

Ephesians 1

Thomas Bradbury

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Thomas Bradbury

EPHESIANS I.

REMARKS

AT THE GROVE CHAPEL PRAYER MEETING

ON

FRIDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 25TH, 1898,

BY

THOMAS BRADBURY,

Minister.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.”—Eph. i. 1.

I NEED not tell you that this is a portion of divine revelation, a part of divine inspiration, in which I love frequently to be found, and according to my feelings and judgment, without prejudice to other portions of Holy Scripture.

I delight to find myself meditating upon, and contemplating the goodness of our Covenant God to a covenant people, the goodness of a kind, loving and liberal Father to His children in Christ Jesus—His children in covenant relationship with Himself—His children in spiritual identification with Him as their Father, in predestinating and regenerating grace, in unfailling provisions of grace, and in that spiritual education which He has secured

to them in Christ, and which He communicates to them by His Good Spirit.

I delight to look at this epistle as a whole, and to see God—that is—by precious faith, faith of His own giving and exercising—to see Him as a Covenant God and Father in Christ Jesus; but not as a Father without His children. Not that—nor do I wish to see Him as a God Whose Fatherhood hangs upon any contingency, Who might by any possibility lose one of those so near and dear to Him. My delight is to look at Him just as He is pleased to reveal Himself to me in the Son of His love, and that by the grace and Spirit of sonship. But not in the state and condition of the patient patriarch, who plaintively cried, “Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; . . . *when my children were about me*” (Job xxix. 2-5). This is the language of sorrowful disappointment which betokened a very desolate place in Job’s experience. Well, I do not wish for a God Who knows not where to find His children. But the God and Father I love and know as my own is He Who is revealed in this blessed epistle.

It is an epistle differing from every other. There is not another like it in the whole number of these letters of holy familiarity which the Holy Ghost sweetly moved the apostles to write for the spiritual instruction and comfort of their correspondents—the persons to whom, and for whom they wrote—whose names they mention—whose characters and privileges they describe—and who have the sole right to these gracious communications. It is a blessed thing to know that we are amongst the number for whom these blessed truths—these family secrets—were written, though we live in ages remote from those to whom they were originally addressed, and that we are interested in the blessed truths thus unfolded by the Holy Ghost.

takeath with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Matt. xii. 43-45). In his own possessions the devil has much of his own way. He comes and goes very much as he wills. But when he is cast out of his usurped tenement, the Stronger than he reigns and rules His own purchased possession in majestic grace and glorious sovereignty. To eternal ages He will show forth His love and care of those who are His by loving donation, redeeming blood, and resurrection power.

May God in His infinite mercy and goodness grant us clearer apprehensions of His will, and more blessed enjoyment of His truth concerning our oneness with Himself in His Christ, and the rich anointing of His Spirit, so that we may ascribe all praise to His glory. Amen.

December, 1898.

His people. The Father blessed His people "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Everything we enjoy is God's free gift, to which we were purchased by the blood of His Son. See Rom. viii. 32: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Read also 2 Tim. i. 9: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began."

But what is meant by "the purchased possession?" I will tell you. Think of this. The heir to an estate lives to claim and possess all the properties named in his father's will. They all belong to him by inalienable right. Yet he discovers a part of his estate occupied by an objectionable tenant on lease. Not being in love with the tenant, he is determined to have him out at any cost, and hold his own in undisturbed purchased possession. This is the case of every individual child of God given by the Father to the Heir of all things in the everlasting covenant of redemption. But Jesus will have him, though Satan holds him fast as long as he can in his vile possession. All that the Father gave to Christ, Christ will come to claim, and hold as His own purchased possession, and to enjoy it to eternal ages. The strong man will retain possession, and hold it fast, until a Stronger than he turns him out and holds His own in righteous possession. The expulsion of the strong man by a Stronger than he, is different altogether to "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man"—not turned out of him—"he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he and

In this epistle we see the Father in the midst of His eternally-loved children—the Son in the midst of His redeemed brethren—the Holy Ghost in the midst of the assembly, and in the heart of every living member of the church of Christ. In every chapter you discover the Father with His children about Him. In the first chapter He is revealed as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Read the third verse—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." We can never have anything of a spiritual, heavenly, or divine character apart from Jesus Christ. Thus, before all worlds, in the far back ages of eternal grace, the Father had every one of His children near to Himself—safe in His heart's affections.

In the second chapter the children are described as dead in sins, and far off from God and the pleasures of home. But there they are not left. Dead though they are, GREAT LOVE quickens them together with Christ, and through Christ they are brought nigh and introduced to the Father. Here they "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (vers. 18, 19). We are thus quite at home in His house amongst His children. Yes, just as much at home, and more so, than we frequently are in our earthly home, whatever our relationship there may be. Whenever I enter my own house I have no hesitation in finding a place for my hat, coat, or umbrella. Why? Because I am at home—free and at ease. That is a sweet word in 2 Cor. v. 8 :

“ Absent from the body, AT HOME with the Lord.” Here the old man and his associates are not welcome, but shut out from all consideration, while the heart of the child is at home with the Father—quite at ease with Him—glad to be near Him—pleased with the sound of His voice—delighted—delighted with His exceeding great and precious promises, and with the Faithful Steward of the household, Jesus Christ.

The same relationship and privileges we find in the third chapter. The sons and daughters of the living God are seen blessedly engaged with Him in sweet devotion and holy familiarity. Turn to the 14th and 15th verses, “ For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is a most precious and endearing title, “The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ’s Father, and since Jesus Christ reveals Himself to me as “My Brother and my God in one,” He is my Father also. “Of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” What a blessed thing it is to be associated with the children of God in heartfelt fellowship and pure devotion.

“ I love to meet among them now,
Before Thy gracious throne to bow,
Though vilest of them all.”

And it is sweet to know that some near and dear to us are safely housed up yonder, with their Father and ours, with the Lord the Lamb—the slain Lamb in the midst of the throne, of Whom we sing,

“ Adoring saints around Him stand,
And thrones and powers before Him fall,
The God shines gracious through the Man,
And sheds sweet glories on them all.”

The fourth chapter reveals the same relationship and fellowship. Look at the 6th verse, “ One God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” All whom? All the children of the

Him hath God the Father sealed.” Sealed! What does that mean? In enlarging upon the subject the dear man showed that sealing is a sign of secrecy, and that secret things belong unto the LORD our God, Who reveals them to us only through the Man with His seal. “No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt. xi. 27). Sealed things are precious and prized by those to whom they belong. So of Christ the Father could say, “ Mine Elect in Whom My soul delighteth” (Isa. xlii. 1). The Father knows Christ with a depth of affection and appreciation that redeemed mortals can never fathom. The Father sealed Him as the Sole Head of the church, and as the only Saviour of every individual member of His body. How blessed it is for us to know that as Jesus Christ was sealed to the work of our redemption, so we are sealed to the enjoyment of that redemption from wrath, the curse, and sin, and to the companionship and counsel of the Sealed Redeemer. As Christ was sealed, shut up, to the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit of promise, so also are we who by His seal are brought to trust in Christ for everything, and in Him to hope for glory.

“ Which is the Earnest of our inheritance.” This is the Blessed Holy Ghost—the Glorifier of the Father’s Christ. What is “the Earnest?” It is part possession of the full enjoyment of the whole inheritance. Christ precious to the heart is the evidence of the Spirit’s indwelling—the Spirit’s indwelling and seal is the pledge of eternal glory.

“ Until the redemption of the purchased possession.” Purchased possession! What does it mean? Some would have us believe that it means that the blessings, graces, and mercies we spiritually enjoy were purchased for us by the blood of Christ. No; that will not do. He did not purchase anything for

gives you all things that pertain unto life and godliness? You cannot do other than believe. Let God explain these matters to you, and as assuredly as He does, the Holy Ghost will exercise precious faith in your heart. "In Whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." You thus see that trust, confidence, faith or belief, always have respect to testimony, and God's testimony is the Word of truth. It is the gospel of salvation, because salvation is revealed in it. It is the word of righteousness, for without righteousness there is no justification, and without justification there is no salvation. A gospel destitute of righteousness is not Christ's gospel. See Rom. i. 16, 17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." It is the word of life, for it breathes life into all those to whom it comes by the witness and seal of the Holy Ghost. It testifies of Christ, Who is the Life of His people. It is here styled, "the gospel of your salvation." It is such when it comes not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance. That is experimental salvation. Salvation felt, proved and enjoyed.

"In Whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Sealed! What think you of that? I remember, when I was a lad, creeping into an upper room of Old St. Jude's, Manchester, where the dear clergyman with the people around him sat, each with an open Bible for reference and proof of the subject under consideration. On the night referred to, the subject was the sixth of John and the last clause of ver. 27: "For

Father's family who have received a gracious education at His hands and at the feet of the Master. Read the 14th verse, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." No. These are led by the Spirit of truth into all truth, and He is pleased to bring to their remembrance lessons forgotten, but lessons which they can never finally lose. For though we are very forgetful, and in ourselves like so many sieves, with no capacity to hold that which we have received, yet, by the provision of our God and Father, all things necessary for the journey home, and for our stay there to the ages of eternity, are sure and certain.

Look at the commencement of the fifth chapter. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour." Here we see the elect of God as the followers of God—disciples of Christ—the dear children of God, eternally loved, predestined to sonship, begotten from above, and walking with Christ in all the richness and sweetness of His atoning sacrifice and fragrant Name. And now notice the good and heartfelt wishes expressed by the apostle for those whom he loved at Ephesus, at the close of the epistle, "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph. vi. 23, 24). Brethren. What brethren? The brethren of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who are so blessedly revealed to us in the latter part of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews—which I like. I do not know another portion which I love more than this: "For both He that sanctifieth and

they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Mark. Not those who *are being* sanctified, and then by-and-by *will be* sanctified. That is Arminian and Wesleyan rubbish, and there is more of it among lovers of pure truth than, perhaps, we imagine. Look at that blessed truth: the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one. One what? Of one stock—of one family—of one covenant—of one standing—"For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee. And again, I will put My trust in Him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." There you see the Father and His elect children—the Son and His redeemed brethren—the Holy Ghost and the "holy brethren" (Heb. iii. 1).

There is another thing I wish you to notice and that is, that characteristic expression, "heavenly *places*;" or, "the heavenlies," having respect to *things*, to *words*, to *doctrines*, to *promises* and to spiritual and experimental *possessions*. Turn to chap. i. 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him." In Christ we are a heavenly people in heavenly places, inheriting heavenly possessions. Now read vers. 19, 20: "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly *places*." Note what we have been singing—

will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself." Many a man has made a will which no one could make out or understand. I remember a lord chancellor who made his own will and when he died no one could explain or understand it. There is an old saying wonderfully true, "None but a fool will make his own will." But here we have a blessed exception. Our God has made His own will, with full provision for the execution of the same, and for its explanation to all those who are interested in its imperishable benefits.

In the 11th verse we find something better! What can be better? Read it for yourselves: "In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." I like those two words, "In Whom." In them we discover all that God can give, or we can enjoy. God has given to us His Christ. In Christ He has given to us Himself. Thus He has made Himself over unto us according to His own will, in the Son of His love, by the power of His Spirit and the preciousness of His truth.

Truth grows upon us as we meditate upon it as revealed in this interesting and instructive chapter. In the first part we see the Father predestinating—in the second part the Son performing—in the third part the Holy Ghost perfecting. Here we have,

1. The Father's plan of salvation after His own will.
2. The Son's perfect salvation in His own work.
3. The Spirit revealing salvation in His own way.

Now look at the precious statements in the 13th and 14th verses, "In Whom ye also trusted." And do you not also trust Him as He reveals Himself to you as your Saviour, Brother, God: and with the revelation,

confirming, encouraging and establishing to my own faith to dwell upon these heavenly things. I wish you to notice the peculiar feature of this first chapter. It is the revelation of the will of the Father to His children. What a blessed thing it is to have one's name in His will. It is very pleasing to the flesh to have one's name in the will of a person who has something worth leaving. Many times I have had my name in wills according to gossips in Grove Chapel, whose delight was to bother their heads with everybody's business but their own. I remember the time when I was left a substantial sum, and a house in "The Grove" to live in, according to one old lady, whom the church thought ought to know. But that was all rubbish. My name was never in any one's will but once, and then not as a legatee, for I was not a fraction better for it. But here we have a will worth perusing, a will conveying to every name contained therein, immense revenues, unsearchable riches, an inalienable inheritance, eternal glory. The will of a Covenant God and Father in Christ Jesus is opened up to us all through this blessed chapter.

Let us read the 5th verse, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." Notice those two words, "to Himself." Himself, in all that He is, our inheritance—our everlasting possession. What a blessed thing it is for us to know that our Father had a will to make on our behalf—that He had a mind to make it—that He never can nor will alter or reverse it. He made it and here we have it sweetly revealed in this blessed chapter—all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus—all clearly understood by the power of His Blessed Spirit.

At the 9th verse we have something still better, "Having made known unto us the mystery of His

"The Man Who liv'd and died, and rose
To perfume heav'n with blood:
To Him my soul her pardon owes,
And claims Him for her God.

"There high He reigns in glory bright,
The Great Incarnate Word,
While suns to darkness dwindle quite
Before their radiant Lord."

There He is high in the heights of glory, and there He is for us. And here we are as He is yonder. Well, I do not feel that to be the case with me, say you. To which I answer, If feelings must have it, neither do I. But this blessed fact is not ruled by our feelings, but by God's word. This is according to that which God teaches—to God's will—to God's purpose—to His eternal counsels—to His everlasting covenant of grace—to His plan of salvation in which no mistake or defect can be found. In the resurrection and ascension of our Head the members of His body are one with Him. He "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ" (chap. ii. 6). I like that word "together." This is spiritual identification and communion.

Now come to chap. iii. 10: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God." This is the place of divine revelation. Here we discover the astounding fact that angels, those bright and glorious intelligences who never sinned—the elect angels who never fell, are learning through redeemed sinners the mysteries of salvation by love and blood. By blood the patterns of things in the heavens were purged; "but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than" the law of Moses could produce (Heb. ix. 23). In the last chapter of this epistle we learn that the place of privilege is the place of perplexity, the place of

assurance is the place of anxiety—the place of communion is the place of conflict. Read the 12th verse, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Or, as you read in the margin, “against *wicked spirits in heavenly places*.” We need not wonder at the conflict with evil by those who are saved and separated from it, when we see the world at enmity against the Father—the devil in arms against the Son—the flesh in unceasing hostility to the Spirit. Lord, grant us Thy peace.

There is another peculiarity which makes this epistle unique—perfect in every part—complete. It is the presence of Christ—it is the presence of the Father—it is the presence of the Comforter. Here we have the fulfilment of the Father’s purpose, “I will not turn away from them to do them good” (Jer. xxxii. 40). Here we have the truth of the Son’s promise, “Lo, I am with you alway” (Matt. xxviii. 20). Here we have the accomplishment of the Saviour’s promise concerning the Holy Ghost, “He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John xiv. 17). The beauty of the epistle is the revelation of Christ ever present with His people. Yes, present in His purity and perfection for them. This is different altogether to the talk of the Christian world. The weakness of the so called Christian world is the absence of Christ. Those who profess to be His disciples are mourning His absence, and are ever looking out for what they call *His second coming*. Why, bless you, if you know that the Son of God has once come to you, you will want Him to come again—and again—and again. You will never be truly satisfied apart from Him in your faith and feeling, and the cry of the lonely heart will be, “O when wilt Thou come unto me?” (Ps. ci. 2).

This is the language of the regenerate soul longing for the presence of Christ and the sweets of divine communion. He desires the continuous presence of the one Object of His spiritual affections. This is what you and I like, and here we have it as the glory and experience of this Ephesian epistle. You will find something about the absence and coming of Christ in other epistles; but not a word of either in this. A present, not an absent Christ is its glory from first to last.

Now, having tried to give you a sketch of the epistle I would like you to notice the mental culture of the writer. Paul was distinguished by a spirit of intense originality and intellectuality. John was not. There is only one expression in the first Epistle of John which savours of intellectuality, that is the word “understanding” in chap. v. 20. But Paul was full—filled—overflowing with spiritual, heavenly, divine intellectuality. This proves to us how God is pleased to single out a learned man at a University as an able expounder of His truth while He passes by the rest. He makes use of a clod-hopper—a coal-heaver—a tinker—while He leaves unheeded the distinguished idols of our Universities. He will make use of whom He will.

“He takes the fool and makes him know

Th’ exceeding riches of His grace;

To bring aspiring wisdom low,

And all the pride of self abase.”

To the illiterate object of His choice He gives a power of utterance which may be far from correct according to the Queen’s English; but what does that matter while it is in sweet harmony with the Court of heaven.

But I want you to notice, and not to grow tired of what I am talking about, because I find it very