

Holy and Blameless in Love

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

"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"—Ephesians 1:4

Above, and around, and through all the activities of the Church is the Mind and Power of God. All is of Him, and by Him, and for Him. As the Head, Jesus, yielded himself in all things to the will of the Father, and in turn received all his strength and wisdom and joy from Him, so must the Body do likewise. "When I am weak," Paul says elsewhere (2 Cor. 12:10), "then am I strong." This is the theme of this epistle, and indeed of all the epistles. *All things are of God*. All things are created by Him and for His purpose, and to contribute to His ultimate glorious end.

The Church, the Body of Christ, is taken from the weakest of His creatures—the low ones, the weak, the despised, the poor. Not the wise, mighty and noble; not the able and self-reliant; none who are contaminated with the wisdom of this world, or pride, or vanity, or ambitions. "When I am weak, *then* am I strong," for—

"My strength (saith the Lord) is made perfect in weakness."

And from this lowly human clay, God is building a temple of glory, eternal for the ages. His method is slow, gradual transformation. In little steps from one shade of glory to a brighter shade until we come to the perfect man in Christ Jesus.

The power for all this comes from God. We cannot make ourselves good or pure or holy, any more than we can make ourselves beautiful. A beautiful character is like a beautiful form—it is the work and glory of its Creator, not of itself. We present ourselves as mediums for manifestation of God's glory by allowing Him to transform us to His likeness. See how Paul emphasizes this basic fact throughout this Epistle—

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly."

These "spiritual blessings in the heavenly" are His transforming works upon us, transforming us from dross to gold—

"That we should be HOLY and BLAMELESS before Him."

That is *His* work. We cannot make ourselves holy, but we *can* present ourselves to Him that *He* may make us holy. We can *want* to be holy, strive to be holy, hunger and thirst for the beauty of holiness, and He will clothe us with it, according to the mercies of His grace toward us.

"We are predestinated" (Paul continues—v. 11) "according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His Own will, that we should be unto the praise of His glory."

"Whom He did foreknow. He did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

Paul prays (v. 17) that God may give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and the knowledge of His exceeding power to usward, according to the working of His mighty power (v. 19). Throughout all it is God's marvellous work. "You did He make alive" (2:1), and again (v. 4):

"For His great love wherewith He loved us, He made us alive with Christ and raised us up with him.

"It is not of yourselves (v. 8)—it is the gift of God."

There is the crux of the matter.

"We are HIS workmanship, created unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

In 3:14, Paul again prays that they may be "strengthened with might by His (God's) spirit in the inner man," that they may be "filled with all the fulness of God" (19) according to the power that worketh in us (20).

So in these first 3 chapters, the first half of the epistle, Paul paints an inspiring picture of their unique and exalted position, chosen of God for the working of His purpose and manifestation of His glory—selected as the clay which the mighty power of God should slowly mould to His likeness, and then, at the last trump, transform into His very spirit substance.

And this final glorious manifestation, gradually brought to birth through the travail of the ages, will be in its completeness and unity the SON OF GOD, born of the flesh according to the will and power of the all-pervading Spirit. It will be God's creation—HIS glory—the greatest example of the handiwork of His wisdom and omnipotence. And so Paul concludes this part of the epistle with these words (3:21):

"Unto HIM be glory in the Ecclesia by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

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We are the clay in the hand of the Potter. We are the material. He has made us as we are, and He will make us into whatever we shall be. We ask then, is anything expected of us? Does God just pick some here and there haphazardly for His purpose? We do not entertain that idea for a moment.

Something is expected even of the potter's clay. It must be suitable material. First and above all, it must be workable. Not stiff and hard and crusted. It must yield itself to the hand of the potter. Clay that was satisfied with its present shapelessness and resisted the Potter, or wanted a shape of its own, would be useless.

Then it must have sufficient consistency to hold the shape into which the Potter forms it. Flabby material is no good. "*God hath no pleasure in fools*" (Eccl. 5:4). He knows our possibilities and will not be deceived, though we deceive ourselves.

Then, to fill a useful role, the clay must pass through the fire. It must be hardened—not too much fire or it will forever be destroyed—but just that degree that is necessary to achieve the best results. The All-wise Potter knows exactly how much each vessel needs, and exactly how much each can stand.

The first half of this epistle describes God's work in us, and Christ's work for us—the glorious temple God is building—the great redemption that Christ has wrought and God freely offers to us because of the "love wherewith He loved us."

But that is not all. The last half of the epistle deals with our work. What we must do for God. It is all summed up in the wonderful phrase (4:30):

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." When we find someone is angry at our shortcomings, our resentment is aroused, and our better feelings are stifled, but when we find that our failures grieve them, then remorse gives us no peace until we overcome.

If Paul had said, "Anger not the Holy Spirit of God," the whole relationship would be changed. But God does not speak of anger to His saints. Anger is for the shortcomings of a servant, but grief is caused by the failure of a son. If it were anger, then we should just sullenly seek to satisfy Him, knowing that He is stronger than we, but when He speaks to us of grief, then we must labour to please Him, and give Him joy, and remove all cause for sorrow. How much greater power has the one incentive than the other!

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The first 3 chapters are inspiration. They describe the glory and the power. They stir us to reciprocation and we exclaim—

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" (Psa. 116:12).

Any service, kindness or favour creates an obligation and whenever we receive any privileges or benefits, we assume a corresponding responsibility. We speak, of course, in a moral, not a legal, sense. The obligation may not necessarily be to the person who has done the kindness. In fact, the higher the degree in which this law finds expression, the further this becomes from being the case. The source of all good is God.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above."

—says James (Jas. 1:17), and again (1 John 4:19)—

"We love, because He first loved us."

It comes from God to us, and then from us—if we fulfil our proper part—it radiates and diffuses in ever-widening circles. He teaches us not to do things for those who can reciprocate, but for those who cannot—they will bless His name, and He will complete the chain by blessing us. Not that we do these things for reward, but it is the working out of the great law that as we sow, so shall we reap—He that rolleth a stone, either good or ill, it will return to him, to bless or to curse.

It is upon this law, in its highest form, that God's relation to us is based. He freely pours His blessings upon us, involving us in an obligation that we can never repay, but which is a lifelong incentive to effort, and a powerful stimulus to love. He does not say, "If you do this and that, then I will reward, or bless you." He says rather, "I *have* redeemed you, I *have* given you life and hope, I *have* made you sons and daughters, I HAVE LOVED YOU—therefore do these things to give Me joy and to show your love and appreciation."

"God commendeth His love toward us in that—while we were yet sinners—Christ died for us."

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God does not ask us for great accomplishments. He is not an exacting Master—He is a loving Father. What does a Father ask but love, and what else can we give Him? He asks us to love Him with our whole heart and mind and soul, and to let that love pervade and direct our every act and thought and word. That is all—but that is everything. Ch. 4 begins *our* part:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, BESEECH you to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

We note the "therefore." Because God has so loved us, *therefore* I beseech you to be worthy of that love. Then the word "beseech." It is an entreaty, not a command. No mention is made of penalty. He appeals to the best in us. John says,

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God"

(1 John 3:1-3).

Then he adds—

"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as HE is pure."

We are His sons. We bear His Name!

"What manner of person ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Pet. 3:11).

Consider the solemn privileges and responsibilities of those who approach God in the natural Mosaic tabernacle—how careful they had to be of every detail! Our privileges and responsibilities are far greater than theirs. We are the living temple, we bear the name of God with us everywhere—exalting it or abasing it according to what action we take.

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die," says Paul (Rom. 8).

That is simple enough. If you just live an ordinary life, like ordinary people, actuated by natural motives and inclinations, *you will die*. A good life in its way, perhaps—so much the better if it is—but still at the end of it, you will die.

". . . But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

We must live according to a different principle. We must live for something besides ourselves. We must win a place in the heart of God, because that is what is going to endure.

If we are inspired by the love of God, and the glorious prospect of eternal fellowship with Him as our Father, we shall bend every effort to overcome those things which draw us away.

God *wants* to use us, to beautify and glorify us, to give us a place in the mansion He is building for His eternal habitation:

"He is not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9)—

—But if we live after the flesh, He cannot do any of this for us for:

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17).

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God—THEY are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

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In the next v. of this 4th ch., Paul begins to go into detail:

"With all lowliness and meekness."

These come first. They are the foundation. All virtue is built upon them. All else is false. These are the traits that Christ put first in his lessons of truth:

"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall have rest unto your souls."

Lowliness and meekness—despised characteristics in the eyes of the world, but unto them that are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

"When I am weak, THEN am I strong."

When I realize my own weakness and helplessness and lowliness and ignorance—then do I feel the strength and wisdom of God.

"Blessed (that is, happy) are the meek . . . "He will beautify the meek with salvation."

Webster defines "meek" as "Mild of temper, not easily provoked or irritated, patient under injuries, not resentful, forbearing, submissive, humble." Meekness is usually looked upon as weakness, but it should be evident to anyone who regards it in the true light that meekness demands great strength of character—"not easily provoked or irritated, patient under injuries." Anyone who has made any effort in this direction—any effort to subdue the coarse, animal passions—can testify that a full accomplishment is of godly magnitude and character.

Meekness is the first requisite of the clay—rigid control of its own passions and full submission to the hand of the Potter. The clay must be pliable, workable, teachable. Humility is the handmaid of wisdom, for to see ourselves just as we are in God's sight and to confess our position, is humility. Being such as we are, there can be no other result of true self-examination except humility.

Add to this self-control, a rare and godly combination, and we have meekness—perfect material for divine manipulation. Paul continues,

"With longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."

This last phrase "in love" is one that Paul cannot keep away from. As soon as he delves beneath the surface of any of the varied attributes or revelations of God, or of the godliness that is enjoined upon men, he finds love at the roots. A moment ago we read Webster's definition of meekness. Doubtless many were struck by its resemblance to Paul's words in 1 Cor. on love.

Paul here begins to analyze meekness, and he finds it is another of the blossoms that spring from the root of love. We have said that whatever Paul is considering, he cannot avoid this thought. Let us look at the Epistle:

"Holy and blameless before Him in love" (1:4).

"Rooted and grounded in love, strong to apprehend" (3:17).

"Forbearing one another in love" (4:2).

"Speaking the truth in love" (4:15).

"The edifying of the body in love" (4:16).

"Be imitators of God and walk in love" (5:2).

It is, we find, his refrain to every teaching, every command. All God's actions are attributed to this supreme motive, and to us He always says, "Do this in love—by—through—because of—love."

What then, is love? When we read 1 Cor. 13 we are apt to think that we have got to the bottom of it. Here is a full explanation, we feel. Love is a combination of all the best characteristics—meekness, longsuffering, kindness, patience, etc.

But that is not true. Paul there isn't telling us what love is, but what it *does*. Electricity isn't light and heat and motors and dynamos—it is the POWER behind all these things.

John tells us what love *is*, and his conception is much deeper than just a combination of its manifestation. He says, "God is love." Let us go a step further. Jesus says God is Spirit. And what is spirit? Spirit is power—the power behind every power—the power in and by and through which all things exist.

The more we analyze it, the more we conclude that there is no power but true love. It is the love of God that conceived and maintains the universe in motion. This is not far-fetched. All things, we are told, were made for Christ—he is the nucleus of all. *But why was Christ made?* He was made, we are told, to be the supreme manifestation of the love of God. The whole creation is designed as the setting for the highest expression of the love of God, and the power of God.

Love is power. Power is that which does things—accomplishes things. Now clearly the highest and greatest power would be that which has the highest and greatest accomplishments.

We say that God's offering of His Son is the greatest manifestation of His power, because it accomplishes the most. It is the power by which He draws men upward and forward —the power by which He transforms them from carnal to spiritual—by which He drives out the natural and infuses them with holiness.

It is the power by which His whole purpose is moving forward. By love, God is gradually developing a host of beings who will reflect His glory and His divine attributes. Beings who, because of the divine attraction which is love, have freely chosen the hard but glorious upward ascent to Him. What power but love could accomplish this?

Love is power. God's love, we have seen, is at the bottom of all mechanical power, for it is the mainspring of the universe. But there is something else. Two thousand million people are in constant motion upon the face of the earth. What is the power behind every action that they make? It is love. Of course, it is not love in the pure and exalted sense in which we have been considering it. When Paul speaks of love, we understand him to mean holy love, the spirit or power of holiness—true love, as God intended it to be.

But the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. Love can be misplaced and debased. It can be a power for evil just as for good. But still love is the power that moves every human creature in every human act. What, for instance, was it that dictated the course of Demas? *Love* of this present world. And of Diotrephes? *Love* of pre-eminence.

Repeatedly we are told: Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. We must love. All living activity is impelled by love. Loving is synonymous with living. Even in the simplest acts, we set our love upon a result, and that is the power that moves us to accomplish that result.

And here lies the vital importance of setting our affections high. We cannot create the power. God does that. We are born with power and desire and will. But we can choose in what direction that power is to move us. If we set our love on the world, we are drawn down to the world; if we set our love on ourselves, we shrivel up within ourselves.

But if we set our love on God, that marvellous power that energizes us makes contact with a greater and unearthly power —we are drawn to God and He is drawn to us, and in accordance with the universal law of magnetism, as we approach Him the attraction becomes greater and greater until finally we are swallowed up into His substance.

"As many as receive him, to them he giveth POWER to become the sons of God" (John 1:12).

We are drawn toward whatever inspires our love. That mysterious magnetism is the secret of all movement and activity. God could force us, or could teach us with cold reason. It did not need the death of Christ to persuade us that obedience to the Supreme Power of the universe is the only sensible course.

But God loved us, and He manifested that love in the most powerful way possible. Therefore we love Him, and are drawn toward Him. We want Him, not because He is Almighty and can do us a lot of good, but because He loves us and we love Him.

Every act is propelled by a drawing toward some object or end in view. We are born with this tremendous and incalculable power. See what labors men will perform, what hardships they will endure, what they will sacrifice to accomplish their ends! It is an irresistible, terrifying power, stronger than life itself and when the magnet is brutality or gain, love is a destructive force.

But there is no magnet like the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Herein is the wisdom of God. If He appealed merely to our self-interests, there are often many stronger attractions than that. Men will give up all their self-interest and lay down their lives for a person or cause that they love.

But God holds before us the highest possible manifestation of love and power—the offering of His Son, who himself joined in that love with every fibre of his being; and looking upon him we are irresistibly drawn toward Him. Lesser powers and attractions fade—a power outside ourselves carries us forward. This attraction is divine and eternal, others are light passing shadows.

Therefore we see why Paul so strongly emphasizes the necessity of looking upon Him—turning our hearts and minds in His direction—setting our affections upon Him—allowing his light free course into our souls—bringing ourselves into the focus of His glory—directing the mighty inborn power of love toward the fountain of holiness, and permitting nothing to obscure the vision or blot out the light.

So we find the power that He has given us to become the sons of God, and that power is love. We can become holy and blameless by the power of love. We must love these things—*and they are ours*. We can be rooted and grounded by the power of love. We can for bear one another, be bold to speak the Truth, edify the Body, walk in the steps of God, all by the power that He has given us, the secret of which is love.

In his final words, after divers exhortations, Paul closes the epistle with a vision of this two-way current of transforming power still before him—

"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 with an imperishable love."

— G. V. G.