

Our Heavenly Calling in Christ

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Paul's letter to the Ephesians has rightly been called the grandest, noblest, most majestic "mountain peak" in the New Testament range of "mountains." It has been well noted that "Ephesians focuses on the believer's responsibility to walk in accordance with his heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 4:1) Ephesians was not written to correct specific errors in a local [ekklesia], but to prevent problems in the [ekklesia] as a whole by encouraging the body of Christ to maturity in Him. It was also written to make believers more aware of their position in Christ because this is the basis for their practice on every level of life." (Kenneth D. Boa and Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The New Open Bible Study Edition*, Introduction to Ephesians, p. 1351) These topics – the believer's responsibility and basis for practice and progress toward maturity – are indeed staggering in scope. Yet these are the key subjects incorporated in Paul's letter to the Ephesians and we will see how they are more significant now than perhaps at any other time in church history.

Paul's craftsmanship as a writer is not what one particularly notices when reading Ephesians because the subject matter is so profound and compelling. Yet the structure of Ephesians is as much an element of this letter as is anything else. Ephesians divides almost perfectly into two halves – the first half focuses on what we are responsible for doing in response to and in conjunction with what God has done. The first half resounds with the phrase "in Christ" or some equivalent and these appear some thirty-five times. It is instructive to note that the first half contains *no* imperative commands at all but instead focuses completely in on God's gifts. The second half, however, includes some thirty-five or so direct imperative commands and concludes with a focus on how to "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might." (Eph. 6:10) Surely this balance and symmetry is no accident but is instead a glimpse into what it means to walk according to our heavenly works or efforts of our own but is instead the balance one attains to when one lives in total reliance upon the Spirit of God. This balance and symmetry is an expansion of what Jesus touched upon when He said, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (Jn. 4:23-24)

Two passages stand as the key to each half of Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

- "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:8-10)

- "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unanimity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:1-3)

So What's the Problem?

What problem(s) was Paul anticipating that the ekklesia as a whole would encounter? Elsewhere, Paul wrote:

- “Now the Spirit expressly (explicitly) says that in latter times some will *depart from the faith...*” and then he goes on to describe what these who have ceased to walk worthy of their heavenly calling will be like – they will be “giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrine of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” (1 Tim. 4:1-3)

- “But know this, in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving (irreconcilable), slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying it’s power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

- “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Ths. 2:3-4)

- “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

Peter wrote:

- “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly (stealthily) bring in destructive heresies (divisions, sects, *denominations*), even denying [the Lordship of] the Lord (Greek, *despotes* [1203], absolute master) who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” (2 Pet. 2:1-2)

And Jesus Himself, when asked what the sign of His return and the end of the age would be, said:

- “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the anointed one,’ and will deceive many.” (Mt. 24:3-5)

How do we know that Paul is addressing the apostasy at the end of the age? In a prophecy that Paul gave to the Ephesian elders, he said:

“From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking corrupted things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now,

brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Acts 20:30-32)

Some two or three years after this “farewell speech,” Paul writes the towering letter we now look upon as the highest peak of the New Testament and more deeply addresses the very same subjects that are so prominent in his last words to the Ephesian elders.

Say All That Again

Because so much of the prophetic insight regarding the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith, has been dismissed by the “church” – that instrument that *is* the great falling away from the faith – many people can read these prophecies under the mis-interpretations or gloss that is routinely put upon these things and never grasp the significance of the picture presented.

The primary sign of Christ’s return is rampant, prevalent deception. (Mt. 24:4, also see 2 Ths. 2:9-10) *Many* will come claiming to belong to Christ and claiming to be the appointed representative of God who has the delegated right to proclaim what God is saying – and *many* will be deceived. (Mt. 24:5) The truth of this prophecy has been obscured by the usual rendering, “...saying, ‘I am the Christ (Messiah)...’” If this rendering were accurate, we are forced to conclude that Jesus is a false prophet for throughout church history only a relative few have claimed to be the Messiah and they have never deceived but a few. But today there *are* many “pastors” and televised talking heads who stand behind their pulpits and proclaim to the large crowd seated at their feet that they are the one *anointed* to proclaim the word of God.

These *are* the heaped up (2 Tim. 4:3) false teachers who stand as the head of the sect of followers who align themselves under (or behind) this false teacher (2 Pet. 2:1), false not primarily because of his false doctrines but because of his false *position* over the people. (see Rev. 2:6, 15; Nicolaitanism, Greek, “conquer the people,” also see Mk. 10:42-43, etc.) *Many* are deceived and caught up in these dangerous and destructive denominations that teach the people to practice lawlessness (what is right in their own eyes – Jdgs. 21:25) and then call it “theology” or “Christianity.” There are at least a dozen “theological” fables (2 Tim. 4:4) that are currently being taught as “true doctrine” in many “churches.” All the while, the Lordship (the right to be Absolute Monarch) of Christ is either given mere lip service, neglected, rejected or scoffed at while men use His name to practice whatever form of unrighteousness they prefer. (see 2 Ths. 2:12) Far too many “church” congregations conform to Paul’s description of those from whom we are to turn away! (2 Tim. 3:1-5) The truth of these prophecies are obscured by the renderings of lawlessness (Greek, *anomia* [458]) as “iniquity” (Mt. 24:12 KJV, etc.), by adding “doctrinal error” to the original meaning of “heresy” (Greek, *hairesis*, [139], originally “sect or party”) and by assuming that “denying the Lord” (2 Pet. 2:1, Jude 4) had the same idea behind it as did John’s instruction regarding those who have departed from the teaching of Christ. (2 Jn. 9)

The Apostasy’s Beginning

The departure from the faith began when men rose up and drew followers after themselves – precisely as Paul had prophesied would happen. (Acts 20:30) The manner in which Paul’s prophecy to the Ephesian elders was so stunningly and precisely fulfilled, yet which went largely unnoticed by men, is eloquent testimony to the truth Jesus put forth in the parable of the wheat and the tares: “While men slept” the devil planted his sons among the sons of the

kingdom. (Mt. 13:25, 38-39) Let us look more carefully at exactly what Paul said would happen and what church history tells us did happen.

- **“From among yourselves...”** Paul was speaking to men who were said to be both elders (Greek, *presbuteros* [4245] and overseers (Greek, *episkopos* [1985], traditionally “bishop” – see Acts 20:17, 28)

- **“...men will rise up...”** Church history speaks openly of the rise or ascension of the episcopacy or bishopric over the presbytery – the bishops who stood in the place of Christ over local assemblies – and thus obscures the simple truth that some men arose from the ranks of the elders and stood over them.

- **“...speaking corrupted things...”** Ignatius of Antioch is the first recorded “church father” who taught that the bishop was *supposed* to take the place of Christ in the assembly and by 180 A.D. every major city had a bishop who presided over the functions of the local assembly. None seemed to recall that “anti” in Greek not only means “against” but also means “in the place of” and this work of the spirit of *antichrist* went unnoticed. Subtle deceptions – *corruptions* – became accepted teachings and practices and these then became time-honored traditions – traditions more sacred than God and His truths.

- **“...to draw away the disciples after themselves.”** The bishops’ followers blatantly named themselves after the particular bishop they followed but men were spiritually asleep and did not know what was really happening. And God Himself would allow this intermingling of wheat and tares until the harvest at the end of the age (Mt. 13:28-30, 39-42) but He would also allow those who would hear and obey Him (primarily by their coming out of the “Christian” idolatry practiced all around them – 2 Cor. 6:17, 1 Cor. 5:11) to “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Mt. 13:43)

These are the roots of the “church” that have now sprouted into the great apostasy, the widespread departure from the faith that occurs before Christ’s return as King of kings and Lord of lords. (2 Ths. 2:3, Rev. 19:16)

The Focus

Let us recall the focus of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, now knowing it to intentionally be a picture devoid of the corruptions Paul himself foresaw coming upon the ekklesia at some future date, and restate it in terms more plainly suited to the realities now at hand:

- Ephesians focuses on the believer’s responsibility to live his life according to our heavenly calling in Christ. Deceptions abound (eternal security, hyper-grace, faith alone, spiritual fathering, to name but a few) whose primary purpose is to relieve the believer of his personal responsibilities before God and either remove them entirely or place them upon someone else. And the clergy class (even those “pastors” who claim to oppose or even detest cergyism!) is right there to soothe, comfort and convince those who doubt and are troubled by the

shakiness of these deceptions that those impending feelings of coming judgment is “just the devil doing his job.” Yes, deception reigns among the many.

- Ephesians was written to prevent the apostasy – that is, to prevent the apostasy, an event that encompasses *many*, from becoming an event that would encompass *all*. (see Mt. 24:24) The balance of knowing more deeply and more accurately exactly what God has done for and given to us accompanied by our diligent obedience and spiritually mature attentiveness to the responsibilities He has placed upon us *is* the way of persevering unto salvation. (Mt. 24:13, etc.) Again, many deceptions abound – one can find a different “Jesus” presented at virtually every different “church.” And the gamut of how to respond to that “Jesus” runs from legalism to lawlessness to do nothing whatsoever because “He did it all.” Take your pick but all these are contaminated by death and deception.

- Ephesians was written to better instruct believers regarding their status and privileges *in Christ* because this is the basis for *everything* they do in life. Paul wrote elsewhere, “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” (2 Cor. 5:15) The more we know spiritually and experientially *of* Christ, the better able we will be to remain *in* Christ. (1 Jn. 2:27) The “church” substitutes membership, attendance and “ministry” participation for abiding in Christ and these cannot understand why only 10% (or less!) do 100% (or less!) of the work!

The great apostasy is the departure of *many* from the faith even as they continue to use (misuse!) the name of Christ and God. There simply is no way on earth or in heaven to help the many. “Wide is the gate and broad (easy) is the way that leads to destruction, and there are *many* who go in by it.” (Mt. 7:13) The only way to escape the apostasy is to become one of the few who again stand on the true Mt. Zion (the ground of the genuine ekklesia) and follow Christ wherever He leads. (Rev. 14:1, 4) It is again (still) necessary for us to “go forth to Him, *outside the camp*, bearing His reproach.” (Heb. 13:13) The truth remains that “narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which *leads to* life, and there are few who find it.” (Mt. 7:14)

The High Calling

Though the second half of the letter to the Ephesians readily divides into four parts, each section resists being labeled because of the depth and profound nature of what is being said. That is, any label, while capturing something of the gist, fails to fully encapsulate the whole thrust of the passage. But let us, nonetheless, take a quick overview of the structure Paul placed in the second half of his letter:

1. Unanimity among the ekklesia – Eph. 4:1-16

The unanimity (Greek, *henotes* [1775], whole agreement, one accord) of the ekklesia (4:1-3) is built upon the oneness of God (4:4-6) and upon the fact that we have *all* been made to drink of His one Spirit, the Spirit of God who is *One*. (1 Cor. 12:13, Mk. 12:29, etc.) From the oneness of God and through our intimate union in His oneness flows the manifold (multi-faceted, many-expressed)

grace (mercy *and* power) of God. (4:7-10) This grace is expressed trans-locally (in messengers, forth-tellers and heralds) and locally (in shepherds and demonstrators). (4:11) As these people express God's grace, new and younger converts and disciples receive the grace (mercy and power) of God and are strengthened and equipped to do the works of service that glorify Christ and God. (4:12) This is not the end goal, however, as each one is responsible for pressing on toward spiritual maturity that increasingly resembles and demonstrates Christ. (4:13-16)

2. **The new life** – Eph. 4:17-5:21

The old life must be left behind (4:17-22) and the new life must be embraced (4:23-29) or we offend and grieve God's Spirit within. (4:30-32) We are to replicate (Greek, *mimetes* [3402], "copy, imitate, duplicate") God because no one who remains in the old life will inherit their portion in God's kingdom. (5:1-5) God's judgment will certainly come upon all those who remain in disobedience and darkness (5:6-12) but we are to walk as wise, alert children of light. (5:8-10, 13-17) We are to be filled to overflowing with His Spirit (5:18-20) and be submissive (not tyrannical or overbearing) toward one another. (5:21)

3. **Relationships** – Eph. 5:22-6:9

Wives (5:22-24) and husbands (5:25-33) are those God chose to best demonstrate the mystery of Christ and His ekklesia (5:32), a relationship which must certainly center around the oneness and unanimity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) Even children (6:1-3), fathers (6:4, slaves (6:5-8) and masters (6:9) have their responsibilities before God.

4. **Mature warfare** – Eph. 6:10-20

We are to be strong (not weak) in the Lord (not our self), in the strength of His (not our) might. (6:10) We are to put on the full (not partial) armor of God so that we may stand against all the schemes of the devil (which we will know because we are strong and mature and not weak or carnal – 6:11, also see 1 Cor. 3:1) We face various kinds of *spiritual* (not physical or human) enemies (6:12) so we must have *all* the armor of God so that when all the dust settles, we are still standing. (6:13) Our armor is truth, righteousness, preparation in peace, faith, salvation – our weaponry is the word of God (not necessarily the Bible – which did not exist as we know it at that time!) and prayer (6:14-17), praying for boldness in the setting forth of the gospel even when faced with the likelihood of imprisonment, torture or execution for the faith. (6:18-20)

This *is* the high call of God in Christ Jesus – to know and withstand *all* the deceptions of Satan, especially in these last days, and continue to endure in the faith, genuinely and sincerely loving one another, those in the world and even our enemies. (Mt. 5:44) As Paul wrote elsewhere, in words that echo resoundingly in our time and season, "Therefore, my beloved, as

you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling and arguing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” (Phlp. 2:12-16)

Paul’s heart was that those he had disciple would continue on with Christ. He feared that some would not (2 Cor. 11:3, etc.) and Paul’s fears and great effort to keep them from the dire consequences that attend departing from the faith (Acts 20:31, Heb. 12:15-17, etc.) exposes the lie of much modern “theology.” Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is written to the remnant of the end of days who would face Satan’s most sophisticated and dangerous deceptions while still carrying the responsibility to live and die according to the heavenly calling in Christ upon our lives.

Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians, saying, “Grace to *all* who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” (Eph. 6:24) Certainly he meant to include us, here in the last days, in this blessing.

Let he who has ears hear.

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