

The fourfold glorification of Christ

~Other Speakers G-L: Raymond Golsworthy:

“God hath glorified His Son Jesus.” Acts 3:13

This was the message that was carried to the world by the early apostles, and it is the heart and soul of God’s message for needy men today. Christ the Lord has been “approved of God” (Acts 2:22), and also glorified.

Most of us have our own picture of what that glorification means, and we revel in the thought of our Saviour, seated high in the glory, and surrounded by multitudes of angels who know His worth and tell it forth. May the Lord keep that picture ever before us, and enable us always to “testify what we have seen” (John 3:11).

It is with the hope of making that vision still more complete that we shall now look at the closing verses of Ephesians 1 where Paul outlines what we shall call “the fourfold glorification of Christ”. By this we mean the four separate stages in the one great glorification of our Lord.

Let us notice, first, that, in this passage, Paul is telling of a particular prayer which he has on his heart for those Ephesian believers. It is a prayer for “revelation in the knowledge of Christ” (verse 17), and Paul assures them that this will lead on to a like knowing of various other very important truths (verses 18,19). This would include a “knowing” of “the power that is on our side” (verse 19), for it is the same power as that put forth in the raising and glorifying of Christ (see verses 19-21). This, of course, is a very vital thing, for we all know how easy it is for Christians to be overwhelmed by a sense of the tremendous power that is against them. But, if we really know the power that is on our side those unnecessary fears will disappear from us. That will be one of the bi-products of God-given revelation. So, with that in mind, also, let us consider these four stages in the glorifying of Christ.

Raised from the dead

Paul begins with the statement, “God raised Him (Christ) from the dead” (verse 20). This has ever been the essence of the Christian gospel, and the early apostles knew it at a simple fact of history. They themselves had seen Him after He rose, and their own hands had “handled Him” (1 John 1:1). When they preached the gospel, they were just reporting their own personal experience. They had seen that He was alive; their own risen Lord and Saviour!

Now, in Ephesians 1, Paul is focussing on the matter of the particular power that had brought about this miracle, the death-conquering power of God Himself. Joseph of Arimathea and his sorrowing companions had lovingly laid the dead body in the tomb, believing that that was the end of everything. But then, at the appointed hour, another power began to stir, and on the third day, early in the morning, the Saviour Himself emerged from the darkness. And that, Paul says, is the power that is “to usward who believe”. As the hymn-writer puts it:

“Death cannot keep its prey: Jesus My Saviour,
He tore the bars away: Jesus My Lord!”

What a power to have on our side! We notice that Paul here used the phrase, “exceeding greatness”, and that, too, is suggestive. We could say that the power put forth that day clearly exceeded the power of Rome. The symbolic seal of Empire, for instance, placed upon the tomb (Matt. 27:66) availed nothing in keeping our Saviour in the darkness. He just brushed all that aside, and emerged triumphant.

And it was the same with the power of dead religion! Was it not those religious leaders in Jerusalem who had dared to use the Roman authorities to assist them in their determination to hold on to their own position? But that, too, was brushed aside when our blessed Saviour rose.

Deep principles, we believe, are here; principles which each one of us may apply in his or her situation. We need not be afraid of any government of this world that opposes us in our work, for a greater power is with us. Nor need we fear the far more insidious workings of dead religion. Resurrection power will overcome them all, and, indeed, will quietly use them for the furtherance of God’s own purposes. Let them rage if they will, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Psalm 2:4).

Just to illustrate this point, we might ask what earthly power could stop the sun from rising so many times every year. What army could do it, even if we equipped them with the very latest in atomic weaponry. Thus powerless is all hell against the rising up of the far greater “Sun of righteousness”, our blessed Saviour

(Mal. 4:2; see also 2 Sam. 23:4). Here is the exceeding greatness of God's power, Christ raised from the dead!

Christ at God's right hand

We may now move on to the second stage in the glorification of Christ, "for Paul then tells us that God set Him (the risen Christ) at His own right hand in the heavenly places" (verse 20b). This is what we all know as the ascension of Christ, "leading on to His enthronement" and it, too, was witnessed by those early disciples (Luke 24:50-52). How could they ever forget it, their own risen Master "carried up to heaven", even while He was in the act of blessing them! Luke gives us more details in Acts 1; the welcoming cloud, and the angels in their white apparel assuring them that Christ would certainly return! Something similar, perhaps, had been witnessed back in Elijah's day when Elijah, too, was "taken up into heaven" (2 Kings 2:1,11). In that case, the old faithful prophet was taken up in a whirlwind, and there was a chariot of fire, and horses of fire; and the younger prophet, Elisha, was the one that witnessed it. In the case of Christ, there was no whirlwind, and no chariot; just the loving hand of God gathering Christ to glory. Here was an exaltation indeed, requiring no "creature assistance", and bringing to the throne the great Redeemer of men. No wonder we are told, "They worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Lk. 24:52). With their own eyes they had seen again a mighty working of God's power "their risen Lord caught up to glory, and seated at His Father's right hand. We are reminded of the Psalmist's words, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in" (psalm 24:9).

What a conquering King is Christ, and how well-deserved His entrance into glory!

We notice, too, that Eph. 4:20 speaks of Christ actually "sitting" at God's right hand (see RV). Yes, indeed, His great redeeming work is done, and His accomplishment has been approved by God. Nothing more needs to be added; the way for us to enter heaven is fully open. All praise to Christ!

That, we have said, was the second stage in the fourfold glorifying of Christ. Can there possibly be anything more? Is not Christ already "far above all principality and power and might and dominion", not only in this world but also in that which is to come? Indeed, He is, but according to Ephesians 1, there is more to follow, and all in the one great act of God! The very next verse goes on to say "and (He) put all things under his feet" (i.e. Christ's feet). Here, then, we suggest, is a third stage in God's act of glorifying His Son. It is what we shall call:

The consequent subjugation of all things under the feet of Christ.

This, we would say, refers mainly to all those conquered enemies of the Lord being set firmly under the feet of the enthroned monarch, our Lord Jesus Christ. In pondering the verse, I visualise a picture somewhat as follows. I see the very eye of God carefully searching out every hidden corner of the universe, and then, with His upturned hand, as it were, gathering up every contrary power that has ever served the interests of Satan, and then setting that whole "world of iniquity" firmly and for ever under the feet of His enthroned Son, a majestic subjugation indeed!

Thus we have, in one sublime sentence of Scripture:

" Christ, raised from the dead;

" Christ, enthroned in the glory;

" Christ, established for ever as permanent Master over all His foes.

I can only say that this is the vision which this amazing passage of Scripture sets before me. I fully realise that by the phrase, "all things put beneath Christ's feet" we could envisage all good things as well as all bad, or evil, things, but, whichever view we take, it remains a glorious picture of Christ established in heaven as Lord over all, for ever. Here we could be excused for saying, or thinking, that God's glorifying of His Son is at last complete. But, according to the remaining verses of Ephesians 1, there remains a fourth and final moving of God's power.

There was something more which needed to be done, to complete that amazing work. And, thank God, it has been done, as we shall now see!

Christ, the Head of the body

In those last two verses of the chapter, we read of God putting all things under Christ's feet, and forthwith giving Him, the glorified One, to the church which is His body (verses 22, 23). The passage, as it stands in our Authorised Version, reads, "God put all (things) under His feet, and gave Him (to be) the Head over all (things) to the church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." We have here put in brackets

those extra words which are normally italicised in our English version. (This, we are told, is done when translators find no corresponding words in the original, but something is needed to make the sentence intelligible).

In this case, however, if we ignore these added words, we still have a statement which is intelligible, and also full of spiritual value and meaning; i.e. "God gave Him, the Head over all, to the church which is his body". In other words, the verse is simply describing a supreme gift which God, at that moment, bestowed upon His people, the church; namely the risen reigning Christ Himself! What an "unspeakable gift"; all glory to the Giver!

We could say that this "giving of Christ" was finally enacted and realised on the day of Pentecost when, by the descending Holy Spirit, the very life of our risen Lord was poured upon, and into God's waiting people, thus making them one organism with Christ Himself.

This, then, was the fourth and final moving of God's power in this one great act of glorifying Christ; the highly exalted One extended into the church, His body. It could be regarded as the great divine metamorphosis: Christ personal becoming Christ corporate! As the caterpillar becomes the glorious butterfly, so God's Christ is extended, released, enlarged! Summing everything up, then, we have something like this:

- 1) Resurrection: God raised Christ from the dead.
- 2) Exaltation: God set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places.
- 3) Subjugation: God put all (things) under His feet
- 4) Extension: God gave Him to the church which is His body. What a complete, and gracious, glorifying of our blessed Lord!

Paul concludes what he has been saying by stating that the church is thus the "fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (verse 23), or, in other words, "the fulness of Christ". The word for "fulness" here is "pleroma", something which completes something else, as a roof completes a house, or wings complete a bird. (The Lord even used it for a patch that completes an incomplete garment! Matt. 9:16). The church, then, is just the completing of Christ. As a head would be incomplete without a body, so, in a very real sense, Christ is incomplete without His people! Wonder of wonders, we are all parts of Him! That is why we can go forth in His name, and minister in His name, and pray in His name. And does not this throw light on Paul's word to the sectarian Corinthians, "Is Christ divided?" We would say that the Corinthian believers were dividing up among themselves, but Paul still says, "Is Christ divided?" To him, that was the real anguish of the situation!

And is it not the same today? We all need to see ourselves as incorporated ones, and totally indivisible one from another.

There is so much that could be said, and needs to be said, in relation to this vision of Christ exalted and Christ extended. Oh, may the Spirit Himself be our Teacher. And let us pray for one another that we may enter into all the privileges, and all the responsibilities, of belonging to a Christ who has been glorified!