

Strefa Zero June 10, 2017

Connected Talk 1

The theme is **Connected**, based on Ephesians 4. I want to look at this theme first in the whole epistle to the Ephesians, which is one of the most coherent letters in the Pauline writings. We can only understand Chapter 4 correctly in the context of the whole letter and especially of the preceding chapters. I love this letter to the Ephesians. People have told me that my ministry is a big picture ministry, presenting the whole plan of God in its overall coherence and unity. Ephesians is very much a big picture letter, though it combines this huge vision with much practical teaching.

In Ephesians, everything is about connections. I see three major connections in this letter. In this first teaching I will outline the three connections, I will speak about their connectedness, and then teach in more detail about the first two connections. In the second teaching, I will look at the third connection in more detail.

There are three major connections being made in Ephesians,

1. between the **heavenly** and the **earthly**.

The heavenly realm plays a prominent role in Ephesians. Right at the beginning we read “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (Eph. 1: 3).

The overall purpose of God is to gather everything into one, into perfect harmony, “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” (Eph. 1: 10).

See chapter 3, there is mention that “the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 3: 10).

In the last chapter, we have reference to “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”. (Eph. 6: 12).

2. between the **beginning** and the **end**.

Similarly the cosmic all embracing vision of Ephesians speaks of the absolute beginning and of the final end. “He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Eph. 1: 4). God’s plan is “to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment” (Eph. 1: 10).

3. between **Jew** and **Gentile**.

The third connection central to the teaching of Ephesians that I will develop in my second teaching is between Jew and Gentile or non-Jew. This distinction is particularly clear in the first three chapters, where there are “we” passages and there are “you” passages. “We” means the Jewish believers, and “you” refers to the Gentiles or non-Jews. So in chapter 1, verse 12, we read “in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” And then verse 13 moves to “you”, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” (Eph. 1: 13).

As we shall see this distinction between Jew and Gentile becomes central to this letter, as the reconciliation between Jew and the Gentile is the foundational reconciliation that makes possible the

unity in diversity of the Church. For that, wait for the second teaching.

The Connector is the Holy Spirit

With all these three connections, the connecting instrument, the connecting power, the connector is **THE HOLY SPIRIT**.

The Holy Spirit and the first Two Connections

First connection. The Holy Spirit is the link between God in heaven and us on earth. The Holy Spirit bridges the **space** gap.

So the Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit, does not pray to a distant God. When we pray we are not trying to make contact with a distant God, who may or may not hear our prayer, or who may or may not be interested in us and our lives. Through the Spirit the Lord dwells in us, and we are in Him. The Holy Spirit of God is within us. Through Jesus and the Spirit we are permanently connected with the heavenly realm.

Second connection. The Holy Spirit is the link between us in 2017 and Jesus the Christ, who lived, died, and rose again almost 2,000 years ago. The Holy Spirit bridges the **time** gap.

So as Christians living almost 2,000 years after the Passover of the Lord, we are not at any disadvantage. The Gospel handed down to us through the generations is made actual, alive, and contemporary through the Holy Spirit.

Key Words in Ephesians

1. **Mystery** (Eph. 1: 9; 3: 3-6, 9; 5: 32)

The eternal plan of God hidden from all ages, but made manifest in Jesus and revealed by the Spirit. Mystery reaches from the beginning to the end.

2. **Fullness.** Fullness of times (Eph. 1: 10). Fullness of God (Eph. 1: 23, 3: 19). Fullness of Christ (Eph. 4: 13).

Note 'full armour of God' (Eph. 6: 11, 13). Fullness speaks of the end, the goal both of the means and of the final reality.

3. **Access.** "For through him, that is Jesus, we both, Jews and Gentiles, have access to the Father by one Spirit." (Eph. 2: 18). The Greek word is *prosagoge*.

More on the first Two Connections

1. between the **heavenly** and the **earthly**.

The heavenly realm plays a prominent role in Ephesians. Right at the beginning we read "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Eph. 1: 3).

The overall purpose of God is to gather everything into one, into perfect harmony, "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." (Eph. 1: 10).

How is it that we believers still upon the earth are connected even now with the heavenly realm? We find the answer in chapter 2. "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2: 6). It is a constant message of St Paul that we baptized believers are in Christ. He is in us, and we are in Him. But Jesus has already ascended into heaven, in a moment we shall see how this is described in Ephesians. So if we are in Christ and He is in heaven, there is a sense in which we are already established in heaven. To say we are 'seated' with Jesus in glory is also to say that we reign with Him, we have the victory in Him. So how does Ephesians describe the ascension of Jesus? We find it in chapter 4. "What does he ascended mean except that he also descended to the lower,

earthly regions.” This appears to be a reference to the descent of Jesus into hell that we profess in the Creed. “He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.” (Eph. 4: 9-10).

In the Hebrew view of the world at the time of Jesus, it was common to hold that there are different layers above the earth. Some spoke of three layers, so St Paul speaks of being “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12: 2). But some spoke of seven levels, with seven seen as a symbolic number for what is complete (seven day week, later seven sacraments). Paul doesn’t appear to be interested in teaching about the number of layers in the heavens, but he takes some layers for granted. What was presupposed was the world view found everywhere in African cosmology, that above the earth, between humans and God, is the realm of demons and unclean spirits. So we read in the last chapter of Ephesians about “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6: 12). What mattered to Paul was the decisive victory of Jesus over the forces of evil. This victory was demonstrated when Jesus ascended “higher than all the heavens”. This is saying that He has power and authority over all the lower levels, including the demonic. When it is said that we are seated with him, that means that in Jesus we have all authority over the powers and dominions beneath Him.

2. between the **beginning** and the **end**.

Here too we need to pay attention to the Hebrew worldview. We find several references in the New Testament to different ages or aeons, to this age and the age to come. Note that it is always **age** (*aionos*) and never **world** (*kosmos*). We find this language in Ephesians. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realms, far above all authority, power, and dominion, and every title that can be given not only in the present age but also in

the one to come (Eph. 1: 21). The coming age is not for a different world, but a total transformation of the world we know.

See Eph. 2: 7 (the coming ages), Eph. 3: 9 (for ages past).

The Holy Spirit who connects the beginning with the end is the Holy Spirit of **promise** (Eph. 1: 13). The end is the content of God's promises.

Note **the Holy Spirit of promise** (*to pneumatikis epangelias to hagio*), NOT **the promised Holy Spirit**. The latter would mean that the Holy Spirit was promised in the past, e.g. by the prophets, but is no longer promised. The actual text means that the Holy Spirit is always the Spirit of promise, that the promises are not all fulfilled until the final completion.

Eph. 1: 13-14 is key here. "You were marked with a seal, the apostle writes, with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance". Interruption here, the Greek has *ho estin arrabon tes kleronomias hemon*, so that English has to use two words to translate *arrabon*, deposit and guarantee. It means that the Holy Spirit with which the believer is sealed is the start foundation of which the full realization is guaranteed in the future. So we continue, "until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory." (Eph. 1: 14). This means, we are already God's possession, we belong to God, but He has not yet taken full possession. When Jesus comes, God will take full possession of all those who belong to him. In 1 Corinthians 15, this full possession is the resurrection of the body, "then when he comes, those who belong to him." (1 Cor. 15: 23).

This language is also used in Eph. 4: 30. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

The Hebrew world view spoke of different ages or aeons, often contrasting this age and the age to come.

Jesus spoke in this way. Matt. 12: 32 (the sin against the Holy Spirit), Luke 18: 30 (“receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come, eternal life”), 20: 34-35 about marriage.

Note that it is always **age** (*aionos*) and never **world** (*kosmos*).

The coming age is not for a different world, but a decisive new phase in the story of this world and this creation.