

STUDIES IN EPHESIANS #85

THE DECLARATION OF WAR

AND THAT YE PUT ON THE NEW MAN. 4:24.

Just before this it is told us that we should put off the old man; that we are *taught* to do this. But we must not mistake the language and the truth here. This is no eradication of the old nature. That is not accomplished until the time of resurrection when incorruption and immortality are put on. But the *deeds* of the old man are to be put off.

We have already learned that the old man, the flesh, the old nature is corrupt. It is not subject to the law of God, neither can be. One who sows to this old nature will only reap corruption or loss. His works will be burned by fire and he will have no crown.

This old nature is an inheritance from Adam. It is not something acquired after birth. It is a congenital defect common to all the human race. A babe will early show the symptoms of this dread condition.

But the believer is endowed with a new nature, the new man, the spirit. But it is up to the believer to put that new man to work, and that is just what our text means. The Greek for put on is *enduo*. It is used in Ro 13:12, 14 and Gal 3:27. It is a new creation that is put within the believer. And that is where the war begins! There is enmity between the old nature and the new. The one fights against the other. Paul has shown how this operates in Ro 7.

It is only the believer that can put off the old and put on the new. The unbeliever is powerless to do either. He is in bondage to the old, and has no new one to put into operation.

So to put off has to do with deeds and to put on has to do with deeds. So it has to do with our conversation or walk. That we can decide and do. It is our responsibility and by that walk we are judged as to rewards.

The foundation is the fact that we are to reckon the old nature crucified with Christ (Ro 6:6). The natural result of that action would be to see that we have put off the old man with his deeds (Col 3:9).

Furthermore no one is a Christian and belongs to Christ unless this new nature had been implanted (Ro 8:9). The old nature is enmity against God and every believer has some of that, either working or latent (Ro 8:7).

No resurrection is assured to anyone except he have the new nature or new man (Ro 8:11). This old nature cannot understand or comprehend the things of God. It takes the new nature to do that (1Co 2:14). So the believer who does not cultivate the new nature, but yields to the old cannot comprehend the things of God. He is blind to the great truths of the Scriptures. He sows to the flesh and reaps corruption or loss. His end is perdition or loss. But he is not lost. They shall never perish who have the new man.

So we can see how important it is that the believer put on the new man and work him to the very limit, forgetting the old man with his deeds. Forget the things which are behind. Reach forward for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

AND I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN THEE AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN THY SEED AND HER SEED; IT SHALL BRUISE THY HEAD, AND THOU SHALT BRUISE HIS HEEL. Ge 3:15.

No doubt there has been many a time since this episode that Satan has wished that he had never gotten into this situation in the garden. It is not likely that he had any idea of why man was created and put here on this earth. In fact, we do not know whether Satan had been roaming the universe upon which he brot ruin or whether he was imprisoned in the deep (the abyss or bottomless pit). The *deep* of Ge 1:2 is the abyss or bottomless pit of Re 20:3 where Satan is bound for a thousand years.

At any rate, Satan hears his sentence pronounced, and what dread must have seized him! There was something dark and sinister about the title *seed of woman*. Could he guess what it might mean? Could he know that this was to be the Son of God? We do not know.

In Revelation 12 we see a warfare between the dragon and a woman. That woman proves to be Israel. Christ was the seed of woman, of Israel and of David. But the man child of Revelation 12 is not Christ. It is something else.

So finally the seed of woman appeared on the earth scene over 1900 years ago. There was warfare then, but not the final conflict. Some day the seed of the serpent, the anti-Christ will come and rule on this earth. During that rule The Lord Jesus Christ will come the second time and will destroy this manifestation of the mystery of iniquity. This evil one, the seed of the serpent will be destroyed by the brightness of the Lord's coming.

There is plenty of Scripture to establish the fact that this warfare is to be completed here on this earth and not somewhere else in the universe. The earth is the stage where redemption is to be enacted and finished. This redemption not only touches upon things of the earth, but also involves things in heaven. The one who dared to lift his hand against the most high and bring ruin into creation will come to an end here on this terrestrial sphere.

Bruising his head has in it the idea of a thoro crushing or pulverizing. It is a beating from which he will never recover. A time is coming when Satan will be no more and peace will reign not only on earth, but in all creation.

It seems that when Satan's iniquity had waxed ripe, God set the stage and began operations that would put an end to him and his works. We do not say that Eden was set up as a trap, altho it would appear that it turned out to be something like that. God knew what Satan would do under any given circumstance, it is true. So Satan is given a mile of rope and then proceeded to begin the process of hanging himself. His wonderful wisdom with which he began has failed him. Separation from God has done that. From that day in Eden his beauty has been fading. He is always trying new stunts to attract men and to get their worship and finally in desperation will set up a man and give to him his power. But all in vain! He and his man will perish.

HIDDEN WISDOM BEFORE THE WORLD

1Co 2:7,8

BUT WE SPEAK THE WISDOM OF GOD IN A MYSTERY, THE HIDDEN, WHICH GOD ORDAINED BEFORE THE WORLD UNTO OUR GLORY: WHICH NONE OF THE PRINCES OF THIS WORLD KNEW: FOR HAD THEY KNOWN, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE CRUCIFIED THE LORD OF GLORY.

Here is a passage that has been giving some folks a bit of worry. They see a word and then jump to hasty conclusions without stopping to think or even look at the context. Sometimes it seems that folks cannot see the woods for the trees. There is more than words to see.

The context is preaching JESUS CHRIST, AND HIM CRUCIFIED, verse 2, and on the other side CRUCIFIED THE LORD OF GLORY, which is in the text itself. Wisdom is spoken of and in a time element which is BEFORE THE AGES.

Now these make us think of other familiar Scripture passages which are about the same subjects. The first of these is Pr 8. The subject is wisdom. We do not read very far till we discover that the Lord Jesus Christ is this wisdom personified. Read this chapter and note the time element. Wisdom was with God from before ever the heavens or the earth were, or the sea. In Joh 1:1 we find that the Word was with God in the beginning. In Joh 17:24 we find that Christ was loved by the Father before the foundation of the world. In 1Pe 1:20 we again find that Christ was a Lamb foreordained before the foundation of the world.

Now the key to it all is in Eph 3 where we read, YE MAY UNDERSTAND MY KNOWLEDGE IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST WHICH IN OTHER AGES WAS NOT MADE KNOWN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN, AS IT IS NOW REVEALED UNTO HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND PROPHETS. This is the mystery of Christ. It began its unfolding in the Word in Ge 3:15 and has been gradually dispensed from that time till Paul finished the Word of God on this subject.

Now getting back to the text, we understand that if the princes of this world had known the wisdom of God (Christ), they would not have crucified Him. But it was a secret, hidden in the Scriptures, in all the Scriptures, for they testify of Him. But to many it is still a secret or mystery, for there is a Revealer of secrets whom the princes of this world did not know.

Even today the wisdom of men is substituted for the Lord, the wisdom of God. But that all comes to nought. Faith cannot stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. This passage has some wonderful truth that can be applied yet today.

Verse 10 tells us that these things, the wisdom of God, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is made known by the Holy Spirit. He speaks of Christ. The natural man, the old man or nature, cannot receive these things (verse 14). They are spiritually discerned (that is, by the new nature or man).

Paul preached Christ, and Him crucified. That is the wisdom of God; but foolishness to men. This Lamb God ordained before the ages began. And without a crucified Christ no believer will ever be glorified.

So this passage is not concerning the dispensation of the mystery. It is about Christ.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST

COL 1:15-18

1. *Christ is the visible form of the invisible God (15).* The colossus of Daniel 2 was a figure of Gentile dominion. When man was made in the likeness of the image of God, he was then given dominion. So Christ was an image to represent dominion, and man was made in the likeness of this image. It gives us some idea of the nature of the invisible God.

2. *Christ is the Prior-Heir of all creation (15).* This does not refer to a time when He began to exist, nor does it infer that He was a created being. He was placed as the Heir of all creation. This is His right since He is the Creator. Being an Heir does not only mean that He possesses all things, but He is the Ruler over all. This again is dominion.

3. *Christ created all the universe by Himself and for Himself (16).* He may not tell all there is to tell about the purpose and plan of it all. But this one thing we know; Nothing was made without His making it. He was able to take energy and wrap it up in the atom, so making all the material world about us.

4. *Christ IS before the universe (17).* It was a wonderful thing in the ears of the Pharisees that our Lord could say, BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM. But He can go still farther and say, *Before the universe was, I am.* In this connection read Proverbs 8 and John 1:1. Since Christ is but a manifestation of God Himself, then He has been just as long as God has been. This is something that cannot be represented by any row of figures. Our finite minds are not able to cope with such problems. We are creatures of time, material and space. We are not able to comprehend anything beyond these narrow limitations.

5. *Christ causes all things to cohere (17).* We do not know what gravity is. We know that it is a force. We know that it governs heavenly bodies as well as earthly ones. We do not understand very much about the cohesion of matter. Neither do we know what light and electricity are. But we use them. We have learned some of the laws governing them.

6. *Christ is the Head of the body, the church (18).* This is a figure of speech. It means that He has a relationship to the church similar to the relationship of a body and its head. We do not have to know too much about physiology to sense that. The Gnostics might have put it that Christ is the *sum* of the church. But that is blasphemy, for the church is not God. We once read a book, 'The Universe is God.' The letter to the Colossians was written to warn them about such philosophies.

7. *Christ is the Firstborn from among the dead (18).* As such, He is the beginning of the resurrected church. This statement was not only true when Paul wrote it, but we presume that it is true yet today. No one has ascended up to heaven but Christ (Joh 3:13). He is seated at the right hand of the Father, sharing a throne till the day comes when He will have His own throne. Also He is not yet manifest to the principalities and powers of the heavens. That will come in due time and the church which is His body will have a part in it.

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS?

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD #14

-- DENTON C. ABBEY

The question before us is just this. Are all who believe and have life members of the church of the dispensation of the mystery? Since the Word recognizes two churches or called-out groups, we might do well to compare and contrast them on this question since such may help to find the answer.

The church of Israel was a chosen group. The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people (De7:7). The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers (Ac 13:17). Other passages may be found by means of the concordance that further show this to be a fact. Now the question we must face is this. Were this chosen people the only ones who had life and who were accepted by God? What of all the men before Abraham? Did any of them believe and have life? What about Nebuchadnezzar who wrote a part of the Scriptures and ascribed glory to the Most High? Does he not rank with other kings such as David and Solomon and Hezekiah who also wrote in the Scriptures? How about the people of Nineveh? The dying malefactor? The Greeks who would see Jesus? And many more?

We must conclude that the church of Israel was chosen out of the great mass of believers of their times. Later some Gentile believers were chosen and grafted into this church of Israel (Ro 11).

Do all believers today belong to the church of the dispensation of the mystery? If they do, then we really have a big problem on our hands. For this church is a group chosen from before the foundation of the world. If all believers are a chosen group, then they had no choice in the obtaining of life. That is in direct contradiction to the teaching of John's gospel, where it is whosoever believeth. This is almost out-doing Calvinism. Some who like to call names would probably call it Ultra-Calvinism. But calling names is not necessary.

In other studies we have shown that a church has a service, a duty to perform. People are chosen for service, but not for life. So if all who believe belong to the church of the dispensation of the mystery, we will have to throw John's gospel out of the canon of Scripture.

Man can choose whether or not he will take the gift of eternal life. That is a part of his testing. But God does the choosing when it comes to membership in a group or church which has a service to perform. It is true that not all who are chosen are willing. There are some Jonahs in the bunch; always were.

It is well to stop and think and make comparisons and look well that there are no contradictions before one makes a decision. Not all believers today are called to service, any more than the fact that all citizens of my country belong to the army. God chooses individuals and groups for service, but not for salvation.

We hope this will start some folks thinking, and that they will go on from here, making sure they have the right answers. Do not accept our conclusions. Search for yourselves and see.

It is not within the scope of this article to try to pursue the authorship of death to its ultimate conclusion. However, it might be of added help and interest to the reader if we would go back before age times and see what the Scriptures have to say. This would serve to widen our scope of thinking of this DEATH we have studied the past year.

Adam was not the author of sin, as we noted in last month's article. Adam did not originate sin, but rather thru him it entered into the world. This being so, then death and sin had to precede the human race as we know it today. Already this gives us a clue as to why the battle of life in Christ and death in the devil is the great struggle of the ages. This is also why we find so many references in the Scriptures citing Christ as the resurrection and the life. And contrariwise why we find death, hell and the devil arrayed on the other side.

Heb 2:14 told us that the devil had the power of death. Just why death is synonymous with him is not clear. Perhaps it is none of our business. However, in Eze 28 the Lord reveals this thru the prophet (verses 14 & 15), Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God: thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. This is the first indication of iniquity in the universe ages ago. The anointed cherub is referred to as Lucifer, or the day star. And not only did he rebel, but other of the angels did also. 2Pe 2:4 says in part, For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell. Re 12:9 echoes this, And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world, he was cast out into the earth, and his angels with him.

So this information, meager tho it is, reveals that sin is part and parcel of the heavenly domain as well as the earthly one. This is why we can say death, as well as Satan, is an enemy of God. God has no desire that anyone should die. Have I pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God (Eze 18:23). It was the ego in Lucifer that was his downfall. I will ascend up to heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. Notice the WILL'S in Isa 14. The chapter goes on to say that Lucifer will be brot down to hell, the same as we read in Re 20 where he is cast into the bottomless pit.

Now we can begin to see why the promise of life in Christ was made before age times as we find it written in Eph 3:6, 2Ti 1:1 and Titus 1:2. The promise may have come at the time or possibly before sin entered the universe, and death with sin.

Romans 8 tells us that not only do believers groan awaiting the day of their redemption, but that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now looking.

WHY A CHURCH?

We have noted in previous articles that the church of the Acts period began with Abraham and that the church of the dispensation of the mystery began at the last of Acts. So we begin to wonder just what is the purpose of a church.

We notice that in the choosing of Israel as a church that there was something to do, a responsibility. They were to be a blessing to the nations. Theirs was a mediatorial work. They were to make known the name of Jehovah to all the peoples of the earth and this work they were to do is summed up in the great commission to the apostles, to teach all nations. That is how that the nations will finally come to know God. They will be taught by the Jews.

So up to the time of Abraham there was no group called out for a specific work to do. Some individuals had responsibilities such as Enoch, Noah, and others. But there was no group or church till the call of Abraham. In the Greek the word church is ekklesia. It means called out. Since there were always other believers besides these called out ones, we can say then that they were called out from among believers for service. They were chosen. They were predestinated. These terms cannot be used of those who are believers, having everlasting life, but outside of a group called for service.

Now the Israel church will produce overcomers who will reign with Christ in the Millennium here on the earth. Some others will live with Christ here on the earth. Not all who live with Him will reign with Him.

There are other overcomers of Israel who will be in the New Jerusalem in the new earth. It is quite sure that many who are here in the Millennium will also be in the New Jerusalem. An example would be the 12 apostles. They will rule over the 12 tribes during the Millennium. Also they will be in the New Jerusalem and have their names inscribed on its foundations. Each of these groups, those ruling in the Millennium and those who will go in and out of the city from heaven are called firstborn. So then we find a firstborn group in each of these two spheres. But in Ephesians we find another firstborn group. Since all time in the future on the earth is already taken by firstborn groups, then where will this one be? Where will we put them?

They have a heavenly citizenship. They are already seated with Christ in the super-heavens. There they will be resurrected and there they will live with Him and many will also reign with Him in that sphere. There can be no other place for them, except this heavenly sphere.

But this latter church is not to be a blessing to the nations of the earth. Even now they are engaged in making known the manifold wisdom of God to principalities and powers in the above-heavens. In this sphere Christ will reign and the overcomers of this church will reign with Him. So they have a responsibility parallel with that of Israel, but in another sphere.

On the other hand, those who have life, from Adam till now, form no church nor do they seem to have a calling or responsibility in service. Life and service will call for another article.

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