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Enlightenment and Enlargement (Feb 1958)

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We Could not doubt for a moment but that the beloved Apostle Paul was entirely within the mind of God when he prayed for the Christians at Ephesus. His two prayers on their behalf are recorded in chapters 1 and 2 of the epistle that he wrote to them, and these accord perfectly with the general theme of his letter, the heavenly places.

Five times over in this communication to them, he makes mention of this wonderful spiritual experience in which, even now, the Christian may live with enjoyment. In one of these references he declares, “God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-6). How wonderful!

In His first prayer (chap. 1:16-23), Paul asks that the Holy Spirit would deeply exercise the hearts of God’s own people in that ancient city. That this prayer would embrace the saints of today, as well as the saints of the past, must be evident to all.

If our hearts were subdued and these prayers were answered in us what a change there would be in our behaviour and walk! Most certainly our profession would be in closer agreement with our heavenly calling, and this, after all, is the most important thing in Christian living.

Paul's heart was moved to thanksgiving, as well as to prayer, because of the Ephesians' "faith in Christ Jesus, and love unto all the saints" (chap. 1:15). What a beautiful combination! Little wonder that praise and gratitude arose to the Lord from the Apostle's heart!

The difference between these two prayers should be noted. In chapter 1 it is a request for enlightenment, and in chapter 3 it is a request for enlargement, a maturing in Christian experience.

The Prayer For Enlightenment

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." It is ever the work of the Holy Spirit of God to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us.

Let us consider another of the requests of this prayer: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened that you may know what is the hope of His calling." This is the hope of His calling, not our calling. It is mentioned elsewhere as, "The high calling of God in Christ Jesus, or upward calling." (Phil 3:14. R.V.) What a wonderful prayer this is, and how wonderful the hope of His calling! The Apostle in this petition did not pray merely that they might assent to the truth of the Lord's coming, but that their understanding might be enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God to take in all that was involved in that blessed hope. The Lord Jesus will never be satisfied until He sees the travail of His soul, until we have reached the full stature of the sons of God, and until we are with Him and like Him. What are these riches of glory in the inheritance in the saints to which Paul makes reference in this regard? One can understand

their inheritance in Him much more easily than His inheritance in them. It has been suggested by certain that the Holy Spirit has something more in view in this passage than the saints; be that as it may, one's heart is, nevertheless, melted in recalling what he was when God saved him, a guilty slave of sin and the devil, and in considering the heights of glory and the nearness to God unto which he has been brought.

As we read Paul's prayer, naturally we wonder what he means by his next statement, "The exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." A word in Psalm 33:9 might cast some light upon the matter. "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." God did manifest His wonderful power in creation, and we do well to stand in awe and wonder as we behold His mighty works in the great Universe; notwithstanding, the power He put forth when He raised His Son from among the dead exceeded His power displayed in creation. Now that infinite and exceedingly great power is to usward who believe. It is at our disposal, and the Holy Spirit of God has made this record in order that saints of today might know that this power is within their reach. We are not storage batteries that merely need to be recharged when run down, but we are souls living in communion with God, and our needs, therefore, are met moment by moment as they arise. It is thus that we become channels of blessing to others. Such we become, not because of our own strength, but because we are sustained by the same power that raised our blessed Lord from the dead.

The Prayer For Enlargement

We now turn to Paul's second prayer for the Ephesian Christians; it is given us in chapter 3 of this Epistle. Let us remind our hearts again that these prayers for the saints at Ephesus were produced by the Holy Spirit of God. Not only so, but let us remind our hearts that these experiences Paul desired for those saints of long ago, should be coveted by all today.

Paul says, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." There was an intensity of exercise here on behalf of the beloved children of God, so he prays, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." There is much precious teaching in this epistle regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The Apostle did not have in mind the baptism of the Holy Spirit or a second blessing when he uttered this prayer. The saints on believing had been sealed with the Holy Spirit (chap. 1:13), and therefore indwelt by Him. It seems that he desired for them an enlargement of that which already existed. He longed that they might be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man. How can that strengthening be done except by a more complete yielding of the heart and life to the Holy Spirit of God?

In recent years there has been a great scarcity of living quarters in our large cities. Often an owner rents part of his dwelling, retaining only one or two rooms for his own use. The tenant has control of a portion of the house. This is an illustration of what is all too true in the spiritual experience of many of God's people. Many have retained rooms in their own hearts, so to speak. The

Spirit of God cannot occupy the whole heart and life because it has never been yielded to Him. He cannot, therefore, strengthen as He would the inner man.

Paul next prays, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” This is truly a high standard indeed, and is, doubtless, the normal New Testament Christian experience. Nevertheless, it is not the experience of many of God’s beloved children, for it results only from the enthroning of Christ in the heart. Needless to say, this is far more than merely knowing our sins forgiven, and of tasting now and again a little of the joy of heaven. It is, by no means, sinless perfection; however, we should not think of it as a continual up and down experience. The Holy Spirit not only should be resident in our hearts, but likewise president, today, tomorrow, and every day.

Another of His suggestions is worthy of note, “That ye, being rooted and grounded in love.” We are to be rooted as a tree drawing its nourishment from an unseen source, and grounded as a building on a solid foundation. In other words, we are to be established in the love of God. How beautiful!

If we are thus settled by this divine influence, the next request will be fulfilled in us, “May be able to comprehend with all saints.” That is, each according to his capacity will be able to understand the things of the Lord. Here the Apostle suggests that the Ephesians understand “what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” There has been some difference of opinion as to what this means, but obviously it is not the love of God but His wonderful purposes in grace as unfolded to us in the previous chapters. As far as the complete

fulfilment of these purposes is concerned we must wait a future day, but we ought to learn more and more of them now.

“To know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” was a burning desire on Paul’s part for the people of God. His statement is a paradox, and sounds almost a contradiction. God’s love is divine, and therefore never can be fathomed, yet, we should constantly learn more and more about it. His love is so wonderful, and the Apostle sends forth the challenge, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

Paul reaches a climax and his whole soul seems to cry out for God’s people. Earnestly he prays, “That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

God grant that these prayers, in a large measure, may be fulfilled in our lives that He might be glorified and His people blessed.

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Forsaking God for worldly advantages and material prosperity will surely bring soul misery.

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Redeemed ones must be worshipping ones, and must only worship in God’s own appointed way.

The Whole Armor of God (Feb 1964)

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Ephesians 6:10-20

In the last chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians having exhorted the believers to be filled with the Spirit (5:18), the Holy Spirit in this portion, chapter 6:10-20, brings before us in the most condensed form possible the nature and power of the believer's foe. This foe is not only spiritual wickedness in high places as states the Authorized Version, but actually wicked spirits in the heavenlies according to the Revised Version. How necessary then that we put on the whole armour of God, and that we be filled with the Spirit in order that we get the victory over such an enemy!

As the Lord helps, a few comments will be made on each of the seven pieces which make up the entire armour. Let us examine each piece separately.

The Girdle of Truth

"Let your loins be girt about with truth." In the First Epistle of Peter, we have the expression, "Gird up the loins of your mind." The oriental would know very well the use of the girdle. It would be quite in order for him ordinarily to wear his clothes hanging loosely about him, but when going on a journey, it would be necessary that his clothing be girded closely about his body so that his progress not be impeded.

The Lord Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The first great bulwark for the young Christian is to have his loins girt

about with truth. The Holy Spirit can only recollect in our memories the Word of God that has already been stored there. One cannot treasure up the Word of God by a little casual reading of the Scriptures, but by a habitual, careful reading and meditation of the truth taught in the Bible.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The second piece of the armour, the breastplate of righteousness, can be seen in human conduct. Furthermore, the child of God is responsible to put it on: “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.” The righteousness that was imputed to us when first we trusted in Christ was entirely God’s own provision; to which it is impossible to add or to detract. What is referred to here is the practical righteousness that should be demonstrated in the daily life of the Christian. This aspect of righteousness is the result of having the loins girt about with truth; the one is the outgrowth of the other. What a defense! It is well named the breastplate of righteousness.

Equipment for the Feet

The feet are to be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace, and this forms the third piece of the Christian’s armour. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of Peace” (Rom. 10:15). The Gospel testimony of one who is not wearing the breastplate of righteousness is absolutely powerless. How fitting here are the words of Philippians 2:14-16: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings that ye may be blameless and harmless,

the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life." Such a testimony results from having on the breastplate of righteousness, and from having the feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace. All have not the gift of the evangelist; nevertheless, all should be ready to give an answer to every man who asks for the reason of our hope. The believer who has ceased to witness for Christ has lost much of his assurance and joy. It may be that some need to have their feet re-shod in this spiritual way before their private and collective witnessing will be again effective.

The Shield of Faith

The ancient shield was a circular metalic covering used for the protection of the whole body. The believer is enjoined, "Above all, taking the shield of faith." With it he is to quench the fiery darts of the devil. This fourth or middle piece of the armour is very important. As the shield was shifted to meet any stroke of the opponent, and at every turn of the conflict, even so must the child of God learn to trust in God as his over-all means of defense. The faith mentioned here is not that aspect of confidence in God that was exercised for salvation, but rather that hourly confidence in God for every circumstance of life. May the Lord enable us to keep this ever in remembrance; the Christian is not engaged in any sham battle. "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." Furthermore, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to

the pulling down of strong holds" (3 Cor. 10:4). Should Satan get through with a fiery dart of unbelief, the battle for the time being is lost to the child of God. How necessary it is to resist him! He attempts to accomplish our defeat by introducing wrong thoughts about our loving heavenly Father.

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet of salvation, of course, is for the protection of the head. The Apostle Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, "Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8). It would appear that this fifth piece of the Christian's armour indicates salvation in its consumation. Many may not be familiar with the fact that for over 1,500 years of the Church's history, the precious truth of the Lord's coming, as we know it today, was practically lost. When this doctrine was forgotten the Church relinquished her position of separation and power as a witness in the world. About 200 years ago the blessedness of this hope was recovered. It has since then strengthened the feeble knees and has encouraged God's people amidst troubles, trials and difficulties. It can only influence the life if it is held in fellowship with God. Today, as never before, we should lift up our heads for our redemption draws near.

The Sword of the Spirit

We are told that the sword of the Spirit, the sixth piece of the armour, is the Word of God. In the first piece of the armour, the loins being girt about with truth, the suggestion is that the mind ought to be stored with the Word of God in action. There is a clear example of this in

our Lord's answer to Satan, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word of God." We do well to remember, however, that the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, can only be thus used by us as we surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit. Might it be possible that, even in assemblies of God today, the speaker's message is ineffective because the Holy Spirit is not the source of the message, nor is He the power in its delivery.

The Prayer

John Bunyan calls the last piece of the armour "all prayer." It is a terrible thing for a soldier to be out of touch with his headquarters when on active duty. The Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians that they should pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. All prayer here seems to imply prayer in its every aspect: intercession, supplication, thanksgiving, and these with importunity. Praying in the Hoy Ghost will keep us in the love of God. In the Epistle to the Romans we read, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (8:26). The context in which this appears deals with our prayers. The Apostle here encourages us to pray for all saints, and in this gives us a little insight into his own unselfish heart and habit.