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THE BOOK of Ephesians

Readings in the Letter to the Ephesians were first published in September 1963 and repeated in 1977 and 1990. We have recently however concluded a series of studies in the epistle on Sunday mornings with, we trust, new and fresh insights into its teaching, and the Notes that follow represent the fruit of that study.

This Letter, along with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, was written by Paul while in prison in Rome. Scholars tell us that Ephesus itself is not mentioned in the text of many ancient manuscripts, and this has led to the supposition that the letter was a circular one, designed perhaps to be read in several churches in Asia. This may explain the absence of any personal greetings in Ephesians, and may also give us a clue to the identity of the letter referred to in Colossians 4:16 as the letter from Laodicea. Whatever its original destination, it is the expression of the maturity of Paul's experience, written in the last years of his life. It is the ripe fruit of his wonderful Christian insights, and there is an October mellowness about all its teaching. It has been aptly described as unfolding 'the wealth, walk and warfare of the Christian', and it is in its detailed exposition of the believer's position in Christ that its chief significance for us lies.

I) I:I

Some introductory observations are necessary when beginning a new study, the first being a comment on our method of study. It is, of course, possible to go into Ephesians in great detail - indeed, in our first study of the epistle in a Sunday series we spent seventeen or eighteen weeks on the first chapter alone (and that was by no means an exhaustive treatment of the chapter), whereas a later Midweek series was little more than this for the whole epistle. We are not concerned to spend so much time on detailed study in these Notes (previous series of Notes have done this very adequately), but hope rather to deal with the salient doctrines unfolded in the letter in such a way as to give a fair idea as to what the Apostle is saying to the church at Ephesus - and also to us - and perhaps give indications for further study of it in the passing.

'Ephesians' is one of Paul's 'Prison Letters', along with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, written during the time he was a prisoner in Rome. In many of the ancient manuscripts 'Ephesus' is not mentioned, and some scholars think this may indicate that it was a circular letter, meant for other fellowships as well as Ephesus. This may be a clue to the identity of the letter referred to in Colossians 4:16 as that to the Laodiceans, an epistle not mentioned elsewhere than here.

2) I:I

This epistle is the expression of the maturity of Paul's spiritual experience, with his missionary journeys behind him, with the end of his active service, and indeed his life, not all that far ahead. There is an 'October mellowness' in its teaching. With regard to the possibilities of interpretation, the noted scholar F.F. Bruce's view is that chs 1-3 give a declaration of the eternal purposes of God in Christ wrought out in His church; and that chs 4-6 give us the practical consequences for the Christian of these purposes. Another - similar - suggestion is that chs 1-3 describe the nature of the new life in Christ and that chs 4-6 show how that life is to be lived out. Following from this latter, the theme of the epistle may be taken as the reality of the two worlds, 'in Christ' and 'in Ephesus', and their interpenetration, not to say collision. In this regard 'in Ephesus' means two things: a) 'in the world', among the pagan atmospheres (2:1-3, 2:11, 12, 4:17-19, 5:3-7); b) 'in the flesh', ordinary human existence (cf 5:22-6:9 - homes and families, family relationships, daily work). Such is the sphere in which we are to live the new life and in which it is to shine forth. On the other hand, 'in Christ' also introduces us to two realities: a) the wealth and riches that are ours in Him; b) the reality of the world of spirits arrayed against us 'in the heavenly places'. If this is a key to the interpretation of the epistle, in terms of Ephesians 6:10ff, then Paul's concern is:

- (a) to proclaim Christ's victory over all dark powers;
- (b) to relate that victory and its realisation in the lives of believers
- (c) to speak of 'the perfecting of the saints' in effective warfare with these dark powers.

This last may be borne out by a consideration of Acts 19 and the account of the turbulent time that Paul had at Ephesus during his extended visit there.

3) 1:1

It will be helpful at this point to look at the account in Acts of the founding of the church at Ephesus, to give us something of the flavour of the place and of the background to this epistle. There is a brief reference in Acts 18:19ff to a visit paid to Ephesus at the end of the second missionary journey, with the promise of an early return visit, recorded in Acts 19, which begins with the story of the twelve disciples who were clearly, in Paul's estimation, seriously lacking in authentic experience. It is enormously encouraging that these disciples were the first members of the church founded in that strategic city. There is hope for any of us, isn't there, in the light of how they ultimately shaped! That incident may well shed some light on the concern Paul shows that the believers in Ephesus might enter into the fullness of their inheritance in Christ. The sequence of teaching in the epistle bears this out, from the statement in 1:13, 14 about being sealed by the Spirit, then the prayer in 1:17ff, that the eyes of their understanding might be opened to know the immeasurable greatness of the power at work in their lives; then the statement in 2:22 about being 'an habitation of God through the Spirit'; then the prayer in 3:17 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ... that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God' - and then in 5:18 'Be filled with the Spirit' as if to say 'Let that gracious indwelling be all it was meant by God to be'. Paul was determined to leave no stone unturned in establishing them on a true and solid foundation. He was a true pastor to his people.

4) 1:1-3

Paul nominates himself in v 1 as 'an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God'. This is an impressive utterance, for straightway the apostle affirms the authority by which he speaks and writes. There may be a conscious implication in this, as if he were saying, 'Recall how it was when I came among you. What was done then was done by the power of God, and I was the Lord's anointed for you'. Next, the words 'the saints in Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus', which contain a great deal for us. The twofold designation, 'saints in Ephesus' and 'faithful in Christ Jesus' indicates the two worlds in which Christians live. On the one hand we are 'in Christ', which bespeaks a new order of being (cf 2 Corinthians 5:17 - a Christian is someone to whom something has happened so decisively that life is never the same again). On the other hand they are 'in Ephesus', and this is a reminder that they are to live this new life in the world of Ephesus with all its ugly and hazardous connotations. Furthermore, they are 'the faithful in Christ Jesus', and this is not only a name for the Christian, but a description of what they ought to be in the world in which they live - and this is a reference not to orthodoxy of belief so much as integrity of life. The two phrases, of course, belong together for it is our consciousness of what we are and have in Christ that enables us to live lives that are faithful and well pleasing to Him.

5) 1:3-12

The 'message' of the epistle begins in v 3 with a glorious doxology. The word 'blessed' here means 'Speak well of', and there is no doubt that Paul speaks well of God in these verses. We are to 'speak well' of Him because He has spoken well of us in Christ, and in the grace of the gospel, speaking peace to our needy hearts in the proclamation of forgiveness and newness of life. This doxology is not simply a rapturous expression of mere emotion, for it can hardly be unnoticed that these verses are full of deep theological and doctrinal truth; and it is surely what they contain that is the cause of the doxology. Nor should we miss the significance of this in relation to the situation in which those to whom Paul wrote were placed - the alien, pagan, spiritually bankrupt atmosphere of Ephesus, described so graphically in Acts 19, with its 'Diana' worship and its occultism. This in itself contains a message for us today. We are placed in a similar situation in our unchurched and indifferent world, fraught as it is with all sorts of problems and hazards - boredom, hopelessness, despair, futility - what one modern writer has called 'the implacable absurdity of the universe' and 'the idea of total uncertainty' - with all the fear and terror that this gives rise to in modern society and the consequent violence this engenders. This is the arena in which our witness and testimony must be made; and if there is anything that must surely be obvious, it is that in such a situation the church must have a faith worth passing on. But for this to be possible Christians need to be deeply taught in the Word, and it is this consciousness that lies behind Paul's solid doctrinal teaching in these verses.

6) 1:3-12

We should note first of all three things that Paul underlines at the outset in these verses. Firstly, he indicates the primary and abiding characteristic of the true Christian life as being centred on God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle never wearied in his desire to magnify and commend the Saviour to all who would listen to him. Secondly, he speaks in these verses of 'spiritual blessing'. It need hardly be said that he was of course conscious of the many temporal blessings that gladden and enrich the common life of man; and he never neglected to be thankful for them. But it would be true to say that for Paul God's spiritual blessings so far eclipsed them in grandeur and glory that he could not even think of them here. It is well to be reminded of this when so many think of God's love only in terms of His daily goodness to us - our happy homes, security, comforts, friendships, and suchlike, all so true and real, but never the primary preoccupation of New Testament saints, who were gripped and thrilled by the realities of forgiveness and reconciliation and the new life, almost to the exclusion of every lesser thing. Thirdly, these verses bear out what has just been said in the thought of 'the heavenly places', the sphere in which the true Christian really lives, and from which he draws all his resources. And the simple challenge of this word is that we should live as Christians in the right world. 'Seek those things which are above', says Paul, as clearly here as he does in Colossians 3:1. Let us browse, then, in that unseen world of the heavenly places, and savour its joy and wonder.

7) 1:3-12

Paul mentions five fundamental and overwhelming realities in these verses: the predestination of God (4, 5); forgiveness and acceptance (6, 7); the adoption of children (5); the knowledge of His will (8-10); and the saints' inheritance (11). Predestination underlines the causeless and unconditional sovereignty of God in our salvation. Rightly understood it is the most comforting, and enriching, and thrilling of all truths. The words Paul uses here are 'chosen in Him before the foundation of the world', and 'having in love predestinated us unto the adoption of children'. The Psalmist says 'What is man that Thou shouldst be mindful of him?' in the contemplation of the vastness of creation. But man, as chosen and called by God, is not insignificant in relation to the majesties of the heavens, for the suns and stars in space are mortal and one day they will be no more; but a man in Christ will outlast all the suns and stars in space, for he is a redeemed moral and spiritual being, and as such is destined to share God's eternal glory forever and ever. What an answer this is to the rootlessness of life, for a man to discover that in Christ he is rooted and grounded in everlasting love. To get through to ultimate reality and find - not nothingness, not implacable absurdity, but - a smiling Father! Moreover, predestination is 'earthed' in the finished work of Christ, in His death and resurrection, by which our forgiveness and acceptance are accomplished and sealed to us through faith. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, dealing with the terrible thing that sin has done to us by a terrible manifestation of His love, grappling with it and destroying it forever. There is a great substitution at the heart of the divine redemption: He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Here is the way to peace.

8) 1:3-12

Adoption is a subject that has its own particular significance and has nowhere been better defined than in the Shorter Catechism as 'an act of God's free grace whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God'. In Paul's thought it is the fact of the Spirit's dwelling in our hearts that makes us sons and daughters of God. Spiritual rebirth in Christ brings us into His family, and the spirit we receive when we are incorporated into Christ is the spirit of adoption. 'God setteth the solitary in families', says the Psalmist (Psalm 68:6) - this is the heart of adoption, and it means that now, in Christ, we 'belong' and we 'matter'.

Not only so: we are also saved into meaning and purpose, into knowledge of God's will (8-10). Those whom He has reconciled to Himself as sons He also enlightens with the understanding of His purpose. This is developed further in chs 2 and 3. This opens a rich vein of truth and we will need to leave it until tomorrow's Note to do justice to it.

9) 1:3-12

There is a tremendous wealth and sweep in this thought of the understanding of God's purpose. Indeed in the whole passage before us there is a massiveness in the apostle's thought that almost overwhelms us. To look back for a moment to 4, 5: there, what was in view was 'past eternity' so to speak, in the mists of 'before time began', with predestination and election; then, in 6, 7 it was 'the present', with forgiveness, acceptance and sonship; and now, in 8-10, it is the ultimate issues in the future 'the dispensation of the fullness of the times'. The whole of existence, past, present and future, is set before us. It is hardly possible fully to comprehend the wonder and the glory and the mystery of this reality - that we should see our lives immersed, encapsulated, held and kept in utter changeless security, in that comprehensive enterprise of divine grace. This is a thought echoed elsewhere in Paul's writings, as for example, in Romans 8:29-30: 'Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified'. And in there, in that vast, mysterious chain of divine activity, our lives held fast and secure by His loving and omnipotent hand! Ah, what a salvation is ours!

10) 1:3-12

We turn now to the nature of the eternal purpose in view in all this, what Paul calls the inheritance that is ours in Christ (10, 11). The fullness of the time we may take as referring to the glorious consummation at the end of all things. But what does dispensation mean? The word in the original means 'the management of a household or family'. It is a word referring to administration, and it has sometimes been translated as 'stewardship'. This is a significant picture that we are given: the thought is of the entire universe being the Father's House, with the stewardship of that House and the administration of all its affairs, being committed to the Son as the sole Dispenser of its affairs, with all things finding their fulfilment and perfection in and through Him. This wonderful thought gives a new dimension of depth to the great prophecy in Isaiah 9:6, '... and the government shall be upon His shoulder'.

But there is something even more wonderful, and it is this: J.B. Phillips translates 11 as follows: 'And here is the staggering thing - that in all which will one day belong to Him we have been promised a share (since we were long ago destined for this by the One Who achieves His purposes by His sovereign will) so that we, as the first to put our confidence in Christ, may bring praise to His glory'. This is the prospect before us! Well might Paul break into a glad doxology and 'speak well of' such a God and such a Saviour!

11) 1:3-12

If we were to ask what having a share in this stewardship could possibly mean, there are not wanting hints and suggestions about this in the New Testament itself in some of the parables that Jesus taught, as for example in the parable of the talents and the pounds: 'Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many thing', and in similar vein 'Be thou ruler over ten cities'. And we can turn to other places in Paul's epistles to illuminate this. In Romans 8:19ff the apostle speaks of the whole creation waiting with eager longing for the manifestation of the sons of God so that it can be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of His children. We may look at it this way: whatever God's original purposes for creation were, they were hindered, frustrated, and held up by the sin of man. Earth, so to speak, of all God's creation, became the 'black sheep', the 'sheep that was lost'; and because of this the normal development of creation was stunted and held up until the lost sheep could be found and when that fulfilment takes place, the whole universe will come into its own. In the meantime, only one piece is missing in the cosmic puzzle, and when it is recovered, the whole creation will move into life and energy and activity almost beyond man's power to conceive. Even now, the great Steward is at work, and presently He will finish the work He has begun on humanity - the preparatory rehabilitating work - and then, when a redeemed humanity is complete and takes its full place in the divine plan - and such is God's grace that it will be a foremost place in that plan - God's purposes will come into their own, and things inexpressible, beyond the thought of man, will begin to happen and glory upon glory will shine and gleam all through the universe with surpassing splendour, forever and ever, and Christ will be all in all! Such is the prospect and such the extent, of the Christian hope and the Christian life. Who would not rejoice in it, when once its glory has dawned on their souls!

12) 1:13-14

With these verses we come to a transition in the apostle's thought. Up to this point he has been speaking in the first person plural - 'we', 'us', 'our' - it is we who 'speak well of our God' and this is the function of the church so to speak well of Him that we commend the gospel to all who will hear, and draw others into the kingdom. When the glory of the gospel grips a man it sets him on fire, and that fire communicates and spreads to others. There is always the possibility of this happening where the gospel is living and active, and the possibility of others saying 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you' (Zechariah 8:23). And this is how, in the case of the Ephesians, the 'we' changed into 'ye'. They heard the gospel from Paul, and they responded in faith. We should also note the parallelism between the words 'ye trusted' and 'ye believed' in 13 and 'you hath he quickened' in 2:1ff. These are two different ways of describing the miracle and mystery of salvation: both are needed for a full expression and exposition of biblical truth; and although we are concentrating on the first of these at the moment, we must never fail to have the other in our minds and thoughts along with it as 'the other side'. Paul's own experience of this is a good illustration: on the Damascus Road (Acts 9) he capitulated to Christ, saying, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' but in Galatians he describes this thus: 'It pleased the Lord to reveal His Son in me'. We enter this new world, then, by trusting in Christ, and that trust is awakened and called forth in our hearts by hearing the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation.

13) 1:13-14

We need to pause at this point to clear up something that has often been a cause of confusion. The word 'after' is used twice (in the AV) in 13, first in relation to the hearing of the word of truth, and then in relation to the sealing of the Holy Spirit. There is, however, no suggestion in the original Greek of any 'time-lag' in either the matter of hearing or of believing, and the verse would be more accurately rendered 'In whom, on hearing the Word of truth, ye trusted; and in whom, on believing, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise'. There is no suggestion that the sealing of the Spirit took place at a time subsequent to believing the word of truth, but rather at the point at which genuine belief took place. Interestingly, this is the same Greek construction as we have in Acts 19:1ff, in the account of the disciples at Ephesus whom Paul felt were lacking in something vital. He asked them, not 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' (which would imply a reception of the Spirit some time after believing in Christ), but rather 'Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?' or 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit on believing?' (the implication being that their believing was faulty and deficient). The general teaching of the New Testament leaves us in no doubt that the reception of the Spirit constitutes one's initiation into the kingdom of God (see, particularly, Romans 8:9b, 1 Corinthians 12:13).

14) 1:13-14

Clearly, in Paul's thought, 'trusting in Christ' follows upon, and is the direct consequence of, 'hearing the word of truth', and due weight needs to be given to this important idea. What Paul says here can be summed up in his own words elsewhere, in Romans 10:17, 'faith cometh by hearing'. There is an essential simplicity in Paul's words, and we must beware in gospel work, of placing an emphasis where Paul does not place it. It is all too easy to trust or lean on atmosphere, technique, method, or equipment, instead of on the hearing of faith. Spurgeon is said to have left, as his legacy to the church, his sublime faith in the converting power of the gospel. There is something essentially mysterious about this. It is not something, strictly speaking, that we can fully understand. As Jesus said, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth; thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit'. All the same, there are certain things that are quite clear to us, and the first is that the word of truth is quite central in the scheme of salvation. It is the word of truth that 'opens the door' for us into the new life, as the Psalmist says, 'The entrance of Thy word giveth light'. This can only mean that the Word of God is a living and a life-giving word which communicates and imparts life in the hearing of it. Two things may be said of this: the first is that it is life-giving because it is the word of truth - not merely true, but truth, the embodiment of truth itself, and the second thing is that it is life-giving because it is the vehicle of the Holy Spirit's operation. We shall look at these two considerations in the Notes that follow.

15) 1:13-14

There are profound theological implications in the statement that the Word of God is life-giving because it is the Word of truth. Jesus said, 'I am the Truth' and He is the eternal Word that was from the beginning. He is the original Word of Life, and it has pleased Him to be in the written word. This idea of the 'inscripturisation' of the Eternal Word is central to the Reformed view of Scripture. It is a cardinal doctrine of the Reformed faith that Christ and the Scriptures can never be separated or severed from one another. This is how and why the Word of truth is life-giving, for He, the Christ in the Scriptures, is life-giving. And, rightly understood, this is the charter of every true preacher: as he stands before his people, he knows that the living Christ is pleased to be in the word that he preaches, making it a living, life-giving reality. This is why men encounter a living Christ when they hear the Word of truth. We sing,

Beyond the sacred page
I seek Thee, Lord.

Luther says that the Scriptures are 'the cradle of the Lord'. In other words, when the word is heard, it is as if our Lord Himself were standing in the midst, stretching out His gracious hand to awaken the slumbering soul, to cleanse the leper, to heal the sick, to call the dead forth from the graveyards of sin. Indeed, it is not only as if Christ did that - He does do that! This is why Calvin is able to say that we should listen to the Word of truth with a great reverence and anticipation, for it is God Himself Who is speaking to us. We should come to it with all the thrill and joy, the awe and reverence, with which the shepherds came to the manger of Bethlehem, and the Wise Men, who said 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews?'

16) 1:13-14

The second thing to be said about the living Word is that it is life giving because it is the vehicle of the Holy Spirit's operation. He, the Spirit, is the Presence of Christ in the Word; and without Him all is in vain. 'The letter killeth', says Paul, 'the Spirit giveth life'. And here, particularly, we see the mystery of grace: He who is the Spirit of life, 'the Lord and Giver of Life', is present in the word of our salvation, and it is He who imparts life to our souls. The wonderful story in Acts 10 of the wonderful conversion of Cornelius the Centurion illustrates this: we read there that 'While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the Word'. The words of a man became the Word of God to these people - the living and life-giving Word - for that word brought the Holy Spirit upon them, and it was the coming of that Spirit that brought them into a state of grace, creating faith within them so that they believed the Word of salvation spoken to them by Peter, and received Him of Whom he spoke. And the message he spoke was that of the anointing, life, death and resurrection of Christ - Christ crucified and risen - and the proclamation of forgiveness through His Name. It is a wonderful picture. One can almost see the dawning of the light on their faces as they listened and their hearts began to burn within them.

17) 1:13-14

Next, we must look at the other phrase, 'trusting in Christ'. As has already been indicated, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to create faith in Christ in our hearts. This is what happens when the gospel grips us. As the Shorter Catechism puts it, 'we are persuaded and enabled to embrace Christ as He is offered to us in the gospel'. Anders Nygren, the Swedish scholar, defines faith thus: 'When one hears the gospel, and is mastered by it, that is faith'. When we look at it in this way we see that it is beside the point, and indeed absurd, to think of faith in terms of some natural trait within us, or of an aptitude that some folk have by nature, and are therefore 'good at' in a way that others are not - in the way that some folk have a bent for, say, train spotting or bird watching. Not so: if we have a genuine faith it is something that the finger of God has planted in our hearts and imparted by the Holy Spirit in and through the hearing of the gospel. There are three main terms used in Scripture to describe the soul's relation to God - 'trust', 'belief', 'faith'. Here, the AV uses 'trust', but the word is not the usual one but one which has the meaning of 'to hope', and the sense here seems to be 'to pin one's hopes on Christ', and that gives a very good meaning to the nature of true faith, for it is not an intellectual exercise, or the expression of a natural trait, but an act of committal of oneself to Him. We shall say something further about this in tomorrow's Note.

18) 1:13-14

Commitment to Christ is of the essence of faith and trust in Him. There is a well-known word in Romans 6:17 which underlines this. Paul says, 'But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine (teaching) which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness.' Here, in other words, we have what Paul is saying in these verses in Ephesians. It is a great and comprehensive statement. The 'form of doctrine', or pattern of teaching, corresponds to the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation'. 'Obeying from the heart' is the effect that the hearing of the Word of truth had upon them. And if we look more closely at the words, we shall see just what is involved in the response that is made to the word of salvation.

First of all, the mind is involved. It is by the mind that the form of doctrine, the pattern of teaching, is grasped. It makes its appeal to our minds, it engages our thinking, and indeed it is usually the case that when the gospel grips a man it sends him home thinking furiously.

In the second place, it makes its appeal to the heart. When we ponder in our minds the story of a God Who came down to die for sinful men our hearts begin to burn within us, and we cry with Wesley,

Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Thirdly, the will is involved. They obeyed! There was a surrender of the will, as the result of their minds being gripped and their hearts stirred. In other words, hearing the word of salvation brought them to the point of true committal to Jesus Christ. That is what 'trusting Him' means. Is this how it has been with us?

19) 1:15-22

We have spent several days on 13 and 14 but these are highly important verses and we need to be clear on their meaning. We are now able to proceed with the rest of the first chapter of the Epistle. We come in these verses to the point where exposition passes to intercession. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that the truth of God which he has expounded in 3-14 might come home to their hearts with living power and that it might mean all that it ought to mean for them. And, significantly, the link between the two sections of the chapter is the Holy Spirit (13b, 14). It is He Who makes real to our experience the truths of redemption, creating faith in us to enable us to embrace the blessings Paul has unfolded; and it is He also Who enlightens our understanding in such a way that we begin progressively to grasp something of the immensity and magnitude of God's salvation. Significantly also, the same process by which we are first brought to faith - with the involvement of mind, heart and will - operates in that deepening understanding. Being 'filled with all the fullness of God' (3:19) is not something that takes place 'in vacuo', but in relation to one's grasp and apprehension of the truth. And this is the point in Paul's words in v 18 about 'the eyes of your understanding being enlightened'. One thinks of our Lord's own teaching in John 16:13ff about the Holy Spirit's ministry as leading us into all truth, and taking of the things that are Christ's and showing them to us. It is for this gracious and fruitful ministry that Paul prays here. Similarly, heart and will are involved in this, for when the riches of divine truth are really grasped it is impossible but that the heart should be kindled and warmed within and the will made wholly responsive to all that God will say.

20) 1:15-22

Before we look in detail at Paul's prayer, let us pause for a little at its preface in 15-17a. We see first of all, in 15, 16, the warmth of his love and joy at the news of the Ephesians' spiritual state. Also, the words 'when I heard' tell us that when faith is real it is something you hear about! It is noised abroad, and it will 'out', for it cannot be hid. Also, the phrase 'making mention of you in my prayers' implies, according to Handley Moule, the expression of individual remembrance. It could even mean literally 'by name'. This is one of the most striking characteristics in Paul, his intercession for the saints, in every epistle, and on every occasion. He truly had them on his heart. His work was not done when he had proclaimed the word of salvation to them, but once begun he continued it through prayer (cf Galatians 4:19). Paul, then, is in effect praying into the Ephesians all that he had preached to them, as if to say, 'I want you to know in your experience all that I have said to you in writing as I have done in this epistle'. We should also note particularly how he describes the God to Whom he is praying: 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory'. What a tremendous utterance! Modern versions render the phrase 'the glorious Father' but this is not what the phrase means. He is 'the glorious Father', of course, but He is more. He is, to use Moule's phrase, 'the Father who is the Origin and King of all that is meant by 'eternal glory'. And when we take the two things together - the fact of being mentioned 'by name' in someone's prayers, and the fact that our name is being spoken to this Ineffable Presence, the Father of glory - is not this a wonderful, glorious privilege and joy!

21) 1:15-22

As to the prayer itself, it is threefold in nature, embracing a threefold knowledge, as 18 and 19 make plain. The threefold petition corresponds to the threefold unfolding of the riches of grace in the first half of the chapter. 'The hope of His calling' corresponds to 'calling and election' in 4, 5; 'the glory of his inheritance' corresponds to the 'inheritance' in 11; and 'the greatness of His power to us-ward who believe' corresponds to the power of 'the Spirit' in 13, 14. This means that what Paul is in effect saying is, 'I have spoken (3-14) of your calling in grace, but do you really know what that means and implies? I have spoken of your inheritance in Christ, but oh, do you have any conception of how great and wonderful it is? I have spoken of the working of the Spirit in your hearts but do you know how big and glorious and immeasurable a thing it is that has gripped you, and what an incalculable power is at work in you? It is for this that I am praying on your behalf, that you may enter into all that is yours in Christ'. This is the significance and interpretation of the passage, that the Ephesians - and we ourselves - may come to know, as fully as redeemed sinners can ever know, all that is ours in Christ Jesus.

22) 1:15-22

We shall now consider in some detail the apostolic prayer, phrase by phrase. First of all, 'the hope of his calling'. To what are we called in the calling of God? We are called, first of all, to fellowship, to be with Him, to walk in fellowship with His risen Son (cf Mark 3:14), Who will one day sum up in Himself all things in heaven and in earth. To think that such a One as He should desire the fellowship of our poor hearts! Then, we are called to holiness, as is indicated in 1:4. Nothing less than conformity to the image of God's Son. This is the prospect and hope of His calling - not merely that we should be forgiven, but that we should be conformed to His image. Then, we are called to fruitfulness of life (cf John 15:16), and that our lives should tell in the world for Him. Is this hope being realised in us? And, best of all, we are called to His eternal glory - to the unimagined responsibilities of the world to come, for which all else in this life is preparatory!

And why is it so important that we should know all this? Because hope is an anchor (Hebrews 6:19) to keep us steady amid all the storms of life; and hope is an armour (1 Thessalonians 5:8) to protect us against the onslaughts of the enemy. With the 'hope' burning brightly in our hearts we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5). Such are the implications of the phrase 'the hope of His calling'.

23) 1:15-22

There are two possible constructions that can be placed on the second phrase 'the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints'. On the one hand, the preposition 'in' may be fairly rendered 'among'. If it is taken thus, what Paul is saying is that it is possible to get to know fully the glory of that inheritance only in and through the fellowship of the people of God. It is when we are together in fellowship that the fullness dawns. This is the same thought as is expressed in 3:18 in the words 'with all saints'. The communion of saints is a wonderful means of grace. This is one reason why we are exhorted in Scripture not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. On the other hand, however, Paul does say, 'his inheritance in the saints', not ours in him - that is to say, the prayer is that we should grasp something of the meaning and purpose God has for us, what He is out to do in us for Himself, to make us satisfying to Himself, a people for His own possession. This is more integrally linked with our inheritance in Him than we might at first suppose, for all possible blessing for us derives from His having His way with us and in us. It is of supreme importance for us to know what God is aiming at in our lives. This part of Paul's prayer ought to make us pray, 'Oh God, open my eyes to see what You are doing with my life and, when I see it, give me grace to stand back and tremble lest I interfere with it in any way and blunderingly hinder the fulfilment of Your will and purpose in me'. How often do we hinder and jeopardise the divine working, by our own wilfulness, and our determination to go our own way! If only we saw clearly enough what God is out to do, we might appreciate the necessity of allowing Him free rein in our lives. Hence Paul's prayer here.

24) 1:15-22

The third and final phrase in Paul's prayer is an extended one: 'the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to His mighty power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead' It is a majestic utterance, and we see it to be so more and more when we study it and seek to understand its implications. The power the Apostle refers to is, of course, the Holy Spirit. It was He, the mighty Spirit of God that wrought in Christ in His death and resurrection. Christ offered Himself without spot unto God on the cross by the eternal Spirit, and was declared to be the Son of God with power at the resurrection by that same Spirit, called 'the Spirit of holiness' in Romans 1:4. And the wonder of what Paul is saying here is that the Spirit's working in us is of the same nature as His working in Christ. He wrought mightily in Christ in His death, resurrection, exaltation and assumption of power, and He comes to work the same pattern in us - death, resurrection, exaltation and assumption of power - His desire being to 'repeat' the same process in us. It is in this 'repetition' that Christian experience consists, and it is this that Paul prays that we should know, and know to the full.

25) 1:15-22

We must next consider what Paul means when he says that Christ was made head over all things to the Church. He means that all that Jesus did, in His atoning and redeeming work was for the church, for us, His people. All that the Spirit wrought in Him was for our sakes, and the Spirit now comes to work in us, and make Christ's victory ours in experience.

He died for us - and the Spirit comes to make that death our death, His death to sin our death to sin.

He rose for us - and the Spirit comes to make that risen life our risen life.

He ascended for us - and the Spirit comes to make that ascension our ascension to the heavenly places.

He assumed power for us - and the Spirit comes to make that power and authority ours in experience.

This is why Paul can speak as he does about our being raised together in Christ and made to sit with Him in heavenly places (2:6). This is what the seal of the Spirit, mentioned in 1:13, is for and is about. And when we come to chapter 2 we shall see that it is the exposition of the death/resurrection/exaltation process as it took place in the experience of the Ephesian believers.

26) 1:15-22

There is something else also that we must note in the words 'to the Church ' (22). Paul is saying that through His redemptive work Christ has been given this place of power and authority. But the question arises, has that not always been His place from all eternity, above all principality and power, as the all-glorious Second Person of the Trinity? Is not Christ infinitely superior to all principalities and powers by virtue of His eternal Godhead? Ah, yes! That is the point. He did not need to go through this great battle with the powers of darkness for Himself, on His own account, nor did He require to be made Head over all things on His own account, because He is eternally Head over them, in His own right, as the Second Person of the Trinity. But it was as man, and for man that all this took place. It is as man and for man that He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, and was highly exalted and given a name above every name. It was as man and for man that He fought and won, in order to give that victory to us. He had no need of victory over the dark powers for Himself; but He did need it as the Representative of His people, the Church. And His victory is a representative victory, in that His people, His Church, are victorious in Him. It is this that Paul prays for so earnestly in this passage, that we might really grasp how great and glorious the work of this mighty Spirit is, and is meant to be in our lives. Well might Paul use superlatives to describe it - the 'immeasurable greatness' of that power, as one modern version renders it.

27) 1:15-22

Before we leave this wonderful passage, one final thought: We might well think of another statement in Paul's teaching elsewhere. In Philippians 3:10 Paul speaks of his longing to 'know Him and the power of His resurrection'. Is not this what he is speaking of here, in 18, 19 - 'that ye may know ... the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe'? Indeed, it is. And we should note that in Philippians 3:10 the phrase about knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection is prefaced by the significant words (Philippians 3:8), 'I count all things but loss' That is the price that needs to be paid for this to become a reality. It is 'to us-ward who believe', and 'believing' has to include and mean 'counting all things loss'. This is the challenge that this wonderful prayer of Paul's leaves with us.

This is the wealth of our position of Christ, and this is where God has placed us in Him. And this is why it is so tremendously important for us to know our position in Him, as being no less than this. Oh, for a true grasp of it, and a true appreciation and experience of its wonder and power!

28) 2:1-5

If the first chapter of Ephesians unfolds to us the constitution of the Church, in God the Father (1:3-6), in God the Son (1:7-12), and in God the Holy Spirit (1:13ff), what we have in chapter 2 may be called the raw materials of the Church. This is a good way of looking at this chapter, for we are given some perception of the greatness of God's everlasting salvation, as we look at what we were before God laid His hand upon us, and then see the miracle of grace by which we became new creatures in Christ. The sequence of thought from the latter part of chapter 1 to what we read here is surely clear. Having spoken of the power at work in Christ when He was raised from the dead and exalted above all principality and power, he now shows us that power at work in the lives of the Ephesians - hence the change from the pronoun 'we' in ch 1 to the pronoun 'you' in 2:1. Not only so: in the reference in 2:2 to 'the prince of the power of the air', the dark malignity that holds all men in his bondage and tyranny, it is made clear that Christ's being made head over all principality and power has direct reference to this power. Here, in the case of the Ephesians, Christ has exercised this Lordship over the evil one by His Spirit. One readily recalls our Lord's own parable about 'first binding the strong man, and then spoiling his house'. There are two possible ways of interpreting these verses before us, and we will proceed to look at them in tomorrow's Note.

29) 2:1-5

The two possibilities of interpretation of these verses are as follows: one is to concentrate on the doctrine of sin that they represent, dark and solemn as this is; the other is to look at them in relation to the grace of God, as a background to what is said here about that grace. This second possibility is the more profitable of the two. We do not view sin in isolation, in Scripture, but rather in relation to grace, for sin is the dark background against which the operation of God is seen in its fullness and at its best. The Paraphrase of Titus 3:3-9 expresses this very well in its opening two verses:

How wretched was our former state,
When slaves to Satan's sway,
With hearts disorder'd and impure,
O'erwhelmed in sin we lay!

But, O my soul! for ever praise,
for ever love His Name,
Who turn'd thee from the fatal paths
of folly, sin, and shame.

And so, dark as the opening passage is, we place our emphasis on the grace of God that sets to work on this most unpromising of raw material, to build it into a church. One thinks readily of the parable in Jeremiah 18 of the potter and the clay: marred in the hand of the potter, the clay is taken up and made into another vessel, but it is not the marred clay so much as what is done with it by the potter that is the important issue. And so it is here.

30) 2:1-5

Paul, then, is intent on magnifying the grace of God to us. We have already seen in 1:3 how he 'speaks well' of that grace, and how, later in that chapter, he prayed that his readers might know something of its immeasurable greatness. And later still, in 3:8, he speaks of 'the unsearchable riches of Christ'. We need to keep this ever in our minds as we look at the dark and sombre statements in 2:1-3, which give such a profound insight into the nature of sin. The first phrase in 1, 'dead in trespasses and sins', describes what it means to be a sinner. They take us right back to Genesis 3, and to the warning words spoken to Adam and Eve, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die'. Sin - disobedience, rebellion, against the word and will of God - is a killer. Something happened to man when he transgressed the direct and unmistakable command of God: he died - not indeed in the physical sense, at that point in his experience, for Adam and Eve continued to exist, but in the deep and tragic sense that it became impossible for him to recover his former position, impossible to regain his freedom to do the divine will, impossible to realise his divine destiny. For he was no longer a free agent, but now a captive, and no longer able not to sin, although not thereby ceasing to be a responsible person. This is not the time or place to enter into a lengthy discussion of the relation between freedom and responsibility: it is sufficient to say at this point that being 'dead in trespasses and sins' means that there is nothing in the sinner that is capable of responding to God. He is insensitive to any spiritual considerations of any kind, and it is this that makes Paul say, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'. The implications of this are very considerable, and fundamental to a proper understanding of the gospel itself, as we shall point out in tomorrow's Note.

31) 2:1-5

The implication of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:14, quoted at the end of yesterday's Note, is that it is not a question of degree which separates the spiritual and non-spiritual realm. The work of grace in the gospel is not a matter of 'bringing out' what is already there in a man, a sort of uncovering a man's 'better self', and encouraging it to take control. Nor is it a question of 'turning over a new leaf' either, or 'reforming' or 'brushing up one's life'. Paul uses the word 'quicken' in 1, which indicates that it is a matter of imparting or bestowing life, the implanting of something that was not there before, the imparting of the gift of life. And until this takes place, a man remains 'dead in trespasses and sins'. What is spoken of here is a completely new order of existence, which the New Testament describes as 'the kingdom of God'. And to be there, without this imparting of new life, would be like living in a country where all the money you had was of the wrong currency, with no currency office to exchange what you had, a country where they spoke a language of which you could not understand one word, a country where a scale of values operated that was completely beyond your understanding. It would drive a man mad!

To use a different illustration: think of a man with no ear for music condemned to live in a world of classical music. There is a whole world of wonder and beauty in classical music which a tone-deaf man can never penetrate, and you cannot even begin to describe it to him. How do you describe a tree, or the colours of a sunset, to a man who has been born blind? He has nothing, no apparatus with which to cope with such information. There is a complete inability in him, which no human means can ever overcome. This is an illustration of what it means to be 'dead in trespasses and sins'. A man may be alive enough in physical and mental faculties, but with regard to the one all-important factor, that which was meant to give him his distinctive status, as made in the image of God, he is dead.

32) 2:1-5

All that follows in this grim catalogue of man's sinnerhood serves to bear out what has already been said. For, being dead in sins, man follows, as an inevitable consequence, the course of this world. If we compare the state of being dead in trespasses and sins with having come adrift from the true anchorage of life (and that is an apt way of putting it), then naturally and inevitably that man drifts downstream with the current. That is the course of this world. And anything without an anchor will drift downstream. The majestic liner and the dirty coaster will both alike drift, the princely yacht and the derelict hulk will go the same way. That is a parable of life: the natural man may be a respected member of the community or a broken down alcoholic, but although outwardly so completely different they share common ground in this: if they are outside of Christ, they both alike drift downstream, following the course of this world.

Nor is Paul finished yet with his analysis. Behind this world-course, he claims, there is a personal evil power directing operations, conspiring to ruin the souls of men - the devil himself, the 'prince of the power of the air'. We are probably less disposed to ridicule this concept today than previously. We have lived through so much evil and horror in society that we have been almost forced to take on board some such factor to explain the sheer extremity of the evil things we have seen in our time. By the same token we may become more disposed to take the apostle's climactic word, 'children of wrath', than hitherto, and recognise that the confident assertion that 'we are all children of God' is not a biblical concept except in the one general sense that God created us all, for in the all-important spiritual sense, only those born of the Spirit into newness of life can claim to be true children of God. After all, it was Jesus Who said, of the Pharisees, 'ye are of your father the devil'!

33) 2:4-6

Such is the human predicament, then, which is answered by the grace and mercy of God in the gospel. What a glorious word Paul utters in 4, "But God" The word 'but' is in English grammar only a connecting particle - but what a connection it makes here! For it links the plight of man with the power of God; it links the degradation and despair of the sinner with the love and compassion of the Saviour; it links the helplessness of the lost with the Strong Name of the Trinity. And it is the special delight of God so to do, in His Word, and by the mighty operation of the Spirit to make it a reality in our lives. We need to set this wonderful reality over against every conceivable human situation. Let our situation be as dark as could be - but God! Let circumstances be as difficult and doom-laden as they could be - but God! Let the magnitude of your sin be as insuperable as possible - but God! Let your weakness, your disability, your background, your track record, or whatever, be as problematic and intractable as possible - over against all that stands God in the riches of His grace - rich in mercy, ready to pardon, mighty to save, able to do exceeding abundantly above all you could ask or think, able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before His Presence with exceeding joy! The truth of the matter is that if God spared not His Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, how shall He not also, with Him, freely give us all things. If He is able to deal with the extremest of needs, and bring life out of death in His atoning and reconciling work, then all and every lesser need will yield to His blessed touch. That is our God and that is our gospel. Blessed be His Name!

34) 2:4-6

We see now what was meant earlier by saying that it is better to think of the dark picture of human sin in the light of the mercy of God, than to look at that picture by itself. When we think of what we are in our plight and helplessness as sinners we might well despair, but the message of the gospel is of a God Who in Christ intervenes to give newness of life, and to meet every other need and eventuality. We could put it this way: There was a day when the sun's rays penetrated the mists and clouds of the primeval chaos at God's behest, as He commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and there comes a day, in the lives of God's elect, when the Sun of righteousness rises upon them with healing in His wings. That is the miracle of the grace of God by which we become regenerate, and pass from death unto life, and from darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God. And it is all of grace. If we are Christians today we are so by the sovereign grace of God. We never deserved His grace. He did not have to speak that life-giving word to our souls. There was no obligation on Him to do so. There was nothing in us to invite His pity or compassion. He might have left us in our sins and in our lost estate. But the Spirit of God brooded upon our darkness. The divine pity overshadowed our helplessness. His thoughts towards us were thoughts of peace and not of evil. He held out His hand to us and it was a hand of love. He loved us, and He had mercy on us. Blessed be His Name! And - to anticipate what follows later in the chapter, and to continue the 'creation' analogy a little further - just as God commanded the flowers and the fruits of the earth into being, so He commands the flowers of grace and the fruits of the Spirit to come forth in the lives of those He has recreated. So also, the fragrance and beauty of the first creation have their spiritual counterpart in the new creation of God in Christ. The soul of man becomes like a well-watered garden, and the desert blossoms as the rose. There is nothing in the world so beautiful as a newborn child of God.

35) 2:4-6

We have sometimes used, as an illustration of the regenerating work of the Spirit, the picture of a ragged urchin creeping up to the window of a big house, and gluing his eyes to the scene within - a lovely, sparkling, and infinitely desirable Christmas party in progress. What a marvellous, yet poignant and wistful sight for a poor, outcast child. And then - wonder of wonders! - the master of the house sees him, comes out and invites him in to share in the festivities. It was good to look in - but infinitely better to go in! Now, in chapter 1 of Ephesians, we were looking in, as it were, gripped, stirred, hungering for the Word of life, and longing somehow to get in. And here in chapter 2 we get in, and just as the opening verses (1-3) underline the poverty-stricken state to which sin has reduced mankind, and are well described and illustrated by the picture of the poor urchin child, so also does his 'welcome to the party' illustrate the wonderful divine intervention by which the plight of man is changed and transformed into an experience of infinite hope and realisation. Such is the wonder of the gospel.

36) 2:4-6

We add one further comment before we leave these verses, about the way in which this whole operation works - how we 'get in'. First of all there is the love of the Father. It is the Father who goes out and brings the poor outcast child into His house and home. And it is because of His great love wherewith He loved us that we are brought into the fold and family of God.

Then, there is the work of the Son. We should note well the past tense that Paul uses in 4 - the love wherewith He loved. God's love has its focal point in history in the death of His Son. This, as we have often stressed, is the great centrality of the gospel - not general love, but special, particular love, manifested in the death of the Cross. This rings out throughout the entire first chapter of the epistle. It is ever on the basis of Christ's finished work that the Father issues the invitation to 'come in'.

Then, there is the operation of the Spirit. It is by the instrumentality of the Spirit that God the Father brings about our redemption. This Paul has already recognised in 1:17-23, when he prays for the operation of the Spirit in our lives.

Next, there is the prayer of the Church. We must never forget that we are called to be co-workers with God in the grand enterprise of redemption. We must look again and again at Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in 1:15ff, and at its answer in 2:1ff: 'You hath He quickened'.

Finally, there is the response of faith. This, as we see in 8, is the outgoing of our hand to the Hand stretched out to save us; it is the response quickened and brought to birth in our hearts by the life-giving Spirit of God. Faith cometh by hearing.

37) 2:7-10

The theme in these verses is that of God's workmanship, in the great enterprise of salvation. 'Saved' is the word that Paul uses to describe and sum up what he has said in 4-6, wonderful and glorious as these verses are. We need, of course, to remember that implicit in Paul's teaching here is the operation of the Spirit of God Who applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ - as the Shorter Catechism says – Q 30 'by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling'. The Catechism goes on, Q 31, to define 'effectual calling' as 'the work of God's Spirit whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered to us in the gospel'. The Catechism's statement will repay careful study as we read Paul's words here. The word 'saved', both in 8 and also earlier in 5, has the force of 'have been saved', the perfect tense not so much pointing back to the decision of faith by which we enter into the kingdom as to our present condition as the continuing result of that entrance. In other words, it is the state of being saved, rather than the point at which we were saved that Paul is stressing. And he is saying that our present experience, our present standing in newness of life is due to grace. But we are not to think of grace as a 'thing'. We are saved by God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Grace is an 'attitude' in the heart and mind of God that wills to save the sinner. James Denney's great definition says it all:

Grace is the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful, unearned,
at work in Christ for the salvation of sinners.

Sin leaves mankind like the traveller in the story of the Good Samaritan, robbed, stripped, wounded, and left for dead. Grace is the Good Samaritan, who comes to bind up our bleeding sin-wounds, and pour in oil and wine.

38) 2:7-10

Paul's point is that salvation is all of God. Sometimes it is questioned whether the phrase 'the gift of God' in v 8 refers to 'grace' or to 'faith'. But it is best perhaps to take it as referring to salvation, and as including both grace and faith. Faith is certainly the gift of God, as we read in Paul's writings elsewhere (Philippians 1:29 - 'It is given to us ... to believe'), whether Paul means it here in Ephesians 2 or not. And this is the point that is made in 10, in the words 'we are His workmanship' - which stands in contrast to 'not of works'. For if salvation is a gift from God and all of grace, something we receive from His bountiful hand, then our 'works' do not, and cannot, come into it at all. It is His work and we are His workmanship. This is a favourite theme of Paul's, as we may see from such verses as Philippians 1:6, 'He that hath begun a good work in you' and Philippians 2:13, 'Work out your own salvation ... for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure'. There is more to be said on this important theme and we shall return to it in later Notes but at this point we must consider what Paul says in 7 'that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus'. These are words which show the sheer breadth of Paul's thought, and we shall turn to them in detail in tomorrow's Note.

39) 2:7-10

What we have said about the word 'saved' being in the perfect tense and referring to the believer's present condition as the continuing result of his conversion is further underlined now by Paul in what he says in 7. Paul's thought is multi-dimensional and speaks of the work of grace having vast repercussions and ramifications not only in this life but also in the ages to come. We can put it this way: Inherent in the biblical doctrine of creation there is the basic truth that God is continuously present in His creation maintaining it in being and sustaining it every moment by the word of His power. 'By Him', as the apostle says in Colossians 1:17, 'all things consist,' are maintained in being. And so it is also in the new creation. Grace is never a once-for-all operation but continues without respite 'until the day of Jesus Christ' - and, if this word in 7 is any indication, long after the coming of that day. It continues 'in the ages to come' - not only

Till we cast our crowns before Thee
Lost in wonder, love and praise,

but throughout all the ages of eternity. There is ample evidence in Scripture that the years of this life - long though they may be - are as a drop in the ocean compared with the endless ages of eternity, only an incident, compared with the timeless future that lies ahead. The word 'show' in 7 means 'to exhibit fully'. The idea seems to be that only in the ages to come will it be seen - will be possible to be seen - just how great and marvellous and glorious this wonderful salvation is.

Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.

40) 2:7-10

What was said at the end of yesterday's Note is echoed elsewhere by Paul, for example in 3:10, where he speaks of the ultimate purpose of the gospel as being that of the manifold wisdom of God being made manifest by the Church to 'the principalities and powers in heavenly places.' What Paul means is that the Church, saved by grace and ultimately glorified and transformed, might be a spectacle to the entire heavenly panoply, showing forth to their adoring gaze the glory and wonder of the divine purposes in Christ. Well might the Apostle Peter say, 'Which things the angels desire to look into', and well might Wesley exclaim,

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.

It is only when we reach glory that we will see clearly. Here, in this as in other things, we 'see through a glass darkly' but when we view all the ransomed of the Lord, shining in everlasting splendour, like the stars outshining each other in glory - a great multitude that no man can number, of all nations and peoples and kindreds and tongues, clad in white robes, with palms in their hands, men and women who were once lost, dead in trespasses and sins, without Christ and without hope in the world, but now redeemed and saved to sin no more - then shall we know something of the marvel and the glory of the grace of God in Christ.

Nor is this all. There is more in this thought of God showing forth in the ages to come the riches of His grace, more than coming to a full and comprehensive knowledge of how great divine grace is. There is also the idea that 'being made like Him' at His coming - passing wonderful though this will be - is only the 'end of the beginning', and that there will be further and indeed unlimited adornment of the perfected lives of the redeemed, in ways that are far beyond our comprehension or ability even to conceive. Ah, do not let our earth-bound minds, puny as they are at best, limit the ineffable majesty of God's sovereign purposes for eternity. He is a glorious God indeed!

41) 2:10-13

But let us return to the thought, touched upon earlier, of our being 'His workmanship'. The hidden implications of this phrase are very considerable. It will be noticed that Paul uses the word 'created' in reference to our new status in Christ Jesus. The word in the Greek - 'ktisis' - comes from the thought of the divine creative act in Genesis. This is a favourite theme of the apostle's, as we may recall from the well-known words in 2 Corinthians 4:6: 'For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts ...'. Central to the biblical view of creation is that it is 'creation ex nihilo' - creation out of nothing, and we must necessarily understand this of Paul's words here. God created the world out of nothing, and in the new creation He does likewise. We are re-created in the new, or last, Adam, and this inevitably excludes anything that we could do or contribute to God's workmanship. It is all of God, and all of grace. The new life in Christ is totally new, owing nothing to anything man can do. Indeed, this is presupposed in the opening verses of the chapter: we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins and this means that the whole of the first, original creation of man is 'a dead loss' and therefore salvation must mean 'a new thing'. The whole operation is to be done over again. It is a real, new beginning by God. The Divine Potter makes the clay into 'another vessel'!

42) 2:10-13

The 'new thing'! We have only to link 1-3 with 11ff to see the greatness and wonder of divine grace, for what we have in these verses is not simply a repeat of the earlier description of man's lostness, but a subjective and highly moving statement of man's predicament - not so much his sin as his misery in his sin - a description which throbs and pulsates with an unutterable anguish. There is the sound of many voices in the pathos that it reflects - 'without Christ', completely in darkness, in a sense and in a way the Jews had never been, for they had had the promise and the covenants, with types and shadows of the cross cast backwards from Calvary over all their history. The road had never been in complete darkness for them for there were lights on the way enough to see by; 'aliens' - one has only to think of the pathos of the countless refugees of modern times, without country, without rights, without homes, cut off from the possibility of living like ordinary human beings - when we translate this into the spiritual realm, we have some faint idea of the plight of the Gentile world before grace touched their lives; 'strangers' - displaced persons - and what a tragic state, in the spiritual realm; 'having no hope' - one need only think of the literature of the ancient world to recognise the truth of this, for with all its brilliance and excellence, its development of culture, the arts, and learning, that world was gripped by a profound uncertainty and despair. Someone has said, 'In Greece, at the epoch of Alexander the Great, it was a current saying, and one profoundly felt by all the best men, that the best thing of all was not to be born, and the next best thing was to die'; 'without God in the world' - note well the words 'in the world', this unfriendly, uncertain existence, full of gigantic question marks and enigmas, to be without God, and with nothing to hold on to, and nothing for a sure anchorage! A sad plight indeed! Such were the Gentiles then, and such is our world today. What Paul is underlining is the hopelessness and meaninglessness of life, its frightening senselessness - the tragic 'lostness' of humanity. It is over against this that the 'But now' in 13 stands in such glorious contrast, as we shall see in tomorrow's Note.

43) 2:13-15

These are verses which reveal the amazing, glorious, overwhelming change that grace makes in human life. That change can be well summed up in the phrase 'He (Christ) is our peace'. From terrible emptiness, meaninglessness and hopelessness - with the awful fear and horror that these bring - into peace, well-being and rest. That is the wonder of the gospel! We need, however, to understand the context of Paul's words here. In 13, 'far off' and 'nigh' are almost technical terms, the first referring to the Gentiles, in contrast to the Jews, who by virtue of having the covenants and the promise were regarded, in this comparison, as being 'nigh'. And the force of the phrases in 14, 'hath made both one', and 'make in himself of twain one new man' in 15 is that they refer to the coming together of Jew and Gentile in the grace of the gospel, for both alike, being reconciled to God, are reconciled to one another (16). Paul is, of course, thinking of the great reconciliation wrought in the cross, but here he first of all applies it to the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile through that cross. As such, this is an apt illustration of the greatness and wonder of the way in which today those that are 'far off' - the outsider, the unchurched, those divorced from any background in spiritual things - can be wrought upon decisively by the gospel and brought to newness of life in Christ and transformed by His grace. To think that such outcasts and 'no-hopers' can be reclaimed and brought into the fold and family of God should surely encourage us to believe that even the worst, the hardest, the most antagonistic, the most indifferent, can be touched and reached for Christ. There is no one too far away for the grace of God to reach!

44) 2:11-18

We turn back to 11 in today's Note to get the full flavour of Paul's great teaching on reconciliation, and also to underline particularly Paul's insistence on the need to 'remember' what we once were. 'Reconciliation' is a great New Testament word, but it is to be feared that it is often used today in a way that is not the real intention of the New Testament in using it. Men speak today in terms of reconciliation between this nation and that, this community and that, this denomination and that, but while there is no doubt that these ideas are very important in our world of today, it nevertheless has to be said that this is not the primary meaning of the word as Paul uses it, even though he does make mention in these very verses of the 'making one' of Jew and Gentile through the cross. But this is a result of the doctrine and not the doctrine itself. Here, we begin to look at the heart of this doctrine.

In all my reading, I have never come across anything so profoundly moving and satisfying to my spirit as James Denney's great chapter on Reconciliation in his commentary on 2 Corinthians. Denney points out that the word reconciliation presupposes a state of estrangement, and that estrangement can be of two kinds; the feeling of hostility or estrangement may exist on one side only, or it may exist on both. In the New Testament, he says, 'the estrangement which the Christian reconciliation has to overcome is indubitably two-sided'. In tomorrow's Note we shall give an extended quotation from Denney's commentary on this wonderful theme.

45) 2:11-18

Referring to the 'two-sided' aspect of New Testament reconciliation, Denney goes on to say:

'There is something in God as well as something in man which has to be dealt with before there can be peace. Nay, the something on God's side is so incomparably more serious that in comparison with it the something on man's side simply passes out of view. It is God's earnest dealing with the obstacle on His own side to peace with man which prevails on man to believe in the seriousness of His love, and to lay aside distrust. It is God's earnest dealing with the obstacle on His own side which constitutes the reconciliation; the story of it is "the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19); when men receive it, they receive (Romans 5:10) the reconciliation – "Reconciliation" in the New Testament sense is not something which we accomplish when we lay aside our enmity to God; it is something which God accomplished when in the death of Christ He put away everything that on His side meant estrangement, so that He might come and preach peace. To deny this is to take St Paul's Gospel away root and branch. He always conceives the Gospel as the revelation of God's wisdom and love in view of a certain state of affairs as subsisting between God and man. Now, what is the really serious element in this situation? What is it that makes a Gospel necessary? What is it that the wisdom and love of God undertake to deal with, and do deal with, in that marvellous way which constitutes the Gospel? Is it man's distrust of God? Is it man's dislike, fear, antipathy, spiritual alienation? Not if we accept the Apostle's teaching. The serious thing which makes the gospel necessary, and the putting away of which constitutes the gospel, is God's condemnation of the world and its sin; it is God's wrath, "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:16-18). The putting away of this is "reconciliation": the preaching of this reconciliation is the preaching of the Gospel.'

46) 2:11-18

When once we grasp the reality of what Denney says (see yesterdays Note in his commentary on 2 Corinthians), we begin to see what a profound and moving doctrine this is, and what tremendous light it sheds on the message of the cross. Let us ponder it a little further. 'Something on God's side', Denney said. What, then, is this 'something on God's side' that needs to be removed before peace can be made? It is, as Paul says in 15, 'the enmity'. But to what does this refer? Frequently, people tend to say 'I have nothing against God'. Here are some words by Leon Morris, in his book 'The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross':

'Man is quite content to get along amiably with His Maker, and does not, in point of fact, regard his sin as a just cause for enmity. He himself is not greatly concerned about the trifle of wrongdoing that is in him, and he cannot see why God should be. So when sinful man is content to let bygones be bygones, but nevertheless God speaks of an enmity, it is hard to see how it can be maintained that there is no enmity from the side of God. The point is that it is God's demand for holiness which causes the enmity, and not a conscious hostility on the part of man against God.'

This enmity from the side of God, which is simply another way of speaking of the divine wrath and the condemnation which it involves, are not unreal things, as Denney points out, but the most real things of which human nature has any knowledge until it receives the reconciliation:

'They are as real as a bad conscience; as real as misery, impotence and despair. And it is the glory of the gospel, as Paul understood it, that it deals with them as real. It does not tell men that they are illusions, and that only their groundless fear and distrust have ever stood between them and God. It tells them that God has dealt seriously with these things for their removal, that awful as they are He has put them away with an awful demonstration of His love; it tells them that God has made peace at an infinite cost, and that the priceless peace is now freely offered them.'

47) 2:11-18

Such then is the extent of the seriousness of man's predicament, for which the doctrine of reconciliation is the answer. And it means that, great as is man's need in his sin, and great as is the wonder and glory of what Christ's reconciling death does for him, the effect of that death for God is far greater, for the divine wrath exhausted itself in the sacrifice on Calvary, and the blood of mediation not only speaks peace to our sinful hearts, but speaks also to the holy heart of God, and even to His memory, making Him say, 'Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more'. We sometimes sing,

I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice
And I have peace with God.

But it is surely not difficult, in view of what has been said, to think of God speaking in these terms also as He gazes on the blood and sees the mighty sacrifice, for this is the ground of His peace also, that turns His anger away. Is it any wonder that the Scriptures speak of 'the precious blood of Christ'? This is how precious, how valuable, it is!

48) 2:11-18

We turn now to the consideration of another important issue in these verses, namely Paul's summons to us in the words 'wherefore remember ...' Why should Paul be so insistent in asking the Ephesians to cast their minds back to what they once were? There is an insistence in the word amounting almost to a command to them to relive their past. Now, we should realise that Paul was deeply taught in the Scriptures, and he would know that this is something that is rooted in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. For him therefore to make such a challenge here is to speak in a biblical way. Again and again in the Old Testament, especially in books like Exodus and Deuteronomy, we find the Lord enjoining His people to remember that they had once been bondman in Egypt (cf Deuteronomy 15:15, 16:12, 24:18, 22). The significant thing is that, in the context of these and other such references, the fact of having been delivered from bondage is made the basis of the claim upon God's people to live true, generous and compassionate lives, and the remembrance of this becomes the inspiration for such behaviour. This is why Paul calls on the Ephesians to remember where they once were. By the same token there is a great challenge here for us. For the world has great need to see compassionate, generous living, holy living and liberal, loving attitudes; for this is so out of the ordinary that when such living is seen, it makes people ask questions of those who so live. It makes them ask, 'What makes you tick? What makes you live like this, and do such things?' And the answer is, 'I was a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord brought me out and saved me'. There could be no greater or more persuasive commendation of the gospel than this, than a life transformed by divine grace into true godliness and Christlikeness.

49) 2:11-18

There is a great challenge in what was said in yesterday's Note, in very practical ways. We could take, for example, the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35, who was forgiven a great debt by his master, but refused to show mercy to a man who owed him a far lesser debt. The unmerciful servant failed to remember the greatness of the mercy that he himself had been shown. It is sometimes like this with those who profess the name of Christ. Sometimes a slight, real or imagined, is suffered; and a deep hurt and resentment grips the heart, and an estrangement takes place which may last for years. Even if it had been real, and not imagined, it is never forgotten, and never forgiven. And even set over against the greatness of the debt that has been cancelled by Christ in the forgiveness wrought in His cross - 'Remember thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord delivered you' - there has been no corresponding or answering generosity over a much smaller matter, like a slight, real or imagined, but only implacable hostility and estrangement. O the tragedy of it, that such resentment and bitterness should persist, when so great mercy has been shown us in Christ! Let us ask ourselves today, do we hold a grudge against anyone? Have we held it for long? For a year or more? Was it really such a great matter, compared with the greatness of the debt we owe to Christ for having saved us? Should there not be some sense of shame creeping into our hearts, as we 'remember' how it once was with us, before we were drawn to Christ and saved by His grace? Is this a word for someone today? Ah, remember how you were once a bondman in Egypt, and be reconciled with your estranged friend. This is the message of the passage before us. Please God it will be heard - and heeded.

50) 2:19-22

The remaining verses of the chapter continue the rich vein of teaching that the Apostle gives us. We spoke in an earlier Note about 'the raw material' from which the Church of Christ is built and we now see in these verses the result of God's handiwork, in 'an holy temple in the Lord', and 'an habitation of God by the Spirit'. What impresses one in reading this chapter is the rich profusion of metaphor that Paul uses to get his message over to us. The word 'access' in 18, for example, may be translated 'introduction'. It is on the basis of Christ's atoning and reconciling work that the Spirit 'introduces' us to the Father, and brings us to a real and personal knowledge of Him - we are no longer 'strangers' but accepted into His circle. But the implications of this are far-reaching. The 'introduction' we have is much more than is represented by the phrase 'presentation at court' - there, we are introduced to the sovereign, but it can scarcely be called a personal introduction, rather it is a formal one, and the sovereign can hardly remember everyone who is introduced to her. But it is also more than a personal introduction to another. Here, in this 'access', we can truly claim a personal knowledge: we have been introduced, and we know and are known. And further still, the introduction that the Spirit effects is an introduction to the Father's love, care and affection, an initiation into real fellowship.

No longer far from Him, but now
By precious blood made nigh;
Accepted in the Well-Beloved,
Near to God's heart we lie.

It is this thought that naturally leads into that of the church as 'the household of God', and 'the habitation of God through the Spirit'. This is indeed another metaphor, and we will need to continue its thought in tomorrow's Note.

51) 2:19-22

The words in 21 'all the building fitly framed together' speak of the individual members slotted into the building, in much the same way as Peter speaks in his first epistle of living stones being built up a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4ff). Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 3:9ff is much the same: 'Ye are God's building ... I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon ... other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ' And, significantly, Paul goes on to speak in that passage of 'the temple of God', indwelt by the Spirit. Both in Peter and in Paul, of course, the church is thought of as a company of people: the 'living stones' are men and women, not materials, and the temple, where God the Spirit dwells, is a people, not a place.

This idea of a 'building of God' as a description of the church is but one of a number of different metaphors used in Scripture - others are 'the body of Christ', 'the bride of Christ', 'the congregation of the Lord', all of them having significant insights to give us, but this is a rich and significant one that we have here, and it merits some further thinking about it.

To speak, as we have done, of the 'raw material' from which God builds His Church is already to have entered this particular metaphor's imagery, and it is natural for us to go on to extend that imagery now. There are certain important implications inherent in the idea of a 'building of God', and two in particular need to be looked at, both of them present in the over-all picture given in the Scriptures. First of all there is the idea of the building in process of construction, and secondly there is the idea of the building completed. The latter is referred to later in Ephesians, in 5:27, in the concept of 'a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing' - an eschatological reference, properly belonging to the thought of the Church triumphant. We will deal with that passage later in our studies, when we get to chapter 5.

52) 2:19-22

As to the idea of the building in process of construction, a great deal can be fruitfully said. It is a common sight in many parts of the country to come upon an ancient ruined building in a rundown and dilapidated condition and to learn at a later date that the historic building society have proceeded to restore it. And even to see the ongoing transformation wrought by careful rehabilitation makes it easy to visualise what the completed building would look like. This is a faint illustration of how it will one day be with the Church of God. And in the meanwhile, the King and Head of the Church is supervising the operation of rebuilding, and by His Spirit is present in all the work. And the word is getting around that a Day is coming when He will return to take up His abode and the church will be a glorious church, transformed beyond all imagining, as a true habitation of God. But in the meanwhile, while the work of rehabilitation is in progress, the Church must often - and inevitably - be in a very untidy, even haphazard, state, as any building site must be. It is by no means a 'showhouse' as yet, but far more like a workshop, with bits and pieces lying here and there, uncoordinated, and far from being in their proper place. But this does not ordinarily dismay the Clerk of Works, since He has the over-all plan in his mind's eye, and knows that, by and by, these odd, uncoordinated pieces will be fitted into their place to some purpose. In the same way, if we are wise master-builders, we will not be too upset or discouraged if at any particular point in the process things may look untidy, disorganised, and even symbolic, for we will have the ultimate end-product in our mind's eye, and will be working toward it. Besides - to pick up Peter's metaphor in 1 Peter 2:1ff - in the earlier stages of a reconstruction or rehabilitation work, there is often a good deal of clearing away to be done, even demolition, in order to make way for new building. And that creates a very messy situation. And in the spiritual rehabilitation, demolition has to take place also, wrong attitudes, wrong assumptions, wrong presuppositions, so much that has become 'second nature' to us in our sinnerhood has to be challenged and brought under the scrutiny of the Word of God and stripped away from us. You get the idea?

53) 3:1-13

In view of all that has been written thus far in the epistle Paul now proceeds to draw certain inferences and come to some conclusions in the light of the teaching he has given. This is the force of the words in 1 'For this cause ...'. However, such is the richness of his mind and thought that he goes off on a tangent for some verses, and does not come to the logical 'next step' (which the words 'for this cause' in 1 lead us to expect) until 14, where he repeats the words 'For this cause'. It is important for us to see this and to realise what he draws as an inference from his teaching, particularly at the end of chapter 2. We shall look at this for a moment, before focusing our attention on the 'tangent' in his thought which begins at 2 and stretches to 13. Paul says in 2:22 'Ye are ... an habitation of God through the Spirit', and now in 3:14 he says, in effect, 'I pray that you may realise this in your experience and be this' and utters the wonderful prayer in 16-19 about Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith, that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. Such is the sequence of Paul's thought - a wonderful sequence indeed!

But we must leave this wonderful prayer for the moment, and concentrate on the 'tangent' in his thinking (2ff). This tangent is not an irresponsible one, the product of a mind that is disorderly and undisciplined; nor is it a 'non sequitur', but something integrally linked to the theme Paul has been unfolding, enriching it and giving it further depth of meaning (one has only to look, for example, at the wonderful words in 8 about his preaching 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' to realise how full these verses are of rich and enriching teaching). We shall look in detail at what the Apostle says in this tangent in tomorrow's Note.

54) 3:1-13

Paul makes two points in particular in these verses. One has to do with what he calls 'the mystery of Christ', hid from ages and generations and now revealed in the gospel; the other has to do with the ultimate purpose in that 'mystery', in relation to what he calls 'the principalities and powers'. It has been suggested that this twofold emphasis can be summed up by saying that what is in view is (i) a sense of history, and (ii) a sense of eternity. We shall look at these two in turn. As to the first, in speaking of 'the mystery of Christ', one needs to think only for a little to realise that this is a phrase that repeatedly comes up in Paul's writings. In Romans 16:25, 26 he speaks of 'the mystery kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest ... and made known to all nations for the obedience of faith'. In 1 Corinthians 2:7 he speaks of 'the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory'; in Colossians 1:26, 27, he speaks of the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to His saints ... this mystery ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.' This is clearly an important part of Paul's teaching. Not that this mystery was completely unknown in past ages, as cf Genesis 12:3, 22:18; Psalm 72:17; Isaiah 49:6. But - and this is the point - it was not revealed then as it is now. The 'as' in 5 has the force of 'in such a manner as', or 'with such clarity as', or 'in the way it is now'. What was not clear, and not understood, in time past, was that the old exclusive 'theocracy' was to be completely abolished, and that in its place a new organism would arise, in which Gentile and Jew would be on an equal footing, a complete and perfect fusion, making of twain one new man (2:15) - this was what was hidden from the view of Old Testament saints. This is an important and significant consideration, and we shall consider it further in tomorrow's Note.

55) 3:1-13

What was said at the end of yesterday's Note serves to explain something that we see in Genesis 10 for example. Here is a long chapter, containing a seemingly boring genealogy, but in fact it is a highly significant statement, listing the sons of Noah, and linking them with the patriarch Abraham. Up to this point in the book, Genesis has been concerned with mankind as a whole; but from this point onwards that is no longer the central theme, the emphasis passing now to the Semite line, in the family of Shem. Adolf Saphir, the noted Jewish Christian commentator, says in his book 'The Divine Unity of Scripture', 'The tenth chapter of Genesis is a very remarkable chapter. Before God leaves, as it were, the nations to themselves and begins to deal with Israel, His chosen people from Abraham downward, He takes a loving farewell of all the nations of the earth, as much as to say, "I am going to leave you for a while, but I love you. I have created you: I have ordered all your future"; and their different genealogies are traced'. This does much to explain to us God's seemingly arbitrary choice of one nation rather than another. Sometimes we ask, 'Is it fair of God to set aside all the other nations, to concentrate on one only?' But we see here that it is the underlying purpose of it all that explains it. This was the way - the only way (and this is the mystery Paul has in mind) - for God to deal with the problem of sin. He could not help but set aside the others, to take up one, for it is through the taking up of one rather than all that all would eventually be given the opportunity of blessing. This is borne out in the wonderful picture in Revelation of 'All nations and kindred, and peoples, and tongues' gathered round the throne of God, worshipping the Lamb that was slain for their redemption. Thus, the 'narrowing down' in Genesis 10 is but a stage in the whole divine plan of the ages. Well might we exclaim with Paul 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!'

56) 3:1-13

The second emphasis in this passage relates to what we called 'a sense of eternity'. What is meant by this is unfolded in Paul's words in 10, about the manifold wisdom of God being made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places by the Church of God. We begin to see in these verses something of the scope and grandeur of the Apostle's thought in his conception of the gospel. What one is conscious of is a great and glorious unfolding of the divine purposes, far exceeding anything we could have possibly conceived, and reaching into the ages to come and into the unseen and eternal world. What Paul means is that the Church of Christ, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, is like a mirror, in which the angels and archangels, the cherubim and seraphim, behold the incomparable wisdom of God, displayed in a manner unknown to them before. They see a work which is new to them and, as Calvin says, 'the reason whereof was hid in God'. This is what the Apostle Peter refers to when, in speaking of God's wonderful redemption, he says 'which things the angels desire to look into'. This is really a very thrilling and exciting idea, for it represents the heavenly beings in a state of ignorance concerning what Paul calls the manifold wisdom of God ('manifold' means 'many coloured', 'many splendored'). And if we ask in what sense the heavenly beings can be said not to know the divine wisdom, we would have to answer that they would know the 'simple' wisdom of God in terms of knowing that God created the world as the theatre of His glory, and created man in His own image as the crown of His creation. But when man sinned and fell from fellowship with God into guilt and shame, the natural thing for them to think would be that this great God of theirs would destroy the offending thing that had spoiled His creation, and put man out of the way forever. But God in His love was not willing that any should perish and He therefore proceeded to deal with the complicated problem of man's recovery and redemption. Tomorrow's Note will continue this discussion.

57) 3:1-13

When God began to work on man's recovery and redemption He instituted, with infinite care, patience and longsuffering, the plan of the ages, His 'eternal purpose in Christ Jesus' and the first rays of the dawn of a new day broke on the darkness of a fallen world in the promise given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. And it was things that the angels could not grasp or comprehend, this that was beyond their understanding altogether. They could not see how a holy God could withhold judgment from a sinful race; they could not see the force of this plan, and it perplexed them. They were out of their depth, and God said to them, gently, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter'. And bewilderment followed bewilderment as they watched Him single out one man, Abraham, and one family, one nation to the exclusion of all the rest. 'What can this mean?' the angels asked. 'Has He discarded all the nations, saved this one only; has He found the task of saving all the nations too great and settled on this one only?' Thus they viewed God's dealings with men all down the Old Testament ages, in perplexity. Then there was the Incarnation. And although the angels sang at Christ's birth, they did not fully understand why. Then came His public ministry, and this is perhaps where the first gleams of light began to dawn on the angelic hosts, as they saw broken lives transformed and broken hearts made to sing. Then came the Cross and the Resurrection and Pentecost, and glorious ingathering and the formation of the Church - the appearance of a band of men and women in that lost and darkened world with an infinite hope in their hearts, a glorious light in their eyes, and a glad new song on their lips, brought back so miraculously into fellowship with God and the heavenly hosts began to say, 'So this is the meaning of all the work and travail, this is what it is all about!' 'Yes, that is the meaning', said God, and His manifold wisdom dawns on their souls as they see before their wondering eyes glorious and breathtaking miracles, the hand of God bringing forth life out of death and blessing out of cursing, and so overcoming evil in the world, that the redeemed state of man is infinitely greater and more wonderful than if he had never sinned at all. Wonderful indeed is this many-splendoured wisdom of God!

58) 3:1-13

Nor is this all: not only this glorious outpouring in Jerusalem and on this one nation. 'My cup runneth over"', says God, and out goes this water of life to all nations, and again the angels are made to see the manifold wisdom of God. 'This was the plan all the time', God cries, 'it was for this that I chose the one nation, that through the one all nations of the earth might be blessed'. The best proof, to angels and to men, of the many-coloured wisdom of God is the existence of the Church of the redeemed, from every people, and kindred, and tongue, and nation. In the book of Revelation we see the final extent of this, when we are told of the great multitude that no man can number gathering before God, when the angelic hosts will join the redeemed in praise to Him, and there will be singing and music, the like of which has never been heard on earth, when the glory of Handel, and the magnificence of Bach and the beauty of Mozart will pale into insignificance before the wonder and marvel of the new song that will then be sung, magnifying God's great and glorious Name. And what a day of rejoicing that will be!

59) 3:1-13

One final word before we close our study of this remarkable passage.

We could hardly pass from it without saying something about the wonderful words in 8, 'Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I might preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ'. What a glorious word this is, and it is highlighted all the more by what we have seen in this passage already. All this that we have been saying, about the testimony the Church bears to the angelic beings, casts a tremendous sense of awe and wonder on the inestimable privilege given to any man who is called to preach these unsearchable riches of the gospel. To think that any man should have this high dignity put upon Him by the Lord of the Church, to preach in such a way, and such a message, that souls that are dead in trespasses and sins should be born into newness of life, and be transformed by His grace and renewed in His image! Well might Calvin say that when a man was preaching the Divine Word, he was performing the most exalted work on earth, co-operating in the redemptive work of God, bringing sinners to salvation, building the Church of Christ and, above all, glorifying God, the Lord, Whose ambassador he was!

60) 3:1-13

It is impossible not to sense the wonder in Paul's words in 8, the sense of the disproportion between what he was and the privilege given him. He was gripped by the sheer wonder of it all. This is how he thought of the gospel he was ordained to preach - unsearchable riches indeed, riches 'not to be traced by footprints', as the word has been literally rendered - the sense that no matter how deeply he explored its mysteries, it was always true for him to say 'These are but the edges of His ways'. This is a real antidote to discouragement, when days of darkness assail and seek to bring the spirit down into despair - to light our candle at this flame, and say, again and again, 'Unto me, who am less than least of all saints, is this grace given' It will be useful to look back at the opening words of the chapter, in 1, 'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ for you Gentiles' In the literal sense, of course, the reference is to the Apostle's imprisonment in Rome, as he wrote this epistle; but in the far more important spiritual sense, he was the prisoner of the gospel of the divine love - for the Gentiles. That, in the deepest sense of the words, is what he was for! He was Christ's captive for a lost world, and the divine purposes for that world were being fulfilled in and through him. That is the measure of his commitment to Christ.

61) 3:14-21

Paul's prayer in these verses must surely be one of the most profound and moving in all Scripture; for sheer depth and richness it could hardly be surpassed in its beauty and significance. First of all we must see it in its proper context. We have pointed out earlier that chapter 3 begins with the phrase 'For this cause I, Paul ...', then goes off at a tangent from 2-13 before returning to his intending theme in 14 with a repeat of the words 'For this cause I, Paul ...'. The prayer that follows, therefore, is linked directly with the last words in 2:21, 22, about the church being 'an habitation of God through the Spirit'. This explains the reference in 17 about Christ 'dwelling in your hearts by faith' and being 'strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man' in 16, and being 'filled with all the fullness of God' in 19. What riches there are in this prayer for our study! By way of introduction we should note three things: first of all, the comprehensiveness of range in the prayer, in the fact that the entire holy Trinity is involved in this mighty work of grace - Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith; strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; and filled with all the fullness of God. It is a wonderful, if sobering, thought to realise that all the powers of the Godhead are involved in making us what we ought to be. Secondly, what we have said about the 'tangent' in 2-13 has real significance for our study now, and lends weight to what the prayer contains for us, in this sense: we spoke about the Church being a 'spectacle' to principalities and powers (3:10), showing forth the manifold wisdom of God. And if this is so, then the Church had better be worth seeing and worth looking at. This surely explains the burden upon the Apostle's heart that God's people should enter fully into their inheritance, and be all they ought to be.

62) 3:14-21

The third thing for us to note in Paul's prayer in these verses is that first of all there must be apprehension in grasping the facts of the situation. Until this takes place, there can be no movement forward in the Christian life. Then, next, there must be aspiration after the blessing of which Paul speaks. The well-known words [Mendelssohn's oratorio] 'If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me, ye shall ever surely find Me' are as true here as elsewhere. The aspiration has to be with all the heart. Then comes appropriation: we lay hold of what is offered us in the grace of the gospel. And when we do, there is realisation of all this in our experience.

As to the prayer itself, the reference in 13 to 'tribulations' may be linked with 3:1, but the whole passage holds together, for involved in the preaching of the unsearchable riches of Christ are the tribulations of a faithful life. For Paul, imprisonment was part of the cost of faithful discipleship; and he does not want the Ephesians to be discouraged at the thought of his sufferings, but rather see more deeply into things, and realise that this was something which in the sovereignty of God was furthering the work of the gospel. The greatness of the cause was such that Paul was more than willing to suffer for it. Indeed, it was 'their glory' - that is to say life and blessing came to them through the apostle's travail. The way in which the unsearchable riches of Christ 'get out' to the world is through the 'door' of tribulation in the believer. A distinguished missionary once said, 'Blood of our own must attest our faith in the precious blood of Christ, if we would share and show forth the victory of the Cross'. Few words could be truer to Paul's inner meaning than these.

63) 3:14-21

What follows in 14 reveals another aspect of this tribulation - his travail in prayer for the church in Ephesus, that they might 'inherit' all that was theirs in the gift of God's Son. We may recall how Paul speaks, in writing to the Galatians, of travailing in birth till Christ was formed in them, and this is the sort of travail indicated here in the phrase 'I bow my knees ...'. We have already seen in chapter 1 his concern to pray his readers into a full understanding and experience of their riches in Christ, and here is another example. And real prayer, with the discipline involved in maintaining it, and continuing in it faithfully and steadfastly, is travail indeed.

The prayer itself has four clauses, but commentators are divided as to how to interpret them. One interpretation is that the four clauses are each a prayer: 'I pray that ... and that ... and that ... and that ...'. Another is that the prayer itself stops at 17a, and that what follows is the consequence of the prayer. Another still is to take it as follows: 'Strengthened with might' is further defined in the next clause, in the thought of Christ indwelling our hearts; the result of this indwelling is that we are rooted and grounded in love; with the consequence that we are enabled to comprehend the four dimensions of redeeming love; the final outcome being filled with all the fullness of God. But on any interpretation, there is a rich glory shining in the prayer, which surely makes it one of the greatest utterances in all the New Testament.

64) 3:14-21

As to details in the prayer, the Apostle's phrase in 16, 'the inner man' does not mean 'the new man' as such, but rather the soul as distinct from the body (the phrase is used similarly in 2 Corinthians 4:16, 'though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day', and in Romans 7:22, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man'). As one commentator puts it the phrase refers to 'all faculties, intellectual, moral, emotional, that make up the spiritual nature - reason, conscience, will, mind, affection'. Another commentator says it is 'our central and highest life, the noblest portion of our being, the seat of our intellectual and spiritual life with its impulses, feelings and struggles, the hidden man of the heart, the rational moral self, our whole conscious personal being, in short, our true personality'. This 'inner man' in the unregenerate is darkened, being in subjection to the power of sin in the flesh; but when quickened by the Spirit of God, it becomes 'the new man', and the sphere of the divine operations. It is here that Paul prays that God will work His gracious purposes.

It is in the heart and core of the personality, then, that Paul prays the Ephesians will be strengthened, and it is significant that the word 'in' in 16b has the force of 'into' in the original Greek. The implication is that the Holy Spirit penetrates into the deep recesses of the heart, and this should do much to explain the painfulness that a true ministry of the word involves for those who take it seriously, for it is through the Word that the Spirit effects this strengthening. If our real need lies in the deeper levels of our personality, it is precisely there, and not on the surface, that the renewing and strengthening work must take place and to get there, much probing needs to be done. To be made strong where once we were weak requires a work of no mean depth and quality; but those who respond resolutely to the buffetings of the word will, over the months and years, assuredly be changed.

65) 3:14-21

This work of the Spirit of God producing inner conformity to the divine will serves to remind us that it is never merely a question of the adjustment of outward behaviour (although outward behaviour will certainly change). There is a real danger of forgetting this in Christian life today which can easily degenerate into conformity to a set pattern of behaviour. We must beware of putting patches of new cloth onto old garments. It is much easier to conform to an outward pattern than to maintain a living, inward experience, but we must resist the temptation to do so, for this always produces a stilted and unreal caricature of Christian life. When the heart is right, outward expressions will tend to look after themselves, it is in the deeper reaches that the work of rehabilitation needs to be achieved, for it is there, far more than on the surface, that the human personality has been breached by sin and brought into disharmony, and it is there that new harmonies must be set, in which we learn to come to terms with ourselves, so that all the conflicting forces of personality might be unified into one whole man. Furthermore, when this work - surety 'all-round' in its essence, in the sense that every part of the personality is addressed and renewed - becomes more and more a reality in our lives, we will find that we have an answer to particular temptations. It is the 'all-round' strengthening that safeguards against the wiles of the devil in any particular approach he may make. In physical life it is when our general condition is low that particular germs find access to the system; and it is so also in the spiritual life. The way of deliverance from a besetting sin is not to concentrate on it, either in thought or in prayer - for that simply brings it to the forefront of the mind and encourages it - but to look away from it to what we are in Christ, recognising that in His victory we are victorious in the whole of life. Reflecting on our position in Christ improves our general condition, and this is the best deterrent to particular sins.

66) 3:14-21

The words 'that Christ might dwell in our hearts by faith' in 17 need to be understood in the context of what Paul has said in 2:22 about being 'an habitation of God through the Spirit'. It might be thought that to pray thus is rather strange when in fact we are already 'an habitation of God'. But we need to understand Paul's meaning thus: he invariably uses indicatives to express the wealth of our position in Christ: 'This is what you are' he means, 'and I pray you will realise this in your experience, that His indwelling, and your being an habitation of God will be a glorious reality to you and that you may indeed prove what a wonderful thing this is' (this is similar, and for the same reasons, to what he says later in 5:18 about being 'filled with the Spirit', which means in effect 'let His gracious indwelling in you be all that it was designed by God to be')! The phrase 'rooted and grounded in love' speaks of the inner stability and steadfast immovability that is the hallmark of mature and stable Christian experience. One thinks of the lines of the old gospel hymn

'Fastened to the rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love'

for when Christ dwells in our hearts by faith it is essentially and inevitably a loving relationship that fills our experience, for He is love!

67) 3:14-21

The tremendous words in 18, 19a have been described by one commentator as 'the four dimensions of redeeming love'. This is a good way of describing Paul's words here, and typical of the exuberance of his language that he should speak of knowing something that passes knowledge. We will come to this presently, but we need to look first of all at the phrase in 18, 'with all saints'. Fully to comprehend the love of Christ is not something we can ever do on our own, but only in fellowship with God's people. It is not the individual, but the Church, that is the Bride of Christ, and it is to the Bride that He discloses Himself most fully and without reserve. This is why the worship of a congregation often knows blessings and enrichments that none of us can know as individuals, and we often get supreme glimpses of His truth, grace and love when we are together. This is one of the reasons why we are exhorted not to 'forsake the assembling of ourselves together' - we miss so much when we are not in our place on Sundays! As to the 'dimensions' of Christ's love, it is suggested that we will catch something of Paul's meaning if we place them alongside the greatest of all gospel texts - John 3:16. It is as if John were stretching out his arms as widely as possible to illustrate the all-embracing breadth of that love in the words 'He gave His only begotten Son' we are shown the length to which that love went, in going 'all the way to Calvary' for our sakes. The depth of the divine love is seen in that He stooped to the lowest - 'whosoever believeth in Him should not perish'. And finally, the height to which we are raised is of course the chief preoccupation of the Ephesian epistle - everlasting life, 'far above all principality and power and might and dominion'. This is the position to which the love of Christ has raised us, and it is when we grasp the significance of this ('comprehend' speaks of mental perception - no unthinking emotionalism here!) that we experience the fullness of God.

68) 3:14-21

Paul's prayer seems to have left nothing unsaid, but still he is not finished, for he says in the glorious doxology that follows in 20, 21, 'God can do even more than this - He can do more than we could ever ask or even think possible'. There is great challenge, as well as encouragement in this thought for it teaches us that we cannot excuse ourselves from rising to the tremendous possibilities of the Christian experience of which Paul has been speaking by thinking that it is much too high for us. The real issue is not whether such a life is possible - it is - but whether we are willing for it to be made a reality in our experience. If we are willing, He is able to raise us to unimagined heights. Of course the standard is too high for unaided mortal effort - we could not even begin to rise to what Paul has unfolded in these verses by our own strivings, let alone reach it. But that is not Paul's point. It is the divine activity, not ours, that is emphasised here. We must beware of making the very splendour and glory of the gospel provision an excuse for our basic unwillingness to allow God to do in us all that He wants to do. He is able: but the question is whether we are prepared to allow Him free and unrestricted right in His indwelling of our lives.

69) 4:1-3

We come with this chapter to the second main section of the Epistle, which is concerned with the walk of the Christian. The 'therefore' in 1 makes it clear that what Paul goes on to say follows from and depends upon what has already been said in chs 1-3, and constitutes an insistence to the Ephesians that their Christian walk might be consistent with the immense wealth that is theirs in Christ. The pattern that Paul follows here is a characteristic one, following doctrine with duty, and indicatives and affirmations with imperatives. The exhortations in the gospel are always based upon the great affirmations of the faith, on what God has done for us in Christ. It is this that lifts them from being a counsel of despair. For if God has made of us new men and women in Christ, He has created the possibility of our living as such. This is the point of the exhortation in 1: We are well able, because well equipped, for this, and so it is our bounden duty to walk worthily. Now, clearly, the quality of our Christian walk will depend on the grasp we have of the wealth that is ours in Christ - hence Paul's preoccupation, in 3:18, with the need to 'comprehend' (mental grasp and perception and knowing it in our experience). It is as we experience the fullness of God in the knowledge of the divine love - with love possessing us - that we will walk worthy of our calling. We could put it in this way, in summary form: The Apostle has spelled out what it means to be Christian believers. 'You are believers,' he says, to the Ephesians; 'now live as believers.' And, in turn, this is now spelled out to them.

70) 4:1-3

There are a number of link-ups that can be made between the doctrine and the ethics, and we need to look at these now. First of the Apostle's words, 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called' take us back to 1:4, and the fact that we are 'chosen in Him before the foundation of the world', which Paul opens up in terms of the divine purpose that we should be holy, that we should share in Christ's exaltation (1:19ff), and that we should be united in a bond of unity (2:14). That is to say as Christian believers we are called to be conformed to the image of Christ, and to constitute one family, as 'one new man'. Then again, we must note how Paul ends ch 3 in the glorious doxology 'Now unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end'. And we must understand that what follows in ch 4 shows us in practical detail how glory is to be rendered to God in the Church - in holy, godly living, in lives that are in character with our high and holy calling. It is highly interesting to see just how this is spelt out. Paul indicates that the sphere of this Christian walk is in love (5:2), in light (5:8), and circumspectly (5:15) - in domestic relationships (5:22-33, husbands and wives), in family relationships (6:1-4, parents and children), and in work and business life (6:5-9, masters and servants). It is Christian behaviour, then, that we are now to be concerned with in this second half of the epistle. Enough has been said to indicate how Paul thinks of the imperatives of Christian behaviour. And we can draw one definite practical lesson at the outset, and it is this. Since Christian walk always rests on Christian doctrine, therefore to spend time each day thinking of our position in Christ (in terms of what we have been studying in chs 1-3), letting this sink in and down into our deepest being - this is what is going to condition our Christian walk, and prove to be the inspiration and dynamic of holy living. And when we do so, it will mean that progressively we will find it less and less easy to say, think or do anything, or adopt attitudes out of character with what we are in Christ. It will train us in habits of the soul that will be of incalculable value in our ongoing Christian life and testimony.

71) 4:1-3

There is a good example and illustration of what was said at the end of yesterday's Note in the experience of the early church. The story of the church at Antioch in Acts 11:19ff makes it evident that the Christian fellowship there was a deeply-taught one and that believers were well instructed in the things of God. And it was from this that so much emerged in terms of Christian grace in their testimony. For one thing, the beauty of the Lord their God was upon them. We are told that when Barnabas visited them, he 'saw the grace of God' among them and upon them and was glad. For another thing, it was from that church and fellowship in Antioch that the first great missionary outreach took place that spread the gospel throughout the ancient world. Their lives were lives that told for God, and they clearly lived in character with their calling.

We look then at the Christian's calling and vocation: call to be conformed to the image of God's Son and - in 2:22 and 3:17 - an habitation of God through the Spirit, and Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith - and now this: 'lowliness and meekness, longsuffering, forbearance'? Well, remember what Jesus once said, 'I am meek and lowly of heart!' 'All right', says Paul, 'Christ living in you? Let us see it. If Christ is living in you, then let Him live out His life in you'. This is challenging indeed, but surely it is realistic. In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live ...'. This is the way forward, this is the path to realisation, to Christ 'getting out' of us to the world He wants to bless - through our being crucified with Christ with the 'I' that is filled with self-love being replaced by the 'I' that is the Christ-life in us; the 'no longer I ... but sin that dwelleth in me' of Romans 7:17, 20 becoming the 'no longer I, but Christ liveth in me' of Galatians 2:20. This is the 'death-life' pattern that allows the life of the risen Christ free expression in our experience. This is the pattern, which is demonstrated here in Ephesians 4.

72) 4:1-3

We may think of what was said in yesterday's Note and approach it in another way. We have said earlier that the quality of our Christian walk will depend on the grasp we have of the wealth that is ours in Christ, and that since the Christian walk always rests on Christian doctrine, we will find that to spend time each day thinking of all that is ours in Christ will prove to be the inspiration and dynamic of holy living. This is certainly in line with much of Paul's teaching in his epistles, as for example in Philippians 4:7, 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, think on these things' - and what wonderful things we have to think about in the gospel, called as we are to share His eternal glory! Just to think of the honour and dignity done us in Christ makes us square our shoulders, spiritually speaking, and get on with the business of living, in character with that calling and destiny! Does it not bring a sense of worship to our hearts, which alone makes us walk worthy (the words 'worthy' and 'worship' come from the same root):

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,
How great Thou art!

This helps us to see, does it not, why Paul adds the words 'in lowliness and meekness', for a sense of worship brings us low down at His feet, like Mary who 'sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word'.

My highest place is lying low
At my Redeemer's feet

This is the mark of a true and worthy walk - we forget our foolish pride and airs and take our proper place, in the sight of this great wonder of His grace.

73) 4:1-3

Furthermore, in the whole reality of our sonship in Christ - our being made sons and daughters of God (children of the heavenly King indeed!) and kings and priests unto our God, it is the royal, the regal privilege and dignity bestowed upon us that lifts us and fills us with an awe, almost that strips from us any attitude of pettiness and niggardliness of spirit. If we are 'royal' in the spiritual sense we are lifted out of the reach of poverty, of small mindedness and envy and the bitter, shrunken attitudes that so corrode the human heart - the pride and vainglory, the discontent, the vinegary spirit that makes us often so unattractive to others. It is to a high dignity that we are called, and we must walk worthy of that calling, and be what God has made us in Christ. We have often illustrated this by the reference to Boaz, in the Book of Ruth, that warm, generous, unassuming, kindly, gracious man, so 'well-saved', and delivered from what he could so easily have been, with his social background. Lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, patience and forbearance - these are the qualities we see in him. There is a great challenge in this. We are often tempted to say, at this point, 'Ah, you do not know how weak I am, how frail, how tempted. You do not know the twists in my nature, or you would not speak like that'. But what does it matter what we are by nature? It was because of what we are by nature that Christ did for us what He did. He gives us the victory just there, where we need it most, and commands us no longer to walk according to what we are by nature, but according to what He has made us by His grace. 'Lift up your eyes', He says, 'and think what Spirit dwells within you'. Remember the words of the Scottish paraphrase: 'High is the rank we now possess' – and let this take a hold of you, grip you and fill your whole horizon. This is the way to walk worthily, for when we are here, we will be thinking straight concerning ourselves, and living the 'crucified life' as second nature. Our life will be well-ordered, and we will be 'well-saved'. Blessed be His Name!

74) 4:4-7

It need hardly be said that the subject of unity, which is unfolded in these verses is one that is much in the minds of the churches in these days, and it is well that we should examine what the Scriptures say on the subject. It is not without significance that, as Paul discusses the subject here he speaks of 'the unity of the Spirit'. This means that unity has to do with the Holy Spirit of God, and that it is He who creates that unity. These words of Paul's, and our Lord's teaching in John 17, are parallel to one another in large measure, and both passages alike share common ground in the fact of the 'given-ness' of Christian unity. It is important for us, therefore, to recognise at the outset that the 'holy endeavour, the striving to keep the unity of the Spirit', is our response to what Paul has already expounded in the previous chapters, where he speaks of Christ, in his atoning and reconciling work, having 'made both (Jew and Gentile) one' having slain the enmity thereby and creating 'one new man'. What Paul is asking the Ephesians to do is to be what God has made them in Christ. There is a 'given-ness', then, in the unity of the Spirit, as indeed in every other Christian grace and provision. And this is how we must view the whole issue of unity - not as something that we are to create, or aim at, but as something we have been given. This is the first point that requires to be made; and as we shall see, a great deal in the thorny and controversial subject of unity depends on our grasp and understanding of this fact. More of this in tomorrow's Note.

75) 4:4-7

If we begin with the essentials mentioned in yesterday's Note we shall immediately find ourselves turning to Paul's earlier concept of 'the household of God,' which means the family of God. This has necessary implications: the unity of the Spirit is not like a natural bond of friendship in which people accept one another on various levels and for various reasons; rather, it is like a family relationship in which we do not really have a choice. We are born into a family, and although we may disagree with members of our family, we cannot get rid of the relationship, or opt out of it. It is a matter of blood. Furthermore, it is of the essence of a family that we do not, and cannot, 'join' it; we are born into a family, and we do not have a say in becoming part of it. And in the Christian sense, Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. They are one by virtue of the family bond, and they do not have to try to be one. And they are required, by family rules, to be what they are, to the best of their ability. The fundamental basis, therefore, of unity, in practical terms, is spiritual life. If we are children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus, we are one in Him. Following from this, we must add that with regard to the teaching of Ephesians as a whole, this unity is presupposed throughout, from 1:10 onwards, where Paul speaks of all things being gathered together in one in Christ. This is what Paul continues to expound in this chapter: in 1-3 he makes his general appeal for unity on the basis of what Christ has made us; in 4-6, he describes the nature of the unity; in 7-12 he describes the variety and diversity in the unity, and the means which God has taken to preserve it; and finally, in 13-16, he describes the unity in its ultimate full realisation and flowering.

76) 4:4-7

We note, then, that Paul moves from doctrine to the practical outworking of that doctrine in the demonstration of the unity that God has created. That is to say, the unity of the Spirit as created by God Himself, is to be preserved by the exercise of the virtues mentioned in 2 - lowliness and meekness, long-suffering and forbearing one another in love. This indicates the real direction in which desires and hopes of Christian unity should go. It is a question of realising our position in Christ, and entering into the fullness of our inheritance in Him. It is in this context that unity is possible as an experience. The recovery, therefore, of unity which has been so tragically lost, lies in the recovery of the true values of the Faith and of the vocation wherewith we are called. We are bound to concede that this approach of Paul's is very different from what the Ecumenical Movement has seemed to stress in its programme for the unity of the Church today. For it seems to reverse the Pauline order, emphasising outward, organisational unity, which they think will bring about the inward spiritual unity for which so many long. It is no part of the exposition of Paul's words here to go into a long excursus about the Ecumenical Movement and the flaws in its fundamental arguments. Statements have been made in past years about this, in the Congregational Record Letters from April-June 1966 and March 1967. Arguments are made fully in these documents for any to see if they can lay hands on back copies.

77) 4:4-7

Down the ages of the Church an attitude has existed which can perhaps best be described as a 'separatist' view, and which has frequently been mooted in modern times, for different reasons. It is the attitude by which people can sometimes feel so strongly about certain doctrines or issues that they regard them as a ground for separation from a denomination or a congregation. There are, of course notable examples in Church history of separations taking place such as the Reformation in the 16th century and the Disruption in 1843, when the established church in Scotland was sundered. It can hardly be controverted, however, that the further down the line one comes, the greater has been the tendency for 'splits within splits' to take place, as the sorry history of Presbyterianism in Scotland has shown, with families being split on what now seem to be the flimsiest of grounds. One would have thought that the dangers of division in denominations or groups would have become abundantly evident by this time. Church history has a great deal to teach us, if we are prepared to read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest it. We cannot simply dismiss these deeply held convictions, however, as mere bigotry; at the same time, however, one has to recognise that almost any deeply held viewpoint can be elevated to the status of a fundamental issue, and made a ground for separation and secession. We shall continue this theme further in tomorrow's Note.

78) 4:4-7

We have to ask ourselves some serious questions in regard to what was said at the end of the previous Note. One of them is whether there is, deep down within us, a hankering after secession, a secret desire for it, on the grounds of establishing at last a pure church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Well, apart from the obvious comment that if we were to find such a church, it would not be 'without spot or wrinkle' for very long (!), we have to recognize that this is an impossible ideal for this life. How easy it is to become unbalanced in one's attitude, when a 'separatist spirit' takes over! Now, of course, the issue of apostasy is a real and serious one, and it tends more and more to rear its head in our day for obvious reasons; and withdrawals in the past have often been made because it has been felt that a denomination has passed the point of no return and God has forsaken it. But the biblical evidence against such withdrawal seems clear. In the days of Eli the priest (1 Samuel 1/2), Israel had reached a time of apostasy, at the end of the period of the Judges. But it was in that situation of anarchy and apostasy that Samuel was raised up to be the mouthpiece of the Lord, 'and the Lord appeared again in Shiloh' - the place and centre of apostasy, the place of no hope. Does this not give us cause to hope that better days can yet come in our land? Indeed, the signs are not wanting that God is at work, in spite of the blemishes, in spite of the betrayal of precious truths that are the lifeblood of the gospel of redeeming grace. And if God can work in spite of all these things, should we not be prepared to do the same.

79) 4:8-16

The next subject that Paul deals with, having spoken of the unity of the Spirit given to God's people from Christ, is the thought of 'diversity in unity', which he proceeds to open up in these verses in terms of the gifts that the ascended and exalted Lord gives to His church to equip them for service for Him. In 4:12 he expresses this in terms which are not sufficiently clear in the AV translation, but which the commentaries and some modern renderings make plain. The verse should read:

'With a view to the equipment of the saints for the service they are to render Him, and for the building up of the body of Christ'

'To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up' (NIV)

'His gifts were made that Christians might be properly equipped for their service, that the whole body might be built up until the time comes when we arrive at real maturity ...' (JBP)

We will look in more detail at this verse in due course, but in the meantime we consider the issue of diversity in unity in the people of God, and the fact that within that unity there is a wide variety of function and responsibility in the gifts that the Spirit of God bestows. Paul, in fact, deals with this subject in a number of different ways in his epistles, as cf his words in 1 Corinthians 12:27ff, 'ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.' Here, he deals with this general principle in a particular way in relation to the gifts with which some members of the church are endowed in terms of the ministry of the Word (Paul uses other 'lists' of gifts elsewhere, eg. 1 Corinthians 12:9ff and Romans 12:4ff and these should be compared with the 'list' given here).

80) 4:8-16

The 'list' of gifts given here is a specialised and particular one related to the ministry of the Word, but it is important to realise that gifts of ministry are not the only kind of gifts. Furthermore, it is also important for us not to become too preoccupied with some of the more dramatic gifts, such as 'tongues', or prophecy, or healing, for there are gifts of other sorts also, just as important, and some more important, such as gifts of administration (or government), and what Paul calls 'helps'. One may think for example of the gifts that Barnabas had, that earned him the 'nickname' of 'son of consolation'. He was par excellence a great encourager. And what a gift that is.

We must understand that these gifts are not necessarily mutually exclusive, in the sense that a man might only have one of the gifts. It is, of course, true that some men seem to have the gift of evangelism, for example, in a preeminent way, or a prophetic gift in the sense of being able to speak what we regard as a truly prophetic word to the people. But this does not mean that their work has to be exclusively that: nor was it so in the New Testament itself, for on different occasions Paul claimed to be not only an apostle, but also a preacher, and a teacher (2 Timothy 1:11; 1 Timothy 2:7), and he also claimed to have the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 13:2). And who would dare to say he was not also an evangelist, when his labours were so signally blessed among the Gentiles? It is salutary for us to remember that Paul the evangelist was the pastor who taught his converts the deep things of the Faith. So also Timothy and Titus were pastors and teachers to their flocks, yet Paul can say to Timothy, 'Preach the Word ... do the work of an evangelist'. It would be fair to say that most men are called to an all-round ministry of prophetic utterance, evangelism, teaching and pastoral work, although some seem to have a preeminence in one rather than in the others.

81) 4:8-16

We anticipate a little, however, in what we have said thus far in the sense that we need at this point to look at what Paul says about the ascended and exalted Lord in 8, 9. There are two things to be said about these verses, the first, that the bestowal of the gifts flows from Christ's finished work in death, resurrection, and exaltation; and the second, concerning the difficult statement in parenthesis in 9.

First of all, then, the bestowal of gifts on the basis of the finished work of Christ. The significance of the ascension of Christ is well expressed in our Lord's words prior to ascending to the Father's right hand: 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth' This is surely a reference foretelling the result of that ascension, for the ascension of Christ was not merely His returning to the Father, but His assumption of an official position - the evidence of His having been given a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. This is an interpretation that is borne out by the apostles' preaching itself, and is the interpretation they placed on Christ's ascension. Peter said, on the day of Pentecost,

'There being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear'.

It is as ascended Lord that He thus bestows His gifts upon the Church. And still today, when He is allowed to be Lord, He gives gifts to men, and appoints some to be apostles, prophets, evangelism pastors and teachers - where He is allowed to be Lord!

82) 4:8-16

Next we turn to a consideration of the parenthesis in 9 and 10, which follows Paul's quotation in 8 from Psalm 68:18. We have to note that the Apostle does not quote from the Psalm as the AV reads it, but changes the word 'received' in the Psalm to 'gave' here in the NIV. The significance of this seems to be that while the Psalm represents God as descending from heaven to wage war against His enemies, and ascending again as Victor, loaded with spoils, Paul changes this, interpreting it in terms of Christ's activity, whereby He gives gifts to men. His meaning seems to be that the Victor, Christ, in His cross and resurrection, receives the spoils of that victory with a view to giving them away. The giving is implied in the receiving. There has already been a hint of this in 1:22, where Paul speaks of Christ's having been made Head over all things to the Church, as if to say, that He did not require the victory on His own account, but as something to pass on to His own people, in terms of the well-known words in 1 Corinthians 15:57, 'Thanks be to God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'. It is the same thought as is given us in 2 Corinthians 2:14ff, where Paul speaks of Christ leading in triumph the captives of His grace, chained, as it were, to His chariot wheels. Paul looked on himself as one of these captives, being led in triumph by Christ. And Paul was one of the victorious Christ's gifts to the church, in his apostleship and ministry. By implication, therefore, there is the thought of God's people sharing in the ascended, exalted life of Christ, through the ministry of the Word.

83) 4:8-16

As to the perplexing matter of the 'ascending' and 'descending' in 9, there are two views. The first, traditional one, is that the reference is to our Lord's descending, in the mystery of the Incarnation, the implication being that His ascending to the right hand of the Father would never have been possible had He not first descended from the glories of heaven to earth's shame and suffering. This is the view of Hendriksen and, substantially, Calvin and others like Irenaeus, Bengel, Alford, and Ellicott, and reference is made to the fuller passage in Philippians 2:5-11, on the same theme.

Another view, however, expressed in ICC by Abbott, should not be summarily dismissed. This holds that a descent was necessary in order that He who ascended should give gifts, and that the 'descent' is subsequent to the 'ascent'. The meaning would therefore be that the ascent would be without an object, unless it was followed by a descent - that is to say, the 'ascent' of Jesus at His ascension is followed by the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. Those who hold this view point out that in the context of this verse there would be no point in 'identifying' this Christ, since it was already well-known who He was and what He had done in His incarnation, death and resurrection. This is food for thought, indeed!

84) 4:8-16

We come now to the particular gifts of ministry mentioned in 11ff. There is much to be said in relation to these gifts, both as to the nature of them, and also to the purpose for which they have been given. We look first of all at the purpose of these gifts. Mention has already been made of our sharing in the exaltation of Christ, as expressed in 1:19ff, where Paul speaks of believers needing to know 'the exceeding greatness of His power' toward us. Here, Paul indicates the means whereby that prayer is to be answered - through the gifts of ministry that the exalted Christ gives to His Church. This is the way forward to maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ and to what we ought to be - which is what the word Paul uses in 12 (translated 'perfecting' in the AV and 'equipment' in some modern versions) means, having the force of 'bringing something or someone into its proper use, whether for the first time or after a lapse'. Such is the purpose of the gifts of ministry, and the verses that follow show us the scope and extent of that exercise - the bringing forth of maturity and the growth in maturity, toward the 'measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ', being no more children, but growing up into Him, with the resultant increase of the body. What a glorious view and aim! Does not this give us some conception of the grandeur of Paul's doctrine in these verses?

85) 4:8-16

As to the gifts themselves, and their nature, we shall look at them in turn; and first, 'apostles'. This word has a twofold meaning in the New Testament and is first of all applied to the twelve original disciples and Paul. In this narrow and exclusive sense, the qualifications for apostleship were: to have seen Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:1), and to have been a witness of the resurrection. On this understanding of the word the apostles were bound to die out in course of time and never be replaced, there could only be twelve apostles in this sense, for later generations could not possibly 'see' Jesus in the way they did, or be eye-witnesses of His resurrection in the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension. But the word 'apostle' is also used of others than the twelve - of Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), James the brother of our Lord (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19), Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 2:16), and others. These may well in fact have 'seen' Jesus in his earthly ministry, and been witnesses of the resurrection also. But what is important for us to recognise is the fact that Christ gave to these men the responsibility of establishing the norm of the apostolic gospel, by their preaching and writing. In this, they were unique and unrepeatable. There are no apostles in this sense today, nor could there be - nor need there be - since the revelation is now complete. New revelation is not possible - or necessary either - although new illumination (a very different thing!) of what was originally and once for all given may be needed again and again.

86) 4:8-16

Secondly, the prophets. There seems no good reason for not assuming that these stand in integral relation and succession to the Old Testament prophets. In the Old Testament the norm of prophecy is Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). They 'forth-told' the Word of God, and sometimes in the course of this 'foretold' the future - a combination of proclamation and prediction. These we see likewise in the New Testament prophets as for example Agabus, in Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11, on the one hand, who foretold the future; and Judas and Silas in Acts 15:32, on the other, who exercised a ministry of the Word, exhorting and encouraging the brethren. While in the New Testament every Christian was a potential prophet - the pouring out of the Spirit carries with it this result, 'and they shall prophesy' (Moses had said 'would God all the Lord's people were prophets') yet there was a special class or group known as 'the prophets' as mentioned here and in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Theirs was a work of edification, exhortation and comfort. It is clear that in the New Testament they were an important group. With the apostles, they laid the foundation of the New Testament Church (Ephesians 2:20, 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets'). One all-important aspect of this was the establishing of apostolic doctrine, the formulation of the teaching of the gospel. In this respect, both apostles and prophets would necessarily pass from the scene, for there is a 'once-for-allness' about this. The New Testament canon was eventually completed, and no more 'revelation' was needed. It had all been given.

87) 4:8-16

A further word may be added in relation to the prophets. With the establishment of settled ministries under 'pastors and teachers', the prophets became progressively unnecessary and 'redundant', and their special office superseded, with ministers 'taking over' their ministry of exhortation and instruction. Here is a helpful comment by Francis Foulkes in his Tyndale commentary on Ephesians:

'The ministry, or at least the name, of prophet also soon died in the Church. Their work, receiving and declaring the word of God under direct inspiration of the Spirit, was most vital before there was a canon of New Testament Scriptures. We read of prophets in the second century, but they had diminished importance. The apostolic writings were coming to be read widely, and accepted as authoritative, and this tended to replace the authority of the prophets. At the same time, the local ministry was assuming greater importance than that of itinerant ministers, and there was the added problem that there were many false teachers and self-styled 'prophets', who went from place to place to peddle their wares.'

The prophetic function today, must therefore be seen as that of contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. This is what we mean by a 'prophetic' ministry - the recovery of old, lost values, the rehabilitation of a true ministry of the Word in the Church.

88) 4:8-16

Next, evangelists. What is evangelism? On scriptural grounds, it is misleading to identify 'preaching the gospel' with 'preaching a gospel message', as if only the latter were true evangelism. Men who labour to expound the Scriptures are sometimes criticised for not making pointed enough appeals to the unconverted, and the implication is that only the pointed appeal constitutes true evangelism. There is a whole philosophy behind this attitude, but it must be asserted that all the available scriptural evidence stands in contradiction to it. According to the New Testament, the preaching of the gospel is the proclamation of the mighty acts of God, not a series of exhortations and entreaties to get right with God. All the characteristic preaching of the gospel in the Acts of the Apostles bears witness to this. The Apostles preached doctrine. Modern scholarship has established that there was a well-defined apostolic 'kerugma' which formed the foundation and basis of all their ministry. And it was objective proclamation in this sense, not subjective appeal that God was pleased to bless. A careful and unbiased reading of the New Testament will surely make it clear that the apostolic evangelism consisted of the exposition and interpretation of the Scriptures concerning Christ. Paul reasoned with men out of the Scriptures (Acts 17:2), opening up and unfolding their meaning in such a way that their message in all its virtue and power got home to mind, heart and conscience. It is precisely the lack of this kind of preaching that has so often brought evangelistic work into such a parlous state today. We need to be clear that it is the law of the Lord that converts the soul (Psalm 19:7), not the earnest pleading of men, and this means that it must be proclaimed and expounded objectively, and trusted in - whether it be John's Gospel, Romans, Genesis or Numbers - as having converting power, if the Spirit is in the preaching of it.

89) 4:8-16

Finally, pastors and teachers, which, as the Greek makes clear, constitutes a combined office. This is significant and it is possible to see a reason for such a union. The teaching of the Word, the exposition of Holy Scripture, is something that probes men's hearts and lives, and unearths and brings to the surface the basic human problems and needs that lurk hidden in the recesses of the soul. It is this fact that necessitates pastoral care and help in order to resolve them and bring relief and blessing. According to the narrative of the gospels, the Presence of Christ seemed again and again to draw into the open the demons that hitherto had remained concealed in the dark and hopeless depths of men's lives, in order that they might be challenged and cast out. In the same way, the Word exposes the works of the evil one in human experience, to enable wise pastoral care to be exercised for the establishment of spiritual health.

And the reality of this healing and restoration is borne out in what Paul says in vv 12, 13 about the purpose Christ had in view in instituting these gifts in His Church, to bring people into their 'proper condition', and thus 'made serviceable' for Him.

90) 4:8-16

We turn now to the purpose in our Lord's giving these gifts of ministry. We said earlier that this is expressed in 12 as being 'for the equipment of the saints for the service they are to render Christ ...', and that the word Paul uses here means, in its verbal form, 'to bring something or someone into his proper condition in the purpose of God'. William Barclay points out in his notes on Ephesians that the word *katartizein* is used in surgery for the setting of a broken limb or putting a dislocated joint back into place. One does not need a great deal of imagination to realise that there are often situations in which the work of God is hampered and put in jeopardy by someone in a fellowship who is 'out of joint' spiritually, and who, by continuing to be out of joint, can grieve the Spirit away. We have only to look ahead to the last verses of this chapter (30-32) to see how real a possibility this is. One thinks of the murmuring that arose in Acts 6 about the alleged neglect of some in the daily ministration, which is described in words that indicate that it was under the surface, festering like a hidden sore before it finally erupted to the surface. And it was something that the apostles recognised had potential for harming the ongoing work of the Spirit. In the New Testament itself the word is used of the disciples mending their nets (Mark 1:19), and this readily recalls to us our Lord's words 'I will make you fishers of men', and reminds us that you cannot catch fish with torn nets! To be fishers of men we need to be made serviceable, and this is Paul's point in what he says in 12.

91) 4:8-16

Paul's word is also used in such contexts as 'the framing of the worlds by the word of God' (Hebrews 11:3), and 'restoring a backslider' (Galatians 6:1) and 'making perfect' (1 Peter 5:10), where the etymological meaning of the word is almost interpreted and commented upon in what follows that reference - 'stablish, strengthen, settle' - for this is the redeemed man's 'proper condition' in the purpose and intention of God.

The latter verses of this passage (13-16) contain a great deal of essential teaching for the Christian. The building up of the body of Christ, which is the aim and purpose of ministry, is to issue in maturity. We grow first toward maturity, and then in maturity - this is the force of the words 'a perfect man' (which is to be understood in a corporate rather than in an individual sense), and 'to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. Thus Paul gives a series of consequences that will flow from such spiritual maturity (14ff), with each verse adding something fresh to the overall picture. In 15 the AV says 'speaking the truth in love', but the original Greek, literally rendered, would be 'truthing in love', and it would be getting at Paul's meaning very well if we translated it 'cherishing the truth in love', doing with the truth what the Thessalonians did when they received it as a welcome guest (this is the force of the word Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Psalmist's attitude expresses it graphically in Psalm 19:10 in the words 'more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold ...'. This, according to Paul, is how Christians grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord. They become a people deeply taught in the word; and this is always how things begin to happen in the church, as we may learn from Acts 13, for it was from the church at Antioch, that had been taught so ably by Barnabas and Saul, that the first great missionary outreach of the gospel went forth.

92) 4:8-16

The reason why a deeply taught church becomes a 'sending' church is that such a fellowship has discovered the secret of true growth, as 16 proceeds to indicate. The translation of this verse in the AV is somewhat cumbersome, but its general meaning is quite clear. The essential idea is the inner harmony and coherence of the body and the common growth of its various limbs (we are members in particular) through individual connection with the Head (this is what 'fitly joined together and compacted' means). The phrase 'by that which every joint supplieth' has been variously rendered, but is probably best taken as 'through every contact with the supply' - i.e. through the union of every member of the body with the Head. This is further suggested in the next phrase, 'according to the proportionate working of each several part'. Each member of the body of Christ has his contribution to make to the harmony and wellbeing of the body, and will make that contribution when he responds without reserve to the ministry of the Word. And this will result in the glad, spontaneous and inevitable increase or growth of the body. Here is the true, New Testament conception of evangelical outreach - the Church as the body of Christ energised and vitalised by an unreserved reception of the word of ministry, healed, equipped, built up into maturity and balanced development, and thus made self-propagating and fruitful in the service of the gospel.

This, then, is the service for which the saints are to be equipped, this is the final purpose and goal of the ministry of the Word in the Church of Christ. Such a ministry, for Paul, meant the whole counsel of God, a full-orbed message (Acts 20:20, 27). As he wrote to Timothy, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable ...' (2 Timothy 3:16), which tells us that we need all the truth of God for our balanced growth, not merely this or that doctrine, this or that emphasis. Christ is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and to get a whole Christ we need the whole Word. He is the life of the Word, and it all has sanctifying, edifying, upbuilding power. This is why undue emphasis on any particular 'line' is often productive of confusion, not to say tension and stress, in Christian lives. We need the whole counsel of God to make us what we ought to be.

93) 4:8-16

Our final consideration in this notable passage must be to look at the things which prevent or impair the growth of the believer in maturity. We should note in 15 that Paul uses the phrase 'grow up into Him in all things', indicating balanced, all-round growth, emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual and that in 14 he mentions childishness, inconstancy, shallowness, lack of discernment as indicating a lack of preparedness, not to say unfitness and disqualification for service. What are the marks of childishness in Christian life? We speak of people behaving like spoiled children, sulking in a corner when they do not get their own way. And there are Christian fellowships where half the problems and difficulties are caused by Christians who behave in such a fashion. And those who are inconstant, tossed to and fro by periodic enthusiasms, superficial and undiscerning, persisting in living in spiritual shallows, instead of launching out into the deep, are a liability, not an asset to the gospel. What has been called 'the cult of frivolity', the lightsome, frolicsome, superficial Christianity, whose appeal is the appeal of entertainment not of worship, bidding fair to be called 'the new worldliness', is very far removed from the pattern of the Acts of the Apostles. The fire that burned there, in the early Church was of a different order, indeed, and the manifestations of the Spirit's presence there were very different from those that are made to do duty today.

94) 4:17-24

Having indicated in the first half of the chapter the provision Christ has made for our growth and development into full maturity of life, Paul reverts once more to the exhortation to walk worthy of our vocation (which he began in 4:1). There is a sense in which what the Apostle has said in 4:4-16 is a tangent in his thought, like the tangent in 3:2-12, and it is a measure of how important he considers it to emphasise the indicatives of the faith, and the nature of the divine provision for all our needs, that he keeps coming back again and again to these indicatives, so as to get home unmistakably to our thinking that all Christian behaviour depends and rests on what God has given us in Christ. The exhortation to a worthy walk is therefore doubly based on the divine provision - in chs 1-3 Paul has spoken of the wealth that is ours in Christ, and the exalted nature of our position in Him; and in 4:4-16 he likewise shows the bountiful way in which the Lord has undertaken to 'make over' that wealth to His people, namely by the institution of the gifts of ministry in the Church. This, in fact, serves to highlight and reinforce the appeal (begun in 4:1-3 and taken up again in 4:17ff) to walk worthy of such a vocation, when such abundant resources are at our disposal to make this possible.

That is the first thing we are to learn from this passage, and the second thing is - and for this we need to look on a bit, beyond the end of the chapter and into chapter 5 - that Paul first of all makes a number of negative observations and follows them with positive ones. These can be summed up by underlining the words 'walk not' in 4:17, and the word 'walk' in 5:2. This is a significant point, which we shall continue to look at in tomorrow's Note.

95) 4:17-24

What was said at the end of the previous Note serves to explode one of the confident clichés often heard today, namely that 'Christianity is not a negative thing, but a positive one'. And the answer Paul gives is: 'Of course there are negatives, as well as positives, in the Christian faith'. And he does not allow anyone to forget it, nor is this the only place he emphasises this fact, for it is evident all through his epistles, as for example in the well-known statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain' How can anyone say that 'Christianity does not say "You mustn't do this, you mustn't do that" when that is exactly what Paul does say in that verse in Thessalonians.' The truth of the matter is that there are both negatives and positives involved, and so often the negatives are a necessary 'first' before the positives can become possible. It is the 'negatives' that we are particularly concerned with - 'walk not', 'put off the old man', 'sin not', 'steal no more', 'no corrupt communication', 'grieve not'.

The 'negatives' Paul uses in these verses are summed up in the phrase 'the old man', and the 'positives' in the phrase, 'the new man' and, he says, we are to put off the old man and put on the new. And it is always a case of 'identifying' the evidences of the old man, putting them off, shunning and turning from them; and likewise 'identifying' the attributes of the new man, putting them on and living as new men in Christ. This is a fundamental and decisive part of Paul's teaching in all his epistles, and central to his doctrine of sanctification. And it is something that every Christian must grapple with, to understand it and know its virtue in his life. This is not easy, but then, what is easy that is worthwhile and vital in Christian experience? It is abundantly worth it to make the effort and get down to it.

96) 4:17-24

There is one point, however, that we need to underline at the outset, and that is to grasp, from Paul's words in 17-19, what a terrible thing it is not to be converted to Christ and to be lost. One senses the tender concern and compassion in Paul's heart as he pens these solemn words. It was said of D.L. Moody, who in temperament was one of the happiest of men, that he could never speak of a lost soul without his eyes filling with tears. That is the use of such a passage as this for Christians - not merely that we should know the true state of the lost, but that we should feel for them with the compassion of Christ. Think of the tears that our Lord shed over the lost city of Jerusalem: 'If thou hadst known', He cried as He wept, 'even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes'. The whole moral and intellectual character of heathenism, and the pathos of it, its emptiness and meaninglessness and despair, are evidenced not only in these verses before us, but also throughout the New Testament - the ignorance caused by hardness of heart, the alienation, the darkness in their minds, the vanity of life. Paul was surely conscious of all this as he wrote Ephesians, visualising what he had seen when he was in Ephesus and the other cities of Asia, and the question that these verses ask us is: Is this how we react, when we see those who are not Christians all around us?

97) 4:17-24

In understanding the ideas expressed by Paul in the phrases 'the old man' and 'the new man' it will help us to look at other similar statements in his writings - Romans 6:1ff; Romans 7:1-6; Romans 13:14; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:1ff, all of which are closely linked together in thought. The Galatian statement is notable, in the double paradox that it expresses, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' - this is the 'new man', just as the 'I' in 'I have been crucified with Christ' signifies the 'old man', being done to the death and abandoned. And the 'new' is a 'replacement' life, which is 'Christ in us', yet which is nevertheless a true life for us. Perhaps the most helpful illustration is that in Romans 7:1-6, in the 'marriage illustration' Paul uses. It is a somewhat complex one, and makes us ask the question, 'Who is married to whom, in this illustration that Paul uses?' Well, the 'woman' here has two marriages, the second of which is to Christ (4). The 'woman' represents the essential personality, or 'ego', that has through the Fall become 'married' to, or saddled with, this brute of a husband, 'the old man'. It is this, first, marriage that causes all the trouble in human experience. But this 'old man', the first husband, is put to death in the death of Christ, and the essential 'ego', or personality is set free to marry another, even Christ. This is what is referred to in Galatians 2:20, 'I have been crucified with Christ ...' a crucifixion in which the old man is destroyed, and a new marriage takes place, with Christ. This is why in the words which follow 'Nevertheless I live ...' there is no contradiction. Rather, a new union or marriage takes place, for our association with Christ relates both to His death (by which 'the old man' is crucified and destroyed) and to His resurrection (by which we taste and share - by our new marriage - in His risen life). And of this second marriage, God says, as He said at the beginning, 'Be fruitful and multiply'. There is to be fruit of this new union; and the fruit of the first marriage is to be eschewed and turned from. This is what Paul spells out here in 4:25ff.

98) 4:25-32

The 'marriage' illustration mentioned in yesterday's Note is a good one, from many points of view, for we can see all the more clearly the force of Paul's word about grieving the Holy Spirit of God (30). He, the Holy Spirit, is the bond that binds the believer to Christ, and when things go wrong in this marriage it is He Who is grieved. This is how we are to think of Paul's teaching in these verses - in relation to the marriage of the soul with the Saviour. There is a threefold emphasis in that teaching (from 19 to the end of the chapter): i) sins of action - lasciviousness, uncleanness (19), corrupt behaviour (22), stealing (28); ii) sins of word - lying (25), corrupt communication (29), evil speaking (31); iii) sins of thought - anger (26), bitterness, malice (31). In 25 if we have the expression of two possibilities of living, with each succeeding sentence presenting two possibilities - lying/truth (25), anger/righteous indignation (26), stealing/labouring and giving (28), corrupt communication/edifying (29), bitterness/kindness, forgiveness (31/32). These are all expressions of 'the old man' and the 'new man' respectively. It can hardly be questioned that these contrasts have a great deal to say to our modern, decadent society today, and it will be worthwhile spending a little more time in spelling out in some detail their implications, and the principles that underlie them, in tomorrow's Note.

99) 4:25-37

The significance of the contrasts presented by the Apostle in these verses is that they represent at their roots two very different and indeed mutually exclusive attitudes. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, in his remarkable and challenging book 'The Other Side of 1984', speaks about the change of 'mind-set' in modern life as compared with earlier periods in our history. He says, 'The difference between mediaeval society and our own time is that mediaeval society emphasised the idea of the duties involved from each person by his or her position in society, whereas from the Enlightenment onwards it was the rights of man which seemed axiomatic.' The results of this change of 'mindset' is that the world becomes (as in the contemporary western world it has become) a place where each individual has the 'right' to pursue 'happiness' in the domestic and privatised sense, and that it is the responsibility of the state to see that this right is honoured. It can hardly be controverted that this has become part of the unquestioned assumptions of the western world. It is one thing to quote with approbation (as we must surely do) the famous words in the American constitution, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights ...' but history has shown that the implication 'limited only by the parallel rights of others' was only too easily forgotten until in our time the divorce of the idea of 'rights' from that of 'duty' and 'responsibility' has become virtually complete. We are seeing the fruit of this today with a vengeance, when the whole concept of 'duty' has become a dirty word in the human vocabulary, and 'rights' are paramount, even if gaining and maintaining them should cause untold damage to individual and society alike. What, after all, is terrorism - whether of the IRA or of Islamic fundamentalism or of the Animal Rights' atrocities or whatever - but the insistent and imperious demand that their particular right should be established, regardless of the cost to others? There is nothing in any reasonable and common-sense understanding of all this to suggest that one section of the human race - the human rights' activists of whatever sort - should be the permanent imposers of the restrictions and the rest of us the permanent sufferers of them. There is no one-way traffic possible here. It is essentially a two-way system.

100)4:25-32

As a postscript to what was said in the previous Note we add some comments by Dr Graham Leonard, formerly Bishop of London, from a newspaper article a few years ago in which he discussed 'Conscience, Loyalty and Freedom' (those who retain past copies of the Record will find the Minister's Letter on this subject in the May 1990 issue). The following excerpt is taken from his observations about Freedom:

'On freedom, the first point which needs to be made is that freedom for anyone means of necessity some restriction on all. Freedom for all to do whatever they want means anarchy, not freedom.

'It should be the aim of a liberal democracy - and I use the word liberal in the old-fashioned sense - to provide the maximum liberty of conscience with the minimum of restraint. But this can only be provided against the background of a moral consensus in which personal responsibility is seen as the necessary concomitant of freedom, and in which certain common values are accepted, and particularly in the nature of freedom itself. Such a consensus is lacking today.'

Food for thought indeed!

101)4:25-32

Before we leave these verses we must say something about 30, by far the most important verse, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.' Nothing could emphasise more decisively how unthinkable and inexcusable it is for the believer to let the sins mentioned in this unholy catalogue reign in his mortal body; for when we sin, we hurt not only ourselves, but also the Holy Spirit, the honoured Guest Who dwells in our hearts. The Christian life is above all else a fellowship, a personal relationship with Christ, by the Spirit. And sin is an infringement of that relationship. As to the way to safeguard against any such infringement we may consider how it was with Simon Peter when he transgressed in denying his Lord. In the striking 'resurrection' appearance by the Sea of Galilee our Lord's challenge to him was not a rebuke about the failure of his faith or of his theology but a failure of his love. 'Lovest thou Me?' is what was said. Love is a constituent element of genuine faith - 'faith worketh by love' - and love to Christ is necessary within the context of Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20, and makes the whole thing work. It is this that produces expansiveness of spirit - kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness. How deeply we should covet this! To be able to say 'My Jesus, I love Thee' and to mean it - and for Him to know that we mean it - this is what will keep us true to Him and to our fellows, day by day, and all the days.

102)5:1-2

It will be helpful, as we begin this new chapter, to take an overview of its teaching, before looking in detail at the opening verses. We see that the Apostle underlines three things in particular in 1-21 - walking in love (2), walking as children of light (8), and walking circumspectly, in wisdom (15). Then, from 5:22-6:9, he 'sets the agenda', so to speak, for this Christian walk as being in the context of relationships - between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between masters and servants. This is a comprehensive, and indeed challenging, unfolding of Christian living, as we are to see in the Notes that follow. We look first, in this Note, at the chapter's first emphasis in its opening verses, that of walking in love as God's dear children.

By way of introduction, we may look back for a moment at the final thought of the previous chapter (4:30), 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption'. That is the climax and heart of the negative aspect of the Christian life. But the opposite is also blessedly possible: it is possible, by the way we walk, to bring pleasure and delight to the Holy Spirit of God. This is a very fruitful and, one fears, a much too neglected thought, and it is worth spending some time on it at the outset. This we will do in the next Note.

103)5:1-2

As Christians, we stand in a relationship to God, as His dear children. And, as in human relationships, this also has certain implications. Just as we like - or should like! - to express our appreciation of our friends and loved ones, so it should give us pleasure and joy in thinking out ways of giving pleasure to God. The human analogy helps us here: It is often not necessary to ask someone we love what they would like as a gift - parents know their children, and know what would please them, husbands know what will bring pleasure to their wives, and wives what will bring pleasure to their husbands, without asking. That is how it is in real relationships. And if we are walking with God, if our hearts love Him and desire to give expression to that love, then we will want to give Him what will delight His heart. Remember Mary and her alabaster box of precious spikenard poured out upon the Saviour - it was not the spikenard, but what it represented, that touched our Lord so deeply. It would be very beneficial for us all just to spend some time meditating on this, and giving thought to how we could give expression of our love for God that would bring pleasure and delight to His heart. That is never an unnecessary exercise. When we love anyone, we want that person to know our love, and we will put ourselves out to show and demonstrate it. Should we not have a similar urge and desire to express our love to God, and to His Son Jesus? It is very wonderful to think that we could ever bring delight and pleasure to the heart of God, but this is what the Scriptures themselves tell us. Then think on these things.

104)5:1-2

The injunction 'Be ye followers of God, as dear children' in 1 is clearly linked with the last words in 4:32, 'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another ...' Therefore, 'forgiving one another' is one aspect of 'walking in love' (2), and included in it. Forgiveness and love are common enough words in our everyday Christian vocabulary, but they have become debased in value and their real challenge is often lost. They very much need to be re-valued in our thinking. The exhortation in 4:32 is to 'forgive even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you'. How does God forgive? Freely, fully, and finally. That is the testimony of Scripture. We may understand this from the parable of the creditor and the two debtors in Luke 7:41, 42: 'When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.' This is as true in the Old Testament as in the New: in Micah 7:19 we read 'Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea'; and Hebrews 10:17, quoting from the Old Testament, says, 'Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more'. When we lay this alongside what we are sometimes pleased to call forgiveness, we see what a hollow sham ours often is. We sometimes say, 'I'll forgive him, but I could never forget what he did to me'. Do we not see that this is a form of self-deception, and that it is something that comes from the devil? He is the accuser of the brethren, and it is he who casts up sin to us, and when we do it to others, we are of our father the devil, and not of God! Ah, we are to forgive as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us - fully, freely, unconditionally.

105)5:1-2

The command to love and walk in love carries the same inexorable challenge as the command to forgive. It is to love 'as Christ also hath loved us'. And how did Christ love us? The answer is: He gave Himself. That is the measure of His love, and ours is to bear that characteristic also. And when it does, it will be to God what Christ's love was - an offering and a sacrifice to Him for a sweet-smelling savour. Ah, this takes us into the realm of mystery: Christ's dying love is the ground of all our hopes, and the source of all our gratitude, but it is more: it is something inexpressibly sweet to God, and dear to Him. And the closer and nearer we are to Christ's self-sacrificing and self-denying love, the sweeter will our lives be to God also.

There is something else here also. In the nature and character of God, and that of Christ our Lord, holiness and love are inextricably linked. God is holy, and before Him angels veil their faces, but He is also a God of infinite tenderness, compassion and love. That paradoxical blend is to be seen in our lives also, and not the one without the other. Alexander Maclaren, in his exposition of the seven Christian graces in 2 Peter 1:5-7: 'Add to (supply in) your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness ... brotherly kindness ... love' - comments, 'On the one side, severe, self-regarding graces fronting a world full of antagonism and evil; on the other, gentler graces fronting a world full of people who need care and help. How important this is! It has not always been so, and it is not always so today, in Christians' lives. There are lives that are upright and true and holy yet not loving; there are Christians in whom the fruit of holiness is unquestionably there, strong and steadfast, and straight as a die but the fruit tastes sour. There is a sanctification that is hard and metallic, cold, forbidding and censorious, and even strident, and it lacks the melting quality that the love of Christ alone can impart.'

106)5:1-2

Many years ago a tract was published with the title 'Tenderness of Spirit'. Here is an excerpt from it which underlines what was said at the end of yesterday's Note:

'Deep tenderness of spirit is the very soul and marrow of the Christ-life. Without it, the most vigorous life of righteousness and zeal, and good works, and rigid purity of morals, and missionary reform and profuse liberality, and ascetic self-denial and most blameless conduct utterly fail to measure up to the Christ-life unveiled in the New Testament.

'It is possible to be very religious and persevering in all Christian duties, to be a brave defender and preacher of holiness, to be mathematically orthodox and blameless in outward life, and very zealous in good works, and yet be greatly lacking in tenderness of spirit.

'Many religious people seem loaded with good fruits, but the fruit tastes green. It lacks flavour and October mellowness. There is a touch of vinegar in their sanctity. Their purity has an icy coldness to it. They seem to have a baptism on them, but it is not composed of those sweet spices of cinnamon and calamus and cassia which God told Moses to compound, as a fragrant type of the Holy Spirit. Their testimonies are straight and pointed, but they lack the melting quality. Their prayers are intelligent and strong and pointed, but they lack the heart-piercing pathos of the dying Jesus. The summer heat in them is lacking. They preach eloquently, and explain with utmost nicety what is actual and original sin, and what is pardon and purity, but they lack the burning flame ...'.

107)5:3-14

We come in these next verses of the chapter to the second of Paul's emphases: following the exhortation to 'walk in love' (1, 2) he next enjoins us to 'walk as children of light' (8). Just as the great empowerment and inspiration for walking in love, and living the life of love, is the offering and sacrifice of Christ for us as a sweet-smelling savour to God (2), so also this lays upon us the constraint and requirement to walk in light. The death of Christ lays upon us an inexorable demand that we should be holy. In this connection we should note how Paul puts it in 8: 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light' - that is to say, the summons to walk in the light is based upon our position as believers. 'This is what you are', says Paul, 'Now be that.' As ever, then, Paul bases his exhortation upon exposition, and his challenge upon affirmation. The great, tremendous fact, if we are believers, is that we have been brought out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). We have been translated from the kingdom of darkness, where the works of darkness were natural to us, into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13), where the fruits of light are now to become 'second nature' to us. This mighty transaction takes place in the power of the Cross. It is the Cross that speaks the word of power that sets men free from darkness and makes them 'light in the Lord'. Such is the doctrine, now comes the duty: walk as children of light. Walk in character with your new status. This is something quite fundamental to the Apostle's teaching on the Christian life.

108)5:3-14

We should note in 8 how Paul defines and describes our new status: 'children of light'. We are born of the Spirit into the family of God, and we are to show forth the 'family likeness'. God is love, and therefore we must walk in love; but God is also light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5), and therefore we are to walk in the light. James Denney, in a striking sermon on 'walking in the light' says,

'To walk in the light means to live a life in which there is nothing hidden, nothing in which we are insincere with ourselves, nothing in which we seek to impose upon others. We may have, and no doubt we will have, both sin and the sense of sin upon us – "if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" - but we may walk in the light nevertheless, if we deal truly with our sin, and it is only as we do so that we enjoy Christian fellowship and are cleansed by the blood of Jesus.'

That is challenging enough in all conscience, is it not? There is a burning fire in these words, and we do well to pay heed to it.

It will be noted also that Paul deals with both negatives and positives in these verses (as he did in 4:17ff). In 3-7 he speaks very bluntly of the works of darkness that characterise the old life while in 8-14 he turns to the positive aspects of being in the light. We shall look at both these sections in turn in the Notes that follow.

109)5:3-14

Paul could hardly be more forceful and direct in what he says in 3. Not only are such things not to be practised, they are not even to be named among believers. This is a very penetrating and perceptive word, for to speak of such things, to want to speak of them, betrays a secret preoccupation with them, and this is something that needs to be dealt with. One can usually tell what sort of person is speaking to us at any particular time - the man whose 'stock-in-trade' is the off-colour remark, the 'double entendre', the man whose conversation is just on this side of smut, when what is left unsaid is conveyed by the tone of voice or the kind of look just as unmistakably as if it had been spoken plainly. To be a person like that - and sadly one has sometimes heard professing Christians speak like this at wedding receptions - is to earn the Apostle's negative estimate in these verses. And one has only to think of the world of modern literature and entertainment to realise how needful such a warning is today, when impurity is exploited and commercialised, and traded upon, until people's minds are almost sodden with it. Paul says in 6, 'Don't let anyone deceive you on this point', make no mistake about it - as if to warn against Mr Worldly Wise who laughingly and condescendingly tells us we are old-fashioned and Victorian, and to move with the times. Well, there are worse things than being Victorian! Let us not forget that a day is coming when the times will stop moving, a day when time will be no more, but God will still be Light, and His criterion of judgment will still be 'walk in the light'. J.B. Phillips translates 4 as follows, 'The keynote of our conversation should be a sense of what we owe to God'. This does not mean to be always spouting religious talk; but it does mean that in all our talk, of whatever kind, there will be an integrity about us that will be unmistakable.

110)5:8-14

Paul next turns in these verses to the positive aspect of being in the light. He begins once more by stating the great change that has taken place in the believer. Once we were in darkness, but now we are light in the Lord, and we must therefore walk in character with our new state, and walk as children of light. And he adds, in 9, 'The fruit of the light (not 'the Spirit', here) is in all goodness and righteousness and truth'. J.B. Phillips renders this as 'The light produces everything that is wholesome and good and true'. And this is a readily comprehensible summary of Paul's meaning. It speaks of integrity of character, moral rectitude. Sometimes we may say of someone, 'He's not a right man', by which we mean that there is a lack of integrity about him. We need to remember that God's holiness, when incarnate in Christ, expressed itself in a life that 'went about doing good'. So also, that same manifestation is expected in His children!

But now, there is a significant development at 11. Walking as children of light does not only mean to live holy lives, and shun all that is evil in thought, word and deed. There is another aspect, and these next verses indicate what it is. The children of light are to shine forth for Christ and for God. And the alternative to having no fellowship with the fruitful works of darkness is not so much 'withdrawal' from them, as reproofing them. But we need to be careful here. Paul may not mean that we should reprove these unfruitful works of darkness, as shown in the lives of unbelievers by word. Indeed, such a picture might well conjure up the notion of a disapproving frown, or even a self-righteous denunciation, from a strait-laced Mrs Grundy with a vinegary face. What may rather be in Paul's mind is the kind of unmistakable reproof that a life of integrity administers without even a word being spoken. One thinks of the story of D.L. Moody, whose presence in a barber's shop stopped the swearing and bawdiness of language in the shop by simply being there, without saying a single word. Ah, there is something in a godly man or woman's bearing that raises the tone of a place whenever he enters it. He does not say anything; he does not need to say anything. His life speaks for God and for light.

III) 5:8-14

The AV rendering of 13 is somewhat difficult to understand, but the meaning is something like this: 'Let your lives show, by contrast, how dreary and futile these things are. For light is capable of showing up everything for what it really is. It is even possible for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also'. Handley Moule paraphrases it as follows:

'You are light in the Lord: use this character upon the surrounding moral darkness, in order to the rescue of its victims, that they also may become light. Nothing but light will do this work: no conquest over darkness, literal or spiritual, is possible except to light. And one evidence of this is that every such real conquest results in the subjects of darkness becoming now subjects of light, becoming light.'

'You are light', Paul is saying, 'keep your light, then, but shine far into the dark. And then other men, as already you, shall become light in the Lord.' It is important to see the implications of this, in terms of the evangelistic power of a holy life. What is meant by saying this can be explained by reminding ourselves that there are two ways of looking at holiness. One is to think of it in terms of the devastating challenge and summons it presents to us to be holy as God is holy - a frightening and off-putting challenge indeed, as we may see from the way in which the first disciples reacted to the call to take up the Cross and follow Jesus.

But it is very impressive to see how, after Pentecost, their attitude was very different: then, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Lord Jesus. That was the difference, and in that difference their lives were indeed transformed, and they were immensely attractive people who drew others to Christ by the very quality of their lives.

112)5:8-14

What was said in the previous Note tells us something important about the sheer attractiveness of holiness, in the biblical sense and meaning of the word. We have before pointed out that the biblical word has a twofold etymology - on the one hand, it contains the idea of separation; on the other hand it contains the idea of brightness. And it is this latter idea that is so often forgotten and at a discount. But it certainly was not so in the New Testament Church. Here is another quote from James Denney, who says in one of his sermons:

'Before the gospel came, despair had fallen on the ancient world; society had abandoned the very idea and hope of goodness; "deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell". But suddenly a change came. Men appeared in that lost world with an infinite hope in their hearts - an assured and triumphant hope, to be holy as God is holy; and it spread from heart to heart till in the Christian Church a new people of God became visible upon earth, a society which with all its imperfections was a communion of saints. What was it that made the change? It was the sense of a divine call that had come to men. And how had it come? It came through the revelation of the love of God.'

It was this irresistible attractiveness of the Church of Christ that was one of the great evangelistic impulses in the early days of the Christian Faith. Holiness - yes; blazing purity was their only standard, as witness the condign punishment that fell on Ananias and Sapphira for their sullyng of that standard; but it was a fire that warmed as well as a fire that burned, and proved immensely attractive to countless people in the ancient world. They had never encountered anything like it.

113)5:8-14

We get some indications and hints about this attractiveness in such phrases as Peter's, in his first epistle, where he speaks of being 'brought out of darkness into His marvellous light'. What does Peter mean to convey by these words if not that something unspeakably wonderful had happened to him in the grace of the gospel? Indeed, all the imagery that the New Testament uses about salvation conveys the same unmistakable message, whether it be that of the setting free of the prisoner, or the coming home to the Father's house from the desolation of the far country, or whatever - all alike tell of the same wonderful experience. Why then, should we as Christians be always so much on the defensive, and even apologetic, about what our faith, and our Saviour, mean to us? If the greatest thing in the world has happened to us, we surely need not be afraid to tell it forth, and to commend the Saviour Who has wrought such a transformation in our lives, so that others might also share in what we have found!

The section ends with what purports to be a quotation from Scripture, in the words 'Wherefore he saith' or 'it saith'. The commentators point out that although the substance of this verse is scriptural, its precise words do not correspond precisely to the Old Testament (but see Isaiah 9:2, 26:19, 52:1, 60:1). It is thought likely that we have here another fragment of an early Christian hymn - we often quote lines of hymns in just this way to illustrate and reinforce the points we make in sermons - probably used at Christian baptism. This much is clear: in it three metaphors for turning to God are linked - awaking from sleep, being raised from the dead, and going out of darkness into light - and these are familiar enough figures in the Pauline writings. Hendriksen maintains that Paul's aim here, and in the passage as a whole, is to show that he who has renounced the wicked ways of the world should live a life consistent with his new standing. Therefore, instead of any longer taking part in the unfruitful works of darkness, he should emerge completely from his sleep and arise and withdraw in every respect from the wicked ways of the company of the spiritually dead. The blessed result will be that Christ will shine upon him. That would seem to be the meaning of the passage.

114)5:15-21

We come in these verses to the third of Paul's injunctions about the Christian walk, to walk circumspectly. The modern versions render the verse 'Be careful how you live, not as unwise, but wise' (NIV and RSV). Whatever the rendering, the thrust is much the same and, in Colossians, the parallel epistle to Ephesians, Paul says, 'Walk in wisdom toward them that are without'. This third exhortation requires to be 'read back', as it were, into the other two, 'walking in love', and 'walking in the light' - just as both require to be 'read into' the third exhortation. When we say, however, that we need to read wisdom and circumspection into our loving, this does not, of course, mean that love has to be limited in any calculating way, for it is in the nature of real love to be wholehearted and even 'prodigal' in its expression. God's love went all the way to Calvary for us. All the same, there is a strength in true love that makes it a very awesome thing, on occasion, and there is nothing of the merely sentimental about it. One does not easily forget what the great Scottish theologian, P.T. Forsyth, once said about the divine love, that 'God is strong enough to resist pity until grief has done its gracious work even in His Son'. That surely puts a certain construction on divine love: it is something that is strong, fierce, inexorable on occasion, and never to be trifled with. C.S. Lewis captures this very trenchantly in what he says in *The Problem of Pain* about the difference between a Father in Heaven and a grandfather in heaven - a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see young people enjoying themselves' and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might truly be said at the end of each day, 'A good time was had by all' ... And he adds, 'It is for people whom we care nothing about that we demand happiness on any terms: with our friends, our lovers, our children, we are exacting and would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes ... God has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense'.

115)5:15-21

The same wisdom must be 'read into' our walking in the light, into our 'holiness'. Be wise, says the Apostle, in your holiness, not hard or forbidding, but tender and understanding and compassionate. Do not 'slap people down' in asperity and with a frown; there is all the difference in the world between a cold, disapproving look that reminds one of a moral disinfectant as much as anything and the attitude of our Lord in His treatment of the woman taken in adultery, when He said to her, 'Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more'. Which attitude do we suppose would be more likely to make the woman want to go out to live a different kind of life - the asperity, or the compassion?

We should note the link between 'redeeming the time' in 16 and 'understanding what the will of the Lord is' in 17. The implication seems to be that we can sometimes waste a great deal of time trying to decide what God's will is for our lives. It is safe to say that almost no issue is so perplexing and beset with difficulties - both for young believers and also for those not so young - as knowing the will of God for their lives. The fact that Paul speaks of walking circumspectly, and in wisdom, is an indication as to how to discern the divine will. We are to seek to understand what that will is. One of the lessons this teaches is that there is a purposive will for our lives in the good providence of God. The AV phrase 'not as fools, but as wise' is translated by J.B. Phillips as 'not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life, but as those who do'. This is a very perceptive rendering, and what it stresses is the need to have a sense of direction, and have the wisdom and grace to follow it. The key word, of course, is 'understanding' what that will is, and if it is something that can be understood, we must apply our minds to it and think things through. This is so important that we must spend another day considering it more fully.

116)5:15-21

The principle on which we normally order our lives is that of common sense: we think things through rationally. We know the difference between a rational approach to a situation and an emotional one, which latter often proves a disastrous course to follow. And when a man becomes a Christian he does not jettison common sense; rather common sense is sanctified, and therefore much more reliable. We must not distort the meaning of the well-known words 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding' into a denial of rational, common sense attitudes, for to 'trust in the Lord with all the heart' means to have a heart - and an understanding - directed, informed and controlled by the Spirit of God. Paul is saying to us distinctly that we must not be mindless in this, or jettison our most valuable possession. Nor must we forget that the Apostle says in Romans 12:1, 2 that it is when we present our bodies a living sacrifice to God that we are most likely to know what is His good and acceptable and perfect will for our lives. When hearts are wholly given over to God we become wonderfully clear-sighted and perceptive, able to identify and isolate the rational from the irrational, able also to discern and resolve the conflict between duty and inclination. Our Lord's words about His sheep knowing His voice (John 10:4) are very pertinent in this. Our real need is to be near enough to the Shepherd to be within hearing distance of His voice!

117)5:15-21

The words 'redeeming the time' in 16 require to be understood properly. They must not be construed as a 'carte blanche' for forcing our witness upon people indiscriminately. Indeed, the opposite is indicated. The right to approach people and witness to them and tell them of Jesus is something that has to be paid for (as the etymology of the word 'redeem' makes clear as meaning 'to release, or set free, by the payment of a price') and the indiscriminate approach in Christian witness is often a substitute for the costly work of identifying oneself with the needs of others. The price to be paid here is: reality. Above all, we must be real, for the outsider sees through unreality and cant and humbug, and abhors it: You redeem the time by being 'utterly real and of sterling worth'; and when you are, no moment will be wasted, everything you do and say will tell for God. But this takes time. And time needs to be bought - bought from other things, redeemed from the useless waste of it that is so often our lifestyle, because of self-indulgence, laziness or indiscipline. Buy it back, for God, says the Apostle, at whatever cost and price. This is what 'redeeming the time' really means. Many Christians, for example, have too many irons in the fire for them to have much time for the real priorities in the Christian life, and the price to be paid to redeem precious time is often too great for them even to contemplate. And as soon as it is suggested, the process of rationalisation begins in their hearts, and they quickly persuade themselves that this, that, and the other, are all valuable things and essential for our well-being, and of course cannot be displaced from their lives. And so, time for prayer, time for serious Bible study, time for costly Christian service, that lays demands on time and energy - these are the things that are displaced: it is a solemn thought, is it not?

118)5:15-21

We look now at what Paul says in 18, in some ways the climax of the passage: the words 'Be filled with the Spirit.' This has become very much a loaded statement and exhortation today, and it is safe to say that there have been all sorts of distortions to its meaning; and these distortions have arisen because the Apostle's words have not been interpreted in their context, with meanings read into them rather than meaning taken out of them. It is here that we see the real value of continuous and systematic expository ministry, for when we take these words in their context and in the flow of Paul's thought throughout the epistle, their meaning becomes very plain. Let us consider what Paul has been saying throughout the letter. Having unfolded the wealth that is ours in Christ, in chs 1-3, he proceeds from chapter 4 onwards to spell out how this wealth that is ours in Him is to express itself - in a Christian walk that is worthy of the vocation by which we are called. It is a call to be different - not as the Gentiles walk (4:17), but to walk in love (5:1, 2), and in the light (5:3-14), and in wisdom (5:15ff). It is in this general context that we best understand what Paul says in 18, 'be filled with the Spirit'. And it is important to see that, in context, Paul is not so much saying something different or additional to what he has already said, as something parallel to what he has said and explanatory of it. It is only in the energy of the Spirit, and in His control that we can be different, and walk in love, and light, and wisdom. These, indeed, are the marks of the fullness of the Spirit. It is as if the Apostle had said, 'All that I have been saying to you up to this point can be comprehended in this word: "Be filled with the Spirit"'. We shall continue this discussion in the next Note.

120)5:15-21

It should be noted that there is a parallel passage to this one in Colossians 3:16-17 (which see). Clearly, Paul is saying the same kind of thing in Colossians as here, the difference being that the same 'heart exercise' that is attributed to the Spirit in Ephesians 5 is attributed to the Word in Colossians 3: 'Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.... 'It is surely evident that the Word and the Spirit stand in conjunction here, with the rich indwelling of the Word and the fullness of the Spirit closely linked together. This surely indicates that the life in the Spirit and living on the Word belong together and that the fullness of the Spirit is a fullness associated with the Word of God, and never divorced from it. This may be a real indication and pointer as to how to be filled with the Spirit in the way Paul means: it is to be diligent in the Word. It is when hearts brood on the Word, drinking in its teaching, until they glow within, that they are filled with the Spirit. It could be put this way: here is a man who is captive to the Word of God; in that Word he sees a great and glorious Christ and he forms the conviction that Christ is a mighty and all-sufficient Saviour, and he is thrilled and overcome with the sheer wonder of it all. Now, when he is there, there is the fullness of the Spirit, for the Spirit's work and delight is to take of the things that are Christ's and show them to us. And the evidence of the Spirit's indwelling and fullness is, not that we are conscious of the Spirit's fullness, but that we are conscious of Christ. This is the real mark of the divine infilling - to be conscious more and more of the greatness of the Saviour, to realise that we owe Him - and gladly give Him - the worship, homage and obedience of our hearts. This is the biblical evidence that the Spirit of God is having His way in our lives: And when he is, the language that He makes us speak is - not 'I am filled with the Holy Spirit' but 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain', and 'This one thing I do ... I press on towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus', 'None of these things moves me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify the gospel of the grace of God'.

121)5:15-21

Before we leave these verses something should be said about the 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' that Paul mentions in 19. Some maintain that the words refer to different divisions of the Psalter. This is a possible interpretation, but the Apostle would hardly have used three distinct Greek words to describe these divisions. Archbishop Trench, in what is still, after so long a time, a standard work, 'New Testament Synonyms', maintains that each of these words 'must have had a meaning which belonged to it more, and by a better right, than it belonged to either of the others', and goes on to point out that the word 'psalm' comes from the Greek 'psao' which means 'properly a touching, and then a touching of the harp or other stringed instruments with the finger or with the plectrum, was next the instrument itself, and last of all the song sung with this musical accompaniment'. This last is certainly the meaning attached to Paul's use of the word in the New Testament, and the reference is just as surely to the Old Testament Psalter.

But the word 'hymn' has a different connotation. The essence of the Greek word is that a 'hymn' should be addressed to, or be otherwise in praise of, God. A hymn is essentially a song about God. A psalm could speak - and often did - of the Psalmist's experience - how often we see him in the depths or rising to the heights! - but a hymn 'must always be more or less of a Magnificat, a direct address of praise and glory to God'. The Te Deum is a superb example of this ascription of praise and glory to the Triune God. We shall look at the third term, 'spiritual songs', in the next Note.

122)5:15-21

The third term, 'spiritual songs', is different again. They are not 'psalms', in that they are distinct from the Psalter itself; they are not 'hymns', since they do not direct an address of praise to God; but they are authentic expressions of spiritual aspiration, covering the whole range of spiritual experience, Christian thought and feeling. In this, they share a common ground with many of the Psalms, which of course express wonderful depths of joy and sorrow, distress or exaltation (in this sense, although 'spiritual songs' are not 'psalms', many psalms partake of the essential characteristics of spiritual songs). How, then, could it be unsuitable to sing them in public worship? To relegate utterances such as Psalm 40, or Psalm 55, or Psalm 130, to name but a few, from public worship would surely be unthinkable, and just as unthinkable to exclude some of the great 'spiritual songs' that have blessed the people of God down the ages.

The real point at issue is not that 'spiritual songs', with their subjective emphasis should be discounted, or excluded from public worship, but that undue sentimentalising of spiritual experience should be avoided, and excessive preoccupation with subjective feelings. It is possible to be too engrossed in one's spiritual health, and become a spiritual hypochondriac; possible, too, in a service of worship to be so taken up with one's cares and burdens that God Himself is displaced from our consciousness. And this is where the robust, outward-looking emphasis of the great hymns of the Faith, that magnify the name of God and of Christ, provide such a salutary safeguard and counteractive, lifting the heart from its woes to the All-sufficient God Who can supply all our needs. It is all a matter of balance; but in true Christian worship, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, there can be little doubt as to where the primary emphasis should lie.

123)5:22-33

The well-known teaching that Paul gives in these verses needs to be interpreted in its context in order to get the full force of his teaching. There are three things for us to note at the outset. On the one hand, what Paul says here flows from the general statement in 21, 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God'. It is in this connection that three concrete examples are given us in the verses that follow - in the relationship between husbands and wives, that between parents and children, and - in 6:1ff - that between masters and servants. The principle of submission is therefore 'spelt out' by the Apostle and not left in the air as a general idea floating about without any real substance or grounding. On the other hand, it is made plain that the Christian walk, which has been Paul's concern and burden in the second half of the epistle, has to do with such relationships as Paul now turns to and highlights in these verses now before us. The Christian walk is a practical thing, not belonging to any rarefied and mystical domain, but to the 'nitty-gritty' of personal relationships - in marriage, in the home, and at work. The third thing is this: Paul has just spoken in 18 about life in the fullness of the Spirit, and now he insists that the experience of the fullness of the Spirit is also not part of any mystical and exalted 'out-of-this-world' notion but a down-to-earth, practical reality, expressing itself in personal relationships at home and at work. In other words, it has to do with our behaviour in the home and at the workplace. And it asks us, 'What is your Christian testimony like at your own fireside or at the office or workbench? What would your wife say about your Christian life, what would your husband say about you, what would your boss say about you, or your colleagues?' It is all very challenging, isn't it!

124)5:22-33

We look, then, at 22ff, which give the Apostle's teaching about husbands and wives. The immediate context of what he says is the idea of submission, expressed in 21. The being filled with the Spirit, he means, inculcates an attitude of submission. This is not a curious idea confined to Paul's thinking, for we find the same teaching in 1 Peter 2:13-3:1ff, where clearly the principle of submission is applied by Peter to this and other areas of Christian life. Indeed, it would be true to say this is a cardinal doctrine throughout the New Testament epistles. 'Christ pleased not Himself ...' Paul says in Romans 15:3, and in Philippians 2:5 he reminds us that 'Christ ... became obedient unto death', and urges us to be armed with the same mind. What Paul says here therefore in 22 is 'all of a piece' with apostolic teaching and practice. Submission is 'built in' to the structure of the Christian doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, and the notion of 'inter-dependence' is paramount.

There is little doubt that what Paul says here about wives submitting themselves to their husbands tends to 'raise some hackles', and it is hardly possible to expound these verses without the danger of this happening. All the same, this is not the writing of some cranky male chauvinist, but the inspired Word of God and one can only view with amusement and dismay the antics of Church dignitaries who fall over backwards in their efforts not to offend feminist fanatics, and have gone the length of revising some modern new translations of the Scriptures which remove every possible reference to the male sex or gender, for fear of offending feminist susceptibilities. This has reached such a pitch of absurdity in our day that one wonders whether they have simply developed some kind of hysteria. It is safe to say that it would not have crossed most preachers' minds to suspect that they were being chauvinist in using the phrase 'good will toward men' in the Christmas story but simply using the word 'man' in a general, collective sense. Why make such an issue of this?

125)5:22-33

It is important to see that what Paul is asking for, and enjoining, in these verses, is simply acceptance of, and obedience to, the divinely ordained order and arrangement as between man and woman. The natural and spiritual order is that the husband is the head of the wife, and this is clearly the teaching of Scripture. It will not do to introduce at this point the assertion that men and women are equal in the sight of God and to suppose that this contradicts and negates Paul's teaching here. Of course there is an equality as between man and woman, in this sense, that they are equal in dignity before God. But this is not what Paul has in view here; what is in view is the equally important and valid idea of differentiation of function. It is true that marriage is a partnership, but it is also true that in any partnership of two, decisions will have to be made from time to time, and inevitably there will be those occasions when there is a difference of opinion. Whose opinion then will carry? Scripture indicates that, in the last analysis, it is the man's prerogative. We should remember the context here. Paul is speaking on the theme of submission, and it is significant that this follows the verse about being filled with the Spirit. The implication is that to be filled with the Spirit is to live under His control; and it is when we are under His complete control, that is, in submission to Him, and therefore to the Word (cf Colossians 3:18) that we are most ourselves. This is the point of the contrast that Paul makes between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit: drunkenness leads to loss of control and a measure of disinhibitedness that can often be frightening and indeed disastrous, whereas being Spirit-filled means total self-control and therefore truest humanity. A wife becomes her truest self, and achieves her truest destiny, when she seeks to fulfil this word that Paul speaks here. The more the Holy Spirit is at work in her heart the more truly womanly and feminine she will be, and the more naturally she will, not only be, but also want to be, submissive to her husband.

126)5:22-33

What was said in the previous Note leads to something that requires to be said about the nature of the submission enjoined for womankind here. It will be noticed - and husbands will do well particularly to notice - the words 'as unto the Lord'. This means that the obedience that a wife gives to her husband is regarded as part of her obedience to the Lord. And - husbands, please note - it is something the Lord requires and commands, not something the husband has a right to require or command. It is safe to say that if this had been realised down the years, a great deal of steam would have been taken out of the whole feminist debate. It is to be feared, however, that the teaching has become sadly distorted in many men's minds. There are men who speak - and act - about the headship of the man with a callousness and heartlessness - not to say crass arrogance - that is reminiscent of the attitude of the Middle Ages when womenfolk were treated as nothing more than goods and chattels. Paul would simply not have countenanced such an attitude, it would have been foreign to his whole conception. There is no mandate in Scripture given to any man to lord it over his wife in this arrogant, boorish and ill-mannered way. What is it that makes some men like this? Well, sometimes it is really like a relic of the Middle Ages and can be put down to a cruel, heartless, contemptuous streak. But sometimes it is something else: it may be a kind of psychological quirk, the expression of a sense of insecurity or infirmity by which a man hides behind this injunction because, subconsciously, he feels he cannot be a real man without it. He therefore needs to bolster an uncertain ego. This could certainly be called 'handling the Word of God deceitfully.' Such men, far from fulfilling the biblical pattern and teaching, are in fact furthest away from it. Their relationship is a frightening - and sometimes tragic - parody of the true teaching. They need to get wise to themselves. They really deserve the blistering attacks that feminists make upon them. They are a disgrace to the gospel.

127)5:22-33

The real doctrine of headship is very different, and no comment on it could be more penetrating or profound than C.S. Lewis' exposition of 'Christian Headship' in his book 'The Four Loves'. Here are some sentences from that book:

'The husband is the head of the wife just insofar as he is to her what Christ is to the Church. He is to love her as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for her (Ephesians 5:25). This headship, then, is most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion; whose wife receives most and gives least, is most unworthy of him, is - in her own mere nature - least lovable. For the Church has no beauty but what the Bridegroom gives her; he does not find, but makes her, lovely. The chrism of this terrible coronation is to be seen not in the joys of any man's marriage but in its sorrows, in the sickness and sufferings of a good wife or the faults of a bad one, in his unwearying (never paraded) care or his inexhaustible forgiveness: forgiveness, not acquiescence. As Christ sees in the flawed, proud, fanatical or lukewarm Church on earth that Bride who will one day be without spot or wrinkle, and labours to produce the latter, so the husband whose headship is Christ-like (and he is allowed no other sort) never despairs.

'To say this is not to say that there is any virtue or wisdom in making a marriage that involves such misery. There is no wisdom or virtue in seeking unnecessary martyrdom or deliberately courting persecution; yet it is, nonetheless, the persecuted or martyred Christian in whom the pattern of the Master is most unambiguously realised. So, in these terrible marriages, once they have come about, the 'headship' of the husband, if only he can sustain it, is most Christ-like.'

128)5:22-23

Paul's words speak of the illustration that marriage is meant to give of the grace of the gospel. In a right marriage, he means something of the glory and the beauty and the mystery of Christ and His redeeming love will be communicated and will shine forth. This is very wonderful. It should be a man's first and prior concern that his relationship to his wife and in his home should somehow, in some measure, reflect this. And when this really grips him, he will have too much on his heart to be over-concerned about lording it over his wife in any unworthy and caricaturing sense, and the wife will see to it that she reverence and respect her husband because it is part of her duty to Christ. How Christ-centred Paul is in all his teaching!

The wealth of Paul's words in 25-27 is impressive indeed, and there is a breadth and sweep about them that is scarcely equalled anywhere in the New Testament. The whole of the work of grace is covered by them - justification (25), sanctification (26), glorification (27) - life through Christ (cf 1 John 4:9), living unto Him (cf 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15), and ultimately, living together with Him (1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10). The AV translation of 26 is misleading; it should rather read: 'That He might sanctify it, having cleansed it in the laver of water in the word'. The reference is to baptism - not that baptism justifies us or makes us Christians, but rather what baptism signifies. The 'word' does not refer to the Word of God - although the Bible teaches elsewhere that the 'Word' cleanses and sanctifies - but the 'word of faith', the confession we make at baptism (cf Romans 10:9). The main emphasis in the verse is upon Christ's final purpose and design in His people, and the work of justification and of sanctification alike is wrought with this in view, that He might 'present unto Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing'. What a glorious prospect!

129)6:1-4

The second relationship Paul deals with is that of parents and children. Obedience is enjoined upon children (again the principle of submission is evident), and the first reason given is 'for this is right', and the second, that the fifth commandment requires it. This is both an appeal to the fundamental reality of the creation ordinance - it is something that is built into the very structure of life, and to go against it is to do something essentially unnatural - and to the revealed will of God in the Decalogue. The importance of the teaching is seen in the fact that this is the only subject that is singled out in the Scriptures for special reference in relation to children and young people. One reason for this is surely clear: obedience to parents leads to obedience to God, and the one is training for the other. Parents are in the place of God to their children, as God's representatives. This is why the modern tendency of children calling their parents by their Christian names and, worse still, calling other adults by their Christian names, is so wrong and perverse. Children are not the equals of their parents in any sense, and should not be given any encouragement to think so, for it contradicts an essential order of creation, and this always tends to the disintegration of society. Furthermore, Paul reminds us that this is 'the first commandment with promise'. The idea of 'the first commandment with promise' raises a problem for those who regard the second commandment (Exodus 20:5, 6) as also carrying a promise, and some commentators render the words 'this is a priority commandment, and it has a promise attached to it'. Either way, however, if these words mean anything, they must mean that particular and specific blessings come to those who honour their parents, and that children who dishonour them are not likely to get on in life - and may in fact come to a premature end. And what is true in individual life is true also for society, which is not likely to last long without disintegration where the family relationship is undermined.

130)6:1-4

What is true with regard to children in Paul's injunction here must surely be regarded as having application to young people also, in their relation not only to their parents but also to older people in general. And it should be sufficient that it is a God-ordained order to young folk for them to conform to it. It is a mark of true Christian discipleship when young people show a due respect for older people in terms of courteous attitudes and speech toward them. It is surely not fitting that young folk should ride roughshod over either their parents' feelings and affections or those of mature adults. A Christian profession does not entitle us to be unnecessarily offensive, even when we are in decisive disagreement with our parents' point of view. It is perfectly possible to disagree with them in a courteous way and, if need be, disobey them honourably. But young people must see to it that it is honourable and not dishonourable disobedience that characterises them. The thought of young folks brashly telling their parents that they are all wrong spiritually (however true it may be in fact) is not a happy one. Just as Christian wives are warned in Scripture not to preach at their unconverted husbands but that they may be won over by the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, without a word being said, so also a similar attitude should be taken by young people in their relationship with their parents.

131)6:1-4

One of the commentators gives a useful outline, mentioning three 'stages' in the ongoing development of a child's or young person's life. First of all, when a child is at home and dependent on parents, respect and honouring, in terms of the commandment, will involve obedience, and this means compliance with the parents' decisions, directions and demands. The importance of this is that from the outset we all have to learn the need for submission to authority, and that such submission does not normally restrict freedom, but liberates us into freedom. And where better than in the context of a loving family can this be learned? God always intended that the child must believe that his parents will never ask him to do anything but what is for his good and that with the passage of the years the child should come to the understanding that not only does the parents' store of experience of life give them the right to offer guidance and advice, but also that this is God's order for both parents and children.

The second stage in showing respect and in honouring parents changes from compliance to courtesy, and it is marked by the change from dependence to independence. In some ways this is a very difficult transition for the reason that modern life today has opened up so many more doors for young people than their parents ever had - in education, learning, expertise, skills - with the result that many young people may be cleverer and better equipped than their parents. But they are not necessarily wiser. And therein lies a snare and a danger for them, for they can so easily fall into the error of looking down, rather disparagingly, on their parents, forgetting that it is only the passage of years and the experience of life that can teach wisdom. This is why courtesy, in terms of genuinely listening to what parents say about this or that situation, is such a vital necessity, for the very good reason that parents have often had to learn the hard way, through bitter experience, and have found wisdom that way, which they want to pass on to their children.

132)6-1-4

The third stage of showing respect for, and honouring, parents passes from compliance through courtesy to caring, in genuine and practical terms. From being cared for, children, now grown up, become carers and show care to their parents, when they are no longer so able to care for themselves. There is often a great deal of dedicated and devoted honouring of parents by sons and daughters in this way which is an inspiration to behold when long years of devoted, and often costly, caring for frail and disabled parents magnifies Christ by the sheer quality and extent of the love and care ministered to them, in the fulfilment of a precious stewardship committed to them. But this is also an area where tensions and difficulties sometimes arise. As the commentator says, the big question is not 'What shall we do?' but 'What would be the best for my parents?' It can hardly be controverted that this is something that creates many feelings of guilt, and often with least justification, for there are many situations in which guilt operates even where the quality of care has been most dedicated and devoted, far beyond the call of either duty or filial love and loyalty. There comes a time when loved ones pass the point where it is physically possible for love and tenderness to be able to cope, and when professional care and nursing becomes a necessity. It can hardly be doubted that people are very vulnerable here, and need firm reassurance that it is right as well as inevitable for loved ones to enter full-time care.

133)6:5-9

The third relationship that Paul deals with is that between masters and servants. The first thing we have to notice here is that the reference of these verses is unquestionably to the principle of submission in the Christian home, and to the relationship within the home between masters and servants. The question of industrial relationships between capital and labour, between management and employee, is not in view. Indeed, it is clear that the 'servants' here are in fact 'slaves' and what he is speaking of is the domestic relationship between Christian slaves and their masters. The primary lesson of these verses therefore can hardly apply to us today, for such a situation as Paul envisages here does not really exist for us. But the derivative lessons and applications of what he says are very considerable, and that in two directions: on the one hand, there is the question of slavery as such, and the principle of the application of the gospel to social, economic and political issues; on the other hand, there is the relationship between servants and masters in general, as for example Christians working in a non-Christian environment, and the whole vexed question of industrial unrest. We look first of all then at the 'slavery' question. We are all familiar with the great philanthropic and humanitarian movement in the 19th century which led to the final abolition of slavery. We also know that this was accomplished in the name of the gospel, and by staunch evangelicals who earnestly contended for the faith once delivered to the saints. But it is an astonishing thing that slavery is nowhere explicitly condemned in the New Testament, indeed, the New Testament seems not only to countenance it but acquiesce in it. Paul seems content to give instructions as to how to behave within the context of the institution of slavery; on the one occasion when a runaway slave called Onesimus was converted, the apostle sent him back to his master, Philemon. How are we to explain this? Are we to say that Paul had a blind spot in this matter? We shall look at this important issue in the Notes that follow.

134)6:5-9

What is usually - and rightly - pointed out in the slavery issue is that while the New Testament nowhere explicitly condemns slavery, it nevertheless enunciates principles which are fatal to its ultimate continuance, and which undermine its very existence - principles of the equality in dignity of all souls made in the image of God. So that, while in one sense the gospel left the issue of slavery alone, in another sense it doomed it. There are those, however, who are uneasy about this viewpoint, and who feel that it hardly meets the case, so we need to look at it with some care, looking at the whole issue of slavery in general.

In Old Testament times slavery was practised by the Hebrews under the sanction of the Mosaic law, and in this they shared common ground with the Greeks and the Romans. But there the common ground ceases, for the Hebrews were not allowed by lawgiver or prophet to forget that they themselves had been bondsmen in Egypt, and all their relationships with those who were slaves were moulded by the sympathy of this recollection. The Hebrew's slaves were members of his family, and members of the congregation of Israel. They had both religious and social rights. If the slaves were Hebrews, their liberty was secured to them by Mosaic law after six years' service. If they were foreigners, they were protected by that law from tyranny or violence from their masters. And, as Lightfoot says, 'considering the conditions of ancient society, and more especially of ancient warfare, slavery as practised among the Hebrews was probably an escape from alternatives which would have involved a far greater amount of misery'. In contrast, however, slaves in Greece and Rome were in a far more parlous state. As Lightfoot observes, 'In our enthusiastic eulogies of free, enlightened, democratic Athens, we are apt to forget that the interests of the many (i.e. the slaves) were ruthlessly sacrificed to the selfishness of the few'. We continue this discussion in the next Note.

135)6:5-9

Here are two statements which serve as a warning against too simplistic a dismissal of the idea of slavery being undermined gradually and from within. The first is from Lightfoot, in his commentary on Philemon:

'With this widespread institution Christianity found itself in conflict. How was the evil to be met? Slavery was in-woven into the texture of society; and to prohibit slavery was to tear society into shreds. Nothing less than a servile war with its certain horrors and its doubtful issues must have been the consequence. Such a mode of operation was altogether alien to the spirit of the Gospel. The New Testament, it has been truly said, "is not concerned with any political or social institutions; for political and social institutions belong to particular nations and particular phases of society." "Nothing marks the divine character of the Gospel more than its perfect freedom from any appeal to the spirit of political revolution." It belongs to all time: and therefore, instead of attacking special abuses, it lays down universal principles which shall undermine the evil.'

The second statement is from an article by Sir Fred Catherwood entitled 'Can Society Survive without Christian Ethics?', on the subject of violent overthrow of institutions in the interests of justice:

'those (students) who were most revolutionary came from the most affluent and politically stable countries They assumed ... that society could take an awful lot of beating without much ill-effect, that if you turned parts of it upside down because you didn't like them, the parts you did like would stay the right way up.

'On the other hand, if you came from an unstable country, you realised that this was not so, that authoritarianism of the right could be replaced by authoritarianism of the left and vice versa, that civil war might wipe out some old inequalities, but would produce a whole crop of new ones.'

136)6:5-9

The quotations in the previous Note have surely a great deal to teach us in relation to the subject in hand. Both Lightfoot and Catherwood have a point when they maintain that to try to overthrow by violent revolution the injustices of the world would be to make matters worse in terms of suffering for all concerned, and that would help no one in the long run. We should not therefore miss - or dismiss - the significance of the principle of indirect influence, but ask ourselves whether there is not a pattern shown here, and an example, to be followed, and a guiding principle for the Church? It is sometimes said that in Paul's day the social conscience of the Church was not so keen as it is today, and that the Church came very slowly to the understanding of the social implications of the gospel that they preached. But we take leave to disagree with this point of view. It would be a very bold man who tried to put a man like Paul in his place in matters of interpretation of the gospel! It is far more likely that today's Church has missed the profound insights given by the Apostle, and is going about things in the wrong way. What Paul seems to advocate is that the Church's influence in such matters as slavery - and this can legitimately be extended to social, economic and political questions in general - should be an indirect one, rather than one of direct intervention. It is easy to become so taken up with questions pertaining to this life, legitimate though they may be, that we forget our message concerning the world to come. And if these verses tell us anything they say that ultimately the Church will do more to help 'this-worldly' issues by being the Church and paying heed to eternal realities - and therefore being a potent influence among men - than by concentrating on political and social questions at the expense of neglecting spiritual issues.

137)6:5-9

As to the application of these principles to daily work, there are three important considerations for us to note. The first is that the obedience of servants to masters is enjoined in the first instance for the testimony's sake. Christ's lordship extends over all life, and we do our work day by day primarily unto Him. It is His glory that must be our concern, and the integrity of His Name is in our care. Rebellion, disobedience, for the Christian, is unthinkable, because it besmirches the name of Jesus. It is not our beliefs, but our behaviour, that will carry weight in the factory or the office. Men are interested in how we behave and how we do our work. Christian testimony at work is borne by what Christians do, more than by what they say. Singleness of heart is to produce quality of service.

In the second place obedience to employers is enjoined also because of the contract to work. An employee chooses to work and to serve, and whether that contract is written or given by word of mouth should be regarded as binding. And it is a matter of honesty, apart from anything else, to honour that contract. The obligations that bind us in this regard are moral obligations, and therefore sacred in the sight of God. This is why Paul uses the phrase 'not with eye service', working as long as we are watched, or with one eye on the clock (as we say), or as 'men-pleasers', for the merely utilitarian motive of currying favour but rather for the high motive of honour. And so also 'with goodwill' - willingly, since we owe it to God and to men. It is a matter of debt. Above all, we are to be obedient because we work and live in the light of the judgment seat of Christ. In our daily work, as in our witness in spiritual life, we may build wood, hay and stubble, or gold, silver and precious stones. We must work in this light and against this background.

138)6:5-9

In the third place, obedience is enjoined because a right attitude to work is in fact a means of grace. And to say the least, it is a strong motive for obedience to realise that it pays! One thinks of some common attitudes to work today, such as that it is a necessary evil, or that it is irksome and to be avoided if at all possible. But is it something to be got out of if at all possible? We should consider just how thoroughly the media pander to this idea, in their offers of almost unlimited prizes and free gifts, and indeed fortunes - offered even by former reputable businesses, including banks. When one thinks of the piles of junk mail that comes through our letter boxes offering easy money and how we are told we have been selected by computer to be the recipient of tens or even hundreds of thousands of pounds - 'you need never work another day more' - it becomes clear that such a syndrome is a disintegrating factor in society.

But what if work is really irksome? Well, it is true that some people do under-achieve, and that they could do better. If so, they could always change their job for something more fulfilling. But when changing is impossible, obedience and honourable service are still enjoined. Let us not forget that the divine sentence passed on man for his sin in Genesis 3:19, 'In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread ...' was one of mercy; and what was man's discipline because of sin becomes in fact an ennobling factor in his life and experience. Work is honourable in itself, and ought to be performed with all diligence and with integrity. When it is done thus it becomes a means of grace, and a right attitude to it will convert it into spiritual blessing. This is why the attitude expressed sometimes in the words 'My real work is serving the Lord, I only do this job to keep myself going' is so perverse and misguided. This is not what our daily work is for or about. Work well done is honourable, and glorifies God in the doing of it. How could this ever become irksome or frustrating? By failing in this obedience to our masters, we are failing in the obedience we owe to Christ.

139)6:10-18

We come in these verses to the final section of Paul's Letter. We have spoken of the wealth of the Christian, in chs 1-3, and of the walk of the Christian, in chs 3-6:9; and now we come to what has been called the warfare of the Christian. This is a good way to sum up the theme of the epistle, and it is worth our while to remember what we have already said in passing about this final passage. To go back no further than 5:18, and to the verse which speaks of being filled with the Spirit, we said that the fullness of the Spirit expresses itself in our personal relationships, in the home and family and at work, and that is the arena in which that fullness is so important. In the same way, we need to recognise that it is also first of all in the realm of personal relationships that the Christian warfare has relevance, in the sense that it is when we win the victory there that we are enabled to fight the battles of the Lord with some credence and hope of victory. We need to note therefore first of all, and by way of introduction, how Paul introduces this subject. His first words are significant: 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might'. This picks up some of his main themes throughout the epistle: in 1:19 he prays that the Ephesians might know 'then exceeding greatness of His power ...'; in 3:16 he prays that they might be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man; in 5:18 he has summoned them to allow that gracious indwelling of the Spirit to be all it was designed to be; and now, finally - and we must understand this summons in 6:10 to be of a piece with these other verses: 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might'. Such is the 'setting' and context of this tremendous passage.

140)6:10-18

'Be strong in the Lord...' is followed by the exhortation, 'put on the whole armour of God' We need to see that 'the armour of God' is simply another name for the wealth that the apostle has been unfolding throughout the epistle, whether in 1:15-23, or 2:19-22, or 3:14-21, or 4:24ff (where, significantly, his language is the same as here - 'put on the new man...' equals 'put on the whole armour of God'), or 5:18, in the exhortation to be filled with the Spirit. Paul is summing up, so to speak, the essentials of his earlier teaching in these famous words now before us. It is also worth noticing that the phrase 'in high places' in 12 (AV), which Paul describes as the sphere in which this warfare takes place, is the same as we find in 1:3, and translated there as 'heavenly places', and also in 1:20, where he describes the realm to which the victorious Christ has been raised and exalted - far above all principality and power..', and in 2:6, where the apostle says that in the mystery of regeneration we have been 'raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus'. The significance of all this is that Paul is making a twofold statement here - about Christ's warfare and victory, and about our warfare and victory, with the one based on the other. Therefore - and this is the point that is being made at the outset in 10, in the words 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might' - the believer must lay hold of, and enter into, the victory that has been won for him by Christ. And the personal appropriation of that victory is something that exercises the believer to the fullest extent. It is the fight of faith, a battle, a warfare. But we do not go to this warfare on our own charges: we battle from a position of victory that has been given us in Christ, and it is a matter of appropriating what is ours, what has been given us, in the gift of God.

Take, my soul, thy full salvation,
Rise o'er sin and fear and care.

141)6:10-18

There are two preliminary considerations that we must look at before going any further. This is not the first time in the epistle that Paul refers to the evil one, for in 2:2 he has spoken of 'the prince of the power of the air'. There, however, he has mentioned him almost in passing, as one element among others describing the plight of man in his sin. But here, in 6:10ff, Paul brings him right out into the open, and reminds us that Christians, who are called 'saints' in the opening verses of the epistle, are also called to be 'soldiers', and that they are beset by the host of evil under their dreadful king, and that it will be all they can do to hold their ground, in unshaken fidelity to their divine Commander, as Handley Moule puts it in his commentary. Paul then is reminding the Ephesians that the life of fullness which he has been expounding is all the while to be lived on hostile ground, and in face of organised assaults made by unseen personal adversaries. As Moule puts it, this is 'an urgent reminder of the infinitely serious conditions under which the bright secrets of grace are to be lived out. The Christian is not only a servant but also a soldier; he belongs not only to a home ("an habitation of God through the Spirit") but also to a citadel. And to recollect the formidable surroundings is of course vitally necessary if the life lived amidst them is not to be swept away in ruin. That is the first preliminary consideration; and the second is this: Paul leaves this issue of the dark powers to the end of the epistle, and it seems to us that this is the proper place for it, for the whole subject of the dark powers must not be allowed to become a preoccupation and obsession, assuming a wholly disproportionate place in our thinking that obscures the infinitely greater reality that Jesus Christ has conquered Satan. This is the greatest and most important witness the New Testament bears concerning the dark powers, and this is the true perspective that we are given here by Paul.'

142)6:10-18

As to Paul's description of 'the enemy' arrayed against us, he speaks first of all in 11 about the wiles of the devil, then in the next verse he 'diversifies' and instances separately the powers of darkness principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places - a remarkable catalogue indeed! And it seems to indicate, for one thing, that the phrase 'wiles of the devil' is not to be mistaken as a graphic description of forces within ourselves, as described for example in the words of the hymn

And some such grievous passions tear
That only Thou canst cast them out

for Paul expressly indicates that this is not a 'flesh and blood' problem, troubling us from within, but something coming at us from the outside, with an objective reality. For another thing, the various categories mentioned in 12 seem to suggest, as one commentator puts it, that these various powers have different functions, all under the controlling direction of the devil, their commander-in-chief. One of the things that lends credence to this view is the fact that the evil one makes different approaches to the souls of men. Temptation to sin is but one of Satan's wiles - attacks on health (as in the case of Job) are another, and hindrances yet another (as is witnessed in Paul's words 'Satan hindered us', 1 Thessalonians 2:18), while the strange dark experiences that sometimes befall the children of God are evidence of another kind of approach - and all these need to be recognised for what they are. The dark world of evil is indeed a grim reality, and a reminder to us that there are forces arrayed against the people of God that can be dealt with only in the way that Paul describes in these verses before us.

143)6:10-18

While on this particular aspect of Paul's teaching, we may begin to see a real significance in the phrase 'the evil day, which commentators think has reference to a time of crisis - 'the dark crisis of the campaign', as Moule puts it, or 'the crisis (as each crisis comes on) of temptation or of terror'. There are ample evidences in Scripture of the sudden onslaughts of the evil one, that bring a sense of crisis in almost an instant of time. One thinks of Peter in the Judgment Hall, when the artless comment of a servant maid plunged him into a morass of fierce and devastating temptation - that was 'the evil day' for him!

Something should be said at this point about the devil himself, the 'diabolos' as he is called in the Greek. Scholars point out that this word is a regular equivalent, though not the precise translation of the Hebrew 'Satan'. In the Greek this word literally means 'Slanderer' or 'Accuser'. The actual word is an adjective but is often used as a noun, and if we wanted to be precise we would have to call him 'the slanderous one', and the heart of his slander is that it is false accusation. Hence, he is called in Revelation 12:10, 'the accuser of the brethren'. This 'false accusation' idea may be what lies behind our Lord's description of him that he is 'a liar, and the father of it' (John 8:44). It is always a good and necessary exercise to examine the Scriptures' reference to Satan's wiles, his voice, and his guises. His voice, for example, is heard only three times in all Scripture - in the garden of Eden, in the story of Job and in the record of our Lord's temptation. Surely that invites us to study these references with great care, and to seek to understand their implications. Similarly, it is important to examine the ways in which he is portrayed. As well as being called the tempter, he is also called 'an angel of light' (2 Corinthians 11:14), 'a roaring lion' (1 Peter 5:8), the 'hinderer' (1 Thessalonians 2:18), 'the destroyer' (1 Corinthians 5:5). All these names have significance and we will be wise to examine them with care (although not in detail at this point, but it may be that we shall find ourselves referring to them in relation to the different parts of the armour in the verses that follow).

144)6:10-18

We should also give some thought as to how it is that Paul uses this particular metaphor and imagery of warfare and armour in this passage. Some think that he is using the analogy of the Roman soldier's armour in the picture he gives, and suggests that the imagery was ready at hand in his prison when he wrote Ephesians, guarded as he was by Roman soldiers at the time. But, interesting as that is as a possibility, we think it is much more likely that he had in mind the Old Testament picture of the Divine Warrior in Isaiah 59:14ff. If one looks at these verses it will be seen that Isaiah is depicting a time of great crisis and difficulty for the people of God. We may gather from this passage in Isaiah that the Apostle is making use of words that were spoken first of God and of His Divine Messiah. The impressive thing is that the armour that God wore to execute His victory over His enemies is applied by Paul to the believer in Christ so that the armour of God, described here in Ephesians 6, is not only the armour that God supplies to His children, it is also His own armour given to us for the same fight and the same battle as God's! This is the link, once again between Christ's victory, spoken of in chapter 1, and our victory in chapter 6. Is it not rather wonderful that the armour with which Christ was clad for battle against His foe is the same armour as is made available to us for our battle, and our victory? It is one and the same battle: we are entering into and appropriating what He has done for us, but in order to do this we need His armour. This is why Paul exhorts us, 'Take unto you the whole armour of God ...'.

145)6:10-18

One further word must be said before we turn to the armour itself. If Paul is describing something which is central to the experience of the Christian, in emphasising the reality of spiritual battle - as is certainly the case, then we must recognise that it is no sign, when we are under attack, that we are failing as Christians. Being under pressure, and being troubled by temptation, for example, does not mean that we are not living the Christian life properly. Indeed, in this context, it may mean the exact opposite, for it is precisely when we are what we should be that Satan turns his attention on us most acutely. An old Puritan once said, 'He that standeth near to his Captain is a sure target for the archers'. Indeed, in terms of Paul's teaching in the earlier part of the epistle, it is when we enter experimentally into our position in Christ - that is, into the heavenly places - when we take our full salvation and enter into the thrill and enjoyment and glory of it, that we most of all draw the attention of the enemy, for 'the heavenly places' are the sphere in which he operates. He is 'the prince of the power of the air', after all, that is his realm. Nor should we forget that one of the major themes leading up to and into this statement about the Christian warfare is the Apostle's teaching in 5:18 about being filled with the Spirit. To be so filled does not mean that all our problems are solved, but rather the signal for problems and attacks to begin in earnest. The truth of the matter is that a true consecration to Christ brings us to a new dimension of experience in which we find ourselves in the thick of the battle. Dr Emil Brunner, in a remarkable chapter in his *Christian Dogmatics*, entitled 'Angels, Spirits and the Devil', writes:

'To believe that wherever the true Gospel is proclaimed with power, men will open their hearts without further difficulty is a mistaken optimism. Rather, a living proclamation of the Gospel often sifts the hearts of men, and the more powerful the message, the more violent is the hostility of the powers of darkness. Hence it is precisely those Christians who have the deepest Christian experience, who have the greatest personal experience of the reality of the power of Darkness.'

What is God saying to us in all this? 'Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's' (2 Chronicles 20:15).

146)6:10-18

As we turn to the armour itself, we must bear in mind the pattern that Paul has been unfolding in this passage. It is 'Submit yourselves to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you' (James 4:7). Submission is the 'door into the resources of divine grace in Christ, and enables us worthily to resist the wiles of the devil. Submission indeed gives us the weapons with which to resist!' And Paul's exhortation and summons here certainly carries with it the implication that when we do enter into all that is ours in Christ, we shall inevitably be thrust into conflict and collision with the powers of darkness. Indeed, by summoning us to 'be strong in the Lord ...' Paul is actually committing us to the conflict, and this is of God. The divine graduation is: From sinners, to saints, to soldiers. It is rather like Jesus commanding His disciples to sail out over the Sea of Galilee, knowing that they were going to sail right into a storm! Is not this an exhilarating and exciting thought! Paul is teaching the Ephesian Christians with a view - that is with a view ultimately of thrusting them, by this word, into battle. Remember, there is a war on, and in war it is the making of soldiers that is the important thing.

147)6:10-18

As to the armour itself (14ff) Paul speaks twice of the 'whole armour of God', and the need to take it and put it on. The word in the Greek is 'panopleia', a word which denotes 'complete coverage'. There is complete protection, Paul means, in Christ, against all the wiles of the devil. And now, the 'whole armour' is broken up into its several component parts, as white light is broken up into the colours of the spectrum when passed through a crystal. We may be meant to think of the various parts of the armour as being the answer to the different forms of attack that the evil one can bring upon us - for example, as Hinderer, Destroyer, Accuser, Angel of light, Tempter, and so on. This can be a helpful way of looking at the various parts of the armour. We mentioned earlier that the phrase 'the evil day' refers not so much to the final crisis of history as to each recurrent crisis in spiritual experience, when battle is joined with the enemy. This must surely mean that the armour must be put on before the attack comes and in the quiet hours. It is too late to be reaching for your armour when the enemy is upon you!

We should note that the first five pieces of the armour are all defensive, and that the last two - the sword of the Spirit and the weapon of all prayer - are for attack. The defensive parts of the armour are designed to guard us against the attacks of the enemy, as has been said. The first of these is the girdle of truth. The imagery here is certainly that of the soldier, and the girdle was the belt which gathered in the soldiers tunic, and from which his sword hung, giving him freedom of movement. We need not press the imagery overmuch, or too far, but the picture is surely that of a soldier prepared for battle and ready for action.

148)6:10-18

The idea of loins being girt is a familiar one in Scripture. Peter, in his first epistle (1:13), exhorts his readers: 'Gird up the loins of your mind ...', and this echoes our Lord's own exhortation in Luke 12:35, 'Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning' - an echo, perhaps, from the Passover story, where the people of God were commanded to eat the Passover with loins girt and staff in hand, that is, ready to move out of Egypt. A general state of readiness is therefore indicated.

Loins are to be girt about with truth, says Paul, but in fact all aspects of the armour have to do with the truth and teaching of the Word. It is deeply taught believers who become soldiers and warriors of God, and to put on the armour of God is therefore to think through the doctrines of the Word, making them our own, and doing so day by day, reminding ourselves - daily, and even hourly, when the pressure is on! - what we are and what is ours in Christ, rehearsing our riches in Him. Commentators, however, are divided on the question of what construction we are to place on the word 'truth'. Many take it to mean the moral quality of truth of heart, that is to say, sincerity or integrity. This is the view taken by Calvin, and followed in the ICC commentary by Abbott, who uses the phrase, 'truth in its widest sense as an element of character.' Others, however, disagree with this on the ground that 'this subjective interpretation is inadequate because not even Christian virtues constitute the armour that God provides. Nothing less than the objective realities of the gospel will afford the believer the divine protection he requires to resist the devil's wiles.' More requires to be said about this division of view and we shall continue this discussion in the next Note.

149)6:10-18

Charles Hodge in his commentary maintains that it is not divine truth as objectively revealed, i.e. the Word of God, since that is mentioned in the next verse as 'the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God', but rather the knowledge and belief of the truth. His point is that it is the truth of God clearly understood and cordially embraced that alone will protect the believer in 'the evil day'. This view seems to stand midway between the idea of 'truth of doctrine' and that of 'truth as integrity'. It is not clear that all these different interpretations must necessarily be alternatives, as if it must be either the one or the other, and it is questionable whether from a biblical point of view either of the opposites could ever have been thought of in isolation from the other. From the practical, spiritual point of view, we dare not exclude either the one or the other from our thinking, lest by doing so we deprive ourselves of any protection in the battle. And, of course, both belong together. In terms of 'truth of doctrine, this must mean to allow the truth of God to be a living reality in our experience, to live by it, act upon it, breath it, allow it to govern our conduct and our attitudes day by day, as a second nature. Paul speaks in Colossians 3:16 of letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, and this is what he surely means here. The Psalmist says (119:11), 'Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee', and the Apostle James says (1:19-21), 'Be swift to hear ... and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls' - in the hour of temptation or in any other situation. That is the girdle of truth.

150)6:10-18

But we can go further than what was said at the end of the previous Note. Hearts and lives gripped and mastered in this way by the truth of the gospel are hearts and lives that are invincible, and impregnable by the attacks of the enemy. Indeed, it is possible, to be more specific still, there is what we could call 'battle-truth', there is that body of truth that is so essential for mature Christian experience, given by Paul, for example, in the Epistle to the Romans. It is hardly possible to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ without having made it one's business to grasp the teaching of this mighty epistle and be mastered by it. To live much in the atmosphere of this apostolic teaching will mean to be girt about with truth in such a way as to be able to resist all the enemy's attacks.

It is at this point that we see the necessary link between truth of doctrine and truth of heart. For it is simply not possible to allow ourselves to be gripped and mastered by the truth of God without thereby being made true men and women whose lives are marked by probity and integrity. We sometimes sing the words,

But who can fight for truth and God
Enthralled by lies and sin?
He who would wage such war on earth
Must first be true within.

The Psalmist says, 'Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden parts Thou shalt make me to know wisdom' (Psalm 51:6). David is brokenly confessing his sins in these words, recognising that his real problem lay in the lie that was hidden in his heart, which finally erupted into the action that destroyed his testimony. He was not true within, for deep down there were polluted things that held empire over his soul, and finally brought him crashing down.

Much more could, of course, be said on this subject (and has been said in the book *The Christian Warfare and Armour*), but these Readings have sufficiently indicated the meaning of the phrase 'loins girt about with truth' to enable us to turn to the next part of the armour in the next Note.

151)6:10-18

The next part of the Christian armour is what Paul calls 'the breastplate of righteousness'. The imagery here is significant. The breastplate guards the heart, which is the vital organ of the body. If Satan can get to our heart, the battle is won for him and lost for us. And therefore he tries to get to the very heart of our resistance with the arrows of doubt and confusion. If he can make us doubt our salvation, he will not have much trouble with us, for we will be paralysed as to effective battle. The twofold reference we saw to be possible in relation to the girdle of truth applies just as much here. There is the doctrine of righteousness - by which we mean the glorious reality of justification by faith alone, and there are the moral accompaniments of that mighty doctrine, in terms of integrity of life. Two things may be said about this. The first is that there is no question but that the doctrine of the righteousness of God imputed to us and received by faith alone was the essential heart of the Reformation, and that this mighty doctrine is enshrined in the teaching of the Epistle to the Romans. But it is one thing for Christians to have 'accepted Christ as their Saviour' (hardly, be it noted, the language the New Testament uses), but quite another thing - and this is our second point - for them to understand how this puts them in the right with God. And one finds, in experience, that it is those who are confused and hazy about the nature of what has happened to them in their experience of conversion that become easy prey to the wiles of the enemy, and consequently become unsatisfactory in their Christian experience, and do not grow into maturity; whereas those who are clear and instructed in these matters tend to stand firm and follow on to know the Lord. There is a great need for Christian people to get down to basic study and get a right hold of the heart of the gospel, and its deepest meaning. This is what it is to 'put on the breastplate of righteousness', and we shall look in some detail at this in the Notes that follow.

152)6-10-18

The Westminster Confession of Faith, in its chapter on Justification, reads as follows:

'I. Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness: but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

'II. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

'III. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for any thing in them, their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.'

We shall say something by way of comment on the Confession's statement in the next Note.

153)6:10-18

The great, inescapable question, the ultimate question for every man is: 'How do I stand before God?' This is Paul's theme in the Epistle to the Romans, and he answers that question in the proclamation of the good news of the gospel, that God accepts the sinner as righteous, for Christ's sake. Man the sinner is guilty in the sight of God, and stands condemned at the bar of divine justice (the picture Paul uses is from the law courts and his language is couched in legal, 'forensic' terms). The incomparable message of the gospel is that the guilty sinner is acquitted by God and accepted as righteous in His sight because of what Christ has done in His death and resurrection. The question inevitably arises, 'How can a holy God justify and acquit the guilty and still remain just without mocking the inviolable laws of the universe?' The answer Paul gives to this in Romans 3 is through Jesus Christ, 'Whom God has set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood ... to declare His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus'. God, as Creator and Law-giver has a right to expect from man obedience to His laws and loyalty and devotion to His Person. But man through sin has deprived God of both these things, so that over against man there stands both a broken law and a broken relationship. Man therefore has a twofold need if he is to be put right with God: something to deal with his guilt and something to enable him to fulfil his obligation to God in terms of righteousness and devotion to Him. It is this twofold task that Christ took upon Himself for our sakes. On the one hand He bore our condemnation, standing in for us and sealing our pardon with His blood; on the other hand He offered Himself without spot to God for us, offering His perfect righteousness in place of our sin. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:21, 'God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him'. A great, divine exchange took place, in which 'the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all', and His righteousness was laid upon ('imputed to') us. This is the glory, the wonder, and the marvel of the gospel of redeeming grace!

154)6:10-18

We said in an earlier Note that there is a great need for Christian people to get down to basic study, in order to grasp the heart of the gospel and its deepest meaning, for it is those who have done this who tend to stand firm and follow on to know the Lord. By the same token, it is just those people who are most likely to show forth that basic integrity of life which is the indispensable hallmark of genuine Christian testimony. We have sometimes quoted a judgment passed by an eminent historian of a former day on Calvinism, and it makes this point unmistakably. What he said was:

'The Calvinists attracted to themselves every man in Europe that hated a lie They abhorred, as no body of men ever more abhorred, all conscious mendacity, all impurity, all moral wrong of any kind so far as they could recognise it. Whatever exists at this moment in England and Scotland of conscientious fear of wrongdoing is the remnant of the convictions which were branded by the Calvinists into the people's hearts.' (J. Anthony Froude)

This is a rather different assessment of the great Reformer and his teaching than the derogatory and even contemptuous view currently held by the decadent aesthetes of modern culture, but those who have actually read Calvin would hardly be disposed to disagree that the doctrines that he held and taught encouraged a profound moral earnestness. Truth of doctrine, truth of heart, and the one producing the other!

155)6:10-18

The third piece of armour that Paul deals with speaks of 'feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.' There is a question of interpretation involved in this rather unusual phrase. Some take it to mean 'preparedness' in the sense of enabling the Christian warrior, and equipping him, to go forward carrying the good news of the gospel to others - an interpretation based in all probability on the words in Isaiah 52:7, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace' But it is more likely to refer to the idea of having 'a prepared foundation', in the sense of having a knowledge of, and dependence on, the gospel that gives a man peace in his heart, and a firm ground on which to stand. After all, the general emphasis in the passage is 'stand therefore' It is for standing firm that one wears these gospel shoes. Battle is the theme, not evangelism, and what is in view here is having a firm foothold on the rock that no assault would be able to shift. The 'gospel shoes' are, we may say, designed to keep the believer from getting cold feet in the day of trouble! And troubles there are, in many guises. Sometimes Satan attacks the believer's peace: one thinks of the strange, nameless dreads that assail the soul, like a horror of great darkness. Then there is the strange restlessness of spirit, in which we cannot settle down to anything. This also we must recognise as an attack on our peace. It is Satan's work to bring a distemper of spirit upon us, and if we allow him, he will make havoc of our spiritual life and usefulness. There is only one way to deal with this: it is to put on our gospel shoes, and stand fast, refusing to yield an inch to the enemy.

156)6:10-18

By way of introduction to a consideration of the nature of the provision and protection of this part of the gospel armour, we have to say that putting on our gospel shoes does not mean that the assaults of the enemy will stop; but what it does mean is that we will be able to stand against them. The knowledge of, and dependence upon, the gospel that gives peace is the necessary equipment that we need if we are to have a firm foothold in the conflict. This is the preparedness that we require. And to be so equipped is to recognise the completeness of our position in Christ, and what we are in Him, to recognise and to remember, by a lively exercise of faith, where the gospel has placed us. And when we appropriate, and make our own, in practical experience what is already ours in Christ and what He has already given us, we recognise that the victory is ours in Him. There are three thoughts in particular that will prove useful as specific applications of the basic idea of recognising and remembering our position in Christ. First of all, we are given by the gospel of peace the assurance of our heavenly Father's presence with us - an unfailing assurance, for has He not said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee', and 'When thou passeth through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee'. In the second place, we are given a glorious assurance of our Father's care and love. We should not forget, in this connection, how the Apostle Peter prefaces his warning about the devil as 'a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour' (1 Peter 5:7) with the wonderful assurance of the words 'Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you' (what follows in 1 Peter 5:9 gives practical expression to the putting on of the gospel shoes: 'Whom resist steadfast in the faith ...'). The third consideration we must leave until the next Note.

157)6:10-18

We must never forget (this is our third consideration) that the gospel of peace gives us peace itself, peace with God in the objective sense, giving us a new standing in His sight, justified by His glorious mercy, and peace in the subjective sense in the peace that passeth all understanding. We have referred earlier to the nameless fears and dreads that from time to time come upon us, which have no rational explanation. They are nameless and cannot be understood; and the answer to them is the peace that cannot be understood either, that passes all understanding. There is a wonderful word in Isaiah 48:18 about peace being 'like a river'. It is an eloquent simile and worth following through. Those who are musically inclined and knowledgeable will know the beautiful piece of music by Smetana, 'Ma Vlast', in which he traces the River Vltava from its source right down to the sea, and paints in music all the various moods of the river: the tiny rivulet trickling down the rocks and hills at the source, the fast-flowing currents, the deep movements, the long meandering reaches. This is an eloquent illustration of the many-coloured peace of God: in one context bubbling over with gaiety, like a cascading stream, and in another deep and mysterious, with no seeming movement, although the water is flowing swiftly, and in yet another the meandering movement of the water as it approaches the sea, slowly, almost lazily. The peace of God has many 'moods'! Then, if you throw a branch of a tree into the river, does it stop the river's flow? Of course not. What happens is that it is borne along effortlessly and ultimately pushed to the side. There are some people of whom it could be said that it takes very little to disturb their peace. We sometimes say that a little cog can disrupt a machine, but it is not like this with the peace of God. And what of the great rock in the middle of the river bed? Does it stop the river? No; but the river simply flows round both sides of it and it goes peacefully on its way. There are things like that in human experience - immovable, and there for the duration of life, a sorrow it may be, a tragedy, a thorn in the flesh. But the peace of God is not held up by it; it flows round both sides and goes right on. That is what God can do, in the gift of His peace.

158)6:10-18

The next piece of armour that Paul mentions is the shield of faith. Concerning this he says 'Above all, take the shield of faith'. This 'above all' has been variously interpreted: some take it to mean 'most especially', others that it means 'over all'. With respect to position, others still take it to mean 'in all duties, in all temptations'. Certainly, it could be taken to mean all these things - and why not? But there is some ground for opting for the first suggestion, 'most especially', for not only does it take the central place in this catalogue of armour, but also it is the one piece which is spoken of specially as having a particular function and result - 'that ye may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked'. This in itself should give it a special position. The shield in question, the commentators tell us, refers to the big, massive shield used by Roman infantry in battle, the kind that could cover the whole body with ease. The Greek word is used in Homer to mean 'a stone put against a door to block or shut it', the shield of faith closes and blocks the door against the enemy. That is a useful thought, isn't it?

What is the nature of these 'fiery darts'? The picture is taken from ancient warfare, and refers to arrows, or like missiles, around which combustible material was fastened and ignited, then fired against the enemy. Such arrows thus fired into thatched houses would set them ablaze instantly. This is what is in view. And the characteristic of these arrows is their swiftness, their unexpectedness and their immediate effect. The application of this to the believer's experience is surely obvious, and we shall give some examples of this in our next reading.

159)6:10-18

One of the characteristics of the evil one's attacks through the 'fiery darts', as indicated at the end of yesterday's reading, is the swiftness and unexpectedness with which they are made - the sudden thought that comes to a believer's mind and sticks like a barb, plunging him in a matter of minutes into a raging inferno of doubt and confusion, which can continue for days, or weeks. No one who has not experienced this can appreciate the depth of distress and even despair that this can bring. Bunyan captures this very well in Pilgrim's Progress, when Christian passes through the valley of the shadow, as he describes Christian's confusion and inability to discern whether the voices he hears are from God or from another source. A great part of such an experience is of course just this inability to discern whose voice is speaking to us. It is one thing, for example, for Job to cry out that the 'arrows of the Almighty' are assailing him, but the question that does arise in such a situation is whether the arrows are coming from the Almighty or from another source. This is the big question. In a remarkable passage in Job 9:10ff, the patriarch cries out in his anguish at the seeming harshness and inscrutability of God's dealings with him, and then, after a pause, he says 'If it is not He, who then is it?' This momentous utterance raises the question whether it is the arrows of the Almighty that are troubling him, or arrows from another source. A gleam of light such as this can make all the difference between despair and hope, for when we know that, when we are under attack, we can raise our shield against the evil one's fiery darts, and win through to victory. Is this a word for some storm-tossed believer today?

160)6:10-18

The next piece of armour is the helmet of salvation. Once again the imagery here is important. A helmet guards the head and protects the eyes. This part of the Christian armour therefore, is obviously something for the mind and the thoughts, and the meaning, in brief, appears to be something like this: a mind constantly preoccupied with the thoughts of our great salvation is kept safe from the onslaughts of the enemy. This is the thesis presented by the phrase before us. We could collate an interesting series of Scriptural verses in this connection, as for example, Isaiah 26:3, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee'; 1 Peter 1:13, 'Gird up the loins of your mind'; Philippians 4:7 if, 'the peace of God ... shall keep your hearts and minds think on these things ... and the God of peace will be with you'. And, as Paul goes on to say in the following verse, 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, think on these things'. Well might we sing

With salvation's walls surrounded
Thou mayest smile at all thy foes.

One might well wonder whether the experience that Paul relates in 2 Corinthians 1:8ff was an attack of this nature which required the protection of the helmet of salvation when he was pressed out of measure and above strength, despairing even of life, at the hands of Satan as a destroyer. One recalls a strange and terrible experience through which a missionary passed in which he felt pressures so great upon his mind that he really began to feel, doctor as he was, that he was going insane. It was only after he had passed through it that he recognised that it was a demonic power attacking his mind. It may be that when Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:5, 'Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears', he was similarly conscious of the destroyer at work. But there are other areas in which the New Testament speaks of the devil as having an influence on the mind and we shall consider these in tomorrow's Note.

161)6:10-18

For one thing, the whole area of 'wrong thinking' has an element of the evil one's influence in it - one has only to mention words like 'heresy' or 'brain-washing' to realise the extent to which the enemy of souls is so often at work in modern life. The New Testament concept of 'seducing spirits' (1 Timothy 4:1) is to be taken in all seriousness! For another thing, however, and in a much more mundane sense, it is so easy for believers to be nudged unwittingly into attitudes of introspection and self-preoccupation that become highly detrimental to true spiritual health - my spiritual state, my spiritual progress, my spiritual battles, my spiritual hunger and longings - attitudes which prompt the question, Do we ever escape from ourselves? In such a mind-set we surely need the wind of God to blow through us, bringing much-needed fresh air to remove the spiritual cobwebs from our thinking. In contrast to this we may well think of the Apostle John's attitude and experience on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:5). How easily he could have become preoccupied with his trying circumstances, but instead his mind was lifted up heavenwards in the glorious doxology, 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen'. It is all a question of allowing our minds and thoughts to be captured and mastered by something bigger and greater than ourselves. To spend time day by day thinking of what we are in Christ and what God has made us in Him, to think of our high calling and destiny as sons and daughters of God, to think of the greatness of His redeeming love - it is not possible but that this should have an unmistakeable effect on our whole way of life.

The eternal glories gleam afar
To nerve my faint endeavour

This is the use, and the point, of wearing the helmet of salvation!

162)6:10-18

Up to this point we have been dealing with the defensive parts of the Christian armour; we come now to its attacking aspects, in the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and the weapon of All-prayer. We look first at the sword of the Spirit. There is a twofold implication in this: on the one hand, we are to think in terms of attack being the best form of defence, that is to say, hitting back at the enemy when he has been attacking us in the ways we have already described in previous Notes. On the other hand, we are to think of attack in terms of, and in the context of, Christian service generally - in preaching, evangelism, testimony and witness.

First of all, by way of introduction, we look at the phrase Paul uses: 'The sword of the Spirit' can hardly be the same kind of phrase as 'the helmet of salvation' or the 'breastplate of righteousness'. 'Salvation' is the helmet, and 'righteousness' is the breastplate, but we can hardly say that the Spirit is the sword in the same way for it is not the Spirit, but the Word of God, that is the sword in this phrase. We must therefore take Paul as meaning 'the sword', given or provided by the Spirit, is the Word of God. Implied in this is that it is when we are controlled and filled by that Spirit that He puts this sword in our hand, as a weapon that is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:5). We should not forget, in this connection, Peter's words in Acts 5:32 that God gives the Holy Spirit to them that obey Him. A Spirit-filled man is a mighty warrior when he wields the sword which is the Word of God. That is the first consideration; and the second is this: we should note that the original Greek for 'Word of God' here is not the usual 'logos', but 'rema'. There must be some significance in this differentiation, and we will give some consideration to this in the next Note.

163)6:10-18

There is only one other place in the New Testament where the imagery of the Word of God as a sword occurs, in Hebrews 4:12. 'The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword' (but cf Isaiah 49:2, which Paul may have had in mind when he wrote the words before us). Interestingly, however, the Greek word in Hebrews 4:12 is 'logos', not 'rema', as here. This probably means there is some common ground between the two words so far as usage is concerned, but where something more definite is being conveyed there is a particular or special emphasis in the usage of the two words. Two different interpretations have been given of this. The Expositor's Greek Testament maintains that the proper use of the Greek 'rema' refers to the spoken word, the preached gospel and this in its length and breadth, the preached word in all its fullness. Another interpretation holds that 'rema' means 'a specific divine utterance'. That is to say, Paul, in using it here, is not thinking of the Scriptures in general but rather of a specific word that God gives us in specific times of need. One readily thinks of what Jesus said to His disciples when He sent them forth (Matthew 10:19): 'When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you'. That is to say, God places a sword in our hand at the strategic moment, and gives us the word to speak. We may well combine both these interpretations for they are not mutually exclusive, but complementary to one another, for both refer to spoken utterance, although in different contexts. Both alike, however, are full of encouragement and challenge.

164)6:10-18

It will be helpful for us to consider these matters a little further, both in relation to the preaching of the gospel and also the specific word given by God for specific need. If the preached word is committed to the Church as a sword with which to fight the battles of the Lord, what are we to say about the attitude of a congregation whose minister is seeking under God to fulfil a biblical, expository ministry among them, who say, in criticism of his preaching 'This expository ministry was all right in the fifties and sixties, but we are beyond that now and want something different'? What does this say about people who neglect and lightly esteem the main weapon of the Christian armoury? If this is the general thinking throughout the Church, is it surprising that the Church is suffering decline? Are people not interested, then, in fighting the battles of the Lord? Are they even aware that there is a battle of the Lord to be fought? What images are conjured up in their minds when they sing 'Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armour on'? If they have any faint conception of what these words are supposed to mean, how can they be careless and indifferent about the armour that God Himself provides?

As to the other aspect, that of the specific word given for specific need, one of the things this can mean is that here is a weapon given us by the Spirit in His function and office to bring to our remembrance what we have read and stored up in our hearts, as He takes of the things that are Christ's and shows them to us. It is important for us to realise that the specific words 'given us' are not 'out of the blue', but called forth from the store of our sanctified memories, and brought to our remembrance at the critical moment. It is from hearts filled with the word of God that the Spirit of God calls forth from our remembrance things learned and stored up against a day of need. This is one of the priceless values of expository ministry: it stocks us up, so to speak, against the evil day. This is why, when a particular exposition may not seem to have anything specific to say to our present need, it is still valuable for us in terms of receiving it and storing it up, and remembering it with care, against the day when our need will suddenly become very critical, when it will be met by something stored up. It may be a long while back, and brought to remembrance by the Spirit at the right moment.

165)6:10-18

The final piece of armour is one which some may be inclined not to include in the Christian armour, in that it seems to stand slightly away from the metaphor of the soldier that Paul has been using throughout the passage, but we are very sure that it ought to be included. The 'weapon of all-prayer' is in many ways the most important part of all the armour both for defence and attack. The words in the hymn, 'Stand up, stand up, for Jesus',

Each piece put on with prayer

capture that importance very well. From the Christian point of view, a prayerless warrior is a contradiction in terms. We should note first of all the precise language Paul uses. He says, 'praying always'. This is echoed elsewhere as e.g. in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 'pray without ceasing'. Since this obviously cannot refer to 'stated' times of prayer, retiring into the secret place to pray, as Jesus taught, it must mean another kind of prayer. Unquestionably Jesus taught the duty and necessity of times of prayer but there is also a spirit of prayer and an attitude, as Jesus also taught (cf 'men ought always to pray and not to faint'). It is to this latter that Paul must be referring here. Not otherwise could we be 'praying always'. But consider what this implies. What it means is that it is the quality of our lives - what we are - that will determine our prayers. This is all-important, but not always realised. It is not how we pray, or what we pray, but what we are when we pray what we pray, that is all-important and decisive. In this sense our life is our prayer.

166)6:10-18

To say, 'life is our prayer' means, in effect, this: Here is a Christian who is living close to the Lord. He has plumbed the depths of the living truth of God's Word, and let it do its gracious work of renewal and transformation in him. It is a continuing, ever-deepening work that challenges him at the deepest levels of his being. And he rises to the challenge, meets it, at what cost only those who do likewise can ever know. He has become a man whose prayer draws its virtue from a disposition that has been brought into conformity with the mind of Christ. Such a life is a 'living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God', and in that sense it is a constant prayer. God hears that life, it speaks to God, and it speaks with God, and there is a blessed, intimate, unbroken fellowship with God that moves the divine heart and the divine hand. Is not this a wonderful thought? This is the secret of the lives of the spiritual giants of Scripture, men and women that moved the hand of God in blessing to men. One readily thinks of Elijah on Mount Carmel, in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal and of the simple, unadorned, and indeed brief, prayer that brought the fire of God down on the altar of sacrifice: 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word'. That was all but look what it did! But it was not the simple sentence of prayer that wrought so mightily, but the prayer that was ascending from his life daily, without ceasing. It was what Elijah was that moved God's hand against the prophets of Baal and discomfited them so utterly. Such lives are sending signals every moment of the day to the living God. And we will never pray at all in this way unless we are a certain kind of person. This, it seems to us, is what Paul has in view in the words, 'praying always'.

167)6:10-18

The second thing that Paul emphasises is that 'all saints' should be the object of our prayers. This is a very important consideration, with implications that are far reaching. What we mean by this is that Paul's mind is not so much on inward, subjective prayer as on outward, objective considerations - that is to say, even in the context of the certain battles and pressures the Ephesians were experiencing, he is not making specific reference to them, but to a much larger and more comprehensive reality, namely the battle in which the whole people of God are engaged. One sees this readily enough in our Lord's own words, when he said to his disciples, 'When ye pray, say - not "help me in my pressures today" - but "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name ..."' In other words, our prayer must be first of all taken up with the things of God, and the honour and glory of His great Name. Then, when the divine order is established, personal needs can be brought to the throne of grace. This is an entirely safe and healthy order, but it does cut across merely natural instinct and inclination. For when we are under pressure our instinct is to become preoccupied with our own particular problems, battles and temptations. But Paul seems to be saying to us, 'Do not concentrate your prayer on yourself, lift your eyes to a higher perspective and pray for all saints'. It is, of course, very possible to become fixed in self-preoccupying prayer; and that leads to morbidity. Often, the worst thing we can do about our temptations is to pray about them, for that simply focuses our attention upon them and we never get away from them, but become bogged down, in a morass of depression. And Paul's counsel is: relate your battle to the battle. Strike a blow for the larger cause in your praying. Look at the main strategy of God, not merely at the infinitesimal part of it that is your problem.

168)6:10-18

One of the ways in which we can follow the Apostle's advice, given at the end of the previous Note, is to try to understand our battle in relation to the main one. We need to ask ourselves, 'Why am I under attack? What relation does this attack on me bear to the overall strategy of God?' When we do, we will begin to see that others are under pressure as well as we are, and we will begin to ask, why are we all under attack?' And we will soon realise that this is all part of the enemy's strategy, and in realising it, we will begin to pull together by praying for one another. And, in this way, we get into gear for the main battle. And when that happens, the course of the main battle goes forward, and we will be carried forward in the main advance, and share in the main victory. The truth of the matter is, no attack comes to us personally, out of relation to anything else, but all in relation to what we are committed to in the battle. Therefore, when we pray for the larger work, we ourselves will be carried forward in the glad surge of the Spirit's grace and power. Remember, the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends - 'for all saints'!

169)6:19-24

The third thing Paul says about prayer is to ask the Ephesians' prayers 'for me' (19). This is not an evidence of Paul's selfishness, or an indication that he thinks that his battles are more important than theirs. Rather, he is coveting their prayers because he is in the forefront of the battle. 'Here is the spearhead', he means, and 'I am out there preaching the gospel. Stand with me in the battle, let us fight together, and pray that I may have utterance in the preaching of that gospel'. And after twenty centuries, this is still the only effectual way for gospel work to be done. God give us all grace to see that this is the real and true participation for God's people in His work in the world.

The closing verses of the epistle contain a good deal of teaching for us and there are three main points which call for comment. The first of these is what Paul calls 'utterance' (19). What does he mean by this? He is not asking them to pray that he might have 'eloquence in preaching' or facility and felicity in words. Rather, what he has in mind is the kind of utterance that is fraught with spiritual power and that does things, changing lives and breaking the power of sin. What the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 2:4, 'My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' is a good example of what is meant by the word 'utterance'. In older days, the way it was described was to say that a man's preaching had an unction upon it - a word that simply means an anointing. Years ago, a booklet from the pen of a man called E.M. Bounds, with the title 'Power through Prayer', spoke of unction as

'the indefinable in preaching which makes it preaching. It is that which distinguishes and separates preaching from all mere human addresses. It is the divine in preaching. This unction vitalises God's revealed truth, makes it living and life-giving. Even God's truth spoken without this unction is light, dead and deadening. Though abounding in truth, though weighty with thought, though sparkling with rhetoric, though pointed by logic, though powerful by earnestness, without this divine unction it issues in death and not in life.'

That is a solemn and challenging statement for every preacher of the Word, and one that we can never ever take for granted.

170)6:19-24

The second point to note in these verses is how Paul describes himself in 20. He calls himself 'an ambassador in bonds'. This striking word is used only twice in the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians 5:20 (which see) and here. The word 'ambassador' in the Greek is 'presbutes', from the verb 'presbeuein' meaning 'to be older or oldest', 'to take the place of others', 'to take precedence by right of seniority', and thus 'to be an ambassador'. The idea of seniority leads inevitably to the concept of authority. It is a responsible post. And, significantly, in both places where it occurs, it is the verb that is used, not the noun. This indicates two things: firstly, activity - the job is no 'sinecure'; and secondly it is not the office, but the duty, that is stressed. There is no thought of resting on one's laurels here, but a getting on with the job. And the ambassador's job is to represent his sovereign, or government. It is his representative capacity that gives him his authority and position. He is nothing in himself. One thinks of the analogy of the Lord High Commissioner at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. For the brief spell in May, the Lord High Commissioner ranks next to the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh and the Duke of Rothesay, and before the rest of the Royal Family, and before all the dukes of the realm. He may be nothing in himself, but in the office he bears this position of authority and power. Not only so: an ambassador speaks not in his own name but on behalf of his sovereign whose deputy he is. One of the implications of this is that there is necessarily a 'givenness' about his message. And this is especially true in the Christian ambassador. He is not at liberty to alter or modify the message he bears, or tone it down in any way, but rather he must hand it over as given. When one thinks of the way Paul describes his mission as an apostle in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff, 'I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture,' it becomes very clear how he understood his ambassadorship. Please God we also shall be true to this understanding of our calling!

171)6:19-24

Paul's reference here, to his being 'an ambassador in bonds' is highly significant. He was, of course, literally a prisoner of the Roman government when he wrote these words, but in a metaphorical and symbolic sense, and indeed in a spiritual sense also, he was in bonds, for he was the bondslave of Jesus Christ, a captive at Christ's chariot wheels, captive to His love and to the Word of God, as he makes clear in 2 Corinthians 2:14ff, and led in triumph by the Mighty Victor of Calvary. James Denney, commenting on Paul's wonderful metaphor in that passage, says,

'Wherever Christ is leading a single soul in triumph, the fragrance of the gospel should go forth; rather, it does go forth, in proportion as His triumph is complete. There is sure to be that in the life which will reveal the graciousness as well as the omnipotence of the Saviour. And it is this virtue which God uses as His main witness, as His chief instrument to evangelise the world. In every relation of life it shall tell. Nothing is so insuppressible, nothing so pervasive, as a fragrance. The lowliest life which Christ is really leading in triumph will speak infallibly and persuasively for Him...!'

Ambassador in bonds, indeed! Who would want it otherwise, when captivity to Christ is hallowed in such a way? Paul's bonds indicate that he was in the truest sense of the term sharing in the sufferings and afflictions of the thorn-crowned Christ, and was utterly identified with Him in His costly mission in the world. It is this alone that enables a man to be a true ambassador for Christ, and to say, 'as though God did beseech you by us'. God speaking through a man, Christ acting in and through him - how could this be, except he were one in mind and spirit, and identified, with Him in His redemptive work in the world?

172)6:19-24

The final point to note in these concluding verses of the epistle is the reality of fellowship. This has a lovely touch, which teaches us a great and important lesson, giving as it does a moving picture of Paul the man. We see the humanity of the apostle in what he says in 21-24. The words 'that ye may know my affairs ...' really say it all. It is not always realised that true fellowship means sharing oneself with others and - in a very real sense - 'giving oneself away'. Some Christians are lonelier than they might be, or need be, because they do not give themselves to, or let themselves be known by, others. The mark of real Christian humanity is the open heart. It is very impressive to realise, at the close of an epistle that has spoken so much about the believer's position in heavenly places in Christ, how utterly human the true attainment of that exalted position turns out to be. There is nothing remote about deep spiritual life, and nothing unapproachable either. A life of prayer, when it is real and true, promotes a spirit of warm humanity. What could be more blessed and heart-warming than the spirit of tender care and mutual consideration that breathes in these closing verses? Surely, if fellowship is to be something more than an empty name, it must be something like the fellowship that is expressed here. This then is the test: is such a fellowship developing among us, in which strong and enduring bonds of love and care are being forged, and a mutual encouragement and help maintained and extended to a growing company of men and women whose hearts God has touched? Ah, if the life of prayer is not making us more human, more accessible, more open, more communicable it is a real question whether it is the kind of prayer that the New Testament advocates. The apostolic prayer and benediction in 23, 24 point the way to the fulfilment of the hope that this will ever be the abiding and increasing fruit of the ministry of the Divine Word. Consider the words Paul uses - peace, love, faith, grace - it is all there, in these mighty gospel energies. Let us trace everything back to the source, in the grace of God, which is the fountainhead from which all else flows. No better definition of grace has ever been given than in James Denney's words: 'Grace is the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful, unearned, at work in Christ for the salvation of sinners'. At work in Christ for us - and what a work, bringing peace with God, with ourselves, with one another, creating faith within us, a faith that works by love! It is impressive, is it not, to see how comprehensive a range these seemingly simple words have. And - one final word - observe the definition given of believers, 'them that love our Lord Jesus Christ' (24). Have we discovered that to believe in Him is - to love Him?