

AN ENTIRE

COMMENTARY

UPON THE WHOLE

EPISTLE OF ST PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS:

WHEREIN THE TEXT IS LEARNEDLY AND FRUITFULLY OPENED WITH A LOGICAL
ANALYSIS, SPIRITUAL AND HOLY OBSERVATIONS, CONFUTATION OF
ARMINIANISM AND POPERY, AND SOUND EDIFICATION
FOR THE DILIGENT READER.

PREACHED BY

MR PAUL BAYNE,

SOMETIME PREACHER OF GOD'S WORD AT ST ANDREW'S IN CAMBRIDGE.

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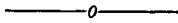
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TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL MY MUCH HONOURED FRIENDS,

SIR JOHN DINGLEY AND SIR ROBERT WOOD, KNIGHTS;

MERCY AND PEACE IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE MULTIPLIED.



SIRS,—In this age of pamphlets true and false, my stationer, as a friend of piety, hath (with a dis-wonted boldness) adventured to print and send forth this worthy Commentary on that divine Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, which, as at other times it might be useful to the church of God, so, especially at this time, it may be of use (by the novelty) to take off the hearts of Christians from idle pamphlets too much in request, and pitch them on the grave and weighty points of religion, which herein are pithily opened and applied to the conscience. The epistle in general may be called (by the apostle's own direction) his knowledge in the mystery of Christ, chap. iii. 4. In the two first chapters, he discourseth of election and the free grace of God in saving his people by Christ, Gentiles as well as Jews. In the third, he recapitulates his doctrine, and applies it to this church of Ephesus, praying they may have the sense, use, and comfort of it in those troublesome times, where-into the churches were soon cast. In the fourth and two last, he exhorteth this people to all holy duties which do best suit with so holy doctrine as he had delivered. And if in these days our apostle were consulted withal as such an oracle deserveth, and this holy interpreter, who had both his name and spirit, neither Arminianism and popery on the one side could so prevail upon the world as it hath done, nor on the other side profaneness and carnal-mindedness in them that turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. For the church's sake are these things thus published, that, though Israel play the harlot, yet may not Judah transgress; and it will be good wisdom in Christians, amidst all these fears and distractions (which prove also distractions to many a man's course of piety, especially in reading good books), to withdraw them-

selves from the noise and dust of the world, and redeem as much time as they can for perusing those holy truths which are here skilfully and in a spiritual manner expounded. Most unhappy is that man who is too well known among others, and at last dieth unknown to himself.

To you both, noble Sirs (being, by God's providence and goodness, near neighbours both in place and piety), I am bold to dedicate these meditations of that worthy servant of God, whose name is yet so sweet in the church: which I have adventured to do, not so much to crave patronage for the work, which is able to defend itself, as to give you thanks publicly for your love to this poor town of Kingston, for your kind respect to us the preachers, and your daily attending at the courts of wisdom, which might be a good example to provoke the dulness of our backward and negligent people. And oh that this late affliction might awaken us all out of that deep security which had too much possessed us! The sword is now come to second the word, that what was not done in a mild way may be done in a rugged. And happy we if we sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon us. I shall be glad if, by perusing these treatises at leisure, there shall be anything added to your zeal in religion, that you may get Christ more into your hearts and advance him more in your lives, which will be your true honour and lasting comfort, when all titles and good things of the world will vanish into nothing. And thus, commending you both, with all yours, to the grace of our heavenly Father, I humbly take my leave, and entreat your pardon for this my boldness, being,

Your worships' much obliged,

KINGSTON, Dec. 12. 1642.

W. JEMMAT.

DR SIBBES HIS JUDGMENT OF THE AUTHOR OF THIS COMMENTARY ;

IN A PREFACE TO THE EXPOSITION OF THE FIRST CHAPTER,

PUBLISHED DIVERS YEARS AGO.

NOTWITHSTANDING the world's complaint of the surfeit of books (hasty wits being over forward to vent their unripe and misshapen conceits), yet in all ages there have been, and will be, necessary uses of holy treatises, applicable to the variety of occasions of the time ; because men of weaker conceits cannot so easily of themselves discern how one truth is inferred from another, and proved by another, especially when truth is controverted by men of more subtle and stronger wits. Whereupon, as God's truth hath in all ages been opposed in some branches of it, so the divine providence that watcheth over the church raised up some to fence the truth, and make up the breach. Men gifted proportionably to the time, and as well furnished to fight God's battles, as Satan's champions have been to stand for him ; neither have any points of Scripture been more exactly discussed than those that have been most sharply oppugned, opposition whetting both men's wits and industry ; and in several ages men have been severally exercised. The ancientest of the fathers had to deal with them without (the pagans), and especially with proud heretics, that made their own conceits the measure of holy truth, believing no more than they could comprehend in the articles of the Trinity, and natures of Christ, whence they bent their forces that way, and for their matter wrote more securely. Not long after, the enemies of grace, and flatterers of nature, stirred up Saint Augustine to challenge the doctrine of God's predestination and grace out of their hands, which he did with great success, as fitted with grace, learning, and wit, for such a conflict ; and no Scriptures are more faithfully handled by him than those that were wrested by his opposites, and such as made

for the strengthening of his own cause. In other writings he took more liberty ; his scholars, Prosper, Fulgentius, and others, interested themselves in the same quarrel.

In process of time men, desirous of quiet, and tired with controversies, began to lay aside the study of Scriptures, and hearken after an easier way of ending strife, by the determination of one man (the bishop of Rome), whom virtually they made the whole church ; so the people were shut up under ignorance and implicit faith, which pleased them well, as easing them of labour of search ; as upon the same irksomeness of trouble, in the eastern parts, they yielded to the confusion and abomination of Mahometism.

And lest scholars should have nothing to do, they were set to tie and untie school knots, and spin questions out of their own brain ; in which brabbles they were so taken up, that they slightly looked to other matters. As for questions of weight, they were schooled to resolve all into the decisive sentence of the see apostolic, the authority of which they bent their wits to advance ; yet then wisdom found children to justify her ; for scriptures that made for authority of princes, and against usurpation of popes, were well cleared by Occam, Marsilius, Patavinus, and others, as those of predestination and grace by Ariminensis, Bradwardine, and their followers, against Pelagianism, then much prevailing. At length the apostasy of popery spread so far, that God, in pity to his poor church, raised up men of invincible courage, unwearied pains, and great skill in tongues and arts, to free religion so deeply enthralled ; from whence it is that we have so many judicious tractates and commentaries in this latter age. And yet will there be necessary

use of further search into the Scriptures, as new heresies arise, or old are revived, and further strengthened: the conviction of which is then best when their crookedness is brought to the straight rule of Scriptures to be discovered. Besides, new expositions of Scriptures will be useful, in respect of new temptations, corruptions in life, and cases of conscience, in which the mind will not receive any satisfying resolution but from explication and application of Scriptures. Moreover, it is not unprofitable that there should be divers treatises of the same portion of Scriptures, because the same truth may be better conveyed to the conceits of some men by some men's handling than others, one man relishing one man's gifts more than another. And it is not meet that the glory of God's goodness and wisdom should be obscured, which shineth in the variety of men's gifts, especially seeing the depth of Scripture is such, that though men had large hearts, as the sand of the sea-shore, yet could they not empty out all things contained; for though the main principles be not many, yet deductions and conclusions are infinite, and until Christ's second coming to judgment, there will never want new occasion of further search and wading into these deeps.

In all which respects, this exposition of this holy man deserves acceptance of the church, as fitted to the times, as the wise reader will well discern. Some few places are not so full as could be wished for clearing some few obscurities; yet those that took the care of setting them out, thought it better to let them pass as they are, than be over bold with another man's work, in making him speak what he did not, and take them as they be. The greatest shall find matter to exercise themselves in; the meaner, matter of sweet comfort and holy instruction; and all confess that he hath brought some light to this excellent portion of Scripture.

He was a man fit for this task, a man of much communion with God, and acquaintance with his own heart, observing the daily passages of his life, and exercised much with spiritual conflicts. As St Paul in this epistle never seemeth to satisfy himself in advancing the glory of grace, and the vileness of man in himself, so this our Paul had large conceits of these things, a deep insight into the mystery of God's grace and man's corruption; he could therefore enter further into Paul's meaning, having received a large measure of Paul's spirit. He was one that sought no great matters in the world, being taken up with comforts and griefs, unto which the world is a stranger; one that had not all his learning out of books; of a sharp wit and clear judgment. Though his meditations were of a higher strain than ordinary, yet he had a good dexterity, furthered by his love to do good, in explaining dark points with lightsome similitudes. His manner of handling questions in this epistle is press and school-like, by arguments on both sides, conclusions,

and answers, a course more suitable to this purpose than loose discourses.

In setting down the object of God's predestination, he succeeds him in opinion whom he succeeded in place; in which point divines accord not, who, in all other points, do jointly agree against the troublers of the church's peace in our neighbour countries; for some would have man lie before God in predestinating him, as in lapsed and miserable estate; others would have God in that first decree, to consider man abstracted from such respects, and to be considered of as a creature alterable, and capable either of happiness or misery, and fit to be disposed of by God, who is Lord of his own, to any supernatural end; yet both agree in this, first, that there was an eternal separation of men in God's purpose; secondly, that this first decree of severing man to his ends, is an act of sovereignty over his creature, and altogether independent of anything in the creature as a cause of it, especially in comparative reprobation, as why he rejected Judas and not Peter. Sin foreseen cannot be the cause, because that was common to both, and therefore could be no cause of severing. Thirdly, all agree in this, that damnation is an act of divine justice, which supposeth demerit; and therefore the execution of God's decree is founded on sin, either of nature or life, or both. My meaning is not to make the cause mine by unnecessary intermeddling; the worthiness of the men on both sides is such, that it should move men to moderation in their censures either way. Neither is this question of like consequence with others in this business, but there is a wide difference between this difference and other differences. And one cause of it is the difficulty of understanding how God conceives things, which differs in the whole kind from ours, he conceiving of things altogether and at once without discourse, we one thing after another, and by another. Our comfort is, that what we cannot see in the light of nature and grace, we shall see in the light of glory, in the university of heaven; before which time, that men should in all matters have the same conceit of things of this nature, is rather to be wished for than to be hoped. That learned bishop, now with God, that undertook the defence of Mr Perkins, hath left to the church, together with the benefit of his labours, the sorrow for his death, the fame of his worth, an example likewise of moderation, who, though he differed from Mr Perkins in this point, yet shewed that he could both assent in lesser things, and with due respect maintain in greater matters. If we would discern of differences, the church would be troubled with fewer distempers; I speak not as if way were to be given to Vorstian, lawless, licentious liberty of prophecy; that every one, so soon as he is big of some new conceit, should bring forth his abortive monster; for thus the pillars of Christian faith would soon be shaken, and the church of God, which is a house of order, would become a Babel, a house of confusion; the dole-

ful issues of which pretended liberty, we see in Polonia, Transylvania, and in countries nearer hand. We are much to bless God for the king's majesty's firmness this way, unto whose open appearing in these matters, and to the vigilancy of some in place, we owe our freedom from that schism that troubleth our neighbours.

But for diversity of apprehensions of matters far

remote from the foundation, these may stand with public and personal peace. I will keep the reader no longer from the treatise; the blessing of heaven go with it, that through the good done by it, much thanksgiving may be to God in the church. Amen.

R. SIBBES.

Gray's Inn.

A COMMENTARY UPON THE EPISTLE OF ST PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS.

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CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.*

Before the words be entered, it is fit to premise some few words concerning, 1, the occasion; 2, the scope; and, 3, the method of this epistle. First, the occasion was the state of the church, foreseen by Paul, Acts xx., 2 Peter i. 15. 2. The scope is to teach them the doctrine of God's most rich grace, and to stir them up to every duty, in way of thankfulness. The parts of the epistle are three: 1, the preface, in the two first verses; 2, the matter or substance of the epistle, which reacheth from the 3d verse to the 21st of the sixth chapter; 3, the conclusion, thence to the end. In the preface, three things are contained: 1, the author's name, who is described by his office, 'an apostle;' which is further amplified, first, from the person to whom he appertained, or for whom he was employed; secondly, from the efficient cause by which he was made an apostle, 'the will of God.' This answereth to our subscriptions, for we write our own names under our letters. 2. The names of the persons to whom he writeth, who are first propounded more briefly, with the place they were at, 'saints at Ephesus;' secondly, it is expounded more clearly whom he meaneth by saints, not such as are written in the pope's calendar, having divine honour done them, but such as are 'faithful in Christ.' Again, these words may seem to lay down persons; first, more specially, as the saints at this place; secondly, more indefinitely and generally, as true believers on Christ everywhere; but the note of quantity wanteth to make this sense; for Paul would

have spoken in this manner, to the saints at Ephesus, and to all that believe on Christ, if this had been his meaning, as in 1 Cor. i. This part of the preface answereth to our superscriptions, wherewith we endorse our letters; for on the back of our letters we use to express the name of our friend to whom they are directed. The third thing in this preface is his salutation. The words of this verse needing no further explication, we will note out the chief instructions which offer themselves to our observation, and so pass on to the second verse.

Doct. 1. First, that Paul doth use to set forth his calling, before he entereth his matter with them, it doth teach that ministers must inculcate to themselves, and such as they have to deal with, their callings from God. St Paul doth not text this forth in the forefront of every epistle, 'Paul, a servant of Christ,' 'Paul, an apostle of Christ,' but that he found it a fit thing to be proposed, both for his own sake, and theirs with whom he had to do. Even as civil magistrates do give out their writs in the king's name, with mention of the office they bear under him, to the end that due respect might be given them of the subject; so this great church-officer doth mention what place he held under Christ, the king of his church, that the things delivered by him might be accordingly received. In a word, this is good for the minister himself, and for the people. How can he speak the words of God, as the mouth of God, with reverence and all authority, if he considers not that God hath commanded to him this piece of service?

Doct. 2. The ministry is a work so weighty, that no man of himself is sufficient for it. Now, what can more assure me that I shall be made able, than to look

at God, who hath called me to such an office? Princes call not their subjects to any service, but that they see them furnished with things requisite.

Doct. 3. Lastly, whereas the difficulties and enmities which encounter faithful ministers are many, how could they look to be shielded against all, but by holding their eyes on him who hath called them? For people this is behoveful, for it maketh them sanctify God in hearing, while they look not so much at man, as at God teaching by man, Acts x. 33, 1 Thes. ii. 13. It maketh them obey those that are over them, when they have conscience of this, that God hath sent them; as a servant, when he thinketh his lord or lady hath sent any to him, doth readily do that he is commanded.

Use. The use of which is to stir up ministers wisely to teach this, and lay it as a foundation. People likewise must willingly hear it; for to acknowledge God's call in such as minister to them, is their great advantage. When we harp on this string much, then people think it a spice of pride and vainglory in us, coming only from hence, that we think ourselves not enough respected. Thus Paul himself might have been misconstrued. What! Nothing but Paul an apostle? Cannot Paul have the office of apostle, but all the town must be of counsel? But as St Paul feared not to prefix this, howsoever his custom might be depraved, so must we imitate the same, in prudent proposing the ministry we have received from God, though evil-minded men misinterpret the fact to their own destruction.

Paul an apostle. Observe more particularly, first, the quality and degree of him who bringeth the doctrine of this epistle to us. He is an apostle, one of the highest degree, an ambassador of state, sent from Christ, for so the word signifieth. Look, as kings have their superior and inferior magistrates, from the chancellor to the constable, so Christ, the glorious King of his church, hath divers orders of ministers, the order of apostles being supreme, and most excellent above any other, Eph. iv. And look, as kings despatch lords ambassadors into other countries, concerning important business; so the Lord Jesus, now about to ascend, did send forth his twelve apostles to publish the charter of the world, even forgiveness of sins, and free acceptance to life eternal, to all such as would take their pardon forth, by a lively belief. Many were the privileges of these apostles. 1. They were immediately, no person coming between, designed by Christ. 2. They were infallibly assisted, so that, in their office of teaching, whether by word of mouth or writing, they could not err. 3. Their commission was universal, throughout all nations, though the usual exercise thereof was limited and determined by Christ, doubtless for the greater edification of the church. 4. They could give, by imposition of hands, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which Simon Magus would have redeemed. 5. They were eye-witnesses of Christ,

and saw him ordinarily and miraculously in the flesh, as Paul.

Use. That, therefore, a person of such quality doth bring us these things, must stir us up to seek into them, and entertain them accordingly. Should the king send his mind by the meanest messenger, we would receive it dutifully; but if my lord chancellor, or some great statesman, should in person publish his pleasure, we would attend it more reverently. The atheism of these times is much to be lamented. Our superstitious ancestors, if the pope's nuncio or legate came amongst them, bringing the pope's blessing, indulgences, relics, such wares as were the mock of the world, oh, how were they received, how were their commodities (if I may so call them) entertained! But our atheism is such, that we let these things lie by, many of us not asking after, nor vouchsafing to read with devotion, these things which the true legates of Jesus Christ have brought unto us, and left published for our sakes.

Secondly, We see hence the firmness of all those things delivered in this epistle; for it was not so much the apostle, as God in him, who indited these things; as when a lesson is sounded forth upon an instrument, it is not so much the instrument as his who playeth upon it. So here, 'I preach not myself, but Christ the Lord,' 'an apostle of Christ,' that is, an apostle, whom Christ doth take and own as his apostle, who is employed about him, 2 Cor. iv. And, indeed, this phrase doth import his being made by Christ, rather than include it; and, therefore, 1 Tim. i. 1, he is said, 'an apostle of Christ, by the commandment of Christ;' where an apostle of Christ is an apostle pertaining to Christ, now possessed of him, and employed about him, having been advanced to this place by the ordination of God and Christ.

Doct. 3. Now Paul's fact holding out this as his glory, that he was Christ's apostle, doth teach us, that we are to account it our greatest dignity that we belong to Christ. We see in earthly servitors, their glory is so much the greater by how much their lords and masters are in greater pre-eminency. Hence it is that we sue for the cloth of noble persons especially, who are great favourites with the king. We see it so, and not without reason, for it is a matter of countenance, of protection; yea, if they be in good place about them, of great emolument. But how much more glorious is this, to retain to the King of glory, and that not as a common servitor, but in some special place, very near him! What greater honour had Moses, Abraham, David, than that God's name was called on them, 'Abraham the friend of God,' 'Moses my servant,' David, 'Oh how thy servant loveth thy statutes!' Ps. cxix.

Use 1. Again, our duty that we owe to the name of our God, doth require that we should truly confess this, and boast of it, as our highest preferment, that he hath made us his servants. Let us therefore who