

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

James M. Gray, D.D.

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LESSON TEN

EPHESIANS

The Epistle to the Ephesians contains probably the profoundest spiritual truth revealed in the New Testament.

The reasons why it was given through Paul to the Christians at Ephesus are also hinted at.

In the Epistle to the Romans we have two very noticeable statements, the first at its beginning, the second at its close. The first refers to the Gospel, which it speaks of as promised or revealed before by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, and which was never hidden. Compare Romans 1:1, 2, with Galatians 3:8. The second refers to the "**mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest**" (Romans 16:25,26).

As it is the business of the Epistle to the Romans to explain the Gospel, so is it the business of the Epistle to the Ephesians to explain the mystery (3:1-12).

I do not say that Romans from the practical point of view is not the more useful or important for us to master; but he who has really mastered Romans will never be satisfied till he has done the same with Ephesians. He may not know what is in Ephesians, but he will feel instinctively that somewhere in the New Testament there will be that for which his soul now yearns. A need of knowledge has been created which he feels satisfied GOD will supply. He has a desire to get down deep into "the why and wherefores" of things, which the contents of Ephesians gratify.

You will recall that the Old Testament prophesied continually of the kingdom to be set up on earth with Israel as its center and the Messiah as its reigning Head. In the Gospels this kingdom was offered to Israel in the acceptance of its King, but was rejected.

In the Acts of the Apostles it may be said to have been offered them again, and again rejected.

Nothing more is heard or said about it till we reach the book of Revelation, where we see the kingdom actually set up, Israel converted and triumphant, and CHRIST on the throne. Here then is a long interval to be accounted for between the departure of CHRIST out of the world and His coming again. This is the church period which is covered by the teachings of the Epistles.

Now the church is a distinct body from the Jews on the one hand, or the Gentiles on the other. Neither is it identical with the kingdom, but separate from it. It is something not heard of in the Old Testament, something specially given to Paul to reveal. It had its earthly beginning after CHRIST's ascension into glory. It will have its earthly ending when He comes again, and it is caught up to meet Him in the air (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Thenceforward it will reign with Him over the earthly kingdom then to be set up. The church is composed of a people taken out from among both Jews and Gentiles, and is called the body of CHRIST.

Under this figure it is referred to in I Corinthians 12:12-27, and Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:19, etc., but the doctrine itself is amplified and enlarged upon only in Ephesians.

Let us call our theme, therefore, *The Spiritual Constitution of the Church*. We might define it as The Mystery of the Body of CHRIST, but I think the former the better title for our present purpose. Paul treats of it under four heads, to wit:-

Its origin,
its standing,
its design,
its duty.

I. Origin of the Church

Its source is seen to be in the will, or choice of GOD the Father (1:4, 5). The GOD and Father of our Lord JESUS CHRIST hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world. Evidently no merit or claim of ours comes into the consideration of the case at all. Indeed, the transaction is not primarily with us at all, but with CHRIST. We are chosen in Him before we came into existence.

But, speaking after the manner of men, it were not enough that GOD the Father should have chosen us, unless GOD the Son had done that which made His choice operative. And, therefore, we find it stated that the origin of the church is in the will of the Father through the work of the Son (vv.7-13). "**In whom,**" i. e., the Son, "**we have redemption**" (v. 7); "**In whom also we have obtained an inheritance**" (v. 11); "**In whom . . . ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise**" (v. 13).

Nor were this all. The last phrase of verse 13, just quoted, suggests another thought, viz: that it were not even sufficient for the Son of GOD by his redemptive work to have made the choice of the Father operative, had not the HOLY SPIRIT taken of His work, so to speak, and applied it to us individually, and made it our possession (vv. 13, 14).

It is sometimes affirmed by the unevangelical that the doctrine of the trinity is not found in the New Testament.

It is indeed true that the word "trinity" is not found here; but the great and mysterious truth for which it stands is the very warp and woof of the New Testament. Just see how it is interlaced with, or rather forms the very foundation of the origin of the Christian church itself!

The origin of the church then, let us say, is:

In the choice of the Father.
Through the work of the Son.
By the sealing of the HOLY SPIRIT.

II. Standing of the Church

By this we mean the position it occupies before GOD in CHRIST.

Of course, when we speak of the church as a body, we mean every individual member of that body; and when we speak of their standing or position before GOD in CHRIST, we mean their present standing or position, not that which will be their privilege by and by merely, but that which is really their blessed possession now though they are yet in the flesh on the earth.

The high priest in his relation to Israel in the Old Testament is a beautiful type of the truth here sought to be set forth. You will remember our studies about him and his office when we were in the Pentateuch.

When he entered into the most holy place on the great Day of Atonement he did so representatively. He carried the names of the twelve tribes engraven on the precious stones which rested on his shoulders and composed his breastplate. They, i. e., the whole nation, entered there in him. All the exalted privileges he there enjoyed they as a nation enjoyed in him.

Correspondingly, CHRIST now represents us in the tabernacle in the heavens, and we are blessed with all spiritual blessings there in Him (1:3). What are some of those blessings? In other words, trace along with me through the following verses some of the things which are at this moment true of every believer, and which constitute his standing or position before GOD in CHRIST.

He is for example:-

Chosen (v. 4).
Sanctified (v. 4).
Adopted (v. 5).

Accepted (v. 6).
Redeemed (v. 7).
Forgiven (v. 7).
Enriched (v. 8).
Enlightened (v. 9).
Sealed (v. 13).
Quickened (2:1).
Exalted (v. 6).
Consecrated (v. 10).
Reconciled (v. 16).
United {v. 21).

At the close of the first chapter, in which he dwells more particularly on what we have called the origin of the church, Paul breaks forth in a prayer that his readers may have the aid of the HOLY SPIRIT in apprehending the wonderful things he has thus revealed to them (1:15-23). He does the same in this case, and with good reason (3:1, 14-21). These prayers will repay the most earnest and prayerful consideration. Let us make them our own.

It is at this point that the apostle enlarges somewhat upon the "mystery" referred to. At 3:1 he begins an allusion to his prayer on their behalf, but is shunted from his topic which he does not take up again till we reach verse 14. The intervening verses, 2-13, are really parenthetical. It is his allusion to his mission to the Gentiles that has this effect. That mission he will now speak about in passing. It was a special dispensation to him (v. 2).

- how was it made known to him (v. 3)?
- had he ever referred to the matter before (vv. 3, 4)?
- had it been known to men at any earlier time (v. 5)?
- how does he define the secret or mystery (v. 6)?

The body of CHRIST, of course, is synonymous with the church of CHRIST, i. e., the true church composed of regenerated, living members united to the Head (1:22; 4:15, also Colossians 1:18). What was one purpose of GOD in revealing the mystery at this time (v. 10)?

III. Design of the Church

The question asked above and answered in the text quoted, leads up to the third division of our treatment of the contents of the Epistle, viz: the design of the church.

To simplify the matter, let us ask, Why has GOD manifested this grace and done all these wonderful things for us in CHRIST? Why has GOD saved sinful man? The answer in John 3:16 at once suggests itself, but it does not go deep enough.

Granted that GOD so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son to die for it, the inquiry will not down as to why He loved it so? The answer is found only in this Epistle, where at least three times in the first chapter, verses 6, 12, and 14, it is said that these things were done "**to the praise of His glory or the glory of His grace.**"

The explanation of GOD's wondrous love towards us, therefore, is that it terminates on Himself

rather than on us.

It glorifies Him to so act toward us in CHRIST. We instinctively feel that here is an object, a motive worthy of such action, worthy of such a sacrifice as that of CHRIST. If it humbles us to think that we are not occupying the first place in GOD's thought concerning our salvation, it comforts us at the same time as we realize a sense of security in the fact that His own glory is involved in the perfecting of the work of grace in us. He does it for His name's sake!

But how, or in what way, is GOD's glory to be manifested in the church? Compare for an answer 2:7, 22; 3:10. According to the last named passage the church is now, even at the present time, an example of GOD's manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. According to the first named, it is to be an example of the riches of His grace in the ages to come. And according to 2:22, it is, and is to be this example from the point of view of His habitation in the Spirit. Compare Revelation 21:1-3.

We might, therefore, outline this third division of the theme thus:-

The design of the church is to be to the praise of GOD's glory.

- (1) As an example of grace in the ages to come.
- (2) As an habitation of GOD in the Spirit.
- (3) As an example of His wisdom now to principalities and powers in heavenly places.

IV. Duty of the Church

This fourth and last division of the Epistle is more easily discovered than the others and is found in the last three chapters.

The duty of the church in the light of all the foregoing is simply to walk worthy of her high calling (4:1). This walk is outlined in three directions.

She is to walk:

- In charity (4:2).
- In unity (vv. 3-16).
- In purity (4:17-6:21).

This exhortation is then applied to the three classes of the social order, as follows:

- Husbands and wives (5:22, 23).
- Children and parents (6:1-4).
- Masters and servants (6:5-9).

The whole concluding with very definite instruction as to the need as well as the supply of grace and power to accomplish the desired result (6:10-20).

~ end of Lesson 10 ~