

As Beloved Children

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

Our New Testament reading this morning (Eph. 5 and 6) brings before us two chapters of great beauty and practical power. No words of men can approach the power of these words. Our wisdom lies in centering our minds continually upon them, endeavoring to extract a maximum of their spiritual value.

Verse 1: *"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children."*

Literally, *"Become"*—a stronger word than just "Be," indicating a process and an accomplishment.

"Be ye therefore"—this turns our attention to something preceding, and we look back to the end of chapter 5, beginning at verse 30:

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

What greater incentive could there be to love and holiness? *"Do not cause sorrow or grief to the One Who has manifested so much love to you."* Consider the infinite graciousness of God's condescension—that the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth, has, by loving us, made it possible for us to grieve Him!

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, (that is, loud, angry words) and evil speaking, be put away from you."

All these things grieve the Holy Spirit of God. "Evil speaking" is anything that we say about others that is not in the true spirit of the love that covers a multitude of sins. Straightforward things must be said when Truth is at stake, but how careful we must be that the Spirit, not the flesh, motivates them!

"And be ye kind to one another—tenderhearted—forgiving, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

There is not much virtue in forgiveness when one comes to us humbly repentant. Forgiveness is then a comparatively easy and pleasant operation. But Jesus said, while they crucified him, *"Father, forgive them,"* and Stephen followed his example.

And while we were yet sinners he died for us to make manifest the power of a love that could lift us out of our sins. Forgiveness to mean anything, must be, as Jesus says, freely from the heart; grudgingly given as a duty, it means nothing.

5:1—*"Be ye therefore followers of God."*

The word for followers means "imitators," as the Diaglott and RV give it. *Pattern yourself after God*—the greatest achievement man can strive for, for God is love and holiness, hating evil, but infinitely patient and understanding and slow to anger, rejoicing in mercy and forgiveness.

... as dear children."

"Dear" should rather be *"beloved"*—again as in Diaglott and RV. Love is the power, and the motive, and the reason for everything. Children must be beloved, or they cannot grow up to be lovable. Love is not just food and raiment, but warmth, sympathy and the closeness of heart to heart. God's children are beloved children. Because they *know* He loves them, they see love even in His wise and necessary chastisement.

"And walk in love" (verse 2).

This sums up all the teaching that follows in both chapters, in fact, *all* teaching—"All the law and prophets are comprehended in this." This cannot be too strongly, or too often, emphasized. So much of ecclesial trouble, and of all trouble, is a direct result of failure in this. "*Love seeketh not her own.*"

Without love, all else is vain, all else is hypocrisy. Irritation, impatience, bitterness, harshness, self pleasing—are *not* love, and such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. "*Walk in love.*" We ourselves are our own greatest problem.

Verse 3: "*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you*"

Have we not often noticed the significant association of "*covetousness*" with these other evil things? In these days of abundance and infinite variety of desirable things, covetousness is a basic problem to those in whom the Spirit is striving against the flesh, though covetousness can equally be manifested in connection with the simplest of objects and activities.

Paul says that covetousness—the *desire to have things*—is idolatry. The Spirit's instructions (1 Tim. 6:8) are:

*"Having food and raiment, therewith **be content.**"*

Anything desired beyond this, except strictly and sincerely for spiritual purposes, is covetousness or idolatry. God is the all-sufficient desire and portion of the true saint, and any desire outside of God is to that extent an indication of imperfect love and incomplete spiritual satisfaction.

Verse 5 tells us that *foolish talking and jesting* are utterly out of place and unbecoming in those who claim the holy and exalted position of children of God.

Here we all stand condemned. Here is one of the childish and juvenile things among the hardest to put away when we aspire to be mature and spiritually-minded men.

The perfect pattern of a Christlike life is too beautiful and gracious to be cheapened by foolishness. Humor is the world's poor, thin substitute for the deep happiness and joy of the Spirit. Let us strive to say nothing we would not say in the presence of Christ, remembering that—

"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36).

And Solomon testifies similarly in solemn warning—

"The thought of foolishness is sin" (Prov. 24:9).

"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor" (Eccl. 10:1).

A few foolish words can make all our preaching seem like hypocrisy and destroy all the good we have tried to do among men in manifesting the joyful beauty of a holy life in Christ.

Verse 6: "*Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things—**including foolishness and coveting**—cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*"

"Let no man deceive you"—do not be deceived by any who belittle the seriousness and importance of these things. The way is narrow, and few find it. It will only be those who *tremble*

at *God's Word* and take it all in utmost seriousness. Light, foolish talk and desire for earthly things are incompatible with spiritual-mindedness (verse 8)—

"For ye were darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord."

From here to verse 15 the apostle speaks of light and darkness. Darkness is the natural state—the state of all the world. Light is the wisdom to realize that the natural way of the world, though appealing to the flesh, is darkness, and can end only in darkness. *All natural thought is darkness*—God's Word alone is light. A full realization of this is the finding of life.

"Let your light shine," said Jesus—quietly, gently, but brightly and consistently—let your Christlike character and conduct be your witness and your preaching of Christ to the world.

Verse 15: *"Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*

The world walks as fools, foolishly drifting away the time with their merriment and covetousness till death swallows them at last. This state of affairs is the evilness of the days. But the saints of God realize the preciousness of every passing hour as the brief time of opportunity to lay hold on wisdom and life.

Verse 17: *"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of God is."*

Don't be unwise by accepting the world's general view of things, or what yourself naturally thinks, but be anxious above all things to know and obey the will of *God* in everything.

Verse 18: *"Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit."*

Does this seem a strange comparison? A little meditation will manifest its fittingness. Wine has an exhilarating effect on the mind, giving a sense of well-being. It is typical of all the world's false and passing excitements.

"But be filled with the Spirit." The Spirit is to wine as the true is to the false. It gives in eternal reality what men vainly seek in wine. It too has an exhilarating effect and gives a sense of well-being and comfort, but this time it is not false and transitory, but deep and true and everlasting.

Verse 19: *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs"—not only among yourselves, but within your own selves—singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."*

What a joyful and delightful and desirable character is portrayed! No anxiety, no self-pity, no childish hurt feeling, *which are just the flesh's wounded vanity*, no dissatisfaction with present circumstances, *which is ingratitude to God*, no disquieting desire, *which is idolatry*; but relaxed, contented, joyful, thankful singing in the heart to God—perpetual sunshine within, regardless of what is without.

"Giving thanks always for all things" (verse 20).

Here is the perfect antidote for all the evils that trouble the mind. The true children of God are always so intensely and continually thankful that all that is unpleasant and unlovely is crowded out of their minds.

Verse 21: *"Submitting one to another in the fear of God."*

This is very important in our relationship in the Truth. It will naturally follow the development of a contented mind. The one who has accomplished contentedness is ready to contribute to general harmony and the wellbeing of others. There will be no self-assertion, no desires demanding attention and satisfaction—but a gentle, Christlike yielding and serving and

pleasing of others. Jesus said, *"I am among you as one that serveth."*

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From this point well into the following chapter, the apostle applies these divine principles to specific circumstances.

The first, occupying the remainder of this chapter, is the relationship of husbands and wives. It is a relationship of love, just as all relationships must be.

He states first, in two verses, that the wife must be subject to the husband in everything. Wisdom and harmony require that there be a recognized head and authority on whom the responsibility before God for all family decisions and arrangements rests. Any deviation from the divine standard is confusion.

But then, in nine verses, he speaks of the height and breadth of the love that is necessary to bring to fruition the fullness of the divinely-intended pattern from the beginning, as the beautiful type of the eternal, perfect union of Christ and his Bride.

Christ first, by the power of God, perfected himself, in the doing of which he laid down his life for his Bride. And now he ever liveth to make loving intercession for her—

Verses 25-27: *"Christ also loved the Ecclesia—the Called-out—and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word.*

"That he might present it to himself a glorious Ecclesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

Has he the power to do it? Can he accomplish this in those who wholly and unreservedly cast themselves upon him? *Who dares to deny it*—blindly measuring themselves by themselves and setting limits to the power of God?

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands in everything . . . This is a great mystery . . . I speak concerning Christ and the Ecclesia."

Are we part of the operation of this glorious divine mystery?

PART TWO—EPHESIANS, chapter 6

To whom does the apostle address himself next?—

Eph. 6:1: *"CHILDREN, obey your parents."*

This is one of the very few places in Scriptures addressed directly and specifically to children. It is very important. It is the one great thing that children have to be concerned with in pleasing God.

Parents will not always be perfectly just and right, for they too have much to learn, but that is not the children's concern—their command and duty is clear, if they desire to please God and be blessed by Him, and be used and useful in His purpose. The full command is—

*"Children, obey your parents **in the Lord.**"*

The obedience must be for, because of, and in harmony with the Lord. This is the great reason and motive of obedience. Parents will vary, just as masters will vary, but the one must be obeyed, and the other served faithfully, *as unto the Lord*. Obedience to parents is obedience to God, and disobedience to parents is disobedience to God.

Here again is the divine provision for family harmony and any violation of it creates serious

responsibility for all the evils that may follow.

The command does not cease when the child ceases to be dependent upon the parent. It becomes even stronger in later years as the child reaches developed maturity. Then it becomes—

Verse 2: "*Honor thy father and thy mother.*"

—a guiding principle through life. All God's arrangements are beautiful; all violations of them are ugly and self-destructive.

Verse 4: "*And ye, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.*"

What does the apostle mean? Why does he begin with and emphasize an aspect we might think very minor and negative?

"*Provoke not your children to wrath.*"

This command is worthy of much meditation. It warns of a danger that can destroy all good efforts, and one that only true divine love can protect against. In giving the same command to the Colossians, he adds—

"... *lest they be discouraged.*"

It does not mean that there should not be strict discipline for fear of arousing anger. The Scriptures are very clear on the necessity of that. In fact, *the necessity of strict discipline is what makes this command so essential*

The parent is in the position of the strong having complete control over the weak. The bully is latent in us all, ingrained in our fleshly natures. There are a thousand subtle ways in which a parent can provoke a child to wrath, agitating and arousing the natural evil of the flesh, often with great and pompous self-righteousness, and the parent can always save face by taking refuge behind his divinely-given authority.

The child has no recourse except to impotent, inward turmoil against sarcasm, and oppression, and impatience, and foolish teasing, and habitual unjustified harshness in giving instructions, and passing whims and passions of the flesh, and a discouraging attitude of petty fault-finding and antagonism.

"*Provoke not your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged.*"

There *must* be a basic foundation of gentle love, manifest even in correction. We cannot teach what we do not practice. Teaching is by example, and a bad, fleshly example is much more quickly imitated than a good one, that is the natural trend of the flesh. We cannot *teach* gentleness without consistently *manifesting* gentleness. Whatsoever is not done in godly love and patience is evil, and out of evil will come evil.

"*Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*"

"Nurture and admonition" means "*chastening and instruction,*" as the RV has it. Here again, it is "of the Lord"—"in the Lord." Everything must be done in the Spirit, and according to the instruction, of the Lord—within the circle of the Lord's blessing and superintendence—in *God's way*—or all will fail.

Verses 5 to 8 concern servants—our daily work—our relationship to our employers. No brother of Christ is a slack, or careless, or disinterested workman, whatever he may be doing. Christ's brethren are only those who do the will of his Father, and his Father's expressed will is that *everything* be done *heartily and cheerfully*, with singleness of heart, as if each task is done for God Himself. And work so done, whatever it may be, will be so accepted by God as service

to Him.

Brethren of Christ must be constantly on guard against drifting into the world's evil way of serving as little as possible, afraid of giving more than enforced minimum, always seeking more payment for less labor. *This is an evil, selfish, grasping manifestation of the flesh that brethren will have no part of.*

Verse 9 concerns those who in any way have oversight over others. Such are instructed to apply the same principles—to be more anxious to give abundant measure than to take. This is not the way the world's industry is run, and a brother of Christ will often find himself very much out of place.

Verse 10: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong **in the Lord**, and in the power of **His** might."*

(Always, and in everything, *"in the Lord"*). Jesus said to Paul—

"My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

And Paul, in response, recognizing the principle, said—

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

It is a contrast and a comparison between natural and spiritual strength. To the world, Christ's brethren are weak. Instead of being strong and self-assertive they are mild and yielding and submissive to evil. But the brave strength of the flesh is but a passing and impotent shadow—the foolish puffing up of a toad in a pond. The worms of the grave soon conquer the mightiest among men. We must seek a more substantial strength and satisfaction than that.

*"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of **His** might"*

How can *we* be strong in the power of *God's* might? Do these words have any real meaning? *If they have any meaning at all, then surely they refer to something very marvellous and unearthly.* Paul fervently prayed, earlier in the epistle (3:16), that God would grant them—

*". . . according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might **by His Spirit** in the inner man."*

—and that they may be—

". . . FILLED with all the fullness of God" (3:19).

And he speaks (3:20) of God being—

*". . . able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that worketh in us"***

Surely there is a glorious reality to these things that we must strive to attain unto—even the things of the Spirit of God which are foolishness to the natural man—the transforming power that can overcome the evil motions and reactions of the flesh and perfect characters of beauty and holiness in the fear of God.

Verse 11: *"Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."*

Paul continues his comparison between the strength of the flesh and of the Spirit. He says further (verse 12)—

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood . . ."

Paul's fight was not against *people*, and neither is ours. We are sometimes apt to forget this and slip into the world's way of antagonism and belligerence against people.

" . . . but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

What are these "*principalities and powers*"? The word translated "principality" is *archie*, commonly rendered "beginning," "old," "chief or ruler," throughout the New Testament.

Here it means leadership—rulership—control—dominion. The word for "powers" is not the Greek for power as *strength*, but the word meaning *authority*. What then is the headship and authority against which Paul fought?

We know it was not the *political* powers of the world, for he testified that such governments, though evil, were ordained by God for the present for general order among men, and he commanded submission and obedience to them.

When Jesus appeared to Paul on the way to Damascus (Acts 26:18), he said he purposed to send Paul to the Gentiles—

*" . . . to open their eyes, and to turn them from **darkness to light**, and from the power (authority—same word) of Satan unto God. "*

And Paul told the Romans brethren that they *had been* the servants, or slaves of *Sin*, but that they were *now* servants of God and of holiness. It was *this* kingdom, rulership, dominion, authority, of Sin against which Paul fought. This Kingdom of Sin is personified and corporealized in the Kingdom of Men, but it was not the Kingdom of Men as such that Paul fought. *He went deeper than any outward manifestations to the basic individual elements of fleshly motives and conduct.* Rom. 7:23—

*"I see a law in my members warring against the law of mind, and bringing me into **captivity** to the law of sin."*

That was the arena of Paul's warfare—the battle for, and within, each mind and heart. He is very clear in Eph. 2:2-3—

*"In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the **prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.*

*"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in **fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.**"*

What then was the "*spiritual wickedness in high (or heavenly) places*" of which he speaks at the end of verse 12 of Ephesians 6?

The Pharisees are surely the best illustration of that, and Jesus' encounters with them well illustrate the warfare of which Paul speaks. They sat in Moses' seat—in "heavenly places"—they even controlled the High Priesthood and the House of God and the worship He had established.

Among the ecclesias the same things soon became manifest, and we see the result in the ecclesiastical institutions of today. It is an ever-present danger and requires a perpetual warfare—*the mind of the flesh exalted and ruling in the very Temple of God*. All the things he warns them of in these two chapters illustrate the same warfare against Sin's principalities and powers, for *its seeds are in every heart*.

Verse 13: "*Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God.*"

We notice that the armor is "*of God*"—from God—for it is only in the power of *His* might

that we can be strong—

"That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day."

Let us never presume on our ability to stand. The Spirit warns:

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Without the whole armor of God we have no hope of success, but are like soldiers going to battle lacking essential equipment.

". . . and having done all, to stand."

—having accomplished the warfare—when it is all over—when the last enemy is destroyed—to be found among those who are found still standing alive on the battlefield, and to join in singing together the glorious victory song of Moses and the Lamb.

Verses 14 to 17 particularize the whole armor of God—the belt, or girdle, or binding together of *Truth*; the protective breastplate or heart-covering of *Righteousness* (*not* self-accomplished, but *"it is God that worketh in you"* and *"we are His workmanship, created unto good works"*), feet shod with the "preparation"—the preparedness—the eager, enthusiastic *readiness* to serve the Gospel of *Peace*—*"How beautiful are the swiftly running feet of him that bringeth good tidings of peace!"*

"Above all," the shield of *Faith*—belief, confidence, assurance—the unassailable conviction that *God is*, and that He *will* unfailingly reward all who diligently seek Him with all their heart. This shield will defend against every attack, every assault of the enemy—all his inflammatory darts of temptation and evil desire—all his shafts of discouragement and doubt.

And take *Salvation* for your helmet, or more fully, as in 1 Thess. 5:8—*"for an helmet the Hope of Salvation."* Why a helmet and a breastplate, if the Shield of Faith is all-sufficient protection? Because *"Faith without Works is dead."*

The head must be enclosed by the hope that Paul says comes by a tested steadfastness, and the heart must be covered by the righteousness that comes from God.

And finally, the Sword of the Spirit, which is the *Word of God* That is the weapon against all the rulership and authority and dominion of evil, both within and without. The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, the one and only weapon of offence—sharper and more piercing than any literal sword—searching and dividing between soul and spirit—between that which is fleshly and that which is of the Spirit. Only the Word can discern, and *teach us to discern*, our own hearts and motives.

He has mentioned six elements of the armor of God. What is the seventh? That he describes in verses 18-19—*Prayer*.

"Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Another version puts the thought perhaps a little clearer—

*"Use every kind of prayer and entreaty, and at every opportunity pray in the Spirit. **Be on the alert about it**; devote yourself constantly to prayer for all God's people."*

It is those who bring their lives to this state of devotion who will stand approved before Christ. There must be an urgency and intenseness about our supplications—a great consciousness of inadequacy and shortcoming and spiritual need.

"*Fear and trembling*" is the required frame of mind, as specified in verse 5. The slightest tendency to complacency, or to relax our efforts, or take salvation for granted while we please ourselves from day to day, is fatal. There must be a constant pleading—a constant sense of abasement and unworthiness—*never of despair*, but always of earnest entreaty. The Great Example was pre-eminently a man of constant, fervent prayer—

" . . . offering up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him Who was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7).

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Verse 19: "*And for me, that utterance may be given me that I may open my mouth boldly . . . as I ought to speak.*"

Even Paul's preaching was not something to be taken for granted, great and especially-appointed apostle to the Gentiles though he was. Even Paul felt the need of their prayers, that he might have the courage to carry on his ministry to the end. Paul, too, was just a man like us, of our own same weak flesh and blood. Weariness, and labor, and pain, and ridicule, were just as real and hard for him as for us.

"*To make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds*" (literally, "in chains," as RV).

An ambassador in chains! The great God of heaven had graciously sent an ambassador to men, fully verified by divine credentials, and they had put him in chains! *Had we forgotten that Paul was writing all these beautiful things from the confinement of a prison cell?*

Paul could have been very bitter about his unjust detention, and about not being able to be where he wanted to be. He could have depressed all around him by his childish moping and ungraciousness. But rather in all things he gave thanks and was not only *content*, but intensely *joyful*, accepting the will of the Lord as best, and doing all he could to spread the sunshine of his contentment and joy.

He concludes with his usual gracious salutation—peace, and love, and grace to all who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity.

"Sincerity" here is literally "incorruptness." He is speaking of the unchanging, spiritual, and enduring love that united Christ and his brethren—

"*Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with an imperishable and unconquerable love.*"

—G. V. Growcott, *The Berean Christadelphian*, October and November, 1956