

STUDIES IN EPHESIANS #56

STEPS TO A GOAL #6

THAT YE MAY BE FILLED UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. Eph. 3:19 RV.

The prayer of Eph. 3 may be outlined with just 3 words, STRENGTHENED, COMPREHEND, and FILLED. We have examined 2 of these and now are ready to take up the last one.

These words at first glance may not seem to have any great significance. But the more we look at them, the more we are convinced that here is not only the goal for the believer in the dispensation of the mystery, but that it is a revelation of the goal of the ages.

The word fullness is what takes the eye. What does it mean? Does it mean the character and attributes of God? Certainly that cannot be the answer. There is no hope that any mortals can ever become omniscient, omnipresent, etc.

The word in the Greek is Pleroma. Its first occurrence is in Matt. 9:16. There it is used of a piece of cloth that is used to patch a rent in a garment. It is a fullness that is used to heal a schism, a division or rent.

God's creation has had something happen to it some time that has produced just such an example. When man was placed on earth he was to replenish it, or to refill it. When the flood depopulated the earth, the survivors were told to replenish it.

Sin has entered the earth. Nothing but the fullness of God can heal it. The heavens have been rent. It will take the same patch there. Earth dwellers will some day be filled unto the fullness of God and the rent by sin here will be closed. Heaven dwellers, the church of the mystery will some day be filled unto the fullness of God and the rent there will be closed. The latter is the goal mentioned here in Eph. 3:19.

While we are yet in these sinful bodies and in the presence of sin daily, God seems to be far off, even as after the sin in the garden. But the threefold goal of the prayer in this chapter looks forward to the time when this will no longer be true, and when God can again dwell with and in mankind. Then He will be all and in all.

There are several steps in all this plan for the ages. There is an enemy that has to be dealt with. There has to be a trying of men to see whether they will serve God or no. Then there will have to be a new earth for the earth dwellers. It is equally necessary that there also be a new heavens, for the present heavens are unclean in His sight. Both the earth and the heavens have been defiled with the slime of the old serpent as he has slithered his way hither and yon thru all of them.

Man, in his rebellion and selfishness, has defiled and ruined the earth. He sets up monuments to celebrate his murders and destruction. All trace of these must go and only righteousness dwell in the new earth.

Satan and his fallen angels have marred the heavens, which will have to be cleansed and repopulated by the saints and faithful.

This filling with His fullness begins here and now. Let us be careful not to miss it.

There is one great motif or theme that runs thru the whole Bible. In fact the Word has just one subject. This theme or subject is a Person. He said of the Scriptures, THEY TESTIFY OF ME.

There are those who try to find the meaning of the Scriptures apart from Him. But it is like trying to unlock the door without a key. Those who do not confess and honor Him never get to know the Scriptures. Neither do they get to know God, for Christ is the true and living way to God. There is no other way or approach.

We look at the whole creation and wonder at its perfections, whether it be what is seen thru the telescope or that seen thru the microscope. All is perfection except where the evil one has marred it. We look at the Book and we again find perfection. It has a definite design. It bears the marks of the Creator.

There is a good news, a gospel for every age. Altho it may vary from age to age in some details, yet the gospel is a Person. He who preaches the gospel, preaches Christ. The oldest and most comprehensive aspect of the gospel is the good news of the eternal life promised in Christ before the ages began (Eph. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:2). All other gospels that may be proclaimed in the Word are but branches from this one. The gospel of God is concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

From the viewpoint of the world, the believer has a lonely walk in this age. His pathway is that of a pilgrim. He is a foreigner, having his citizenship elsewhere. In the affairs of the world he is treated as a stranger. The world does not know him.

There are good reasons for this state of affairs. The hope of the believer today is unseen. The things of the world are only temporal, having to do with time. But the hope has to do with things eternal, things the world knows nothing about and cares less. There is wondrous provision for the walk of the believer. The polestar is Christ. The believer walks with his eyes on Him. He will lead to a haven of rest.

Christ is not merely a way-shower, as some would have us believe, but He is the Way, the true and living way. What wondrous provision has been made!

Christ is Head of all creation by right because He is the Creator. His Headship has been challenged. There has been a temporary disturbance, a setback, in the order of things. Satan, sin and death have to be taken care of. So the process of redemption is on. Much has been done. Much yet has to be realized. If we fail to see something of the overall plan and purpose of God for the ages, the present events may puzzle us and even at times throw us into despair. In the short span of time that man has been on this sphere, wrong seems to have been on the throne most of the time. But victory is in sight for those who have eyes to see.

We know that all things were created by Christ and for Christ. The goal cannot be reached until the last enemy has been put down and all things subjected to HIM.

SEARCH AND SEE

HOW TO APPROACH PHILLIPIANS

Is Luke 16:19-31 a true incident or just a parable? Matt. 13:34; Luke 8:10.

What does being clothed in purple signify? John 19:2, 5.

Who were to wear the linen? Ex. 28:39-41.

To whom is this passage addressed? Verse 14.

To what class then do you think the rich man belonged? Verses 13-18.

What offices then had this man usurped by wearing the purple and fine linen?

Was that a challenge to the Lord's authority? Prophet, Priest, King (Matt. 12:6, 41, 42).

Is it wrong to fare sumptuously every day if one can pay the bills?

Does the Word say that the rich man was a wicked or unsaved man?

Does the Word say that the beggar was a righteous or saved man?

Did the rich man have any responsibility toward the beggar? Deut. 15:7, 8.

Who did help the poor man?

What was carried by the angels?

What was Abraham's bosom before Abraham was?

How did the rich man get to this place if he had been dead and buried?

If he were dead and buried, then where did he get eyes and a tongue?

How did he know Lazarus? Eccl. 9:5.

Could it be that he was in a new resurrection body? 2 Cor. 5:1-5.

Suppose that the resurrection is over already and the rich man has a new body, is the new body subject to torments?

How can the rich man devise such a plan in hell? Eccl. 9:10.

How can he have love for his brethren? Eccl. 9:6.

How can Abraham hear? Psa. 31:17; 115:17.

How could the rich man see? Psa. 88:6.

If hell is a place of darkness, then what about the flame?

If Abraham and Lazarus could see into this supposedly awful place, do you think they could enjoy their own place?

As a conclusion, if a man has good things in this life, what can he expect hereafter?

To obtain blessing hereafter, must we all give away what we have and beg?

Does the Word say that Abraham's bosom is paradise or heaven? Give references, please!

How did Abraham get there? Gen. 25:8, 9.

Would it add to your bliss in the hereafter to see people tormented?

Is there any other Scripture besides this passage in Luke that would so much as hint that the dead are alive and conscious?

How about David? Psa. 17:15.

How about Job? Job 14:14, 15. Compare his CHANGE with 1 Cor. 15:51, 52.

Does this passage teach the way of salvation?

If not, what then does it teach?

Did the brothers believe when One did rise from the dead? Read the Acts of the Apostles.

Now think it over. Which agrees best with all other Scripture, taking this as a parable or as a real happening? Be honest about it.

Just as Ephesians tells us what we are in Christ, so Philippians tells us what we should be with Christ in us. It is remarkable that in Philippians we find no doctrine set forth as we do in Eph. 1-3. It is concerned mainly with the practical side of dispensational teaching. It is taken for granted that the reader already knows the doctrine.

Take, for instance, the word SALVATION. In 2:12 Paul says, WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING. Nowhere in the epistle is this salvation explained or set forth. But it has been proclaimed in Eph. 1:3. It is to be worked out, not worked for. No one can ever obtain salvation by working for it, but it is something to be worked out after one has it. This is where CREATED UNTO GOOD WORKS in Eph. 2:10 comes in.

Philippians not only teaches by precept, but also by example. There are three of these examples in the epistle.

The first is the example of Christ found in 2:5-11. Humility comes before exaltation. Our Lord taught His disciples the same thing. They never were to seek the higher place, but to take the lower so that they might be promoted to the higher and thereby receive honor. The believer must ever keep in mind that the cross precedes the crown.

The second example is that of Epaphroditus, 2:25-30. Here is one who for the work of Christ exposed himself and came nigh unto death. He had ministered to the wants of Paul, the servant of Christ. Certainly here is the example of a faithful worker, one who was working out his salvation with fear and trembling.

The third example is that of Paul himself. He gives his own testimony, not to boast, but that he might encourage others to zeal in the ministry of the gospel. In 3:4-14, Paul tells how at one time he was able to boast of his worth and accomplishments in the flesh, only to find that they were as nothing and had no place in the dispensation of the mystery, in the high calling.

Warnings are freely given. They are to test or approve the things that differ, to be careful about their conversation or way of living so as to conform with the profession, not to be afraid of adversaries, beware of strife and vainglory, look about and help others, beware of murmurings and disputings, beware of dogs and other evil workers, mark those who are enemies of the cross, and stand fast in the Lord.

There is one example given as something to avoid at all cost. It is the example of those who sow to the flesh, make their god their belly, and walk as enemies of the cross. They are carnal Christians and they will reap what they sow. They are the ones that make one ashamed of the name Christian. Their works will be burned up in the day of testing.

There is a great contrast between the sermon on the mount and Philippians. The former is to a people with an earthly calling and destiny; the latter to those of the heavenly calling.

THE TRINITY IN EPHESIANS I

BEGINNER'S CORNER #22

I. THE FATHER. He is first identified as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not our Father until such a time as we have received the adoption as sons. Father is one of the manifestations of God.

1. He has blest us. This is unlimited, for He has put at our disposal every spiritual blessing (no temporal or earthly blessings mentioned). They are lasting and durable. They have to do with heavenly places. This does not mean that God does not bless us with temporal blessings here and now, but we look beyond all that. These blessings are not thru Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but in Christ. There is no need to be related to Israel to be blest with these blessings.

2. He has chosen us. We are the chosen people of this age, just as Israel were a chosen people in a past age. But they were chosen SINCE the overthrow of the world, and we have been chosen from BEFORE the overthrow. They were chosen so that they might stand before the nations as an example and blessing to them; We were chosen that some day we might stand before Him in the heavenlies, in love, without blame, and holy. (See 3:10).

3. He has predestinated us. To what intent? That we might be sons. And how could He accomplish this? It is because of the work of the Son and His merits, not because of any worth or work of our own. Why should He do so? Simply because it pleased Him to do so. It is for the praise of His grace that He has accepted us in the Beloved.

4. He has made something known to us. What? His secret purpose which has been hid from all other ages and generations. What is that purpose? That some day all the families of earth (including Israel) and the families of heaven (including the household of the mystery) may be under one Head, even Christ.

II. THE SON. He is known here as the Beloved. (cf. John 3:16). The Father wills, the Son works.

1. He has redeemed us. This is His crowning work. The price was His blood. Since the soul or life is in the blood, then shed blood would signify death. By the same sacrifice reconciliation was effected, the forgiveness of sins. This reconciliation was for the whole world (2 Cor. 5:19) and so gives every man equal chance to approach God and receive the gift of life.

2. He has made us heirs. It is in Christ that we have obtained an inheritance. Since He is the Firstborn of all creation, then He is heir of all things created. We share in this.

3. He is our hope. All who have trusted (hoped) in Him look forward to glorification with Him in the heavenlies.

III. THE SPIRIT. As the Father wills and the Son works, so the Spirit bears witness. To Him we should listen. He bears witness of the Son.

1. He has sealed us. The seal denotes ownership. It identifies. Hands off!

2. He has given us a pledge. This is the new nature. The new nature is the only pledge or guarantee of a resurrection.

Our next subject to be discussed in our search of the Prison Epistles will be Paul's reference to the Mystery in Eph. 3.

Paul refers to this mystery as being hid from the sons of men and not being made known in other ages. In Col. 1 he repeats that this mystery was hidden from ages and generations.

Not only does he declare this gospel as presented in these latter epistles to be a mystery that had been a secret before, but he goes further and states that it was given to him to FULFIL the Word of God.

There are two ways one might interpret this word fulfil. You might express it as fulfilling the Word of God that had been given before, and perhaps never carried out by earlier apostles. A parallel to this is seen in Christ, that He was the end of the law -- that He came to fulfil it.

The other view is to reason that the complete Word of God had not been fully given until this time and now Paul has been entrusted to complete it. This latter view seems more probable when we consider the context and delve into the peculiar ministry of Paul.

In Col. 1:25 he says, I AM MADE A MINISTER ACCORDING TO THE DISPENSATION OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN UNTO ME -- FOR YOU -- TO FULFIL THE WORD OF GOD. In verse 27 he continues, BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS TO WHOM GOD WOULD MAKE KNOWN WHAT IS THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF THE MYSTERY AMONG THE GENTILES.

The word Paul uses here is a form of the Greek PLEEROO which, according to my Greek dictionary, means "to complete or fill up in the sense of making up a quota or compliment."

This then would signify that Paul was not fulfilling some earlier order, but rather, was finishing the Word of God.

It might be well while we are talking of the Word of God, to refresh our memories on such passages as Heb. 1:1,2 or 2 Tim. 3:16. Remember we are endeavoring to understand and develop what God has said, and not Paul. For we have substantial evidence that all Scripture, not just what God spoke, not what is recorded of what Christ said, but all Scripture was given by God. HOLY MEN OF GOD SPAKE AS THEY WERE MOVED BY THE HOLY GHOST.

It is not a question of Paul writing something which we might try to twist into a new religion. It is the fact that God has spoken unto us Gentiles, and we desire a fuller understanding of it all. We believe that when God speaks, He means to convey a message.

FOR THIS CAUSE, Eph. 3:1, I PAUL THE PRISONER OF JESUS CHRIST FOR YOU GENTILES (8) UNTO ME WHO AM LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS, IS THIS GRACE GIVEN, THAT I SHOULD PREACH AMONG THE GENTILES THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST; AND TO MAKE ALL MEN SEE WHAT IS THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MYSTERY, WHICH FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD HAS BEEN HID IN CHRIST.

HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY. Eph. 3:3.

RECONCILIATION AND SALVATION

Many are confused by ignorance. In fact confusion always stems from ignorance. The knowledge of the truth brings light, and light dispels ignorance and confusion.

The epistle to the Romans is very careful in distinguishing between sin and sins. Yet few seem to get the point.

Reconciliation has to do with sins, but can not touch sin. When sins have been forgiven and no longer imputed, then reconciliation has taken place. This touches the whole human race. Reconciliation is universal. 2 Cor. 5:19.

But salvation is not universal by any means. It is limited to the few who believe, for salvation depends on belief and faith. A man may stand before God without a blemish, with every sin forgiven and blotted out, but if he is yet in Adam then death rules over him. There is no hope of resurrection.

Recently we read a tract in which the writer tried to make reconciliation and resurrection one and the same thing. He did not stop to think that reconciliation was something accomplished by the shedding of blood, something that was bought with a price. But resurrection was a power owned by our Lord before the shameful events of Calvary. However He did not make use of that power until He could justly use it, another problem dealt with in Romans.

Examine Rom. 5:16. There you will find that while we were enemies we were reconciled unto God thru the death of His Son. But read right on and find that there is MUCH MORE. The MUCH MORE is that having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (not death). Salvation is much more than reconciliation, and therefore they are poles apart.

Sin is a congenital venereal disease which has come down from Adam thru all the human race and transmitted from parent to child. There is no escape. Death by sin has come upon all. It takes more than reconciliation to cure this dread disease. There must be a new nature created and implanted within, something which cannot sin and therefore not subject to death, by which the believer has the earnest or pledge of resurrection. One who does not have this new nature totally and completely dies with no hope of ever living again, for he is all of Adam and can hope for nothing but death.

If restoration of all is the divine plan, then giving access to sin to His creatures was a horrible mistake on the part of God. If they have no choice in the matter, then why do they have to suffer as they do?

But this we know; no creature can be morally upright unless tested under conditions of probation in which he may exercise choice. That at once makes evil possible, but not necessary. The sad part of it is that the wrong choice was made, both in heaven and on earth.

In His mercy God has provided a way of escape for man. But it again involves the will. Whosoever is limited by the word BELIEVETH in John 3:16. Those who have eternal life have it because they chose it.

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