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IDEALS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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In his Letter to the Ephesian Church Paul the apostle undoubtedly rises to the heights of true spiritual vision. The sublimity of its style, the sustained majesty of its Theme, the spiritual splendour of its conception and language, all combine to distinguish it, specially in its keynote: '*The Heavens*', which occurs five times in the six chapters. Charles A. Fox aptly compares it to the Gospel of John, 'being at once divinely tender and yet profound'.

He goes on to describe how, as the Apostle's argument rises from one stage to another, 'he seems to leave behind, dwarfed and dimmed in its sensual corruption, the vast and gorgeous Temple of Diana of the Ephesians, one of the wonders of the world of that day; and before us we see the majestic spiritual "Temple" of the Redeemed Church, rising noiseless from the dust like Solomon's stately fabric of old, and soaring heavenward; founded upon the foundation of the irrevocable and sovereign will of God the Father, cemented together by the atoning blood of God the Son, and inhabited by the Pentecostal Spirit, who descending fills the house with the Shechinah Glory of the Lord, and inspires every whit to speak forth HIS praise'.

The keynote of the Epistle is 'one weighty golden phrase', five times repeated, 'The Heavens'. It is around this phrase the Apostle groups his teaching. In order, therefore, to get the full understanding of the Epistle we should study these special references.

For our present purpose, however, we confine our study to the Apostle's references to the Christian Life itself, more particularly as to its ideal constitution and *corporate* manifestation. To begin with we must remember that it is the units individually who make the unity. What is true of the *body* of the church is in a very real sense true of each member of the body. As the apostle views this corporate and yet individual life he sees it in various aspects and from various angles, as it were. It is too complex, too variegated to be expressed in one picture. Let us note some of these different aspects.

The Christian Life may be viewed as

(1) *A condition, or state*, in which every spiritual blessing God has planned for our help and enjoyment may be appropriated and enjoyed (read carefully Ephesians 1:3-5). Each verse needs to be read carefully and pondered over in order to appreciate its full meaning. Outside of this spiritual state we are 'without God and without hope'. But when we step out of that condition of soul, mind and heart, by faith in the Saviour Jesus Christ, and accept the blessings of His salvation we at once are 'delivered out of the power (or "authority") of darkness', and are 'translated into the inheritance of the saints in light' and 'into the kingdom of the Son of God's love' (see Col. 1:12, 13—see marginal rendering).

(2) This new Life implies also a very real *union* with Christ. We are made 'partakers of Christ'. (Hebrews 3:14); 'partakers of His holiness' (Heb. 12:10); 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4); 'partakers of the Holy Spirit' (Hebrews 6:4). Who, in a very real sense, is the Sustainer of this wonderful union of the redeemed soul with the triune GOD: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

(3) This new Life is also viewed as a '*vocation*', a '*calling*'. See specially Ephesians 1:18; 4:1, 4. It is HIS calling—"the Voice of divine grace prevailing upon the will", as Moule terms it. Its New Testament meaning is almost exclusively confined to that act of God whereby He calls us to a closer intimacy and a

more definite enjoyment of what He Himself has provided. Hence the apostle Peter's injunctions in his 2nd. Epistle, ch. 1:5-10. Here is Moffatt's translation: 'Make it your whole concern to furnish your faith with resolution, resolution with intelligence, intelligence with self-control, self-control with steadfastness, steadfastness with piety, piety with brotherliness, brotherliness with Christian love. For as these qualities exist and increase with you, they render you active and fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ'. 'As you practice these qualities you will never make a slip'.

(4) This new Life is also a new '*walking*' before God and in the world. It is illustrated in a statement recorded in Acts concerning the church in Judaea, Galilee and Samaria which were happily active and peaceful, 'being edified (or "buiided up"); and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost' was increasing in strength (chap. 9:31).

But what actually is the meaning of 'walking' and 'walk'? Moule expresses it as being '*the successive acts and practices of life*'; see 2 Peter 3:3; 2:10; 4:17; 5:2. The 'calling' is an appeal to the will for a definite submission to and a fulfilling of the divine will in all things as a life-long habit. The 'walking', is the manifestation of such submission in thought, word, deed and habit. The successive steps of the 'walking' therefore demonstrate the measure in which the 'calling' has been effectual, and the degree of our worthiness of the vocation. In this Christ has given us a great example, for 'He gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smelling savour' (Eph. 5:2). Hence His own gracious appeal is: 'I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done for you' (John 13:15). Just here it is worthwhile noting carefully 1 John 2:6, 11.

(5) This new Life, strangely indeed we might say, involves very definite *conflict and 'warfare'*. In Ephesians 6:10-18 the apostle warns us, therefore, to be ready to meet such conflict in the power of the Holy Spirit. It has always been so: was not Canaan the Land of Promise; the land 'flowing with milk and honey' the land for 'an eternal inheritance' to the children of

Israel? It was: but none the less a land of enemies, of battles, some victories and some defeats. In order to gain possession of this inheritance Joshua had to fight for almost every inch of the ground: only so much as 'the sole of their feet actually trod upon' could the nation claim for themselves.

But it has always been so in the great battle between that which is of God and that which is of the Devil. The coveted 'Victor's crown' reserved for such as are victorious in the Christian Life is not presented to the cowardly or the indolent: it is for those who have braved the attacks of the Great Enemy, putting their trust in God (not merely in the 'arm of flesh'); for be it understood that the Lord is ever ready to come to the instant help of such as call for HIS aid and succour. The apostle Paul has some very sound and helpful instruction to give us in his letter to the church in Corinth, which is worth pondering over and putting into practice as occasion arises (see 1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

In closing this study it won't be out of place to make brief reference to what we have termed the 'keynote of the Epistle'—'The Heavenuies'. What does it represent for the believer in his or her daily life? To begin with, it is the sphere where the Holy Spirit holds sway. It is the 'home' of the Spirit even as it is the 'home' of the 'spiritual' in Christ: a 'home in which you are greatly blessed, and you bless HIM who blesses you'. As Alexander Smellie puts it: 'It is no ordinary home in which we (Christians) find ourselves. It is amazing, incomparable. Its foundations were laid in eternity, and our place was appointed then:

'Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
God thought on me, His child'.

(a) In this 'Home' The Holy Spirit's Life rules supreme—we *'walk in newness of Life'* (Rom. 6:4).

(b) The Holy Spirit's Light pervades all our way—we *'walk in the Light'* (1 John 1:7).

(c) The Spirit's Love is the master-principle—we are to *'walk in Love'* (Eph. 5:2).

(d) The Spirit's Liberty sets us free from entangling bonds—we *walk in The Truth* (3rd John vs. 3); for it was the Lord Himself who said, '*The Truth shall make you free*' (see John 8:32).

(e) The Spirit's lavish Blessings are constantly being poured forth: '*we walk in the Spirit*' (Galatians 5:25); and this is the all-inclusive word concerning the Christian's daily walking before God.

DANGERS IN LIFE AND TESTIMONY

(A Study of 2 John)

W. WILCOX

1. *Withheld Love*. v. 5. The intensity of the Apostle's appeal, coupled with the statement that he writes not a new commandment but that which had been given from the beginning, seems to infer that the one to whom he writes may be in danger of withholding love from some other member or members of the Christian Community. This danger he would avert by friendly warning and earnest appeal.

First he had commended the elect lady because certain of her children were 'walking in the truth'. Here is one of the most important features of Christian life; their conduct must measure up to the new standards contained in the Christian Teaching which had been delivered to them.

(a) The Love which he bears to this dear one finds its conditioning element to be *the truth*. It is thus a love which is genuine, with no touch of unreality about it. It is a love which is sincere with no touch of hypocrisy in it. It is a love which is pure with no dilution or adulteration in it.

(b) The knowledge of the truth brings with it a similar love for those who are in the truth. That knowledge influences the whole personality including its emotions and so prompts to an inclusive love of both the truth itself and those who hold that truth.