

STUDIES IN EPHESIANS #51

THE TREE OF REASON

FOR THIS CAUSE... Eph. 3:1,14. Now we are back where we were starting in Vol. 9 No. 7. Paul starts this chapter with these words and then digresses into a parenthesis concerning his apostleship. Again here in verse 14 he repeats the words and goes on into the prayer.

FOR THIS CAUSE links for us chapter 2 and the wonderful prayer in chapter 3. The prayer is the outcome of the great truths he has given to us in chapter 2.

It is because of the great fact of our being quickened with Christ, raised with him above all that is mundane, and being seated with Him in the heavenlies that this prayer is being uttered. And more than that, it is also because that our great salvation is not of works, but unto good works and that we are His workmanship, a new creation in Christ Jesus in contrast to the old creation in Adam with its death and destruction. It is because that we Gentiles who once were far off are now made nigh by the blood of Christ, that He then is our peace, that Jew and Gentile have been made a new creation, one man, so making peace, and that Christ thru His apostle has preached peace to those that were far off and to those that were nigh (Gentile and Jew) and so made peace. And lastly, we have a citizenship now in the holy of holies, fitly framed together in a building which is growing, and all builded together for an habitation of God thru the Spirit.

Paul has all these facts in mind as he makes the great prayer in Eph. 3. I suppose that there are those who would say, What more could one wish? Why make prayer here?

Many people do seem to be satisfied with mere dogma and are not stirred to prayer. They do not seem to have any desire to talk with God about these things. I suppose they would take all for granted and never think to talk it over or to thank God for such wondrous blessing. What a thankless creature man is!

But not so Paul. Contemplation of great doctrines puts Paul on his knees. He praises God and prays for the saints. His rejoicing is so great that it runs over. He must talk with God about it and thank and praise Him.

How about us? Can we find time to stop and praise and thank Him? Or, do we keep on saying, Gimme, gimme? Think! THINK! T-H-I-N-K! Do these great truths of chapter 2 mean anything to us? Are they our possessions and are they a reality to us? Do we believe that God really meant them for us?

May we be given the spiritual perception that we may understand and appreciate what God has done for us, that we may realize that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. May we realize the awfulness of the sin and darkness from which we have been lifted that we might behold His glorious face and that we might realize what it means to be accepted in the Beloved.

Some of these things MUST be grasped before we can make an intelligent study of the prayer in chapter 3. Let us be ready.

Trees are usually known by their fruits. The reasonings, philosophies, inventions, and foolish ideas of today are the fruit of the tree of reason of which our foreparents chose to partake. Reason is a poor substitute for the intuitive knowledge with which the first man was endowed. But he made the trade. Reasoning and invention still bring death.

Adam was made the federal head of the old creation. He failed. With that failure came in sin and death. Unless some outside force is made to bear on the situation, that death is final, the last word. Adam knew that to be so, for he could see death all about him and knew what it was. Death is the grand finale to all human hopes, works, and aspirations.

But in God there is hope. He has a way to salvage a little from the wreckage. But it is so much different from what human beings think of as salvage. Ordinary salvage is something that is marred and something well nigh useless. It is something that bears the marks of the ruin from which it came. Salvage articles are worth little on the market. They are considered bargains by those who cannot afford the new.

Out of the wreckage God has taken a new creation. The federal Head of this new creation is Christ Jesus, God manifest in flesh. If any man be in Christ he is a new creation. So it is that those who are in Christ are the new creation of which He is the Head. But the surprising part of it is that this salvage material is recreated and is much better than Adam ever was! Altho the old creation is subject to death from which there is no resurrection, every last one of the new creation will be made alive. As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Some men, with their poor reasoning, will try to make us believe that Christ has become the Head of the old creation, not the new, and therefore all that are in Adam will be made alive. It is the new creation that will be made alive, not the old. Death is the end of the old.

By the same kind of foolish reasoning, men would have us believe that death is done away with by resurrection. They have no idea of the extent and terrible nature of death. It is not so simple as they would have us believe. Death was in the universe before man was ever on the scene. It was the marring of God's perfect creation. That is why that God's first purpose and promise was life. God promised life before the ages began. It was promised in Christ. It was promised by God who cannot lie. Resurrection is a part of the program of repair, but not destruction of death itself. We do not put out the fire by building a new house!

What we need most is to quit relying on our reasoning and turn back to revelation. God's Word is a revelation. It does not appeal to our reason so much as it does to our faith. And so revelation is useless without faith.

Wishful thinking is not faith. Faith is believing what God has said and acting on it. Faith is the certainty of things hoped for.

PITFALLS

All too often a great structure of argument has fallen because of a false premise. Taking something for granted is risky business when searching for truth. Here are some examples as warnings along this line.

1. In 1 Cor. Paul tells them that they are babes, that they are in a very immature state as Christians. They are babes because they are carnal. Now it is a great mistake to assume that the Ephesian church was this same people grown up to maturity, since in Eph. there is no room for babes, for immaturity. The hope of the Corinthians was the hope of Israel, the coming of the Lord to the earth to set up His kingdom and rule over the nations of the earth. But the Ephesian saints had an entirely different hope and calling. They were not the same people grown up at all. There is a time coming when the earth calling represented by the Corinthians will come to full growth, to maturity. That will come when the Lord deals with the kingdom calling again.

2. Another common mistake is that some assume that the 10 tribes of Israel were lost. This has led to all sorts of false doctrines. But the truth of the matter is that when they were overcome, not nearly so many were taken captive from their country as there were of Judah. Neither was the land of Israel left desolate. It is also true that many of the members of the 10 tribes went down and strengthened the hand of Judah and lived among them. So it is not surprising that James should write his epistle to the 12 tribes. They were in existence. Paul also speaks of the 12 tribes instantly serving God day and night. There is nothing in the Bible anywhere to give the slightest indication that 10 tribes are lost. Yet this tradition persists. It is a favorite among many who deny the blood and then hope to obtain blessing and favor by blood relationship with God's nation, Israel.

3. A great error has permeated Christendom for ages which has closed the eyes of people to dispensational truth. It is the belief that God's people, Israel, was rejected and set aside at Calvary. Of course then, the Lord's prayer on the cross for Israel went unanswered, if that notion is true. But can we ever imagine that He should ask anything of the Father and have it denied Him? Was not Israel forgiven and given another opportunity to accept salvation thru Christ whom they had in ignorance murdered? That is the very heart of the gospel during Acts. Because of the answer to that prayer, Peter preached at Pentecost repentance so that the Lord could come back to restore all things. Paul preached to the Jew first as he was ordered by the risen Lord. It was not till Acts 28:28 that the Jew was finally rejected and set aside till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

4. Too many have fallen for the idea that when Israel was set aside, that the new covenant fell upon the Gentiles. They ignore Jer. 31:31. Gentiles are saved by grace today, not by any covenant. We must be careful lest we frustrate the grace of God.

STEPS TO A GOAL #1

At the very outset it must be recognized that the most satisfactory way to teach the Word is by exposition. We already have too much preaching from texts which are used so often for pretexts to air some pet theory. Being human, it is unavoidable that some of one's own thots should creep in. It is best to keep as close to the Word as possible. This we shall endeavor to do, using every opportunity to let Scripture explain itself.

Of course this will not appeal to the man of the world, nor is that our intention. We hope that we are writing to God's nobility, those that search the Scriptures daily to find truth. God's nobility believe what God has said; the man of the world does not. That is the difference.

Knowledge comes before believing. Some people will say that they believe the Bible from cover to cover. But upon a little questioning, one will find that they have never read it thru. They have not told the truth. One cannot believe without knowledge. You cannot believe what I say unless you have heard me speak. You cannot believe God's Word unless you know what it is. So we begin by assuming that we are speaking to folks that know God's Word and believe it. But there is a further step. We sincerely believe that this knowledge and belief will soon become corrupt unless there is action. It is said of faith that it is believing what God has said and acting on it.

The Scriptures reveal, not a creed, but a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not what we believe, but Whom we believe that counts. The written Word and the incarnate and living Word are closely woven together. The mystery of God is Christ. May we all seek to know this great mystery.

In his book, *The Two Natures in the Child of God*, Mr. Bullinger has shown us that the new nature is nourished and makes growth by the Word. This is the way to come to a full stature, the maturity that is demanded of the members of the body of Christ. This same food for the new nature will at the same time starve and weaken the old nature, the desires of the flesh. There is no real Christian growth outside a study and knowledge of the Scriptures. There are no substitutes.

One of the first things we must learn is the fact that God says what He means and means what He says. Then we must learn the difference between interpretation and application. Text and context are important in this study. Even the devil can take texts out of contexts and use them for proof texts to prove anything. Many of his followers are doing just that. We must beware of any such handling of the sacred Word.

Any ministry of ours, any building of ours, must be placed on the right foundation. That foundation has been laid. It is Christ. It may be that some will build thereon with unworthy materials, but the foundation comes first. The building material is the next consideration. It must be truth if it is to abide. We cannot use vain philosophies of men. The test is by fire.

TODAY'S PROGRAM

BEGINNERS' CORNER #17

There is a great deal of confusion as to what is God's program for today. Some say that it is earthly, that all that is to be done is for the Lord to come and set up His kingdom. Already many who have an earthly kingdom in mind have set up kingdom halls all over the land. Even years ago, 1843, and also in 1844 many of them went to hilltops on a certain day dressed in night clothes expecting the Lord to come. But He did not come. Then some said that it would be in 1914. But still He has not come.

They got God's program all mixed up. The earth is only a part of the stage, or maybe one of the stages where the final drama is to take place. Not only are there to be wars and rumors of wars on the earth, but there is also to be war in heaven.

The earth was put under a curse and there will have to be a restoration of it, it is true. But long before that there was an overthrow in the heavenlies. There must also be a restoration there. And that is God's program for today.

Before the overthrow, when it was still in an incipient stage, long ages before man was ever on the scene, a people was chosen who were to have all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. At the overthrow, before the ages ever began, there was a promise of restoration, eternal life, in Christ Jesus. This was kept a great secret or mystery for ages and generations. That way Satan had no way of knowing just what God was going to do about the situation and so as long as he was in ignorance, he was not able to do anything about it.

Israel was to be a channel of blessing to the peoples of the earth so as to restore the earth to its former beauty as it was at the time of Adam and Eve. That will be fulfilled in the Millennium. That was God's program from Gen. 12 at the call of Abraham till the end of Acts. That program has been interrupted for a season till another is completed and then it will be resumed.

We are living in that time of interruption. The great secret or mystery has at last been revealed. Satan has lost no time in getting busy trying to spoil it. He has done a good job of it so far. He has gotten the minds of people on about everything else but what God wants them to think about. There is a feeling that the time is not long now and that soon the evil one will meet his defeat.

God's chosen people for the heavenlies are scattered all over the globe; hardly enough in one place to have a dozen at meeting. In spite of intervening miles, there is a blessed fellowship, a unity Satan has not been able to destroy. He has tried desperately to get the minds and affections of God's chosen off things above and on things of the earth. A few unwary ones who were not established have been caught in his net. Paul had warned these in his epistle to the Colossians. They are without excuse. The Word is sufficient to establish the believer and make him proof against the wiles of the devil. Minding earthly things is a deadly snare.

It seems strange that people should be so dogmatic in their refusal to accept Acts 28:28 as a beginning of a L.O.-AM condition for Israel. One would think, to hear the arguments, that it was impossible for God to set aside Israel temporarily. And yet as we look back thru Bible history, this is exactly the punishment that was meted out to the Jew time and again for his disobedience and hardness of heart.

Forty years they wandered in the wilderness for doubting God's promise that they could possess the land. They sojourned in Egypt. Four times they were carried off to Babylon, etc.

Yet, as we come down to the crucifixion of Christ by the Jews, these same people, who believe thoroly in the judgments of the past concerning Israel, are blinded to this one.

Who is to say that Israel, having performed the most heinous in a long list of crimes (the crucifixion), is going to escape this judgment? How foolish is the heart of man when he reads that such is to happen, sees it happen, then refuses to believe it because it violates his religious beliefs!

Christ gave partial judgment when He said, O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, THOU THAT KILLEST THE PROPHETS, AND STONEST THEM WHICH ARE SENT UNTO THEE... BEHOLD YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE. Matt. 23:37, 38.

Do we imagine to believe in our minds that all prophecy is to go down the drain, all punishment set aside, all history to be burned just because we WILL to think that the Jew is, was, and always shall be first?

Did not God give up the nations back in Gen. 11 for their unbelief, when they were His people? Is there any valid reason now that He cannot give Israel over to a reprobate mind for the crime against His Son?

John says, HE CAME UNTO HIS OWN, AND HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT.

Paul says, BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT.

Hosea says, BECAUSE OF THEIR FORNICATIONS THEY ARE NO LONGER MY PEOPLE.

You can read these passages any way you desire; forward, backward, upside down; in the end they say, WHO HATH BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM IS THE ARM OF THE LORD REVEALED?

You will note that these passages form a structure which is a literary miracle testifying to the inspiration of the Word of God.

- A. CAME UNTO HIS OWN) John
- B. OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT)
- C. BE IT KNOWN TO YOU)
- D. SALVATION TO GENTILES) Paul
- C. THEY SHALL HEAR IT)
- B. BECAUSE OF FORNICATIONS) Hosea
- A. NO LONGER MY PEOPLE)

And so Israel passes from the scene. The dispensation of the kingdom is held in escrow until the return of the Lord and the gathering of His people. See Psa. 11:11 and Deut. 30:3-5.

THE LORD... WILL RETURN AND GATHER THEE FROM ALL THE NATIONS. --DENTON C. ABBEY

THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

-THE EDITOR'S DESK-

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD WHICH TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD. Jn. 1:29. Read this very carefully. It does not say that He takes away the sin of believers, or of the righteous. It is the sin of the world. It does not mean the world has quit sinning. It is not that, for He died and the world has gone right on sinning. It is the fact that He has taken away the guilt. It is forgiveness!

Paul claims to have been an apostle of the reconciliation too. He defines reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5:19, TO WIT, THAT GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES UNTO THEM. This is stating in other words the same thing that John the Baptist had said. Sin is not imputed to the world. The guilt is taken away. For what purpose? That they might come unto Him and receive the gift of eternal life. There is no barrier of guilt of sin between man and God today. That barrier was taken away. There is no place for fear of being too great a sinner. He died for all that their trespasses might not be imputed against them. Sin has been taken away if there is to be access.

This is a most difficult thing for the world to believe. With its gods of cruelty and retribution who have to be pacified and propitiated by all kinds of works and sacrifices so that men will not be tortured and tormented in the future life, such a gospel of grace is unbelievable. But once the man of the world does grasp the fact that all such fears are groundless and made of no effect by the grace of God in the sacrifice of His Lamb, they are transformed upon believing it and receiving the unspeakable gift, life.

Remember this; these statements are unqualified in God's Word. No "if's" or "but's" about it. You can never change truth by refusing to believe. It is truth still. All men have been reconciled to God. That reconciliation is universal today. All men have been forgiven. That is universal today too. There are no exceptions. Even Hitler! I hear someone say? Yes, even Hitler was reconciled, but we do not know that he took advantage of his position and received the gift of life. But even those a thousand times worse than Hitler also stand forgiven. I speak of those who pose as shepherds of the sheep and deny the Word of God, the truth of the Bible. They too may step right up and take the gift of eternal life. That is the grace gospel.

This was all made possible because of the great love wherewith He loved us. It was thru the death of the Lamb on Calvary. God has removed every obstacle in the way of our receiving life. But we must accept the gift.

Man cannot turn away from this position and refuse the gift except he trample under foot the precious blood of Christ. Did you ever think of that? God has done everything to give man life except to cram it down his throat. There are some who would have God do that!

Whosoever will accept life as a gift may have it. Whosoever means YOU. God has done all He can. The next move is yours. Watch your step!



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ANNIVERSARY. April 13th will be a day of open house and special program for the tenth anniversary of the Truth For Today Bible Class. Watch this space next month for details.

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