

THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

Vol. XXXV

JANUARY, 1924

No. 2

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT ILLUSTRATIONS.

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Note.—This article is addressed primarily to young pastors who are beginning their life work. Previous articles have been devoted to the more vital elements of preaching today.—A. W. B.

The popular effectiveness of a spoken sermon depends largely upon its illustrations. The value of the sermon, under God, depends upon the spiritual power of the messenger and of his message, but the effectiveness of a strong man of God with a timely message may be largely lost because the sermon lacks human interest, whereas the absence of a commanding personality and of a spiritual message may apparently be atoned for by the skilful use of illustrations. All of this is doubly true in preaching to the multitude, and so the pastor should become adept in the fine art of using illustrations.

But is it true that the popular effectiveness of your preaching depends largely upon such ability, which at best is but secondary? A careful review of your sermons for the past year should enable you to answer your question affirmatively; and a casual study of other men's sermons, as written in books, should strengthen your conclusion. Who were the most effective preachers in the days of old? The prophets and the apostles, and the greatest of all was the Lord Jesus, Whom the common people heard most gladly, and not least because He was the world's one perfect Master of the art of illustration. Those other popular preachers, from Isaiah and Ezekiel to Peter and Paul, were like their Master in this respect, as

UNITY IN CHRIST

“... to sum up all things in Christ.”—Eph. 1:10, A. R. V.

OUTLINE STUDY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

1. *Greatness of Ephesians.*

“The Epistle to the Ephesians is the divinest composition of man,” declared Coleridge.¹ Dean Farrar says: “It is the most sublime, the most profound, the most advanced and final utterance of St. Paul’s gospel to the Gentiles.”² Luther loved *Galatians* best, and Melancthon loved *Romans*; but the clear-sighted, logical Calvin maintained that in *Ephesians* Paul is at his best and greatest. *Ephesians*, says Dean Robinson,³ is the “one supreme exposition of the great doctrine of his [Paul’s] life, the doctrine of the unity of mankind in Christ and of the purpose of God for the world through the Church. It is his final conception of the meaning and aim of the Christian revelation.” Once more we quote the eloquent Dean Farrar: “In the depth of its theology, in the loftiness of its morals, in the way in which the simplest moral truths are based upon the profoundest religious doctrines, the Epistle [to the Ephesians] is unparalleled. In it you see Paul the theologian and Paul the man at their greatest and their best.”⁴ “As to utterance and lofty eloquence, there is no composition known to man, in the Bible or out of it, containing more ennobling doc-

¹*Table Talk*, S. T. Coleridge—English poet, philosopher and literary critic, 1772-1834.

²*Messages of the Books*. F. W. Farrar, p. 328.

³*Commentary, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*. J. Armitage Robinson, p. 10.

⁴F. W. Farrar, *ibid.*, p. 334.

trines and moralities, more earnestness, variety and sublimity, than the Epistle to the Ephesians."⁵

2. *A timely message.*

The supreme and sovereign truth of *Ephesians* is God's eternal purpose ultimately to gather together into one body all mankind in Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of the Church; and that truth was never more needed than today. Twenty years ago Dean Robinson declared: "The topic of the Epistle to the Ephesians is of pre-eminent interest in the present day. At no former period has there been so widespread recognition in all departments of human life of the need of combination and co-operation: and never, perhaps, has more anxious thought been expended upon the problem of the ultimate destiny of mankind. Whilst it is true that always and everywhere questions have been asked about the future, yet it is not too much to say that we, who have begun to feel after the truth of a corporate life as higher than an individual life, are more eager than any past generation has been to learn, and perhaps more capable of learning, what is the goal for which man as a whole is making, or, in other words, what is God's purpose for the human race."⁶ Those words are tenfold more true today. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, declares that no durable peace can be secured till there comes into existence an "international mind," which he defines as "nothing else than that habit of thinking of foreign relations and business, and that habit of dealing with them, which regard the several nations of the civilized world as friendly and cooperating equals in aiding the progress of civilization, in developing commerce and industry, and in spreading enlightenment and culture throughout the world."⁷ In *Ephesians* Paul points out that an "international mind" and the consequent peace are to come only as a result

⁵Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, William Graham, p. 11.

⁶J. Armitage Robinson, *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷Cosmos, *The Basis of Durable Peace.*

of a divine act of creation that gives man a new heart and spirit. "That He might create in Himself one new man, so making peace" (Eph. 2:15). The world needs a new man. "What we need is a power that can change the nature of the wicked human heart and remove the impotence of the human will," said Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, late editor of the *British Weekly*. In his first pronouncement since his long illness, Woodrow Wilson said: "Our civilization cannot survive materially unless it be redeemed spiritually. It can be saved only by becoming permeated with the Spirit of Christ and by being made free and happy by the practices which spring out of that Spirit." In one of his last addresses President Harding declared that the only hope of the world was to be found in men who possessed the spirit and obeyed the teachings of Jesus Christ. What these men are saying now Paul said long ago in his matchless Epistle to the Ephesians.

3. *Helpful books on Ephesians.*

For the preacher perhaps the most stimulating and suggestive commentary is *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, by J. A. Robinson, D. D., Macmillan Co., N. Y., 1904: two editions; one for the student who knows Greek, the other for students without knowledge of Greek. For the Sunday-school teacher and general Christian worker there is nothing better than the deeply spiritual and at the same time scholarly commentary by H. C. G. Moule, in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, Macmillan Co., N. Y. 1902. *Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, by William Graham, Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia, 1883—deeply spiritual and based on thoroughly textual exposition. *Christ and His Seed Central to All Things*, a series of expository lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, by John Pulsford; Hamilton, Adams & Co., London, 1872—very striking, original and suggestive. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Ephesians*, Doran Co., N. Y., 1856—analytical and doctrinal. *Cambridge Greek Testament on Ephesians*, by J. O. F. Murray, Macmillan Co., N. Y., 1914—concise, scholarly, stimulating. Very valuable for the

general Bible student is the little commentary on *Ephesians*. by J. S. Candlish in the Handbooks for Bible classes and private students, Scribner's Sons, N. Y., 1901. Commentary on *Ephesians*, by J. MacPherson, Scribner's Sons, 1892—full, clear, suggestive, a model of accurate exposition. We call special attention of preachers to *Pauline Epistles, Introductory and Expository Studies*, by R. D. Shaw, Scribner's Sons, 1904. Every preacher should have this book. G. G. Findlay, on *Ephesians* in the Expositor's Bible, Doran Co., N. Y.—a warm and glowing exposition.

4. *Author, date, and place of composition.*

The Epistle itself claims to be the work of Paul (1:1; 3:1), and there is no good reason to deny this claim. A few modern scholars have insisted that Paul is not the author, but a growing consensus of opinion accepts the Pauline authorship. From 100 A. D. onward the testimony of the early Church to the Pauline authorship is abundant and constant. Paul was a prisoner in Rome for the first time in 60-62 A. D.⁸ Again he was a prisoner there in 67 A. D.⁹ *Ephesians* was probably written from Rome near the close of his first imprisonment in 62 A. D. About the same time he wrote *Colossians*, *Philippians* and *Philemon*. These four immortal letters—*Ephesians*, *Colossians*, *Philippians* and *Philemon*—are consequently known as the "prison" epistles. Second Timothy is also a "prison" epistle, as it was written about 67 A. D., during Paul's second Roman imprisonment, close to the time of his martyrdom.¹⁰

5. *The occasion and purpose.*

There is no definite reference in the Epistle to the historical occasion that called it forth, and no explicit reference to its purpose. The theme of the Epistle, as will be presently shown,

⁸Acc. to Pauline Chronology as given in David Smith, *Life and Letters of St. Paul*, p. 659.

⁹*Ibid*, p. 660.

¹⁰*Ibid*, p. 660.

is the ultimate unity of mankind in Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of the Church. The Church of 62 A. D. was in great danger of being split into the two factions of Jewish and Gentile Christianity. The purpose of the Epistle was to prevent this split, preserve the unity of the Church, and reveal God's purpose for mankind through the Church. It is Paul's last appeal for a united Christendom in which both Jew and Gentile shall stand together as brothers in Christ Jesus on the sole basis of faith. That this is the purpose and occasion will, we believe, be shown in the next topic.

6. *Paul's preparation for writing Ephesians.*

Paul, we believe, was inspired of God to write this Epistle; but we also believe that God prepared him by His Spirit and Providence for the writing. A review of Paul's life will show that God had been preparing His servant for this supreme effort to set forth the Divine plan for the race through the Church. The Epistle to the *Ephesians* is the climax and pinnacle of Paul's master passion for a united universal Church, co-extensive with mankind. Let us note briefly some of the steps along which God led Paul in preparing him to write this Epistle.

(a) *Stephen's speech* (Acts, chap. 7), 33 A. D.¹¹ Stephen declared that no particular land, shrine, condition of life, outward ordinance, nor people has an exclusive claim to God's favor. His speech was a mighty appeal for the universality of the Gospel. Stephen himself may not have seen the full logical outcome of the truth which he so boldly proclaimed that memorable day, but the fact is, he released a doctrine which did not cease working until Christianity had broken the fetters of Judaism and proclaimed itself a free and universal faith. Stephen's startling doctrine must have amazed Saul of Tarsus and set him to thinking. It overturned much of the teaching Saul had learned in the school of the rabbis. Saul's conversion was the result, under God, of the speech and prayer of Stephen.

¹¹We follow the dating as given in David Smith, *ibid.*, pp. 645 ff.

(b) *Appearance of the Risen Christ to Saul* (Acts, chap. 9). It is an interesting fact that the commission of the risen Christ to Saul was to preach the universal Gospel which Stephen had proclaimed. "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Paul's commission, as here stated, is two-fold: to the Gentiles and to the Jews. And Paul made one great purpose of his life to be the effort to bring Gentile and Jew into one body in Christ (cf. Rom. 11:13-14). He strove to the end to preserve the unity of Jewish and Gentile believer in Christ. Always and beyond others he is the apostle of unity.¹² Yet he never sacrificed truth in his effort to achieve unity. He says explicitly that he resisted the Judaizers in order "that the truth of the Gospel might continue" (Gal. 2:5).

(c) *Vision in the temple* (Acts 22:17-21). After his conversion and three years spent in Arabia, Paul returns to Jerusalem, and is inclined to make that city the place of his ministry. He feels that in the very place where he had persecuted the people of Jesus he ought to preach; that there his testimony would have the greatest effect. But Jesus, Who had other plans, commanded him: "Depart, for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21).

(d) *Special work at Antioch* (Acts 11:19-26). Greek-speaking Jews of Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch in Syria and did what had never been done before—they preached the Gospel to pagans, and invited them into the Christian Church. Heretofore only "devout" Gentiles who had been in attendance upon the Jewish Synagogue had been thus invited. But now a new thing was done. And a great number of these pagans believed the Gospel and turned unto the Lord. When the Jerusalem Church learned of this new departure, they sent forth Barnabas to investigate the matter; who, when he had seen the clear manifestation of the Holy Spirit's work in the conversion of these pagans, exhorted them to "cleave unto the Lord." That is, he urged them to remain in the Church in

¹²J. A. Robinson, *Unity in Christ*. p. 285.

spite of the opposition of those Jewish Christians who were opposed to the admission of pagans. Barnabas had great difficulty in holding together the Jewish and Gentile elements in the church at Antioch. Now the point of interest for us is that he knew of a man able to handle that delicate situation. So he went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul, and when he had found him he brought him unto Antioch, where he and Saul labored for a whole year with remarkable success. Thus, early in his career, Paul became the champion of the unity of the Church, in which both Jew and Gentile stand together on the same basis of faith in Jesus Christ.

(e) *Famine visit to Jerusalem and debate in regard to circumcision of Titus* (Acts 11:27-30; Gal. 2:1-10), A. D. 46. At the suggestion of Barnabas and Paul, the Christians at Antioch sent relief to the famine-stricken Jewish Christians at Jerusalem. Doubtless Paul's motive in taking this offering was two-fold—to relieve the distress caused by the famine and also to cement the ties of Christian love between the Gentile Christians of Antioch and the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. This famine visit of Acts 11:27-30 is, perhaps, to be identified with the visit of Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Titus, recorded in Galatians 2:1-10, when Paul refused to circumcise Titus, in order that, as he declares, the truth of the Gospel might continue with the Gentiles (Gal. 2:5). The final outcome of the debate was the agreement that Peter and his Jewish Christian helpers should continue the custom of circumcision among the Jewish believers, and that Paul should continue opening the doors of the Church to pagans on the sole condition of faith without circumcision. Here again Paul preserves the unity of the Church in which both Jew and Gentile believers are to form one body in Christ Jesus.

(f) *Conflict with Peter at Antioch* (Gal. 2:11-21), A. D. 50. Paul and Barnabas were called by the Holy Spirit to leave Antioch and go forth on the first missionary journey to carry the Gospel to the great Gentile world (Acts 13:1-3). And when they returned to Antioch at the close of this journey, the record says that they gathered the Church together and

rehearsed all things that God had done with them, "and that He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). This report of Gentiles coming in doubtless resulted in a great revival at Antioch in which many more Gentiles were brought into the fold. The news spread to Jerusalem and the mother Church sent Peter to investigate the matter. He came and fellowshipped with these Gentile members, even going so far as to expose himself to the risk of violating the Old Testament food laws by eating with them at the meals in connection with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. But when certain Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem, claiming to be sent by James, Peter became afraid and no longer ate with the Gentiles. At the beginning of this affair Paul seems to have been absent from Antioch. When he returned this is what he found—the Jewish believers had withdrawn from the Gentile believers, and ate the common meal apart in a company to themselves and celebrated the Lord's Supper separately from the Gentile Church members. At once Paul saw that this conduct destroyed the unity of the Church and boldly took the position that if necessary to preserve the Church's unity the Old Testament food laws must be abandoned. Paul won the day, and once more saved the unity of the Church.

(g) *Letter to the Galatians*, A. D. 50. While at Antioch before starting on his second missionary journey, Paul hears that the Judaizing Christians have gone on into Galatia among the churches he had founded on his first missionary journey, and were insisting that the Galatian Christians be circumcised. Doubtless these Judaizers now giving trouble in Galatia were the same who had given trouble at Antioch. At once Paul writes his great letter to the Galatians, in which he sounds the trumpet call of Christian freedom—freedom of the Gentile believer from circumcision and the Old Testament ritual law. This letter seems to have silenced the Judaizers and preserved the unity of the Church.

(h) *Council at Jerusalem* (Acts 15:1-29), A. D. 50. Through the influence of Paul this Council decided to admit the Gentiles into the Church without circumcision. Had he failed

here, the Church would have been rent in twain; but thanks to Paul, the unity of the Church is once more preserved.

(i) *Letters to Corinth*, 54-55 A. D. When at Ephesus in the course of his third journey, Paul hears that the Corinthian Church is in peril of splitting into various factions. "Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). So Paul writes 1st and 2d Corinthians in an effort to keep the Church from breaking to pieces over the old Jew and Gentile question. -Here again he is the great champion of the unity of the Church.

(j) *Epistle to the Romans*, 56-57 A. D. While resting at Corinth for three months (Acts 20:3), Paul hears that his old enemies, the Judaizers, are causing divisions in the Church at Rome (Rom. 16:17-20). Accordingly, he writes the Epistle to the Romans, the main purpose of which is to show how Jew and Gentile can both stand together in one Church on the same platform of Justification by Faith.

(k) *Arrival at Rome*, A. D. 60. Paul finds that his enemies have been very active and bitter against him. The Judaizers at Rome are insisting that Gentile converts be circumcised in order to be saved. (Phil. 1:15-17; 3:2, 18, 19). The situation at Rome is so desperate that only three Jewish Christians side with Paul on the question of the admission of the Gentiles without circumcision. These three are Aristarchus, Mark and Justus (Col. 4:10-11). Thus at Rome in his prison Paul looks out upon the whole Church of his day and sees the great danger of its unity being destroyed. So he writes Ephesians as his last appeal for the unity of the Church. It is a circular letter addressed to all Christendom of his day. It is one of the noblest, sublimest, profoundest documents ever penned. It represents the climax of Paul's long struggle for the unity of the Church. It has a great message for us today.

7. *To whom written?*

We do not know to what Church the Epistle was primarily written, but it seems reasonably certain that it was not intend-

ed solely for the Church at Ephesus. The words "at Ephesus" in 1:1 are omitted by the two earliest and most authoritative Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, and are also absent from the still earlier manuscript which Origen used. The Epistle contains no personal allusions and greetings. It is hard to believe that Paul would have omitted all personal references in a letter to Ephesus, where he had labored for three years. Marcion in the second century called our *Ephesians* the Epistle to the Laodiceans. In Colossians 4:16 there is reference to an Epistle from Laodicea, and some think that this Laodicean Epistle is none other than our *Ephesians*. Others take the view that what we know as the *Epistle to the Ephesians* was written to the Church at Hierapolis. The best view is that *Ephesians* is a circular letter addressed to all the churches of the Empire.¹³ The address was left blank in the original draft, and the destination was entered in each copy. This view agrees with the character of general discussion and the absence of all personal allusions.

8. Theme.

As the word "freedom" contains the distinctive message of *Galatians*, and the word "righteousness" contains the distinctive message of *Romans*; so the word "unity" sums up that which is distinctive to the Epistle to the Ephesians. The word "unity" is found in the New Testament only in this Epistle (4:3, 13). The word "one" occurs eight times (2:14, 15, 16, 18; 4:4, 5, 6; 5:31). The word "all" occurs fifty-one times. The Church is not only one, it is also universal; it reaches out over all races, over all barriers and divisions of mankind. "Here for the first time," declares Hort, "we hear Christians throughout the world described as together making up a single ecclesia, a single assembly of God, or Church." "What is characteristic of *Ephesians* is the vision of the universal Church, the Church of all the nations and of all the ages, the body and bride of a risen and ascended Christ, an instrument for the

¹³J. E. Symes, *Evolution of N. T.*, p. 140.

expression of his mind and heart and for the working out of his eternal purposes, by bringing all men to a knowledge of the truth and faith in him."¹⁴

All believers are parts of one divine temple, are citizens of one city, are members of one family (2:19-22). There are some who maintain that in the New Testament there is a distinction between the Church and the Kingdom. The Church, they say, is the instrument or agency for bringing the Kingdom in; the Kingdom is the culmination of the Church. This distinction may hold in some parts of the New Testament, but not in *Ephesians*. Here the Kingdom idea and the Church idea are identical. The Kingdom and the Church, from Paul's viewpoint in *Ephesians*, are co-extensive with mankind. Overlook this point, and you miss that which is distinctive of the Epistle. Here Paul projects himself into the future, and thinks of that time when every person then alive on the earth will be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the Church, the body of Christ, will be complete, the fulness of Him, who is filling the universe totally with Himself (Eph. 1:23). Paul is here speaking of the perfected and completed Church, and his conception of the Church is identical with that of the Kingdom of God.

The theme of *Ephesians* is to be found by combining certain key expressions in the book. Let us notice these expressions. The first is the unique phrase, "in the heavenlies," which occurs no less than five times, and is found only in *Ephesians* (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). The phrase denotes not a locality, but a "supra-mundane, supra-sensual, eternal order," a spiritual realm that encases and surrounds our physical universe. *Ephesians* is the Epistle of "the heavenlies," "the Alps of the New Testament." The Apostle Paul in this Epistle climbs a lofty mountain peak and takes a view of the past, present and future, and running through them all, he sees the shining river of a divine purpose that is to be realized in Christ through the Church. *Ephesians* unrolls before us the divine

¹⁴Camb. Gk. Test. on Eph., J. O. F. Murray, p. LVIII.

panorama of the ages. Paul takes his stand by the throne of God and looks down upon the events of human history. From that throne he gives a spiritual view of history. He gives us a glimpse of the eternal and world-wide purposes of God. "Ascending into these lofty regions, he views the Church in relation not to time, but to eternity; not to the nations of the world, but to the universe at large."

The second key expression is the word "mystery," which occurs six times in this brief Epistle. (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19-20) The word is found twenty times in Paul, all told. He uses it sixteen times to express the thought of the universality of the Church, the incorporation of the Gentiles into the body of Christ, the union of both Jew and Gentile in one society. *Ephesians* is the Epistle of the "mystery." It uncovers the greatest, deepest and dearest secret that ever lay in the divine mind and heart, namely, the formation of the Church in the Jewish Messiah that is destined to be one and universal. *Ephesians* proclaims the supreme secret of God, the root philosophy of the universe.

A third key expression is the word translated "dispensation." It is found six times in Paul and three times in *Ephesians* alone. (1:10; 3:2, 9) In each instance Paul uses the word to denote the carrying into effect of a prior purpose. The word in *Ephesians* conveys the specific idea that the appearance of the Church in history is the carrying out into effect of a purpose that had forever been in the mind and heart of God.

Let us notice one other key expression. I refer to the word "purpose." It occurs only twice, but is employed both times in a very significant connection. In its first occurrence (1:11) Paul declares that the formation of the Church is one among the many purposes of God. In its second occurrence (3:11) the apostle advances to a profounder truth, namely, that the making of the Church is the central purpose of God in history. Note the expression, "the eternal purpose" (3:11); literally, the "purpose of the ages," which means the purpose running through the ages, the purpose that binds the ages into one

whole, the purpose that guides, controls, directs all events of history unto one final goal. All other purposes are made subservient to this supreme purpose, namely, the formation of the Church and the whole world is governed in the interest of this purpose.

Combining these key expressions—"in the heavenlies," "the mystery," "the dispensation" and "the purpose of the ages"—we obtain the sublime theme of the Epistle: The ultimate unity of mankind in Jesus Christ to be accomplished through the Church is the eternal central purpose of God, the one far off divine event to which the whole creation moves. Theme-texts are: 1:10, 23; 2:15; 3:11; 4:6; texts which will repay most careful study.

9. *Organic structure.*

The first verse of the fourth chapter supplies the key that unlocks the organic structure of the book. "I beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called." (4:1) "The calling wherewith ye were called" refers to the first three chapters, where we have the eternal calling of the Church, or the unity of the Church from the standpoint of the ideal and call of God. "Walk worthily of the calling" refers to the last three chapters of the Epistle, where we have the "walk," or daily life of the Church, or the unity of the Church as realized in its life on earth. Thus the first verse of the fourth chapter is the link which binds together the two main parts of the Epistle and supplies also the respective themes of these two parts. But since in the special viewpoint of *Ephesians* the Church is ultimately to be co-extensive with mankind, a clearer statement of the two main divisions is: Ultimate Unity of Mankind Through the Church from the standpoint of the Divine Plan and Purpose (chaps. 1-3); and Ultimate Unity of Mankind Achieved by the Church on the Field of History (chaps. 4-6); or, The Ideal (chaps. 1-3) and Actual (chaps. 4-6) Unity of Mankind Through the Church.

DETAILED ANALYSIS.

Opening Salutation 1:1-2.

1. Writer: his personal name "Paul"; his official title "Apostle," which rests on the call of Christ and the will of God (1:1).

2. Readers: from the standpoint of God, "saints," i. e., set apart to the service of God; from their own standpoint, "faithful in Christ Jesus," i. e., steadfast because of Christ Jesus (1:1).

3. Greeting: two-fold substance—"grace" (fountain of all mercies) and "peace" (the crown of all blessings); two-fold source—God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two note-worthy features in the opening salutation: (1) Paul associates no one with himself; contrast with *Phil.*, *Col.*, *Phile.* and others; (2) no one Church is addressed, but a blank is left, that each Church may find its own name inserted by the apostle's messenger.

I. *Ideal Unity of Mankind. Unity of Mankind in Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of the Church from the standpoint of God's eternal plan and purpose, 1:3—3:21.*

1. The unity of mankind was the objective which God had in mind when He originated the Church, 1:3—2:22.

That the statement just made is the theme of this section (1:3—2:22) will appear from a study of the key verses: 1:10, 23; 2:13, 14, 15, 16. See J. A. Robinson's commentary.

(1) Origin of the Church in eternity, 1:3-23.

a. Every spiritual blessing, all in Christ and all purposed and planned by God in eternity, 1:3-14.

These blessings are fore-ordination, election, adoption, redemption, inheritance, sealing and final and complete redemption of God's own possession. These seven blessings sweep the whole gamut of God's loving and gracious purposes to mankind through the Church. Observe that the first two—fore-ordination and election—carry us back into the eternal past,

"before the foundation of the world," and that the last—final and complete redemption—sweeps forward into the eternal future; while the four blessings lying between the eternal past and the eternal future summarize God's merciful dealings with mankind through the Church in time. By tracing God's blessings back to a divine purpose in the eternal past the apostle presents the sublime conception of the origin of the Church in eternity. Verse 10 declares that the objective God had in mind in bestowing these blessings is the unity of mankind. "Unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ." Literally, "to head up the universe in the Christ."

b. Paul prays that God may give to his readers power to appreciate, assimilate and impart to others these seven blessings, 1:15-3.2

He prays that they may know three things: God's calling in the past; God's inheritance in the future; and God's power in the present. It is God's power in the present which is the guarantee that His calling in the past will be realized in His inheritance in the future. God, who chose the Church in eternity, is able to carry it through time, and at last present it faultless before His throne, as the riches of the glory of His inheritance. In verse 23 Paul speaks of the Church as Christ's body, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." The Greek word translated "filleth" is a present participle, expressing gradual progress. Hence we may translate: "The Church, which is His body, the completion of Him who is gradually filling the universe totally." Christ's body will be complete when His Church becomes universal, when every soul then living will have been brought into it. Then the unity of mankind will be an accomplished fact.

(2) Origin of the Church in time, 2:1-22.

Just here the question arises, How is the Church to assume an objective existence in time? How is the Church to pass from its subjective existence in eternity in the mind and purpose of God to its objective existence in history? How does the Church pass from existence in posse to existence in esse? That question Paul answers in chapter 2.

a. The Church began on the field of history by God's creative power giving life to souls once dead in sin, 2:1-10. "Made us alive" (2:5) sums up 2:1-10.

(a) Condition of the soul before touched by God's creative power, 2:1-3. Spiritual death; slave to Satan and to its own corrupt affections; object of the wrath of God.

(b) The change wrought—Life, 2:4-6.

The author of this change is God; it is an act of His grace and love; accomplished by our union with Christ; and involves exaltation with Christ.

(c) God's purpose in this change—to make known His grace, 2:7-10.

Every saved soul is a monument of God's grace; for salvation in general is of grace; faith itself is a gift of grace; and all our good works are fruits of God's grace in our hearts. "Amazing grace!"

b. Consequent unity of the Church, 2:11-22. "One new man" (2:15) sums up 2:11-22.

If the account in 2:1-10 of the Church's beginning on the field of history be true, then it follows that the Church is a real unity, because it has been made out of the same raw material acted upon by the same outside power. Therefore, we expect Paul to take up next in order the subject of the unity of the Church in time. This he does in 2:11-22.

(a) Former disunion of mankind, 2:11-12.

Mankind once divided into two hostile camps—Jew and Gentile; and the Gentile is Christless, Churchless, Hopeless, Godless in the world.

(b) Present union and how effected, 2:13-18.

It is in Christ Jesus; it is by His blood, not His birth, life, teachings, miracles, example; His blood effects this union first by abolishing the law that separated the Jew from the Gentile, and then by reconciling both Jew and Gentile unto God.

(c) Consequences of this union, 2:19-22.

All believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, are citizens of one city; members of one family; parts of one temple.

2. The unity of mankind ultimately achieved by the Church

will be the supreme exhibition of "the manifold wisdom of God," 3:1-13.

To make known "the manifold wisdom of God" will be the mission of the completed and perfected Church. We are accustomed to say that the mission of the Church is to save the lost. And that is true. But Paul is here speaking of the mission of the Church after every lost soul that is to be saved has been saved. What is the Church to do when it is complete and perfect? Paul answers, "It is to be a living monument of 'the manifold wisdom of God.'" When at last the Church is complete, it will be absolutely universal; that is, it will have gathered together in one body all then living on the earth. Thus it will have consummated the unity of mankind. The very existence of such a Church, embracing in a real brotherhood all nations and individuals, will itself be the visible indisputable proof of "the manifold wisdom of God." The word "manifold" means literally the many colored, or very varied, wisdom of God. "The metaphor is taken from the intricate body of an embroidered pattern," and the supreme manifestation of God's manifold wisdom will be seen in His bringing together in one loving fellowship all the nations and individuals of our earth.

(1) The formation of one universal Church is the secret of the ages, 3:1-6.

(2) To make known this secret was Paul's special life work 3:7-9.

(3) The mission of the completed and perfected Church is to make known "the manifold wisdom of God," 3:10-13.

Closing Prayer, 3:14-21.

This prayer closes the first main division of the Epistle—chap. 1-3.

Paul prays that his readers may be strong, enlightened and loving, to the end that they may be able to appreciate, at least to some extent, the eternal purpose of God to accomplish the unity of mankind through the instrumentality of the Church.

Note the vast sweep of the petitions in this prayer: (a) An inward strength (3:16); (b) indwelling of Christ in the heart (3:17); (c) firm establishment of love in the life (3:17); (d) apprehension of the full measure of the Divine purpose to accomplish the unity of mankind through the Church—"the breadth, length, height and depth" (3:18); (e) appreciation of the infinitude of Christ's love in the creation of the Church (3:18); (f) attainment of the Divine purpose for mankind—"filled unto all the fulness of God" (3:19).

Doxology unto Him who is able to grant all these petitions, 3:20-21.

II. Actual Unity of Mankind. Unity of Mankind in Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of the Church from the standpoint of the Church's achievement of that unity on the field of history, 4:1—6:20.

On Mount Sinai Moses received from God a pattern of the tabernacle with the instruction that when he descended to the plain he was to build the tabernacle according to the plan showed him in the Mount. (Exodus 24:40; 26:30.) In *Ephesians*, chapters 1-3, we have the Divine pattern, the "blue-print," of the Church as God's instrument for accomplishing the ultimate unity of mankind. In chapters 4-6 we have the actual building of the Church on the plain of history in accordance with the Divine pattern. Chapters 1-3 have been called theological and speculative, but chapters 4-6 are very plain and practical. Here Paul descends from the mountain top to the plain below where the Church is to live out its life, and as a practical Christian statesman points out specifically how the Church, under God, is to achieve the unity of mankind. To accomplish its mission, the Church is to make use of three instruments: Its own organized life (4:1—5:21); its family life (5:22—6:9); and its militant life (6:10-20).

1. First instrument by which the Church is to accomplish the unity of mankind is its own organized life, 4:1—5:21.

This section is tied together by two threads. The first thread

is indicated by the frequent occurrence of such expressions as "one another," "each other," "members of one another" (4:2, 25, 32; 5:19, 21). By these expressions Paul is emphasizing the organic life of the Church, the life of the Church as a corporate body. The second thread is revealed in the five-fold use of the word "walk" (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). By use of the expression "walk" the apostle emphasizes the daily life of the Church as the body of Christ. Combining these two threads, we reach the paramount theme of this section; namely, that the Church in every step of its daily life should maintain a harmonious, compact unity as the body of Christ. Furthermore, the five-fold repetition of the word "walk" gives us the five sub-divisions of this section dealing with the organic life of the Church. The Church is to live its corporate life by walking in unity (4:1-16); in holiness (4:17-24); in love (4:25—5:2); in light (5:3-14); and in wisdom (5:14-21). In proportion as the Church progressively maintains this five-fold "walk," it becomes increasingly qualified as God's instrument for accomplishing the unity of mankind.

(1) Walk in Unity, 4:1-16.

a. How to maintain unity, 4:1-3.

By lowliness, meekness, long-sufferingness, forbearance and moral earnestness in observing the unity of the Spirit.

b. Why maintain unity, 4:4-6.

Because of the seven fundamental unities: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one Father.

c. This unity, so far from destroying individuality, furnishes the only opportunity for the individual to use his peculiar and personal endowments for the upbuilding of the Church as a whole, 4:7-11.

d. Result of maintaining unity—growth, 4:12-16.

(2) Walk in Holiness, 4:17-24.

a. The old man of sin, 4:17-19, cf. Romans 1:18-32.

b. The new man of holiness, 4:20-24.

He is a creation by God; this creation occurs in the core of his being—"in the spirit of your mind"; the instrument of

this creation is the truth; the agent is the Holy Spirit; the pattern is the image of God—"after God."

(3) Walk in Love, 4:25—5:2.

a. What walking in love involves:

Negatively—laying aside falsehood, vindictiveness, dishonesty, putrid speech, bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, railing and malice.

Positively—putting on truth, industry, kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness—The Christian's Wardrobe.

b. Why walk in love.

Because we are members one of another, we must not give the devil a strangle hold on us, we must not grieve the Holy Spirit, we must imitate God, and because we must follow the example of Christ.

(4) Walk in Light, 5:3-14.

a. Why walk in light, 5:3-7.

Because of the surrounding darkness of sin.

b. What walking in light accomplishes, 5:8-14.

Goodness, righteousness and truth; exhibits to the world the kind of life that pleases Christ; exposes, expels and transforms the darkness of sin. See Moffatt's translation of 5:13-14.

(5) Walk in Wisdom, 5:14-21.

Walking in wisdom involves: "redeeming the time" (lit., "buying up the opportunity"); understanding what the will of the Lord is; filled with the Spirit; the subjection to one another in the fear of Christ.

2. Second instrument by which the Church is to accomplish the unity of mankind—its family life, 5:22—6:9.

Paul regards the home as a kind of extension of the Church, a microcosm of the Church. He has just described the ideal life of the Church within its own organization. Now he describes how the Church is to extend its pure and holy life into the home. He gives us here the finest description in literature of the ideal Christian home. Said King George V: "The foundations of national glory are set in the homes of the people. They will only remain unshaken while the family life of our race and nation is strong and simple and pure." As

Christian homes multiply, through the extension of the Church, we shall draw nearer to the ultimate unity of mankind.

(1) The ideal wife and ideal husband, 5:22-33.

a. Ideal wife, 5:22-24.

Her duty—subjection to her husband; ground of this duty—headship of the husband; inspiration of it—“as unto the Lord”; extent of it—“in everything.”

b. Ideal husband, 5:25-33.

His duty—“love”; measure of his love—Christ’s love for His Church; ground of it—oneness of husband and wife.

(2) Ideal child and the ideal parent, 6:1-4.

a. Ideal child, 4:1-3.

His duty—“obey,” “honor;” motive for obedience—“in the Lord”; grounds—it is right, it is enforced by an express Divine commandment, obedience to parent is the basis of all stable government, God makes a special promise to the obedient child.

b. Ideal parent, 6:4.

His duty: provoke not, chasten, admonish.

(3) Ideal servant and ideal master, 6:5-9.

a. Ideal servant, 6:5-8.

Conscience of service—“with fear and trembling”; singleness of service—“in singleness of heart”; motive of service—“doing the will of God”; spirit of service—“with good will; and reward of service—“he shall receive from the Lord.”

b. Ideal master, 6:9.

He will treat his servant as he expects his servant to treat him; will forbear threatening; will remember that both he and his servant are servants of one master, Christ.

3. Third instrument by which the Church is to accomplish the unity of mankind is its militant life, 6:10-20.

The Church must not only maintain a united, holy, loving, luminous and wise life within its own organization; it must not only extend that life into the homes of its members; it must also reach out into society in general and carry on a defensive and offensive warfare against every form of evil in the world. “The warfare here described is not the warfare of the

individual Christian for his own salvation, but the greater conflict, in which Christ leads His forces against the enemies of the Gospel, against the powers that keep mankind in slavery."

(1) The foes of the Church are personal, super-human in power, invisible, organized and prepared, 6:10-12.

(2) Therefore, the Church needs God's panoply, 6:13-20.

Seven-fold secret of a conquering church:

a. "Girdle of truth"=sincerity, opposite of hypocrisy or any form of unreality.

b. "Breastplate of righteousness"=uprightness and integrity of life.

c. "Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"=cheerful willingness and promptitude (cf. Ps. 110:3).

d. "Shield of the faith"=whole-hearted acceptance of the revelation of God made to us in Christ (cf. Gen. 15:1).

e. "Helmet of salvation"=unwavering assurance of final victory (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8).

f. "Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"=inspired utterance, such as Paul spoke at Corinth, in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor. 2:4), and such as Stephen spoke before the Sanhedrin, when his adversaries "were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:10).

g. "With all prayer," &c.=a praying Church.

The Church, possessing these seven qualities, will advance from victory to victory, until it attains unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, i. e., until it accomplishes the unity of mankind.

Concluding Salutation, 6:21-24.

1. Mission of Tychicus, 6:21-22.

2. Greetings of peace, love, faith and grace.

We cannot bring our study of *Ephesians* to a close without directing attention to the last word in the Epistle. It is the word "incorruptible." "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible" (6:24). The

same word is used to express the imperishableness of God Himself. "Now unto the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17). Thus the word signifies that "the same imperishableness which is an attribute of God Himself belongs to the unchanging order of the eternal world. Imperishableness is a characteristic of our new life in Christ, and of our love to Him." That life and that love are immortal. The Church of Christ is immortal; it belongs to a region which is beyond the touch of decay and death. "Hence, the Epistle, which opened with a bold glance into the eternal past, closes with the outlook of an immortal hope."¹⁵

"Mid toil and tribulation,
 And tumult of her war,
 She waits the consummation
 Of peace for evermore;
 Till with the vision glorious
 Her longing eyes are blest,
 And the great Church, victorious,
 Shall be the Church at rest."

. . . "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

¹⁵J. A. Robinson, *Ephesians*, p. 138.