

## THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

– EPH. 2:1-10. – MARCH 22. –

**Golden Text – "By grace are ye saved through faith." – Eph. 2:8.**

IT WAS from his Roman prison that the Apostle Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians, one of the most beautiful of all his letters to the churches; full of deep spiritual instruction. Its keynote is "in Christ," this expression, or its equivalents, occurring at least twenty times in this Epistle. As the first chapter points out that the Church is chosen in Christ Jesus, so our lesson shows that we have life in Christ alone; and, subsequently, the Epistle shows that all of God's blessings and favors toward his people are solely upon consideration that they are in Christ Jesus – members of the body of Christ, members of the New Creation. None can get clear-cut, distinct appreciation of the Apostle's meaning except those who clearly differentiate between the Church and the world, and discern their different hopes, built upon different promises; and perceive that in God's plan only the Church is being dealt with at the present time – that the world's hope is future, and very different from that of the Church, now being called as the body of Christ, "members in particular."

Our lesson opens with a dark picture, delineating the condition of the whole world through the fall; a condition of sin and worldliness under the power of Satan; in disobedience to God, under divine sentence of death, which has already operated to the extent of corruption in matters moral, mental and physical. The whole world, although creatures of God, and thus in a general sense his offspring, or children, ceased to be children of his favor, and became "children of wrath," through sin. The Apostle points out to the Ephesians that this had once been their wretched and terrible condition in common with the rest of mankind. How true is the picture even today! But let it be remembered that this is not merely the picture of the villains and outlaws of the world, but a picture of the world as a whole, including

its very best representatives. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." All are "children of wrath"; all are more or less under the power and control of the great Adversary; all are more or less controlled by the spirit of disobedience common to the whole world of mankind.

The only exceptions to this rule are the few who, like those addressed at Ephesus, have escaped this bondage, this corruption, this death state, this condition of alienation from God; – and surely these are few today, as they were in all but a "little flock" in the days of the Lord and at the time the Apostle wrote these words.

But the Apostle passes on to note what a great change came to the saints at Ephesus, on their acceptance of the Gospel; and how glad we are that a similar change has come to all who have become the Lord's saints, from that day to the present time! The experience of passing from death to life is the same in every instance, although the circumstances connected with the transformation may vary considerably. The steps of grace by which the Lord delivered us from being children of wrath and under power of the Adversary are set forth by the Apostle in the succeeding verses. Let us trace these steps, and note to what extent we have taken them, and to what extent our experiences correspond to those which the Apostle delineates.

Our recovery did not begin with something in ourselves, – good resolutions, good works, etc. We did not improve ourselves, and thus commend ourselves to God: on the contrary, God was the prime mover in our release and recovery. He was inspired to give us aid by the benevolence of his character, for he is "rich in mercy." He is rich in all of his attributes, rich in wisdom, rich in justice, rich in power, rich in love; but it is with the attribute of love and its corresponding benevolence, or mercy that the Apostle is here dealing. How necessary it is for us to get this thought of God's richness of mercy well rooted and grounded in our hearts – that we may never doubt his generosity, his kindness, his sympathy, his mercy toward all those who desire and

seek to know and to do his will! We need great faith in our heavenly Father, and it is only as we come to a clear knowledge of his glorious plan through the Word that we can exercise such a confidence in his love and mercy. The Adversary evidently desires that we should misunderstand our Creator, and, hence, has in every way possible sought to misrepresent his character and his plan; – and so successfully has he done so that at this very moment 999 [R3165 : page 89] out of every 1000 of those who profess his name are moved by fear of an eternity of torture, rather than by love for him and appreciation of his love for them.

The Apostle assures us that God had great love for us, even when we were dead in sins – when we were corrupt. It is difficult for us to think of God's greatness, purity and splendor of character, and of man's fallen condition – his corruption, mental, moral and physical – and then to understand how the holy Jehovah could have love for his fallen creatures. We may be sure that it was not the love of affection, such as he has for us now, as his sons, newly begotten of the spirit, but merely the love of sympathy. He beheld our miserable condition, and realized that an offer of release from our corruption, and of return to holiness and harmony with himself, would be joyfully appreciated and accepted by some – let us hope, by many; – and it was, undoubtedly, in view of such a response to his goodness and mercy that our Creator opened up for the world of mankind "a new way of life," in and through the Lord Jesus and his redemptive work.

But although this sympathetic love was toward the whole world, it has not yet been made generally known – it has not yet been practically exercised toward the world, but only toward a comparatively small proportion of the whole. Here and there the message has been sent to a special class – to those who have "an ear to hear" – the remainder being left for the present, to be dealt with later. (Isa. 35:5.) It is to those who had the "ear to hear", and who hearing, have responded and laid hold upon the grace of God in Christ, that the Apostle is now writing. He calls attention to the blessing of

such an experience. He does not here differentiate between those who have taken merely the first step of faith and obedience unto *justification*, and those who have gone on and taken also the second step of *full consecration* to the Lord, "even unto death"; but addresses the latter class only – those who, having made a full consecration to the Lord of their justified selves, have been begotten of the spirit, quickened and energized by that spirit as members of the body of Christ. The Apostle here interjects in parenthesis (2:5) a reminder that all this blessing has come to us, not of our worthiness, nor of our work, but by divine "grace are ye saved"; we reached this position in the new life, this reckonedly saved position, by faith; – delivered from the sentence of sin, saved from the darkness and delusion of the Adversary,\* saved from the wrath of God, and brought, instead, into his loving favor. Oh, how great is the salvation which accompanies a complete conversion and full consecration to the Lord! What a wonderful change it brings to us, in thought, in word and in act! And yet this is only the beginning of our salvation, or what the Apostle elsewhere speaks of as being "saved by *hope*." (Rom. 8:24.) While thus saved by grace now, we are still waiting for a further salvation, by grace – "for the grace [salvation] that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" – the First Resurrection.

\*The Apostle was a firm believer in a personal devil, and a Bible study of his teachings on this subject would be profitable to many of the Lord's people in the present time, when, through Christian Science and other deceptive teachings, the very existence of the Adversary is being denied, and thus many are the more exposed to his wiles and deceptions. Note the following references to Satan by the Apostles: Acts 13:10; 26:18; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; Eph. 4:27; 6:11; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 3:6,7; 5:15; 2 Tim. 2:26. Our Lord also frequently referred to the Adversary: Matt. 4:10; 12:26; 25:41; Mark 4:15; 8:33; Luke 10:18; 22:31; John 8:44; 14:30.

All that, by the Lord's grace, we shall ultimately have through the "change" of the resurrection as members of the body of Christ – all the

heavenly things, including full fellowship and communion with the Father and with our Lord – are reckoned as having their beginning in the present life. He, therefore, who knows not such a beginning of the new life, and its holy spirit now, has no reason whatever to believe that he has been begotten of the holy spirit – that he is a new creature in Christ. These new creatures are reckoned as having been raised up out of the state of sin and death into a new condition of life, and love of righteousness. Symbolically, they are ushered into the Holy of the Tabernacle, where they have the light of the Golden Lampstand, and partake of the spiritual Shewbread, and may offer the spiritual Incense to God, and have fellowship with him "*in Christ Jesus*" – as members of the *Ecclesia*, "the Church which is *his body*." This is a figurative resurrection from the dead – a figure and earnest of the real resurrection from the dead which shall come to each of these if they prove loyal to God and faithful to their covenant as members of the body of Christ – to be dead with their Head, that they may also live with him, through participation in his resurrection. – Rom. 6:5,8.

Counting the new life as beginning now – counting ourselves as members of the New Creation, which by and by is to be glorified, we ask ourselves with the Apostle, What great thing must God work, then, in us and for us, eventually, if present foretastes of his goodness and grace are so superlatively grand? The Apostle answers such a query (vs. 7) assuring us that "in the ages to come God will show forth the *exceeding riches* of his grace through [in] his kindness toward us [who are] in Christ Jesus." He does not attempt to tell us what these riches will amount to. He would have us see that God is rich in mercy, rich in grace, **[R3166 : page 90]** and rich in every other grand and estimable quality, and he would have us trust that so rich a Father will do for his adopted children "exceeding abundantly more than we could ask or think." Indeed, he assures us elsewhere that it is impossible for him to explain or for us to comprehend "the riches of our inheritance." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of *man* the things which God hath prepared for them that loved him;

but God hath revealed them unto *us* by his spirit." – 1 Cor. 2:9,10; Eph. 3:19.

Nevertheless, the revelation by his spirit is only an approximate one. We cannot clearly discern those unseen things, we cannot comprehend them with our finite natural minds. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be;" but with the new mind we can, even though but vaguely, grasp the thought of our Heavenly Father's riches of grace and love, and can draw analogies from the things of this present life, and thus gain some idea of the glorious things which await us. As we see our heavenly Father's provision for the natural man, – a little lower than the angels, – as we look at the beautiful flowers of earth, and taste of its delicious fruits, it is but another step for the consecrated heart to realize that the rich Father who planned so beneficently for his human sons, and who permits so many of these blessings to come to mankind, even in its fallen condition, is no less rich in love and mercy toward his spiritual sons, and will make abundant provision for them also. And that as he has provided harmonies of music for the natural ear, and pleasant odors and flavors and scenes for the senses of the natural man, so, only on a more exalted plane, there will be gratifications for all the high qualities of heart and of mind for the New Creation; – there will be what will correspond to the present beauties of nature, but higher and grander, for those who shall gain the new nature. There will be that which will correspond to the flowers and the birds, the fields and the trees, the mountains and the valleys. There will be that which will correspond to the most delightful gratifications of the eye, the ear, the nose and the mouth, and to the most pleasurable thrills of the heart. Thus does faith, based upon a knowledge of the riches of grace and love in our heavenly Father, enable the new creature to see the things invisible and to rejoice in the wonderful things only partially disclosed at the present time.

From this exalted position and favor and fellowship with God, associated in the heavenlies in Christ, we are enabled by faith to rejoice in those promises of our Father's Word, which assure us that

we shall be permitted to cooperate with him in the great work of the next age, the Millennial Age, in showing forth his praises, in lifting up so many as will of the world of mankind out of their present fallen condition, – up to full restitution of that which was lost in Adam and redeemed by Christ.

We notice (vss. 8-10) how carefully the Apostle seeks to guard us against the thought that any of these blessings have come to us on account of our own merit. He reiterates, "By grace are ye saved through faith." And if by grace, no longer of works, as he elsewhere points out. (Rom. 11:6.) If of works it would not be of grace. As members of the fallen race we were incapable of doing any work which our holy God could accept – we were dead, corrupted, foul, under condemnation as children of wrath, when he had mercy upon us, and opened up the way of life. Our present standing, therefore, as new creatures, is not the result of anything that the old creature did, or could have done. It is not of ourselves; it is a gift of God. This lesson must be thoroughly appreciated, else we will be continually in danger of falling. The grace is not of ourselves, certainly, and we may say also that although *we exercised* some faith at the beginning (else we could never have come to him at all, to accept his favors), yet the faith by which we were enabled to accomplish our consecration even unto death, and thus to become new creatures in Christ, was not of ourselves – we had no such faith when God laid hold upon us. He developed in us that faith by the revelations of his love, through his promises, through his Word.

If our present standing were the result of our own efforts or "works," there would probably be some room for boasting; – it would imply that we were not so fallen that we could not have lifted ourselves out of the miry clay of sin, – on the line of the Evolution Theory. But such theories are not recognized in the divine Word and must not be recognized by any who would maintain their standing as new creatures *in Christ*. On the contrary, so far from considering the New Creature as an evolution of the old creature, the Apostle would have

us understand distinctly that it is a new and separate creation. We were created in Christ Jesus, God's workmanship – prepared *for* good works, but not *by* good works.

The Apostle assures us that God foreordained that this New Creation should progress in good works. To become new creatures in Christ we gladly surrendered our all to the Lord, that we might know his will and do it; and having accepted us in Christ, he informs us that it is his good pleasure that our entire life should be renewed, that we should discard entirely from our hearts, our minds, our wills, everything sinful, everything unholy, and that so far as possible our mortal bodies should be brought into subjection to our new minds, and that we should walk in newness of life, even on this side the veil – thus giving evidence of our **[R3166 : page 91]** sincerity, developing character and becoming meet "for the inheritance of the saints in light," in glory. Whoever is not disposed to walk in the Lord's ways of holiness and opposition to sin, and in cultivation of the mind, the spirit of the Lord, the holy spirit, surely deceives himself, if he thinks he has passed from death unto life, and that he is a new creature in Christ Jesus.

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