

-STUDIES IN EPHESIANS- #39

-RECONCILIATION-

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Eph. 2:19-22.

We have just concluded the section that has to do with access unto the Father. Here we take up the holy temple. It is no longer a question of access, but of God dwelling in us.

We might make the relationship of the two sections more plain by a little structure. Both are concerning Gentiles:

The BODY aspect;

At that time, aliens and strangers

Now, made nigh.

UNITY; the two made one.

Access, in one Spirit.

The TEMPLE aspect;

No more, strangers and foreigners.

But, fellowcitizens.

UNITY; fitly framed together.

Habitation, of God in Spirit.

So we have two figures used in this chapter. One is of a body. It has access. The other is of a temple. A dwelling place for God. At one time He dwelt among Israel in a tabernacle. Now He dwells in the members of the Body of Christ as in a temple by the Spirit.

During Acts, when the Gentile was not the tree, but a grafted in branch, we did not have the expression FELLOW. Also we must notice that Paul insists that it is a new revelation that comes in after Acts. So it is much more than the Gentile now coming into such a relationship with the Jew as to be a fellow-partaker of the promises made to Abraham. It is much more than that. Abraham and his promises have passed off the scene. All blessings now are in Christ Jesus, not in Israel or Abraham.

Dispensational advantages and disadvantages during Acts were in the flesh. The Jew was first. But now dispensational advantages are in the Spirit, not the flesh, and so there is no difference. No longer do we speak of nations and kingdoms, but of the church which is His body. So a Jew who today is a member of the body has lost all national distinctions. He no longer has any covenant relationship with God. Christ is not his Messiah, but his Savior. He has no prior claim above the Gentile to Christ.

In spite of the fact that the Jew today has lost all distinction as to race and religion, yet he has a greater opportunity before him than ever before in all his history. Up till the end of Acts, the Jew never had anything but an earthly hope, and we mean by that, he had no hope higher than being resurrected and living on this earth. But now a secret has been revealed that gives him access to heaven itself.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5:17-20.

THEREFORE. Read what goes before.

ALL THINGS ARE OF GOD. Not the old things, but the new things. The old have passed away. ALL THINGS must be limited by the context as always. The old things were not of God. Did you ever think of that?

RECONCILE. In some form this word occurs 5 times in this little section. It may be that it will form a structure. So let us try.

A. God hath reconciled us to Himself.

B. Given... reconciliation.

C. Reconciling the world.

B. Committed... reconciliation.

A. Be ye reconciled to God.

It may be that we can find here what reconciliation is and how obtained.

In the first section under A we find that God has reconciled us to Himself. It is by or thru Jesus Christ. That is the bare statement.

Then in B Paul says to US is given the ministry of reconciliation. By US Paul means himself and those to whom he is speaking. It is not his message alone. Others have a responsibility too. It is in a church made up of Jew and Gentile. There is nothing about the Jew and Gentile being reconciled to each other as we find in Eph. It is not time for that yet.

The way the reconciliation is brot about (see C, the center section) is that God was in Christ. It was in Christ that He reconciled the world to Himself. In other passages we read that Christ died for our sins. That He became sin and was judged in our stead. So here we have the truth of the matter briefly put. Trespasses are not imputed to the sinner. Since sins and trespasses are enmity against God, their removal gives access. Access gives the opportunity of approaching God and accepting by faith the gift of everlasting life, or then both it and the kingdom. So the gospel is that sin is not imputed. Now there is no enmity. The sinner can approach God to receive all the good things He has to offer. That is truth for today.

Again in B Paul repeats that unto US is committed the word of reconciliation. That corresponds to GIVEN in B above.

In the last section Paul exhorts all to be reconciled to God. What can he mean here when we have that as a truth already? If God has reconciled us to Himself, then how can we go on and be reconciled to Him? It is merely putting the fact into actual operation. The unsaved do not act as if they had been reconciled. So make it work is what he means.

-JOHN FOR GENTILES-

In our own Bible we have gone thru and shaded with a blue pencil all the verses and phrases in John that are interpolations or are explanations for Gentile readers.

The latter we catalog as we have found them so far. You may be able to add to this list;

- 1:42. which is by interpretation, A STONE.
- 2:6. after the manner of the purifying of the Jews.
- 2:13. Jews' passover.
- 4:9. for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.
- 5:1. there was a feast of the Jews.
- 6:4. a feast of the Jews was nigh.
- 7:2. Jews' feast of tabernacles.
- 7:39. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)
- 9:7. (which is by interpretation, Sent).
- 10:22. and it was winter.
- 11:55. Jews' passover.
- 19:31. (for that Sabbath day was an high day).
- 19:42. Jews' preparation day.

Then there are the interpolations, those passages in which John speaks to us from this side of the great division line, HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT. You will find these as follows, and maybe there are more;

- 1:1-18. The prologue.
- 3:13-21. Conditions for receiving everlasting life (not the kingdom).
- 3:31-36. Again life and death.
- 19:35-37. John's true record.
- 20:30, 31. Reason for writing the book.
- 21:24, 25. Epilogue. Testimony of John.

The purpose of the book is clearly given in 20:30, 31. The purpose has nothing to do with proclaiming the kingdom, but that all who believe may know everlasting life.

Granted that the gospel is for today (not for the family or dispensation of the mystery) we must be careful how that we read it. It is all grouped around 8 signs (not miracles) by which HIS OWN should have known Him. But they did not receive Him. That is history for our understanding of why and how He came. It does not give us license to take a saying of His to the Pharisees, for example, and say that it is truth for today. If it was spoken to a Jew, then it was for that Jew. Let us not be mistaken in this. Nicodemus was shown how to enter or see the kingdom of God. That part of chapter 3 is not the gospel concerning everlasting life. But immediately following this dialogue is an interpolation by John showing how we are to obtain eternal or everlasting life. There is a vast difference. We should not confuse things that differ.

But if something is said to the Jew that is equally true of the Gentile, then that is truth for today and should be accepted as such. But it must be examined carefully first. Some truth is common to all families of God.

-THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM-

Many who profess to be Christians seem to have little, if any, knowledge of Christ. Just why should this be so? How does it happen? This is something that bothers a great many folks at times. It might be well to look at 3 instances of where folks did not recognize Him between the time of His resurrection and His ascension.

I. The two on the way to Emmaus. The Lord joined Himself to them and walked with them and they did not know (recognize) Him. Why? Their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. But what makes eyes holden? It was because they were slow to believe the Scriptures. They had read and studied the prophecies. They knew about the glories of the coming King and Deliverer. But they had no place in their thinking and theology for the cross. They did not know about a suffering Messiah. They did not want to know about the cross and suffering. As too many of us today do, they preferred not to think of all aspects of what was revealed. Now read the account in Luke 24:13-35. Then look at Phil. 1:29. Do you see the gift there? Do you receive it with joy? If we suffer, we shall reign with Him. Cross before the crown. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

II. Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre. She thot the Lord was the gardner. She did not recognize Him. Why? Because, like the two on the way to Emmaus, she thot the Lord was dead and that it was all over. Her own personal grief blinded her to truth. She was, as so often we, thinking too much of herself and her own loss. In 1 Thess. 4 Paul warned about hopeless sorrow. It blinds one to the risen Christ. By the work of the Holy Spirit in the new man let us meditate and think upon Christ that we may know Him, the risen One.

III. The 7 fishermen at the lake. The account is in John 21:1-14. Peter got tired of waiting on the Lord and His directions. So he said he would go fishing. This was catching, so 6 others decided to go along with him. We have here an example of concerted effort, human organization, but without any command from the Lord. They did a good job of fishing. They were expert with the nets. They were most cooperative in work. But they caught no fish. Today we can have the finest of organization and cooperation, but if it is not in the will of God, then all effort is in vain. But the Lord appeared on shore. They did not know Him. Organization has a deadening effect that will blind one to the risen Christ. So it was here. But He gave the command and the first dip of the net brot in more than they could handle. John sensed that this was the Lord. Immediately Peter went to Him. A whole nite of toil had been spent in vain just because they were following their own judgment in what was the right thing to do. They might just as well have slept. With this read Psa. 127:1, 2. If we know His will and do it, then He will give refreshing sleep to His tired ones. Do you know and own the risen Lord in your life and your activities?

-SOME CHURCH HISTORY-

-BEGINNERS' CORNER- #5

If we study church history that is extant today we are a bit puzzled as to the connection between the church we have in the Bible at the end of Bible times and the church as we see it today. When we read the epistles of Paul after Acts and note the simplicity of worship which was to be in spirit and in truth, we wonder just where that church went! It disappeared somewhere along the line.

We can go back into the scarce records of the first 6 centuries and find that the church there is very much like what we have here today with all its Judaism and heathen practices. We do not find what we would expect after a study of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy.

But we do not have to go beyond the Bible itself to find the answer. Even before the death of Paul the apostasy we have today had set in. The churches that Paul had so carefully taught in Asia had departed from his teaching and turned back to Judaism. So we may not be surprised when a century or two later we find a church with all the rituals and practices which Paul had warned against.

However Paul's teachings were not altogether a loss. Only from the enemies of true Christianity do we have a very meager account of what did really happen. The records are very few.

One group which struggled against the gathering heathen darkness was called The Paulicians by their contemporaries. They were very zealous and they copied Paul's writings and distributed them and they preached anywhere they could get a hearing, in the open air, the market place, and the like. They got their name from their being Paul-like.

They had so many converts and succeeded so well in turning back the darkness that their activities even stirred the church heads at Constantinople. Armies were sent to exterminate them. But they did not resist by arms. Their resistance was in a greater zeal in proclaiming the truth. It is told that one great general that was sent out against them returned to Constantinople impressed by their simple faith and did not have rest until he too was a convert to their faith.

The Paulicians were absolutely unconquerable for a long time. Finally they took up arms for their own protection and they at length were overpowered. They were banished from Asia Minor. They fled to Europe and wandered about in the mountains and settled here and there in quiet communities and kept their simple faith. At times they were hunted down by the Church at Rome and stamped out one by one. But their influence was still felt at the beginning of the Reformation.

The Paulician movement is gaining some momentum today the world over. But its members are scattered far and wide. Their simplicity of worship is not favored by those who are in the flesh. True spiritual worship has never been popular. That is true of today. So with the rapid spread of pomp and ritual, this group is again in great danger.

It is apparent from our foregoing articles that Bible study cannot be approached in a haphazard manner. God has not set the world in motion and then left man in charge to bring to a successful conclusion. If God was interested enough to create the heavens and the earth in the first place, then certainly He must have had some purpose, and if a purpose, then a plan.

Which of you, if you owned a business, would spend your time and money getting it started and then depart leaving it in the hands of unskilled people? How much more then for God to leave it to the hand of man. "For we (man) have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)." We are unfit to do His will.

When Adam was placed in the garden of Eden, God gave him dominion over all the earth. Gen. 1:26. But this was conditional upon his obedience. When he disobeyed he was driven from the garden and condemned to die. "And as thru one man sin entered the earth so all have sinned (Rom. 5:12)." And we too are in the same position as Adam and disqualified to take over the commission he might have had.

And this is exactly what the Bible reveals of God's plan if we would prayerfully study it. God has planned man's redemption. Not that man has stumbled thru life picking up bits of information to gain it.

When Adam was set aside for disobedience God promised that the Seed of woman would come and accomplish the purpose and plan of God. Gen. 3:15. So to fulfil this promise of the Seed, we find God in His sovereign knowledge guiding the destiny of man thru the ages.

He spared Noah from the destruction of the ungodly at the time of the flood. Then took Abraham out of the Gentiles to carry out His plan, when He scattered the rest of the people and confused their tongue. And from this beginning we find the promise to Israel that they would be a priestly nation, a chosen vessel to accomplish the will of God. Ex. 19:5,6. Not that they were more righteous or qualified to do this work, rather in spite of their transgressions. So it was that God put them under the law, Ex. 24:3,7,8, that they might be led to Christ. Gal. 3:24, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." But Israel, like all flesh, had so transgressed the law and the commandments that when the promised Seed did come they said, "We will not have Him to reign over us." Luke 19:14. So they conspired to crucify Him.

But even all this monstrous crime against God was to be forgiven. On the cross Christ prayed, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34.

Peter stood up after Pentecost and said to the people of Israel, "Ye denied and killed the Prince of life," but he added, "And now brethren I wot that thru ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers." Acts 3:12-17. We will have to continue this next month.

--Denton C. Abbey

-DO YOU KNOW?-

26. Q. When did covenant relationship of believers with God cease?
- A. Israel were the covenant people (Rom. 9:24). Gentiles were strangers from the covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12). So when Israel were set aside at the end of Acts, Acts 28:28 to be exact, then there was no longer any covenant relationship.
27. When did the great tribulation, the second coming, and the kingdom cease to be at hand?
- A. The great tribulation is also called the time of Jacob's trouble. It has to do with Israel and comes within the scope of the prophecy of the 70 weeks of Dan. 9. The second coming is connected with the end of the tribulation and the last trumpet of Rev. 11:15. This is the time when the Lord will come and set up His kingdom on the earth. All this was at hand during Acts, for according to the prophecy of Dan. 9, the coming and the setting up of the kingdom would have been in A.D. 85. But at the end of Acts the Jew was set aside and the mystery now must run its course before times of the prophecies are taken up again.
28. Q. When did more than one baptism cease to be required and "the one baptism" become God's order?
- A. During Acts there are many references to baptism with water, from Acts 2:41 to 19:5 as well as in the epistles written during that time. Acts 1:5 speaks of a baptism in the Holy Ghost. Rom. 6:4 speaks of buried with baptism into His death. In 1 Cor. it speaks of a baptism by the Spirit into one body. There are four for just a beginning. But when God ceased for a time to deal with Israel, beginning with Acts 28:28, we have left only one baptism (Eph. 4:5) and according to Col. 2:12 it is being identified with Christ in His death. Those who have the high calling have nothing to do with earthly elements.
9. Q. When did believers cease to look for the parousia or apocalypse and begin looking for the epiphaneia?
- A. Parousia and apocalypse are aspects of the coming of the Lord to set up His kingdom here on the earth. Epiphaneia is His manifestation in the heavens to the principalities and powers there. It includes those who are members of the church of the dispensation of the mystery or the church which is His body which came into being when Israel were set aside. Epiphaneia, used alone, does not occur before Acts 28.
10. Q. When did believers cease to know perfectly their hope and Paul begin to pray that they might know "the hope of their calling"?
- A. During Acts they knew perfectly times and seasons; they were not in darkness (1 Thess. 5:1-5). After Acts 28:28 Paul prayed that they might know (Eph. 1:18).

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