, having been united in wedded bonds, Adam and Eve jointly disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, and fell into and under sin. Nevertheless, the holy and divinely-sanctioned character of marriage which it received in the state of sinlessness remained after the entrance of sin. God had made the single pair, and He made them the one for the other exclusively. As our Lord said, God had joined them together by bonds that are indissoluble by man. This character of permanence attaches to marriage still, as it ever has done. In every union under divine superintendence, God binds together the two hearts and lives by a tie that none can sever.

Another aspect of the marriage tie may now be considered. As a relationship established by God in the original circumstances of man's creation, it possesses a pure and holy character. It is obvious, however, that in Eden there were necessarily no human witnesses to the first marriage contract. But with the multiplication of the human species, there arose the necessity that each matrimonial alliance should have a propriety in the eyes of men generally, and should receive public confirmation and approval.

From the days of Noah, God set up among men forms of government for the maintenance of civil order and social wellbeing. The "powers that be" in the community are ordained of God, and their regulations are to be recognized and obeyed by the Christian (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). It is seemly, therefore, that Christian marriage should conform to the requirements of the law of the land. Indeed, it is expressly enjoined upon the believer to "be subject unto the higher powers," and to submit "to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake." Where this is done in the case of marriage, the act of union is formally and legally recognized, and its validity established in the eyes of all men.

The ceremony of marriage required by civil laws to bestow a wedded status upon the persons concerned is altogether distinct from the spiritual union of husband and wife which results from the exercise of God's own will and guidance upon the hearts of the same two persons. The latter is the most serious and yet the most happy side of the undertaking. For this reason, the married couple, realizing the solemn nature of the initial step they have taken in the united life to which they have committed themselves, seek the fellowship and prayers of the assembly of God on their behalf. Thereby, they openly confess that in their new relationship, their joint desire is to receive divine help that

they may walk together in the fear of the Lord, in obedience to His word, and in the furtherance of the glory of His name.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, there is much advice given to those who are married, embodying the leading principles which should govern their new and peculiar relations to one another.

The injunction laid upon the wife in this passage is that of submission to her husband: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands; as unto the Lord." This habit of feminine subjection is unpopular in this twenty-first century, nevertheless the Christian wife is exhorted by the highest authority to practice it, and, however unfashionable in worldly society such obedience may be, she cannot escape her responsibility to render it as unto the Lord to whom she is accountable for her conduct.

But the submission thus solemnly enjoined is not the blind mechanical obedience of a slave to the owner, such, for instance, as that of an Israelite to an Egyptian taskmaster. Rather it is the glad subjection which springs involuntarily from a passionate devotion to the loved one, a ready submission to the will of the beloved man, needing no compulsion, nor even prompting.

To a believing woman there is one authority from which there is no appeal. Hence the apostle brings the Lord Himself before the wife in the matter of her submission in her married relationship. She must submit to her own husband "as unto the Lord."

The Lord Jesus is the pattern to all His own of that perfect obedience which is well pleasing to God. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." Though continually accompanied by sorrow and suffering in the course of His subjection, it was a joy to Him to obey. Our Lord ever delighted to do the will of Him who sent Him. Love to His Father was the mainspring of everything He did as the obedient Servant. In like manner, the believing wife should in her love devotedly fulfill the "law" of her husband.

But the injunction here is coupled with the name of the Lord, not so much as the pattern of obedience, as the One from whom her husband's authority is derived. She is to submit to her husband "as unto the Lord." She is exhorted to recognize the Lord Jesus behind her husband as the directing, governing authority in family life. As the "head of the woman is the man," so the Head of every man is Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). Thus the godly decisions of the husband will express the will of the Lord for her, and to these she will render obedience with all readiness and cheerfulness. "As the church is subject unto Christ," so will the devout Christian wife be subject to her own husband in everything (verse 24).

As the distinguishing feature of the wife's conduct should be subjection, so that of the husband's should be love. "Husbands, love your wives." The form in the original tongue of both exhortations to the married pair indicates that the act enjoined is to be constant and characteristic. Both the submission of the wife and the love of the husband must be a continuous habit, not an occasional occurrence.

In these guiding principles of piety in the two pillars of the home, it is significant that love is particularly enjoined upon the husband, and not, as might almost have been expected, upon the more tender and susceptible partner, the wife. The husband, therefore, needs in entering upon his new responsibilities, to consider this distinction carefully in order to grasp the special force of the exhortation addressed to him.

It is clear that, while the wife should regard her husband as the fountain of authority in the affairs of the household and in the conduct of their joint lives, the husband in the exercise of that authority should express his advice and judgment to her in the terms of love and endearment befitting a channel of the divine will. The real unity of married life will be most fittingly displayed by this blending of authority and affection. The authority of the husband will be conveyed by the expressions of his love, and the obedience of the wife will be prompted by the impulses of her affection.

In this passage, the husband is instructed to regard the intimate relation of Christ to His church upon which the apostle dwells, as the model of his own relation to his wife. Two features of this relation may be mentioned specially in this connection, namely (1) Christ's self-sacrifice, and (2) Christ's devoted care.

In the first place, the husband is to practice his love in the form of entire self-surrender in order to secure his wife's highest welfare, for, "Christ also loved the church, and delivered Himself up for it." The blessed Lord surrendered up Himself altogether, without reserve, to promote the best interests of His church. And this whole-hearted sacrifice to ensure the present blessing and future glory of the church of His choice is set up as the model for the husband's imitation.

In the ideal marriage of scripture, therefore, the wife becomes the enthralling object of her spouse's affection and devotion to a degree which deepens in intensity as the years pass. Self is set aside in the home-life, and he that is married is solicitous in everyday matters how he may please his wife rather than himself. And while he may forget his own little lordship in the absorbing self-sacrifice of his love, he finds that his wife does not forget his authority over her nor omit her ready obedience to him, just because he is so lavish in his love toward her.

But, secondly, the husband's love should be manifested by a continual care for the well-being of his wife. This pleasant duty is impressed upon him by the present service of the love of Christ in sanctifying and cleansing the church with the washing of water by the word (ver. 26). Whatever the behavior of the church towards her Lord, Christ is faithful and unremitting in the activities of His love that she may be purified from everything that is inconsistent with her new status as His chosen bride and the sharer of His coming glories.

Guided by the lofty standard of Christ's concern for His church, the husband studies to promote the welfare of his wife, as his own body (ver. 28). He helps her, first of all in her spiritual life, in the exercises of worship and prayer and service in the home. He lightens her labors in household affairs, shoulders her burdens of family responsibility, shields her from anxieties and fears, comforts her in hours of sorrow, and ministers help to her weakness without telling her so. Neither will he forget to note her acts of devotion to himself in response to his love, nor to praise her many excellences, as the scripture enjoins (Prov. 31:28-29) if he should be so negligent as to need this injunction.

Another feature of pious marriage life made prominent in this passage is that matrimonial union involves the establishment of a new household. The apostle says, "Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh" (ver. 31). By entrance into the marriage relationship, two parental homes are vacated, and a new Christian home set up by the married pair.

The advantages and far-reaching influence of a truly pious dwelling-place cannot easily be overrated. As a national feature, home life is not cultivated on scriptural lines now to the degree that it was formerly. Families thoroughly united in the bonds of piety and walking together in the fear of the Lord are not found so frequently as they should be.

It is a striking testimony to the value in the divine estimation of the home that in the scriptural history of man, family life is given precedence to national life. A great part of the Book of Genesis is devoted to the record of family life set apart in the world as a witness for the living and true God against the corrupting influence of idolatry, while national history begins in the Book of Exodus.

This form of effective witness for God is sorely needed today. And it devolves upon the newly-married couple to organize a home which shall in its primary purpose be entirely controlled by the will of the Lord. Under such management, the home will become a center from which the light of God's truth will shine upon the darkness and ungodliness of the surrounding world. Its occupants will be recognized as the servants of Christ.

A home is not to be confused with a house. An architect plans the house, but love and order construct the home. It is important that in the new Christian home an agreed policy between husband and wife should predominate; and they two shall be one flesh." Particularly in things Godward concerted action should prevail. The former spiritual habits and activities hitherto practiced by each need not cease, only they may now be prayerfully pursued with the enhanced energy that concord and consultation supply to Christian service. The two happy persons will unite as they never could before in "labor for and with the Lord." And the former effect for good and blessing will not diminish, but will rather be increased by the intimate wedding union of two hearts devoted to the Lord.

The shepherd in our Lord's parable sought in solitary places for the sheep which was lost, and his success in finding it was a joy to him. But in the loneliness of the wilderness this joy was restricted. He wanted some hearts to share his joy. And "when he cometh home," he called his friends together, saying, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

Home is the sphere of joy, especially of private and personal joy. The joys of married life are more than doubled in intensity just because they are shared by the two who have become one, and who are now everything to one another. Small matters bring great joys in the intimacies of home life, in which strangers may not meddle.

The daily offering of praise and thanksgiving to God, no longer strictly personal to each, has fresh fervor to which each contributes from a grateful heart. The joint prayers of husband and wife are the more powerful in their intercession, seeing they are offered from the hearts of those whom God has joined together. These devotional exercises carry with them their own peculiar and almost inexpressible joys, which are all the sweeter to the taste because they are shared together in the new home.

In service to the Lord each is strengthened by the other, and what otherwise might be lacking in either is supplied. New forms of service become possible through joint desires and efforts. When an Apollos needed instruction in the things of the Lord, the house of Aquila and Priscilla was opened to receive him, and the husband and wife united in expounding the way of God to him more perfectly (Acts 18:24-28).

They agreed to use the convenience of their house for the spiritual benefit of one who, though not lacking in zeal and ability, was immature in the faith. And the pious pair had the joy of finding that the hospitality and the Christian atmosphere of their home was turned to good account in the after-life of Apollos. The newly-married might well seek to emulate the home service of Aquila, of Gaius, and of Lydia, as recorded in the New Testament. It will be a new form of service for them, and is well within their reach,

New homes are so bright and fresh and joyous that it may seem churlish to suggest that someday sorrow will be an uninvited visitor. But it must be so. Tribulation of some sort is inevitable in every household, but if the Lord is there, the inhabitants will have His peace. Dark thunder clouds may steal across the bright blue above, but the believer knows that the sun still shines in the heavens, and that the rainbow is in the rain.

Moreover, in married life there are two hearts to bear one sorrow, and each striving to take the greater share of grief and loss. The strong man shields his partner from the impending stroke, and the loving wife hides in her bosom many a pang lest her dear man should have still more to bear. But sharing is better than concealment. Men and women are made strong in hours of sorrow by sympathy, and there is no sympathy so choice and so effective as that which dwells in the Christian home-life.

Bible Treasury: Volume N13, Teacher's Prayer for the Taught, The (3:14-21)

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints What is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:14-21).

In these verses we have the prayer of the apostle on behalf of the saints of God that they might by divine help lay hold in some measure of the special truths that he was communicating in this letter. We know that this Epistle sets before the children of God their lofty destiny in the purposes of God, so far as this is revealed to the sons of men in the New Testament.

It is most needful for us, as well as them, to have some insight into God's great plan in connection with this world, so far as that plan has been made known. We are not given complete details of this plan, but we are given in this Epistle the great principle of our present association with our Lord Jesus Christ on high, and of our association with Him in that future scheme of blessing and glory for the heavens

and earth through the church. There could be no nobler theme for the heart of any of us than the share we are given as units in the accomplishment of God's vast plan for the re-constitution of the heavens and the earth through Christ. Such a theme lifts us out of ourselves and our little circle, it lifts us out of the common matters of daily life; it lifts us above the abortive schemes and ambitions of men for the progress and glory of this world, and sets our outlook of hope in accord with God's revealed mind and purpose in this matter.

We have some aspects of this great subject unfolded in this Epistle, but it does not follow that there are no difficulties in our appropriation of what has been revealed. The apostle was conscious that to lay hold of God's mind and purpose was a serious matter for the family of God. They needed support; they needed help outside of themselves; they needed a strength superior to their own. For such transcendent revelations the believer needs a power working in him, a power which is of God, that he may apprehend them.

Hence the apostle bows his knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He would grant them the power of Christ by the inward strengthening of the Spirit, that they might believe the things to come that God has revealed, and having these things in their hearts there should be here upon the earth, some here and some there, in living touch and intelligent sympathy with the divine purpose of bringing about a sphere of universal blessing, of which Christ is the Center and Head.

No wonder that we need special strength from God to receive instruction of this sort. The apostle prayed that such strength might be imparted to the saints whom he was addressing. How far the efficacy of his prayers reach to us we cannot say. But in order that we ourselves should participate in this blessing we must bow our own heads, and be ourselves in the posture of dependence upon God and His Spirit. We must ourselves open our hearts to receive these things that God has written by His Spirit for our learning, and while in this humble attitude of receptivity our souls will be exalted above the plane of mere worldly events, and will be enabled to view them in their true perspective.

The apostle puts up his petition for divine aid for the saints, and the scope of his desires for them is "according to the riches of His glory." His words are: "I bow my knees unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom the whole (every, is the better word) family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory," and so on. Who could measure the glories of Christ? And because of the vastness of these, the mind of the saints needs to be enlarged and strengthened by the power of God.

This appeal of the apostle is made directly to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because the central theme of this Epistle is the glory of God's Son, the constituted Head over all things to the church. The Christ of God is the One ordained in resurrection glory to set all things right both above and below. The revelation of this simple but momentous decree at once gives us the key to the understanding of the purpose of God. We in our small-mindedness and our selfish tendencies are apt to consider man and his blessing, that is ourselves, as the central object of the purpose of God, and so we misinterpret the dispensations of God.

We should not under-estimate the seriousness of this vitiating propensity, but seek to be delivered from its narrowing influence, and to be led to that view which is "according to the riches of his glory." In our shortsightedness we look upon man as the being for whose ultimate benefit God is working out His plans. The blessing and glory of man undoubtedly form a part of the truth, but not the whole nor the most important part of the truth. Even if we take the church, which is the body of Christ, and because of its intimate association with Christ the Head, assume it to be the governing center of the administration of the fullness of the times, we lamentably err, because we thereby displace Christ. We fail to apprehend the unity of the scriptures whose dominant testimony from Eden to the eternal state is to Him, who will bring in and maintain the regeneration of all things.

The decreed purposes of God are in connection with the glory of Christ. His ultimate object which has been maturing throughout the successive ages of the world's history is, as we find in the first chapter of this Epistle, to head up all things in Christ. At the conclusion of the ages all spheres of dependent life will be brought under the direct and manifest government of the Lord Jesus Christ, that lowly Man who was here for God yet was God, that exalted Man raised from the dead by the mighty power of God and seated above not merely earthly dominions and powers but above all heavenly ones.

For the highest and most mighty dignitaries must all take a place of subordination in the presence of the Lord Jesus, the despised Nazarene. He must be above them all, not only above them as the object of universal adoration, but above them to sway and control and to gather up everything that is worth having in God's wide creation, centering them in Himself as the Head of the new creation in a perfection and glory never yet seen.

We gather from this revealed purpose a useful principle of truth for our present guidance: nothing is ever right nor will be right in this world nor in the next, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we not prove this in our experience day by day? We know as we consider our ways and circumstances that if we have Christ before our eyes, His will over before our eyes, His presence by our side and in our hearts, all is well, all is peace, all is joy, because He has His rightful place of supreme love and rule in the life. As this is so now, so will it be in the wider circles of God's grace and government yet to come. The Lord Jesus is the central Figure before God's holy mind, and all scripture is found to point to Him and His glorious excellence as Prophet, Priest, and King.

We see then that the apostle in this Epistle is lifting up the hearts of those to whom he is writing to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ in His glory on high, not manifested but to be known by faith. And we surely know very well that it is difficult for us to have Him in His glory before our hearts, except as we are in the Spirit. We know that the glory of Christ in heaven blinded Saul of Tarsus. He could not face the Shekinah glory that shone down upon him from Jesus of Nazareth. Neither can our natural thoughts, unassisted, come up to Him where He is. Thought and imagination fail in the task. Our highest mental efforts cannot reach Him where He is.

We can therefore only bow ourselves in adoration and wonder at the all-surpassing glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, while we feel how much we need the same strengthening power that Paul sought in his prayer for the saints of his day—that they might be granted such strength in the inner man as would give them to know yet more and more of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We require this energy because the bent of our minds is to recur again and again in an all-absorbing interest to the petty things of the moment. The inner man should seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, should think of Him in His present glory, and of what God will do for Him yet. But our minds are too feeble for such flights, and our hearts too restricted and

earth-bound to dwell above the stars. The apostle, however, has indicated our resource—let us bow the knees in prayer that we might “know Him and the power of His resurrection.”

But the apostle further implies that the attainment of this spiritual knowledge depends upon personal communion, for he desired that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. And we may be sure that it is only in this way that the saints of God will readily and effectually grow into the knowledge of God's things. And think what a regal way it is Christ dwelling in our hearts.

If we think for a moment or so of Christ, of the glory that is His, the glory in which He is even now, the glory which He had with the Father before the worlds were, our poor hearts are humbled and ashamed before Him in the overwhelming sense of His greatness and of our insignificance. But the apostle shows that the One in whom the fullness dwells, the One who fills eternity, the One whose all-transcending glories must ever be beyond our conception, will dwell in our hearts by faith. Without a doubt Christ is on high in glory, but it is revealed in the word that you and I may have Him for ourselves—within our hearts, and therein not as a passing guest, but therein to dwell. Let us then pray for ourselves that, in the sense of this scripture, Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith.

This phrase, relating as it does to a personal indwelling, implies that the knowledge of which the apostle is speaking is not a mental exercise simply, but a personal acquaintance with the Lord of glory. He who once deigned to tabernacle on earth in human flesh and who circumscribed Himself so that man might, in His own presentation, see and hear and know the love of God, that same One will come to our hearts and abide there, being known to us by our faith.

The Lord Himself before the date of the apostle's prayer had promised that there should be such visitations as these. You will recollect that when He was about to depart out of the world to the Father, He announced this imminent departure to the disciples, and they were filled with grief and sadness in consequence. They could not bear to think that they should look upon His face no more. To comfort them in their sorrow He said, “If I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also.” In this promise we have the foundation of our hope of the personal return of our Lord.

But in the same connection He went on to say to the apostles that He would impart to them the Holy Spirit who should come to the world to abide. And having promised that the Holy Spirit should come to abide, He then added, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” This reference is not at all to His coming to receive us to be with Himself in glory, but to His coming to them that they might not feel themselves friendless and forsaken as orphans might do. Such a coming in the heart to dwell is not only a possible experience for us, but it is indeed the right of every one of us. I say the right, because it is founded upon the Lord's own promise. He proposed to come that we might not be left desolate in the world. And how is the fulfillment of this promise to be known? We know it by the inward ministry of God's Holy Spirit. Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith is not a subject of imagination but an object of faith.

The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ knows of a surety that He does make Himself known to us. Christ comes and manifests Himself to us as He does not to the world. And, if on our part we but keep His word, He will make His abode with us, dwelling in our hearts by faith. How far this is a matter of personal experience with us concerns us individually, but it should be a cause of joy to us that we know it at all. May we know it more.

Here in Ephesians divine interposition is sought not so much in the way of support for our fainting hearts and strength to meet the sorrows and enemies of the wilderness journey but rather strength for the knowledge which is not of this world, that knowledge which is truly spiritual. In this Epistle we have true spiritualism, a spiritualism which is not of Satan but of God. We are said to be with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and it is ours to acknowledge this truth and to glory in it. Besides other favors, we learn that the second Person of the Holy Trinity is pleased to dwell in our hearts by faith to lead us forward in this superhuman knowledge. He comes to abide with us and to sustain us while He unfolds what are His great purposes. He who visited the home of Mary and Martha at Bethany and said things, which are not recorded, of heavenly import to Mary sitting at His feet, will also dwell in the humble home of our hearts, and will whisper to us of this mighty scheme which God is working out for His own glory here in this world which stands guilty of the crucifixion and death of His beloved Son. The One who was so humiliated by man in this world God has exalted to the very highest in heaven, and that supremacy will be manifested in this world also, when God brings in His First-begotten again. Let us acknowledge His supreme Lordship more completely than ever.

I wonder whether all present realize that this subject is one not to be confined to our reading and meditation. It is a definite element of the new life through the power of God's Spirit. Is it not, therefore, of the first importance to you and to me that we should seek earnestly that Christ, the Mighty One, should dwell in our hearts by faith.

The apostle petitions that his prayer might be granted “according to the riches of his glory,” that is I take it, according to the riches of the glory of Christ. His eye is upon the Glorified One of God, and it is He who will come to dwell. Who can measure the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ? In Him there is glory upon glory, for all possible glories are added to the Christ whom God loves to honor, to Him who glorified God upon the earth. While it is sweet to us to read and to know of the love of Christ, we should also desire to know the riches of His glory too.

It is a way of Scripture to use large-scale truths for the correction of our minor difficulties. And I suppose that one immediate cause of the apostle's exalted theme in this Epistle was the petty quarrels which arose at that time in the Christian assemblies between those of Jewish and Gentile origin respectively. They brought their native feuds into their new spiritual relationships, with the result that there was much striving with one another for precedence.

To dispose of such disagreements among the saints, the apostle brings forward the great truth of their joint association in Christ Jesus. The middle wall of partition between them that once was raised by God Himself was now destroyed by the same authority. According to the New Testament revelation, Christ Jesus had made Himself of twain one new man, so making peace. There was now a unity of the Spirit, a unity which came about inasmuch as God had given both Jew and Gentile believers a place even while they were here below in and with Christ Jesus, not merely in His death and resurrection but in His exaltation also the apostle looks upward and sees, seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, both Jew and Gentile quarrelers, united above, having already been made joint-partakers in the new creation. They were possessed of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, God having created them anew in Christ Jesus.

In their new position, all racial enmity arising out of an earthly condition should disappear. Christ was the peace. He made peace through the blood of His cross, and in that death every national and carnal distinction would of necessity be obliterated. Hence in the next chapter the apostle proceeded to counsel them to “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This bond is not a peace which results from ignoring the difficulties of the moment, the difficulties of walk, the difficulties that arise in assembly relationships, but it is that bond of peace which the Lord Himself made. It was the result of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, bringing men and women who believe into one body in a living unity before God by the Holy Spirit. This unity we are to seek to maintain in practice.

Well, the only way in which the full knowledge of these truths could be received was by the strengthening with might by the Spirit of God in the inner man, according to the riches of Christ's glory. It is to be noted that in the education and instruction of the children of God the Father and the Son and the Spirit are concerned. The prayer itself is addressed to the Father for His grant. The Son is to dwell in their hearts. And it is the Holy Spirit who by His might strengthens the inner man to receive the deep things of God. Our capacities it is true are very limited, but a little of our own can be made to go a long way when the Lord is with us. We can look out of a very small window, and yet see the wonders of the heavens. There we behold them far away in all their glories in the vast expanse above us. We have but a small power of natural vision, but we can look into the heights and depths of immeasurable space. And so it is in spiritual matters when our hearts are attracted in the right direction, the Spirit of God strengthens us by His might for our growth in knowledge—so shall we comprehend these things.

The apostle continues, “That ye, being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” It is of course not to be assumed that we shall be enabled to penetrate fully all these mysteries, at present at any rate. There must be much beyond us that we shall not know. But one important point to be clear upon is that, so far as the subjects of knowledge are concerned, nothing is reserved in the Holy Scriptures from us. All revelation is open to us, and the great purposes of God are there in their breadth and length and depth and height for our interest, our meditation and our comprehension. They are for the present possession of our hearts, to make them our own as truly as the land of Canaan was for the occupation of tribes of Israel.

One beauty of divine truth is that it is intimately bound up with spiritual emotion—love. The apostle says, “To know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” We remember that John often couples the twin words—truth and love. For the apprehension of the things of God, we do not so much require a capacious mind as we do a loving heart. It is through the heart that the truths of God are communicated. Knowledge comes to us by way of our affections. The Lord loves to win our loyalty and homage and adoration for Himself, and it is in communion with Him by the spirit that we learn the love of Christ. The mere mental effort to apprehend the truths of Christianity is a very dreary occupation. Indeed, as we all know, nothing is more calculated to promote sleep than a theological disquisition, but when we have the Son of the Living God as our Teacher and Friend, we yearn to know more of His blest ways.

It is on the basis of Personal teaching, so it seems to me, that this petition in the apostle's prayer is framed. It was necessary for them that Christ should dwell in their hearts by faith in order that they might know the love of Christ. The full knowledge of the love of Christ does not imply that we get to the end of it, in the sense that we grasp it in its entirety. The knowledge of the love of a person is surely a practical acquaintance with the working of the affections of the heart towards us. We do not measure the affections of another. They cannot be weighed, nor can we take the dimensions of even one of them, but yet we do know, without a doubt, what a warm-hearted affection is. We never imagine that we have got it; we know it. We feel its pulsations, and are conscious of the joy and preciousness of it. To get to the end of love would spoil the whole experience of it. Who would ever want to exhaust the love of a loved one?

To know fully the love of Christ does not imply that it is an attainment easy of accomplishment. We are not to expect that we can sit down quietly in the study, or go down upon our knees and in an hour or two, or in any defined period, take to ourselves all the divine affections of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Nevertheless, we do know that moment by moment in our need and in our sorrow, we are finding how that all-transcending love is helping us and carrying us forward. And this love which is our enjoyed portion now will also be our portion throughout all eternity, and the love which we experience here in the face of the enmity of the world and of the trials of the present time is the same love which will also be our joy in the ages to come.

But the apostle states that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. This must be so; the love of Christ must exceed our capacity. We know that the nature and extent of human love cannot be fathomed, and if this is true of the love of man's heart, what shall we say of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ? It passeth knowledge, but it is an inexhaustible fountain from, which we may draw evermore.

“That ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” The fullness was in Christ. It dwells in Him. All that God was and is He was and is, for He was God. In the fulfillment to us of the apostle's requests, we too may be filled with all the fullness of God. These are great words. They are words that we need inscribed upon our hearts, along with the prayer we have here, often repeated by us that we might be divinely strengthened in the inner man for such experience.

The apostle expresses this thought in the conclusion of these verses. We sometimes think perhaps of verse 20 as though it were solely an encouragement for us in our general prayers, a thought founded upon a slight perversion of the text, “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.” But the phrase is not as it is sometimes erroneously quoted, “above all that we can ask or think.” Hence the statement has not a strict application to the whole of our prayer meetings. It contains, of course, the assurance of Omnipotent resource, which is always an encouragement to needy saints.

But of what is the apostle especially speaking? Is not his phrase in direct connection with the subject of this particular prayer? Paul felt that the task of imparting these themes was a great one; he felt that the subject was so unlimited in scope that he bowed his knees humbly before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for aid, and in result he took comfort in the thought that there was One who was able to do exceeding abundantly above all that he was asking or thinking. And he has asked a great deal. To ask that “according to the riches of Christ's glory they might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” was not this a great request on their behalf? But the apostle says, The One to whom I appeal is able to do not only what I am asking for you, what I am able to think, but He is able to do exceeding abundantly above it.

And surely, we too, as well as the Ephesian saints, need to have our hearts enlarged in this respect. When we come with our various prayers, we come to One whose power is utterly beyond our conception. And is not the reason why our prayers often fail in accomplishment because we have not realized whom we have been addressing? We know that one condition of success is that we must believe that we shall have the things for which we plead. But, searching our hearts, we sometimes find deep down that we are wondering whether we shall be answered. And going still further in our analysis we discover that we have mistrusted the almighty power and love of Him whom we do trust. Although we should fear to put the doubt into words, there is the feeling that perhaps we are asking something that He cannot grant. Let faith grow within us, and it will grow in proportion as we have Christ the glorified before us in our prayers, and the Father too who could do all abundantly above what the apostle asked or thought.

The clause—“according to the power that worketh in us”—shows us another phase of the subject upon the apostle's mind in this prayer. There was a power not of themselves available to work within them. It is well to be clear that there is a divine power that works in the hearts of believers as well as a divine power that works apart from them. God in heaven is for us, and if God is for us, who can be against us? This is the operation of His wisdom and energy outside of ourselves. But we ought not to overlook the power that works within us. For instance, we read elsewhere that God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.

It is a comfort to reflect, as we consider our own weakness that the Holy Spirit by His directing and controlling energy is fashioning our character and actions for that ultimate position which lies beyond us in accordance with God's appointment in the day of His purpose.

This work is altogether distinct from the work of propitiation which is necessarily outside of us as to time and sphere of action. The atoning work of Christ at Calvary is complete, and nothing can be added to His sacrifice. His blood of eternal efficacy was once shed at the set time, and we, in consequence, stand justified by faith before our God. But the Spirit of God is now actively at work in us, Day by day, He, the great Architect, is busy with us, forming us for the plan assigned to us in that holy temple which is growing up to completion as God's habitation, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone. When the headstone is added, the whole building shall be revealed in flawless beauty, a wonder to Israel and the nations at large. Then in glory each living stone will be fitted to the place for which it was modeled in the great temple of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, to shed the luster of Christ's glory upon the millennial world beneath. Thus God has a purpose for each called saint in connection with the church of Christ when the day of His glory comes. We know that the church today lies dishonored in the mire of worldly profession. It is not one body manifestly and expressively, and never will be such in this world. But it will be so seen and recognized when God's purpose is accomplished, and Christ is known to all men as the Head over all things to the church, His body. In that day also will be manifested what the Spirit of God is now doing in fitting us for that great consummation. I think an assurance of this kind should cheer and encourage us in our outlook upon the depressing condition of Christendom at present, God will reconstruct where man can only mar further, not mend. Imagine that by some great council or convention, the divisions and sections of believers were unified by the force of human influence or power of government and organization. What a hotch-potch the whole thing would be, when compared with apostolic teaching. Can man by reunion make the beautiful thing that was seen for one brief while at Pentecost? No, the oneness of the church is wrought not by might nor by power, but by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the fact of the church's unity remains. The Lord amid the wildest confusion knows them that are His and the members of Christ are united with Him the Head, and nothing can sever living links in His body. Moreover, that unity, invisible today, will shine forth by and by when the Lord comes to present the church to Himself. Then, there will be a church in glory without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Who could bring about such a glorious consummation save the Lord Jesus Christ by His Spirit?

We ought to make sure that we understand this great purpose of God before we set ourselves to find what our testimony in church matters should be. If we follow our own ideas on the subject, we may land ourselves in great error. In this Epistle we have God's ideal; and what He means to do He will accomplish in His own time. Let us desire to know the truth in all its fullness now. If we have such a desire there is One who is ready to teach us and to give us the knowledge of the will of God.

The dominating object of God throughout the succeeding cycles of time is expressed in the final verse—“unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.” Paul not only looks up to the exalted Christ in His present heavenly glory, but he looks onward and sees in the ages to come in the sphere of heavenly glory the church, not Israel nor the Gentiles, who will have their fitting and allotted place upon the earth. Throughout the ages, world without end, the church will be the vehicle of glory to God.

There should even at present be a measure of that glory seen in the church. But how quickly the glory of unity faded after Pentecost, never to return. Where is it to be found to-day? God looking down sees the wretched and divided condition of His church. And there are some children of the Father, taught by the scriptures, who see the same thing. Indeed, any honest minded man might see the ruin and its effects, but those taught of God see the original purpose, and know its future final accomplishment. W.J.H.

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