

The Holy Spirit.

A STUDY OF EPHESIANS I. 11-14.

IT is almost impossible to separate these verses from each other. They hang together, not only because of a similarity of phrasing, but also because, taken in conjunction, they give to us the final product of Paul's thinking on the Christian religion. He begins this epistle, strangely enough, by a kind of parenthesis. The first fourteen verses have nothing vitally to do with the argument that he wishes to put before his readers. After his usual salutation, he breaks out into thanksgiving to God for His goodness. And then he forgets himself. Word after word of amazing power is used, and pictures as varied and brilliant as a man can make them pass before us. The whole world is swept into the influence of Christ. Man is shown as predestinated in the divine love from the very beginning of time to come to God through Jesus Christ. He is elected to righteousness and godliness before God. Christ is the Beloved, in whose blood we have redemption of sins. The divine mystery is revealed to us, God's eternal purpose to gather up all things in Christ. Men are called into an inheritance by the power of Him who worketh all things by the power of His will. Finally, those who believe in the Gospel are sealed with the Holy Spirit as an earnest of the inheritance they shall one day enjoy. It is only after telling us all that, that Paul remembers where he started, and gets back to his proper audience.

It is strange to have a parenthesis at the beginning of an epistle. It is stranger still to have one which is worth reading. But Paul often packs his best thoughts into his asides. And in these verses, which have been forced out of him without premeditation, we are given the very soul of his gospel. Even if the rest of this letter were lost, or even if all the remaining writings of Paul were lost, we should be able to judge from these fourteen verses the main things that Paul stood for. And in the last four verses, we see the final outcome of it all, the present life in the Spirit as the earnest of what we shall one day be.

But there are other ideas which Paul touches upon which it is necessary just to mention.

1. The whole work of the Christian Gospel, and particularly the whole purpose of the sealing of men by the Spirit is the effect of the express will of God "who worked all things according to the counsel of His will." This is redundant language, but the meaning of it is clear enough. At the back of all good work, there is God. Only where God works, is the work properly done. The purpose of God is first and last and all the way, in the work of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit. Two further ideas are implied. One is that God does not act arbitrarily. From eternity it was decreed what should be done. The final success of God's plans are not dependent upon any contingencies whatever. The word of God has been spoken, and nothing can turn it back. God's purposes may be delayed, but they can never be defeated. To entertain such a thought for a single second would be the absolute negation of the Pauline Gospel. Neither does the will of God operate on man *ab extra* alone, as a terrific overmastering force which man is forced to obey. It acts in accordance with human experience, with an ethical object always in view, and is voluntarily and gladly enthroned in the heart of the Christian as the ruling factor of all that he does. The will of God operates all the more effectively in that it operates by means of the will of man. And secondly, Paul expresses the absolute self-determination of God. He rules over all things. He has no law to obey, no duty to perform. He is not forced into any kind of operation by anything outside of Himself.

2. We are given a glimpse of Paul's conception of Jew and Gentile alike as being brought into the fold of Christ on the same terms. "In Him, I say, in whom also we were made a heritage"—that applies to the body of Christian believers generally, irrespective of who or what they are; "to the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory, we who had before hoped in Christ"—that applies to the Jews—"in whom ye also, having heard the word of truth . . . ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise"—that applies to the Gentiles. Two thoughts are involved here. The first is that the Gentiles are admitted into the new Israel of faith. That is the thought which we meet in all Paul's letters. His whole grasp of Christian truth stands and falls with that. And second, by being members of the new Israel of faith, the Gentiles enter into the realm of the Spirit. To be in Christ is to be in the Spirit: to be out of Christ is to be out of the Spirit. But Paul allows us to see more than he realises. He is still a good Jew. He does not cease to be a patriot when he becomes a Christian. He, more than any other, is the Christian Jew. He does not forget that the Jews inherited the promises, whereas the Gentiles have to receive something they did not possess before. The Gospel is for the Jews and also for the

Greeks, but he is extraordinarily proud of the fact that it came to the Jews first, and only through the Jews came to the Gentiles. Even before the Advent, the Jews had hoped for Christ.

3. The third point to notice is that the work of God is ethical. He deals with us so that we may live to the glory of His grace. Holiness of life is the object of the divine will in its dealings with men. That we should live to the glory of God is Paul's ethical ideal. His ethical teaching has not been studied as carefully as it deserves. He is a moralist through and through. His emphasis is on character all the time. By nature and conviction he is a Jew stressing the reality of God and the need of righteousness and holiness of life as the only worthy way of serving Him. To do the will of God is the greatest thing on earth. It is only superficially that he is a Greek, talking of mysteries and sacraments. He is thoroughly in agreement with the prophets in emphasising holiness and the glorifying of the divine name as the ideal. His ethics have a decidedly religious basis, and his ideal has a decidedly religious content. God has the same ideal for Jew and Greek. The aim of God through all creation is that mankind in its entirety should live to the praise of His glory.

4. He defines the blessings of redemption through Christ as *an inheritance*. There is no need to track all the metaphors of Paul back to their origin and to build up elaborate systems of theology upon them. Paul must be allowed the same liberty as we claim for ourselves in the use of terms. Here he is simply adopting the Jewish conviction that they were the chosen people and applying it to the Christian Church. All the blessings of God belonged to the Jews because they were the chosen people of God. He was their Father, and Israel was His son. And through the centuries, generation after generation of Hebrews entered into the inheritance of Canaan and of the promises of the future Kingdom, because they were members of the race whom God had chosen out as His children. To Paul, the secret of the divine election was Christ. Israel was chosen in order that it might prepare the way for Christ and bring Him forth. When the conduct of Israel did not fall into line with the purposes of God, the promises were withdrawn from the Jews as Jews, and transferred to the Christian Church, the company of those of whatever nation who enter into fellowship with God by faith in Jesus Christ. The Church is the new Israel of faith. The members of it receive the inheritance and enter into the promises. But that is not all. Paul stresses very emphatically the absolute nature of the divine predestination and the reality of the human will. He does not enter into the question as to how the two are to be related, but both are for him imperative. God is all-operative and yet

man is free. In the last resort, when we are trying to interpret Paul, we have to be satisfied with unresolved contradictions. The promises are the free gift of God, and yet they have to be appropriated by man and be worked out through the entire personality. We are always brought up against the contrast of what is and what is to be. Salvation is the gift of God's grace, and yet every man has to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.

Thus we are brought up to Paul's idea of the Spirit, "in whom"—that is, in Christ—"ye also, having heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, in whom, having also believed,, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory."

σφραγίς is more than once used in the New Testament in a metaphorical sense to refer to the external attestation of an ethical and inward fact. Such is the case in 1 Cor. ix. 2, Rom. iv. 11, 2 Tim. ii. 19. The servants of God were conspicuously marked as belonging to God. They had the name of God written in their forehead. There can be little doubt that the figure comes from the mystery cults, and refers to those who had passed the preliminary tests of the initiated or were marked as belonging to the god. Here particularly there is a reference to the belief that the Spirit is imparted to the Christian believer at baptism. Baptism is the symbol by which the Christian expresses his faith that Jesus is the Lord, separates himself from his past evil life, and dedicates himself to the new life. The candidate is questioned, in all probability, concerning his faith, and when he declares his willingness to follow the Lord Jesus and expresses His conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the officiating minister receives him into the Christian community by baptism, sealing the whole act by calling upon the name of the Lord. Thus baptism leads to the sealing of the believer by the sacred name. But that is not all. Generally, baptism was the means of entering into the Christian community, and this was marked and further sealed by the imparting of the gift of the Spirit as an earnest (*ἀρραβών*) of what would be poured out upon the Christian in the new age. That, in brief, is what lies behind the figure of speech here. But there are several matters which deserve serious consideration.

What is the real origin of baptism in the Christian Church is a difficult matter to decide. It seems probable that our Lord Himself neither practised it nor commanded it. It was probably adopted by the earliest Christian disciples, partly as a continuation of the baptism of John, and partly as a literal means of following in the footsteps of the Master. John had said that his baptism was merely symbolic and preparatory. It declared that the baptised had repented of their past sins and had given themselves

over to the service of the Kingdom. But it was also a promise and a foretaste of the baptism of the Spirit that would be instituted by the Messiah.¹ There are evidences that the early Christians associated their rite of baptism with the gift promised by John. For one thing, Jesus was the Messiah, and therefore the new era of the Spirit promised by John had come. Then, also, on the day of Pentecost, it was shown plainly that the new era had come with the gift of the Spirit just as had been promised by Joel. It was only natural, therefore, that the disciples should declare that Christian baptism was the baptism of the Spirit

¹ It is not to be assumed that John meant by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit in the Christian sense of the term. In fact, that is impossible, seeing that the "Christian" Spirit is essentially related to Christ. Neither must it be assumed that John is thinking about Christian baptism, for there could be no such thing until after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and of such happenings John knew nothing. It must not even be assumed that he definitely predicted a baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire (*ἐν Πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ*) as a contrast to his own baptism in water. The probabilities are that he predicted a baptism of judgment, of wind and fire (*ἐν Πνεύματι καὶ πυρὶ*). That would fit the symbolism of the fan and the threshing-floor, and the whole conception of the Messiah as one of Judgment. The tradition has been affected by the post-resurrection prediction of Jesus that the disciples would be baptised by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts i. 5). There is almost certainly connection between the two traditions. But John predicted the coming of the Messiah, and he undoubtedly followed the prophets in regarding the Messianic Age as one of great exhibitions of spiritual power. There would be warrant in his mind, therefore, for the fusing of the two traditions. But before long, it had become the generally accepted fact that John had predicted a baptism in the Spirit.

The supposition becomes even stronger when we turn to Acts xix. 1-4. This is undoubtedly an obscure passage, and the author is perhaps not extremely well acquainted with the facts. The whole of the early Christian Church believed in the reality of the Holy Spirit. That was the very bed-rock of their faith. For a body of men to confess that they did not know there was a Holy Spirit was equivalent to saying that they were not Christians. The probabilities are that they were followers of John the Baptist who had either left Palestine before the ministry of Jesus came to a head and therefore knew nothing of the claims made by or about Him, or who rejected Jesus and did not look upon Him as the Messiah whom John had predicted. We have other evidence that there was a "John the Baptist" sect in New Testament times. But if John had said that someone was coming after him who would baptise in Holy Spirit, it is extremely doubtful whether any of his followers would say with such emphasis that they knew nothing about the Holy Spirit. They would have framed their answer differently. This strengthens the theory that John made no such definite prediction.

Winstanley (*Spirit in the New Testament*, pp. 46 and 125) arguing from Acts xix. 1-4, suggests that *Πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ* should be omitted from Mt. iii. 11. This is impossible, because of the parallel passages in the other Synoptics. His hint in *Jesus and the Future*, p. 13, is much more to the point, "if indeed the Baptist spoke of 'holy spirit' at all except under the figure of wind for the winnowing."

promised by John. At first, baptism and the gift of the Spirit were not brought into indissoluble connection, but by the time of Paul, the idea was pretty well fixed. It was in the act of baptism that the Spirit was imparted.² Several causes led to this.

1. First of all, it must never be forgotten in our study of the New Testament, that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is an interpretation of a real experience. Conversion was real. It involved a radical change in character and outlook. By faith in Jesus Christ the early Christians were conscious of new powers which liberated them from the crippling influences of their old manner of life, and they were also conscious of new hope and new capabilities and gifts which came into them from the outside, and were so remarkable in their nature and in their effects that they must have come from the world of God. Moreover, the act of baptism was not a mere formality in the early Church, but rather corresponded to something very real in the inner life of the believer. For one thing, baptism meant a complete break from the past. All the early Christians had been brought up in either a Jewish or a pagan environment, and to express faith in Jesus Christ meant taking upon yourself new obligations and expressing new loyalties. Further, as the Church was then constituted, to be baptised in it was an act demanding no little courage. Further still, the Christian warfare was against sin and all the influences of this evil world, and the only power that the believer could rely upon was the power of the Messiah, whose name was invoked over him at baptism. Even further, baptism generally took place in public amid scenes of great enthusiasm and expectation. The believer had gone through a long training and discipline. He had been told times without number that there were certain rights and gifts that could belong to him only when he was definitely

² In Acts x. 44, the Spirit is imparted before baptism, while in viii. 15, and xix. 6, it is due to the laying on of hands. Here, the author has kept true to his sources. But in ii. 38, he expresses his own feelings and says, "Be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Needless to say, this cannot be taken as fully historical. It is a clear case of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. For the early church, the forgiveness of sins, the reception of the Spirit, and the entrance upon newness of life were realities. Moreover, according to the usual conception, they were connected with baptism. To join the church meant a complete break with the past and the break was symbolised in the act of baptism. When the convert openly declared his allegiance to the Lord, he opened the floodgates of his heart to the inrush of all the spiritual influences that were alive in the community. At first, the community feeling was not strong enough for that. But as soon as the idea was arrived at that the Spirit was bound up with the church, the conception was not far off that by joining the community, a man thereby came under the influences of the Spirit.

pledged as a baptised believer to the cause of the Messianic Kingdom. He had seen, from the wonderful gifts manifested by many Christians, that, by joining himself to the Christian Church, he was enrolling himself in a community in which marvellous gifts were operative. Those gifts he would covet. Further, he had to screw up his courage to take the decisive act at all. It is not to be wondered at, when we take all those facts into account, that the believer, who was already keyed up intellectually and emotionally, should be open peculiarly to psychological influences which would have lasting results, and should, when the definite pledges at baptism were taken, be conscious of the infusing into himself of new powers. It was but natural that these new powers should be taken as the gift of the Spirit who was promised in the new age and who was regarded as belonging conspicuously to the religious body the believer was joining.

2. Though the *religionsgeschichtliche* method of studying the New Testament and of finding in it deep influences of the pagan sacramental cults has gone too far, and has led scholars into many extreme statements, yet much of the Christian doctrine of baptism must be laid down to the influence of Hellenistic religion. Put briefly, Paul's doctrine is as follows. First and foremost, the believer enters by baptism into conscious communion with Christ and into the life of the Spirit, and so far as Paul is concerned, there is little difference between these two statements. Then, also, the baptised person passes through an experience of repentance for sin, forgiveness for and cleansing from it, and the imparting of newness of life. The reality of that experience is certain. It is too deeply ingrained in the New Testament to be denied. But so far as the believer could see, apart from his own preparedness and his open confession of faith, the only other two things that could call forth the power of the Spirit were the baptism of water and the invoking of the name of the Lord. All the Hellenistic religions had something very analogous to this. The whole meaning of the religion was symbolised in a secret rite, by passing through which the neophyte was made conscious of new powers and entered into mystic communion with the god. Though there may have been much of a magical and superstitious nature in connection with all this, yet the reality of the experience must again be acknowledged. When we take into account the mental and spiritual preparation of the neophyte, we need feel no surprise to find the awakening of new hope and power at the decisive moment when the ritual was celebrated. Now, as many of the early Christians had already been devotees of the cults, it was only natural that the sacraments should take on a magical significance, or that the act of baptism should be regarded as though it brought about the change in the life and was responsible

for bringing down the powers of the Spirit. In later times, baptism certainly was thought to act magically and to have an *ex opere operato* effect, but it is extremely doubtful whether that is the case in the New Testament. Paul would hardly have said that he came not to baptize but to preach the Gospel, if he looked upon baptism as in itself redemptive. But the tendency is setting in. Paul really believes with the Old Testament that the Christ is to baptise with the Spirit, and that the Messianic age is to be marked by great ethical and spiritual power. But through the influence of the cults, he has interpreted this in such a way as surely to prepare the ground for a sacramental interpretation of Christianity. When the act of baptism was fixed upon as the time of the imparting of the Spirit and the giving of new life, the time was not far distant when it would be regarded as the cause of the change.

3. But another fact must be taken into account. Few of the early Christians had any grasp whatever of a spiritual substance which did not have some material form or another. The distinction between the spiritual and the material was not nearly so finely drawn by the Hebrews as it is by us, nor indeed by any in the ancient world. That doubtless had much to do with the conception of the appearances of our Lord as being physical. In the New Testament we see the gradual materialising of the appearances, partly no doubt in order to safeguard the reality of the spiritual fact. Paul himself seems to have interpreted the appearances more spiritually than any one else, but even he held that there were material phenomena present. Also the Hebrew found it impossible to believe in the immortality of the soul. Soul without body was a figment of the imagination. Paul thought that, in the resurrection state, there was to be a spiritual body, which seems to be a contradiction in terms, although it is obvious that he is endeavouring to show that immortality belongs not to the bare and barren soul, but rather to the complete personality. Also Paul doubtless believed that there could be no influences from the spiritual world sufficiently strong to operate upon human nature unless there was the imparting of something tangible and real. The Spirit was not merely *spiritual*: it was, in some way, an extended, though very fine, substance, and it could be imparted only by some material ceremony. It was an influence which came flowing into the life from the outside, just as in the case of demons. The difference was that it was holy.

Paul speaks of the Spirit as "the earnest of our inheritance unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of His glory." Here he represents the Spirit as a sort of present deposit as a guarantee that in the Messianic Kingdom God will give immortal life to us. We are even now living in the Spirit.

We possess now the same kind of life that we shall possess in the perfected Kingdom. We are even now seated at the right hand of God. But though that may be so, the best is yet to be. The full redemption has not yet come. There are two or three points of importance involved here.

1. First, Paul shares with the early Christians the belief that the Golden Age lies in the future. Christianity is a religion of hope. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." No matter how much the truth of God may be ours, and no matter how much we may possess of the powers of the Spirit, the full secret is laid up in God, only to be revealed after the day of judgment. Christianity is an eschatological religion. It always has its eyes fixed on the future. Earthly life is a preparation for eternity.

2. Paul also shares with the early Christians the conviction that the Gospel is at once a *Gabe* and an *Aufgabe*, a gift and an achievement. Redemption, justification, the gift of the Spirit—they are all the free gifts of God. In His goodness, God has put men into a relationship with Himself in which there is no condemnation for past sins, and in which they are endowed with the Spirit of God. That position cannot be obtained by our own labour or as a reward. It is of necessity the gift of God. But the spirit is given only on ethical conditions, i.e., only on the condition that we follow its leading. It is closely related to our faith. In fact, it is the supernatural response of God to our faith. This may involve him in contradictions, because the ideas of faith and of the Spirit as a supernatural gift from the outside belong to two different conceptions of religion. The one interprets religion ethically and the other mystically. But Paul holds the two ideas firmly together. The Spirit is received on ethical terms, and it is preserved only as we give to it an ethical response. It must be allowed to redeem us completely, and that cannot be done instantaneously: it is a long process. The one who truly possesses the power of the Spirit advances more day by day in the virtues of the Spirit. Paul would not be a reliable religious teacher were that not part of his message.

3. But it must be acknowledged that he involves himself in a little contradiction. Much of his teaching is an apologetic against Judaism, and, in the main, his argument takes on two forms. One is that Judaism is a religion of law. And as against that, he elaborates his great argument about the ineffectiveness of the law to redeem and the necessity of justification by the free grace of God. Also Judaism is a religion of promise only. All through, it makes promises that it can never fulfil. Its dreams are realised only in Christ. At first, Paul was satisfied with believing that Christianity was the logical outcome of Judaism,

but his thinking brought him to the point that the two religions were absolutely opposed to each other, with different views of God, salvation, and of human duty. One was a religion of law and the other a religion of grace. And there is no point of contact between the two. Judaism suffers from a radical fault of nature, which no pruning will ever get round. It is a new religion that is needed. Paul claims that Christianity gives us a present possession. Here and now, the Christian has peace with God. Here and now he dwells mystically with Jesus Christ. Here and now he shares in the life of the Spirit. Paul has not gone so far as the author of the fourth gospel in teaching that life eternal is the present possession of the believer, or with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who sets forth Christianity, not as one religion among others, but as religion itself, in its final, absolute form. But neither of these two men could have given their messages unless Paul had prepared the way for them. Through faith, we enter here and now into the fruits of the Spirit. Here and now the believer can say, "I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me." But Paul does not carry through the thought consistently. He dwells with Christ now, but he longs to go away and be with Christ, which is far better. He has to live the life of the Spirit in the present order in the midst of many things which hinder the purity of his spiritual life. He longs to be delivered from the body, which is a drag upon the soul. There is something finer and more spiritual laid up for him, but from this he is at present debarred. And so he cannot carry through his conception to the end. Paul the Jew and Paul the Greek are in conflict. Though he lives the life of the Spirit, he is, to a certain extent, in bondage to sense. And though he lives in the era of grace and freedom, he has to struggle to make the freedom complete. To Paul, the contradiction is resolved by the thought of the sanctifying power of the Spirit. The full life of the Spirit is in the future, but it is only as the believer lives in the Spirit now and follows its leading that the full power of it will ever be his. There is a contradiction here, but it lies only in the interpretation. Paul's facts are right, true to his own experience and the universal experience of men. He has saved his religion and ethic, even though at the expense of his logic.

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