

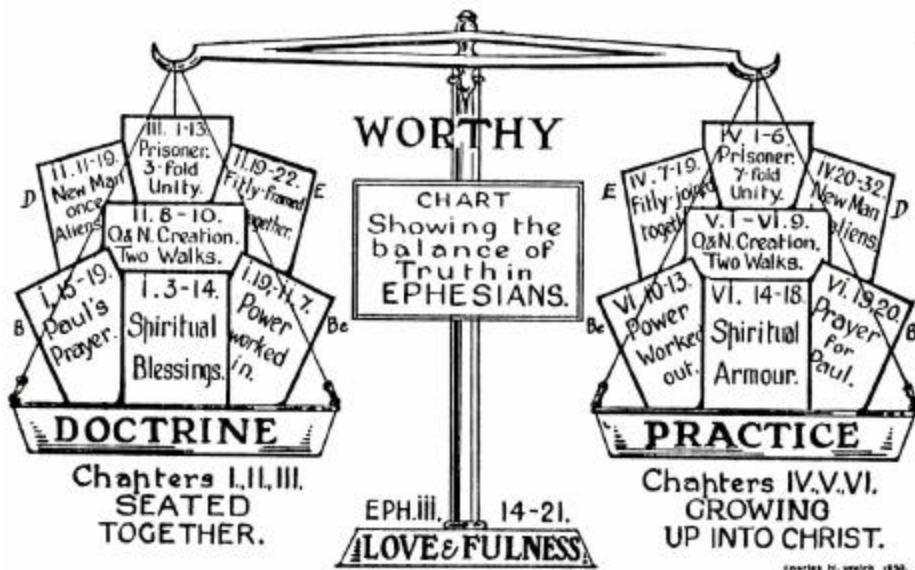
Dispensational truth and practical Christianity

Among the many charges brought against “Dispensational truth” is the one that it is so unpractical; that these folk who have their heads in the stars, who talk about “principalities and powers” and “mysteries” have no message of practical value, their teaching making men hypocritical, mystical and exclusive. Now if these charges could be substantiated they would be serious indeed. But we are glad to say that they exist only in the imagination of those who, when criticising the teaching of the mystery, are somewhat like the would-be teachers of the apostle’s day:

“Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim. 1:7).

It is our object in this pamphlet to show how intensely practical these epistles of the mystery are, and we feel sure that those who desire the truth will gladly open the Book so that it may speak for itself.

First of all let us notice the testimony of the Epistle to the Ephesians to the value of practical truth. In chapter 4 we find the apostle beseeching his hearers “to walk worthy of their calling”, and we notice that this exhortation comes practically midway through the epistle. Upon examination we discover that this epistle is so written that there are seven sections in chapters 1 to 3 dealing with doctrine, and these are balanced by seven sections in chapters 4 to 6 which deal with practice. Further, that every section in the doctrinal portion of the epistle has a corresponding member in the practical portion. For example, in Ephesians 2:19-22, where we read of a “temple fitly framed together”, in Ephesians 4:7-19, we read of a “body fitly joined together”. The word “worthy” in Ephesians 4:1 suggests a balance, as in Romans 8:18, and the whole balance of doctrine and practice may be seen at a glance in the diagram on the next page.



A detailed examination of the practical teaching of Ephesians is beyond the scope of a pamphlet of this nature; we must content ourselves with a few examples. Look how in chapter 4 the apostle not only gives the injunction to “put off” the old man and to “put on” the new, but he emphasizes the injunction with a most searching word concerning the thief who was to steal no more, but to labour with his hands: to avoid any form of corrupt speech, to put away all anger, to forgive even as God for Christ’s sake had forgiven. Who is there among those who cry the loudest for “something practical”, who would say that their manner of life compares favourably with this standard?

Again, in Ephesians 5 the “walk” which is worthy is further expanded. This walk must be “in love” (5:2); “as light” (5:8), and “as wise” (5:15), and moreover, each one of these sub-divisions of the walk are followed by the most comprehensive statements concerning the daily life and conduct. These three divisions are further expanded in Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9, and the reader is not permitted to generalise, but is forced to face particular aspects of practical truth. Wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters, each have their place, and we wonder to what extent those who say dispensational truth is not practical would stand the test of this practical section if it were applied to their home and ways.

Turn to the epistle to the Philippians; where else in all the New Testament shall we find an epistle like it for practical teaching? The wondrous revelation of Philippians 2 concerning the Lord Who, from being equal with God stooped to the death of the cross, was not primarily given to teach anything about the Person of the Lord, but was given as an example, that we might know what true unselfishness meant:

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4).

Where shall we find such trust and tranquillity, such practical faith as that of Philippians 4:6,7 :

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”.

Look at the example set by the apostle:

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be independent (as the word may be translated). I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:11-13).

Or turn to the last epistle that Paul wrote before his martyrdom (2 Timothy) and listen to his emphasis upon not being ashamed:

“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8).

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know Whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12).

“He oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain” (2 Tim. 1:16).

Can anything be more practical than the following words to Timothy:

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

How clear cut are his words in 2 Timothy 2:4 :

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life (his livelihood); that he may please Him Who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4).

Doctrine and practice are balanced beautifully in 2 Timothy 2:19 :

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His (doctrine). And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (practice).

The apostle moreover could point to his own consistent conduct while preaching the truth to others:

“But thou hast fully known my *doctrine, manner of life*” (2 Tim. 3:10).

Would to God that all those who know something of doctrine realized more and more the necessity for corresponding practice.