

## STUDIES IN EPHESIANS #84

## THE FIRSTBORN HATED

AND BE RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND; 4:23.

On the 6th day of creation, man was made in the image of God. The image has become defaced and corrupted. So there is need of a new creation. Both the mind and the body have been corrupted. The body has become weak thru disease and misuse. The length of life has been shortened considerably. From early years and on thru life, most of us are daily reminded that we are frail. The mind has become so corrupt that the imagination is continually evil. God made man upright. But this man sought out many inventions. The mind is under the dominion of sin. It is so completely so that it is not till this dominion is broken that we can yield ourselves to obey, either sin or God. A new creation is a *must* in this case.

God has an order in which He makes the needed new creation. He has a point of beginning. It is a process, not an instantaneous work. This process begins with the mind. It ends with the resurrected body.

So here in this life, this side of resurrection, there is the process of renewal in the spirit of the mind. God begins the new creation by putting in the believer a new nature which is a new creation. It is this new spirit that frees the mind and makes choice possible. It is something that is given to the believer to cultivate and feed. It cannot be improved, for it is a perfect creation from God. There is no need for improvement. But it may be strengthened so that it can take over and change the life of the believer. On the other hand the believer still has the old nature, the old man, which is also making its demands. What will feed the new nature, at the same time starves and weakens the old nature. Needless to say, the old nature cannot be improved either. That which is flesh remains flesh and that which is spirit remains spirit. One cannot be changed into the other.

Most of Christendom today is engaged in the fruitless task of trying to improve the old nature and making it fit for the presence of God. But reformation can never take the place of regeneration. The old nature still remains corrupt in spite of all the gilt one may impose on it. We must turn from it to the new.

The mind is the ego, the self. As we said, in the unbeliever it is in bondage. It has nothing to pull it in any direction but the flesh or old nature. But as soon as the new nature comes in, there is a pull in opposite directions. Which is going to be the stronger? That is up to us. We can choose which we will obey. We can put our affection on things above or we can put our affection on things on the earth. We can make Christ the centre of our being, or we can worship the belly-god, things of the flesh.

We should stop every day and ask ourselves the question whether we worship Christ or the belly-god. Have we been renewed in the spirit of our mind? Are we holding up the new creation process by our unwillingness to be conformed to the image of His Son? The believer has perfect freedom of the will. He should use it aright.

Of the sons of Jacob, Reuben was the eldest. We would expect that he would be chosen as the tribal head and given the blessing and rights of the firstborn. This was the custom.

But the custom was not always followed. We have seen that in the case of Abraham who was the youngest of three brothers. Also Isaac was chosen instead of Ishmael. Then Jacob was chosen instead of Esau.

So by sovereign right, Jacob could choose any one of his sons to be heir and ruler over the household. He chose Joseph. He made known his choice by clothing Joseph with a coat of many colors which indicated that he was the firstborn and heir.

And because Joseph was loved by his father, his brothers hated him. Joseph had a dream, and he told it. His brothers hated him the more for his dream. He then dreamed another dream and they hated him yet the more for his dreams. In fact, they envied him (Ge 37:3,4,5,8,11). The next step was, they conspired to slay him. But they compromised by selling him into Egypt. Be sure to read this story over again.

Somebody may ask, Now what does that have to do with us today? These stories in the OT are written for our learning and many times we find that they are patterns of how God is dealing with the nations today.

Now when Israel was rejected and set aside as a nation because they did not receive their Messiah, as many of the Gentiles as did receive Him, to them gave He the right to be called the children of God (Jn 1:12). That was the first step after Acts 28:28.

Out of these children has been called and chosen a group of firstborn. They have been placed as sons (Eph 1:5). They have been made meet to partake of the Lord's inheritance in the holiest of all. So it is not what they are or what they have done, but the Father's choice.

Many of the brethren object to this. But God has the sovereign right to choose whom He will. He has not asked our opinion or advice. He is perfectly capable of running His own business without our help.

Many not only object to this choosing (Eph 1:4) but they say that there should be an equality and that all the brethren should be heirs and rulers. They say this from envy and hate. They do not understand what the position of the firstborn is and what are the responsibilities that go with that position. Ofttimes this hate is openly manifested and many sons have had to suffer. And many do not understand why.

Those who are truly sons, who are members of the church of the dispensation of the mystery, should take note of the character of Joseph. Even tho mistreated, hated, and sold into Egypt, yet in it all he loved his brethren and freely forgave them all they did. This is the character of the true son. Joseph realized that God was in it all and that all would be for the good of those whom God loved and cherished.

The firstborn has a great responsibility. He should not hate his brethren. He should try to help them in every way possible.

## CHOSEN, PREDESTINATED, ADOPTED

## WHEN THE ACTS CHURCH BEGAN

Last month we showed how that at the end of Acts the *Salvation of God* was sent to the Gentiles, thus opening up the first step toward the dispensation of the mystery. Acts 28:28 marked the end of the church of Israel which began with Abraham and the promises. Its fathers had crossed the Red Sea and received the law at Sinai.

This end of the church of Israel is also noted in John 1:11. So when the church of Israel ended, there were still many Gentile believers the world over just as there had been since the time of Adam. From Acts 13 to Acts 28:28 many of these Gentile believers were grafted into the church of Israel, thus partaking of Israel's blessings without having to be subject to the law of Israel. They were blessed with faithful Abraham, but saved by the work of Christ.

After Acts 28:28 the Jew no longer had any priority as to the oracles of God, salvation, or blessing. They became as one of the nations. They were Gentiles as far as God was concerned. So the prison epistles written to Gentiles include these erstwhile Jews.

Now out of these nations was chosen a church long before the overthrow. See Eph 1:4. These are the chosen people of today. These who were chosen were predestinated unto the adoption of sons (choosing and placing of the firstborn). But this church of firstborn ones today does not stand in relation to the world as did Israel in their day. There may be similar ties, but the church of the dispensation of the mystery had no advantage in the flesh whatsoever. All its advantages are in the realm of the spirit.

So it is concluded that there are no national requirements for inclusion in this select company. Color, place of birth, geneology, and the like have no place in this choosing. And we might add that there are also no educational or IQ requirements either. No superior knowledge makes one a candidate for membership in the church of the dispensation of the mystery. Any knowledge that is required will be given, the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. There is nothing whereof a member can boast in the flesh. The membership is not of works. It is that God in His sovereign grace selects those whom He will and gives them the adoption. All that is required is a willing heart and a trust in the gospel of our salvation. All these are to be found in Ephesians.

The responsibilities with which a member is entrusted will be the subject of another article. We do not have the space here.

Let us praise God who has made us meet to be partakers of our Lord's inheritance in the heavenlies for His wondrous grace that has made all this possible for us in this day. Let us pray also for the brethren who have not received the adoption, but nevertheless are the children of God. There is much confusion and running to and fro and it is too bad that there is quarreling among the children of God, and maybe at times among the sons. This ought not to be. Let us walk worthy of the calling. Let us be what the chosen ought to be.

For a long time it has been supposed that the church in evidence in Acts began at Acts 2. But there are some features of that church that make one stop and think. Generally accepted views may not always be right. It is always in order to ask questions.

In the first place, we find that a church is mentioned in M't 18:17. That was some time before Acts 2. Also in M't 16:18 there is a future church mentioned which will be restored Israel, and that church will be founded on the confession of Peter.

In Ac 7:38 is mentioned a church in the wilderness. That was over 1500 years before Pentecost in Acts 2. Also it is strange to note that it was the church in the wilderness that received the law and in Romans we find that the church still had the law!

And a further surprise is that in Galatians the church is told that the law had not made the promise of none effect. So during Acts the church still had the promise made to Abraham. If the church had received the promise, then it must have begun with Abraham. Rather startling, is it not? But let us go on.

We hear much about the early church fathers. But the ones we hear most about are not in the Bible, but are men who lived subsequent to the writings of the Scriptures. Just how much authority did they have? But in the Word we find that church fathers are mentioned in 1Co 10:1 and they crossed the Red Sea! That fits right in with what was said above. They received the law at Sinai after crossing the sea.

In Ex 12:3 Moses is speaking to the congregation of Israel. The Heb. word from which congregation comes is translated by the word *ekklesia* in the LXX, and *ekklesia* is the word for *church*. So Moses spoke to the church in Egypt. These were the fathers. These fathers are again mentioned in Ro 9:5 in context with promises and the giving of the law. That links the church at Rome with this beginning way back in the OT.

This church was begun early enough that it had been given rules for the observance of the Passover. The members of the Acts church worshipped at the temple (Ac 3:1). Also read Ac 2:46 where they were daily in the temple.

The written basis of the Acts church was the law and the prophets (Ac 28:23). The Gentile members of this church could not enter the temple as that had been the rule for centuries. Neither could they mingle with the Jews in the Synagogue and at the last of Acts the wall of partition was still up (Ro 1:16 and 2:9,10).

So the Acts church began with Abraham. It had the promises, the law, the Jewish rituals, and it was composed of Jews up until Acts 13 where a few Gentiles were grafted in to provoke Israel to jealousy and make her bear fruit. By the time Romans was written the church was composed of a remnant of Israel (Ro 11:5,7). Paul insisted that the father of that church was Abraham (Ro 4:1,6).

When the church began, of which Christ is Head, of course, is another subject.

## FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

AND NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, THESE THREE; BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE. 1Co 13:13. It is too bad that charity has been used in the AV for love. But it is that the language has changed, and charity no longer means love. If it is just giving, then Paul says, THOU I GIVE MY BODY TO BE BURNED, IT PROFITETH NOTHING.

These three words, tho in varying order, are found in the prison epistles as well as in the epistles written during Acts. So they are things that really do abide. They are not limited by dispensational lines.

WE GIVE THANKS...SINCE WE HEARD OF YOUR FAITH...AND OF THE LOVE TO ALL THE SAINTS. FOR THE HOPE WHICH IS LAID UP FOR YOU IN HEAVEN... Col 1:3-5. The faith is in Christ Jesus. The love is to all the saints. And the hope is reserved (not preserved) in heaven. We should beware of that cold legalistic fundamentalism which can hate all that does not agree to the letter with some man-made creed we might subscribe to. A critical attitude cannot go along with love to the saints. It is better not to read what others have written or listen to what they say than to get into such a bad habit.

AFTER I HEARD OF YOUR FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS, AND LOVE TO ALL THE SAINTS, CEASE NOT TO GIVE THANKS FOR YOU, MAKING MENTION OF YOU IN MY PRAYERS;...THAT YE MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING... Eph 1:15-18. Again we find that in these three, love to the saints has the central position. How is this love to be expressed? How can we let the saints know that we love them? We live in a time when self is the main idol of the people. We live among those who spend all for self and if there happens to be a little left over, it may be tossed to the poor. That is the general attitude of the world and sometimes these things rub off onto Christians. It is easy to be conformed to this world.

WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD ALWAYS FOR YOU ALL, MAKING MENTION OF YOU IN OUR PRAYERS; REMEMBERING WITHOUT CEASING YOUR WORK OF FAITH, AND LABOUR OF LOVE, AND PATIENCE OF HOPE... 1Th 1:2,3. Notice the pairs of words here; *work - faith, labour - love, patience - hope*. These 3 pairs occur again in 5:8-14. There is mentioned the breastplate of *faith* and *love*, the helmet of *hope* of salvation, those who *labour*, and those esteemed highly for their *work's* sake, and finally to be *patient* toward all men. Certainly here is some good, practical advice. Faith will certainly stir one to works, for faith is simply believing what God has said and acting on it. Any labor one may perform for God is useless unless it is actuated by love. Patience in old English had the idea of persistence. So hope will cause one to persevere.

LET US DRAW NEAR WITH...FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH...LET US HOLD FAST THE PROFESSION OF HOPE...LET US...PROVOKE UNTO LOVE... Heb 10:22-24.

We find them in pairs in Ro 5:1-8; JUSTIFIED BY FAITH...ACCESS BY FAITH...REJOICE IN HOPE...HOPE MAKETH NOT ASHAMED...THE LOVE OF GOD IS SHED ABROAD...GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARD US.

The reader is encouraged to carry this study on farther as there may be more combinations.

## THE QUICK AND THE DEAD #13

DENTON C. ABBEY

Before continuing our subject, perhaps it would be well to classify this *death* that we might better understand the nature of it. We have quoted chapter and verse in the last year to prove that death is the end of the natural man; that death is the condemnation that has come upon the earth.

When God told Adam that he would die if he ate of the tree OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL, it wasn't His desire that Adam should die. Rather, in His foreknowledge He knew that Adam would die, and that perhaps that this would be necessary if Adam were to regain his lost heritage. This may add a new theme to our thinking, but I am sure the following will reveal what I mean.

The *death* that holds all creation in its grasp is an enemy of God. At the same time it is a burden to man, but still accomplishes a purpose. This is not too startling when we realize that in the past God has used various profane elements to accomplish His purpose. Or better perhaps, to say that He has justified His acts due to these elements.

For instance, when the Israelites were brot out of Egypt, it wasn't that Israel had done anything to merit this release, but rather that the iniquities of the Egyptians had waxed so gross that God could send the plagues in justice. The same holds true of the Canaanite. The land wasn't taken from them and given to the Jew just for the Jew's sake, but rather the Canaanite had accomplished his iniquities and God could give the land to Israel.

So it is in many respects with *death*. It is an enemy as far as God is concerned, a condemnation to man, a profane element that in the ages to come God will put down as others have in the past.

In 1Co 15:26 it says, AND THE LAST ENEMY THAT SHALL BE DESTROYED IS DEATH. Here we have the enemy, and the promise that the enemy will be destroyed. This theme is echoed in Re 20:14 where we read, AND DEATH AND HELL (grave) WERE CAST INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE. Then to caption this, in the next chapter where it speaks of the new heaven and earth, verse 4 carries this guarantee, AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES; AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH; NEITHER SHALL THERE BE ANY MORE PAIN: FOR THE FORMER THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY.

If there is any question as to how this is to be accomplished, Re 1:18 supplies the answer, I AM HE THAT LIVETH, AND WAS DEAD; AND, BEHOLD, I AM ALIVE FOR EVERMORE, AMEN; AND HAVE THE KEYS OF HELL AND OF DEATH.

Since *death* is an enemy, both to God and to man, then it must be destroyed. Christ had to die to rescue man from the grasp of this enemy. What or who is this enemy? After all *death* is the result of the real enemy.

Heb 2:14 furnishes the answer and reveals the author of this cause, FORASMUCH THEN AS THE CHILDREN ARE PARTAKERS OF FLESH AND BLOOD, HE ALSO HIMSELF LIKEWISE TOOK PART OF THE SAME; THAT THROUGH DEATH HE MIGHT DESTROY HIM THAT HATH THE POWER OF DEATH, THAT IS, THE DEVIL.

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