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Scripture Truth

JANUARY, 1977

THE END OR THE BEGINNING?

J. STODDART

Some New Year thoughts from the Olivet Discourse.
Matthew 24: 1-51

THE end of one year heralds the beginning of another. The door of time closes on accomplishment or failure, but opens with hope and expectation as long as we are permitted to remain here. It was not a New Year scene depicted in Matthew 24 but the end of an important era in Jewish history and the promise of a new day predicted by the Lord Jesus. Many interpretations have been put upon the so-called Olivet discourse and it is not the writer's intention to add yet another. Much has already been written, in the Holy Spirit's power, which is relevant and reliable, but we seek with the Lord's help a message from these verses which might help and encourage fellow-believers at a time like this.

It was the end of the Lord's ministry to Israel when he "went out and departed from the temple," never more to enter that building which He once had called "My Father's House" (John 2: 16). But having summarized their rebellious history in chapter 23 He concludes, with Divine pathos, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together . . . and ye would not! Behold, your house (the temple) is left unto you desolate." Having uttered these sorrowful words on leaving the temple, how unbelievably inept were the attempts of the disciples to interest the Lord in the grandeur of the buildings of the temple. How thoroughly out of sympathy with their Master's feelings they were at that moment! They were, however, to be quickly yet graciously disillusioned, for He tells them that what seemed to them to be so permanent and beautiful a structure (a matter for much Jewish pride) was to be presently demolished and ruined stone by stone. As history amply bears out, this prophecy was fulfilled to the letter when Jerusalem was laid seige by the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70.

Suddenly realising that Jesus had hinted at impending and momentus events to take place in their world, they are alerted to question Him privately, asking (no doubt with serious interest), "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age (or world)?" Are we not thankful that their questions evoked from the Lord Jesus the answer which occupies the rest of ch. 24 and that satisfied their enquiring hearts—and ours? But what lesson can we learn from this passage so far? Is it not that the close of another year would teach us the impermanence

of everything here, that apparently stable things are to vanish to make way for what is abiding? But, like the disciples, we enquire, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?" Will this new year 1977 see the realisation of the Church's long cherished hope and the promise of the Saviour's words at last fulfilled, "Behold, I come quickly." (Rev. 22 : 7, 12 & 20)? We do not and cannot know the answer to that, but certainly His coming is twelve months nearer and Christians everywhere believe that wonderful event cannot now be long delayed. Hopefully we feel it must be very near!

The first great and important thing in the Lord's reply to the disciples' question is a warning as to being deceived (v. 4). How necessary this was, for deceivers and deception have abounded throughout the centuries of the Church's history. And prophetic truth has possibly been the most distorted and misunderstood of all. So we do well to give the most earnest attention to the exact words of the Lord Jesus in this passage and in every other reference to His coming again.

We must fully recognise the need of the Holy Spirit's help and guidance to understand the teaching of these Scriptures, for Jesus Himself said, "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth: . . . and He will show you things to come." (John 16 : 13) We need not be misled or deceived, therefore, as we have a Divine Teacher Whose power and wisdom would ensure our clear understanding of things essentially beyond our ken. It is evident that the Church's hope—that which we often speak of as the Rapture—is not the subject of Matthew 24 nor could this have been understood by the disciples in reply to their question at this time. The Lord's reply thus, in the main, refers to the hope of Israel, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and so related to His Kingdom on earth. We may feel, however, as we read verses 5/8 that at least some of the signs spoken of by Him, as preceding His coming are very familiar to us having already appeared in our contemporary world. This is indisputably true for they are spoken of as a continuing feature of the "**beginning** of sorrows," "but the **end** (of the age) is not yet". Who could fail to recognise even in the most recent times the exact features of these sorrows? Wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes in divers places increasingly dominate the contemporary scene and fill the daily news bulletins of the media.

So far we have discerned much that is applicable to our day and generation, and "the end is not yet", for the Church, the Bride of Christ has not yet been raptured to her eternal destination in Heaven, and "the mystery of iniquity doth already work, only He Who now letteth (restrains evil) will do so until He departs from the scene." (2 Thessalonians 2 : 7) The Holy Spirit indwelling the Church is here referred to and doubtless only His presence frustrates the full development of iniquity as described by the Lord from verse 9. Although not actually referred to here, the rapture will have taken place and the Church securely introduced to her heavenly Home, the Father's House above, from verse 9 onwards. As already said, it is not the present intention to expound the details of this chapter but to draw help and encouragement for these days in which so much stress and depression

abounds. In what way may we gain this from verses so fraught with such ominous teaching ? Firstly then, let us see that the evils that abound in this our day are but "the **beginning** of sorrows" and we shall be spared the far more serious events that follow verse 9, for then the Lord will have come for His Church and the first $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of the 7 years of Tribulation will commence with the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom (v. 14). The preachers of those days will be afflicted and hated, but the power of God will sustain them through the whole period of their witness which is 1260 days or three and a half years. This will be the first half of Daniel's 70th week (see Daniel 9 : 25/27) 69 weeks of years (483) having been fulfilled up to the time of the Cross. In the middle of this 70th week there will follow what is spoken of as the great Tribulation (. 21). During this last period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years (referred to by the Lord as "the end") (v. 14) the most terrible events in the history of the world will take place—the fulfilment of prophecies contained in Daniel 9 and many another Old Testament passage, also the appearance of the Lawless One, The Man of Sin, referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2 : 2/4 and the two powerful beasts of Revelation 13 will operate under the direct authority of Satan.

Is this then the **end** of everything on earth or is it the **beginning of a new day ?** In verse 29 the Lord now speaks of the signs of His coming again "with power and great glory." This will usher in His millennium kingdom when He, once despised and crucified, will reign for a thousand years "from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Psalm 72 : 8) (also Revelation ch. 21). This, of course, will mean judgment, Satan securely incarcerated for 1000 years in the bottomless pit, the beast and the false prophet already cast into the lake of fire, (cf. Revelation 19 : 20) the living nations judged (cf. Matthew 25 : 31/32) and every offensive element gathered by the angels out of His kingdom (cf. Matthew 13 : 41). What a glorious day will then begin under His beneficent reign of righteousness and peace ! The writer of Psalm 72 surely looked far beyond the magnificent régime of Solomon in describing the blessings of the King and His kingdom. No more wonderful description of the millennial reign of Christ is to be found in all Scripture.

So we have seen how the end of one era heralds the beginning of another. Thus with the end of the year that is past with its memories of joys and sorrows, achievements and failures, we enter another New Year with its promise and hopes, confident that it could be the harbinger of our brightest prospect—that of seeing Him, "Whom not having seen we love ; in Whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter 1 : 8) Well might J. G. Deck pen the lovely hymn we delight to sing :— "In hope we lift our wishful, longing eyes, Waiting to see the Morning Star arise ; How bright, how gladsome will His advent be, Before the Sun shines forth in majesty." Let us lift up our hearts in expectation of His coming in this New Year of grace, 1977.

PAUL'S LAST WORDS: A CHARGE ON LATER GENERATIONS

COLIN CURRY

(STUDIES IN 2 TIMOTHY)

1. PRELIMINARY MATTERS

Introduction

[The studies in 2 Timothy on which we now embark can be traced to a series of bible studies at Cheltenham in 1973. Some of the material covered then is recalled here, though much of what is now presented is the result of further meditation on these themes. In so far as the ensuing papers derive from the earlier studies the writer acknowledges his debt to all who contributed to them.]

Paul's last letter of all, his second to Timothy, has a special quality about it. Cause for considerable disquiet had arisen in the area of the interests and service of Christ, to which Paul and Timothy were deeply devoted. From a natural viewpoint things had taken a serious turn for the worse. Within the pale of the Christian profession distressing trends were apparent. Many were turning away from the faith. Corrupting influences, distortions of Christian truth and practice, were gaining ground and finding an increasing following. Also, Paul's position as a prisoner at Rome had deteriorated. Hope of release had now gone. The case against him had been heard; judgment had been deferred for a while, but the capital sentence seemed inevitable. His days were numbered; his martyrdom was near. Timothy is urged to come quickly; Paul has a great desire to see him. Whether he saw him again or not, however, important words for Timothy were needed, and must not fail to be written. Thus there came into being a necessary part of the written Word, especially important for post-apostolic times. It has invaluable guidance for days of declension, for Timothy's successors as well as for Timothy himself. Its importance for today can hardly be overestimated, the adverse trends which gave rise to the letter having proceeded far further.

Written in this situation, as a personal letter to his younger fellow-worker, with a great bond in Christ between them, the letter has an evident pathos and tenderness, as well as a strong note of urgency. But it shows a remarkable dignity and fortitude too. It shows clearly that distressing things in the Christian area need not lead to defeatism, and there remains a source of strength to be drawn upon "in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 : 1). There is always good reason for courage and persistence in the godly life. Along with the urgency of this instruction a real sense is given of the supply which is available to follow it. Paul provides a model of confidence and encouragement for his reader (whether Timothy, or any of a later generation). This is not confidence which belittles the problems, but a well-founded confidence, based on the surety of all that God is and does, and has made available in Christ Jesus.

Two additional broad aspects of the letter are covered briefly in this opening paper, so as to leave the field clear for a stage-by-stage progress through the epistle later. First, the setting of 2 Timothy in the N.T. is worth noting ; the way it forms a sequel to 1 Timothy, and the fact that it shares an outlook common to several late-written letters by other N.T. writers. Secondly, the briefest of outlines of the whole course of the epistle is attempted, in order to provide a background for the piecemeal treatment to come later.

The Setting of the Letter

Second Timothy is clearly a follow-up letter in the light of a new situation. The purpose of the first letter is clearly stated near the end of its third chapter. In Paul's absence, **behaviour** of the right kind in the house of God, amongst the community of believers, is explained to Timothy. He needs this instruction himself (chapter 4 particularly), but it is also for transmission to others, by word and by example. This guidance about orderly ways in the Christian gathering is pressed on Timothy. He is charged repeatedly with his responsibility to take a lead in these directions (see 5 : 21 and 6 : 13, 14, for instance). The prevention of empty pursuits is another part of his charge (1 : 3, 4, 18); and he is warned against evil activities and teachings in chapter 4, and required to pass on this warning.

It is evident therefore that the first letter, no less than the second, has its own urgent character. In the main, however, it speaks about **orderly behaviour** amongst Christians, as God would have it. But the second letter is more concerned with proper action when this God-given pattern has to a large extent broken down. In times when perversions of the true Christian teaching and practice seem to be on the upgrade, when man's order and teachings would seem to swamp God's order of things, how is a godly person to conduct himself ? This is the new question which 2 Timothy answers. On the whole the approach in the second letter is fairly soft-handed. Directions to Timothy using strengthening and kindly-persuasive words seem specially suited to the darker situation in which this last letter is set.

Indications of the darkening prospect within the broad field of nominal Christianity are not confined to 2 Timothy alone. Indeed there is a whole body of N.T. teaching which envisages this. Our Lord Himself looked ahead to see the enemy at work in the same field as the good seed had been sown. It was **His** teaching in the first place that the adversary would introduce what is spurious and false ; and that false accretions would change the face of Christianity in the world into something very different from essential Christianity. Nevertheless there would remain something of extreme value to Him at the heart of it (Matthew 13). Paul warned, long before his imprisonment, about "grievous wolves" entering the Christian flock, and perverse influences arising within it (Acts 20). Even 1 Timothy notes weaknesses, and other ominous signs, current at the time. When the second letter was sent, the state of departure and falsity was a sadly worsening reality. How to hold fast the pure and vital truth, in the face of all this masking of it, was the urgent problem needful to face.

Furthermore, letters from other writers such as John, Jude, and Peter (2 Peter especially) face the same kind of trend. While these letters have great encouragements, to cling to what is pure and real, they also have much about distinguishing the false from the true; about guarding against what is deceptive though plausible; warnings about the morass and the false moral state into which departure from the faith can lead; tests to detect what is Christian in word only, what is pseudo-Christian and what is anti-Christian. The urgent note in each of these letters is plain. John speaks of the critical hour that had come. Peter says he will go on reminding his readers until the close of his life. To meet this urgent matter Jude wrote a different letter from the one he first intended.

It would surely be foolish to read the N.T. with a blind-spot for this part of its teaching. These facts about the state of affairs in Christendom are foreseen in plain terms, and there is no wisdom in complacency about them today, nor in ignoring their existence. Rather let us seek to gather up the positive guidance given in the presence of this situation, and to obey it in practice.

Outline

We can conveniently outline the letter by thinking of the qualities required from Timothy in facing the new situation. In days when observable Christianity (in the broad view) has departed from the norm, in times when weakness and falsification of its true character are widespread, what kind of persons are needed? The answer to this, in its various details, is the main thread through the letter. The incentives towards such behaviour, and the ample support available if this line is taken, are also made clear. The papers which follow in this series will centre upon those attitudes which seem to be urged upon Timothy as the letter proceeds.

The first chapter stresses the need for **courage**, for instance. There is a great need to stand up and be counted, to be unashamed of the great testimony of our Lord which must be maintained, to kindle anew the flame of devotion to Him, to shake off timidity and all undue disheartenment. New strength for this can be gathered by focussing on the unshakeable things that God has done and determined in Christ, which can never be violated nor gainsaid. This is the opening message of the letter. In addition the need to consider oneself entrusted with something is pressed. What was committed to Paul (that fixed deposit of N.T. truth, including those specially high-quality parts of it entrusted to Paul to make known) was handed on to Timothy to receive, to value, to preserve, and to transmit to others. It is a great responsibility, but also an honour. Strength and grace for such a task can certainly be found in the ascended Christ.

The earlier parts of chapter 2 show that discipline and effort will be required in a life after this pattern. The need for **wholehearted commitment** to our calling as Christians is illustrated in various ways: a far from soft life is to be expected if loyalty to our Lord is its guideline. But it is a life which has its rewards, not least the approval of the One Who has called us into it. Then the later parts of this chapter

show that **purity** is a highly essential matter in the Christian life. Purity of approach to the word of truth, purity of adherence to its teaching, purity of heart and motive, purity from liaison with what is iniquitous and with teachings and persons who undermine the truth and damage the faith of others. Many things have to be avoided and others to be followed assiduously if one is to honour the Master and be suitable for His service.

Chapter 3 draws a dark picture of the coming landslide away from genuine Christianity (in its true inward character). It was to happen broadly in the very area where the light of Christianity has shone, and where its profession still remains. Against the general drift in this direction Timothy is to stand firm. He is to continue as he had begun. The sources of such **staying-power** in the face of decline are reviewed. Not the least of these is the availability of the Scriptures and their power to equip the man of God in all situations.

The depth of feeling underlying the farewell words to Timothy in chapter 4 is apparent. Yet there is strength and triumph in these words too, and not a shred of self-pity or defeatism. Paul's undaunted spirit shines out in the whole chapter : in the solemn rallying-call of the opening verses, to preach the word, to commend and reinforce it by his way of handling it ; and in the call to **faithful consistency** with the message committed to him, pursuing to the end the trust placed upon him, with alert and sober judgment of all the trends around. The force of all this is assisted by the fact that Paul is commending the very pattern which he had so constantly shown fighting the good fight, keeping the faith, and keeping it to the end.

FIVE VILLAGES — GEORGES ANDRÉ

INTRODUCTION

"Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3, 18)

THE following pages present the Person of the Lord Jesus Himself. However, such a subject is extremely vast and for that reason it has to be limited. We have divided it into five parts, each being concerned with a different period in the life of our Saviour, as it was lived out around five villages :

BETHLEHEM—where He was born ;
NAZARETH—where He was brought up ;
CAPERNAUM—the centre of His ministry in Galilee ;
BETHANY—in Judea, the only place perhaps where He found a few hearts who understood Him, and where He displayed His glory in a special way ;
EMMAUS—where the risen Man opened the Scriptures to two disciples whose hearts burned within them.

Five villages, five stages in the **life** of Jesus on the earth, where He revealed that glory about which the Apostle could state, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the

glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth". (John 1, 14)

What constituted in God's sight the value of the journey which the Israelites made from Egypt to Canaan ? Not the times of weariness and difficulty, which they endured reasonably well, but "in order to make that journey the journey of God's Israel, the Ark must be in their company, borne by a people ransomed by blood out of Egypt, and tending, in their faith of a promise, to Canaan." (J.G.B.) That Ark was a type of the person of Christ Himself, when He was here below. Is it not He who should have the first place in our hearts, and be the centre of our affections and thoughts ?

While considering so marvellous a Person, two dangers are to be avoided. In Matthew 11, 27 the Lord Himself could declare, "No one knows the Son except the Father". There is the unfathomable mystery of His Person, into which we cannot enter ; "He who from all eternity was one with the Father, become man, surpassed, in the deep mystery of His being, all knowledge save that of the Father Himself". (J.N.D.) Therefore, it was only with holy reverence that a person in those days could gaze upon the Ark ; only the priests dared carry it, and nobody, on pain of death, was allowed to look inside. So it is with the Person of the Son, "The Son, the only begotten Son, the Son of the Father, emptied Himself that He might do the divine pleasure in the service of wretched sinners. But will the Father suffer it, that sinners, for whom all this humiliation was endured, shall take occasion from it to depreciate the Son ?" (J.G.B.)

On the other hand, someone could say : this mystery is so great that it is beyond my grasp. However, the Word specifically invites us to contemplate this "glory as of the only begotten of the Father", to "consider Jesus" (Hebrews 3, 1), to "behold with open face the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3, 18). What a marvellous subject is this moral glory of the Lord Jesus ! "Our first duty to that light is to learn from it what He is. We are not to begin by anxiously and painstakingly measuring ourselves by it, but by calmly, and happily, and thankfully learning Him in all His perfect moral humanity. This glory is departed ! There is no living image of it here. We have its record in the evangelists. The disciples knew Him personally. It was His person, His presence, Himself that was their attraction. It is more of this we need". (J.G.B.)

G.A.

THE WORLD IN JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE ——— JOHN BARNES

YOUNG believers sometimes consider the world to have been somewhat maligned by older Christians. They seem to imagine that maturer Christians speak from a soured and disillusioned point of view and that this colours their thinking concerning the world. The apostle John's great epistle, written when he was probably a very old man of vast experience, whose insight had not only been developed by an

experimental knowledge of the world, extending over the greater part of a century, but had also been enriched by astounding visions of glory and revelations of truth, is written from no embittered standpoint, but from a spiritual elevation few have been privileged to reach.

In chapter 2 : 16 he gives us his analysis of the world ; the evil system, set up by the Devil in opposition to the divine system which finds its centre in the Son of God's love. This wicked organization is analysed for us in this deeply instructive verse, "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." We cannot fail to notice this sweeping and comprehensive indictment of this system of evil. John does not condemn part of it as evil, leaving us the difficult task of sorting out what is harmless and what is dangerous, but he condemns it entirely, in every part of it ; "All that is in the world." Some of that which forms part of the world may seem to many of us to be fairly innocuous, but the highly experienced writer excludes no aspect of the world and denounces the whole as evil. The three expressions referred to would appear to include every aspect of the world system as it is set in opposition to the Father. John says, "It is not of the Father but is of the world." What the Father has introduced is radically and permanently opposed to the corrupt régime which the Devil has so cunningly imposed on mankind with a view to detaching men from God and attracting them to himself. It has frequently been pointed out that the temptation presented to Adam and Eve concealed these three principles and that they failed to detect the evil and fell. The temptations which the Lord Jesus was subjected to in the wilderness were the same, though differently presented, but He did not fail. "There is nothing new under the sun". The world which Satan used to try to deflect the Son of God from the path of obedience to the Father's will was the same which he used successfully to cause the fall of the first human pair and which he has used efficiently ever since to the damage of the entire race.

In the remainder of the epistle John speaks of the world in seven ways, suggesting a full development of evil, and against each of these aspects he sets an opposing view of truth, so bringing into perspective the Father's scheme of blessing. It is to these seven aspects I would like to draw your attention.

1. The world is IMPERMANENT. 2 : 7

There are other features of the world which we shall be thinking of shortly, but it is remarkable that the first aspect which the Holy Spirit emphasizes is that of impermanence. I believe this can be thought of in more than one way but I wish to refer to one only. The world is a transient system and it is passing away. This is graphically illustrated for us in the physical world. If a shaft of sunlight penetrates an otherwise dull room we may observe thousands of tiny fragments floating about, reflecting the rays of light. These are minute particles of cloth, paper, wood, and many other things which are wearing away all the time. Even metals and other hard objects which we consider to be enduring are not exempt from this process of wear and tear. "Gold which perisheth." is a Scriptural allusion to this fact. Odours,

pleasant and unpleasant are believed to be caused by infinitesimally minute fragments of matter, floating in the air and impinging on our olfactory organs, so inducing a sensation, pleasant or unpleasant as the case may be. Each tiny particle emitted is thought to reduce the volume of its source by so much. The material world could therefore be said to be wearing away. In a similar way the moral system we call the world is passing away. It will not last for it is breaking up all the time. A great ray of divine light flooding into the squalor of this world makes this fact clear to the believer. The immense increase in learning and technology has not advanced the world a moral inch and it is perishing in its own corruption before our eyes. Was there not something to look forward to, "some better thing," something of divine origin, the future for the universe would be bleak indeed. But the apostle gloriously directs our gaze to another view and he does so in the words which follow immediately. "He that doeth the will of God **abideth for ever**." In contrast to the dying world there is another sphere which will never break up but which is destined to abide for eternal ages, and there are men and women who will eternally enjoy the blessings of that sphere, not because they are in any way superior, in themselves, to others but because they have put their faith in the Son of God. John the baptist says of the Lord Jesus. "He is preferred before me because He was before me." That eternal, abiding system was conceived in the minds of divine Persons before anything that exists was made and is centred in the Person of the Son who has come from the Father to perform His will. The foundations rest securely in His finished work. The privilege we have of being brought into the blessing of such a scheme cannot be measured.

2. The world is IGNORANT. 3 : 1

Chapter 3 begins with a marvellously illuminating view of the Father's love. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." The word translated "manner" is evidently rooted in the idea of "place, location," and might so suggest a kind of love which is from another country altogether ; a kind of love foreign to our way of thinking. This is true, for the Father's love towards us is totally alien to our modes of thought. In the ways of the world, how would a person react towards those who murdered his only son in whom he reposed his confidence and whom he expected to carry through his plans and ambitions ? He would exact revenge if he could, and the greater his power the more rapidly and decisively would he act. The Father's attitude towards us is so different as to be entirely alien to our ideas.

As God's children, what marks Him should mark us. In fact, in 2 Peter 3 : 11 the word manner is the same as in 1 John 3 : 1 and quite plainly teaches us that since the present world is soon to disappear the believer ought to be living in a manner alien to its ways, for his links are with the world to come which the Father will soon introduce publicly, and with the new universe (which will succeed the present one) where righteousness will dwell. Of this the world knows nothing and is abysmally ignorant of its principles, unrighteousness

being one of its salient features. No one would be so foolish as to suggest that men of the world are ignorant. There is an immense reservoir of know-how in almost every imaginable field of research, but divine things are beyond the ken of the most enlightened human mind, and the world has no means of breaking into that sphere of knowledge. Indeed, as our text informs us, the believers are, themselves, a mystery. "The world knoweth us not because it knew Him not."

But the Christian is not left in ignorance. The next verse goes on to speak of the fact that we are introduced into a circle of knowledge. John says, "We know." There are many things we do not know and many others which we know only partly. We do not know, as he tells us, what we shall be like when the Lord appears, but this we do know; we shall be like Him. This brief letter, referring to the enlightenment the Christian enjoys, uses the verb 'to know' over thirty times. It is a letter which lets us into secrets inscrutable to the finest minds on earth, unenlightened by the Spirit of God.

3. The World is INJURIOUS. 3 : 13

"Marvel not if the world hate you." It is one of the most profound mysteries of human history how the world has promoted a campaign of hatred against believers of all dispensations. It began with what a Christian poet has called, "The first, if not the foulest murder. . .", the killing of Abel by his brother Cain. Scripture gives us the reason. His own works were evil and his brother's righteous. This viciousness has run through history reaching its culminating act of criminality in the crucifixion of the Son of God on Golgotha's stark tree. Many of history's most horrific deeds have been perpetrated on innocent victims by those who thought they had a right, by violent means, to modify their religious beliefs. The world is brutally intolerant. Some of its most dangerous elements have cloaked themselves and their activities under a religious garb. The scribes and Pharisees did so in their day and the Inquisition did so at a later date, but the principle of evil was identical. The Lord Jesus seems to have considered this to be the feature of one moral generation and lays at it's door all the righteous blood spilled on earth from Abel's day. It would seem to be of little importance what religious name is used; the principle of violence remains the same. (Matthew 23 : 35)

John goes on, in the same verse, to describe the spirit of genuine Christianity. "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." Love is never injurious. It is righteous but not intolerant, and where violence, intolerance and injustice predominate, love does not dwell. "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." This is a most searching text. Where there is divine life there is love. The two must be found together because they go together. If we claim to have the life but do not have the love we shall be found to be liars.

4. The World is IMPIOUS. 4 : 3

The world will not have God. Despite some loud claims to the contrary and a kind of lip service paid to the name of God in high places, the world is, in reality, an impious system. The Christian circle is indissolubly linked with the confession of the Lordship of Christ. See Romans 10 : 9. The spirit of antichrist marks the world ; Christ is thrust aside and His place is usurped by a man elected by men, or by a man powerful enough and ruthless enough to enforce his will or his influence on the masses. Any Hitler, any pope—even any pop star will do, but not Christ, the Lord of all. This attitude was already evident in John's day and its power in the world of our day is emphatic and becoming increasingly dominant. It is NOT of God.

The Christian contrast is immediately given in the following verse. "Ye are of God." The simple believer is in a different category altogether to the most advanced in the non-Christian circle. They belong to that which is in opposition to God and His Christ and have banded themselves together for this purpose, as Psalm 2 tells us. They may not be openly so and have not, perhaps, so declared themselves. Indeed many would be deeply hurt to be told this, but the Scriptures are plain. "He that is not with Me is against Me." The system is not of God. The believer is of God ; he owes everything to God, recognises every blessing as from Him. It is true that creatorially speaking all are of God ; "we are also His offspring," but the Christian is of God in that he has life from Him and is in His family, and he delights to bring God into his circumstances instead of shutting Him out.

5. The World is INFERIOR. 4 : 4

People who follow the world's pursuits closely would be highly amused to be told that what they have is greatly inferior to that which is enjoyed by believers. John is quite sure, however. "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." The evil one who activates the world system is a fallen spirit. He is evilly disposed towards God and everything connected with Him. Scripture states him to be the world's prince : he rules it authoritatively. He is also called its god, demanding allegiance. Both politically and religiously the world is dominated by this malevolent, fallen being who imposes his own brand of inferiority on the whole complex.

On the other hand, that great Divine Person, the Holy Spirit of God indwells each believer. "He shall be in you," the Lord promised His disciples. Into the Christian's life He brings the power, the wisdom and the love of Divine Persons and makes available illimitable resources of energy and intelligence, inaccessible to those entrapped in the world system, however clever they may be. We mostly feel our smallness, weakness and ineptitude, and rightly so, but these terms and limitations are inapplicable to the great Person who has deigned to indwell us. The whole power and wisdom of the Godhead are at His behest, and no power or combination of powers in heaven, on earth or in hell can equal, not to say surpass, the infinitude of might at His command. No matter how great we may conceive the power of

the devil to be, it is finite. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

6. The World is ILLUSORY. 4 : 5

The world is busy with a vast propaganda enterprise and is energetically presenting its modes of thought, its principles of evil and its ambitious designs on a grand scale. The book of the Revelation tells us of three unclean spirits like frogs which come out of the **mouth** of the dragon, out of the **mouth** of the beast and out of the **mouth** of the false prophet. The word mouth, thrice repeated, cannot be without significance. The period of the late war and the eventful years since have provided convincing evidence of the dangerous effect and efficiency of loud-mouthed, evil propaganda, and of how capable it is of stirring the unthinking or the unwary into violent activity. These three spirits are to be seen in a yet future day but it may be worth remembering that frogs develop from tadpoles and it is possible that we have the tadpoles today. The antichrists of John's day spawned a prolific progeny and their evil propaganda assails our eyes and ears night and day, leading millions astray.

John again brings to our notice the salvation of the believer from these quagmires of corruption. If the world listens to this evil it is because they are on the same "wavelength". We are not. The apostles were of God (v. 6) and those who are also of God, hear and are influenced by the truth which those apostles taught. The divine revelation communicated to us in the writings of these servants of Christ commends itself to everyone who is of God. We may feel ourselves to be poorly instructed and not very intelligent, but because we have community of nature with the apostles, what they teach in their letters makes its own appeal to our hearts. We are not taken in by worldly illusions of greatness, or peace in our time, or some man-made millennium or whatever else they may suggest in their utopian dreams. We are able to distinguish between the truth of God and the error of men. We do make mistakes but the general truth is that the Christian is not deceived by the airy theories foisted on an unsuspecting mass of spiritually unenlightened men.

7. The World is INIQUITOUS. 5 : 19

John says, "The whole world lieth in wickedness," or, as some read it, ". . . in the Wicked one." There is no doubt who this person is. In the parable of the Sower, recorded in each of the synoptic gospels, the Lord gives an explanation of the parable. The birds of the air which snatch away the seed are variously explained. They represent the enemy of our souls. In Mark's account he is called Satan ; in Luke, the Devil ; in Matthew, the Wicked one. So we need be in no doubt as to the identity of the person who controls the world so thoroughly that it is said to "lie in him." John is, once again comprehensive in his assessment. He tells us that the **whole** world lieth in the Wicked one. Every part of it, political, religious, philosophical or whatever else, is under his control and subserves to his ends.

But if the whole world lies in the Wicked one, the whole company of the saints lies secure in the **True One.** "We are in Him that is **True.**" The contrast between the evil case of the unbeliever and the glad destiny of the Christian could scarcely be more clearly underlined. "This", concludes John, "This is the true God and eternal life." Small wonder, surrounded as we are by so much that is evil, small wonder that John warns the divine family to beware of idolatry. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." I suppose it would be true to say that an idol is anything which or any person who challenges the total supremacy of the Lord in our lives. John cannot have lightly concluded so weighty a letter with this warning. We may not be inclined to be led astray by the world's politics, literature, religion or some of its other well known aspects, but there is certain to be something of it which makes a particular appeal to our minds, socially, commercially or in some other way. Anything at all which would tend to come between us and God, to lessen His influence in or control of our lives has to be excluded. Little children of the Father cannot afford to have their communion with the Father and with His Son interrupted in any way.

RECOLLECTIONS OF RIPON : 1976

THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE ——————— J. S. BLACKBURN

1. SAMUEL

Samuel's Birth

From the days of Joshua the tabernacle had been set up in Shiloh, and this name is prominent in the Samuel story. It was the place where, for the time being, Jehovah had placed His Name. "Shiloh, where I set My Name at the first." (Jeremiah 7 : 12) Samuel was born in circumstances unfolding in connection with the tabernacle at Shiloh. It is a charming picture of godliness in family relationships and in worship at God's centre. Hannah was childless, and a very special feature of this family life, immediately related to Samuel's birth, was Hannah's prayers, and the entire sympathy which existed in all family matters between Hannah and her husband Elkanah. The record centres round these two features of their family life—Elkanah's devotion to the worship of Jehovah where His Name was placed, and secondly, Hannah's prayers. These were two dominant influences which under God, made Samuel the man he was.

First, then, let us consider the family life as centred on the place where Jehovah's Name was placed, Shiloh. Year by year, at the appointed day, they went up to the Name of Jehovah at Shiloh to worship and sacrifice. On that day, the Name of Jehovah was a gathering centre which drew the pilgrims from all parts of the land. I hardly need to point out how exactly we have in Christianity, in complete

finality, what corresponds to this. Please do not let your familiarity with the New Testament passage close your mind and heart against taking a fresh look at it now. "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18 : 20) Here is one of only two occurrences of the word 'church' in the Gospels. It may be that you will have to conclude that, although you have been familiar with the verse for years, you have not yet been conquered by it.

Matthew 18 : 20 has been one of the great formative verses for Brethren, and as such, it stands in contrast, first with all denominational names. In practice, it means the steadfast refusal of any other name for their regular gatherings, than that they gather to the Name of the Lord. Their hearts are won by what they will experience there, the presence of the Lord. The superlative appeal of this character of our gatherings is the promise ; "there am I in the midst of them". Attention is often drawn to what we lack, but we experience the presence of the Lord in the midst ; and do you really believe that anything can be lacking if the Lord is there ?

Perhaps we could think of this as a message directed specially to young married couples. Is yours a family where the husband is firmly set in the unalterable practice of assembling in the Name of the Lord alone ? Is yours a household in which the wife has learned to solve the deepest difficulties by praying through ?

Hannah's prayers must have had a most pronounced formative influence making Samuel the man, for was he not given in direct answer to her prayer, and his birth celebrated by her praise ?

Samuel's Call

Of course, the great event of Samuel's childhood which determined what manner of man he was to be was his call in the temple. The story is one of the most familiar in all the Bible. It has never been better re-told, and its message pointed than in the familiar hymn :

Hushed was the evening hymn,
The temple courts were dark ;
The lamp was burning dim
Before the sacred ark ;
When suddenly a voice divine
Rang through the silence of the shrine.

O give me Samuel's ear—
The open ear, O Lord !
Alive and quick to hear
Each whisper of Thy word ;
Like him to answer at Thy call,
And to obey Thee first of all.

All the circumstances vividly portray a state of declension in the priesthood so serious as to herald its imminent dissolution. The Word of Jehovah only rarely reached the people, (3 : 1) and there was no

vision. Eli lay down and his eyes were dim. The lamp was about to go out in the temple of Jehovah. **But** Samuel was set to minister to the Lord. Through the message given to Samuel he became known as the person to whom the Lord had spoken, so that he would be able to speak directly from the Lord to the people, that is, he became known as a prophet of Jehovah.

The story so dramatically recounted in the hymn is the story of how the Lord made His voice heard by Samuel. The Lord wants to make His voice heard by each one of us. There was difficulty in its reaching him because he did not **expect** to hear it. Is this a message directed especially to youth ? So often you think you get nothing from the meetings because you are not expecting to get anything. Expectation of getting something from the Lord would lead you to pray for it. And by this time your attitude would be so different that your ears would be no longer shut and asleep to what He is saying to you all the time. When, on this first occasion, the Lord's voice reached Samuel, it transformed his life. What is **your** life to be ? From that night onward Samuel's life was, in the hands of the Lord, one of the most effective of all, because it led, through the anointing of David, away out there in the future to the fulfilment of God's counsel. It all came about because Samuel's ear was attuned to the call of God.

Samuel's Message and Power

For a few words on Samuel's message, we turn to 1 Samuel 7. All the house of Israel lamented after Jehovah. (v. 2) They had come to realise again that the link with Jehovah was the most precious thing Israel ever possessed. And Samuel "spake unto all the house of Israel, saying,

"If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts
put away the strange gods . . . from among you
prepare your hearts unto the Lord
and serve Him only
He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

Thus were set out the conditions in which the Lord would come in for them. Every line warrants the most prayerful perusal. And the great aim of serving the Lord in those days was victory over the Philistines. Two verses, even without further comment, will hint to a thoughtful reader the counterpart of the Philistines with us. Genesis 26 : 15. "all the wells digged in the days of Abraham, . . . the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth". 1 Samuel 13 : 19-22. "There was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel, because the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords . . . so it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people".

True to his origins, the power of Samuel was certainly in prayer. We read some details in 7 : 5 and 8 ; 12 : 18 and 19. Let our older, perhaps aged readers find a special message for themselves in 12 : 23, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you".

Scripture Truth

MARCH, 1977

PAUL'S LAST WORDS: A CHARGE ON LATER GENERATIONS

COLIN CURRY

(STUDIES IN 2 TIMOTHY)

2. A CALL FOR COURAGE

ONE cannot read the first chapter of this letter without noticing how Paul faces the discouraging situation by falling back on some of the finest and grandest aspects of Christian truth. He reminds Timothy of these in a way which ought certainly to stimulate his confidence. He aims to revive in Timothy the sense that he is entrusted with massive and vital things to hold and to maintain, whatever may be the departure in other quarters. Whatever God does **must** stand, unshakeable and inviolate, despite all that men (and even Christians) may do in losing sight of it or misrepresenting it. What He has promised, "the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus" (verse 1), cannot fail in its realisation. The power of God, saving and calling His people, "according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (verse 9), cannot be resisted nor questioned in the smallest degree by any of the adverse trends of time. Nothing shakes nor countermands what has been established and made manifest in Christ. Nothing can reduce its positive and glorious content. "He has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings" (verse 10, J.N.D.). Inherent in what Christ has done is the disarming of all opposition to God, the shaming of all disloyalty to Him, and the assurance of the completion, in all purity and faultlessness, of all that God in grace has initiated.

On the basis of these great Christian certainties Timothy must find new courage to continue on a course unashamedly loyal to "the testimony of our Lord". Paul urges him to rekindle the flame of devotion to his Lord. "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee, . . . for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (verses 6, 7). Paul cites his own outlook as a help to Timothy. " I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed" (12). Certainly there had been much on Timothy's part of genuine faithfulness and service to Christ. Though youthful, he had considerable experience in the faith. From his early days examples of faith and piety in his family had been a great asset to him. More recently, over a period of years,

he had shared many testing experiences with Paul; sometimes accompanying him, sometimes acting for him in his absence. Paul's high opinion of his quality is indicated in other places (as an example, see Philippians 2 : 19, 20). The bond of fellowship with Paul in the interests of Christ was very strong. There had been hazards survived, and many kinds of demands upon him. He was aware of the strenuous and responsible side of Christian living ; he knew about Christian faith in practice. Nor is there any suggestion that his faith was flagging. But he had now to face the home-call of his spiritual father, his elder partner and guide, at a time of mounting departure from the truth. It was to be a severer test than any past experience. One of the lessons of this book is that timid persons can be manly persons in times when weakness and corruption of Christian truth are prevalent. Not only can they be like this, but it is urgent that they **should**.It is not natural boldness that is needed, however, nor any kind of self-reliance. The strength for such behaviour comes from "the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 : 1). The man of God draws, not on his own resources, but on that Source ; and it is a sufficient one. [Note the recurrence of the phrase "in Christ Jesus" in this letter. The ascended Christ is the fountain-head which supplies the Christian life, in its testing experiences as well as its more joyful ones.]

A Sense of Commission and Trust

In his earlier writings Paul at times expresses amazement at the grace that grasped and blessed a person like himself. But he seems specially overwhelmed by the fact that the grace of God could now **entrust** him with a service for the Name he once despised : and indeed what a special ministry was committed to him to fulfil ! To him it was a crowning act of favour from God. The following quotations show his appreciation of this, and the humbling effect that this great trust produced in him : "The glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. . . . Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." (1 Timothy 1 : 11, 13) ; "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery" (now revealed) (Ephesians 3 : 8, 9).

In verses 11 and 12 of the first chapter of the present epistle Paul refers again to the special nature of his ministry and his call. He was appointed, by the rich grace of God, to be a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. He knew well his responsibilities in discharging these functions. His whole life had been spent in these activities since his conversion. But the glory of the content of his message fills his soul anew as he thinks of it. It had been the driving force of all his labours for the Lord. A message concerned with the fadeless things connected with the ascended Christ, Who is the centre and the outshining of the glory of God, is indeed a tremendous thing to be associated with. A gospel which is the door into a realm where the riches of God's grace are known, where the life which flows from

union with Christ is experienced, is indeed a high-quality gospel to proclaim. Such was Paul's gospel. A body of teaching which tells of the calling-out of the Church of God, the special object of the love of Christ, which provides what is needed for the upbuilding of that Church, and which fosters right responses within its members, is indeed of the utmost importance and value. Colossians 1 : 24-29 gives a clear statement of the unique place of the Church within the purposed plan of God. The truth of the Church as the body of Christ, undisclosed in O.T. times, but revealed after the descent of the Holy Spirit, was given to Paul to make known. This great truth, ever in the intention of God, rounds off and crowns the whole scheme of revelation, adding as its climax one of the most wonderful thoughts of all. The marvel and wealth of this secret, now an open one, is reflected in Paul's description of it. The bright light of this disclosure had taken place among the Gentiles who were formerly in darkness. The Father had translated them into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

The apostle had fulfilled that trust. Through him God had been pleased to bring the whole divine revelation to its summit. Rich and distinctive parts of Christian truth had been expounded and disseminated ; and the manner of life which agrees with this kind of light from God had been shown. It was essential, however, that these vital truths of Christianity should be preserved and treasured after Paul had passed on. Hence we find him consciously handing on the torch, to Timothy first of all. He presses upon him the importance of personal loyalty to the message, and to the example he had gained while in Paul's company. Also, he tells him that he must think of himself as more than a mere recipient of vital truth. He has a responsibility to guard it, to value it, and to commit it to other reliable persons so that, through the generations to come, it may continue to be appreciated.

Verses 13 and 14 indicate these responsibilities now falling upon Timothy ; and verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2 continue the same line. The first letter had concluded with the appeal "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust". That appeal is spelt out further here. In the context of the disappointments of verses 15ff. it becomes an urgent charge on Timothy. Hold fast to the faith ; have an outline of sound words ; guard the deposit entrusted ; cling to the whole truth, including the Pauline teaching ; follow the model he had seen in Paul, in practice and in outlook : these are the elements of the charge. A long line of successors in turn were to receive this charge and pass it on. It was to reach the 20th century as well as the first. In a sense it is a highly-demanding charge, and certainly a real responsibility. But various words within the verses give substantial hope and encouragement in facing it. "Faith and love", in practical demonstration, can appear when a person lives and draws on what is constantly available "in Christ Jesus". Christian fidelity and devotion spring from a real link with Him. "The Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" is the power for appreciation of Christ, and for valuing what concerns Himself. Christian strength and stamina come from an inflowing of "the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Vital Words for Today

As we continue with this letter, we shall find that the word of God is abreast of current events. Indeed it seems to span the centuries, and has words which are particularly apposite in today's situation. The lessons are not hard to find, and they are to the point ; and we must see them as directed to ourselves for our own obedience in the first place. The need to face the challenge of this first section is clear. The word of God discerns its readers ; it exposes our true condition. We must humbly recognise that we require instruction of this kind, and seek a new willingness to be under its guidance.

If we are to honour our Lord, then, these momentous issues call for our appreciation and our loyalty. The gospel of the grace and the glory of God is as glorious as ever. Lukewarmness about its content and its dissemination is both un-Christian and unlike the great apostle who wrote this letter. The full splendour of Christian truth into which that gospel admits us, truth brought to light in Christ and available in the N.T., is also as great and undimmed as ever. Its value is not greatly appreciated today : the broad Christian profession and practice often has little in common with the N.T. pattern. Men have freely imported their own patterns of "Christian" thought, their own styles of church order, their own preferred beliefs and acceptable standards of conduct. Let us see clearly the need to bow to the word of God in all these matters, and let us feel anew its strong and urgent guidance about them.

Courage will be needed, as we have seen, if we are to follow that guidance. But there is every reason to be courageous if we are on that line. Self-sufficiency in embarking on such a course, or in continuing on it, will plainly lead us astray. Continuous grace from our Lord must be drawn if we are to take the way that He will approve. But, given that kind of dependence on Him, a manliness befitting the testimony that we bear can be shown.

We have seen Timothy in a dual rôle in these verses : as a **follower** of Paul, the **recipient** of a wonderful heritage of truth and example, yet also a **leader**, the **channel** through whom others were to be influenced to value the same things. Though much further down the succession mentioned in 2 : 2, we must not neglect to see ourselves in both these ways. As Christians it is proper and most natural to think of ourselves as blessed with great riches through the abundant Grace of God. Certainly it is always right to be aware that we **have** nothing, and are nothing, apart from God's mercy and bounty. One part of the Christian outlook must be to admire and wonder at the scale of God's grace to us, to take in the things that He so freely gives. But the thought of a Christian as solely on the receiving end of wonderful things from God is an incomplete one. Part of the biblical teaching is that grace reigns over the believer's life ; **responses** to grace are part of its effects. What streams into our lives, from the risen Christ in heaven, should flow through them too. **Returns**, in appreciation and gratitude to the Source of it all, and **reflections** of its value, to be observed by others (and helpful to them), are part of a response to the true grace of God. Grace not only settles upon a

believer, and blesses him greatly, but can use him to affect others.

One more observation may be made, which should make us think quite soberly about this passage. Over the centuries since the N.T. was completed there have been "dark ages" when much of its truth was unavailable and unappreciated on a wide scale. There have been times of rediscovery of that truth, or of some of its parts. Some of the most distinctive aspects of the Pauline teaching (those of the kind mentioned earlier in this paper) have been appreciated afresh perhaps more in recent centuries than in earlier times. God has raised up those who have shown us some of these great things of His revelation (not new things, but things already there in His word). The opportunity to value, to guard, and to stand for the truth is ours today, as it was to Timothy. It has not always been so ; and surely the responsibility lies mostly on the shoulders of those to whom God has made it available. The value of a life which is "not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" lies, not in its ease, nor in its lack of problems, but in that it pleases Him, and brings honour to Him (as our next section will show).

FIVE VILLAGES — GEORGES ANDRÉ

BETHLEHEM

The Word became flesh (John 1 : 14)
He made himself of no reputation (Philippians 2 : 7)

The Incarnation

(Matthew 1 : 18-23 ; Luke 1 : 26-35)

"GREAT is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh", so 1 Timothy 3 : 16 reminds us. Confronted with this mystery of "Jesus Christ come in the flesh", how much it behoves us to exercise the utmost reverence. How solemnly the Word presents to us—in Matthew from Joseph's point of view, and in Luke from Mary's—what the conception of the divine child was. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee : therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God". Joseph was not in fact His father ; he was that only in a legal sense. In the humble village of Nazareth, where she was unknown to most people, an ordinary young virgin received the mysterious revelation of what was to take place in her, and a poor carpenter had his fears dispelled by the assuring words that the child which was to be born, conceived by the Holy Spirit, would be He "who shall save his people from their sins". (Matthew 1 : 21)

"You shall call his name Jesus", says the angel to Mary and Joseph, which means Eternal Saviour. To Joseph he adds, "They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us".

To Mary he states, "He shall be called the Son of the Highest",

and "that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God".

Wonderful name which makes visible,
On the earth where night reigns,
In his inaccessible splendour,
The God whom eye never sees!

Name of Jesus which none can fathom,
Name of the God strong from eternity,
And of the Lamb, Saviour of the world,
And of the resurrected Man.

The Birth (Luke 2 : 1-7)

The annunciation had taken place at Nazareth, but the prophets had foretold that Christ would be born at Bethlehem (Matthew 2 : 4-6 ; Micah 5 : 2). God uses the unwitting emperor himself in order to cause Joseph and Mary, by means of the registration decree, to go up "from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem" (Luke 2 : 4).

How many memories Bethlehem recalled! It was there that Rachel, exhausted by the journey and the birth of Benjamin, passed away at Jacob's side ; her sepulchre could still be seen. It was in the fields of Bethlehem that Ruth gleaned ; that poor widow who had come from the fields of Moab to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. It was there that young David, an object of scorn to his brothers, watched over the flocks of sheep. In the same fields, the most humble inhabitants of that region, simple shepherds, were to receive the glorious announcement of the Saviour's birth.

Nearly six centuries before, the remnant of Judah left by Nebuchadnezzar found a refuge at "the habitation which is by Bethlehem", when they fled to Egypt because of the Chaldeans (Jeremiah 41 : 17). In what might have been the same inn, there was no room for the King of glory ; and Mary had to make do with the manger in which to lay the child, which almost certainly was found in the cave where the animals sheltered. With what simplicity the Word depicts for us that scene which has given rise to so many extremely spectacular representations surrounded with a kind of veneration bordering on idolatry. "She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger ; because there was no room for them in the inn." That is all that the holy scripture contains!

The Shepherds (Luke 2 : 8-20)

It was not to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, nor even to the notables of Bethlehem, that the Saviour's birth was proclaimed by the angel. The first to receive the news were those shepherds watching their flocks by night ; the angel says to them, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". There

is no doubt that the Saviour came for all those who would put their trust in Him, but as he addresses the shepherds, the angel makes it clear that He has been born for them ; and each one of us can say—it was for me that He came into the world.

Likewise the angel adds, "This shall be a sign unto you ; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger". What a peculiar sign to distinguish the Christ, the Lord, from all the children in Bethlehem—to be laid in a manger ! People recognized Saul, the first King of Israel, because he was "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward". But the distinguishing mark of Jesus was extreme poverty ; and the apostle would later state, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8, 9). Proverbs 13, 7 had already declared, "One man considers himself rich, yet has nothing" : how many men would indeed like to appear to be what they are not and to display material and intellectual wealth which they do not possess. However the Word adds, "Another man considers himself poor, yet has great riches". A miser pretends to be poor to hide his wealth, but it is not a question of such a person here, rather of Another, of the One who became poor, although He had great riches ! So He was in the manger at Bethlehem.

The shepherds go off quickly and find "Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger" ; having seen him, they reveal the message which they had been told. On their way back they glorify and praise God for all the things which they have heard and seen. Not Mary, nor Joseph, but only the little child had attracted their eyes, and captured their hearts.

The Circumcision and Purification (Luke 2 : 21-28)

"Made of a woman, made under the law", (Galatians 4, 4), everything which was laid down in the law had to be accomplished concerning the child Jesus. That is why, on the eighth day, he was circumcised and thus made subject to the sign of the separation of God's people on the earth. Then on the fortieth day of his birth, the parents carried Him to Jerusalem for the dual purpose of presenting Him to the Lord and offering the sacrifice prescribed in Leviticus 12.

Was there any need for a sacrifice to 'redeem' the young child ? None at all, and the pair of turtledoves offered in keeping with Leviticus 12, 8 was for the mother and not the child ! She needed to be purified by a sacrifice, but He was perfect from His birth ! Under normal circumstances, Mary would have been allowed to offer a lamb and not a turtledove, and no doubt, knowing what a glorious child she had brought into the world, she would have ardently desired to do so ; but Mary and Joseph were too poor ! The Word had provided for their case in advance, "If she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles or two young pigeons—the one for the burnt offering and the other for a sin offering—and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean".

Mary knew as well as Joseph that the child whom they presented that day to the Lord was the Son of the Highest, the Son of David,

the Son of God. Therefore they might have expected that at least a few people, priests, elders, the governor, would recognize the child ; but all showed complete indifference. Yet God wished to display the glory of His Son in a plain but unobtrusive way on that day of the presentation in the temple.

Alerted by the Holy Spirit, old Simeon was aware of the fact "that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ". It was also by the Spirit that he came into the temple just when the parents brought the small child Jesus to do for Him according to the custom of the law. What a moving scene ; this old man takes the child in his arms and blesses God, "Mine eyes have seen thy **salvation** !" To the shepherds it had been said, "Unto you is born this day a **Saviour**", and Anna was to speak of Him "to all them that looked for **redemption** in Jerusalem".

"Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things and Simeon blessed **them**." It would seem natural that he should bless the little child as well, which he held in his arms. But the blessing of this old man comes to rest only on the parents and not on the child. For "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better", and in no way could even an old man bless the Lord's Christ. Simeon himself needed His blessing. Did he not find it, seeing he could say "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" ?

At the same moment Anna arrives unexpectedly, who "gave thanks unto the Lord and spake of him". Despite her age, solitude, sad circumstances, she did not complain, "She spake of him". "The Lord" whom she praised was the God of heaven, the One of whom she spake—according to scripture, the **same** person—was He not the tiny child whom old Simeon had held in his arms ? There again, discreetly, simply, but yet marvellously shines His glory.

The Wise Men (Matthew 2 : 1-12)

As the last visitors about whom the Word speaks to us, it is not at all certain that the wise men were kings, nor that there were three of them ! Some time had elapsed since the birth of Jesus, as Mary was with Him in a house (v. 11), and Herod, being told precisely when the star appeared, decided to kill the children up to two years of age. Having come from a far country, these wise men brought their treasures. "When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother ; and fell down and worshipped **Him.**" In no way is their worship directed to the mother, but only to the child, and it is to Him that they offer the treasures which they had prepared. What a beautiful type of the homage which we can offer to God provided that we can present to Him what has been prepared in our hearts beforehand : the gold which, as in the tabernacle, speaks of Him who came from heaven, of Him who is divine : the frankincense, the sweet smelling odour which rose up to God from His entire life, His death, His obedience, His devotion : the myrrh which recalls His sufferings. Today, as at that time it is important not "to appear before him empty".

The Flight into Egypt

"Was it then to save His life that the young child was carried into Egypt ?" The whole account of the gospels proves to us that it was not the case, for no one could put a hand on Him before His hour had come ; no one could put Him to death unless He delivered Himself up. But rather than drawing attention, rather than, like the one who will come later, receiving "the wound by the sword, and did live" (Revelation 13 : 14), "He was, among other humiliations, obedient even to a flight into Egypt, as though to save His life from the wrath of the king. . . Under despised forms He hid His glory again". (J.G.B.).

On the other hand, it is clear that divine Providence, God Himself, watched over the child, who, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, was "called out of Egypt", drawn from that place in His association as a Messenger with His people.

The children massacred at Bethlehem as a result of the envy and anger of Herod belonged to that number of lambs about which He would later say, "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18, 11). Whereas there is grief and pain on the earth—the consequences of sin and hatred brought in by the enemy—there is joy in heaven, where the vast throng of little children will sing His praises.

Heaven has visited the earth,
Emmanuel comes where we are,
God becomes man : O holy mystery !
Let His people adore on bended knee.

RECOLLECTIONS OF RIPON : 1976

THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE ——————— L. WALLER

2. ELIJAH

"THE grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced",—so comments a concordance with reference to Elijah. A prominent evangelical divine describes him as "this colussus amongst ordinary men". Yet when we come to read the New Testament (James 5 : 17) we are confronted with the words "a man subject to like passions as we are". These two points of view reflect very accurately much of what we know of Elijah—light and shade, success and failure, mountain tops of victory and valleys of defeat.

Elijah bursts on to the page of scripture in 1 Kings 17 and the events in that and the immediately following chapters will be the area of our study. If we take the phrase "the word of the Lord came

unto him" as in vv. 2, 8, 18 : 1 etc. we shall see useful punctuations in his life. It may be apposite to remark here that this is one of the earliest lessons we need to learn about movement from place to place. To be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit of God as revealed in our reading of the Scripture is not only to have a well ordered life, but to have confidence that we are in the place where God would have us to be. Too often, alas, the reverse is our case ; we take decisions, very often for material and earthly reasons of advantage, then seek God's blessing on us and wonder why we are frustrated in our life and unfruitful in our testimony. The life of Elijah, man of like passions that he was, is a penetrating call to obedience, dependence, and discipline, and consequently a real challenge to 20th century concepts of discipleship. The man of God seeks first the kingdom of God and applies himself to the Word of God to discover for himself the Will of God.

The times of Elijah were not easy ones. That is not to say that it is ever easy to live for God in this world which by its very nature is hostile and unaccommodating to the believer. Following the halcyon days (of empire) under David and Solomon the kingdom became divided under Rehoboam and, the two tribes (Judah) formed one kingdom and the other ten became the kingdom of Israel. About sixty years after the break-up, during which time a succession of evil kings sat on the throne, Ahab, whose characteristic was weakness rather than evil, was king. More serious was the fact that he had married Jezebel (of Tyre) who had brought with her to the favoured land the idolatrous system of Baal-worship and under her scheming and evil mind the altars and priests of Baal were installed. The groves and altars with all their evil associations now dominated the land and the true praise of Jehovah was allowed to fall into neglect. All this called for judgement and Deuteronomy 11 : 16-17 was brought into operation. In this time of rising evil and royal flouting of the law of God Elijah had done all he could do—he prayed : this marked him out as the man for the hour and undoubtedly gave him the courage to stand before his king and announce the judgement of God. Many who read these lines will see in some of the above a situation not too far removed from our own ; our sickness has come not from the weariness of onslaught and fatigue of battle, but rather from the inside corruption which like a canker has spread throughout our society. Wrong is no longer called wrong, the evil flourish and places which once echoed to the songs of Zion are now palaces of pleasure and the like. The message of Elijah to us in such a time is crystal clear—do not become involved ; supplication in secret will arm us for the conflict, and we can safely leave the matter of judgement to God (2 Thessalonians 1 : 6). To learn to pray may seem at first sight a fairly elementary sort of thing, however a matching of our prayer results with those of Elijah will soon correct this delusion and drive us to new depths of effectual intercession.

Having emerged with such dramatic force 'the Word of the Lord' moved him to Cherith (place of separation). Here is proof of Elijah's greatness. Naturally speaking we would have kept him 'at court' as our spokesman on affairs. But not so the man of God—he is yet to be

fitted for the confrontation which will come in God's ordered time. The Lord, Paul, Moses and others underline this fundamental point that to work for God in public is to know and practice the secret life of private discipline. 'Hide thyself' is a lot harder to do than 'shew thyself', and we all know the inexorable inroads of present day life which make this a daily battle to be fought. The 'good' of the social round, endless meetings and committees is often the robber of the 'best' of secret communion. The Lord spoke to his disciples concerning 'the meat that they knew not of', and by the brook Cherith Elijah was sustained by that same meat, morning and evening. We may profitably pause to reflect if the message of Elijah to us touches at this point. If it does the responsibility is ours to correct with the sure knowledge we shall not progress further in the school of God until we have learnt this lesson. To amend a well-known hymn : 'Make time to be holy'.

Elijah, having progressed through this school, (v. 8) received directions (by the Word of the Lord) to move to Zarephath—the smelting furnace. The life of supplication and separation now matured into preparation—and the empowering of the Holy Ghost for his task. The man of prayer and discipline must also be the man of power. When John the Baptist came in 'the spirit and power of Elijah' it was this time of Elijah's life that was in view, the time immediately before his final confrontation and for John the Baptist the time immediately before the Lord's coming. There is an appalling and ever increasing need today for men of power, of spiritual authority. Democracy has no place in the assembly, but there is ample room for those who, spiritually mature and laying hold of resurrection power, can stand and speak for God. Far better have the testimony of the widow 'Now I know that thou art a man of God. . . .' (v. 24) than to be congratulated on our rise to material prominence. The life of separation has (as we shall see for Elijah) its own reward. In order to underline this point the story of Obadiah is introduced. Having started life well, he became sidetracked and ended up in very menial service for the adversary of Elijah, and frightened for his life. Solemn warning here for those who count the advantages of this life more precious than separation to God. Better be fed by ravens and widows and know the God of resurrection than live at ease in the world yet dreading the future.

Chapter 18 : 18 finally takes Elijah back to the presence of Ahab. The long years of supplication, separation and preparation finally produced the fearless man for the hour. Mount Carmel is selected as the stage of confrontation, the slopes teeming with all Israel watching the priests of Baal as they prepare the altars, the ultimatum 'the God that answereth by fire let Him be God' having been agreed as the settlement of the question : Who indeed **was** God in Israel ? Two points call for comment here. First to reflect how much wiser it is to leave the settling of matters of right and wrong, concerning the world, to God and His time. Earlier efforts by Elijah would have been overthrown or lost, but God has His purposes and His will must eventually bring not only righteous judgement but complete vindication of His

servants. Secondly, in such an hour when (humanly speaking) Elijah stood alone against the hundreds of priests of Baal in view of all Israel it is well and encouraging for us to reflect on the comment 'a man of like passion'. Here was no Moses reared in Egypt's court and learned in all its arts, here was no student of some Old Testament Gamaliel, here was not one who had reclined on the Lord's bosom and was thus able to declare Him, here was Elijah the Tishbite of Gilead, obscure, unknown, a nothing by all human standards, yet reared in the nursery of supplication, schooled in discipline to the point where he emerged filled with the Holy Ghost, the man of the Hour. (Compare John the Baptist in Luke 3). The message of Elijah in this respect comes clearly down the years—"not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord". The soul that makes itself available to God in this pattern will not be disappointed. Can we doubt that we need to possess something of Elijah's stature to 'stand' in any way today ? Like Baal of old the world's altars call its devotees from morn till night and with the same pathetic result—there is no voice, no answer nor any regard in them. Materialism bleeds our nation dry and gives no satisfaction—why are we so helpless to convince them and turn them again to God ? The solemn reason why men in the world are not turning to Christ is not only the effective blinding of Satan in their minds, it is that we are powerless in the confrontation with Sin. The 'power of the resurrection' lies untapped. Such power is available to those who, like Elijah, move at God's word, and through his school of discipline are fit vessels for the Master's use.

Elijah began his hour of triumph by setting right the altar, and there is much that is profitable here. Having put things in order he prays, casting God on His own word. This is prayer supreme, not muttered platitudes, but laying hold on what God has said and on His ability to perform. No wonder the fire fell, consuming the sacrifice, to be followed by the sound of abundance of rain.

In the next sad section we see one of the valleys of Elijah's life —no 'word of the Lord' to move him to this position ! Many of us who know public success experience private failure ! To stand alone against the evil priests of Baal and then to run for his life from Jezebel requesting God that he might die. How wonderful to trace the restoring hand of God in sending His angel to minister to him. but also outlining his purposes in Hazael, Jehu and Elisha that they would continue the work Elijah had, under God, begun.

We could not possibly conclude these brief notes of such a full life without reference to his Glorification. Following his meeting with Elisha the time quickly came for him to be called to heaven. 2 Kings 2 gives us the details of his final nostalgic tour of the land, each place so intimately connected with Israel's history : Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and finally to Jordan and over Jordan to his dramatic, ascension in the whirlwind, a truly fitting departure for such a man. But this was not the end for Elijah ! The Gospels tell us of his appearance with the Lord and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. What prospect does this hold out for us—destined to be sharers of His glory in a coming day. "The eternal glories gleam afar to nerve my faint endeavour. So now to watch ! To work ! To war ! And then to rest for ever !"

WATERGATE REVIVAL

J. STODDART

(A Survey of Nehemiah 8)

THE Watergate story of recent times is well enough known to the whole world. Nothing of that infamous saga is worthy of more than a moment's reflection. But Nehemiah's account of the happening at the Watergate of some 25 centuries earlier is worth the most careful study and profitable to every Christian today. If our concern is for revival in this our day, it is possible to find guidance and instruction relevant to the moment in this divinely recorded narrative.

Is it not too often thought and said that it is too late and too unlikely to expect revival now, almost at the end of the Church's history on earth ? If we think so, let us see whether it could have been any more reasonably expected about five centuries B.C. in Israel's time and place. We are undoubtedly familiar with Israel's long history of disobedience and failure confessed so fully from the first chapter of this book and throughout to its end. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah read together cover about a century of their captivity under Cyrus and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. Israel's place as a nation before God had been forfeited and earthly government was now vested in the Gentiles, from Nebuchadnezzar and his successors until "the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21 : 24). In the wisdom and mercy of God, permission was given by the decree of Cyrus and ratified by his successor, Artaxerxes, to allow exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild their temple and the city walls.

The plight of those who had remained in the city and its state of ruin was reported to Nehemiah and he "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven" (1 : 4). As a result of the deep spiritual exercise of both Ezra and Nehemiah, first the temple was built and the walls were completed, despite the determined opposition and hostility of Sanballat and Tobiah, and their confederates. Both leaders were men of intense "effectual fervent prayer", and "the people had a mind to work"—a remarkable contrast to modern labour forces ! (See 4 : 6). A searching question poses itself as we consider this. Does the present ruin of Christian testimony as we know it, cause us to sit down and weep and mourn and pray, and then to work for all we are worth for recovery ? These surely are the prerequisite conditions for any revival there could possibly be. The expertise and example of Zerubbabel and his faithful companions would also provide incentive and inspiration to those with a mind to work. Let us remember that we, too, are exhorted to "remember your leaders who have spoken to you the Word of God," and again "obey your leaders, and be submissive ; for they watch over your souls as those that shall give account" (Hebrews 13 : 7 and 17). Such men may be few today but they can be recognised by the discerning eye.

Now may we consider the result of what we have noticed in chapter 8. The people (a considerable congregation of some 50,000)

were gathered together "as one man" (v. 1) to hear from Ezra, the scribe and priest, the Word of God, the Law of Moses. He was possibly a short man, hence the need for the "pulpit of wood" which they made for the purpose, and he was supported by faithful men whose names are mentioned. As he "opened the book in the sight of all the people . . . all the people stood up and Ezra blessed God and the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up of their hands, and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground." We may perhaps think of this as an old custom of the Jews in those days, not in any sense applicable to Christian practice. But would it not be more true to believe that this was a spontaneous expression of **reverence** for God and His Word ? There is nothing to suggest that this was simply Jewish ritual, and much more to indicate that the heart and conscience of the people had been genuinely affected by what had been heard. "They read in the Book in the Law of God distinctly and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (v. 8). Would that a deeper reverence for God's Word was seen in our day and its authority acknowledged more practically ! It was late in Israel's history and it is now late in the Church's history but it is encouraging to see that **reverence** is a most definite beginning of any revival.

But what kind of revival was this Watergate event ? Clearly it was a movement in the hearts of God's people, leading to their sorrowful acknowledgement of their low state and long departure from God but effecting real **repentance** with meaningful mourning and tears. It was a becoming attitude in the face of God's holy requirements. But was this peculiar to **their** state at that time or does it to some extent reflect a condition we should know only too well at the end days of **this** dispensation ? Surely as we take a sober estimate of our weakness and failure we find much to call for contrition and repentance in God's presence. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Corinthians 7 : 10). Sometimes repentance is thought to be only the initial step of the soul Godward on hearing the Gospel, but a closer acquaintance with Scripture would show that it is rather a deepening exercise as the knowledge of God and His Word increases. Repentance was sought from the church at Ephesus in the Lord's message to them in Revelation 2 : 5, for despite their externally correct position they had left their first love (c.f. v. 4). Again, the Church at Sardis was counselled to "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and **repent**" (Revelation 3 : 3). Repentance was required from other churches too.

Positive results follow such repentance, for now Nehemiah and Ezra encourage the people to action and outreach to others. "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared ; for this day is holy unto our Lord : neither be ye sorry ; for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (v. 10). And let us note that this was "Because they had understood the words that were declared unto them" (v. 12). Can anyone doubt that this was the same kind of **rejoicing** advocated to the Philippians in Paul's epistle 3 : 1 and 4 : 1 and 4 : 4 "The joy of the LORD is your strength"

could well have been quoted by the apostle in writing to that church for in that strength they would "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (1 : 27). Revival in outreach to the needy around us, "sending portions to them for whom nothing is prepared", is the product of "rejoicing in the Lord". We may spend our time bemoaning our "day of small things" or even regarding this as a token of our faithfulness, as some appear to do. Although the congregation of some 50,000 people in Nehemiah 8 was only a remnant of Israel, consisting of those from Judah and Benjamin only, there was clearly a revival of **reverence, repentance** and **rejoicing** which was so effective that the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated (cf. vs. 13/17) **for the first time for more than nine centuries.** "For since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so", although so distinctly commanded in Leviticus 23 : 39/44.

Is it possible to see this kind of revival in connection with Christian truth in our day ? Certainly not with merely massive organisation or amalgamation or the introduction of modern gimmicks which are recommended by some. The children of the captivity returned to God's centre with prayer, perseverance and with reliance upon God's Word to do His work in His way. We, too, acknowledge that God has only one Centre today, our Lord Jesus Christ and although conscious of much weakness and confessed failure, we may pray for and work for His glory in the increase of **reverence, repentance and rejoicing**, so that true revival may be seen even at this late day, while recognising that we are on the very threshold of the Lord's return. There are many within our reach, "for whom nothing is prepared" to whom we may "send portions" and tell them to "come for all things are now ready" (Luke 14 : 17). The result would be as in every true revival—"There was very great gladness" (Nehemiah 8 : 17). May we sincerely covet such conditions for the glory of Him Who is "worthy by all to be adored".

FRAGMENT. Bible Translations.

Why this emphasis on simplicity in translation ? Is it not a result of the fact that the prime means of converting the unbeliever has changed from the preaching and teaching of the gospel to the distribution of literature ? . . . if the unbeliever is unable to understand the Bible as easily as his pulp novel, the cause is not lost. Let us go back to preaching the gospel as our prime means of evangelism. . . I cannot be convinced that Scripture must be read like any other book if it is to have force. The New Testament was written in Hebraised Greek. The A.V. with its literalism is Hebraised English. So far from being unreadable, the A.V. has shaped our whole language.

Adapted from Dr Noel Weeks.

CORRESPONDENCE

The "Cheering Words Calendar" again (See Vol. 45, page 143)

ANOTHER remarkable example of the influence of the "Cheering Words Calendar" on a world scale has come to light. The news was received in the following letter. It concerns a very well-known evangelistic broadcaster.

Not many years ago, a young Christian businessman, already rising steadily to a responsible position in his firm, had to make the most important decision of his life. He had come to what he himself termed "the cross roads". Should he quit business, in which he was about to be promoted, thus ensuring financial security, or should he heed a call which had been pursuing him of late, that those who had never heard the gospel in other lands should have the priority claim ? "At last", he said, "I fell on my knees under a tree in a Cheshire lane and dedicated my life to whatever He might have planned for me—anywhere " ! But where ?

One day he saw a placard outside a shop with the words "The present situation in **India**". At the time it hardly registered, but God was speaking. A day or two later, he received two letters, the writers telling him that each had been to a missionary meeting and the speakers had been missionaries from **India**.

Next, he was invited to a missionary rally where, to his surprise, the speaker was a lady missionary from **India**, The next night, the speaker was a missionary from South America who suddenly looked up at him in the balcony and spoke on the needs of **India**. On returning to his lodgings, the first thing his landlady said was, "We had a visitor to lunch today—a missionary from **India**."

Meantime he was transferred elsewhere in Cheshire where, one day, he visited a School in the area. He crossed a room to play the piano and there, facing him, was a missionary hymn of **India**.

There were other incidents which made him realise that the claims of India could not be ignored, moreover, for several days, on his "Cheering Words Calendar", always kept by his bedside, there had been missionary texts. Surely, God was speaking and he felt certain that He was calling him to India.

Listen to the incident which finally settled his choice of direction. —He was no longer at the "cross roads". He said "Tearing off my Cheering Words Calendar for the day, I read a text from Esther which actually spoke of **India**—the only verse in the whole of the Bible mentioning this great continent: 'The posts rode from **India**' (Esther 8 : 9, 10)".

The matter was settled. He resigned his lucrative post immediately and later set sail for India with his young wife who was also assured of God's call for her.

H. LEWIS

Scripture Truth

MAY, 1977

FIVE VILLAGES — GEORGES ANDRÉ

NAZARETH

The Despised One—"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?" (John 1, 46)

The Years of Silence

(Luke 2, 39-52)

MATTHEW 2 : 23 and 4 : 13 embrace Jesus' stay at Nazareth. It was in fact in that village, far from the important highways and in the hills to the west of the Sea of Galilee, that He spent the greatest part of His life on earth. It was there that He was 'brought up', as we are reminded in Luke 4 : 16.

"His growth was regular and always what it ought to be ; His humanity was perfectly natural in its development. His wisdom kept pace with His stature and age ; first He was a child, then a man". (J.G.B.) It is in this way that Luke 2 : 40 shows us His childhood and verse 52 His youth. Truly He was perfect at all stages, not carrying out as a child what He would do when He became a man, but behaving Himself in all matters in a way which suited His age and the status which He had assumed.

What an example for us who so easily, as young people, wish to run ahead of time to undertake tasks with which we have not yet been entrusted. As adults we often behave like children, forgetting the service which the Lord has committed to us and neglecting to use "for others, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God", what we have received from Him. It is not fitting, for example, for a young man to take action in the assembly, but it is acceptable that a young man, who loves the Lord and remembers Him with his brethren, should begin to pray at the prayer meeting ; nor would it be fitting that he teach the assembly but when he has grown "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" how welcome a timely word is, as the Lord leads him to speak.

From His childhood and youth, the Word does not record for our benefit any miracle or teaching of the Lord Jesus : the time had not yet come. But when the time did come, He would not fail to carry out His service. As a child and young person, He was subject to His parents (v. 51), but when His mother and brothers later wished to prevent Him from doing His work, He declared that He did not know them.

In all things He behaved as a child should but the Spirit of God desired to preserve the occasion of the Passover feast at Jerusalem (v. 41-50) to show us that at twelve years of age, He was fully aware of being the One sent by the Father (v. 49). In that respect too how His attitude suited His age. It was perfectly natural that He was found in the temple ; not to instruct, as He did so many times in later life even to His last day, nor to eject the intruders, but He sat among the teachers "listening to them and asking them questions". It would have been inappropriate for a child to teach them but His questions and answers were such that "all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers". **Wisdom** had made itself a child in order to become the perfect Man.

Considering this scene in its moral application, another practical lesson emerges for us. How easily we lose our communion with the Lord ; we no longer have a sense of His presence in our daily walk and that can often be so without our being aware of the fact ! During the whole day (Luke 2, 43), His parents travelled and "did not know" that Jesus was not with them. When his hair was cut, Samson still thought he had all his strength ; now he "did not know" that the Lord had left him (Judges 16, 20). In the Song of Solomon, the bride will not take the trouble to open her door when her beloved knocks : "I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ? I have washed my feet ; how shall I defile them ?" When she eventually got up to open the door, He "had withdrawn himself and was gone". In the same way an evil or neglected action, of which we are conscious but have failed to judge, interrupts our communion and robs us of the enjoyment of the Lord's love.

Our restoration can be immediate if, after judging **ourselves**, we confess at once to the Lord what has caused the breakdown of fellowship ; but then it may also be necessary to wait for restoration, while many an exercise of heart is undergone. It was **three days** while the parents of Jesus searched for the child at Jerusalem without finding Him, because they had not even thought of looking for Him in the temple ! (Psalm 27 : 4)

The Baptism

(Matthew 3 : 13-17 ; Luke 3 : 21-22)

Matthew reminds us that before finally leaving Nazareth to go and live at Capernaum, "Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptised by him". John the Baptist had proclaimed that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand. He had spoken of the power of the One who should come, whose sandals he was not worthy to carry. He used to warn of the judgment which He would execute by completely clearing His threshing floor and burning the chaff with unquenchable fire. People would therefore expect, to appear in his might, a King invested with all His judicial magnificence.

But when Jesus revealed Himself at the Jordan, it was from Galilee that He came, from the despised region of the country, and not to be crowned but "to be baptised" ! He came to receive for Him-

self the sign of death. He took His place with those in Israel who repented and confessed their sins in order that their hearts might be prepared to receive the One to come. Not that He had anything to repent of Himself but it was appropriate, it was even right, that He should associate Himself with those who were searching after God in that manner. "He took the place before God of the smallest of His people" (J.N.D.) ; it was in keeping with the position which He had assumed.

But the Father desired Him to be distinguished from all others. After all those who in the first three chapters of Luke "spoke of Him", it was the voice of the Father Himself that was heard "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased".

Visits to Nazareth

Did Jesus make more than one visit to Nazareth during the years of His ministry ? It is hard to say. Luke 4 : 16-30 could have grouped two or three successive visits, one of which would seem to be the same as the one in Mark 6 : 1-6 and Matthew 13 : 54-58. Whatever the case may be ; the Word presents the things in Luke to us, as if they were connected with one and the same visit on which He was at first well received but later rejected.

"He went to the synagogue, **as his custom was**, on the sabbath day".As a small child He had paid frequent visits to that synagogue, leaving us an example regarding what should be done on the day of the week which God has set apart for Himself. At twelve years of age, His parents wished that He should accompany them to the Passover feast at Jerusalem which shows us that we should take our children with us early on to be present at the commemoration of the Lord's death.

With every eye upon Him (Luke 4 : 20), the Lord had just read the passage in the prophet Isaiah which spoke of grace, stopping just before the words announcing judgment. "All spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." Among His glories, one in particular predominates : "Grace is poured into thy lips" (Psalm 45). He was "anointed to preach good news, to set at liberty and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". That acceptable time still continues (2 Corinthians 6 : 2), but the scene will change !

Revelation 5 reveals Him to us, once again with the attention of all eyes fixed upon Him and having a book in His hand but this time not the book of grace but of judgments. When He opens it, it will not be the anger of men which will be poured out against Him because grace wished to reach out to the nations (Luke 4 : 28), but it will be the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6 : 16) which will reach those who refused His love.

"They rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill, that they might throw him down headlong." How many years He had lived at Nazareth during all of which he was gentle and obedient, "in favour with God and man", yet what a harvest

He reaped "For my love, they are my adversaries". (Psalm 109 : 4). He could have let Himself be thrown from the mountain by that angry crowd, no harm would have come to Him, no more than if He had thrown Himself from the pinnacle of the temple at the devil's instigation (Luke 4 : 9-11) ; but "whenever His life was threatened, He did not amaze the world by some action which aroused admiration; quite the reverse, He humbled himself. He would have reached the foot of the mountain and the lower part of the temple safe and sound. But how would the Scripture have been fulfilled which declares that He would not seek His glory ? So "passing through the midst of them, He went away". He withdrew without being noticed or recognised, remaining in the form of a servant". (J.G.B.)

What rays of the divine glory shine in this Man who, as He calmly turned round to face an incensed crowd, could pass through it without anyone daring to touch Him !

In Mark 6 : 1-6 (as in Matthew 13 : 54-58), we see Him again at Nazareth. How despised He was in that place ! "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary ? They took offence at him." Does such a failure to recognise His Person stagger us, seeing that His wisdom had been revealed for a long time, that His miracles were many and that He had lived so many years among them ? And what about those young men and women coming from a Christian home who have heard of Him from childhood, have even accepted His teaching for a time and been influenced by His grace, but then turn away from Him and despise Him ? (Hebrews 10 : 29) "And He could do no mighty work there. . ." No salvation for those who reject the Saviour. Yet the Word adds "except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them". In spite of the wide-spread unbelief, grace could still reach a few suffering people wherever a glimmer of faith allowed Him to act.

"Jesus of Nazareth"

The name of the One who was despised is found fourteen times in the gospels, and seven times in the Acts, twenty-one times in the New Testament. "God did not despise Nazareth, but men despise Jesus, because He comes from Nazareth". (J.N.D.) When Philip came to tell Nathanael "We have found him, of whom Moses did write. . . Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph", Nathanael expressed his low opinion of such a village by saying "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth ?" And it was indeed a scornful title which the crowd round Bartimaeus used to tell that "Jesus of Nazareth" was passing by ; whereas, the blind man taught by God, addressed Him with the cry "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me". He was despised too by the soldiers at Gethsemane (John 18 : 5 & 7), by the servant girl before whom Peter denied Him (Mark 14 : 67), and even more by Pilate by means of the inscription which hung over the cross "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", (John 19 : 19).

But on the resurrection day, the same contemptuous title was exalted by the angels, as an integral part of His glory "Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified : he is risen". The disciples of Emmaus, speaking of "Jesus of Nazareth" described Him as "a prophet mighty

in deed and word before God and all the people". And in the Acts, the name borne by the despised Man but revived to describe the Resurrected Man was revealed as the only "name under heaven whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4 : 10 & 12). It was finally used by the Lord Himself who addressed Saul of Tarsus from the glory with the words "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting!" (Acts 22 : 8)

"Thus said the Lord. . . to Him whom man despiseth, to Him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship!" (Isaiah 49 : 7)

SAUL AND DAVID IN THE DAY OF BATTLE —— T. BALDERSTON

THE familiar contents of 1 Samuel 17 provide us with a vivid object lesson in a subject of great practical importance. Jeremiah tells us what this lesson is:

> "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.
> Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." (Jeremiah 17 : 5-8)

The contrast between the characters of Saul and David exemplifies this scripture. And nowhere is this contrast more apparent than in the conflict with Goliath. But to understand it fully, we need first to review the previous histories of each.

The history of Saul can be commenced with the last verse of the book of Judges. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes". The simple order which God had set up in Israel, of Judges and a priesthood, to speak from God to the people and from the people to God, had broken down because of the people's unbelief (Psalm 78 : 55-61). The tribes had been at war with each other (Judges 20), and foreign idolaters periodically wasted the land. There was failure even in those whom God had appointed; the sons of Samuel, like the sons of Eli before them, perverted justice (1 Samuel 8 : 3). In this world imperfection

and sin touches **everything**, and the failure even of those who spoke the word of God gave the people an adequate pretext for the demand for a new order of government.

Is this not an accurate picture of the state of the people of God in our day ? The dispensation under which God dealt with His people then was very different from the 'grace and truth' according to which He acts toward us now, but as far as 'the flesh' in us is concerned, and its inability to sustain the responsibility committed to us, we are exactly the same as they.

God passed a clear judgment on the popular demand for a king. In spite of the failure of Samuel's house God says to him, "they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8 : 7). Nevertheless, what has failed is not restored. The desire of the people is granted. God grants them such a king as satisfies them (10 : 24). He chose a man of excellent appearance (9 : 2), and of becoming modesty (10 : 21 ; 15 : 17). God anointed him by His prophet Samuel (10 : 1), and made that anointing real to him in the pouring of His Spirit upon him (10 : 10). This was in part official ; the LORD's Anointed was holy irrespective of his person (cf. 24 : 1-7 ; 19 : 20-24). But it is even written that "God gave him another heart" (10 : 9). While this statement ought not to be interpreted in the light of New Testament New Birth, equally, the fulness with which God equipped His Anointed must be appreciated.

How admirably Saul began ! The immediate cause of the demand for a king had been the attacks of Nahash the Ammonite (12 : 12), and the Ammonites are cut down (11 : 11). The kingdom is renewed at Gilgal, and mercy is shown (11 : 12-15). We can, I think, infer also that the subjugation of Israel to the Philistines was largely thrown off under Saul. Lastly, his own house is fully worthy of him (ch. 14). In view of all this the beginning of his failure seems very slight. The Philistines came out against Israel at Michmash with troops "like the sand on the seashore" (13 : 5). Israel is terrified ; the people gather, *trembling, to Saul at Gilgal ; a sacrifice ought to be offered before* battle, but Samuel, the prophet and Levite, delays. The people begin to scatter, and Saul cannot wait. He offers the sacrifice himself. How small an error in such circumstances ! Could reader or writer of this article claim to have done otherwise ? Was the kingdom taken from him for this ?

But simple and small though the error was, it betrayed a fault that ran exceedingly deep. Saul, like the people who had acclaimed him king, lacked "the obedience of faith" (Romans 1 : 5). He was, to a degree, obedient, but his obedience was not simple ; it was not "from the heart". To obey, but with reservations, is to display a practical distrust of God, that He cannot, or more likely, will not save, and thus to dishonour Him. It is as the servant in the parable : "I knew thee that thou art an hard man". (Matthew 25 : 24). And yet, how often my obedience partakes of this character !

Saul was not rejected exactly for trespass of the Law. If this were so, the man whom God chose in his place would have been at least equally blameworthy. But David, by contrast, trusted in the LORD. "The

LORD is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer, The God of my rock ; in him will I trust : he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower. . ." (11 Samuel 22 : 2-3). And again (though for David himself this must express intent rather than actuality), "I have set the LORD always before me ; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16 : 8).

Thus the lesson of Saul's failure is not to be understood merely in terms of the dispensation of Law ; it is always applicable. Where therefore do I stand ? How much do I undertake in the name of God (ostensibly) but in confidence in myself, or in man ? Thereby the name of God is dishonoured, because it is linked with the failure of man.

Soon the same kind of error is evident in other actions : the hasty oath by which Saul doubtless sought to bind God to his own purposes (1 Samuel 14 : 24) ; the sparing of Agag king of Amalek, and the best of his flocks (ch. 15). Saul said "I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (v. 24), but God's word through Samuel is "To obey is better than sacrifice, to hearken than the fat of rams" (v. 22). Shortly we see the abject condition of one who has espoused the cause of God, without resting in the strength of God. The Spirit of God departs from him and an evil spirit from the LORD troubles him (16 : 14).

If the history of Saul can begin with the unbelief of Israel, the history of David can be begun in the same period, but with the faithfulness of Ruth the Moabitess, and the mercy shown to her : faithfulness, doubtless toward Naomi and then Boaz, but surely, behind these, toward the God of Naomi and Boaz ; secondly the unfettered mercy of God toward her, which answered her faithfulness, and made a mother in Israel of one whom the Law forbade admission to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23 : 3). It is just these two features which characterised the life of her descendant David. Not his perfections ; David's failings were many. But "the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16 : 7). The difference between the respective circumstances of Saul and David at the time of their anointing were not outstanding. Both were, for example, fairly obscure, though personally David was perhaps the obscurer ; not even his own father accounted him worthy to be received by the prophet (16 : 11). But let us repeat the true difference between the anointing of Saul and the anointing of David, underlined for us by the Holy Spirit : "The LORD looketh upon the heart". "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins. . ." (Jeremiah 17 : 10). We may deceive all others about our motives and the source of our confidence ; we may even refuse to admit the truth about them to ourselves. But God knows perfectly whether or not there is in our hearts a simple constant trust in Himself, whatever our practical failure may be. And yet, though "the heart" is all important, we are also told that David was "ruddy, and of a beautiful countenance" (literally "of beautiful eyes"—1 Samuel 16 : 12). Was not the beauty of his faith displayed in his face ?

In the challenge issued by Goliath of Gath we find the test in

which God first marked out "the man after His own heart" (13 : 14). Israel was evidently obliged to meet the challenge, but was unable to produce a willing champion. Of all Israel, one might perhaps have expected Saul himself to have been the fit man, for he was head and shoulders above all the people (9 : 2), but he was hiding in his tent. What a contrast with the man who trounced Nahash the Ammonite ! Goliath repeats his challenge morning by morning. To him the people of God are but the "servants of Saul" (17 : 8). Was there anything in their condition to invalidate this description ? Was there the faintest sign of the power of the Spirit of the LORD in Israel ? And what of ourselves ? When the enemies of the church of God see in it only a human institution are we in a position to quarrel with them ? When they describe the gatherings of the people of God with reference to this or that leader, this or that set of intellectual beliefs, can they be faulted ? When they regard me as actuated merely by peculiar views, conditioned by my upbringing and so on, can I bring any evidence to bear to show that they are wrong ?

But David, who hears this challenge on entering the camp, views the matter in another light. It is not exactly that he too perceives the difficulty, but has the remedy ; he does not even appear to recognise the difficulty (vv. 26-29). To him, it is not that Goliath the giant has challenged the "servants of Saul". Oh no ! "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God ?" (v. 26). David had learned the faithfulness of God in small, obscure circumstances. None had been present when the LORD had delivered him out of the paw of the lion and of the bear (v. 37). These had been no famous victories in the conflict of God. These were mundane escapes in his daily work. But having learned God **there** first, he saw no difference in principle in the present grave circumstances. Indeed, might it be permissible to infer that to David the situation here was if anything easier, because more clear cut ? The Philistine defied **God**.

But can David really be so sure of this ? Can he call these feeble, dispirited troops, led by a king from whom God's Spirit had departed, "the armies of the living God" ? What a confidence in the lovingkindness of God and in His faithfulness to His covenant promises is also expressed in David's simple question !

David declines the armour of Saul. He does not refuse to try it on, but it would hamper him : "I have not proved it" (v. 39). Having a strength well proved, a strength "made perfect in weakness", his daily defence suffices. And is this not the hardest, and so often the least-learned lesson ? It is in the **weakness** of the natural man that the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, is displayed (11 Corinthians 4) not in the ill-preparedness, the faithlessness, the apostasy of man, as seen in Saul and his armies. **That** weakness is associated with human pride and self-sufficiency. But there is another weakness, the consciousness of which comes only through long preparation before God and which has as its intention, its hope, that any success and honour which results will be manifestly of God and not of man. Thus Paul, however useful his scholarship was in the service of God, refused to address the Corinthians in human eloquence "that your faith should

not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2 : 5). This is elementary Christianity. But I find that I constantly need to relearn this lesson !

As David climbs the hillside toward Goliath, the Holy Spirit reiterates that "he was ruddy, and of a fair countenance". The Philistine "disdained him" (1 Samuel 17 : 42) for it, but do you fancy as I do that David's face **shone** as he approached ? To the blustering threats of the giant he replies with a ringing assertion of the great issue : namely "that **all the earth** may know that there is a God in Israel. And **all this assembly** shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear : for the battle is the LORD's. . ." (17 : 46-47).

The details do not concern us, only the issues. Although there has been some revival in the testimony of God, and perhaps among His people in general, in recent years, worthy of our sincere appraisal, we live undeniably in a period of great weakness. The Philistine is in the land. Is there really evidence to the mass of unbelievers that it is the armies of **the living God** that they defy ? We would love to be characterised by many excellent features : a great gospel work, much evidence of practical works of love, a lively knowledge and ministry of the truth, and so on. But in our day, as much as all these, and indeed fundamental to them, is that simple confidence in God that gives HIM the glory, and which therefore He can use to manifest Himself. May we covet this ! Happily we all know fine examples of such a shining faith amongst us. But what about **me** ? Am I so learning both the great faithfulness of God, and **thereby** my own weakness, in my everyday life, that when the day of battle comes, His glory can be manifested through me ? Or, whatever others may think of my activity in the things of God, am I in reality "trusting in man", and "making flesh my arm" ?

RECOLLECTIONS OF RIPON : 1976

THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE——————— J. N. SHEPHERD

3. ELISHA

(1 Kings 19 : 19-21 ; 2 Kings 2 : 1-8)

Challenge and Commitment

THE story of Elisha begins, as does that of every true man of God, with a challenge : it came and it was understood by Elisha when Elijah cast his mantle over him. However he was not ready to respond and the answer was along the lines of one who came to Him in the

Lord's life on earth, "Lord, I will follow Thee **but**". It is a very serious matter not to let the Lord Jesus have the complete sway in our lives. We are so liable to look back, like Lot's wife, in disloyalty to the One Who has given everything—given Himself indeed—on our account.

The world is always an alluring snare to us and it takes so many forms; "but", however, is never a word which can rightly come from the Christian after the words "Lord, I will follow thee".

Elisha did follow Elijah and when, ultimately, he took up Elijah's mantle, it was that he, too, might truly be the man of God in succession to Elijah.

Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and Jordan all witnessed the reality of that commitment, "I will not leave thee". Our commitment is to the Lord personally and can only be fulfilled in the power of God's Holy Spirit.

A Double Portion of Elijah's Spirit

(2 Kings 2 : 9, 10)

The whole secret of this was that to obtain it, all was conditional upon the view of Elijah being caught up in glory and there is surely a glimpse in this Old Testament passage of the great truth which is ever a vital necessity for the Christian, that for us to grow like the Lord Jesus, our eyes are to be directed upwards to Himself as the glorified Man in heaven,—"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3 : 18).

There is a rather lovely sequence of events in these chapters which gives a picture of the means God has taken to bring such blessing to us. In 1 Kings 18 we read of Elijah's great victory over the evil forces of his day, executed for God's glory and in His power and following this, in figure, we see Elijah passing through death in 2 Kings 2 : 8, for the passage of the Jordan ever speaks to our souls of the precious victorious death of the Lord Jesus, and finally, Elijah —picture again of our blessed Lord—was "received up in glory". It is only consequent upon this wondrous work of the Lord Jesus that it is possible for the likeness of that blessed Man to be seen in men and women in this world now by the Spirit's work. He delights to occupy us with the Lord's glory with this object in view. "He shall glorify me", the Lord Jesus said to His own, "for He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you".

A Man of God

From this point we consider Elisha as a type of Christ. No human picture, however great, can present, even to the smallness of our appreciation of these things, the glories of God's blessed Son. Thus it is that so often in the Old Testament two parallel pictures are given as complementary views of His wonderful Person. So, we are led to think of the High Priest and the sacrifice, of Moses and Aaron, of David and Solomon, as pale and yet God-given illustrations of contrasting glories to be seen in surpassing fulness in Himself alone.

This kind of distinction is clear too in the types before us in these passages. Elijah is set before us then as the one who maintains God's rights in Israel, with miraculous, dramatic and sometimes judicial happenings, whereas Elisha is presented, still with miracles, as the dispenser of the sovereign grace of God ; he gives provision, food, protection from enemies, healing, raising the dead and preaching the gospel.

Elisha is the picture of dispensing grace.

Provision for the Man of God

(2 Kings 4 : 8-37)

God in His goodness now brings to us the possibility—pictured in the Shunammite woman—of the great and special privilege of making room for the Lord Jesus as the controlling influence and power in our lives. There may not be anything spectacular about a bed, a table, a stool, and a lampstand in a little room in the Shunammite's house, but it meant life, even resurrection life to be found eventually under her roof. It is in the ordinary circumstances of our lives that the Lordship of the One who loved us even unto death, comes out so clearly even in the smallest details, such as "a cup of cold water" given in His name ; and let us not forget the great and abiding and dispensation-passing principle given to us in Matthew 25, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me". So we are to treat and deal with those who belong to Him in just the same way as we would desire to be found acting with regard to the Lord Jesus Himself.

So Elisha is depicted on the principle of grace dwelling in our hearts.

Grace in Action in the Man of God

(2 Kings 5 : 1-27)

In the very well-known story of Naaman, we see **grace cleansing.** When he eventually dipped himself seven times in Jordan, there was given to him flesh "like unto that of a little child" and he was clean. What follows gives to us the change which had taken place in his ways as a result of the change which had taken place in his body. He had a thankful heart, an exercised conscience in relation to his ways and he was able to "go in peace". Grace to the Gentile (Luke 4) is contrasted with Jewish defilement in Gehazi, the prophet's servant, after all his experiences of the ways of God, so easily tripped up by the wiles of Satan. Our lives henceforth are to be lived in the power of a new life in Christ.

The Man of God in the Hand of God

(2 Kings 6 : 13-17)

The story of Dothan presents two simple yet very powerful features of the ways of God with regard to His own, which should give us confidence and cause for thankfulness continually because they apply in every age. God has one great concern and interest in the world and it is not to be found in the political and historical scene around us, all of which is going on to its destruction, but as the Lord Jesus said in John 17 to His Father, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me ; for they are thine."

First, the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him and when the world around has at last reached that stage when men's hearts are failing them for fear because of that which is coming on the earth, the Christian can rest in the knowledge that all is secure in the very hands of his Lord, and indeed that all that is about to happen here has been mapped out beforehand by God and that He is in possession of the answers to the problems around, that all the intelligence of this world's great men can never provide.

Then secondly, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psalm 34 : 7). We have very powerful and wily foes but "they that be with us are more than they that be with them".

When the Lord Jesus was passing through this world, from the time of the slaughter of the innocents onwards through His precious life, God's hand was over Him and how often it was said "His hour was not yet come" ; with what surpassing tenderness the Father's care was seen in display with relation to His Son on many occasions in the gospels. Even in Pilate's judgment hall, the Lord Jesus said "Thou couldst have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above".

And that same wonderful protecting hand is over all His own, not, of course, only with regard to physical things but in the unseen realm where Satan would otherwise bring all his force to bear against us. Only the glory will show us the full circumstances of the way in which God has led us through this world and the protecting mercy which has continually preserved us, and it will call forth a personal song of praise from each one of our hearts. What a chorus will be rising throughout eternity's ages from the hearts and voices of all the redeemed !

But we can know now, that of the angels it is said, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ?" (Hebrews 1 : 14). And in quietness and confidence we can go on now to

"Praise Him for all that is past
And trust Him for all that's to come".

JOHN MARK

FRANK WALLACE

THE writers of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are all identified for us in the pages of the New Testament. Matthew and John are familiar to us as disciples of the Lord Jesus. They were chosen by Him to be with Him in His public ministry. They were two of the favoured twelve. Luke is known to us from his New Testament book, the Acts of the Apostles. He was the trusted companion of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and is mentioned by him in two of his letters. Mark, or John Mark, is referred to in the Acts, in the letters of Paul, and by Peter in his first letter.

A careful study of all the references available concerning these honoured servants of Christ gives us some idea of their character. The character of a believer is very important, as it often indicates the Lord's dealings with him as He prepares His servant to be a competent witness for Him. Success and failure, virtues and faults, courage and cowardice are portrayed that we might see the Lord's hand in forming His servant eventually to accomplish something of lasting spiritual worth.

With this in mind, we desire to examine the Scriptural references to John Mark, and attempt to increase our understanding of the Lord's dealings with him in view of his great service for the Lord, the writing of the account of the Lord's life, commonly called the Gospel of Mark.

John Mark lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12 : 12). We do not know anything about his father, but his mother owned a fairly large house. This can be deduced from the fact that many gathered there for prayer. An uncle of John Mark (see Colossians 4 : 10) is described in Acts 5 : 36, 37, as owning property. He sold it and gave the proceeds of the sale to the apostles to help in the daily distribution. It may be correct to say that Mary and John Mark were not poor but possibly not exceedingly rich. They had the advantage of the services of a maid named Rhoda.

Tradition has suggested that Mary's house was the one referred to in Acts 1 : 13 and that it became the meeting place for the apostles. Whether this was so or not we do not know, but one thing is certain from Acts 12 : 12, Mary's house was used for a prayer meeting. It was a dangerous thing to be a believer in Jesus of Nazareth at that time. James, the brother of John, had been executed. Peter, the apostle, and other believers were in prison. How important it was to pray, and pray they did. All over Jerusalem prayer was offered up to God on Peter's behalf (v. 5) and Mary's house was available for that purpose. The fact that many believers gathered together in Mary's house testified to the importance of her home in Jerusalem. It obviously had the confidence of the believers and indicated the good and godly testimony of John Mark's mother. As a result of continual prayer, Peter was miraculously released from prison and found himself at Mary's house. He had no hesitation in knocking to gain admission. Peter obviously was no stranger in that home. After he gained entrance, he told of his wonderful experience and gave the Lord the glory for his release.

Commanding the brethren to make the rest of the believers aware of his release, Peter left Mary's home and went away to another place, perhaps a discreet action of the apostle not to involve that home in any unnecessary danger. Did John Mark witness these things? We suggest that he did. The opposition of Satan, the power of prayer, the courage of his mother in using her home for prayer, the testimony of Peter and all these events must have made a deep and lasting impression on his mind.

When did John Mark openly confess Jesus of Nazareth as his Saviour and Lord? We do not know. There is no recorded account of his conversion. We suggest considering three influences that would greatly affect John Mark and prepare his heart and mind to accept Jesus of Nazareth as his Lord and in his life to follow Him.

First, the influence of his godly mother. Secondly, the influence of his experience in the garden of Gethsemane. (We are assuming that Mark was writing about himself as some have suggested. See Mark 14 : 51, 52). Thirdly, the influence of Peter the apostle.

The brief account of Mary and her home would encourage us to believe that she was a godly woman. She would instruct and care for her son according to Scriptural directions and examples. The Old Testament Scriptures would be her guide and inspiration plus the latest instructions and example of the Master, Jesus, the Son of God. The two great principles, **instruction** and **care**, supported by **personal example**, are powerful means to secure the blessing of the young. Mary would be familiar with the wonderful commendation God gave concerning His servant Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment ; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he had spoken of him" (Genesis 18 : 19). We feel sure that Mary's home would be controlled by these great principles—love to God and to His Son—love of the Old Testament Scriptures and the new teachings of Christ. We also feel sure that John Mark would be diligently taught these great and important matters. We feel sure that what Paul wrote to Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3 : 15), was also true of John Mark. For New Testament references to Christian parents and their children see Ephesians 6 : 1-4, Colossians 3 : 20 & 21, 1 Timothy 3 : 4, 5, 12 ; Titus 1 : 6.

The important feature of instruction to the children has been stressed and we now refer to another important matter—**care.** Many incidents in the Scriptures show how mothers expressed their care for their children. Sarah protected her son Isaac from the mockery of Ishmael. She insisted to Abraham that the mocker be put out of the home. She was deeply concerned that her son should get the blessing that God had promised for him (Genesis 21 : 1-13).

The second great influence in the life of John Mark was his experience in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14 : 51, 52). The incident recorded by Mark has an element of mystery attached to it. The other gospel writers do not refer to it. Was the young man Mark

himself? Many believe that he was, but we do not know with certainty. If, however, he was John Mark, that experience would be imprinted indelibly on his mind. Later, it would prove a valuable link in the chain of circumstances that led to his blessing. Many interesting things were to be observed in the happenings in the garden. The calm and dignified demeanour of the despised Teacher would impress the young Mark. He would notice too that the Teacher claimed that the Scriptures were being fulfilled in the treatment He was receiving. Mark would see the sad defection of the disciples, how one of them, in hypocrisy, duplicity and betrayal, delivered his Master into the hands of His enemies. The others forsook their Master and ran for their lives. Mark must have wondered at the hatred expressed against the calm and humble Teacher, as the religious leaders with their followers united in their animosity, and acted against this Man as if He were a dangerous criminal. After all the disciples had fled, Mark sought to follow the Lord. Was it attraction that caused him to follow, or was it curiosity? We do not know, but Mark soon experienced the solemn fact that to follow this Teacher was to involve himself in danger. When he was approached by young men who intended to apprehend him, he fled naked, leaving his garment in their hands. Not a very dignified retreat, but he lived to fight another day. How different his experience from that of the upright Joseph who left his garment in the hands of the unfaithful and seductive wife of Potipher (Genesis 39 : 13). Joseph fled that he might not sin against God, but Mark fled to save his own skin. He had many lessons to learn before he became the "profitable servant". We feel sure that when the news began to circulate that Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified One, was alive, Mark would remember all the events with which he personally had been connected in the Garden and it would produce in his heart a longing desire to follow the risen Master faithfully.

We shall now consider Peter's influence on John Mark. The incident we considered in Acts 12 clearly indicated Peter's knowledge of Mary's home. He knew the house and the inmates knew him, therefore we believe he was a frequent visitor there. Those were stirring times and Peter was a prominent figure in all that was happening in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can picture many interesting gatherings in the home of Mary. Eager disciples of the glorified Christ would be listening intently to the teaching and exhortations of Peter, and John Mark would be listening among the company of the saints. The words of Peter, based on Scripture, would be quickly understood by Mark because of his mother's teaching. Peter's ministry about the beauty and greatness of Christ would recall to Mark what he had seen of the Lord with his own eyes. Perhaps, timidly, he would venture to ask Peter some questions about the Master and about the new revelations. We believe there was a moment in that house of Mary when Peter convinced John Mark about Jesus, His work and His glory. At that moment John Mark confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Master.

In 1 Peter 5 : 12, Peter calls Mark his son. This statement would seem to confirm what we have suggested. Mark was his spiritual son begotten through the gospel. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles,

wrote to the Corinthians who had been converted through his preaching, ". . . as my beloved sons (children) I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4 : 14, 15). Writing to Philemon he referred to Onesimus, "My son (child) whom I have begotten in my bonds" (Philemon 10). These two quotations from the writings of Paul show that the term 'son' (teknon) or 'child' was used to indicate a person who had been blessed through the instrumentality of the apostle. It was in this sense that Peter used it. Mark had been converted through Peter speaking to him about Christ.

Although much of what I have written about Mark's upbringing and conversion consists of suggestions rather than certainties, I am confident that the suggestions are based on a solid Scriptural basis. I feel sure that the Holy Spirit's work in the heart of John Mark was along the lines we have suggested. We have endeavoured to show the links in the chain that bound John Mark to Christ and made him a true follower of the Master. It remains to examine the Scriptures to see how he became a servant of Christ, and his great work of writing an account of the life of his Lord and Master.

FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTE BOOK

Some New Testament Words

MOST words have a range of meaning, and the most appropriate meaning to choose is normally clear from the context. A striking New Testament example of this is provided by the last phrases of Colossians 2 : 23. In A.V. this passage reads: "not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." I have not found it easy to attach any meaning to this translation. The R.V. translates: "not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh". In view of the fact that the subject is legal prohibitions, (v. 21), the latter version is brilliantly clear in meaning, as well as of great importance for the Christian life. It seems clear that 'honour' and 'value' are both within a normal range of meaning for the noun 'time', and similarly 'satisfying' and 'indulgence' for 'plesmone'.

An interesting example is the word 'sugkrinontes' in 1 Corinthians 1 : 13. The verb 'sugkrino' means 1. combine 2. compare 3. interpret (only in LXX). Since the only other occurrence in the New Testament is clearly 'compare', we ought to give consideration to this. 'Match' is clearly within the normal range of meaning of the English 'compare', and it has been suggested that 'match' is the most illuminating translation in this case. The translation of the last phrase of 1 Corinthians 2 : 13 would then be, "**matching** spiritual (truths) with spiritual (words)". Only by the Holy Spirit could words be found exactly to match the "depths of God" being revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets. In no other passage does the truth of verbal inspiration of Scripture come to so clear an expression.

Scripture Truth

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THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

4. DANIEL — COLIN CURRY

THE general content of the book of Daniel divides into two parts. The first six chapters describe events in which Daniel figured. These events have more than mere historical significance: they indicate features characteristic of the ruling powers during the whole period of Gentile supremacy in history ("the times of the Gentiles"): they say something about the tests to be faced and undergone by persons true to God in that period. The second six chapters describe **visions** given to Daniel personally; prophetic communications about times yet future to Daniel, a fair fraction of which still remains to be fulfilled.

But in addition, prominently through the whole book, there is much about Daniel himself, his character and deportment in the face of all his experiences. It is an object-lesson in faithfulness to God in times of declension and in face of difficulties. We shall confine ourselves here to Daniel the man, and the message his **conduct** provides for us.

Daniel was one of a small group of selected persons transferred to Babylon at the time of the servitude of Judah to Babylon, a little before the larger-scale deportation there at the time of the captivity. The period of the captivity was 70 years. Now the various chapters in the book date the ocurrences rather carefully. Chapters 1 and 2 occur at the beginning of this 70 year period; chapter 5 describes the last moments of Babylonian supremacy, i.e. the very end of that period. Chapter 6 shows the Medes in control, and chapters 9 to 12, the Persians. Chapters 7 and 8 are a little earlier, in the time of the last Babylonian ruler, well towards the end of the 70 year period. Hence we can see that Daniel must have been quite young in the opening chapters (perhaps 20 would be an overestimate) and an old man in chapters 5, 6, 9-12 (perhaps 85 or more). The 70 year period has to be accommodated between these limits. We can certainly learn something by taking note of the stages in Daniel's life at which the various incidents occurred.

Daniel in youth.

As we have indicated, we must look at chapters 1 and 2 to see the young man Daniel. It is plain that Daniel did not have a well-cushioned youth; the situation in which he found himself (along with

his three friends) was an unenviable one. He was a captive, in a situation totally foreign to him, away from his homeland, never to return it seems. Luxury, culture and sophistication were all around him ; many were the opportunities to forget the land of his fathers, and the God of his fathers too, if he so wished. The pressure upon him to conform, to be absorbed into that idolatrous community, was strong. Yet we discover him to be a young man of purpose, determined not to defile himself, resolved to be true to God. He showed (and his companions with him) a firm and decisive faith, a confidence in God whatever the outcome might be. He stood firm for God and left his career and his safety in God's hands. We should never have heard of him had he not done so.

To all appearances he was a prisoner, a high-quality slave, a pawn in the hands of the mightiest power on earth. The intention was that his mind and his body should be moulded entirely to Nebuchadnezzar's will and service. He was to be an asset to Nebuchadnezzar's set-up, lifting the cultural level of his court. But the reality was distinct from the appearance. He was made of less plastic material than Nebuchadnezzar had imagined ! He and his friends could not resist a change of name (the divine syllable was removed in each case), but Nebuchadnezzar could not remove God from their lives, nor from their faith. Daniel would **not** assist the process of assimilation into the foreign and faithless way of life. The upshot was that he became a **voice** for God in that heathen headquarters : a power for God, shaking the powers that ruled over empires, awakening them to their obligations and their shortcomings in the sight of God, undermining and deflating their arrogance, telling them that they were only there by His allowance, humbling them with words from God Himself. All this was done quietly, cooly and decorously, never by speaking in a harsh or offensive way. Hence Daniel was an asset in a totally different way than Nebuchadnezzar had intended ; bringing **God** into the picture in a way that **must** be taken notice of.

Particularly notice the quiet brave manhood shown (by Daniel and the three) in chapter 2. It stands out in such contrast to Nebuchadnezzar himself ; with his savage, unreasonable and capricious behaviour. Youthful purpose and discipline had made Daniel a courageous young man, with a deep reverence for God, fearless and erect in his demeanour before men.

Let us note again that this line was **taken** in youth (perhaps in his teens), and **continued** in youth. Resolution to be separate, to be clean, to be true to God, to watch for and stand clear of defiling things, to avoid compromise and acts of surrender, is all-important **in youth** (and later too, of course). It was not a mass movement, nor ever will be. There were only a few of them ; acting personally without support or encouragement, perhaps against dissuasion, undeterred by the unpropitious situation, not waiting for a lead from anyone. Surely we have a strong lesson here for young Christians of today !

Daniel in private.

What went on behind the scenes in Daniel's life ? We have many glimpses of this throughout the whole book. There is a consistency

about Daniel's inward life at all stages, in youth, in maturity, and in old age. Inwardly (in the heart) there was real purpose, and devotion to his God. Often we read of him in the presence of God. Before God, there was **reality :** he shows dependence, confidence, a sense of his own smallness and weakness, yet a sense too of the greatness of God. We find him **asking** for wisdom ; **burdened**, not about his safety nor his problems, but about the situation as it affected God.

We see him **as a man of prayer** ; joint prayer with his other young colleagues. What a picture this is in chapter 2 ; four young men (under threat of death) holding a prayer meeting (perhaps the first-mentioned prayer meeting in Scripture), "desiring mercies of the God of heaven". It was direct prayer, expectant prayer, prayer not failing in gratitude, even worship, as well as petition. Prayer of this kind was part of Daniel's life, it was habitual, it was constant, it was regular. See him praying "as he did aforetime" in chapter 6, knowing the risks of doing so ; an old man at prayer now, still concerned about God's interests above all else. Chapter 9 tells of another of Daniel's prayers. Perhaps there is nothing quite like this in the whole of the bible. An urgent burdened prayer, full of confession, full of genuine repentance, aware of all the shamefulness and the backslidings of God's people, yet aware too of the great mercy of God ; finding the basis for an appeal to God here, relying solely on the fact that God is the great God that He is. In short it is a prayer full of assured faith, though also full of strong and urgent petition. Then finally, note how full of Scripture this prayer is : he plainly had lived much with the word of God.

This leads to another part of the inward life of Daniel. He was a **man of understanding,** not because he initially possessed that understanding, but because he sought for it. He was deeply concerned to know God's mind about things. We see him learning from "the books". He had read Jeremiah (almost his contemporary) and a great deal more. We find him **searching,** praying about things ; we see how this led to more understanding. We see him as a **learner,** learning from God at very late stages of his life too. We find him supported by God, approved by God in all these concerns of his. His diligent and earnest seekings were answered : hidden things were made known to Daniel in an abundant way. The study of Scripture and prayer are interweaved in the Christian life, and true understanding comes that way.

Then further it is clear that Daniel was a **sensitive man.** Certainly the account of Daniel's life demonstrates that having to do with God, being involved in His concerns, is no superficial business. It drains and consumes a man. How often we see Daniel overcome and almost exhausted with the burdensome aspects of the current situation, or with the awesome nature of the revelations made to him. But we see him **comforted** too, and strengthened by God, and by messengers sent by God. It was said of him that he was "a man greatly beloved"; and it is well to note that this statement was made mostly about his private life. Let us remember that the quality of the man seen in public depends much on his unseen life. The story of Daniel brings home this lesson to us. Let us learn this lesson, and seek to be **real** persons in the presence of God, with a deep devotion and loyalty to Him **there.**

Daniel in public.

The first six chapters (except chapter 3) show us different aspects of Daniel's outward life. As we have seen, Daniel's unseen life had much to do with the high quality of his public behaviour. What then were the features of this man of God which were open for all to see ?

One of his most striking qualities was his inoffensiveness. He was always well-mannered, courteous, upright and straight. There was nothing ostentatious about him ; always he disclaimed wisdom of his own, and gave the glory to God. He never sought the limelight, we do not find him aiming high at all. Along with a firmness of purpose was a wise and humble spirit in making it known. He did not parade his separation, the spirit he displayed was neither harsh nor haughty ; there was a complete absence of the "holier than thou" attitude. Even with a man like Belshazzar, he refrains from his own comments, and simply explains and pronounces God's words of judgment upon him. Never was there anything artificial, nor any special pose adopted, as of a man conscious of his own piety. Often he was the only man around with the key to the problem that had arisen. He gained respect, promotion and honour : his weight and his quality could not fail to make its mark. He was inevitably the object of jealousy and opposition too. He was as readily forgotten, by those who wanted to forget, as he was remembered when an urgent situation arose again. The Belshazzars (and the like) of this world care little for the Daniels until something desperate occurs. Forgetfulness, opposition and jealousy made little difference to Daniel, however. He showed no resentment whatever about it.

In chapter 6 : 5 a magnificent tribute is paid to Daniel ; and it comes from his enemies. They could find nothing against him except his devotion to his God. They were hostile and jealous, but had nothing in reality to charge him with. Surely there is a reflection of Christ Himself here. **They** said it (that he was faultless), of course, not Daniel. Daniel himself had nothing self-claiming about his spiritual make-up. Let us remember that we too are watched critically, and appraisingly. Our deeds are measured against our profession ; all our words are weighed by those who observe us. We need to use diligent care, self-control, humility, and prayer, about what others see in our lives.

Perhaps one of the most general points about Daniel is that he was unaffected by publicity and prominence, or by obscurity. He is the **same** man when he comes back after years, forgotten and now re-called (chapter 5). In or out of the public gaze, he is strong, firm, basically humble and consistent, in youth and in age, **whenever** and **wherever** he appears.

Daniel in later life.

Chapters 5, 6, and 9-12 cover the last stages in Daniel's life. We see plainly in these passages that he was a person of no less weight when he was an old man. Still he presents the same front ; consistent and alert to the end. There was no retiring from concern about God's

concerns. His inward life was as fresh and real as ever. God's mind was revealed to him in considerable degree in his later life. Words about God's sovereignty, His total over-ruling behind the scenes now, and His open supremacy later, were conveyed to him. Continuance in loyalty to God at **all** stages is important, and not least when the prime of life is over. It is especially important to continue in the disciplined and receptive attitude, in open-ness to the mind of God, in the sense of real dependence on God for wisdom and understanding. Daniel shows no hint of the attitude which rests in its own wisdom and seniority ; he shows no wish to withdraw from fidelity to his God so long as his life remains.

Hebrews 11, with its long line of acts of faith, gives only a fraction of a verse to Daniel (verse 33). Picking out the crowning moment of his faith, it speaks of faith that "stopped the mouths of lions". Perhaps his crowning whole night of faith would be a better description. Let us remember the fact that it was as a very old man that this specially noted example of his faith was shown.

Another few verses worth singling out are the opening ones of chapter 10. It happened as late in Daniel's life as anything in the book. See him here, in extreme old age, mourning and fasting three full weeks, until "a thing was revealed" to him, which he later records. Is it not a singularly potent lesson to us all, young and old, to see how disciplined is Daniel's manner of life to the very end ? Here is a life governed, not by self-interest, nor by expediency, but totally controlled by devotion to his God. It began that way in his youth, and here he is, still jealous for God's honour at the end.

Final words.

Reviewing this address, it ought to be said that the first two sections are the most pressing ones. What we are **in youth** determines very much what we can be later. Faithfulness to God is much less readily taken up in midstream in our lives, than entered into at an early stage. It is surely more honourable, and worthy of our God, that we should begin on this course at the earliest stage, and continue too, as Daniel did. Also, what we are **inwardly** is the key to what we may be for God in the outwardly active sense. We cannot be Christians of any weight on the surface, and in Christian activities, unless we are right at heart and inwardly devoted to our Lord.

The last verse of chapter 1 is worth noting. Daniel outlived the empire and the emperors who were his captors. Empires crumble and pass, but the man of God has a durability about his person and his character. The last verse of the whole book is also significant. Daniel will "stand in his lot at the end of the days". At the end of time his place is assured ; God honours those who honour Him. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof : but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2 : 17).

FEAR NOT

JOHN BARNES

Luke's Gospel.

IT has frequently been remarked that the Old Testament ends on a sombre note. "Lest I come and smite the earth with a **curse.**" This last word of the Old Scriptures was followed by a long silence, thought to have lasted about four hundred years. When the oppressive silence was, at length, broken, what a wonderful word it was which came from the Lord : "Fear not" ! This lovely message of cheer and comfort occurs seven times in Luke's gospel. I thought we might meditate on them.

1. Disappointment. (Luke 1 : 13).

Zacharias was a disappointed man. Godly and irreproachable, he and Elisabeth his wife were nevertheless childless and now well on in years. No doubt their pious desire was to have a son who would continue, as his father had done, in the service of the Lord in the priesthood, true to the Lord in the prevailing apostasy. Israel's unfaithfulness and consequent subjection to a foreign power would be a constant grief to the faithful priest and in the course of his long service he had brought these matters to the notice of his God, but apparently there was no answer.

Then the answer came at a most unlikely time. He and Elisabeth were both old and, humanly speaking, the possibility of their having a son was remote indeed. It had happened before, of course. No Jew would forget the remarkable case of Abraham and Sarah ; but this would be thought of as unique. The time was unpromising in other ways, too. The Jews were still walking in unfaithfulness, nationally, and there had been no repentance or turning to the Lord. The detested Romans still ruled while the equally hated Idumean family provided sub-rulers for the provinces. What a picture Luke paints with a few deft strokes of his inspired pen. (3: 1, 2) Roman, Idumean and apostate Jew were in the seats of the mighty. Chapter three depicts a scene some years later than the period which concerns us at the moment but doubtless similar conditions prevailed. Intrigue and bribery, corruption and violence, dishonesty and unrighteousness blanketted every aspect of life. Into that scene of dense darkness shone this bright gleam of hope set in words of wonderful power ; "Fear not." Possibly, like Asaph of old, Zacharias had frequently asked,

"Will the Lord cast off for ever ?
And will He be favourable no more ?
Is His mercy clean gone for ever ?
Doth His mercy fail for evermore ?
Hath God forgotten to be gracious ?
Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies ?(Psalm 77)

Six haunting questions ! It began to look as though God had cast off His people. For four centuries the nation, long used to messages from the Lord had heard not a word. Then, like Asaph in the sanctuary, the voice spoke to the aged priest : "Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard." In a still future day the remnant will similarly yearn for a word from the Lord. "How long O Lord . . . ?" They may have to wait for the answer but it will come. (c.f. Habakkuk 2 : 3).

Everything that Zacharias had prayed for was to be granted him. A son, yes more than a son ; John was not to be a priest but the long awaited forerunner of the Messiah who would come to the people in the spirit and power of Elijah. This was more than he could ask or think.

The response of Zacharias to this intelligence was delayed for several months ; delayed because of his unbelief. But when it did come, upon the restoration of his power of speech it burst forth like a bubbling fountain.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for He hath visited and redeemed His people."

The angelic messenger had linked this first communication of the New Testament with the last breathings of the Old. C.f. Malachi 3 : 5, 6 with Luke 1 : 16, 17. If we recall that Malachi means Angel or Messenger of Jehovah, the link becomes even more emphatic. It is but a step from the Old Testament to the New.

Nor could we ignore the conjunction "lest" in that final word of Malachi. What was uppermost in the Lord's mind was not the curse which He would ultimately have to enforce but the blessing His heart longed to bring in, a blessing centred in His own Son. He would come in Manhood and by His death redeem His people. Zacharias had some insight into this truth as we see in his noble song.

2. **Dismay** (Luke 1 : 30).

The second occasion on which these encouraging words were spoken was when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. This great heavenly messenger was sent by God to a small Galilean city called Nazareth to carry a message to Mary, a virgin engaged to Joseph who, though of the direct lineage of David, was working in the place as a humble carpenter. The sudden appearance of the great heavenly emissary would be a frightening experience for a simple peasant women like Mary. Verse 29 amply confirms this impression. Then the message he was to give her was so altogether astounding that it is not surprising to us to know that she was disturbed beyond imagination. The angel immediately calmed her troubled mind using those same word, "Fear not." How much she would appreciate the kindness of that encouragement.

The message which the angel Gabriel brought to Mary was that by divine intervention she was to bear a son Who was the Messiah, the Son of David, the King of Israel. This was a message of shattering intelligence to such a person as Mary and one which might well fill her heart with awe, but the angel said, "Fear not." This new direction in her life would bring the young woman and her husband into strange and terrifying situations, but she was not to worry, Humanly she might indeed be aghast at the implications of the announcement but was calmed by the cheering word included in the message.

People often say to others, "Don't be afraid," or more often, in an attempt to cover their own inability to help, "Try not to worry," so mutely confessing their own helplessness. They ask us not to worry

but rarely give us a reason for not worrying. In each of these cases we refer to in Luke a reason is provided. In the case of Zacharias the reason was that his prayer was heard. In this case Mary was not to fear because she had found favour with God. What a bulwark for the young woman in this unique situation. She had found favour, unasked, unsought for, unthought of. God had set His seal upon her which made her blessed and unique among women.

3. Dread (2 : 10).

Months have gone by and Joseph and Mary are now in Bethlehem for the census decreed by the emperor. Out in the hills shepherds were with their flocks. It was night. The hills were bathed in a velvet darkness relieved by the myriads of stars twinkling over-head. Perhaps some of the men were dozing while others watched, maybe chatting in subdued tones, when suddenly the whole environment was illuminated by a blaze of dazzling light as the angel of the Lord came upon them. We are not surprised that they were sore afraid. The sudden appearance of a lion or a wolf would have galvanized them into action and they would have known how to cope with the situation, but this was something entirely unprecedented for which they had no blueprint.

The glorious messenger opened his mouth and addressed them. No dreadful words of doom or judgment fell from his lips. "Fear not," he said. Instead of announcing some impending punishment he brought this wonderful word of cheer ; "Fear not." The reason, in this instance was that he bore, instead, a message of great joy. The Saviour had been born, the Messiah, the Lord. Instead of creeping fearfully into Bethlehem to tell the frightened people of a doom about to engulf them they were able to run there joyfully and see the blessed Babe for themselves and then spread the holy tidings to others around.

4. Despair (Luke 5 : 10).

The Lord Jesus had requested the use of Simon Peter's boat from which to speak to the crowd on the shore. After the address was ended He instructed Simon to let down the nets for a catch and they enclosed a great haul of fish. Peter then threw himself down before the Lord—at His knees, it reads—and said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man O Lord." What did he mean ? How beautifully the incident emphazises the truth that the goodness of God leads men to repentance. Peter's association with the Lord had commenced earlier than this episode, no doubt, and he had listened not only to the baptist's testimony but to the Lord Himself. Probably the sense of his own sin and unworthiness had deepened progressively, culminating in that gesture and utterance of despair. He must have felt his unfitness to be in the presence of such holiness. The miracle of the huge catch of fish only served to confirm this conviction of Peter's that he was in the company of the Holy Son of God and that enhanced his sense of despair. In similar situations others had uttered their dolorous groans. Isaiah had cried, "Woe is me for I am undone."

Job had confessed, "I abhor myself." John the apostle was to write in his great book, "I fell at His feet as dead." This was Peter's experience on this occasion.

The Lord Jesus immediately responded with this sweet empowering word of comfort and strength, "Fear not." It was, as usual, not only a word of comfort but a reason was given for taking courage. "Fear not ; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." He had not felt fit to take fish out of the lake in the presence of such an august holiness but there was a wonderful prediction, to be fulfilled from Pentecost's memorable day and onwards. He was to take men alive for his divine Master. What a contrast to the dead net of Rome which falsely links itself with the name of this great and successful servant of Christ.

5. **Death** (8 : 20).

Many experiences in life quite naturally inspire us with fear but death is probably the greatest of them all, the king of terrors, as Bildad calls it. (Job 18 : 14). With the grisley monster about to snatch away their only little daughter, Jairus and his wife would feel their hearts invaded by a sickening dread. The Lord Jesus had undertaken to come to their aid but meanwhile there was some delay occasioned by the healing of the woman who had suffered from the issue of blood. Thereupon came the numbing news that the child had died. A brother in the Lord whose only daughter had been taken from them in blooming young womanhood said to me, as I haltingly tried to speak words of comfort to him ; "I know what you mean, John, and am grateful for your words which I know to be true, but I would give all that I possess to see her walk through that door now." This is a sentiment we can all understand. In the case of Jairus we would gather that the Lord's offer of help as Healer would be welcome but what could even He do now that death had actually occurred ! "Trouble not the Master." (v. 49). There was an implied acknowledgement of His ability to cope with situations. "Master," but they thought that this was one beyond even His ability. But the Lord Jesus was aware of their message and comforted the stricken father with those same magnificently simple words, "Fear not ; believe only, and she shall be made whole." He did not say, "Everything will turn out alright," but spoke with assurance and power. "She **shall** be made whole." He who was, Himself to pass victoriously through death was, in Himself, the Resurrection and the Life. The sequel we know well ; the girl was raised and restored to her rejoicing parents.

6. **Danger** (12 : 7).

The Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples about the appalling difficulties of the testimony. He did not speak unfeelingly but addressed them with deep affection as "My friends." (v. 4). But He did not veil the stark reality of the perils they faced. Maintenance of the truth in a hostile world is no easy matter. If men are faithful they will surely suffer. They were to confess the rejected Son of God

before men whatever the cost. Men sometimes have fearful power over the lives of their fellows—even power to kill. Probably nothing frightens us so much as this. The Lord spoke to His beloved followers as One who knew the stern truth thoroughly. He says, "When they bring you ; not, "Should they bring you." He was speaking of facts, yet future but no less certain. "When they bring you into the synagogues, etc." They would be, like Himself, falsely accused, tried before religious and civil courts vested with awesome powers over men and they were not to take the easy way out by denial but they were to stand for the truth fearlessly. "Fear not," He urged them. The God who does not forget the lowly sparrow will never forsake His own, of more value to Him than many sparrows. The hairs of their heads were numbered. We may comb them out of our thinning thatch and never give them a thought, but the God who cares for us takes account even of this. What is almost beneath our own notice is not without importance to Him. What a foundation for confidence in our God in the darkest hour !

7. Deprivation. (12 : 32).

These early disciples were to experience real privations and so were to learn dependence. In our European society of today we know but little of this. The Lord is speaking here not of luxuries, but of the very basic elements of living ; what to eat, what to drink and what to wear. He reminds us of God's care for wild creatures, the flowers of the fields and the grass of the plains. He provides for these and in their need He would provide for the Lord's followers. He refers to them as a "little flock," a term of sweet endearment, surely. They were a tiny, humanly speaking defenceless company in a fiercely hostile world. He speaks of God as, "your Father." He mentions His bounty to them as His "good pleasure," and He would give them not perishable things which last only briefly like the moth, but abiding things like "the Kingdom." One asks, Where are our interests ? Are they in the kingdoms of this world which disappear in a puff of smoke or in that which is enduring and has the power of the divine throne beneath it ? "Fear not, little flock." The Lord Jesus is shortly coming back. Rejected and despised by this world, He is coming back to lay claim to His rights. May we be enabled to be "in nothing terrified by our adversaries" as we wait for the Lord, caring for His interests and His people. "Blessed is that servant whom His Lord, when He cometh shall find so doing." (v. 43).

JOHN BARNES.

PAUL'S LAST WORDS : A CHARGE ON LATER GENERATIONS.

COLIN CURRY

(STUDIES IN 2 TIMOTHY)

3. DILIGENT AND PATIENT EFFORT NEEDED.

IN this paper we shall limit our attention mostly to chapter 2 : 1-15. The need for Christian stamina is pressed in verse 1, and its Source made clear. A few comments on this have already been made. Paul

next illustrates some of the features of a character made strong by the grace of Christ, and urges Timothy to show these qualities. A Christian's faith commits him to a warfare, in which soldier-like discipline and attention to duty are necessary. Another way in which a Christian bends himself to his calling is indicated by an athlete's dedicated submission to training and his unsparing aim to succeed. Then sheer effort is needed, protracted and solid, of a kind suggested by the hard-slogging of farm labouring. The idea of 'working at it' is latent in all these pictures. Indeed it continues to appear in later verses. Verse 15, for instance, speaks of a **workman,** busy in a different way; carefully and painstakingly handling, understanding, and teaching the word of God. The end of the chapter mentions a **bondservice** to the highest Master of all (v. 24), a service requiring a meek and patient approach, yet also involving much self-spending in the arduous task of instructing others. Verse 5 of chapter 4 uses the phrase "do the work of an evangelist". This is sometimes construed to imply that less-gifted persons should step in when evangelists are few. Certainly it is unwise to claim the title of evangelist (or any other title), but to be **doing** and supporting service of this kind is important. Here again the emphasis seems to be on the word **work.** *All these verses show that any activity for the Lord is demanding.* They encourage effort and thoroughgoing commitment in our Christianity, in the strength that Christ provides. Less than that would surely be unworthy of our Lord. We shall make brief comments on the four illustrations occurring within the section. Headings based on the A.V. seem suitable, though the alternative translations for some of these words have their merits.

Endure

Like a soldier on active service, Timothy is urged to face the hard experiences, the rigors and privation and the reproach which consistency with the testimony can entail. If Paul asks this of him, he does so as one already taking a large share of it himself (see verses 9 and 10). A capacity to bear things is part of true Christian faithfulness. It calls for a certain hardiness and robustness. It is heartening however to know that there is fellowship, with Christ Himself (verses 11, 12) and His truth, and with others true to Him, in this line of loyalty to the Christian calling. "Take thy share in suffering" (J.N.D. translation) brings out this idea latent in the opening of verse 3.We are not to think of ourselves as conscripts, but as selected along with others for this high honour of devotion to our Lord, with a great opportunity to please Him is this way. Like a soldier in the thick of a real conflict (not merely on exercises or manoeuvres) it befits each of us to give undistracted and thoroughgoing attention to our task. We must be on guard about entanglements; things which divert us, choke our Christian life, sapping the energy of our allegiance to Christ. "A good soldier of Jesus Christ" is **true** to Him; his whole outlook is geared to his calling, and his whole desire is the approval of his great Commander-in-chief. It is his most valued reward to have that approval too. After considering these verses the following question arises for each of us to face.

What things have we been prepared to deny ourselves (even quite legitimate things) so that our involvment in our Lord's interests might be more pure and unhampered ?

Strive

Many translations use the word "contend" (as in a contest) where the A.V. has the word "strive" (verse 5) : the actual word is allied to our word athlete. Strive is a good word however, and it seems undesirable to weaken it since no athlete succeeds without hard striving to that end. Outright exertion during the contest is preceded by strict preparation for it, and there is a total dedication and self-discipline about the whole action. The sole aim is to win, and to gain the crown. The striving has to be done "lawfully" however, a word which implies adherence to the rules and the style of the contest. Not only earnest thrustfulness towards a single objective but also impeccable behaviour in agreement with such a pursuit is suggested here. Conformity in practice, in manner of life, goes hand in hand with zeal to excel in the Christian life, as Timothy is repeatedly reminded. We may well ask ourselves how well-absorbed we are in following the life that honours our Lord. There is a difference between dallying with Christianity and being properly involved in it.

Labour

The third illustration of the wholeheartedness appropriate to a faithful Christian is a more prosaic one. Our imagination is stirred by thoughts of soldierly self-sacrifice, or the all-out performance of a competitor. But a husbandman's activities, in the untiring culture of a plot of ground (perhaps starting from virgin soil), command little excitement. This kind of toil is unspectacular and attracts few observers. It receives little acclaim. But the hard grind of the husbandman, his persistent work and his patience, brings him its harvest in due course. This is the sense of verse 6. Labour expended on an object renders it one's own, but there is little satisfaction from little effort. An athlete puts in an intensive effort, piling his energy into the immediate task. The tiller of the ground on the other hand mounts up an extensive total effort over a long period ; he goes on patiently without flagging. Clearly this is yet another illustration of the principle of expenditure and sacrifice **now**, followed by compensation **later.** But the quality of behaviour that it asks from ourselves perhaps presents one of the stiffer challenges from these verses. There is always enthusiasm for the special high points in Christian experience. But there is a real need to be keen and faithful in the unspectacular areas of Christian living. Sustained fidelity to our Lord is asked of us, day by day, in season and out of season. This ability to carry on steadily with our Lord, in patient devotion to Him, with little recog-

nition form elsewhere, is certainly not in accord with our natural bent as human beings. We can, however, be sustained in such a course by the sense of what is due to Him, by the grace which He supplies, and in the awareness of the sure harvest from such a life.

Consider ; Remember ; Study.

We take these three words together (from verses 7, 8, and 15) since they are all activities of the mind, in dependence on our Lord. In the kind of days in which we live discernment of the will of God for our own lives, in all thoughtfulness and diligence, is a further activity requiring our serious application. **Meditation** is needed on the scriptural and the spiritual guidance available to us. In our own special circumstances we must earnestly seek out and follow the course that would please our Lord. Those who depend on Him clinging to Him for guidance, find the understanding that they need. Openness to instruction from Himself (mostly through His written word), together with preparedness to follow it, can clear away many of the problems in knowing His mind for us. Let us consider what the apostle says particularly here, and may we find the Lord's clear support in applying it to ourselves.

Recollection of the great cardinal basis of our faith helps greatly in facing the demanding side of the Christian life. The person of Christ, the solid reality of His visitation here in the flesh, His perfect and costly faithfulness to the very limit, must always be kept in mind. The other side of the story of His suffering, the answer to it, is also full of encouragement for us : the wonderful outcome for Him of that supreme sacrifice, risen now from among the dead, soon to reign unrivalled, ever living and ever at hand today to strengthen those who follow in His steps. If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him. We must constantly recall this ; for it will feed grace and fortitude into our living for Him.

The word "study" in verse 15 simply means "be diligent" ; but diligence in approaching the word of God is little different from study of it, and we learn from this verse how important such an activity is, though it has to be done with humility as well as purposefulness. Here is an occupation which God seals with His approval. The evidence of that approval appears in the life which feeds on the word of God. This is one of the most critical sources of strength in the life of faith. It builds the sinew and shapes the thinking of the man of God, thoroughly equipping him for every good work (as chapter 3 will tell us).

Study of the word of God is work, but it is rewarding work, work which is its own reward and commendation. The noun "workman" here is said to be restricted to practical handicrafts men. Handling the word of God is like craftsmen's work, requiring delicate judgments, carefulness and skill, and respect for the material in hand ; in short abilities which are in accord with the direction of the Spirit of God. The product of such work is a credit to the workman, though the boastful spirit will be absent. A life given to the word of God has qualities and effects on others which more than justify the whole activity.

We delay consideration of other details in this verse and its context. These matters fall under our next heading : the characteristic of **purity** urgently required from Christians today.

FIVE VILLAGES — GEORGES ANDRÉ

CAPERNAUM

"Behold my servant" (Matthew 12 : 18).

"LEAVING Nazareth, he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea". It is in this way that Matthew 4 : 13 indicates how the Lord Jesus made his entrance into public life. He left the remote village where he had spent so many years to come into this busy commercial town beside Lake Gennesaret where he was to perform many miracles and present the bulk of his teaching. "He was about thirty years of age," as it says in Luke 3 : 23.

It was a very great privilege for this town to see the Son of God living there for some time, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light ; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matthew 4 : 16).

But what a responsibility at the same time, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12 : 48). Capernaum did not welcome the Messiah. As in other places he was rejected and despised there. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not : Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! . . . and thou, Capernaum which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell : for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matthew 11 : 20-23).

Neither Sodom nor Capernaum have remained until this day. Nothing is left of Capernaum ; everything has disappeared ; even the precise site on which it was built is unknown.

But how much more dreadful is the fate of those who, having heard Him, seen Him and witnessed His miracles, "spurned the Son of God !" And what will be the end of those who, in our time, reject the gospel of grace and turn away from the One who has been presented to them from their very childhood and oppose the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts ? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10 : 28-31).

As the centre for his ministry in Galilee, Capernaum is called "his own city" (Matthew 9 : 1) ; we see Him returning many times to the house in which he lived there.

Calling the disciples

It was at Capernaum and its surroundings that the Lord Jesus had the desire, at the start of his ministry, to associate with himself disciples called by himself and who left all to follow him. Simon and Andrew, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him". "James and John, his brother . . . left their father Zebedee in the boat and followed him". "Levi . . . rose and followed him". What obedience to the Master's call ! as they followed in the steps of Him who would

respond "immediately" and "again" - very common words in the gospel of Mark - to the requests and the various needs presented to Him.

Again it was near Capernaum that Jesus "went up into the hills and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and to have authority to heal" (Mark 3 : 13-14). Let us notice these words. It was not the disciples who decided to follow the Master ; it was He who called them ; he chose those whom he wanted, and when they came to him, he appointed them ; not in order to preach immediately but first and foremost "to be with him". There can be no fruitful service without first sitting at the Lord's feet and learning from him, without having lived and continuing to live in fellowship with him.

In Luke 14 : 25-35, Jesus stresses three conditions to being his disciple and they contain in full the secret of a victorious life of blessing.

The hour strikes for any person who has responded to the call of Jesus "follow me" to deliberately "take up his cross" (Mark 8, 34). It is one thing to be aware of our identification with Christ in his death in a doctrinal sense but quite another to have knowledge of the cross in our experience.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters . . . " (Luke 14 : 26). The Lord must have **precedence** over the strongest relationships which bind us to others. That is the meaning of the verb used. Matthew 10 : 37 makes it plain "he who loves his father, mother . . . son or daughter **more than me** is not worthy of me". In the realm of legitimate affections Jesus claims the first place.

" . . . and even his own life . . . " (Luke 14 : 26). Dying for Christ is a favour bestowed on a few but to give up one's life for Christ is one of the essential conditions for any who wish to be his disciples. "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself" so the Apostle Paul says (Act 20 : 24).

"So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14 : 33). This third condition encompasses at a stroke all aspects of self-denial for Christ. It is the cross with all its implications. It is presented to "whoever". No-one is excluded, there is no way of escape. It is **all** . . . or nothing.

Have we decided, after counting the cost (verse 28), **that** we intend to know Christ as intimately as possible and to be his disciples with the help of his grace ?

These verses are not intended solely for missionaries but for **whoever** desires to follow the Lord. The test of their application in the first instance will not be the great acts of renunciation or impressive departures but the way in which we succeed in our daily lives in giving Him first place in all things. Seek **first** the Kingdom of God ; then confidently commit oneself to the Father's keeping. For example, are we able to set aside each day, the morning reading apart—even to the detriment of our studies or pastimes—twenty or thirty minutes to study his word, (in this respect, it is better to spend

twenty minutes each day reading the bible and three pages of the writings which give us help to understand it better, rather than giving an hour to it . . when we find the time!) Are we able to accept as from him the annoying events of our daily lives ? Do we know what it is to give up some advantage or opportunity so that we may perform a good work which He prepared beforehand and placed in our pathway ?

Being a disciple of the Lord, as someone has said, involves a change of centre : at one time self was the centre, now He is the centre. That fact has tremendous significance !

The miracles

The gospels relate for us about thirty-four miracles of the Lord. But John indicates that "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20 : 30 cf 21, 25). A large number of these miracles were performed at Capernaum and its neighbouring parts. It was there that he healed the centurion's servant with" a word" (Matthew 8 : 5-13). It was there too that he delivered Peter's mother-in-law from her fever, by touching her hand ; "And she rose and served **him**" (Matthew 8 : 15. (Mark says "She served **them**" : how can we serve the Lord without doing it to those who belong to him ?).

It was also at Capernaum, when evening had come, that they brought to him many who were possessed with demons, all who were sick, "the whole city was gathered together about the door : and he healed many". It was there that when "it was reported that he was at home", some people came to him, bringing a paralytic whom they had to let down through the roof because of the crowd. "Seeing their faith", Jesus forgave the sick man's sins and healed him.

It was also at Capernaum that the incident of the half shekel took place (Matthew 17 : 24-27) which illustrates on the one hand the humility of Jesus who agreed to pay this tax, although he was the Lord of the temple, being associated with Peter by his payment. On the other hand it shows the glory of the Creator who commanded a fish to bring him the necessary coin to give to the collector. "Everything which the earth contains was dependent upon him, at the very moment when he consented to be dependent upon men". (J.G.B.) Then with what tact did he reprove Peter (who had put him on the same level as himself) by saying "Give it to them for me and for yourself" !

His teaching

To the crowds he spoke in parables : "He spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it". It was at Capernaum that several were told like those in Matthew 13. How he adapted himself to his audience, choosing his examples from their everyday life, not speaking in Galilee as he would in Judea, not addressing the crowds in the same terms as his disciples ! Here is an example for us, in order that we might present the Word in a way which is suited to our listeners, not speaking to children as if they were grown up, nor to uninformed people as we would to children of God. In the Acts, Paul carefully followed the Master's example by not addressing the Athenians as he would the Jews.

SEPTEMBER, 1977.

SPIRITUAL MYOPIA

J. STODDART

OF all the good gifts and perfect gifts bestowed upon man by his beneficent Creator sight is surely one of the most precious. To be deprived of this faculty either wholly or partly is a truly sad experience all too common in our modern world. Thankfully we read in the Gospels of the Saviour's complete mastery of this and every other ill to which the flesh is heir. Indeed, to assure John the Baptist, languishing in prison, that He was the Christ His encouraging words were, "**The blind receive their sight**, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Matthew 11 : 1/6). And how many were grateful recipients of such miraculous power!

Throughout Scripture, **spiritual** blindness is spoken of as the counterpart of the physical malady and thus the seriousness of the human plight is made abundantly plain. In its spiritual sense blindness is common to all men and only the miraculous operation of grace can effect the remedy that causes men "to see the light . . . to be enlightened with the light of the living" (Job 33: 28/30). "The true light was that which, coming into the world lightens every man." (John 1 : 9, J.N.D.. Trans.) The condition described in the title of this paper is related to spiritual sight impaired, as so often in the physical sense, by inattention and lack of exercise. Literally, myopia (combining two Greek words, muops-to shut and ops, the eye) is shortsightedness. Here is the very word used by the apostle Peter in his second epistle (ch. 1 : 9), "But he with whom these things are not present is blind, **shortsighted** (myopic), and has forgotten the purging of his former sins." The "these things" are those referred to in the foregoing verses 5/7.

Giving attention to these words of Peter, there would seem to be a great amount of spiritual myopia in the world today. While we may have to endure the physical disability of shortsightedness (although alleviated in measure by the use of spectacles) there is happily no necessity to tolerate spiritual myopia. Peter was writing to those who had "received like precious faith with us" (v. 1) and were not, therefore totally blind, but some at least were closing their eyes to "these things" mentioned in v. 5/7, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance (self control) ; and to temperance endurance ; and to endurance godliness ; and to godliness brotherly love ; and to brotherly love ; charity (love). For if **these things** be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such therefore are the

things which stimulate spiritual perception and without which we are spiritually myopic and useless. Diligence, therefore says Peter, is to be given, not only to the reading of the Scriptures - so necessary in itself - but to the cultivation of "these things" in the practical details of life. Undoubtedly they are produced by the power of the Holy Spirit, but the danger of closing the eye to their importance in practice is nothing short of spiritual myopia.

The blind man who received his sight from Jesus in John 9 exercised his new-found faculty so well that he witnessed boldly, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." (v.25) Spiritual sight seemed also to have been imparted with the physical miracle, for fearlessly contending with the Jews, he finds himself excommunicated. But even this man had still much to learn about the One who had given him sight. Did he really know Him, know Who He was ? It was not enough to be able to contend with others because he saw what they could not or would not. Only another contact with Jesus could reveal his spiritual deficiency in the knowledge of Him. Perhaps many like him today are unaware that their spiritual sight is lacking the most wonderful discovery that faith can reach. Content with witnessing (however good and needful that is) to a thrilling experience, they fail to come to the knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God. True, the blind man was ready and willing for this further light, the clarification of his spiritual vision, for when asked by Jesus, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God ?", he readily and eagerly asks, "Who is He, Lord, **that I might believe on Him ?"** As yet his perception fell short of the full truth of the Lord's Person ; and are there not many like him in this respect ? But to remain in that condition is spiritual myopia, a shortsighted apprehension of Christianity's most wonderful revelation. So far as the blind man was concerned, the remedy for his lack was instantaneous, for now the Lord Jesus says to him, "Thou hast both seen him and he it is that talketh with thee." (v. 37) His vision now abundantly clear, he answers in the only way such a revelation made possible. "Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him." No true worship can there be, "in spirit and in truth" until this blessed knowledge of the Son of God is clearly apprehended.

A rather strange story emerges in the Gospel of Mark (8 : 22/28). A blind man is brought to Jesus with the request that He should touch him. "And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town ; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put His hands upon him, He asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up and said I see men as trees walking." What an imperfect, extraordinary kind of seeing this was ! He was certainly not now blind and could see things but not as they truly were. Men loomed large as trees in his vision, (was this an exaggerated sense of man's importance?) and trees were seen as walking in some distorted way. Now no miracle that Jesus ever did was imperfect, we can be sure. But the blind man's reception of the gift of sight appears to have been partial and incomplete. Surely we have known souls with a spiritually parallel experience resulting from misconception or misrepresentation of the truth. Blind they are not but myopic they certainly are, since their

understanding of the spiritual scene is disproportionate and out of focus with the truth. What cure is there for such a condition ? "After that, Jesus put His hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up : and he was restored, and saw every man clearly." The impress of Christ upon the man's sight removed the exaggerated concept of men around him and put everything else into true perspective, and the upward look assured him that Christ was greater than all. The verses that follow this incident illustrate the spiritual principle it inculcates . Asking the disciples, "Whom do men say that I am ? they answered, John the Baptist : but some say, Elias ; and others, One of the prophets." Their ideas and opinions of such men obscured the truth about Christ. But when He asked those who knew and loved Him, "But Whom do ye say that I am ?" their answer was clear and unequivocal. "Thou art the Christ." He was unrivalled in their thoughts and affections.

Sometimes we see much more clearly the things that are against us than those that are for us. A form of spiritual myopia is evidenced by occupation with life's problems and difficulties, real as they may be, to the disregard of greater and more abundant blessings. A striking illustration of this is provided in the well-known story of 2 Kings 6 : 9/18. The King of Syria warred against Israel but was greatly hampered by the intelligence operations of Elisha, the prophet, whose sagacity out-witted his plans, informing the King of Israel of the enemy's every movement and plan of attack. But it was told Ben-Hadad that Elisha was in the city of Dothan so, "sent he thither horses and chariots and a great host : and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master ! How shall we do ? And he answered, Fear not : for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." This answer was not in the least clear to the servant who could only see defeat and disaster for Israel from so formidable a force arrayed against them. "And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see." So often spiritual myopia, shortsightedness, is due to a lack of prayer which alone can dispel the mists that impair our vision and give us clear sight of the true situation. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man ; and he saw ; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Victory was assured for Israel and a resounding defeat for the marauding King of Syria. The powerful protection of God, unseen by the shortsighted servant at first, was there all the time but only when the eye-salve of prayer and faith was applied did this become apparent.

"What shall we then say to these things ? If God be for us, who can be against us ? He that spared not His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things ?" (Romans 8 : 31/32) May we answer these divinely-posed questions with the clear vision and conviction of our faith.

IMPRESSIONS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

DAVID ANDERSON

"The People Resort unto Him Again" (10 : 1)

IN a first detailed study of this gospel I was struck by this recurring feature that Jesus is the Person to whom all the people were attracted. Many phrases give this impression, e.g. "They brought unto him" (1 : 32), "They came to him from every quarter" (1 : 45), "There were many, and they followed him" (2 : 15), "They pressed upon him for to touch him" (3 : 10), "Many . . . ran . . . and came together unto him" (6 :33), and it is good to see how He was able to meet every need. It is well known that the Lord is here portrayed as the Servant-Prophet, the key verse to the gospel being "For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10 : 45). The purpose of this paper is to trace, in a general sense, this ministry of the Son of God (1 : 1) through the gospel and to see how it reflects His present ministry on high towards His own - especially as they are "gathered together unto Him" (10 : 1 R.S.V.).

Ministering to the General Needs of Mankind

After the minimum of introduction, the writer plunges into the story of how Jesus soon busied Himself in service towards men. The Editor is renowned for his references to the great enemies of mankind - **disease, demons, death** and **disaster** and in the opening chapters the Lord deals with all these (1 : 32-34 ; 5 : 35-43 ; 4 : 37-41). Individuals and multitudes were blessed and none was turned away - even at the end of the day ! (1 : 32). I often reflect at the prayer meeting on how many of the people of God today are experiencing the effect of one or more of these enemies in their lives and how comforting it is to realise the Lord's constant service towards them.

One marvellous incident is recorded, as the hymn writer puts it, "When mothers of Salem their children brought to Jesus" so that He would bless them (10 : 13-16). "How kind was the Saviour to bid these children welcome" and take them up in His arms, put His hands on them and bless them ! (10 : 16). Many of us have families and desire His blessing upon them - such an incident would encourage us and also indicate to us His approval upon our gospel ministry towards the young.

His Ministry of Challenge and Rebuke

Where necessary the Lord issued a challenge.. The challenge of the cross and of following Him was twice given (8 : 34-38 and 10 : 17-22). This was done in compassion and grace.

A ministry of rebuke is also evident especially to the religious leaders of the Jews. I have long time noticed the development of their opposition - they were astonished at His doctrine (1 : 22), they

reasoned in their thoughts (2 : 6-7), they approached the disciples (2 : 16), they came to Him (2 : 18), they confronted Him (2 : 24), they watched Him to accuse Him (3 : 2), they set to destroy Him (3 : 6), they attributed His works to the Devil (3 : 22), but failed to see the patient rebuke they received from Him.

The scribes, those well taught in the Scriptures but wrong in the interpretation of it, were quietened by the One who was able to "teach with authority and not as the scribes" (12 : 35-37 ; 1 : 22).

The Sadducees, those rationalists who subtracted from the Scriptures and held only to the Pentateuch, but even that as being the words of a great man and not God's word, heard that "Ye err because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God" (12 : 24).

The traditional Pharisees who added to the Scriptures found they "were making the word of God of none effect through their tradition" (7 : 13).

The Herodians, who introduced the things of Herod and Rome into the Jewish religion were told "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (12 : 17).

It may be necessary for us to have this kind of ministry forwarded to us on occasions when we display one of these four characteristics.

The Lord's Ministry to His Own

The Lord gave special attention to serving His disciples, but more especially the twelve, and even more so to Peter, James and John. They were the recipients of His teaching for "unto them it was given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God" (4 : 11). It was when they were alone with Him (4 : 10-34) or in the house (7 : 17 ; 9 : 28, 33) He instructed them. He deemed this necessary (4 : 34 ; 6 : 31 ; 8 : 34 ; 9 : 35 ; 10 : 23, 32, 42 ; 12 : 43) and they desired to know (4 : 10, 7 : 17 ; 9 : 28 ; 13 : 3-4). Similarly we should "gather together unto Him" (a fundamental point of assembly gatherings) not only to tell Him about things (6 : 30) but to learn from Him.

He ministered unto them in several ways :

1. The call to follow Him (1 : 17-21).
2. Instruction in prayer by example (1 : 35-38).

This was the secret to successful service. The place of prayer was the place of empowering (14 : 35-42).

3. They saw His power (5 : 37, 40-42). He cast out devils (5 : 8) and so they, with apostolic power (3 : 15), were able to cast out many devils (6 : 13) and carry on this miraculous work (16 : 17, 18) signifying that the Lord was working with them (16 : 20).

4. They received instruction in the gospel. He wanted them to be "with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (3 : 15) which He did (6 : 7). Following John Baptist's preaching of the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (1 : 4), he preached that men should repent and believe the gospel (1 : 15). They learnt this from being with Him and so were able to go out and preach that men should repent (6 : 12). Having been with Him (3 : 14) and commissioned by Him (16 : 15) they were sure of His support and of success

(16 : 20) also much instruction about the gospel and its effects was given before they went forth (see the parables in ch. 4). There was a happy balance between "being with him" and "going out to tell" (5 : 18-20). Activity was not all ; they returned and reported back (6 : 30) and had to recuperate (6 : 31). Much effort had to be made in prayer (9 : 18, 28-29), and their commitment to the propagation of the Good News was to be the same as their commitment to Him (8 : 35 ; 10 : 29).

5. He taught them about Himself (8 : 28-30). He referred to Himself as the Son of man, which is the title of His deepest humiliation as well as that of His widest glory (see 2 : 10, 28 ; 8 : 31 ; 9 : 12, 31 ; 10 : 33-34, 45 ; 13 : 26 ; 14 : 21, 41, 62).

6. He revealed unto them His glory (9 : 2-8). This is His millennial glory but we may like to see His glory as being "at the right hand"—that place of power (14 : 62) and exaltation (16 : 19). In this gospel which emphasises His lowliness there is adequate testimony to the glory of His person (1 : 1, 10 ; 5 : 7 ; 9 : 7 ; 14 : 61-62 ; 15 : 39).

7. He was anxious that they should learn about His humiliation and His death. Several times over He draws their attention to how He would be treated (8 : 31 ; 9 : 9, 12, 31 ; 10 : 32-34, 45 ; 14 : 21, 41) and institutes the supper (14 : 24-26) so that they would have His death regularly before them. Peter, James and John were called to witness His sorrow (14 : 33-36). Others stood "afar off looking on" (15 : 40). We would do well to contemplate the presentation of His death in this gospel - the loneliness of the judgment hall, His humility, the details of the account of the cross, His cry and the way He died, all pointing towards the sin-offering aspect of it.

8. Peter, James, John and Andrew received instruction in the Prophetic Word (13 : 2-37). This gave them (as representing the coming Jewish remnant) the ability to distinguish prophetic events and to be on the alert for His coming.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen how the Lord was able to minister to the people and His own. "The Man who in the might of His love touched the leper without being defiled, was the God who alone could remove the leprosy" (J.N.D. on 1 : 40). But there was one great obstacle to His service - unbelief (6 : 4-6). Where there was faith, He served (2 : 5 ; 5 : 34, 36). Even the disciples were slow to learn (9 : 10, 32 ; 10 : 32) and to believe (16 : 10-14). Is this true also of us ?

The effect of the Lord's ministry was threefold. First, it was immediate - a key-word of the gospel used about forty times.. Then it was complete - the paralysed man (2 : 5-12) had his sins forgiven and was healed ; Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead and given something to eat (5 : 43). Thirdly, it affected others, causing them to be astonished (1 : 22 ; 2 : 12 ; 5 : 42 ; 6 : 2, 51 ; 7 : 37 ; 9 : 15 ; 10 : 24, 26, 32 ; 11 : 18 ; 12 : 17 ; 15 : 44) or afraid (4 : 41 ; 5 : 15 ; 6 : 16, 20 ; 9 : 32 ; 10 : 32) and to glorify God (2 : 12). Some were offended (6 : 3). What about us ?

Finally, the Lord's **desire**: another recurring phrase in Mark's gospel is that He "looked round about him" (see 3: 5, 34; 5: 32; 8: 33; 10: 23, 27; 11: 11). From the context this phrase has two meanings. Either it is that the Lord was taking notice of the situation (e.g. 3: 34) or He was looking for a **response**. This latter is especially evident in chapter eleven where, the people having cried those opening words of Psalm 118: 26 "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (v. 9), Jesus enters the city and goes to the temple (v. 11) awaiting the response of the people further "We have blessed thee out of the house of the Lord" (the completion of Psalm 118: 26). It was missing so He had to leave at the end of the day. Let us desire to respond to Him like those of whom it is recorded (15: 41) that they ministered unto Him!

THE COMING OF THE LORD IN I THESSALONIANS

JOHN BARNES.

THOUGH Bible divisions into chapters and verses are man made, and sometimes misleading, in I Thessalonians they have the merit of being logical. Each chapter ends with a reference to the Lord's second coming and each allusion takes up the subject from a different point of view.

1. Confidence. 1: 10

The Thessalonian christians had heard the testimony of Paul, Silvanus and Timotheus and had believed. (2 Thessalonians 1: 10) They had confidently embraced the truth presented to them by those devoted servants of Christ and had turned to God from idols. It is of no little interest that they turned not from idols to God but to God from idols; no doubt an illustration of Dr. Chalmer's famous expression concerning the 'expulsive power of a new affection.' The presentation of the truth as it is in Jesus had captivated their hearts, drawing them away from the dead false gods who had hitherto secured their allegience, and they then devoted their service to the living and true God as opposed to the dead and false idols they had formerly served. Moreover they were awaiting the return of His Son from heaven. He is coming back from the heavens to establish on earth conditions such as prevail in heaven. In the prayer the Lord taught His disciples to pray there is this request; "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This condition of things will be introduced by the Son when He comes. The Thessalonian brethren were confidently awaiting that day. V. 3 refers to the enduring constancy of their hope following on the great assurance with which they had received the message preached to them. Their reliance was well placed. The One who was coming was the One who had died for them and had been raised from amongst the dead in mighty power.

The same power which raised Him to glory would bring Him from glory to earth to establish His kingdom here.

The idea of awaiting is understood to emphasize the assurance of their expectation. In Daniel 2 the stone which struck the great image on the feet is stated to have been cut out without hands. Men have been busily shaping things according to their own ideas and and dreams, but these will all be destroyed by the smiting Stone which will fill the earth. The Thessalonians were happy to await the introduction of an order of things which meddlesome human hands have not tampered with ; confident of its coming, success and durability. This attitude of confidence should mark the saints today. If those saints of so long ago expected its imminent appearing the dawn must be close now.

2. Compensation. 2 : 20.

The apostolic group of workers had laboured arduously in the work of implanting the truth of the gospel in Thessalonica. They had endured sufferings, loss and many hardships there as indeed wherever they went. Paul mentions Philippi as a sample of the kind of treatment they received in their work. (Philippians 2) They had laboured self-sacrificially for the Thessalonians, not seeking to gratify the wishes of men but only seeking to please God ; not looking for financial reward or the congratulations of men ; not even expecting the support of those for whom they laboured in the gospel though it was their undoubted right. On the contrary, they themselves worked with their own hands, night and day, in order to make their services in the glad tidings freely available. (v. 9) Their personal conduct was blameless and their behaviour towards the new converts was marked by a tender care. They tended them as a nursing mother would care for her own infants (v. 7) or as a father would provide for his children (v. 11) giving them counsel and advice. All this was done while enduring bitter persecution from their own countrymen who followed them to foreign cities to prosecute their malicious activities against the gospel.

But the Lord Jesus was about to return and all this would come to an end. The sufferings, sorrows and privations would cease and they would see the Lord in His glory and the saints with Him in glory, their joy and boast in that happy day. They were already in the good of it though the actual day had not yet dawned. Their reward for their labours would be to see their beloved converts in the glory with the Lord shining in the splendour of that supreme occasion. This would be compensation more than sufficient to repay the privations borne in the service of the Lord. Paul refers to it as though it were already here. "Ye ARE our glory and joy."

3. Consolidation. 3 : 15.

The apostle was, nevertheless, concerned about the Thessalonians. We recall that his stay there was brief. Hounded on by the savage hatred of the Jews he had to leave his new friends and move

on to other fields. Consequently news of the persecutions they were enduring caused him some concern as to their ability to endure. So this third chapter conveys strongly the thought of consolidation. He had sent Timothy to them to confirm and encourage them (v. 2) in order that they may not be shaken by their afflictions. He strengthened them with the reminder that they were set for this and that they had been forewarned by the apostle that it would be so. He was anxious that their labours should be ratified in the steadfastness of the saints and affirms that this is his great hope that they should 'stand firm.' All this in view of the Lord's return that they should be confirmed unblameable in holiness before God and the Father at the coming of the Lord with all His saints. They were to be worthy of the day of glory and confirmed in the faith in view of it.

4. Consolation. 4 : 18.

In the early part of this chapter Paul presses on the saints the truth of sanctification, especially in their relationships with one another as men and women. The loose morals of the heathen world were not to be reflected in the assembly. God had given them His Holy Spirit and this was to govern their lives. Later in the chapter he refers to their loved ones who had been taken from among them in death. This was a great sorrow to them, but they were not to grieve in the hopeless way of the pagan world. Those who have lived in a wholly pagan society will be well aware of the hopeless despair which marks mourners at the loss of a close relative. The total absence of hope on such occasions is a poignant feature of heathen societies. The new christian company, of which the Thessalonians formed a part, were not oppressed by this gloomy outlook. The Lord Jesus was coming. In most references to His coming it is His glorious appearing which is mainly in mind but here Paul was inspired to write of the rapture which will precede that public revelation. The Lord will come privately to take His saints away from this sad world. The dead in Christ and the living will all be raptured into His presence. There will be no double event or later catching up of the dead but they will all be taken up 'together' to meet the Lord in the air. So, as being thenceforth forever with Him, when He returns a little while later in the glory of His Kingdom, the saints will come with Him to have their part in that magnificent display and see their Lord in His public manifestation. What a blessed hope, indeed ! The consolation of such a hope would help strengthen their hearts to endure the loss of loved ones in the assurance that they, too, would have their share in the glory and pleasure of that day.

5. Conformity. 5 : 23.

The answer to all the wonder of this unfolding would be found in conformity of life in the waiting time. The world wallows in dense darkness but the believer has the dawning of the day before him. As sons of light and of the day they were to eschew activities which were of the night. Sleeping suggests unwatchfulness and drunkenness suggests artificial stimulations. These features can be found in the

dark outside world but as sons of the day we are to watch and be sober.

Whole sanctification is what the God of peace has in mind for His people. Paul speaks of spirit, soul and body being preserved blameless. It is interesting to note the order in which these constituent elements are named ; not body, soul and spirit as is generally said. Men try to promote sanctification of spirit and soul by applying restrictions to the body or sometimes by the use of artificial stimulants, emotionalism and the like. There is no divorce of body from spirit as though I can do as I like with my body while professing godliness. The man is spoken of in the wholeness of his personality. Although man is a complex being, he is one entire person and the activities of one part cannot be dissociated from the others. So whole conformity is in mind in view of the Lord's return. He will bring in that which is pleasing to God and the saints are to walk now as pleasing to God ; as it were, with the light of that day of glory already reflected in them. This involves the truth of the morning star. It is far enough above the level of this squalid world that it catches the beams of the coming day and reflects them.

AN EXHORTATION FOR THE PRESENT TIME

NORMAN GRIFFITHS

BELOVED, using all diligence to write to you of our common salvation, I have been obliged to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

These words are not the words of the writer of this article even if he has used all diligence to write to you, but were written over nineteen centuries ago by Jude, the brother of James. If this James, as seems most probable, is the one referred to as the Lord's brother (Galatians 1 : 19) then Jude, too is a brother of the Lord and this is supported by the names of His brethren given in the gospels (Matthew 13 : 55 Mark 6 : 3).

Jude's letter is addressed to the called ones, beloved in God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, i.e. all Christians—to you and me, desiring that mercy, peace and love might be multiplied unto us—not merely added but multiplied—greatly increased. Mercy—the compassionate help of God in our weakness ; Peace—heart and mind at rest not only in relation to our acceptance with God but also in respect of our circumstances and Love—the ever increasing enjoyment of the warmth of the love of God and of Christ. These things being experienced would produce the right state in which to receive and respond to, the exhortation.

Jude's original exercise had been to write about our common salvation. Common, not in the sense of what is ordinary, inferior, of little worth, but in the sense of what belongs equally to each one of

the Christian company, the salvation we share (N.I.V.). This salvation which the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews refers to as "so great salvation" is indeed an all-embracing subject. A lovely story is told of the famous Bishop Westcott of Durham, who was one of the great Greek scholars of his day, that out walking one day he was accosted by a young lady. She had recently been converted and full of zeal that others should be, she went up to the elderly grey-haired gentleman and asked him if he was saved. His reply completely non-plussed her for he said "Do you mean **sotheis** or **sozomenos** or **sesosmenos** ?" and then proceeded to explain to her. **Sotheis**—saved once for all, **sozomenos**—being saved and **sesosmenos**—finally saved. Salvation in its past present and future aspects, as it has so often been put, saved from the penalty of sin, the power of sin and the presence of sin.

It would be extremely interesting to have had Jude's exposition on such a theme, but the Holy Spirit, by Whom all scripture is inspired, led him to see the necessity of writing to exhort the saints to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to them. The word translated "contend earnestly", not used elsewhere in the N.T., is an intensified, strengthened form of the Greek word **Agonizomai** from which we get our word agonise. This word is variously translated in the A.V. as strive, fight, labour fervently. Paul uses it in his letters to Timothy "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6 : 12), and "I have fought the good fight" (2 Timothy 4 : 7). Also in his letter to the Colossians where he writes of Epaphras that he was "always labouring fervently in prayers" (Colossians 4 : 12).

Thus when Jude uses this word in an intensified, strengthened form we get some inkling of the serious state of things obtaining in the Christian circle, a condition which is described by the word apostasy, obliging him to abandon his desired task to write about our common salvation and to write instead this solemn exhortation.

In the second epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians chapter 2, he says, reminding them of the coming of the Lord and of the rapture of the saints before He appears in judgment, that the apostasy must first come. In our A.V. the word for apostasy is translated "a falling away". Again in Acts 21. 21 Paul is accused of teaching Jewish believers to "forsake" Moses, lit : "thou teachest apostasy from Moses" i.e. to give up adherence to the law. So in Jude's day there were men in the Christian company, crept in unawares, ungodly men who were marked by two things—corrupt morally and denying the faith.

The state of things in the professing Christian circle was marked by this giving up, falling away from the faith, the results of which were seen both morally and doctrinally. Giving up the faith, moral restraint is swept overboard and the basic truths concerning our Lord Jesus Christ are denied.

If this was so in Jude's day how much more so now when the verbal inspiration of Scripture is almost universally denied. More than fifty years ago a professor of classics at Cambridge University said that the inspiration of the Scriptures would be the last battle-ground between the Church and the world, to which a commentator added

that the church was abandoning the battle.

The basic doctrines, concerning the Virgin birth, Virtuous life the Vicarious death, the Victorious rising and the Visible return of our Lord Jesus Christ are frequently denied and that by some of the leading figures in Christendom, who, also, are often found, to condone present day permissiveness and moral decline.

How needful, therefore, that this exhortation from the Word of God in the epistle by Jude, should be solemnly heeded,—to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints the faith i.e. all the revealed truth of God, made known in the scriptures of truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole circle of revealed truth completed in the apostolic writings once for all i.e. of perpetual validity—not to be added to or taken from—delivered to not emanating from and that, not to a chosen few, a hierarchy, but to the saints, the Christian company, to be kept and contended for earnestly.

Now to do this, two things are essential. Firstly, we must know what we are fighting for. How vital it is that each one of us should study the scriptures prayerfully, desiring the Holy Spirit's illumination, availing ourselves of every aid, concordance, alternative translations, commentaries, etc. Among so much teaching which presents incomplete views of the faith, we must test all such aids by their adherence to the fundamentals enumerated earlier, and also whether they give first place to the Mystery, that is, the teaching by which it was given to Paul to complete the Word of God (Colossians 1 : 25). This will not only strengthen our own faith but fit us to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Paul's exhortation to the young man, Timothy, was "give thyself to reading, to exhortation, to teaching" (1. Timothy 4 : 13) and "strive diligently to present thyself approved to God, a workman that has not to be ashamed, cutting in a straight line the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2: 15).

Secondly, it is important to contend earnestly in the right spirit. Here again I quote Paul's words to Timothy, "Foolish and senseless questions avoid, knowing that they beget contentions, and a bondman of the Lord ought not to contend but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forebearing, in meekness setting those right who oppose : if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance to acknowledgement of the truth" (2. Timothy 2 : 24-25).

When Paul says a bondman of the Lord ought not to contend or strive, he is not in contradiction to Jude's exhortation to contend earnestly for the faith but uses a different word which means to fight, quarrel, dispute.

May the Lord grant to us all, the grace to persevere in the good fight of faith, giving us the needed strength and wisdom to stand resolutely in defence of and in proclamation of, the faith and "if any one of you lack wisdom let him ask of God Who gives to all freely and reproaches not and it shall be given him" (James 1 : 5).

FIVE VILLAGES — GEORGES ANDRE

CAPERNAUM

IF he taught the crowds in parables (Matthew 13 : 10-15), "privately he explained everything to his disciples." In addition he instructed his disciples directly according to the measure of their faith. It was at Capernaum that he showed them the importance of humility (Matthew 18, 1-14) ; again it was at Capernaum that he spoke of the living bread come down from heaven (John 6, 24-59).

Seeing Him

But it is not only what he did or said, his miracles or his teaching, which attracts us. It is above all else his Person. It states in John 12, 41 that "Isaiah **saw** His glory and spoke of Him". But "if, in the vision, Isaiah had been able to follow the pathway of Jesus passing through the towns and villages of his native land, how full of adoration he would have been ! He had seen his glory. He had contemplated him on his high exalted throne with his train filling the temple and the seraphim covering their faces as a sign that in Jesus was the glory of the diety. We need to see in the same way by faith—we need to lay hold of his Person, to have a sense of his glory which was hidden behind a thicker veil than the wing of a seraph, the veil of a humble Galilean rejected by the world". (J.G.B.)

With what emotion the old apostle, he whom Jesus loved, could write late in his life : "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you . . . that your joy may be full" (1 John 1, 1-4). We cannot see Him, contemplate Him or touch Him as the apostle did, but through the pages of the gospels, by faith, the eyes of our hearts can be focussed upon him and recognise his glory. What other subject would fill us with greater joy ?

In a few words Peter described his ministry : "Jesus of Nazareth . . . anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power . . . went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10, 38). Let us consider him **going about** in this way. When the disciples said to him : "Everyone is searching for you", he said to them : "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also ; for that is why I came out. And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons" (Mark 1, 38-39). Having gone to Nazareth, when "he marvelled because of their unbelief," he did not grow weary of continuing his ministry, but "he went about among the villages teaching" (Mark 6, 6). Luke too presents him to us "He went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8, 1). In spite of the opposition which he met, he could say to the Pharisees : "I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the

day following" (Luke 13, 33).

And it is not only going about that we must see him ; it is in the various places in which he spent his days. Once when he was "at home" tired out, "straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door : and he preached the word unto them". A little later "they went home ; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat". However it was in the house that he loved to be found with his disciples. After the healing of the epileptic child in Mark 9, it was "when he had entered the house his disciples asked him privately Why could we not cast him out" ?

While passing through Galilee he taught his disciples about the sufferings which awaited him ; they, instead of grasping what he imparted to them argued about who would be the greatest but it was only "when he was in the house he asked them : What were you discussing on the way ? But they were silent . . . And he sat down and called the twelve", and spoke to them about humility. Can we imagine him, walking, going into the house, asking his question, waiting patiently for the disciples' consciences to speak to them, then sitting down and calling them to him to reprove and exhort them with gentle firmness.

In Matthew 13, 36 it was once again in the house that he expounded to the disciples the meaning of the parables which he had just told.

But it was by the sea side that he practised his public ministry in particular. "As he walked by the sea of Galilee" he called Simon, Andrew, James and John ; a little further we read "He went out again beside the sea . . . and as he passed on, he saw the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him—Follow me".

When the Pharisees and Herodians took council to put him to death, he "withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude followed him . . . and he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they should crush him ; for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him". What a scene ! It is active, untiring grace full of mercy.

In Matthew 13 "Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea" and sitting in the boat, he taught the crowd standing on the shore many things in parables. It was also beside the sea that Jairus came, threw himself at his feet and besought him urgently for his daughter.

But if the Lord enjoyed speaking to the crowd beside the sea, he was not afraid to go into the synagogue, when it was necessary. He healed a man possessed with an evil spirit in such a place (Mark 1, 23) and without allowing the opposition which he met to stop him, He went in 'again' to help the man with the withered hand in spite of the hostile silence of those who surrounded him (Mark 3, 1-5).

But when he desired solitude with his disciples, it was on to the mountain that he went. It was there that he called the twelve (Mark 3, 13) ; it was there that he spoke the beatitudes ; it was there too one evening after a day of toil that he went alone to pray, when he

had fed the crowd and made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side (Mark 6, 46). And it was "on a high mountain" that "after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, apart by themselves, and he was transfigured before them" (Mark 9, 2-8).

Is there not a special blessing in **withdrawing alone**, "to see no one, save Jesus only" (v.8) and in the silence at his feet, to let the hours pass while we listen to him and contemplate his glory ? It is undoubtedly a good thing to sit at his feet each day, if possible right at the start of the day for a few moments ; but occasionally it is vital to take several hours, indeed one or two days, to be alone with him, to be quiet and listen to His voice. He himself exhorted his disciples "come away by yourselves to a **lonely place**, and rest a while" (Mark 6, 31). It was also "in a lonely place" that in the morning, a great while before day, he would rise up and go out alone to pray.

But if he knew what it was to withdraw alone when necessary, it was his **tireless activity** in particular which comes across in the pages of the gospels especially in Galilee. In Mark 1, 33 "the whole city was gathered together about the door". As we have just seen, when he came to the house at Capernaum, "immediately many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them". By the sea side "all the crowd gathered about him". When he returned home, "the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat". On another day, "when a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, Jesus said : I have compassion on the crowd".

And even when he came down from the mount of transfiguration and found around his disciples "a great crowd and scribes arguing with them", although he had to declare : O faithless generation, how long am I to bear with you ? He did heal the sick child and gave him to his father.

All that certainly did not take place without great weariness. We have an example in Mark 4, 36, when having dismissed the crowd, his disciples "took him with them just as he was in the boat": in spite of the great storm of wind and the waves which beat into the boat, "he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion". "There he was like a tired workman to whom sleep is sweet. Such was the form in which he revealed himself. But beneath this veil was "the form of God". He rises up and as the One who gathered the wind in his fists and wrapped up the waters in a garment (Proverbs 30, 4), he rebukes the wind and says to the sea : Peace ! Be still !" (J.G.B.).

Perfect servant, indefatigable servant but what is even more remarkable, willing servant. Man as a created being, a believer as one of the redeemed of the Lord is a servant. But he chose to **become** a servant. "His person adorned all his service and obedience with a glory which gave them an eternal value". (J.G.B.).

Therefore is it not moving to hear him say through the voice of the prophet at the end of his earthly ministry, when all had forsaken him, one of his own betrayed him, another denied him and the rest fled : "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain" (Isaiah 49, 4) ? But what does God reply : "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribe

of Jacob . . . I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth". And he himself could say: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12, 24).

Does that not remind us of Psalm 126, v.6, where having spoken of the servants "that sow in tears and reap in joy", the psalmist also speaks of the Servant who "goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed and cometh again with rejoicing", like the servants; but in addition—something reserved only for Him—bringing His sheaves".

With deep humility,
Following thy lowly pathway,
Thou wast despised by the world,
Thou whose hand was outstretched;
Thou whose loving help,
Compassionate and perfect,
For guilty men and women,
Poured forth gift upon gift.

Oh! what treasures it opens to our eyes,
Thy heart brimming with heavenly love!
God himself finds in Thee
Nought but light and holiness;
And we, showered with thy mercies,
Children of God by faith,
Can follow thy footsteps
With the same love as Thine.

FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTE BOOK.

Some New Testament Words.

2 Corinthians 3: 18. The phrase in A.V. "beholding as in a glass" translates the one word **katoptrizomenoi.** A suggestion which might be helpful is that this is simply the word 'mirror' used as a verb. This happens to be an English usage also, as in the sentence, "the lake mirrors the mountains". In this sentence, 'lake' is the subject, and the 'mountains' the object of the verb 'to mirror'. If this be indeed a correct view of the original verb, then 2 Corinthians 3: 18 becomes,

> "we, mirroring the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face are transfigured into the same image".

This suggests some valuable thoughts. (a) a mirror takes on the exact likeness of its object, and (b) it does so more easily than any other article, simply by turning towards it. The idea of 'turning to the Lord' has already been introduced in v. 16. If we turn to Him in the sense of devoting time to the contemplation of Him in His glory, we also shall be transfigured by taking on His image.

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PAUL'S LAST WORDS: A CHARGE ON LATER GENERATIONS

COLIN CURRY

(STUDIES IN 2 TIMOTHY)

4. PURITY, AN ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTIC

LATER in chapter 2, Paul turns to the quality of purity which is also quite vital in the Christian life. The word purity (or something close to it) occurs in verses 21 and 22. The idea runs through all the verses. Timothy and his kind are told to be apart from all that is shallow, empty, erroneous, unprofitable, misleading and dishonourable. They must pursue with the zeal what is right, what is true, helpful, honourable and approved.

Our discussion falls under four headings. First, the **substance** occupying the mind and feeding the life must be the pure word of God (verses 14-18). Secondly, a pure and upright **approach** to that word is needed. Thirdly, individual **persons** naming the Lord, serviceable to Him, must be pure (verses 19-22). Finally, the **service** itself we might do for the Lord should have a certain purity and suitablity of manner about it (verses 23-26).

The pure Word of truth.

A strong contrast is made between "the word of truth" and other kinds of words. Empty words, profitless words, words arising in dissension (often about small points), are not only valueless; they have a catastrophic effect upon those who have to listen to them. They can develop further too; shallow activities can lead to corrupting trends. Deviations can become grave distortions. In the end, the faith of individuals can be undermined. Misleading and subversive teachings often develop with cancer-like rapidity. Timothy must warn others against the very beginnings of these processes of decline. But his most helpful impact upon them will be his own example. He is to remind **others** by showing **himself** approved unto God. He must charge them to follow and guard the apostle's teaching, not only in word, but by giving them a clear lead in this direction. Let us remember that we have an influence of some kind on others; it can be an honourable and effective one if we search out and obey the teaching from God for ourselves.

So Timothy is told to shun the empty and damaging activities,

and to be wholly and deeply engaged with the profitable content of the word of truth. This will make a weighty person of him. **Working** in this field will make him a living example of its guidance. Nor is there a different way for serious followers today. The passage charges us to take ourselves in hand in a similar way. We too are entrusted with positive authoritative teaching and direction from God; it has constructive value for us which is far beyond our proper estimation. We must absorb it and obey it. We must keep it pure and unmixed; we must hold it, adhere to it, and transmit it. We must urge others to appreciate it; but we must begin with ourselves. Busy and careful work in this great field of activity is needed, not allowing ourselves to be diverted into profitless channels.

Purity of approach to it.

An approach to Scripture which is consonant with its pure substance is also required. This is the honest, honourable and unprejudiced approach, spoken of as "rightly dividing the word of truth." What is needed is **straightforward rather than loaded handling of Scripture.** Work of **that** kind has no shame attached to it. The distinction between verses 15 and 18 should be noted. On the one hand there is straight and direct understanding, and on the other, error concerning the truth. "Rightly dividing" in verse 15, is literally "cutting straight;" while "error" in verse 18 contains the idea of being "off target." The contrast is between an approach which is fair and one which is biassed.

Extreme care and self-control are needed here. Direct and fair reading of Scripture is not a natural ability. Spiritual truth requires spiritual discernment. The proper approach will be without presupposition in the spirit of obedience. The attitudes of humility, simplicity, readiness to learn, and open-ness to the Holy Spirit's illumination are vital. Readiness to give God His place, as the One Who graciously shows us His mind, is all-important. On such straightforward (yet more than natural) lines a truly spiritual understanding of the Word takes place. On the other hand, the approach which injects something of ourselves, of our own abilities or our own set views, will lead us astray. To be self-consciously "advanced," "well-taught," or even "spiritual," by our own standards, will distort the material in the process of examining it. Let us use great care that we follow the pure and clean-cut approach in our understanding and practice of Scripture. Let us be awake to our susceptibility to deviousness and special pleading. What is needed is an accurate, plain and scrupulously fair reading of Scripture. We must take the **upright** line. The word "rightly dividing" occurs once more in the N.T. (in Galatians 2 : 14) where it is translated "uprightly." **What is spiritual is always upright:** it is never devious nor fanciful.

"Rightly dividing" (in the A.V.) conveys the idea of distinguishing things that differ. Where such distinctions are real, a straightforward reading will notice them, and consider them important. As an example a plain and pure reading of the O.T. will not spiritualize

statements about Israel and apply them to the Church. Nor will it allow itself undue freedom to make elaborate interpretations far-removed from what passages say on the surface.

Suitability to the Master; Purity of heart.

We now consider verses 19-22. The picture of corruption and desertion of the truth indicated in the previous section forms the background to these verses. Thoughts not governed by the Word begin with vain and speculative ideas and move towards what is impious, and can soon become gravely erroneous. Straying from the truth leads towards rank falsehood. When human judgments and human "enlightenment" lead the way, the very foundations of Christianity are soon queried, distorted or discarded. These trends do not always take the form of open opposition to Christ; they can have the appearance of sanctity and sophistication about them. There are those who take the initiative in these developments. Two persons are named in verse 17, as samples of many; and their teaching is mentioned, as an example of the kind of falsehood in mind. Others are misled, and feel the hurtful effects; the faith of some is overturned.

But Paul has something to be confident about in the face of this gloomy picture of perversion of the truth. For his own comfort and Timothy's, the thought of God's sovereignty is a great stay to him. Everything really founded by God is unmoveable. There are implications which are urgent, too, for those who would honour the Lord amidst this general situation. The godly life will be purged from complicity with evil. These themes occupy the immediate verses.

"The foundation of God standeth sure." God's solid basis abides, it can never be assailed. Earlier he had said "the word of God is not bound," "He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself;" and here is another statement showing the same kind of confidence in God. The adversary of God is certainly active, men are proving unfaithful, the apostle may be a prisoner; but **nothing** will overturn or violate what God will do. The truth may be deserted, distorted, opposed, denied, but it **cannot** be devalued or spoiled, nor rendered ineffective, in any basic sense. The Lord knows what is going on; He is firmly in control. In a situation which may be confusing to us, **He** can discern the true and the false, and is quite unerring in His judgments. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." On the other hand, a true bond with Him will move a person to sever himself from unrighteousness. The Lord knows His own, but those who use His name need to show the marks of knowing **Him.** "Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." **The principle** of separation from what dishonours the Lord is clearly affirmed. The working out of this principle is assisted by an illustration of **the situation** in which it is to be put into practice (verse 20, 21). **The action** needed follows in verses 21 and 22.

Paul likens the broad realm of Christian profession, with all the doubtful elements mixed in with it, to "**a great house.**" There are vessels and utensils of all kinds there, some of high quality, others

of a baser sort. The vital distinction, however, lies between those set apart as suitable for the Master's personal use, and those which would not be used in that way. What is urgent (drawing the lesson from the figure) is to be a person **suitable in quality and in purity to the Master**, usable in His service and honourable to Him. Two kinds of action are needed: self-purification, and pursuit of righteousness (and those other attractive qualities which are in accord with it). Internal as well as external aspects of separation from evil are indicated here. A distinct detachment from what is dishonourable is required, in particular from those who spread error on fundamental matters, and from their teachings, which vitiate the faith of those misled by them. But a vessel fit for the Master must be clean itself, cleaned out from those internal things which would be an offence to Him. Followers of this instruction are urged here to be decidedly on the right side of a moral boundary; not a tangible boundary defining a position adopted or held, but rather a state of heart towards the Lord (purity of heart), and an uncompromising clearance from all that belies the basis of Christian faith. The air of superiority that can accompany a positional separatism is well enough known. Many tendencies -are included under "youthful lusts;" pride and self-congratulation are in that category, as well as lusts, passions, and self-seeking. We have to **flee** these things, and **follow** other objectives purposefully. How pleasing it is (to the Lord, as well as to themselves) when devoted Christians are together in the honourable pursuits. Let us remember that the relatively uninstructed can be devoted to the Lord, pure in their consciences, and undivided in their allegiance to Him. Let us ourselves follow the **right** path, as God makes plain to us, with that humble purity which has nothing of self-estimation about it. There are many pure and positive activities which can be followed with others who love the Lord. Zeal in these directions is part of our avoidance of the dishonourable activities.

Purity of manner in serving the Lord.

The passage flows on continuously to the end of the chapter. The final verses continue the thought that certain things must be absent and others prominent for suitability to the Lord. In seeking to serve the Lord by helping and teaching others a suitable demeanour is needed. Timothy is to leave out the foolish things, the undisciplined activities, questionings in unprofitable areas, and everything that leads to contention and controversy. He must not be drawn into these areas. On the contrary, it behoves a bondman of the Lord to reflect his Master's gentleness; showing patience and forebearance in his bearing amongst those he seeks to guide. He must react meekly to awkward persons. He must show grace as well as truth; he must be ready with all the constructive help he can give. He must wait on the Lord, trusting that the gracious approach may, in His hands, soften and recover those whose spirit is difficult and damaging to themselves. May we covet to follow such pure ways in the service of our Lord. What is being pressed here not only suits Him, but reflects His own perfect spirit of meekness and service.

FIVE VILLAGES — GEORGES ANDRE

BETHANY.

"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."
(Proverbs 18 ; 24).

The Son of God who was going to die'
(Cf. John 11 : 51 ; 12 : 33).

WHY among the countless towns and villages through which the Lord Jesus passed is the name of Bethany so well known ? Yet he was not born there but at Bethlehem, nor brought up there but at Nazareth ; neither did he serve there in the way that he did at Capernaum. But there was a family there who loved Him and whom He loved. There is perhaps no other place in the world where his perfect manhood and divine glory have been revealed more plainly at the same time.

When the disciples entered a village in Samaria (Luke 9, 51) to make ready a place for Him to lodge, they were not welcomed because "He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." And in how many places was he that "Son of Man who hath not where to lay his head." But "Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village ; and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house" (Luke 10, 38). That first visit when he was made welcome led to others ; Jesus had a place on earth which was like his home, where he found understanding and love. It was at "Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha her sister."

What consequences flowed from that first welcome ! When testing came, he was present not just to heal but to restore life. The day before his death he came there and Mary anointed him with expensive perfume ; and the Lord made the remark : "Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." Countless believers through the ages have been encouraged, revived and fortified by the various accounts connected with Bethany. Was it not worthwhile to take the trouble to receive Him, when he appeared ?

Today the Saviour is passing by . . . . . .

The First Meeting (Luke 10, 38-42).

Capernaum left us with an impression of the Saviour's indefatigable activity, but peace dominates the scene at Bethany. How often it is repeated that people were 'sitting' there. At the feet of Jesus Mary listened to his word. How the Saviour must have found pleasure in being listened to in peace and quietness. Do we not have a greater need—apart from the daily reading which is essential like the manna for Israel in the wilderness—to take a few moments more often to be alone at his feet,

Letting the hours pass by,
In silence where self is forgotten,
Jesus, to let Thee draw nigh.

When she gave her first invitation, "Martha was distracted with much serving." The Lord did not reprimand her. It was only when she left her place and intervened to ask Him to reproach her sister that Jesus led her with infinite calmness to think about the activity of her 'self' ; "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. One thing is needful." These words have very often rung in our ears, but to what extent have we taken them to heart ?

Bereavement (John 11 : 44).

"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." "At Bethany He is a friend of the family, finding, as we find to this day among ourselves, a home in the midst of them. Jesus' love for the family at Bethany was not of a Saviour or a shepherd, though we know well He was each of these to them ; it was the love of a family friend." (J.G.B.). How moving and pure was the love of the One who was willing to partake of flesh and blood (Heb. 2, 14) and so shared to the full the feelings which men's hearts can experience in God's sight.

Therefore when Lazarus was ill, the sisters sent a message to Jesus : "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." That turn of phrase has already brought comfort to many a heart in the suffering caused by illness : "he whom thou lovest . . . . "

But because he was constantly sensitive to the mind of His Father Jesus "abode two days still in the same place where he was." He could have rushed to the aid of the one whom he called 'our friend' ; but he had to accomplish something better than a cure, "This sickness is not unto death ; but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." As a dependent Man, he waited until the time was come ; as Son of God he was perfectly aware of what would happen to Lazarus and could say to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep."

The sisters waited a long time. If it was probably a four days walk for Jesus from the place where he was to Bethany, about the same was necessary for the two sisters' messengers ; and as Jesus allowed two days to pass between the message and his departure, the sisters would have waited about ten days for the reply to their urgent request. It is understandable that they both said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," thus showing their grief which they had borne without the presence of the Friend who had taken so long to come.. But He had reserved something better for them. Is it not like that often when he seems to delay answering our prayers, or when the trial continues beyond the limit which we would have fixed for it ?

With what quiet confidence the Lord presented himself to Martha saying to her, "I am the resurrection and the life." He asserted his glory, divine power and personal greatness ; but a moment later,

when Jesus saw Mary weeping at His feet where she came and threw herself, as well as the Jews who came to weep with her, he "was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled;" then as he drew near to the tomb, the depth of his human feelings burst forth in the simple words: "Jesus wept."

If we wished to choose the two words in the whole Bible to form the shortest verse, could we discover more remarkable words? Jesus, the Eternal Saviour, the Word made flesh, the One who had just declared himself the resurrection and the life—Jesus . . wept. When he reached the tomb, he was deeply moved again, "expressing the deep sorrow, mixed with anger, brought forth in the Lord's spirit by the sight of the power of death over the spirit of man." (J.N.D.).

We must try to portray that scene. A large crowd surrounds the Lord, people from Bethany, Jews who had come from Jerusalem to comfort the two sisters, the disciples, Martha and Mary. They were about to be witnesses of the Saviour's most extraordinary miracle. Jairus' daughter was raised when she had been dead a short time and was still lying on her bed. The son of the widow of Nain was on the way to the cemetery; but Martha says about Lazarus, "By this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." Corruption had already set in. The stone is removed and before all, Jesus raises his eyes above, prays and gives thanks, "because of the people which stand by," he says to his Father, "that they may believe that thou hast sent me." Every eye is fixed on him, then at the entrance to the tomb, when he cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come out! And the dead man came out. What an indescribable moment when by that victory over death, all the glory of the Son of God is revealed! Could anyone from that moment on deny who He was?

One can appreciate the consternation of the chief priests and Pharisees faced with such a miracle. "From that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death . . . And they consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus."

Chapter by chapter, from the tenth onwards, the shadow of the death awaiting him becomes more and more obvious on his pathway to Golgotha.

Six days before the Passover. (Mark 11: 11-12, 19, 20; John 12: 1-8).

With the crowd acclaiming him, crying "Hosanna! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," Jesus entered Jerusalem. But if the crowd received him thus at that time, not a single house was opened in the holy city to welcome him. So "when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve" (Mark 11, 11). There was a refuge in that place for him (v. 19, 20) where, away from the hatred which surrounded him, he could spend a few hours more.

It was there at Bethany that six days before the Passover, they made him a supper. "Six days before the Passover," that is to say

in that year, the first day of the week, that day which would be set aside, sealed by his resurrection and his appearing amongst his own, when they were gathered together "There they made **Him** a supper." "However interesting the person of Lazarus might have been in everyone's eyes, the supper was not arranged in his honour, but in honour of the One who had raised him. Those who attended Jesus' supper are not named here , but are replaced by that small word "they." The human activity which prepares is left out in order to stress the great fact that a supper was prepared for Him, and Him alone." (H.R.)

The Passover was prepared by the disciples: "Where wilt thou" they say to Jesus, "that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?" (Mark 14, 12), but the Lord's table, of which the supper at Bethany reminds us, is it not in fact He who has prepared it?

Lazarus, Martha and Mary "depict for us in three characters the three fundamentals which form the entire Christian experience in the House of God. These three fundamentals are communion, service and worship." (H.R.)

"Lazarus, the dead man . . . . was one of them that sat at the table with Him. "Although he had gained a new life by the resurrection from the dead, he remains with respect to his entire past life, the **dead man.** His previous existance ended in death, he now lives a new life which has no link with the old." (H.R.) He was at table **with Him.** Without Him, he would have had no right to sit down at **His** supper. How sweet is the communion of the soul with its Saviour, when experienced at His table. There is no doubt that they enjoyed there too the communion of the saints, that wonderful bond which unites all the children of God, but in this case it is primarily the communion with Him which is underlined. What a blessed portion, to be at table with Him, perhaps without saying a word but enjoying His Person, His presence, communion with Himself.

"Martha served." On another occasion her service took the first place; she had not learned that before giving to the Lord one must receive from him; but now she was in the appropriate place. It does not say that she served Him or them like Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8, 15; Mark 1, 31); without needing to make the point obvious, her service was extended as much to the Lord as his people, and how can we really serve Him in this world if it is not through his own and alongside souls still far from him and in need of a Saviour?

Without uttering a word but filled with love for Him, Mary takes the most precious thing she has "a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anoints the feet of Jesus." "Three hundred denarii" would represent a whole year's wages; but for her nothing was too precious for Jesus. In the other gospels we view her pouring the perfume on the Head of the King in Matthew, on that of the Servant in Mark; but here in John it is on the feet of the Son of God that she pours out her perfume, the fragrance of which fills the house. "He is about to die," she sensed it in advance by means of the foreknowledge which love gives.

Some women came on the morning of the resurrection bringing "the spices which they have prepared" (Luke 24, 1). But it was too late : He was already risen ! Mary had come in time. As Jesus said : "She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying " In the day of His glory all the redeemed will surround the Lamb that was slain and sing the new song, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense. No voice will be lacking in that universal choir. But today when He is rejected, when some of His own, like the nine lepers in Luke 17, go away with the joy of salvation but forget to come and give thanks at His feet—does He not appreciate in a special way that praise and adoration which pours forth from thankful hearts and can, like the ointment of Mary, fill the whole house with its fragrance.

It is now, on the earth, that we can "show His death" and remember Him as he requested. In heaven it will be too late to respond to this desire of His heart.

What balm it provided for the Lord's heart to find at Bethany once again, and in such abundance, the sympathy and understanding encountered so rarely on his pathway !

The Ascension. (Luke 24, 50-53).

Why did Jesus choose Bethany as the place to spend the last moments of the forty days, when he was visible at least ocasionally and in the midst of His disciples on the earth ? He did not depart for heaven from Jerusalem, the city of the great King, but also the one which had rejected him,—nor from Galilee either, which had witnessed his ministry and been the meeting place with the disciples when he gave them clear proofs of his resurrection—but from Bethany, where his glory had shone in such a remarkable way. "He lifted up his hands and blessed them." What a sublime final vision the disciples would retain of their much loved Master, because "it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."

All that remained for them to do was to worship him, retrace their steps with great joy and praise and bless God in the temple.

Let us add that it is on the mount of Olives, not far from Bethany, that in the day of his triumph, he will appear and, "his feet shall stand" (Zechariah 14, 4). In the place where he wept ; in the place where he suffered ; in the place where, in the midst of hatred and opposition, his glory shone—to that very place He will return.

NOT OF THE LETTER BUT OF THE SPIRIT ———— F. W. Boyd.

(2 Corinthians, 3 : 6).

THE text is heard quoted from time to time even in secular conditions. It usually suggests an alternative which is inferior in quality to the matter in hand but, shall we say, good enough for the occasion. Of course, if we are to get the Scriptural meaning as indicated by the Holy Spirit we shall have to read it in its context in 2 Corinthians 3.

Paul and Timothy (probably including other apostles) say "God . . . has made us competent (as) new covenant ministers, not of the letter, but of the spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit quickens" (N.T. note) or as Phillips paraphrases it "the letter of the law leads to the death of the soul. The Spirit of God alone can give the soul life." Paul had referred to the letter of the Old Covenant, the law, in verse three, when speaking of the writing "on tables of stone," but he would fix our attention on the New.

The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31 : 31 ff).

Even with Israel of old—so rebellious of heart—God had acted in divine kindness and grace. But he goes further than the frailty of man by declaring the New Covenant. "Behold, the days come saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah : Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt ; (how gracious is our God) which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD :But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, (translated 'heart' in Hebrews 8) and write it in their hearts ; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying Know the LORD ; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD : For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more."

Let us summarize this—

(a) **The Law written in the heart and mind,** i.e, God's thoughts of holiness for man ; so that God can bless as God.

(b) **God Himself to be known.**

(c) **Sins and iniquities remembered no more.**
Through God's mercy all hindrance to the outpouring of His heart in grace and blessing caused by sin is removed.

Does This Apply to us (Gentiles) ?

It must be made clear that the New Covenant is not a general idea but a specific treaty promised in Jeremiah. This specific covenant is not to be made with the Church. It is to be made exclusively with Israel and Judah, and the purpose is to determine the relationship between this nation and Jehovah during the Millennium. It is no promise to the Church which says "Know Jehovah." Misunderstanding has arisen when the statement "the New Covenant is not to be made with the Church" as understood to deny that the **principle** set forth in the New Covenant finds fulfilment (**and more**) in the blessings of the Church. It is now our task to explain and illustrate how the blessings of the Church are new covenant blessings, that is of a new covenant character, but not the New Covenant.

On that night our Lord took the cup, looking beyond this suffering to that which would be established and secured thereby **and gave thanks.** What moral supremacy ! He said, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood which is shed for you." The shedding of the blood signified the life laid down, provision made for sins to be removed and the New Covenant to be established. He looks quite beyond death and says, " . . . till I drink it new with you in the Kingdom of my Father."

In Jeremiah 31, the New Covenant is mentioned as a future blessing. Christ had not died, but He has now. The Holy Spirit had not come, but He has now, so Paul can declare "God has made us competent as new covenant ministers, not of the letter but of the spirit." The main features are there. We find Paul and his companions as new covenant ministers, but it is the Spirit of the Living God who does the **writing** and that upon the heart. And what does He write ? Not the letter of the law but Christ—epistles of Christ (verse 3). We are liberated by the same Holy Spirit from the bondage of the law which rests on Israel, called the "ministry of condemnation" (verse 9). Doctrine is needful but God's thought expressed in the New Covenant is that we should know Him and His glory. Paul, full of his mission, continues "beholding the glory of the Lord." This is how the Spirit works : "We are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord, the Spirit" (verse 18 N.T.).

How important it is to study the Scriptures in this light. He continues in 4 : 6 "God, who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the *knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4 : 6). We cannot take account of all the references to the New Covenant in this paper but I should like to draw attention to Colossians 1. Paul does not even mention the New Covenant in this passage but he is so directed by the Holy Spirit that again all the features of it are here. These can be meditated upon at leisure :

(a) **The knowledge of His will** in all wisdom and understanding (verse 9).
(b) Increasing in the **knowledge of God** (verse 10).
(c) **The Forgiveness of sins**—redemption (verse 14).

No wonder our Lord gave thanks for "the cup of the New Covenant in my blood." How far-reaching ! How absolute ! How honouring to God ! How blessed for us ! He said "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God," establishing God's thoughts for He is a God of matchless grace, "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second," (Hebrews 10 : 9). How fraught with blessing for us ! May we realise this more fully as we contemplate the cup and remember our Lord. We are not to be occupied with ritual but in infinite grace and divine Persons, with Thee, precious Saviour and Lord ; and with Thee, loving and all-wise Father and God.

RECOLLECTIONS OF RIPON: 1976
THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

5. PAUL——— C. D. BLAKEBOROUGH

AS the Old Testament narrative is dominated by great men of God, used in their generation, who lived full and colourful lives, so Paul in the years that followed the Lord's Ascension bestrode the pages of the New Testament like a Colossus. Whilst the biographical details are often sparse concerning the older heroes, in the case of Paul one is embarrassed by the wealth of information, whether from the seventeen chapters devoted to his life in Acts, or from the autobiographical details that are frequently found in his own writings.

From the first mention he is seen as a man of action and dogged determination. After taking part in the execution of Stephen, the first christian martyr, he is described as making havoc of the church, fully committed to stamping out all evidence of this new sect whose members were to be found in the main centres of Judea and surrounding area. After a successful campaign in Jerusalem, he obtained permission from the High Priest to go to Damascus intending to repeat his success there—but arrived a badly shaken and partly blinded young man. He remained for some days in a critical condition —then to the consternation of both friend and foe, emerged as a man with a different mission for his message now was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The motive sufficient for such a life as followed was found in faith and love, "the faith of the Son of God, who (says Paul) loved me and gave Himself for me."

In the service of his new master he travelled thousands of miles, from one end of the civilized world to the other. From the very beginning he was the subject of vicious attacks by his former colleagues. Whilst it may have been something of a joke that he was let down by a basket over the walls of Damascus, it was no joke that on five separate occasions he received the savage maximum penalty—"forty lashes save one." Ceaselessly he travelled from centre to centre, beginning at the Jewish Synagogues, and when rejected there, preaching to the Gentiles. He was the most prominent of that small group of men described as having "turned the world upside down."

However, for us it is his letters that are of greatest interest. They constitute over a third of the New Testament, and cover a wide range of subjects. Only his letters to the Romans and Ephesians can be regarded as careful logical setting out of a subject, the rest were in response to immediate problems written in haste, possibly on the back of a donkey, but often from a prison cell.

What was the heart of Paul's message ? The answer is best seen in the way in which Paul deals with all the subjects, an approach which is contained in the two word phrase which occurs time and time again throughout all the letters—"in Christ."

The phrase has its roots in the Lord's message to Paul on the Damascus road, "Why persecutest thou me" Acts 26 : 5. Paul had been hounding individual believers to death and imprisonment, whilst Jesus, the person on whom they believed, had, at that point in time from Paul's viewpoint, been buried in a tomb for some years ; yet the voice had said "why persecutest thou ME."

The other main thrust of his message was also included in that dramatic roadside interview "I send thee to the Gentiles to open their eyes that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith" (26.18). His obedience to this command was the reason above all others why he was persecuted so ruthlessly by the Jews. Whilst they would listen with interest to his reasons for believing Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah, their enthusiasm would go cold when Paul proclaimed that the Gentiles were to share in the blessings associated with the Messiah. These two strands coalesce in the topstone theme of the MYSTERY, Christ exalted as Head of the Church, in which Jew and Gentile are made one body in Him.

Old Testament prophets, whilst bringing God's word for the problems of the day, also looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, a King who would throw off from Israel the yoke of foreign domination and bring into being a glorious era of peace, justice and prosperity "when the glory of God would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." Other prophecies spoke of the coming of a Servant, and a suffering Saviour whose advent was not so eagerly waited by the Jews. Paul, however, introduces this new theme, a new revelation to him by the Holy Spirit that had no place in the Old Testament, one which he himself describes as being hidden from his predecessors (Ephesians 3 : 5), an age in which the Gentiles would be fellow heirs with the Jews and "be of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3 : 6). This subject is referred to by Paul as the mystery (3 : 3, 4, 9) and reveals a period between the suffering of the Messiah as the Servant (Isaiah 53) and His coming as King (Isaiah 22). It is to men and women of faith living in this era, that Paul writes concerning their treasures in Christ Jesus. It is to such that he says "in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" and made "in Him" one new man (Ephesians 2 : 13, 15).

As one reads through his writings, the heart of the message is to be found "in Christ," and many of the memorable passages include that electric couplet, as will be seen in the summary which now follows.

Romans sets out in a logical manner the fundamentals of the gospel, and in 3 : 21, we read they were "justified freely by His grace through redemption that is **in Christ Jesus.**" In chapter 6 : 11, they were to "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God **through Jesus Christ.**" In the 6 : 23 "The gift of God is eternal life **through Jesus Christ.**" "No condemnation to them that are **in Christ Jesus** for the law of the spirit of life **in Christ Jesus** hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (8 : 1, 2). "Nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is **in Christ Jesus.**" (8 : 39).

The undisciplined "babes **in Christ**" (3 : 1) at Corinth were faced by Paul with the fact that Jesus is Lord, a point that is made over fifty times in the two epistles and that they were Paul's "work **in the Lord**" (9 : 1). The apostle ends with the stirring chapter 15 on resurrection where "as in Adam all die even so **in Christ** shall all be made alive" (v. 22). His relief at their positive response to the first letter caused him to rejoice that "he which established us with you **in Christ** is God" (1 : 21) who made him "to triumph **in Christ** (2 : 14). He spoke of the unveiling of truth through his ministry "which veil is done away **in Christ**" (3 : 14) and that "if any man be **in Christ** he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are made new" (5 : 17) and of "God, **in Christ** reconciling the world unto Himself, for he hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God **in Him**" (5 : 19, 21).

In Galatia there was a slipping back to Judaism and its reliance upon law-keeping. Paul points out that he himself had been spied upon by those who were concerned at his "liberty which he had **in Christ Jesus,** that they might bring us into bondage" (2 : 4); also that "the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles **through Jesus Christ**" (3 : 14) ; for "**in Christ** neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision but a new creature" (6 : 15).

From a Roman prison Paul wrote to the Philippians, as one whose "bonds were **in Christ**" (1 : 3), an encouragement to his "brethren **in the Lord**" (1 : 14) to preach the word without fear. In spite of his circumstances he "rejoiced **in the Lord**" (3 : 1, 3 ; 4 : 4, 10) and "trusted **in the Lord**" (2 : 19, 24) because his mind was kept "**through Jesus Christ**" (4 : 7) so that he "stood fast **in the Lord**" (4 : 1). The Thessalonians whilst "having patience of hope **in our Lord Jesus Christ**" (1 : 3) had erroneous ideas about the "dead **in Christ**" (4 : 16). Young Timothy was exhorted to be "strong in the grace that is **in Christ Jesus**" (II 2.1), and whilst to Philemon Paul could have been "bold **in Christ**" v. 8, and insisted that Philemon took back his runaway slave, instead he asks that he should give his friend "**Joy in the Lord**" v. 20.

In his letters to the chuches at Colosse and Ephesus the phrase takes on a new dimension. Paul proclaims the Lord as the Head of all things for "it pleased the Father that **in Him** should all fulness dwell" (Colossians 1 : 19) "for **in Him** dwelleth all that fulness bodily" (2 : 9), so how we should rejoice that Paul goes on to say that "ye are complete **in Him**" (2 : 10). But the practical side is not neglected for "wives are to submit themselves to their husbands as

it is fit **in the Lord**" (3 : 18).

Finally, we have already seen the topstone of Paul's teaching in his letter to Ephesus, (which incidentally also has the practictl exhortation "Children obey your parents **in the Lord.**" (6 : 1). We are indeed "blessed with all spiritual blessings **in Christ**, according as he hath chosen us **in Him** before the foundation of the world . . . **in whom** we have redemption . . . in order that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things **in Christ**, both which are in heaven and which are in earth, even **in Him** (1 : 3, 4, 7, 10) Praise the Lord.

No wonder Paul could burst into prayer that God might "give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that we might know what is the hope of His calling, and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1. 17. 18).

BOOK REVIEW

THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE

Edited by JOHN HICK

SINCE writing "An Exhortation for the Present Time" which appeared under the above heading in the September 1977 issue of Scripture Truth, a recent experience has impelled me to write again to contend earnestly for the faith. My concern acquires urgency in view of the rude publicity given to the book under review.

I had taken two visitors to see Wells Cathedral and was quite shocked to see on the bookstall inside the Cathedral a book offered for sale entitled "**The Myth of God Incarnate**" edited by John Hick, Professor of Theology at Birmingham University.

Some years ago I read a book by John Hick entitled "Christianity at the Centre" in which some of the divinely inspired records of Scripture were referred to as myths, e.g. the fall of man, the virgin birth, etc. On the jacket of this book in a reference to the author, one of the great Nonconformist preachers of the day wrote that John Hick was our leading theologian.

This recently published book "The Myth of God Incarnate" is contributed to by the leaders of the theological philosophy in this country.

A journalist writing in one of the London morning daily papers reports of being summoned to a meeting in the chapter house of St. Paul's Cathedral on June 28th at which the book was introduced "in order to be told by an assembled bench of Anglican theologians that Jesus was not in any ordinary sense of the words "the Son of God." Quoting from this article he goes on to say, The Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, the head and the dean of two Oxbridge colleges, a theological college principal and a professor of theology maintained that "Jesus did NOT say He was God incarnate," they added that this is the conclusion of almost all contemporary Christian scholarship."

We are not unaware of the specious special meaning with which the word 'myth' is used in this connection, but such meaning does

not the less make this teaching a fundamental attack on the Christian Faith as revealed for our belief in the New Testament. The words of Jesus recorded in the inspired Word of God in the gospel by John "God gave His only begotten Son and God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world" John 3 : 16, 17, are not to be taken literally say the theologians, "scholars doubt if He ever said those very words."

There are many statements of the Lord Jesus which predicate His deity, for instance when He said "I and the Father are one" and the Jews to whom He was speaking had no doubts as to the implication of the saying, taking up stones, to stone Him for blasphemy, accusing Him "that Thou being a man makest Thyself God" (John 10 : 30-33). Again we might refer to His words when He said "I came down from heaven" (John 6 : 38) or again "Before Abraham was I AM" (John 8 : 58). In denying the incarnation of God the Son, the clear simple statements of scriptures are set aside. "The Word was God—the Word became flesh" (John 1 : 1 and 14). "Christ, Who is over all, God blessed for ever (Romans 9 : 5). "Unto the Son, He hath Thy Throne O God is for ever and ever" (Hebrews 1 : 8).

Challenged by the journalist these men stated that "they had had no word of reproof or any other reaction from the Archbishops and Bishops so far." Thus, seeing such a book on sale on the bookstall in Wells Cathedral it seems that these anti-Christ theories are condoned—theories which include and I quote again from the newspaper article "various current theories of the Redemption and the Resurrection. One is that the Redemption is a myth like the Fall of man is a myth."

There can be no doubt that this latest emanation from the professors of theology, is a clear pointer to the apostasy of the last days leading on to the revelation of Anti-Christ. In his first epistle (4 : 3) John writes, "every spirit which does not confess Jesus Christ come in flesh is not of God ; and this is that power of the antichrist of which ye have heard that it comes, and now it is already in the world."

So again one turns to the epistle of Jude with its exhortation to contend earnestly for the faith and to the positive action he exhorts the beloved saints to take when in verses 20 and 21 we read, " But, ye beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Here are four things we must do, in order that we may be fitted to contend earnestly for the faith. They are expressed by (1) building up (2) praying, (3) keeping and (4) awaiting or looking for.

It is a very great privilege to be left here in this world, in this day of apostasy, to contend earnestly for the faith, so, beloved, may we be given this grace to be found faithful to Him, Who is able to keep us without stumbling and to set us with exultation blameless before His glory, to the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, might and authority from before the whole age and now and to all the ages. Amen.

Norman Griffiths.

Scripture Truth

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(incorporating "Words of Help")

THE WORKS OF FAITH

T. D. SPICER

This paper concludes a series commenced in "Words of Help".

> "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" (James 2:25)

WE cannot conclude this series of articles without considering an important point connected with the history of Rahab, which the Holy Spirit has recorded for our learning.

Rahab's story is that of a sinner saved by **grace** through **faith.** Here, as elsewhere, God singles out the lowest and worst specimens of humanity to show conspicuously that utter degradation of conduct and notoriety are no obstacle to His salvation. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). But while the grace of God brings salvation to sinners (Titus 2:11), and brings them into fellowship with Christ and His people, it also brings them out of their sins. Jesus is the Saviour who saves His people "from their sins"; and while that salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast", those who are saved are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). The Word of God rejects completely all so-called good works as the ground of hope for salvation; yet at the same time it uncompromisingly asserts the invariable connection between true faith and works of righteousness.

No Contradiction

These two lines of thought and teaching are not contrary one to the other, but the complement of each other. They do not contradict but confirm one another. Of the first, the Apostle Paul is the principal expositor in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians; of the other, James is the determined exponent. It would seem while reading one that he denies the truth of the other; yet Paul is not contending with James, and neither does James contradict Paul. They are not fighting one another and wrangling for particular doctrines, but rather striving against special errors which were attacking the truth from different sides. They are not fighting, as it were, face to face, but back to back. Paul is wrestling with the self-righteous Pharisee who would use his works as stepping stones to heaven; James is striving with the deluded man who argues that if we are saved by faith, then there is no necessity for good works. So both are contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

What is true of the doctrinal teaching of Paul and James is also true of the illustrations in Scripture of saved men and women. In one way or another they demonstrate that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to the mercy of God that we are saved ; though this is in order that we may be " filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God " (Philippians 1 : 11). It is with this object that while Rahab is shown in the Epistle to the Hebrews as an example of salvation by faith, in the Epistle of James her conduct is referred to as proving that true faith is accompanied by works. Her faith was accompanied and proved by works ; in this way she was " justified by works " (James 2 : 25). This is seen in her kindness to the people of God, and in her efforts for the salvation of others.

It is specially mentioned in Hebrews xi, verse 31, that she " received the spies with peace ". It was not her receiving the spies that saved her, for we are specifically told that it was " by faith " that she perished not. She could not be saved by faith **and** works ; it must be one or the other. For if salvation be of works then grace is no more grace. Her salvation was by faith ; therefore her works, that is her actions — the reception of the spies — had nothing to do with her salvation. Yet her deeds are mentioned in connection with her salvation, because they resulted from it and proved it. Her works were the evidence of it. Faith was the root, works were the fruit. It was because she believed in the coming judgment and trusted in God for mercy, that she acted as she did.

James' Thesis

It was to show where real faith exists that James wrote, " was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar? " (James 2 : 21). In other words, he says, faith will prove itself by " works ". There were professing Christians in James' day whose profession was an empty one. People who talked about justification by faith, but who **only** talked about it. Such faith he told them was a dead faith, being without works ; it was no better than the faith of devils who " also believe and tremble ". These people had a form of godliness, but were denying the power of it. James, therefore, cites two instances from the Old Testament, one from the top of the social ladder, the other from the bottom — one the father of the faithful ; the other, the harlot Rahab ; both of whom were justified by faith — to show that their justification by faith was accompanied by justification by works. Thus the completion of their faith was proved — in other words their faith was made perfect (James 2 : 22).

Evidence of Self Denial

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and Rahab's treatment of the spies, show two main points in which the faith of those who trust in Jesus is manifested and " made perfect "; and without which their faith would be but an empty name. The first is by surrendering to God that which we hold most precious, our Isaacs, ourselves. The believer receives salvation from God, and then gives himself to God. Having trusted in God and become a recipient of divine grace, the proper

consequence is to yield ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. This is real self-denial, the fruit of true faith, and therefore its manifestation and complement. Where this does not follow, faith does not have its "perfect work", there is an incompleteness in the life and experience of the believer. Yet, sadly, this is the state of many today. Had Abraham failed to surrender his son — in fact, to surrender himself — he would not have been less justified, for that was a prior fact which could not be undone; but he would have come short of the fulness of the blessing of God, and he would not have been called "the friend of God".

Another way in which real trust in God is manifested is, as in the case of Rahab, by the reception and love of God's people. This is dwelt upon at length in the Epistle of James. It is also a prominent subject in John's first letter, who instances love to God's people as a great proof of the existence of spiritual life (1 John 3:14). In Paul's writing it comes to the fore continually: as for instance, when praising God for his Colossian converts, he mentions their faith in Christ Jesus, and love to all the saints (Colossians 1:4), as the things which led him to give thanks for them.

Is it not the actual experience of everyone who trusts in Jesus that he loves others who trust Him? Though he may not like all equally, and though there may be in some of them things that would rub him the wrong way, yet he is conscious that he cannot help loving them. They have been washed in the same blood, renewed by the same Spirit, adopted into the same family — they have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:5,6). Language, colour, caste, all lose their distinction in that society "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:11). This is the one great evidence of faith, "we love the brethren".

Concern for Others

Such are the works, or outward signs, which prove the reality and existence of an inward faith. But there was a further proof of the reality of faith in Rahab. She was concerned for the salvation of others. Her first thought was for her nearest and dearest. "Show kindness to my father's house . . . save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have" (Joshua 2:12,13). Is this not further evidence of faith? If she had not truly believed she would not have acted like this. Moreover, it was not only a prayer for their salvation, she made efforts to bring them into the enjoyment of it. It would appear that they did not live with her, but they must share her house if they would be saved. They must come into her house. We can imagine the scene, although we need not dilate upon it. How impossible would her story appear. Yet her object was achieved and her family on that great day of judgment was saved from wrath. So again her faith was proved by works.

This is one of the very first ways in which the faith of a sinner shows itself. Saved himself, he is at once concerned for the salvation of others. Just as it is natural for one who has heard good news, or

found some treasure, to communicate and to share it with others; so is it the first and instinctive desire of the soul that has believed that Good News and found the Saviour, to tell it out to those near and dear. What was the first action of Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, on hearing John the Baptist's declaration, "Behold, the Lamb of God"? "He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, we have found . . . Christ. And he brought him to Jesus." And what does Philip do the next day, as soon as Jesus had found him? "Philip findeth Nathanael . . ." (John 1:35-45). What does the woman of Samaria do when she has heard the marvellous words of One Who told her all that ever she did? She "went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come see a man . . . is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29).

So we could go on, but the fact is clear. The first impulse of the saved is a loving concern that others should know the way also. There is hardly a clearer proof of the reality of faith than the desire and effort to make others share in it.

A final word, let us translate this concern for others into practical issues. In our individual testimony, shall we not endeavour by all means to save some? Opportunities for evangelism are on every side; like Rahab we can bring others into the place where salvation is to be found. If we have found and love the Saviour, let us not lose our first love . . . the concern for the salvation of others. Let us do all that we can to enable them to obtain "like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1).

FIVE VILLAGES — GEORGES ANDRE

EMMAUS

"The Lord is risen indeed" (Luke 24:34).

THE END of the four gospels, the first chapter of Acts and the 15th of 1 Corinthians teach us about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. About ten occasions are mentioned when he appeared, sometimes to individual disciples or to groups of them; and we see from the early chapters of Acts to what a large extent the testimony of this resurrection filled their preaching.

"Being raised in the morning, the first day of the week, he appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene." Why did the Lord Jesus want to appear in the first instance to a woman, and why to that woman? Was it not because of her deep affection for him and also that she was a special object of His grace? When her name is mentioned, it is stated clearly that he had cast seven demons out of her. At the foot of the cross, at the tomb when Joseph placed Him in it and later at dusk on the first day of the week, then on resurrection morning we find Mary Magdalene. John 20:11-18 reveals her to us weeping, although she was completely changed when she recognised Jesus and heard his voice, so simply calling her: "Mary!"

Then it was to the women returning from the tomb that he appeared (Matthew 28:9), then to Simon alone (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinth-

ians 15:5). Nothing is told us of that interview of the repentant disciple and the risen Lord. At conversion as well as times of restoration, there are "sacred moments" when the soul is alone with God.

In the afternoon of that same first day of the week, the Lord appeared to the two disciples going to Emmaus (Luke 24), then in the evening to the apostles assembled with "those who were with them" (Luke 24:36; John 20:19). He brought them his peace; he showed them his hands and side, and "the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord". Eight days later, once more on the first day of the week, the Lord appeared to his own assembled on that occasion with Thomas (John 20:26-29).

John 21 informs us how He appeared to seven of his disciples who had gone fishing in the Sea of Tiberias in response to Simon Peter's invitation. It was all to no avail for "that night they caught nothing"; in the morning when Jesus questioned them, "Children, have you any fish?", they had to answer, "No". What an unforgettable moment when, as he looked fixedly at that man on the shore and the net full of fish, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Peter rushed to meet him but not without putting on his clothes (one cannot come to the Lord in any way that one likes!); the other disciples followed and they all had a meal with him together. "This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead," that is to say the third time when the disciples were in a group; the other previous appearances were to individual people.

The eleven in accordance with the command received from Jesus "went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him" (Matthew 28:16-17). Could it be on that occasion that he was seen by 500 brethren at once of which 1 Corinthians 15:6 informs us? It seems likely.

"Then he appeared to James" (1 Corinthians 15:7), although the gospels do not tell us anything about that encounter. Finally he was with the disciples the day of the Ascension when "he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them."

Emmaus (Luke 24:50)

When the Lord appeared to Simon, Thomas and the seven disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, the Lord had in view the restoration of souls which to a greater or lesser degree had departed from him. It was the same with those two disciples who, downcast and with eyes that were kept from recognising Him, left Jerusalem for Emmaus. Through their own action, they were about to miss the occasion that very evening when the Lord intended to meet with His followers; they had no one to blame but themselves. But how different are the Lord's thoughts from ours! "And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them." They were departing, **He drew near** to them. They were dispirited; He was about to cheer them and make their hearts burn within them. How was he to achieve that?

With one or two questions he induced them to tell him what was troubling them. Then it was his turn to speak; what would he speak

about? What would he reproach them with? He spoke to them about Himself! "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." He would be now only a little time with them, but when he would have left them, the scriptures would remain with them. Until that time, when reading, or hearing read the Old Testament they had thought about the history of their people, its former glory, its misery, about the liberation that the Messiah would bring; but from now on it would be Himself, the One whom they had known during his life on earth, whom they were to know raised from the dead. It would be Christ Himself whom they would look for on every page of the Old Testament, for its types and pictures constantly direct our gaze to his Person (cf. Leviticus 23:11, 14). We can well understand that their hearts burned within them when he "talked with them by the way, and while he opened to them the scriptures".

Arriving in the village, "He made as if he would have gone further. But they constrained him saying, 'Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent'. And he went in to tarry with them." The Lord never forces His company upon us; He wishes to be a welcome, an invited guest. What a practical lesson for our lives! "Thou hast said, 'Seek ye my face'. My heart says to thee, 'Thy face Lord, do I seek'." (Psalm 27:8). Could there be a better wish for a new home than "Abide with us," or a more treasured reply than, "And he went in to tarry with them"?

But instead of taking his place at table as a guest, he took the host's place. It was He who gave thanks. It was He who broke the bread and gave it to them. This attitude may have caused surprise but when, as we may suppose, those pierced hands were stretched out toward them, "their eyes were opened and they knew him". What an unforgettable experience for those two disciples, whose hearts had burned within them by the way, when they now, with opened eyes gazed on the face of their dear Saviour. "And he vanished out of their sight." It is not said that he left them; his presence was always with them; but they had to learn to walk with him as the One who had become invisible, just as they had learned to walk in his company during the days of his flesh (Hebrews 11:27).

On the other hand, however, to eat bread with them after he had broken it and to remain at table there would have been tantamount to a kind of sanctioning of their temporary departure. His place was not there, even if He had come there to seek them, in order to lead them back to the proper place of gathering.

The Lord did not command them to return to Jerusalem, but as soon as their hearts have been awakened, their eyes opened and their thoughts filled with him, could they do any other than be found together with those whom the Lord loves, in the place where together they can enjoy his presence?

They arrive; are they going to astonish the others with their glorious news? No, it is the eleven and those with them that greet them with the words, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared

unto Simon ". They all spoke to each other about the wonderful things that had happened. " And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and said, ' Peace be unto you '." Would any who experienced this scene ever forget it through all the difficult years that were to follow? Surely not; whoever has tasted the presence of the Lord in the midst of His own gathered together will never be satisfied with anything else.

In that gathering once more " he opened their minds to understand the scriptures ". He was about to depart; what would remain with them then? His presence would be experienced, when He himself, though unseen, would be in the midst of those who gather to his name; and just as for the personal walk of the two disciples, so also for the gathered company of believers, **the scriptures** were to be their resource. The Spirit, the " promise of the Father " would be there to make them plain for them, as He takes what belongs to Christ and reveals it unto them (John 16:14).

In this chapter, everything is ' open '; the tomb, whose stone was rolled away; the eyes, at first kept from recognising him, but which could now see Him; the scriptures, once veiled (2 Corinthians 3:12) but now opened so that his own can find Him in its pages; the understanding, renewed and enlightened, as soon would come to pass through the Holy Spirit, in order that it might be able to penetrate into everything " which was written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning Him "; and lastly the hearts opened to a song of praise that glorifies God.

But above all else **He Himself** is in their midst. " Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see." It was **the same** Jesus, whom they had known before. " Jesus who had eaten with them in the days of His sojourn with them, had now eaten with them in His risen days; Jesus who had given them draughts of fishes in the days of His sojourn with them, had now given them draughts of fishes in His risen days; Jesus who had blessed the meat and given it to them then, had done so in like manner now. . . . We hold the same Blessed One in view, at Bethlehem, in the garden of the resurrection, and at the mount of the ascension. Risen from the dead, with His wounded hands and side, He ate and drank with His disciples during the forty days." (J.G.B.)

And it was also " with the same wounded hands and side, He ascended into the heavens . . . God has been here, Man is there."

What we have to realise above all is this; that the Lord Jesus is not a remote person for us, someone whom we have heard about or know to a greater or lesser degree, but a living person, the same one that we have seen in Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethany, Emmaus and who is now in the glory. " It is our highest blessing, that our treasures are bound up in a Person, who is not a present Teacher and living Lord for one generation only, and for all following generations a past Teacher and a dead Lord — but a present Master and a Lord ' who ever liveth '." (J.G.B.)

We repeat once more : " Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit,

seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." So it is that our eyes will soon see Him face to face, for "He that descended is the **same** that also ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10), all things, even our hearts!

We gaze upon Thee in the glory,
O dear Saviour!
Tasting the fruits of thy victory,
Mighty Saviour!
For ever in the holy place,
At thy Father's right hand,
Thou who came down to earth,
Lowly Saviour!

We love to wait for Thee from heaven,
O dear Saviour!
Hast Thou not said: I will come for you,
Mighty Saviour?
Oh! joy unspeakable!
To see thy adorable face so near
And finally be made in thy image dear,
Heavenly Saviour!

PAUL'S LAST WORDS: A CHARGE ON LATER GENERATIONS

COLIN CURRY

(STUDIES IN 2 TIMOTHY)

5. STAYING POWER AND ITS SOURCES

IN ANY extended task staying-power is an important quality, and in following the course that is faithful to Christ, it is a vital requirement. This is especially so when desertion and unreliability are common, and influences that would move the Christian from the true course are subtle and strong. The ability to remain true to our Lord, continuing steadfastly with Him, is not something that any man possesses in himself, however. To continue at all requires a supply that comes from elsewhere. The sources of such spiritual staying power are pointed out in Chapter 3.

The chapter has two main parts, which overlap a little. First Paul looks ahead, foreseeing a general drift away from true Christianity, gathering momentum as it goes. These strong currents could easily carry the believer with them. It is in **this** climate that he is to remain firm and constant in loyalty to his Lord. "What others will do," as the defections in the Christian area become more grave, is perhaps a fair caption to this first half-chapter. But "what Timothy must do" in the face of these unhappy developments, is the concern of the rest of the chapter.

Verse 13 is a closing statement winding up the first section. Downhill trends, advances towards the worse, will broadly characterise the area where the truth of Christianity was once known. But verse 12, anticipating the remainder of the chapter, shows that the godly life **can** be lived in such times, though it will cost something to pursue it. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It will involve going against the stream. There will be discouragements and opposition. A real bending of the will to follow this line will be required, as the verse suggests. But the sources of this kind of life are also indicated; it is a life "in Christ Jesus", finding its springs in Him, drawing continually upon His grace.

The first section divides into two parts. The general **trends** in post-apostolic days are described first. Secondly, **participators** in these movements are mentioned, leaders and followers in the downward direction. The rest of the chapter is really one whole piece, in which Paul counsels Timothy to be steadfast, and points out the various helps from God available to support him in that line. Amongst his valuable assets he has the holy scriptures; and the final verses form a crucial passage regarding Scripture. Because of its importance we *conclude with a separate sub-section on this.*

End stages of the Christian era

In verses 1 to 5 Paul looks ahead to times of full-blown departure from Christian truth. He sees these tendencies already present in incipient form at the time of writing. Timothy is told to turn away from types of person already around, though in the main Paul envisages the stage when these attitudes will be more open and prevalent. Here is a description of the last days of the Christian era. Paul speaks of "perilous times"; difficult, ugly, menacing times, especially for the faithful. "Men shall be lovers of their own selves, . . . lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God." It describes a broad trend; men, generally, are to be like this. But it encompasses the "Christian" profession too. It describes the world that has known Christianity; it includes what claims the Christian name. It will be an empty shell: the form of godliness will be retained, but its power denied. This, regrettably, is a true picture; an all too accurate view of the way things are going in the broad Christian arena today. But we must be warned by the passage ourselves. How much of **our** Christianity is formal, and on the surface only? How much does self-love and self-interest really dominate us? Do we know in reality the inward power of a godly life, and allow it to rule us?

The list of unwholesome characteristics in verses 2 to 4 describes these things in their strongest form. It shocks us; but perhaps we have to let it search us too. There are the sensual attitudes, of laxity, pride, self-gratification, and self-congratulation; let us not underestimate our proneness to these. There are characteristics at the other extreme too, such as anti-naturalism, intolerance, hardness and arrogance in our view of others, elevating self in the process. How easily we can move away from the true Christian qualities, towards either of these extremes; and it can be done in the name of Christianity too! These things are detailed for our warning as well as for our

information. As well as turning away from those who exhibit these features, let us also judge every vestige of the same tendencies within ourselves.

The leaders and the led

In Chapter 2 Timothy was told that, while following and adhering to the truth himself, he must lead others that way too. In this chapter too Paul is shortly to urge on him a close following of his own pattern of life (verses 10, 14). But the intervening verses (6-9, 13) picture a very different progression on which some will move and others will follow. Deceivers will be active, deceiving others, who will easily be led in wrong paths. People can be in both situations at once, the victims of subtle error yet helping along the deception by their acquiescence in it. Actively to take the lead in error is reprehensible, and those who do so are described as **evil** men. The strongest of adverse terms are used about those who lead people astray. Their subtle, underhand methods, gaining access to places by less than respectable ways, captivating and pressurising their hearers in the process of misleading them, are spelt out for us. Those who are gullible and easily misled are described in quite severe terms too. These characteristics are not presented as tolerable weaknesses; there is something really blameworthy about this kind of instability. **Silly** women are cited as examples of this kind of person, but it is evidently not confined to one sex. What is described is not simple foolishness. Moral weakness, and desires after wrong things, openness to novel ideas and new crazes, vitiate a person's resistance to persuasive influences in the downward direction.

This opposition to the truth is likened to the actions of those who withstood Moses. God's activities through Moses were countered by imitation by the Egyptian magicians. Error is particularly subtle when it takes a form closely like the truth. Resistance to the truth in the guise of imitation, producing something which is appealing, and deceptive in a showy kind of way, requires a certain alertness in its detection. But in the end it gets nowhere; it exposes itself as folly in the long run. Jannes' and Jambres' activities showed their lack of value when "the finger of God" manifested itself (Exodus 8:19). Corruption has the seeds of its own defeat within it; but it can do a lot of damage in the meanwhile.

Let us be careful about our influence on people. If we lead others in any sense (and certainly this letter does not discourage this), let us see that we press only what the word of God presses: and let us do it in a way that is not subtle or overbearing. Let us be patient, gracious, and totally upright and above-board in manner. Let us be cautious about the influence of others upon us too. Let us not easily be drawn in as followers of men; let us not be mesmerised by strong personalities. We must test all things by the word of God, and follow that guidance alone. We must follow and respect the guidance of others only in so far as it agrees with that Word.

Stability and Persistence needed

From this description of the general unfaithfulness of others, Paul turns to address himself directly to Timothy. Twice over he does

this (the opening phrases of verses 10 and 14 are the same). As for you, Timothy, you must be different; whatever others may do, you must continue steadily. This is the gist of these challenging words: let each of us feel how pointed they are, as the same message comes through to us today. He proceeds to review Timothy's **assets**, his **equipment**, and his **incentives** to remain on such a stable course. These kinds of helps are still available today.

Timothy's longstanding companionship with Paul is the first of his assets mentioned. It was a tremendous advantage to have followed Paul's teaching closely; and to have observed at first hand the quality of his life, so closely in agreement with that teaching. He had seen Paul's drive and purposefulness; and the gracious traits too, of long-suffering and patience, faith and love, constantly being exhibited. He had witnessed Paul's robust way of facing deterrents and persecution. He had seen the Lord preserving His servant in acute situations; he had shared in some of these experiences himself. All this provided a model for him. Let us remember that in some ways we are as well-placed as Timothy in knowing about Paul's doctrine and his conduct. We have it in written and inspired form, which Timothy did not, and it is explicitly said to be a pattern for believers of a later stage (1 Timothy 1:16). Let us note the prominence of Paul's **teaching** and **practice** within the body of N.T. truth. May we not fail to be companions of the apostle, in meditation on the truth he brings to us, and in obedience to it. This is certainly one of the ingredients of a stalwart loyalty to Christ in present days.

There were other helpful features in Timothy's background. His contacts with godly people, his upbringing from childhood, the guiding influences of his youth, the respect for the scriptures instilled in him, and the help given in understanding them; all these contributed their quota in fitting him and strengthening him for his present role. While it is true that the faith of others (including parental faith) is no substitute for a real and energetic faith of one's own, let us all value highly the influences that have been afoot to help us, to shepherd and to guide us in the Christian life. Even those who have lacked a home influence of this kind can point to others whom the Lord has used to care for them. We can all think of persons whose concern for us in the past needs to be acknowledged and appreciated still. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow . . ." (Hebrews 13:7). **Good** guides, earlier on the road than ourselves, as well as present companions in the same path, must be recognised as a highly-valuable part of God's provision for our support.

Scripture

The prominent feature in the closing verses is the part played by the scriptures in fortifying and directing the man of God. For growth in manliness and spiritual stability it is important to live in the light of the scriptures. To **read** what is written, in the spirit of the **learner**, leads to a **knowing** of the content of the sacred writings. Such a knowledge, properly gained, will be more than mental awareness alone; it will be part of the spiritual constitution of its possessor.

From an early age Timothy had been a learner in this area; he could well have learned to read in the first place from the letters and words of the O.T. (the word 'scriptures' in verse 15 is 'letters'). His exposure to scripture in the past, its accumulated effect over the years, together with his present usage of it, would stand him in good stead in facing the demands currently upon him. Paul's concern is that he should extract the maximum value from what he possessed in this way. The statements about the holy scriptures seem to include words about their **power**, their **Source**, and their **functions**; and we shall devote a few sentences to each of these matters.

What the scriptures are **able to do** is indicated in verse 15. They have an inherent power to inject strength and wisdom into the life that is guided by them. Security and firmness of character come from knowing and relying on God, Who discloses Himself through the written pages. Eternal salvation is entered into through the scriptures when the grace of Christ is drawn on by faith. From that same supply practical salvation is also found, including the wisdom needed for facing the problems of Christian living. Many a life has demonstrated the truth of what is said here. It may be noted that while Paul is thinking mainly of the O.T. (the scriptures Timothy had known from childhood), yet it is the O.T. as it points to Christ which has this great potential help in it. The O.T. is rounded out, it is brought to its full outcome and intention, **in Christ**: its full significance and value is apparent in the light of N.T. truth. Timothy had the O.T., but he also had faith in Christ Jesus as the key to it. Moreover he had a good part of the substance of the N.T. in incipient form through his contacts with Paul, if not yet on the written page. These statements are about all Scripture despite the fact that a few parts remained yet to be written.

The opening of verse 16 is the basis of the surrounding statements about Scripture. It is because of the **nature** of Scripture that it has these abilities to affect its hearers. Every part of it (and the whole) is inspired of God, and because of this is also profitable for any who will obey it. The words "inspired of God" can be misunderstood; what they really say is that Scripture is **breathed out** by God. It is the pure word of God, with no human admixture whatever. It is entirely divine, a communication from God, a living and active Word, searching, influencing, and directing its hearer. In it God reveals Himself, promoting responses of the appropriate kind. The scriptures owe their value to their divine origin and authority. May we always bear in mind what a priceless possession we have in the written Word of God; and let us continually approach it with confidence about the guidance and the living energy it can feed into our conduct.

Various **functions** of Scripture, all helpful towards maturity in godliness, are indicated in verse 16b. Verse 17 seems to suggest that a man of God needs to have gained from all these kinds of help, so that he is soundly equipped in an **all-round** way to live the life which is good, and productive for God. The four areas of profit (in verse 16), provided by the Word, cover the field in a broadly comprehensive way.

Little can be said in brief about the **teaching** function of Scripture, except to point out that it is self-evidently vast in scope and thorough in its detail. To look askance at 'doctrine' (an attitude sometimes taken) is to fail to appreciate what God has given us. What a marvel it really is that God has revealed Himself in all the manifold ways that Scripture recounts, everything being centred on Christ; and that He has directed the record of it to such as ourselves, for our instruction and profit. What a strange attitude it would be to have little interest in teaching that comes from God! How little our other Christian activities will mean if our regard for the truth of God is small.

Secondly, Scripture **convicts** its hearers; it has a searching effect, judging the heart, and bringing the individual into the presence of God. This also is a highly profitable experience. We cannot meet God through His word on a superficial level, our hearts and consciences must be affected; our inward response to God must be real. Then, **correction** is found in Scripture; let us readily confess how much we require this kind of help. We need to approach God's word in order to be humbled and disciplined by it, allowing it to speak directly to us in **this** vein. Only thus can we be drawn into the path of the will of God for us. Though we do not naturally welcome correction, let us not avoid it, since the kind of correction that God sends is entirely profitable for us. Finally, **instruction** (or training) **in righteousness** is another gain that comes from Scripture. The man who undergoes the searching and disciplining effect of meeting God directly in His word, also finds much in the same scriptures about the positively right courses to pursue, the right actions and attitudes to follow. Practical ways of living, right and pleasing in the sight of God, as a response to all His approaches to us, are spelt out for us in Scripture in an abundantly clear way. May we be prepared to accept all the inestimable gain available to us in the living Word of God.

THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY ———— R. G. SPRATT

Read: Numbers 2
Numbers 9:15-end.

IT CAN never have been more true than it is today that the Christian's journey lies through a wilderness. There is, of course, this difference from the children of Israel that the Christian in the twentieth century has the attractions of the world all around him, whereas the Israelite had literally left them behind, however much after a while he began to think of the cucumbers and garlic of Egypt. But just as the Israelites had left Egypt, so must the Christian turn his back on the world if he is to find himself in a path pleasing to God. And, having done so, the normal result of walking in the power of the Spirit of God is that the surrounding circumstances become, in a sense, a desert. No enduring satisfaction is to be found, no food of lasting value other than the "living bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51),

no true fellowship apart from the company of the Lord's people. Another aspect of christian truth tells us that the promised inheritance can be enjoyed in a spiritual way, even while travelling through a desert world, but, nevertheless, the bent of the mind of the Christian should be to look forward and hasten on, rather than to linger amidst the temporary pleasures of a corrupted scene.

We can, therefore, discern a parallel between the journeyings of the children of Israel, as described in the book of Numbers, and the journey we take through this present life. Sadly, we can also see in our weakness and waywardness a parallel with their wanderings.

But it was never God's mind that they should wander, or that we should pursue a path of doubt and uncertainty. Had they kept to the pattern set out so clearly in Chapter 2 of the book of Numbers, there is every reason to believe that they would have got to Canaan very quickly, whereas most of them never got there at all. In just the same way, it is possible for any Christian, however young or however feeble, to enjoy the blessings of the Christian inheritance, if only he will walk in simple obedience. And in the details set out for the camp of Israel in Numbers 2, we can surely see principles which hold good for us in our day. Paul tells us that these things were our examples (1 Corinthians 10:6).

The first principle to be noticed is that of **order.** If over half a million people had set out to cross the desert as a disorganised rabble, they wouldn't have survived the first week. Yet many Christians today seem to feel that they need yield to no discipline, subscribe to no standard of truth, undertake no responsibility. What was the divine pattern for Israel? The neat diagrams that we remember from Sunday school show the four camps at the four points of the compass, each with its own standard; then the inner ring of the tents of the Levites; and all surrounding the Tabernacle in the centre. What does the picture symbolise for us? Surely, in the spiritual notation of Scripture, the four standards belong to the whole company positioned in relation to the defence of the Christian testimony. The tribes, in military array under their captains, faced outward on every side to protect the Tabernacle, which as the symbol of God's presence with them was at the centre of their lives. And within that circle of protection was carried on the service of God through the priests and the Levites.

So it should be with us. In a world where some standard of truth or decency is forsaken every day, there are still Christian standards. "Contend earnestly", says Jude, "for the faith once delivered unto the saints." Imperishably enshrined in the Scriptures, and available to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, are the standards of our faith. Some who profess to be Christian leaders are giving them up, traitors to their Lord and a disgrace to their faith. Let us hold fast to the Word of God, "which is able to build us up and give us an inheritance among the sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

But you will have noticed that there were not only standards but also ensigns. In feudal days, when a great lord set out to do battle, each family in his domain would rally round his standard flying their personal banners. How many of us in this day, when the Name

of Christ and everything that Christianity stands for are being assailed on every side, are prepared to stand up and be counted? Over how many of our houses flies the banner of commitment to the testimony of Jesus?

There was also in the camp of Israel a reminder of another important principle — that of **unity.** How many of our Christian contemporaries want to do their own thing, go their own way, have their own vision, as if the battle can be won by disorganised individuals, however energetic and however sincere. And how many Christian companies prefer independence in fellowship and service to the close ties envisaged in Paul's words: "With all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord"? In each of the four camps of the Israelites there was not one tribe, but three, linked together by their common standard. A threefold cord is not easily broken, and if the Christian testimony is to prosper it must express unity and not independence. "Oh!" someone will say, "but what about all the breakdown and division in the Christian Church?" Certainly the course is not an easy one between the Scylla of ecumenicalism and the Charybdis of division and disruption. But do we, each in our small way, strive after unity? "Using diligence" — J. N. Darby's translation of Ephesians 4:3 — "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace".

And there is another aspect of unity presented in the camp. The four camps stood round the Tabernacle; the Levites encircled it; every man's tent was over against it. It was not, of course, merely the structure, wonderful as that was, but rather the significance of the abiding presence of God in their midst which made a focus for every true Israelite. We may say: "I don't think much of our meeting," or "There's not much going on for the young people," but do we sufficiently understand the importance of a practical centre where the Name of Christ is cherished? Our personal witness is important; our households should be devoted to the Lord's interests; but if we are to be in the mainstream of Christian activity and privilege, we must recognise and support a unifying centre of fellowship and service. The tabernacle of the congregation, in simple English, means the "tent of meeting".

But another lesson has to be learned. You will have noticed that the camp of Judah was to set forth first, whilst Reuben, the first born, was in the second rank. If we are to find our true place in the Christian company, we shall need to learn the lesson of divine **sovereignty.** How often do we want to lead when it is the mind of the Lord that we should follow. Perhaps we may seek prominence when our assigned place is to shine in obscurity, as did our blessed Lord in those thirty years which drew from men the slighting comment: "Is not this the carpenter's son", but from heaven the Father's voice: "In thee I am well pleased!" How many women in today's Church have sacrificed the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, the place of dignified subjection that is pleasing to the Lord, the homely but so necessary service of mothers in Israel, for the brief glory of the pulpit and the compulsive desire to be heard in the prayer meeting? And,

conversely, how many of us are prepared to leave the burdens of the testimony to others, apparently not hearing the voice that broke in upon Elijah's self-occupation: "What doest thou here?"

Let us all, brothers and sisters alike, seek the place that the Lord would have us to be in, and in the recognition of His sovereign will, echo the words of the newly converted Paul: "What wilt thou have me to do?"

The camp of Israel was not a static one. Chapter 9 of Numbers shows that the people were always to be ready for **movement.** Similarly the Christian testimony is not static. Great movements of the Spirit of God have taken place through the centuries: the evangelisation of Europe begun by Paul, the Reformation, the various non-conformist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and many other evidences of the living power of the Holy Spirit. What of our day? How are we to discern the direction in which we should move, individually or collectively? The danger is that we shall change direction in response to the wrong signals. Many a need, physical or spiritual, has sent well-intentioned Christians haring off into avenues of service which have not prospered. Many a local dispute has brought the sadness and stigma of division because there was not the patient waiting upon the Lord for wisdom and guidance. The signals were there for the children of Israel — the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, provision for guidance at every time and in every circumstance. But every move was "according to the commandment of the Lord". They were not looking around for fine weather or propitious circumstances: their eyes were fixed on the Tabernacle to catch the divine signal for concerted movement. To miss the movement of the cloud was to lose one's way in the desert.

So should we wait quietly and prayerfully upon the Lord for direction. Not difficult, of course, when plenty is happening, but what when the cloud remains still over the Tabernacle many days? Do we get restive and impatient, and eventually strike off in our own direction? Or do we remember what is said of Israel — they kept the charge of the Lord. Activity in the Christian conflict is to be commended; Christian witness in an alien world is the sacred duty of every one of us; but we must never forget in our zeal to serve others that the word regarding Israel was: "Let my people go that they may serve **Me**". How many Marthas are so occupied in the privileged service of the Master that they do not find the time to sit at His feet and listen to His word? Only thus, in the secret of His presence, shall we consistently experience that "good part".

Scripture Truth

MARCH, 1978.

(incorporating "Words of Help")

PAUL'S LAST WORDS: A CHARGE ON LATER GENERATIONS

COLIN CURRY

(STUDIES IN 2 TIMOTHY)

6. INSISTENCE ON THE TRUTH: CONSISTENCY WITH IT TO THE END

A SPECIAL tenderness underlies the final words to Timothy in Chapter 4. The strength of the human tie between these two devoted individuals appears prominently here. The impending parting is deeply felt, but nevertheless a sense of triumph and Christian fortitude prevails. There are no regrets; nor doubts about the value of a life lived to the full for the Lord. Paul's whole life confirmed it, and Timothy was proving it too. But first of all, before moving to personal words about himself and his situation, Paul has a last solemn directive to Timothy (verses 1-5).

The charge

This is perhaps the most urgent word of all, and it is pressed with all firmness and dignity. Timothy must preach the Word; and in every sense he must be consistent with his message. For any true successor in the footsteps of the apostle this is a matter of major importance. Paul uses almost legal terms in stressing the gravity of this last charge. He knows that God witnesses and supports his words, and intends them to be received with similar seriousness. He bids Timothy think ahead to the day of Christ's appearing and kingdom, with the various overtones (solemn as well as joyful) that this introduces for those engaged in His service. These are strong grounds for his appeal, and for a proper response to it on our side.

Timothy must preach the Word, heralding it forth and pressing it home in a positive way. It is not sufficient to guard the truth; it must be disseminated with resolution and insistence, even in difficult days. Prompt action is needed; occasions must be seized, whether they are favourable or difficult. Sluggishness does not befit a servant of the Lord; his light must not be hid under a bed or a bushel. Yet zeal for the truth must be clothed "*with all longsuffering and doctrine*". An offensive and overbearing manner must at all costs be avoided. It is perhaps well to notice that Timothy is being asked to reflect the characteristics of the Word of God in the process of pressing it on others. The activi-

ties of verse 2, convicting, reproving, encouraging, and teaching in a firm but patient manner, are all abilities which the Scriptures themselves possess (see 3:16 again). To channel Christian teaching to others one must be well under its effects oneself.

A waning of desire for the truth of God is forecast in verses 3 and 4. Sound doctrine will prove unwelcome and distasteful to many, who will prefer smoother talk and shallower subject-matter, suiting themselves in what they will listen to. The demand for lightweight teaching (less humbling and less valuable in effect than the Word of God) will create the supply; but it will be void of real substance: it will be fable rather than truth. Undoubtedly this has happened increasingly within the Christian pale. Paul stresses the fact that where there is still a hearing for Christian truth it is more than ever urgent to present it.

Verse 5 concludes and summarizes the direct message to Timothy, by picking out a basic set of qualities needed. These include all-round vigilance, sober judgment about all the surrounding trends; robustness in the face of opposition and set-backs; effort, not least in evangelism; and actual realisation of his potentialities in the Lord's service according to the measure given to him.

The challenge of these five verses reaches each one of us today. Let us be sensitive to our shortcomings in this field. Prompted by the Word of God, and drawing strength from Christ, let us seek to obey this direct word to us in a more worthy manner.

The end in sight

Paul's strong desire for Timothy, that he should fill up to the full his God-given capacity for ministry and service honouring to Christ, is reinforced with the strong backing of his own example. His own service was now fulfilled. The life filled with devotion to Christ was now being poured out. His whole energies had been thrown into "the good fight", into the Christian race. He had kept the faith, spreading it, treasuring it, living it to the end. One last occasion had been seized, at his trial, an opportunity perhaps as great as any previous one. Forsaken by others he faced that Roman audience alone; though conscious that the Lord stood by him. He had been in real danger and the charges against him were grave (the desertion by friendly parties witnesses to this), but Paul had discharged his obligation to his Lord. His message had been fully conveyed, to such effect that his sentence had been temporarily deferred. Christ had been magnified yet again in that life so constantly honouring to Him. Paul treats it as a last high point in his career for the Lord. He seems to know that the verdict is against him, but is not greatly saddened by this. He looks ahead to another court of appeal, infinitely superior to Caesar's, where "the righteous Judge" makes His assessments and awards, and all false verdicts are reversed. There are joys and compensations ahead for all who live in the light of Christ's appearing, with a great love for the prospect of the high and public honour to be accorded to Him in that day. For Paul, with his sights set on the day of Christ's glory, even martyrdom was too small a thing to daunt him, or to shift him from loyalty to his Lord.

Meanwhile, the strain of rigorous confinement and comparative forsakenness was considerable. " I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is come " (verse 6, J.N.D. translation). His vital energies were being drained ; the earthly tabernacle was dissolving. The end was near, though its timing was uncertain. With some wistfulness he welcomes the prospect of a speedy release, even though it may be violent in form. Yet he also urges Timothy to come post-haste, hoping that he may yet see him. Every feeling person must surely be stirred by these words. But the triumph that surrounds such an end to such a life is the most prominent feature. Paul looks back over his life-work with an evident integrity, which is far removed from self-commendation. All that he had achieved was a direct outcome of his link with the living Christ, and he would be the first to trace the credit for it to that Source alone.

Last Messages

The closing verses include some details about the apostle's situation, referring to persons present (or lately present) with him ; they also mention a few of his needs, remarkably few in the circumstances. Greetings then conclude the letter. It is a human story, full of human interest, not less like this because it is also the last page of the divine record of the life of one who was a chosen vessel of the Lord.

The greetings include a salutation to that devoted couple Prisca and Aquila, those close friends of his in faithfulness to Christ. There are greetings too conveyed by Paul to Timothy from local brethren in Rome, some of them named. Paul seems still to have been visited by a few loyal persons in these bleak times.

A little before the close Paul makes a few requests to Timothy. For the second time in the chapter he urges him to come quickly, though we cannot know whether he got there in time. He also asks for his cloak, to provide a little warmth when winter comes. We can imagine the sparseness of Paul's place of confinement, but Paul does not even mention that. As on earlier occasions, when things were bad enough, though less rigorous than now, Paul does not complain. He simply makes a move to protect himself a little when still severer times come. Certainly Paul shows us what a hardy thing Christian faith can be. His other requirement is that Timothy should bring " the books and the parchments ". Within close sight of his departure from this life, he would not pass the time unprofitably. Rather he would keep his mind active, and his soul sustained, in reading (and perhaps writing) the things of Christ. May we be on guard against our tendency to slip into a too-soft and relatively inert kind of Christianity. These closing requirements voiced by Paul, in their fewness and in their simplicity, surely have their lesson for us along these lines.

Information about movements of individuals is passed on in some of these verses. The impression is given of a small band of persons recently with Paul, most of whom had moved off on legitimate but unspecified missions. " Only Luke is with me " bears testimony to the isolation felt by Paul, and his longing for a little more fellowship and

company. It also underlines the faithfulness of " the beloved physician ", who had accompanied Paul on so many of his travels, and whose support and constancy had been so real. Luke is still there, closely in support, sharing the reproach and the isolation, right to the end. The Christian testimony owes much to steady self-effacing people who are always on hand, constantly shouldering things and meeting real needs.

About one of the individuals who had left, however, Paul has reasons for real disappointment. Demas had not only departed, he had **forsaken** Paul, having loved this present world. It seems to grieve Paul more than all else, and is an added reason for wishing to see his loyal Timothy once more, and to share things with him. But Paul has a comment about Mark, whom he asks Timothy to bring, which lightens the picture somewhat. Mark, says Paul, is a useful and profitable person, likely to be of service to him in his present state. Acts 13:13 and 15:37-39 tell how Mark discontinued in mid-stream at a vital stage in the Lord's work. But Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24 indicate that he later returned to faithful service to the Lord, and was an accepted and valued fellow-labourer with Paul. The verse in Philemon brackets him with Demas as such. It is indeed sad when the last thing that is known about a person is that he gave up after real service for Christ. But there is great cause for thankfulness when, after defection and failure, a person can be restored and useful to the Lord, and continue in that way later.

Perhaps, looking back over all that 2 Timothy has been saying to us, we can take this contrast between Demas and Mark as a last and pointed challenge. Are we on the way further **in** or are we on the way **out** from this course of dedicated and disciplined loyalty to Christ which the epistle has shown us? Let us seek His grace to remain true to Him, and may the desirable qualities we have considered find their expression in our own lives in the way Paul looked for them in the first place from Timothy.

THE POWER OF PENTECOST ——— ANGUS THOMPSON

Please read: Leviticus 23:15,16 ; John 16:7 ; Acts 1:8 ; Acts 2:1-4 and 42.

OUR PASSAGE has introduced us to the Feast of Pentecost. The word Pentecost denotes fiftieth, that is the fiftieth day after the Passover. This acquires its great interest for us in that, counting from the death of Christ, which is the fulfilment of the Passover, it was after fifty days that the Holy Spirit came upon the believers in Jerusalem.

Now let us think of the promise, in seven parts, which was fulfilled at Pentecost. Just prior to His death upon the cross, the Lord Jesus gathered His own together and gave them this precious promise, " It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." (John 16:7) The word " Comforter " is probably used in the sense " One who undertakes our case " and this, of course, is wonderful when

we know so well that we would be like helpless orphans exposed to any danger, if we did not possess such a Comforter.

It teaches us also that the Lord Jesus had to go into glory, back to His Father, before the Holy Spirit would come. This is important because many believe and teach today that the Church was established long, long before Pentecost. This cannot be true, since the Lord Himself said, " Upon this Rock (meaning Himself) I **will** build my church " indicating that the formation of the Church was still future. That it took place at Pentecost, after His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, is shewn by 1 Corinthians 12:13. Only when the Holy Spirit came, was the Church formed as one body.

What a blessed promise, " If I go, I will send ", and the One sent would come alongside to help, to guide into all the truth, and to give this power to move out in witness for Himself. This is the aspect of the promise which will now engage us. " Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high " (Luke 24:49). Never was there a power like this in the world before. No doubt, in the Old Testament, the Spirit came in power upon some of the saints, but His permanent indwelling was never known by them as He is known now by even the simplest believer. The promise to every disciple was, " that He may abide with you for ever . . . for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you " (John 14:16,17).

We should also look at the type of material upon whom God was putting His Spirit. What a mixture they were! And how like ourselves! Peter, for example, just before, had denied his Lord with oaths and curses. The others (save John) had fled, and left Him in His hour of need. These were the very people upon whom the Holy Spirit came with rushing, mighty wind and tongues of fire. When the Spirit came upon Jesus at the Jordan, it was as a dove ; but when He came upon them at Pentecost it was with cloven tongues of fire. From Luke 3: 16,17 it would appear that the fire was to consume all that is contrary to God and make men and women fit vessels to serve Him, in the way He wanted to be served in a Christ-rejecting world.

You will notice that as a result of their being filled with the Spirit there is an immediate response in at least two ways, outwardly towards the world, and inwardly in the Church.

There was Peter, who had so recently denied his Lord, moving out amongst the Jewish people. They were very unhappy about what was going on ; they certainly did not know that the Spirit had come down ; some were saying that the disciples were full of new wine. They knew something had happened but they did not know what ; but Peter goes out and preaches in power, and in one day three thousand souls are converted. Never forget, while we shall never get back to the conditions prevailing at Pentecost, the power is still the same today. If a person will put himself at the disposal of God and open heart and life to Him, even today, the Spirit can use such an one. We have seen men of God who have been and are being used mightily by God because they have let God rule in their lives.

Let us now turn to the results of the Spirit's coming seen inwardly, that is, as it creates a Christian company, the Church. This power of

the testimony is seen in our verse, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). This is a side to our service which is often overlooked. First, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship". How easy it is to want a religion, a christianity that suits ourselves, but are we willing to look into the Scriptures, into the apostles' doctrine, to read it? And even if I have to make some adjustments to my life, to my manner of living, to my talk, to my companions; if the Scriptures guide me how to conduct myself, am I willing to follow the apostles' doctrine and fellowship? Fellowship means coming together into the one boat, so to speak, like fishermen partners (Luke 5:7), sharing in everything as equally involved. No man is an island, we hear it said, and I believe fellowship is vital, but old and young together. How happy it is when all the generations join together with no gaps!

The verse next refers to breaking bread. How could you serve Him fully in the gospel if you neglect to do this for **Him**? He says to each one of us, "This do for a remembrance of me", until He come, and if I really love the Lord I think that there will be no doubt that I will be found with the Lord's people, coming together on the first day of every week, in fellowship, understanding something of the apostles' doctrine, and breaking bread together. Would it mean giving something up if you were to do this? Is there something else more important to you? Or, would you be subject to the Lord's request? Give Him His portion, I ask you. Let the Lord have His way. Let the Holy Spirit control and something of that power that was so evident at Pentecost will be at work in your life.

The verse finishes, "and in prayers". When were you last at the prayer meeting? I find it one of the most blessed times of the week to have fellowship and prayer together. It is most important in these days of difficulty that the Church, its young and its old, should be willing to go all the way for Christ. The lesson of these Scriptures is that the power is available.

COMFORT — JOHN BARNES

A BROTHER in the Lord told me of a fellowship meeting he had attended. "The afternoon reading was excellent and was followed by ministry in the evening which was of a high standard, but something was missing. It was the element of comfort. There were believers present who had recently suffered bereavement; some were in business or domestic difficulties. I reflected that such a company must often represent a good deal of sorrow and even anguish. We had enjoyed much valuable instruction but there seemed to be so little comfort." A dying clergyman whose godly ministry had been blessed to many is believed to have said, "If I had my life to live over again I should concentrate on a ministry of comfort." With these thoughts in mind I thought we might consider the matter of comfort in the Scriptures referred to below.

1. The God of all comfort. 2 Corinthians 1:3

God Himself is the great source of strength and encouragement. We live our daily lives often in an environment of pressures and worries which depress our spirits and sometimes bring people to the brink of despair. God may permit His people to pass through such experiences for good reasons of His own. One of them may be that He wants us to rely more fully on Him. If we can battle through in our own strength how prone we are to do so. We are constitutionally independent and like to see ourselves through life's problems on our own. This is so natural to us all that we all understand it.

The idea of comfort here expressed is not simply that a soothing word is spoken to someone in trouble but that encouragement of a real kind is provided. The word appears to be based on the well-known root "Paraclete". This is normally construed as meaning "One called alongside to help". So the concept of real, practical aid in difficulty or danger is inherent in the word. God is described in this chapter as the source of all encouragement. He places Himself, with all His unfailing resources, alongside the tried and perplexed believer as One available for timely help in troublesome circumstances. He is here spoken of as the God who raises the dead. Of all human problems this is the most insoluble. Death is beyond human help but God operates in this sphere in living power; it is a region where He, alone, can work.

It is important, too, that help should be timely. Sometimes, after we have passed through deep waters, someone who hears of it may say, "I wish I had known, I could have helped". We appreciate the willingness to help but regret that the offer is too late to be of avail. Help, to be really effective, must be timely and God is a "very present Help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). He is alongside.

2. The Lord Jesus as Comforter.

The Lord Jesus was a Paraclete to His disciples during the days of His humble Manhood on earth. We know how richly He ministered to them and stood by them in all their need. He was always alongside to help, not only His disciples, but all who were in need of help. He bound up the brokenhearted, restored hope to the despairing, reached out His strong hand to support the faint, spoke words of cheer and encouragement to the dispirited. He was available at all times, day and night, to bring help. The outcast leper, the helpless paralytic, the groping sightless all found in Him a Friend indeed. Peter says of Him simply but sublimely, "He went about doing good". What a summary of a life! The apostle goes on to tell us that "God was with Him". He brought into needy man's reach all the power and succour of the Godhead.

Although the Lord Jesus does not appear to have the term "Paraclete" applied to Him on earth yet He indicates its applicability to Him in what He says of the Holy Spirit whom He called, "Another Comforter". He Himself was their Paraclete and the Holy Spirit, who would come, was the Other.

The Lord Jesus does, however, have the term applied to Him in His present ministry on behalf of His own. In 1 John 2:1 the word translated " Advocate " is the same lovely term. He is there as He was here ; to help and encourage, to look after the interests of the saints.

3. The Holy Spirit as Comforter.

On His departure out of this world to be with the Father, the Lord's concern was how His loved ones would fare. Left without His physical presence in a hostile world which hated them as it had hated Him, how would they manage to survive, sheep in the midst of snarling wolves as they would be? He promised them that He would send them the Holy Spirit, " another Comforter ". The same noun is used here again. The adjective " another ", is of great importance here. It seems that the Greeks had two words for " another ". One of them means another of a different kind, while the second means another of the same kind. It is the second adjective which the Lord Jesus employs in this place. He was to send to them another Comforter, not of a different kind, but of the same kind as Himself. He would be the same in love, power, interest, patience ; in every respect except that He would not become Man, and He would carry on the work begun by the Lord in His people. The Lord says of Him, " He shall abide with you for ever ". He would not leave them during the remainder of the sojourn of the church saints on earth, but would at all times be alongside to give help. Indeed, He would be " in " them so that they would never be separated from Him by any circumstances whatever. As we think of our evident weakness and consider the powerful enemies we are pitted against, we can take courage from the knowledge of the superior power of our great indwelling Comforter and Succourer, the Holy Spirit.

4. The Comfort of the Scriptures.

Not only do we have the immeasurable help of Divine Persons, as we have considered, but God has also given us the holy Scriptures to comfort, guide and encourage us. In writing to the Romans (15:4) the apostle Paul says, " That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The word comfort in this verse is from the same root. God has made arrangements, in spite of every effort by the enemy, that we should have these infinitely valuable holy documents available for our encouragement. It is shameful that we should neglect such a source of comfort and cheer. Every contingency has been foreseen and catered for in one way or another. Certainly we shall have to search the Scriptures to derive the counsel and guidance we require, but the help is there for us if we look for it. There must have been little the Roman christians could see of consolation or encouragement in what surrounded them. The frightening atrocities of some of the Roman emperors, such as Tiberius or Nero, would offer no comfort, but the holy Word of God can and does in every trial.

5. Comfort one another.

Finally, there is the assembly of God on earth. As the saints themselves benefit from the infinite range of encouragements provided for them in the Person of God Himself, in the Lord Jesus, in the Holy Spirit and in the Scriptures, it becomes their privilege to communicate like encouragement to the depressed and frightened and the needy. 2 Corinthians, Chapter 1 is full of this idea, and again the words used are from this root. We are to be to one another rather like little paracletes as we drink in encouragement from divine sources opened to us for our blessing.

It is clear from the teaching of this chapter that God never intends us to be self-contained tanks into which comfort is poured, but rather like reservoirs, supplied by Him, from which others can draw refreshment and cheer. We are to be living channels, not tarns in the hills. The word comfort or encouragement occurs ten times between verses 3 and 9. God is the source and the saints are to be receivers and channels of blessing to others.

One subject is specially indicated by the Holy Spirit for mutual encouragement ; the coming of the Lord. The well-known passage referring to the rapture, in 1 Thessalonians 4 concludes with these words: " Wherefore comfort one another with these words." The word comfort in this text is once again from the same root. We can, each of us, thus help to complete the chain of encouragement, which is anchored securely in God, as we ourselves find encouragement from the Lord, by the Spirit, through His Word, and pass on to one another some of the precious benefits we receive.

TWO ADDRESSES FROM ST. ANDREW'S: 1977

1. NOT I, BUT CHRIST ——— JOHN D. RICE

Galatians 2:20 ; Job 29 ; Romans 5:6-12 ; Romans 6:1-11

Introduction

AS this series of conference addresses is under the general title of " Not I, but Christ," it is appropriate that we should begin with an examination of the verse from which this phrase is extracted — Galatians 2:20.

The verse begins, " I am crucified with Christ ", and the first question we must answer is, Who is this ' I '? What is crucified? Who is crucified? In an address by C. A. Coates, " The Christian's Desires: An Index to Christian Character "*, three spiritual states are considered, culminating in that characterised by " I am crucified with Christ ", and these bear repetition.

Self Magnified

A fundamental feature of the nature of unregenerate man is self-

* " The Paths of Life and Other Addresses ", C. A. Coates.

centredness. Sadly in Job we see this feature as the motive force even in religious observance and charitable actions.

In Job 29 note that the words "I", "me" or "my" occur altogether more than fifty times. "Job had been in circumstances which favoured a great deal of benevolent activity, but you notice it all centred round himself, and you might justly entitle this chapter, Self Magnified" (CAC).

Is self-magnification only seen in unregenerate man? Alas, not. Do we not see ourselves in Job 29? What we see is unattractive, but not unknown. We need to be alive to the dangers of self-motivation in our assembly activities. Self is hypocritical, self is deceitful, self is loathsome. If I have never seen **myself** for what I really am by nature, I cannot profit from the truth of Galatians 2:20.

Self Decreasing?

"He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all" (John 3:30,31).

Many Christians have taken John's words and applied them as a rule for Christian living. Recognising the perfect life of the Lord Jesus, they seek to emulate it. "He must increase," but what problems we find when "I must decrease"! Nature itself illustrates the folly of adopting such a rule. I have an apple tree in my garden which, though correctly pruned, produces very few apples, and those it does produce are minute. I could remove the tiny apples and pretend that the tree is totally non-productive, but how foolish! I must cut the tree down, and plant a new one in its place.

Yet **we** try to improve ourselves, to remove our more obvious deficiencies, and then wonder why no corresponding increase in Christ-likeness appears. Self Decreasing may be the mark of a good humanist; it is not the mark of a Christian. We must see the **futility** of such a recipe for Christian living before we gain the blessings of Galatians 2:20.

Self Gone

Here is the truth of our verse. Self is not Magnified, not Decreasing, but Gone. "I am crucified with Christ." If we can truly say this by faith, then we are living in the enjoyment of deliverance from sin. If not, then we are probably marked by the despair which characterises the man in Romans 7.

Despair?

There may come a time in our experience when we submit ourselves to critical self-examination. Do we come to the same conclusions as those expressed in Romans 7? What a desperate situation to reach! Sin, the inherited root within me from which sins spring; sin, my self in rebellion against God, doing its own will; sin, is too strong for me. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

It is a sad fact that many Christians never find deliverance. They

know the forgiveness of **sins**, but labour on, living a life of constant defeat, without any knowledge of deliverance from **sin.** Instead of searching God's word for deliverance, we try to improve matters ourselves, a hopeless task.

> " The fact is, we do not believe God, that we are as bad as He says we are ; so bad, so vile, so loathsome, so offensive, so dead to all that is good, in the flesh as children of Adam. Have you ever said, ' I am only fit to be buried out of sight. Yes, bury me, bury **me** out of sight. I am not fit for heaven, I am not fit for earth. Oh, bury me out of the sight of God, and out of my own sight '?" (CS).

Here is the answer to the problem of sin: we can be delivered if it is buried, and here is one of the wonders of God's grace: **deliverance from sin.** " I am crucified with Christ."

Deliverance

Is crucifixion with Christ a continual thing? Was Christ crucified continually? Certainly not ! " Christ was **once** offered to bear the sins of many " (Hebrews 9:28), and **I** know now what happened then, my " old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed " (Romans 6:6).

Because " death hath no more dominion over Him " (Romans 6:9), the Apostle can write that " sin shall not have dominion over you " (Romans 6:14). God condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3), sin in me, and so I had the sentence of death upon **me** ; but Christ was " made sin " for me (2 Corinthians 5:21) and the condemnation is over because death, His death, has taken place.

> " It is not merely that I have found in Christ a Saviour, but I am crucified with Christ. My very nature is dealt with. All that I have as a living man in the world is gone, — not of course as a matter of fact, but, what is far more important, as a matter of faith " (WK).

Practical deliverance comes in the realisation that " I am crucified with Christ ".

Paul says " I am crucified ", and then looks on himself as dead. This is the start of the enjoyment of the fruits of Christ's death. It is the start too of a life of true service. " Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin " (Romans 6:6). This is not some higher knowledge reserved for advanced Christians, it is a fundamental truth of our position in Christ, and without this knowledge we are not free to serve the Lord Jesus.

If deliverance only meant freedom from sin, we would be blessed indeed, but it also means Christ living in me. " I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ". I was a sinner without strength and without hope (Romans 5:6,8,9), now I have Christ: my life, my strength, and my Object of affection. What deliverance is in that expression " alive unto God through Jesus Christ " (Romans 6:11)! " Not I, but Christ ", is not a rule for living, but a

declaration of this glorious fact of life: **self gone, Christ come.**

The result of understanding death with Christ is to change our view of the battle within us.

> "We died with Christ . . . and we so reckon ourselves dead. We put off the old man and we put on the new, or else it had been a fight between the two, and a kind of even chance which should get the upper hand. Conflict there will be, but now it is of quite a different kind.
>
> If a man be struggling with me, it is a very different thing for me to have him down with my knee on his chest, from his having me down with his knee on my chest" (JND).

Are we living defeated or victorious Christian lives? The secret of victory lies in the appropriation of the truth of Galatians 2:20, "Not I, but Christ".

2. BEING A CHRISTIAN — COLIN CURRY

Romans 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 5:9,14,15.

WE ARE to speak tonight, not about becoming a Christian, but about **being** a Christian. By observing Christians one can find good and poorer examples of real Christianity in practice. We need a standard by which to judge these matters, however, and it will therefore be best for us to concentrate on the biblical version of what it means to be a Christian.

The true practice of the Christian faith is **not** a dull and unexciting thing, nor is it a pleasant routine, a part-time occupation, a sideline in our lives; though people do sometimes misrepresent it in these ways. On the contrary real Christian faith is living, fervent, and all-consuming in character; there is a kind of compulsion about it, one is drawn and absorbed into the kind of life that it follows. Let us not forget that something of earthquake proportions has taken place in our lives; the living Christ has confronted us with His amazing love and mercy, and from that moment we are under the grip of His overwhelming grace to us. **This** is what being a Christian involves.

An illustration may be helpful. To the speaker, taking the observer's view, **fishing** as a pastime appears to be a dull occupation. A person when fishing seems to wait almost endlessly, recasting the line at times, but in the main very little happens; there is a lot of dead time. At the end of the day he packs up and goes, and returns to repeat the process tomorrow. But fishing when something **is** happening is no doubt a vastly different matter, especially when 'a big one' is on the line! What was a dreary passing of the time becomes a 100 per cent engagement. The link with something living and active at the other end sharpens the concentration wonderfully, and dictates the pattern of the fisherman's activity. In a similar way the true outworking of the Christian faith in a life where the living Christ has the mastery, is something totally other than empty lip-service to that faith, or a routine performance of it.

Let us begin then by making the point that being a Christian is not something **I** do so much as being under the grip of something that dominates me. It is something that awareness of Christ, His all-surpass-

ing love to me, and my indebtedness to Him, makes of me. We have to ask ourselves tonight how much of our Christianity is a kind of make-believe, a playing at it, going through with certain motions? How much of it, on the other hand, is a real living personal response drawn from me; something which involves me, impels me, constrains me? How much of my Christianity is decisively and deliberately entered into because its claims on me are so tremendous; because the love of Christ leaves me with no alternative? Primarily what matters is that His love overwhelms us, controlling, commandeering and directing us (always in the most gracious of ways); it makes its impress upon our thinking, shaping our judgments, our decisions, our mode of life.

Illustrations

The point that the surpassing love of Christ and the almost unbelievable mercy of God have intervened to affect our lives is so important that I want to give two biblical instances of it.

The first is the story of Zacchaeus (perhaps the best-known subsidiary character in the Bible). Each of us could perhaps ask ourselves the question "Whereabouts in the story of Zacchaeus do I fit in?" To begin with, Zacchaeus was a man with an interest in Christ but with a poor view. Something special was happening in Jericho, but he had no clear view. Perhaps some of us are like this; Christianity is a big thing, a Conference is a special occasion, but we don't follow much, we have no clear view of things. Well, Zacchaeus was a person of initiative, and he saw to it that he had a better view. In fact, he had one of the best views from that sycamore tree. Probably quite a number here **do** have a good understanding of what is going on; they appreciate the finer points, enjoy the discussions in the Bible readings; they are well in the picture, have been to many conferences, can produce chapter and verse for many things. But though Zacchaeus moved from the poor view to the better view, it was **only a view,** and he himself would have been content with that. At the end of the day he would have gone home satisfied that he had seen this special person, he had had a special day—just as some of us at the end of the week will say we have been engaged with special things, we have had a wonderful week. But that was not the end of the story. What was good enough for Zacchaeus was not sufficient for Christ. That personal confrontation by the Lord Jesus was not in Zacchaeus's thoughts. It came as a complete shock to him; his heart must have missed several beats. To have Christ picking him out, singling him out by name, taking control of him, saying "come down, today I **must** abide at thy house", was totally unexpected. It was the earthquake in Zacchaeus's life. It was a shock, but also a tremendous joy; he received him joyfully. Let us note well that observing Christianity, agreeing with it, even in a well-informed way, falls far short of **being** Christian. The personal face-to-face link with Christ, His authority over me, and the obedience which ensues, is vastly more important than knowing all about it from the spectator's viewpoint. How many of us are finding ourselves confronted by Christ Himself this week, with all the claims that His love has upon us?

Let us now speak briefly about Saul of Tarsus. He was certainly

not a mere observer, nor a quiescent person. He was an activist, an angry young man, yet a rank traditionalist too. He knew what he felt to be right, and was bent on doing it, throwing his whole energy into his task. Yet his life too was turned upside down in a moment. He was stopped and humbled at a single stroke ; confronted by the living Christ in an inescapable way, with no defence to make, no argument possible, no shelving of the issue. He was blinded by something far more glorious and overpowering than ever he could have imagined. From that moment on he always marvelled that he was not condemned, but grasped by grace, rescued from his headstrong ignorant ways, to be used, to be a channel for that same grace. Henceforward he was to live not to himself, but to Him Who died for him and rose again. He knew well that this was the only right response in his own life.

From the pen of **this** man, now Paul the apostle, came the words of our two passages, advising and urging us to be moved by the mercies of God, and providing such a good example himself: telling us too what the springs of his life as a Christian were — constrained by the love of Christ, consciously and seriously judging that his life must be lived solely unto Him. Both these passages tell us that being a Christian is **not** one kind of life, but it **is** another. We shall look at the negative side first — what being a Christian is not — before moving to what it **is.**

What being a Christian is not

There are life-styles all around us which are not Christian. These ways of life are so normal and so conventional that they are almost taken for granted. Advice to pursue life on these lines is thought to be sound, almost self-evidently so. It is easy for us to be in these channels too, almost without knowing it, because they are so common. It is important therefore to be clear that these patterns of life are not Christian.

One kind of advice often given and often followed might be summarized as " Push hard for yourself ". The phraseology varies: be a go-ahead type, be an individualist, do your own thing, develop your capabilities, watch your standard of living, get to the top of the tree, make a name for yourself. Note the emphasis on **yourself** in all these aims. Being a Christian is **not** living to oneself. Self-promotion is not Christian.

There are other norms around, favoured and accepted by many. There is the softer approach to life, whose motto might be " Take life easily ". Drifting on through life, sampling everything that seems pleasant, with ordinary things filling the horizon, allowing our time to be filched away with empty pursuits, sights, sounds, activities ; this is a common pattern. Such lives are often disorganised, lacking in discipline, with little sense of direction. The shallow, trivial life, the easy-going life, the life that treats itself gently, or the life that is heavily absorbed with being up-to-date in its outlook, or cultured and sophisticated in its pursuits ; these ways of living are just as much self-centred as the one that drives itself hard in self-advancement. This too is not being a Christian.

Another common if unspoken outlook on life nowadays is the frustrated, unhappy outlook, which feels the pointlessness and emptiness of things. People of this kind have, in some senses, a more penetrating insight than those who adopt the attitudes we have already mentioned, yet they seem to find nothing to put in place of them. Such people are marked by ill-contentedness ; they are often frustrated, resentful, critical, rebellious. They are quick to focus on shortcomings of others, the poor guide given by earlier generations, the bad testimony of Christians ; they can see only the weaknesses of those who seek to follow the scriptural patterns of Christian living. The spirit of complaint, the thought that somehow things should be better than they are, that life owes one more than one finds in it, is widespread today. The grumbling unhappy spirit, always ready to join the opposition, is a common attitude. Needless to say, this is not being Christian either.

The worldly attitudes we have mentioned are by no means absent amongst Christians ; and we all have strong susceptibilities in these directions. The appeal in our verses for non-conformity to this world is directed to **us**, and needs our urgent attention.

What being a Christian is

The inconsistency and the falsity of the worldly habits of life are shown up strongly when the marvels of the divine love towards us are really appreciated. Pressing strongly for one's own advantage, and the hard spirit of pride and self-advancement, are seen to be the ugly and unthankful things that they are, in the light of the mercy and bounty that God has shown us. The soft life, the trivial life, the life of formal lip-service to Christianity, are shameful and shoddy responses to love of the quality that Christ has expended upon us. Complaint, ingratitude, disillusionment with our lot, are remarkably strange attitudes in those who have really received God's grace and liberality. The critical and frustrated bent ill suits those who really see themselves as having deserved condemnation from God, and yet know that they have been loved and spared, given life, and wonderfully enriched too, by His pure grace alone. Whatever else causes disappointment, the love of Christ cannot be faulted ; it towers far above all criticism, and fills and motivates the life that has a sense of its quality and plenitude. A life that is submerged in the ocean of the love of Christ cannot be an empty one, nor a pointless one.

Being a Christian, then, is a proper awareness and a true response to the tremendous mercy and the measureless love that have been shown to me. It is giving serious attention to what would be the will of God for me. The question " What would God have my life to be? " is the central one now. I see now that Christ has a total claim to be Master of my life. My body, my mind, my time, must be under His control. I must present myself to Him, for His ends and for His service.

To be a Christian is to be a humble person. Airs of superiority, pride and arrogance, betray a lack of awareness that a great debt has been frankly forgiven ; as the story of Simon the Pharisee makes plain. The woman in that story exhibits the proper spirit, making everything of Christ and taking a low place herself. " To whom little is forgiven,

the same loveth little". Do we realise, as much as we should, how **much** we owe to our Lord? Is this one of the causes of shallowness in our devotion to Him? How much, and how constantly, do we feel the sense of overwhelming gratitude to Him?

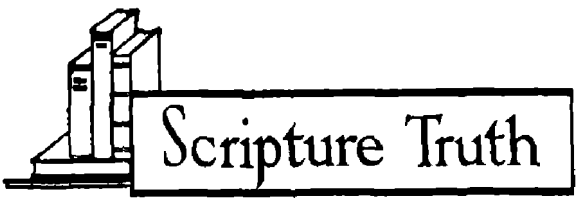
To be a Christian is to be constrained by the love of Christ. To be constrained is, in one sense, to accept certain restrictions upon one's activities. One is not free to do unsuitable and unhelpful things. The question "Does this please Him?" is the controlling one. On the other hand, to be constrained is also to be impelled strongly in directions which please and honour our Lord. Guardedness about things that He would not approve, and energetic following in the paths that please Him, are the signs of great attachment to our Lord. "We labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him", writes Paul. This was his ambition and strong aim in life. It is a good summary of what it is to be a Christian.

May I make a plea for serious-mindedness in seeking the will of God in our lives? The sense of what is due to Him, the spirit of earnestness and obedience, of continual freshness and renewal of mind about these great issues in our lives, is vital. There will be problems about discerning the will of God in many of the details of our individual situations in life. Often we shall need to wait on Him, in patience and prayerful dependence. But we can hardly begin to do God's will unless our basic attitudes are right: we have therefore concentrated tonight on the broad and essential features of a true Christian response.

In closing, and in summary, may I extract three key points from the verses we have considered. First, an appeal is being made to us all. Primarily it comes, not from a human speaker or writer, but from God Himself. Not the apostle only, but the compassions and the grace of God impart their own force to this appeal. The love of Christ makes its own claim upon us here and now. This is the great lever which these verses use to move us towards practical devotion to our Lord. Can we really hear about this and remain unmoved?

Secondly, there is a valuable life to be lived if we **are** so moved. The will of God is by far the best line for any of us to follow. In contrast to the self-interested pursuits, seeking the will of God proves itself to be "good, and acceptable, and perfect (ideal)" to the person who is following that course. We shall need to keep at it, running the race. There will be battles to be won; it is a fight as well as a race. It will be costly too, "a living sacrifice" is required; we shall have to count the cost. Later talks this week will dwell on these matters. But let us not fail to understand that the life that honours our Lord is the supremely worth-while life.

Finally, decisive obedience on our part to the claims of our Lord upon us is clearly needed, and there can be no doubt that this is the only proper and honourable response to Him. What is our reaction going to be? May we be firm and outright in intelligent and warm-hearted commitment to Himself as our Lord and Master; let it be not in word only but in reality. So shall we prove in our own experience what it means to be a Christian.



MAY, 1978

(incorporating "Words of Help")

SPIRITUAL WEAPONS FOR A SPIRITUAL WARFARE

R. A. CREETH

THIS is a day of conflict; and the Christian is exhorted to put on the whole armour of God, that he may be able to stand in the evil day in his conflict with the spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:11-13).

It is interesting to notice where the word "armour" occurs in the New Testament. In Romans 6:13 the word translated "instruments" is really "weapons" or "armour". As one redeemed to God, all my physical members are to be used in the conflict as weapons for God. Once a slave to Satan, I am now privileged to serve as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ", placing myself unreservedly at the disposal of my new Master.

Instruments of Righteousness

Let us look more closely at the truth unfolded in this sixth chapter of Romans. The key words "knowing" (v.6), "reckon" (v.11) and "yield" (vv.13,16,19) will help us here. "**Knowing** this, that our old man is crucified with him [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed [or, 'rendered powerless'] that henceforth we should not serve sin, for he that is dead is freed [or, 'justified'] from sin" (vv.6-7). All that I was as a man in the flesh, an unsaved man, was seen by God to be crucified with Christ. Sin is no longer my master: I am righteously justified from sin's authority, and now in Christ I am to live unto God.

Practical deliverance comes as we carry out the exhortation of verse 11: "Likewise **reckon** ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." We are to accept the facts of this teaching as true for ourselves, and to act accordingly. We are to count as true what God considers to be true: that we have died with Christ to the claims and power of sin; and we are now free to walk in newness of life as being in Christ risen.

We come now to the third key word of the chapter. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but **yield** yourselves unto God as those that are alive from **the dead**, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (v.13).

"Yielding is presenting, as the sacrifices of old were presented to God for His acceptance, and use in His worship. We are once for all to present ourselves as a whole to God, and also our various members in detail to God. To live to God is to surrender all to

Him, and this we are called to do in a single and complete act, as implied by the tense of the verb " (W.J.H.).

It is our privilege and responsibility to make a full surrender of ourselves and all our members to the service of the God Who has saved us by His grace. No longer are our members to be used as formerly in the service of sin and unrightousness, but they are to be used as instruments (or weapons) in the service of God.

There are thus two distinct options open to us: to which are we going to yield? Let us be very simple and practical here. One of our most important members is the eye: what am I doing with my eyes? Am I using them for God's glory, or am I employing them in a vain search for satisfaction in the things of this world? Then what about my ears? Am I using them to listen to the many confusing and soul-damaging voices of the world, or am I listening day by day to what my Lord has to say to me from His word? My lips are important members: have I surrendered them to Him, so that I love to speak of Him at every opportunity, or am I allowing myself to speak what is unkind or even untrue? Then what about my hands? There is so much to do in the service of the Lord ; let me employ them wisely. And my feet: are they leading me in the path of obedience to the Word, or do I allow them to carry me into places where it is not becoming for a Christian to go?

You see, our various members are the " instruments " of all our activities ; they are to be used as " weapons " or " arms " in our spiritual warfare. Our whole being is to be yielded first to God as alive from the dead, and then the members in detail. My talents, my physical members, all my powers are to be used in the conflict as weapons for God.

The Armour of Light

In Romans 13:12 the apostle uses the same word when he says, " Let us put on the **armour** of light ". As believers, we are responsible to know the time, for, " it is already time that we should be aroused out of sleep ; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed ". It is time to awake, to rise to greet the day that is about to dawn — the day of our Lord's return. As children of the day, the works of darkness are to be cast away ; all that belongs morally to the night is to be repudiated, and as soldiers of Jesus Christ we are to put on the armour of light. This shining armour should characterise the child of God, marking him out as one invested with the light of the coming day, and preserving him from the fleshly activities so common in the world. But there is more than freedom from evil: he is to be clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ! What a remarkable exhortation, involving His full title! What a privilege for the believer to be so invested with Christ that he sets forth in his life that glorious Person Who is the Sun of the coming day! How fully this was exemplified in the life and pathway of the apostle Paul, who at the beginning owned his subjection to the " Lord " (Acts 9:6), manifested the life of " Jesus " in his mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:11), and ever sought to magnify " Christ " in his body (Philippians 1:20)!

The Armour of Righteousness

In 2 Corinthians 6, in his sketch of Christian service, the apostle enumerates the qualities that should characterise the servant of the Lord. The last of these is "the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" (v.7). The servant of the Lord needs to see that he is walking consistently in practical righteousness, avoiding everything that might bring the ministry into reproach. As those that belong to the Lord, we must be careful to put on the breastplate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:14), and exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:16). The apostle's desire for the Philippians was that they should be "harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation" (Philippians 2:15, J.N.D. Trans.). May this be true of us too!

Spiritual Weapons, not Carnal Ones

At Corinth there were some who were endeavouring to undermine the authority of Paul as an apostle, and were seeking to bring him into disrepute. They alleged that he was weak when present with them, and his speech contemptible, whereas he was bold when absent and his letters boastful. To refute these false accusations and to vindicate his apostleship as ordained of God, the apostle lays down a most important principle which surely has its application to the present day, as much as to the circumstances at Corinth in Paul's day. He walked indeed in flesh, a man like other men, but he engaged in no fleshly conflict. His great endeavour was to establish a principle of obedience, not to himself, but to Christ, and to Him he desired to lead captive every thought. He says, "For the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, J.N.D. Trans.). In this materialistic age it is good for us to realise that the weapons we use in the conflict with evil are spiritual ones, and are mighty indeed when used for God's glory and under His direction.

For we would thus be girded
To serve our faithful Lord,
And in this day of conflict
Cleave to His name and word.

GOLD FOR THE THINGS OF GOLD

—— J. S. BLACKBURN

> "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for Jehovah, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood. . . . Arise, O Jehovah, into Thy rest; Thou, and the ark of Thy strength" Psalm 132:4-8.
>
> "The house that is to be builded for Jehovah must be exceeding magnifical. . . . I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death" 1 Chronicles 22:5.
>
> "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God . . . because I have set my affection to the house of my God . . . the gold for the things of gold" 1 Chronicles 29:2-5.

IN these verses we have most movingly displayed the ruling passion in the life of David from youth to extreme old age. He was distinguished from his successors in that David followed Jehovah with a perfect heart. The attractiveness of such a meditation as is presented in these verses is the charming picture of a man of like passions with ourselves, whose heart was nevertheless so enraptured in his youth, that through to old age he wholly followed the Lord. We have in Caleb a picture similar in this one respect. One glimpse of Eshcol became the secret of such a quality of steadfast continuance, that he and Joshua continued when every other man fell out in the wilderness.

One aspect of the study of such passages as these, with a view to seizing the lesson for ourselves, must be made clear. The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are the books of the kingdom. This was a distinct period in the history of Israel which began with the anointing of Saul by Samuel, and ended with the deportation of king and people to Babylon. Thus the kingdom ended. For more than 2500 years there has been no king on David's throne. For most of that time there has been no land of Israel, and no people of Israel. Today, again there is a land and a people of Israel, and this is a most powerful reminder of the true meaning of the kingdom books of the Old Testament. The stories of these books point unerringly to the imminent restoration of the kingdom to Israel. The promises made to David, such as we read in our Psalm 132 will surely have their fulfilment when the Lord Jesus, "great David's greater Son", will have returned to occupy David's throne as King of Rightousness and Prince of Peace. He Himself has told us in the parable how, after His rejection by the Jews, He went away into the far country of heaven "to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return"; and return He surely will, and that quickly! Nothing we shall learn here from the parallels between the history of David, and spiritual and New Testament truth, must be taken as the primary and literal meaning of these passages, or of this large section of the Old Testament. They present us with an aspect of

the glory of our Saviour which we joyfully accord Him, and would never cease to proclaim.

What justification exists, then, for our reading these passages with a view to receiving enlightenment for the mind and stimulus to our love, since we have no part in the earthly promises to Israel and to David? Two elements in the answer to this question must suffice for the moment. The Person Who moved the heart of David so deeply and lastingly, was God. It was God as revealed in that Name which He took for the purpose of proclaiming His faithfulness in making and keeping His earthly covenants and promises — Jehovah. And it is the same God Whom **we** know, now fully revealed in His Son, in His new Name — the Father — in connection with His **eternal** purpose for the blessing of a people for heaven. The second element arises from the fact that it was the house of this God, Jehovah, which channelled the enthusiastic response of David to such transports. The house of God in the Old Testament is a theme which has a very clear counterpart in the New Testament. One passage must suffice: "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" 1 Timothy 3:15.

There has been a great deal of learned discourse about the meaning of Psalm 132:6 — "we heard of it at Ephratah"— but the natural meaning would be that he first heard of the ark when he was at Ephratah during his boyhood, for he left home there when he was "but a youth", and at that time the ark had been brought to Kirjath-Jearim, not far away. He "heard of it", and what he heard of it, shining with the glory and beauty of the gold covering the acacia wood, fired his heart with a holy desire which never left him. It was not an idol, but it represented for him Jehovah, and the mighty God of Jacob who was Israel, and the father of Israel. What a stimulus such a story should be to the people of God! Let it be so, that the young growing up amongst us may "hear of it"; may hear of the beauty of the Saviour, of the mystery of God manifest in flesh, of the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, in such wise that the same zeal, the same responsive love, the same steadfast purpose of heart, may be awakened and sustained in them for the whole of their earthly course.

When the ark first came to Kirjath-Jearim, at a time of defeat and distress for Israel, Samuel "spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts . . . and prepare your hearts unto the Lord and serve him only, he will deliver you". This was very close to the time when David "heard of it" during his youth at Ephratah, and when his heart was so affected.

"We found it", continues David in Psalm 132, "We found it in the fields of the wood". So David was leaping forward from the "hearing of it" in his youth, to his "finding" it when he was established at Jerusalem as king over all Israel. The "wood" of Psalm 132:6 is in Hebrew the singular of the name "Jearim" in Kirjath-Jearim, the city of woods. It was in connection with these experiences of "hearing" and "finding" that David uttered the vow that, until it

was fulfilled, his firm purpose would never sleep: to find an habitation for Jehovah. And here is the place to note that later in the Psalm (vv. 13-17) it is recorded, "Jehovah hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever." In these words we learn not only that David's purpose was in line with Jehovah's purpose, but are led on to the fulfilment of that purpose in the Millenium. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established . . . for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2,3). Nevertheless, David's intense desire to find a habitation for Jehovah was to be diverted from actually building the house, to preparing the materials for it with all his might.

There is a touching allusion in v. 1 of our Psalm. "Lord, remember David and all his afflictions." This is an echo of David's address to Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:14), charging him to "arise and be doing" in the great work allocated to him by the Lord: "Now behold, in my trouble (affliction) I have prepared for the house of the Lord, an hundred thousand talents of gold" and all the rest of the materials needed. It is true that for all the Lord's servants the work must continue through the afflictions of life, but surely this is a moment when our thoughts must turn to the One greater than David, through Whose afflictions and sufferings all God's plans alone can come to fruition. Everything which has been secured for God, and will be eternally established, is so because of the sufferings of Christ.

It is in this chapter (1 Chronicles 22) that David declares his intention to prepare for the building of the house of Jehovah, by occupying himself with the collection of the suitable materials. The greatness of such a plan demanded the most careful attention to the amount and nature of the materials of construction. "The house that is to be builded for Jehovah must be exceeding magnifical. . . . I will therefore now make preparation for it". David was not left to his own understanding to decide the things for which gold should be provided, as well as silver and even the other materials. In chapter 28 we learn that at this point David was one of God's chosen vessels for verbal inspiration (28:12,19). For what he had set his heart on, David received the pattern by revelation from God, just as Moses also had for the tabernacle. "Then David gave to Solomon . . . the pattern of all that He had by the Spirit . . . of the treasures of the dedicated things". After detailing the gold required for the things of gold, "all this", said David, "Jehovah made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern". The general truth that David, especially as psalmist, was a vessel of inspiration, is beautifully brought out in his last words: "David the son of Jesse said, . . . the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, the Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:1-2).

Thoroughness in all we do, and not least in the things of God, is a most important quality. "Give thyself to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine . . . Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them", writes Paul to Timothy in this very connection of the work of the house

of God. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," writes this same Solomon who received instruction in these matters from David. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" If these directions were heeded in all matters of Christian fellowship and service, how different things would be; here we are concerned particularly with diligence in spiritual things. When David set about preparing gold and silver for the house of his God, he did it with his might. "I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God" (1 Chronicles 29:2). And what was the secret source of such thoroughness and zeal? The answer is in verse 3 of this chapter: "I have set my affection to the house of my God". Love, divine love, is the only power that never fails. And divine love exists in us uniquely as a response.

In selecting gold for special attention I am, of course, not unaware that gold is only the first of several materials which occur in this context; silver, brass and other substances are frequently in the same sentence. But no one could read the details without remarking the unique position held by gold among these materials. This appears in several ways. The catalogue of the "things to be made of gold" which occupies 28:14-18 includes all the vessels for use in the sanctuary. Another indication is that, apart from the vail, nothing was seen in the temple but gold: walls, ceiling and even the floor were overlaid with gold. There was evidently a special urgency about the need to supply gold for the things of gold. No substitute could be tolerated. By contrast, when Shishak took away the shields of gold from Rehoboam, the king was reduced to using brass for the things of gold (2 Chronicles 12:9-10). Admittedly, they were for the house of the forest of Lebanon, but it was a sad debasement of the treasury, for indeed the temple was a treasury, a storehouse of things most precious.

Where is our justification for taking to ourselves in the church, which is the house of God, instruction from David's behaviour in these things? A near enough parallel is found in 1 Corinthians 3:12, where the servants of God are warned to take extreme care in respect of the materials used in the building. The house is here considered as within man's responsibility, and not in the unassailable perfection which is its mark when considered as the work of Christ as the sole builder. (This latter case is found in Matthew 16:18, and no imperfection or failure of any kind will be found, even when the gates of hell have done their worst, in that which He builds). In 1 Corinthians 3 the responsibility of the Lord's servants, with the possibility of failure, is clearly in view.

'In his temple, everything utters his glory" (Psalm 29:9). The Word of God's glory is the Son, and therefore the gold, everywhere and only to be seen in the temple, is the divine glory of Christ. It is no obstacle to this view that, from one point of view, the house of God is under construction, and from another is considered as functioning.

There are two qualities of gold which have made it in all ages the emblem and standard of preciousness: its beauty and its permanence. I have sometimes caught myself gazing at a gold watch, enthralled with the amazing beauty of the metal; and the fact that it does not

tarnish completes the reason for its never-failing preciousness, and for its unique position among the materials for the house of God. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord . . ." (Psalm 27:4). "The beauty of the Lord", "in the house of the Lord" and "all the days of my life": here is David's own interpretation of the desire which ruled his life. For us, the Godhead glory and beauty of the Lord Jesus, the Father's beloved Son, is a beauty which not only satisfies our own souls, but is the substance we can contribute, however feeble our measure, so that in the assembly it is the preciousness of Christ ever and only which holds within, like walls, the minds and the spirits of the saints gathered together. Some of those who have gone before, who have spoken to us the word of God, have laid up a marvellous treasure of recovered truth. They have indeed prepared with all their might, because their affection was set to the house of God, gold for the things of gold.

THE TRUE VINE — J. STODDART

John 15:1-8, 16.

RECENT observations among a number of the Lord's people seem to indicate some confusion of thought — and consequent distress — relative to the meaning of the above passage. This does result from wresting the verses from their context in some cases, but it is felt that all to little has been said or written that would clarify the subject in a convincing and consistent way, to the genuine seeker after the truth. Some commentaries either ignore the difficulties or explain them away unsatisfactorily and in collision with the rest of Scripture.

In deep and prayerful humility, therefore, these lines are penned with a view not only to understanding the Lord's teaching, but, by the Spirit's gracious help, also to appreciating His greatness and the result He desires to effect in His own, whom He calls "My friends" in v.14. It is not the purpose of this paper to expose or counter the many misconceptions of this passage; that might even lead to more confusion. But the intention (however feebly attained) is to compare Scripture with Scripture and to "communicate spiritual things by spiritual means" (1 Corinthians 2:13).

At a cursory reading, the first eight verses of John 15 would seem to have little connection with the context of the so-called "Upper Room Discourse" covered by chapters 13 to 17. The sudden declaration by the Lord Jesus, "I am the true vine", must have quickened the attention of the disciples to whom He was speaking. He had never said this before, and the moment chosen to reveal this truth was one of great significance. In chapter 13 He had shown the cleansing that was necessary to have "part with Him"; His own condescending action demonstrating what that meant. The Saviour's lowly example only enraged the hatred of Judas Iscariot who, "having received the sop, went immediately out: and it was night." He had no part with

Jesus, no love for Him and thus he became the willing dupe and tool of Satan to do his work. Despite the warning of Peter's failure soon to take place, the Lord's most treasured words — "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's House are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you, and . . . I will come again and receive you unto Myself"— open chapter 14. Precious, unassailable promise of our blessed Saviour! Until the moment of His coming again believers in Jesus would receive the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to equip and empower them during His absence.

But now the moment has arrived (chapter 15) for this hitherto undisclosed truth from the lips of Jesus to be announced. "I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman." How would this relate to the truth already spoken in the first part of the Lord's discourse? It is surely clear to us that the Lord intended us to "have part with Him" with the "washing of water by the Word" (Ephesians 5:26), and also that the Lord Jesus would return to the Father to prepare a place for us and that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to maintain believers in communion with the Father and the Son. But there is more to unfold. The vine was a well-understood figure of Israel (cf. Isaiah, 5), but already predicted to fail to bring forth fruit for God's pleasure. It was His vineyard, but when "He looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes". How appallingly true that prophecy proved to be in the history of that nation! Treated with unstinted care and husbandry by God Himself, the most favoured nation on earth yielded nothing but bitter fruit, repugnant to Him. Comes the day when He sends His Son into the vineyard of Israel, it is He Who spells out the dire state of that which should have brought pleasure to God. The well known parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21:33-46 poignantly describes its incorrigible state and the wickedness of those who would conspire to "kill the Heir and seize on His inheritance." Was this really Israel to whom He referred? Well, it was perceived by the chief priests and Pharisees to refer to **them** (v.45) and they were the responsible "husbandmen" before God for the state of the nation.

Incontestably then, Israel was not the true vine, but now in Israel's midst stands One Who says, "**I am** the True Vine". In Him the Father had found fruit to perfection, and "My Father is the Husbandman", He says. Thus the Father expresses His delight first at the baptism of Jesus and then again at His transfiguration. "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I have found My delight." Oh, wondrous and incomparable Saviour, Son of God, The True Vine! But now He was to depart this scene by way of the Cross and take His place in Heaven from whence He had come. Fruit for God had been produced on earth by the True Vine and God glorified by this. And this precious fruit was still to be maintained in this world, so He says to His disciples, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." Abiding in Him and livingly energised by the coming of the Holy Spirit, they too would bring forth fruit which would glorify the Father (v.8) by its abundance. Attention has often been drawn to the progression in these verses of "fruit", "more fruit" and "much fruit" (vv. 2-5). What was said of Joseph in Genesis 49:22

was to find its perfect fulfilment in the True Vine: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well [the Spirit of God]; whose branches run over the wall."

Fruit is that which manifests the life and nature of the tree, and the branch must draw dependently from the parent stock in order to bear fruit. Even then, the branch bearing fruit must be periodically pruned with a view to increasing its fruitfulness. This is readily understood to be the "chastening of the Lord" referred to in Hebrews 12 which the Father's love deems necessary for our profit who are truly His sons. Such were the disciples (and all true believers since their day) of whom the Lord can say, "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." But the principal difficulty encountered in this passage is that of the branch which "abides not" in the Vine (v.6). Is he (or she) a true believer, or can such a position be defined in another way? Let us think of Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, who certainly did not abide in the Vine although appearing to take a place as a branch, but bearing no fruit. Surely here is an example of the man in v.6. His true character was that of a thief (John 12:6), an hypocrite in the service of Satan who finally possessed him to become the instrument of the Lord's death at the hands of wicked men. For other examples we might consider Ananias and Sapphira, of whom it is said that "Satan had filled their heart to lie to the Holy Ghost" (Acts 5:3 and 9). Think also of Simon the sorcerer, who believed and was baptised, and yet whose heart was not right in the sight of God, because he thought that his money could purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit and so give him power with men. Of this man Peter says, "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:18-23). Surely a branch without fruit, because he did not abide in the Vine.

We shall avoid confusion if we keep in mind that the subject of the True Vine and the branches is connected with earth and not with heaven. Nothing in these verses in John 15 refers to the believer's place in heaven, but to his responsible place on earth as representing Christ in His absence. The man in v.6 who is "cast forth as a branch, and is withered: and men gather them and cast them into the fire", is no true believer. Although professing faith he possesses none, but simply poses as a branch by an external connection with Christianity. Let no one think that the eternal security of the believer is questioned in these verses. Of this the Saviour's words in John 10:27-28 leave no shadow of doubt. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me (not men or church); and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." Blessed, eternal security, depending only upon Him, His Word, His work, His worth, which nothing can ever impugn. The fruit-bearing of the branch refers only to our place of privilege in exhibiting (in our measure) the life and nature of Christ in loving and dependent obedience to the Father's will. It is not to be regarded as the number of souls we may have been enabled to lead to the Lord, precious privilege as that is. This is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit and not fruit in the believer, although he may be the instrument He uses. It has been

known for certain missionaries to spend years of faithful labour in their particular field of service without knowing of a single conversion. As branches in the True Vine their fruit was seen in their patient, consistent and persistent presentation of Christ to men and showing His love and grace, in lowliness of life and ways. Such fruit would remain (v.16), withstanding every test, and abide for the glory of God.

It should be underlined, therefore, that the symbol of the Vine and its branches is related to the earth, whether viewed as the nation of Israel, or as believers of this present day. (The Church, as such, is not in view in the context of John 15.) Nevertheless, while here on earth, believers are the branches of the Vine, bearing fruit for God as sustained by the Holy Spirit. When the Lord Jesus comes to take His own to the Father's house, this testimony and fruit-bearing will be entrusted to a renewed Israel — " to a people that shall be born " (Psalm 22:31). The prayers of the faithful remnant for the " Vine brought out of Egypt " will be gloriously fulfilled in the Man of God's right hand, their Messiah (cf. Psalm 80:7-9, 14-19).

Finally, as to the fruit which the Father, the husbandman would produce in the branches today, we confess it should be much more than we render to Him. But what encouragement the Word affords to bring about increase for His pleasure, revealing that it can be so through the indwelling Spirit. " The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance . . ." (Galatians 5:22-23). Can it be denied that this is but the reproduction of Christ, the True Vine, in our own lives? If we say we are advancing in years and so less productive, let us recall Psalm 92:13-14: " They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age."

May we increasingly know the great privilege, as believers, of abiding in Him, the True Vine, so that fruit, more fruit, and much fruit may abound in our lives to the glory of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, for His Name's sake.

DEPARTURE FROM THE FAITH——— JOHN BARNES

A STUDY IN 1 TIMOTHY

IN this letter to Timothy the apostle Paul writes of the solemn danger of departure from the faith, referring to the subject seven times and using a variety of expression which we hope to notice as we go on. In these verses " faith " seems to mean, in general, the body of revealed truth which we normally speak of as " the Faith ", though faith as a principle is also in mind.

In each of the seven references the adjective " some " is employed with one exception, where the word " any " is used (Chapter 5:8). However, this seems substantially the same. The suggestion may be that while not all believers are likely to be turned aside by the same thing, nevertheless some of us are peculiarly exposed to each danger. Alongside each reference to departure there is noted a corrective theme, mainly presented in hortatary terms.

1. The Peril of Legalism: Chapter 1 : 6

Chapter 1 verse 5 brings forward three things: "Love out of a pure heart, a good conscience and faith unfeigned." Immediately after we are faced with the sobering fact that "some" having swerved have turned aside. If the goal is not kept firmly in the view of faith there is a real danger that the soul may wander off the path into some tempting byway. The basic thought of swerving is 'missing the mark". Probably few lives could be classed as totally aimless, but it is what the life is aimed at that is of such importance. If the goal is not Christ and what centres in Him, we shall certainly lose our way. Once the aim is deflected, the longer the shot is, the further will one be off-target. It seems to me that this consideration is of great importance. If we go astray or step out of the path and do not respond to correction, each additional step we take will carry us further from the true way; and each wrong step taken makes the way back to truth more difficult and, sadly, less likely. Moreover, the human mind cannot remain for long a vacuum; it demands an object. If it is not engaged with what is true, it must, necessarily, be with what is false; maybe dangerously so. What Paul has in mind in this context is the danger of souls reverting to a legal system. Those who teach it as a means of salvation are certainly in error and prove, by doing so, that they do not understand the law and are therefore not qualified to teach others, in spite of their emphatic assertions (cf. final clause of v.7 J.N.D. Trans.). Being divinely given, the law is good and has its proper function, but this is not to save. Paul had to remind the Galatians that the law cannot quicken or impart righteousness (Galatians 3). The law exposes two things. It brings into the open the evil of fallen man but also shews how man cannot, by means of law, work out his own salvation. To abandon the liberating gospel of Christ for this system of despair is a sad fall indeed and, as Paul emphasises to the Galatians, unreasonable also (3:1).

He gives us the contrasting truth: "We know." The so-called teachers, ignorant of the truth, lead and are led astray, but the simple man of faith need not be in ignorance. The Word of God supplies abundant light in these matters. We know that the law is good and since we are instructed as to its true application we can understand its usefulness in its proper sphere (1:9-11) and be grateful to the God who has lifted us out of the sinking sand of our own works on to the solid foundation of the finished work of Christ where, by grace, we stand in liberty.

2. The Peril of Loose Conduct. Chapter 1 : 19

In the second reference Paul urges the need to maintain the balance of faith and a good conscience. It is perhaps worth noting that in the first three of the seven texts we are looking at, faith and conscience are definitely linked. It is no easy matter to maintain this harmony in a do-as-you-like society dedicated to the destruction of moral standards, and the idea of such a struggle is strongly brought out here. Paul urges

his young fellow-servant to " war a good warfare ". In circumstances of laxity there is a risk of truth being held in the mind but not controlling behaviour as it should ; of assent to truth without real adjustment to its values. The link between the two is strongly emphasised as we see in 1:5 as well as here, and they cannot be parted without damage. Faith must issue in practice, guided and governed by divine truth ; practice must be rooted in faith. Without faith, practice, however commendable, would be humanism ; profession without practice savours of pharisaism. To divorce the two is to draw a blueprint for shipwreck. The two persons named in the text stand as examples of those who concerning faith have put away a good conscience. The term " put away " is quite strong and is rendered by some, " thrust away with some energy ". It has been thought possible that the same Hymenaeus is mentioned in the second epistle as a defector. If this is so we may be warned of the very serious consequences of such a turning away. One of the more immediate effects was that of apostolic sanctions imposed on these men, committing them to the enemy for necessary discipline that they may have an opportunity of learning important lessons. It is blasphemous to hold or teach that the maintenance of a good conscience is of no importance. This kind of outlook makes a mockery of Christian teaching. So their " putting away " the truth led to their being " castaway " in the shipwreck of their lives. The believer's safety lies in the truth brought out in the previous verses (vv. 18, 19) put in the form of an exhortation or charge. Timothy was to hold faith and a good conscience. It seems that, among a number of possible meanings, the verb " to hold " can mean " to hold the wheel of a vessel steady on its appointed course." In view of the shipwreck mentioned here this is not without interest. If the vessel of Christian life is to be kept on course, faith and a good conscience must be maintained together. The tiller has to hold to the course indicated by the chart.

3. The Peril of False Teaching. Chapter 4:1

In the closing verses of chapter 3 we are given that wonderful outline of truth centred in the Person of the Lord Jesus, surely the core of the faith. Immediately following Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit has expressly declared a certain fact. The term " expressly " means " in words ". Here we have something stated plainly, without recourse to parabolic or symbolic language. What He says is that in the latter times some will depart from the faith. Instead of giving heed to divine truth unfolded in terms such as those in 3:16, they will attend to statements by misleading spirits and teachings of the demon underworld, endangering the whole man. The consciences of these teachers, so far from being maintained in conjunction with faith, are branded in conjunction with error. Paul, writing to the Galatians, speaks of himself in these moving words: " I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus ". These false teachers bear the brands of other masters, evil spirits. There could just possibly be the suggestion of their being " past feeling ". Certainly branding could produce this condition of

absence of sensation, so that no effect would be produced on the conscience and no sense of shame felt. The precious benefits of Christian liberty are also eroded in every sphere of life: human relationships and even food. When man's ideas are allowed to intrude into the divine sphere, only damage can ensue.

The contrary course is pressed upon Timothy, the true course. He was to remind the brethren of the source of all these good gifts, and that they are there, not to be rejected according to restrictive, demon-inspired codes, but to be received gratefully from the hand of a loving God and enjoyed. These blessings are appreciated by the simple who value the truth and stoutly reject the lies of the hypocrites.

4. The Peril of Improvidence. Chapter 5 : 8

Faith is also inseparable from love. Paul specifically connects them in 1 Timothy 1:14; "faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." The well-loved 1 Corinthians 13 is another example. "Now abideth faith, hope, love. . . ." The provision of the necessities of life for dependents is a duty which falls on household breadwinners and is a burden which faith shoulders cheerfully. Indeed it is one which household providers, very generally, gladly bear. Paul states that a Christian who fails in this basic obligation is worse than an unbeliever, for the unbelieving father normally cares for his family and makes provision for them to the best of his ability, often at some sacrifice. Even in the lower world of beasts, the care of parents for their young is a touching lesson. No Christian can evade his plain responsibility to provide for his household. He has voluntarily assumed these obligations and can have no excuse for failing to carry them out. But selfishness and even sheer laziness can creep in and destroy the instinct to provide. If this is given a foothold it can lead to the solemn condition described as "denial of the faith".

The positive side is to be seen in the verse ending the previous section. "These things give in charge that they may be blameless." While this seems to relate mainly to widows and those on whom they become dependent, v.8 would probably be capable of a wider application and direct the exhortation with equal force to those who have widows in particular on their charge, or other dependents. The Christian standard of care would certainly be higher than that of the world. Indeed, the apostle James includes the care of orphans and widows as marks of "true religion". In that verse (James 1:27) "visiting" does not mean having a cup of tea with them; it means having a practical care for them in their deprived circumstances and providing help of a positive kind.

5. The Peril of Indolence. Chapter 5 : 12, 13

The particular risk to which the young widows were exposed was that they may have little to occupy their time. Suddenly to be deprived of a husband would also mean that the woman would be relieved of many duties and would leave her with a lot of free time. What will she do with it? There would be a strong temptation to go about those who

likewise had little to do, thus establishing nuclei of tittle-tattle which can cause irreparable harm in the circle of the saints. We all know this to be so and there is no need to use circuitous terms.

Those who have fewer duties to tie them down can find abundant service for the Lord to engage their attention and Paul stresses the need to be occupied. "I will therefore. . . ." The antidote to indolence is industry. If the younger widows were to remarry they would find plenty to keep them busy in the household. However, though the main subject is the young widow, I expect that the principle can be extended to us all, for sisters are not alone in their proneness to idle gossip. This penchant is a human failing and brothers can be as guilty as sisters. So, for all of us, a more energetic engagement in positive service would save us from wasteful and harmful gossip about the affairs of others. One Bible example of a valuable service performed by a widow is that of Anna. She did not waste time airing the affairs of other people: "She spake of HIM!" Here is a precious service for all whose ordinary duties have been curtailed by retirement, bereavement or for other reasons.

6. The Peril of Covetousness. Chapter 6 : 10

Again "some" are singled out as prone to this error, though its appeal must be almost universal. The fact that we do need money to live, and that in alarmingly increasing supply these days, may help to blunt the edge of this thrust to our minds, but we are bound to heed the warning. It has often been pointed out that the danger is not in money itself, which is needed and useful, but in love of money. Hankering after enrichment has caused some to wander away from the faith. Probably they had no intention of doing so but were gradually immersed in some profit-making venture which slowly crushed their interest in the Lord's things. One of the dangers is that we do not try to earn enough to satisfy our requirements and those of our dependents, but wish to have more to satisfy our whims and fancies. Who is there among us who can afford to throw a stone at another? Yet here, Paul tells us, is a root of all kinds of evil, and instead of the promised joys it bears a harvest of sorrows for its devotees. There are spiritual treasures of untold magnitude spread out before our hearts, which will enrich us for time and for eternity. The apostle refers to some of them. "Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." He urges Timothy to flee the danger referred to but to pursue these things and to strive earnestly in the good fight of faith.

7. The Peril of Philosophy. Chapter 6 : 20

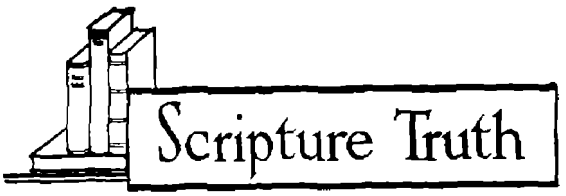
The world of books and broadcasting is a prolific exponent of the philosophies of men's minds today; and how easily we may be influenced by clever ideas put over in attractive language. It would seem that the Greek world of apostolic days was as big-headed as could be about its own brilliance. The contemptuous, "What will this babbler say?" may confirm this impression. Scripture, however, lowers this

self-exalted view to its true level, divinely considered. Its thinking is base, its utterances profane and empty ; these are the real babblings (6:20 J.N.D. Trans.). The tenets of these cults are opposed to truth and unhappy will be the path of the Christian who allows his mind to be duped by the high-sounding, but really degrading, theories promoted by these teachers. So, though we have the mind of Christ, the danger is real and we need to be on our guard. Truth committed to the apostles and prophets of the first century of the early church has been passed on to us in holy writings and has been committed to our trust, a sacred and incalculable treasure (v.28). It is our duty to preserve the great deposit entrusted to us so that we can pass it on intact to the next generation. A resolute purpose to keep and pass on this holy treasure would be a bulwark against the inroads of men's worthless notions.

Here then are seven dangers to which the brethren are exposed, some to one more than another, perhaps, but there is certain to be at least one which would be likely to entrap us. These are not small risks which could keep us back a bit or somewhat stunt our growth. These are matters serious enough to imperil a man's allegiance to the faith. The positive antidotes found alongside each danger are a blessed and gracious provision to enable the brethren to pursue a right course through this labyrinth and avoid these pitfalls.

Outline of the verses referred to

	Departure			**Exhortation**	
1.	Turned aside ;	some ;	1:6	But we know	1:8
2.	Put away ;	some ;	1:19	I exhort	2:1
3.	Departed from ;	some ;	4:1	Put in remembrance	4:6
4.	Denied ;	any ;	5:8	Give in charge	5:7
5.	Cast off ;	some ;	5:12	I will therefore	5:14
6.	Erred from ;	some ;	6:10	Pursue	6:11
7.	Erred concerning ;	some ;	6:20	Keep	6:20



JULY, 1978

(incorporating "Words of Help")

CHRIST FOR THE CHRISTIAN ——— NORMAN ANDERSON

Philippians 1:20-21 ; 2:5-13 ; 3:3,13-15 ; 4:12,13,19,20

I REMEMBER an address on the Philippian epistle which started like this: "Sport for the sportsman, politics for the politician, money for the miser, Christ for the Christian". This was thought-provoking, and might also have its effect on the reader.

There is a sequence in the development of the truth in the epistles, which we have heard expressed like this:

Dead with Christ — Romans
Risen with Christ — Colossians
Seated in the heavenlies in Christ — Ephesians.

These three very short remarks do not cover the whole truth of these epistles, but they give a key for going into them more fully. Where does Philippians fit into the sequence? I believe that Philippians is complementary to Ephesians, in this manner: it gives the life of a heavenly man. Do you know any heavenly men? Look around and see if you can see any heavenly men! 1 Corinthians 15 speaks of Christ as the Heavenly One: "As is the heavenly One, such also the heavenly ones"; so there must be some heavenly ones on earth, heavenly as to their destiny. God would have us to be heavenly in character; this covers our conduct too. And the way the Spirit of God takes to promote heavenly-mindedness and to produce heavenly character, is to engross us with the heavenly One.

First, I want to say, we need a bedrock to rest upon. Here it is: "He who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day" (1:6 J.N.D. Trans.). Do you need assurance? Do you need a sense in your soul that what you got in trusting Christ will last, and that you cannot be lost? It is here. Your history has been commenced by the work of God. It will be completed by the work of God; but I can also tell you that you have got to do a bit of work as well. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (2:12-13). God has given you a commencement of history with Him, that identifies you with that blessed heavenly One and will eventuate in placing you in His company, where He is, and like Him for evermore. He does not cease to work between the commencement and the conclusion. He is working all the time, and He is working with such Scriptures as we have here in the Philippian epistle, to bring Christ before us, that

we might be so taken up with Him that we begin to take character from Him. True character is the product of heart occupation with this blessed Man.

The Christ Who engages the heart of God in constant, fresh, unchanged delight, is the Object with Whom God would have us engaged. I hope that the Spirit of God will impress upon your heart and mind the preciousness of Christ. I will therefore put the four chapters of Philippians under four headings in my own words. The heading for chapter 1 is contained in verse 21. The grand ambition of the apostle Paul was, as he said in verse 20, that Christ should be magnified — **magnified**! God desires that with us also Christ be made large. Here Paul says, "in my body, whether by life or death". This was the language of a man who was on the threshold of martyrdom. The possibility of execution was always there at his elbow. He says, "that Christ might be made large in my body, either by life or death"; and this is the reason: "for to **me** to live — Christ." Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel said this: "As the living Father has sent me, and I live on account of the Father, he also who eats me shall live also on account of me". To eat is to make a thing your own. If you make Christ your own, there will be reproduction in you of that kind of purpose of living that characterised our blessed Lord. He said, "The reason for my living is the Father"; if you and I are absorbed with Christ, the reason for our living will be Christ. Here is a man who was absorbed with Christ, and he says, "He is the reason for my existence". "For to me to live — Christ." And, "to die" (remembering as we say these words that martyrdom was just at his elbow all the time) "to die, gain". Do we think that way? It searches us; it is only possible when our hearts are taken up with Christ in glory; so the word that I write over chapter 1 is **the motive** for Paul's living. Is it the motive for my living? It is a question we all face.

In chapter 2 verses 5-13, the man who had the motive for living was given a **model** for living. I will revert to those verses later. Christ the motive! Christ the model! "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." In chapter 3, the heading is Christ the **mark**. Paul says, "Forgetting those things which are behind . . . I strain, I leap forward, for I press toward the mark". The verse continues, "for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus". What is the "calling on high"? Christ is, in the language of Hebrews, the Forerunner. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered". I wonder if we are pressing on? Some of us are going on, dear brethren, but crawling there, **crawling there**! This is the language of someone who is keen to get there! This is the language of someone who is absolutely absorbed by what is drawing him on. I press toward the mark for the prize — the calling on high of God — Christ Jesus. Peter, in his second epistle, uses his own language, taught by the Spirit. He says, "Called by glory and virtue" (1:3 J.N.D. Trans.). There was something beckoning Peter on. It beckons me on. It beckons every Christian on. Are we **straining** to reach the mark? We need virtue on the way, and it will be supplied — moral courage, spiritual backbone to lift you out of the rut and to make every aspiration active for Christ, a living reality in your life

now. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus".

Then, in chapter 4, Paul is well aware, as we are well aware, that we are absolutely poverty-stricken naturally as to the means to pursue these things. Verse 13 is the answer: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me". Christ is my **might.** Brethren, everything we need is afforded to us. Our reading concluded with verse 19, "My God" — I like that! "There no stranger-God shall greet thee". God was no stranger to Paul; he says, "my God". Taking account of the exigencies of everyday living, he has already told us he knows how to be full and how to be empty. Some of us know what it is to be full; some of us know what it is to be empty. Perhaps we do not know **how.** Ruminate on it, because there is a wealth of blessing in it for us. "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus". It is mountains high, is it not? He says, "**my God**"! Put "my God" before "my need" and sandwich "my need" between "my God" and "His riches in glory in Christ Jesus". My need begins to shrink; it does not disappear, but I find the wherewithal to carry me through. So we have Christ as our motive, Christ as our model, Christ in glory as our mark, and the might supplied by Christ on the way to reaching it.

Let us return to the verses read in chapter 2. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation". How do you think He made Himself of no reputation? By taking the form that He never had before: in J.N.D.'s translation, "Taking a bondman's form". He gave up nothing. If there was anything external to the presence of God, He left that for a moment. As for what was properly Deity, He gave up nothing. He gave up nothing attaching to Himself in Deity, but He emptied Himself by taking a form that He never had before. He took the servant's form, and He "was made [became] in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself". How did He humble Himself? By becoming "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross". Seven steps down have been seen in these verses; I can only see three — two steps down and one up. The first step was taking the bondman's form, and the second was humbling Himself in this way, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. That does not mean that He obeyed death. Death had no claim on Him. It means He obeyed all the way — all the way to the cross. It is not the story of our redemption that is being given to us here. It is that self-humbling, that demonstration livingly in our blessed Lord Whose right it was ever to command — a demonstration of self-abasement. If it were known more by us, even in feeble measure, it would give us the power morally, livingly, spiritually, in every way. It would give us more fellowship practically, because like answers to like, and there is nothing so good for drawing saints together as likeness to Christ. It is the unlikeness and the fleshly characteristics in each one of us that put us out-at-elbows with each other. In like-mindedness to Christ we will be drawn together.

I want to draw your attention to these phrases, " being in the form of God " (v.6), " took upon Him the form of a servant " (v.7), " in fashion as a man " (v.8), and " God has highly exalted him " (v.9). The Christ of the Epistles is the Christ of the Gospels. Even in Ephesians we learn Christ — " ye have not so learned Christ ; if so be that ye have heard him . . . as the truth is in Jesus ". **In Jesus.** Our Lord has not changed in the glory. The only change related to Him in the glory is circumstantial. His position is changed. Circumstances have changed for Him, but He is unchanged. In coming down into manhood's lowly form He gave up nothing that attached to Him as " in the form of God ". " Having ascended up where he was before " (John 6:62), He is giving up nothing of what He took when assuming manhood. He has carried manhood into glory and I want now to draw attention to the fact with regard to these verses, that the Christ of the Gospels is the Christ of the Philippian epistle.

If I travel through the pages of John's Gospel I am led by the Spirit of God to the irresistible conclusion that He was no mere man. I borrow an expression from 1 Timothy: this is " God manifest in flesh ". John's Gospel brings before us the Godhead glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Person Whom the Spirit of God delights to parade before adoring hearts in the pages of John's Gospel is here presented by the same Spirit of God: " who, **being in** [the eternal " being in "] the form of God". The lowly Man Who sat by Sychar's well, weary with His journey was none other than this blessed Person, Who was in the form of God. John's Gospel presents us our Lord Jesus Christ in the greatness and glory of His Godhead and we have the same in this verse: " being in the form of God ".

In the sequence of these verses we go next to Mark's Gospel. " Behold my servant whom I uphold ; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth ". Mark's Gospel is the Servant Gospel. As I go through the pages of Mark's Gospel, I become entranced with the " immediate " activities of the blessed Son of God in the execution of the will of God. I see Him instant in His activities. I listen on occasion to the words that fall from His lips, and when I rise from Mark's Gospel after reaching the end of chapter 16, I am irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that if anybody was, in the language of Isaiah, " Jehovah's Servant ", the Man of Mark's Gospel is He. We have in Mark's Gospel the bondman's form. The Christ of the Philippian epistle is the Christ of the Gospel of Mark.

The very next expression, " being found in fashion as a man ", carries us through Luke's Gospel. Proverbs says, " The charm of a man is his kindness " (19:22 J.N.D. Trans.). As I go through Luke's Gospel, I see the charm of a Man. I see Him, for instance, in the house of an austere Pharisee, and a woman of the city, which was a sinner, could make her way weeping, not to the feet of the Pharisee, but to the feet of the blessed charming Man. I go to the city of Nain ; I see a funeral procession on the way to the cemetery and I see this Man taking account of a widowed mother who had lost her only son ; and He heals her heart at the loss of her only-begotten son. He was moved with compassion, and He touched the coffin and He gave that young man to his mother.

The glory of His Godhead is presented to us, as we have said, in John's Gospel, but He assumed flesh and blood to come near to us. In coming near to us He brought God near to us in revelation that we might get near to God in the fashion and recognition of the manner in which God has drawn near to us. So we see Him, in the grace of His manhood. Are you glad that your Saviour is a Man?

Matthew's Gospel is the Gospel of the King — the tribe of Judah stamped, so to speak, upon the presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit as He moves with great dignity through the pages of the Gospel. The "shout of a king" is there, and so there is power. The lion turns aside for none. He came for a reason and He pursued it to the end; nothing stopped Him. He moved there in all the majesty of His royal bearing. The Christ of the Philippian epistle is the Christ of Matthew's Gospel. The impress of royalty is here in verses 9, 10, and 11, "Wherefore God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name". I do not myself believe that "the name above every name is 'Jesus'". It is the superior renown that He has been invested with. It is going to be displayed shortly and it is this that will be displayed in eternal days, and all will give expression to the fact that "Jesus Christ is Lord", and it will be "to the glory of God the Father". How will He bring that about? It will be by the exertion of His majestic power; and the devils, Satan amongst them, will bow the knee to Jesus. I think that is marvellous. Satan who assailed Him at every turn of the way, tried to bring Him down in the wilderness temptation, probably made an assault on Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, is going to bow the knee to Jesus, to say with all his minions "Jesus Christ is Lord"; and every being in the heavens, and every being on earth, every being in the infernal regions is going to acknowledge this to the glory of God the Father. Power will bring that about. We have the privilege now of owning His Lordship while He is rejected here on earth. You have got an opportunity now that you will not have when you are like Him and with Him in the glory: that is, to be for Him in the world where He is refused, because He is the attractive object of your heart, and you cannot help being devoted to Him.

Christ our motive; Christ our model; Christ our mark; Christ our might; Christ for the Christian! Praise His name!

THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS —— J. STODDART

A REFLECTION ON PSALM 90

"We spend our years as a tale that is told (lit. 'as a passing thought'). The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:9-10).

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (v.12).

One of the most common sayings among ordinary people is that " time seems to fly! ", and that " years appear to pass like days ". Poets, too, have waxed eloquent on this theme for generations. Those whose lives have been long and full know how true this is, and even the wise among young folk are impressed with the fleeting experience of youth and begin to wonder how it should be spent. How good it is if we have learned the secret of the above verses so that our hearts are applied to wisdom as the hurrying days go by!

Attention is not always drawn to the fact that the writer of Psalm 90 is " Moses, the man of God ", according to the inspired title. This surely has great importance in view of the length and character of his own life, so devoted to the purpose of God for His people. Here is a man who is deeply affected by the timelessness of God Himself, as he exclaims in the opening verses, " From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God " (v. 2). Literally this means, " from eternity to eternity ", so that He is unaffected by the passage of time, even a thousand years being an inconsiderable fraction in His sight (v. 4). What a contrast this presents to the brief, transient and, alas, sinful existence of man, conscious of deserving the wrath of God. Good it was that the tree of life was made inaccessible to sinful man, else his miseries would have been interminable and life itself utterly intolerable.

It is in the mercy of God, therefore, that a limit is set by Him for the duration of our life on earth, in the knowledge that real life, that is life indeed, " is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who has annulled death and brought life and incorruptibility to light through the Gospel." (2 Timothy 1:10). The subject of Psalm 90, however, is our present life in this world, the norm of which is stated to be " threescore years and ten." There are, of course, some who die earlier, through illness or accident, and some who live longer, but seventy years seems to be a fair, if tenuous, average of human life. It is striking, therefore, that Moses, the writer of these words, should have exceeded this normal span of life by fifty years, for we read that, " Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died ; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated " (Deuteronomy 34:7). Few, if any in this day live to such a great age, with the exception of some in remote parts of the Caucasus, who, it is claimed, enjoy exceptional longevity. Even this is questionable, in view of the poor records in such places.

So how are we to understand that the days of our years are " threescore years and ten ", that so-called allotted span of life which, if exceeded, is said to be " upon borrowed ground "? Perhaps the writer of this paper is not alone in finding this somewhat enigmatic! But I believe that prayerful inquiry yields help, as in all matters of understanding Scripture. Thus, a few brethren deeply taught in the Word have suggested that the answer may be found in the life of Moses himself, whose one hundred and twenty years not only surpassed the norm of Psalm 90, but marked him out as a unique servant of God in every other way. In Stephen's address to the council in Acts 7 we learn that his one hundred and twenty years were divided into three equal periods of forty years. Firstly in the house of Pharaoh, secondly as a stranger in the land of

Midian, and thirdly in the wilderness with his people, as their leader. As has often been said, he spent forty years learning to be somebody, in Egypt; forty years in Midian, tending the flock of his father-in-law, learning that he was nobody; and forty years in the wilderness learning that God was everything to him. It thus becomes clear that God had raised up Moses for His own special purpose, educating, disciplining and training him for the immense work for which he had been called. Until the wisdom of God determined that this work was done, he would be sustained in life and health even far beyond the normal age of others. To him God had said, "The Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Perhaps this would satisfy us as far as Moses is concerned, but is there not a principle established here? Namely, that God determines the length of the believer's life according to His will and purpose for that life? Some therefore are long and some short, as He sees fit. To king David God had said, "When thy days be fulfilled, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers" (2 Samuel 7:12); and in Acts 13.36 the apostle says, "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep and was laid unto his fathers." The king was then only seventy years of age, when he was said to be "old and stricken in years" (1 Kings 1:1). Earlier in life David had said, "I trusted in Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God. My times are in Thy hand" (Psalm 31:14-15). How wonderful to be so surrendered to the will of God that we can trust His wisdom to decide the number of our days! Job, in the midst of his sorest trials, was able to say, "[Man's] days are determined, the number of his months are with Thee: Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:5). What comfort this brings to the believer in Jesus, who can confidently sing with David, "Our times are in Thy hand, Father we wish them there; our life, our souls, our all, we leave entirely to Thy care."

Of further interest and instruction in this subject are the apostle Paul's words to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:6-7), "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." At that moment he would probably be between sixty and sixty-five years of age (as far as we can determine), and yet he beseeches Philemon (v.9), on the ground of being "such an one as Paul, **the aged**, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ". Doubtless such a life as his had prematurely aged him; but without concern for the norm of threescore years and ten, he was ready and confident to surrender his earthly life to Him Who, despite what Nero would do, would accord him "the crown of righteousness at that day".

But above all, let us remember that the only perfect life ever lived in this world, that of God's beloved Son, terminated at the early age of thirty-three. The Jews taunted Jesus earlier, saying to Him, "Thou art not yet **fifty** years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?". Did they see in His appearance one who was older than He really was? So it would seem. But what they could not see was One Who could say at the end of His pathway, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do". The Lord Jesus alone is set

before us in Scripture as the perfect Example of godly life in this scene. Not that every godly person dies at His early age; there was one specific Hour for which He had come into the world, and of that moment we read, "Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father". What love, grace and wisdom had characterised those three brief years of preaching and teaching, and of devotion to the Father's will; and now the supreme moment of all: "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Blessed, adorable Saviour, Son of God! Make us more like Thee, our Pattern and our Guide! His own words were, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you". Says Peter, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

Finally, reverting to Psalm 90, the possibility of strength permitting us to live to fourscore years is envisaged, but scarcely to be coveted. "Yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away", is the verdict of the Psalmist. Rather pessimistic, we might say! But if our times are in His hands, then let us remember God's promise: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25). The great lesson to be learned from Psalm 90 is in verse 12: "So teach **us** to number **our** days, that we may apply our hearts unto **wisdom**". Whether our lives be long or short, each day can bring new opportunities of service, new vistas of glory, and a greater readiness for the day when we shall see His face. Until that moment our prayer should be as in the last verse of our Psalm: "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

THE HOUR FOR WHICH HE CAME —— COLIN CURRY

(John 12:20-36; 13:30-32)

"Shall I say Father save Me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy Name."

The Crucial Hour

In the Gospel of John the record of the public life of our Lord comes to a sharp climax in chapter 12. The chapter opens with a private gathering at a home in Bethany, less than a week before the final Passover. A few devoted people had a very special reason to honour Him there. Perhaps more than anywhere else, a deep sense of His greatness and His love was felt at Bethany; and Mary of Bethany seemed to feel intuitively that grave happenings were soon to develop. Next in the chapter is the account of His open entry into Jerusalem. The popular response to Him from the masses had a certain reality, but lacked the depth of appreciation accorded to Him at Bethany. It was, however,

followed up by enquiries after Him from some strangers, in Jerusalem for the feast. Arising from these approaches, our Lord voices most profound words about the critical nature of the hour which lay just ahead for Him. It is to these words we shall pay attention in this paper. Finally, the close of the chapter rounds off the whole of the gospel as far as this point. These final solemn words from our Lord Himself, spoken for all to hear, warn about the tragic possibility of refusing the bright Light that had been shining amongst them.

Apart from the crucifixion then, these are the last recorded public events in the gospel. Here is our Lord's last message, for all who care to hear. The next few chapters contain words of a different kind ; deeply precious words addressed privately to His disciples. Before these words begin to flow freely, however, there is a further point of climax in chapter 13. The moment when the betrayer left the little group, and went out into the night, marks a further critical stage in the story. It was the point when the action leading to His arrest and crucifixion really began, and the schemes against Him were set in motion. Our Lord understood and felt deeply the dark issues of that moment. The trouble upon His spirit before Judas left, and His profound statements immediately afterwards, witness to the magnitude and crucial importance of all that lay immediately ahead. His words at that vital juncture deserve our attention alongside those from chapter 12.

These fast-moving developments which build up so sharply from the opening of chapter 12 were really precipitated in chapter 11. Our Lord's last and greatest " sign ", pointing to the greatness of His Person and the truth of His claims, showing Himself in very deed to be " the Resurrection and the Life ", was an unbelievable wonder and revelation to Mary and Martha and the others who appreciated Him. It was also a marvellous act of sympathy and kindness. It is not surprising that they honoured Him! But it also hardened those who were bent on rejecting Him. As far as they were concerned, He left them with no choice but to act ; and they chose to act shamefully. They determined to remove Him. But it is important to notice that He allowed things to take this course. His preparedness for all that ensued is absolutely clear. Primarily, the action was His, not theirs. We have seen how the raising of Lazarus brought it all to a head. The record shows plainly the vicious intentions of the Jewish leaders, doubly strong because of what He had done. But it also shows their problems in putting their intentions into effect. Theirs were the schemings, and the desires to arrest Him and get Him out of the way in a secretive, underhand way. Though He retired from the public eye, there was no question of evading those who plotted against Him. He was close at hand, in Bethany, again in this very chapter. He neither feared nor avoided His opponents on the day that He rode into Jerusalem, nor in His confrontations with them in the temple, mentioned in other Gospels. All the openness of approach was on His side ; the shiftiness and the subterfuge were entirely theirs. There is a very real sense in which control of the events was not in their hands but in His. No man took His life from Him: He had the authority, and the willingness, to lay it down. He came to that hour ; it was the focal point towards which His whole life was directed.

The Supreme Glory of That Hour

In both of these passages the Lord Jesus speaks about the glory which surrounds, and arises from, the hour of His death, now close at hand. In both passages, too, He refers to Himself as "the Son of Man", a phrase which has the meaning, "very Man"; it implies His uniquely perfect and God-honouring humanity. It is a title which is used in contexts which envisage the total and widespread sovereignty and glory ultimately to be accorded to Him; (Hebrews 2, with its quotations from Psalm 8, is the best-known example of this, though there are many). Our Lord, having been acclaimed by the Jewish throng, and seeing now the Greeks attracted to Him, thinks ahead to the day of universal response to Him. But, in doing so, He dwells most of all on the immediate basis upon which that day of glory (and so much else) hinges. Only if the corn of wheat **dies** will the fruit come into being. The glories of the coming day derive from the glory of the work of the cross, and they take their character from the quality and the devotion of the One Who suffered there.

"Now is the Son of Man glorified", a statement made when the final events leading to His death were really afoot, is one of the key truths here. The glory of our Lord consists not alone in recompense for His sufferings, nor is it entirely long-term glory in the widest sense. Neither is it solely the immediate glory into which He has ascended. In a very real sense His glory shone out then and there, **in** the scenes of testing and of suffering into which He went. The qualities of the Son of Man were exhibited in all their perfection at the cross. The many hues of His moral glory are to be seen in all those attitudes of His; attitudes of submission to betrayal and animosity, of marvellous forbearance and grace with men, of unflinching purpose and devotion to the will of God, and of utter obedience and faithfulness, even to the death of the cross.

God was glorified there. Where all other men had dishonoured Him, here was One Who honoured God to the utmost limit. What was due to God from man was seen in a faultless way, no matter how searching the test. Moral perfection is demonstrated in all His demeanour in those dark hours. Here is something of unbelievable value, commanding our respect and appreciation, justifying God in the face of all unbelieving questions about Him; perfection which God had rightly recognised with the highest approval. Let us not fail in awareness of the matchless glory that attends the dark hour when the Saviour died. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the memory and the splendour of that hour will not fade.

The Unspeakable Trouble of That Hour

Everywhere in this Gospel the greatness of the Person Who came into the world, the wonder of the revelation of God that He has effected, and the unquenchable nature of the Light that shone in Him, are the dominant themes. Besides displaying the moral qualities we have already mentioned, the work that He came to do was carried

through effectively and thoroughly, with authority and dignity. It has something irresistible about it; everything He did was accomplished in a unique and glorious as well as gracious fashion. "I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do". There was a certainty about it. It is impossible to imagine any failure or set-back in its execution.

These facts (while true) should not however be allowed to minimise our feeling for the **weight** of all that rested upon Him to accomplish. Our Lord went through with the mighty act of Calvary in irresistible love, triumphantly superior to everything that stood in the way. But the wonder of that love takes on a still higher dimension when the burden that He carried so patiently is given proper consideration too. Certainly these passages, while they possess a definite surety about the outcome of His death, do not fail to indicate His own profound awareness of the abyss into which He would enter, of the tremendous load He was to carry, of the strength of the adversary He would face.

"Now is My soul troubled": these words were drawn from Him as He anticipated the full climax of those awesome and punishing experiences that were ahead. The prospect was indeed a daunting one. He would not ask to be spared that hour, but rather that the Father's Name might be exhibited. But the cost to Him of going forward purposefully towards that end was enormous. Verse 27 of chapter 12 alone speaks volumes about this. But this feature is found repeatedly in these immediate chapters. Our Lord's power to accomplish His mission is found alongside His deep feelings about the gravity and the horror of the things He must grapple with. At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus "groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" at the awfulness of human death and corruption, and wept too as He shared deeply in the human sorrow and bereavement. His ability to meet the situation did not in any way lessen His sense of its gravity. The thought that a chosen disciple, a familiar friend, could be the instrument of the vilest treachery was in itself a great grief to Him. "One of **you** shall betray Me", He says. The depths of human sin and falsity under the grip of Satan brought a great cloud upon His spirit; though He knew what He would do to release men from that awful power.

The Tremendous Outcome of That Hour

We have considered the one hour of special crisis for our Lord, the hour of His death. But these verses are charged with the consequences of that hour, in all their variety and range. One single grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies; but a vast fruitage follows. The solitariness of our Lord at Calvary, the lone central Figure there, the uniqueness of His sorrow and death, are plain. But the harvest of that death is extensive. Many are the effects of the cross, and we shall do no more than notice them in these verses. We take the verses in chapter 13 first.

First, God was glorified there (verse 31). Against the dark background of the treachery and depravity of men, wonderful truths about God were revealed. There, in a transcendent way, God was displayed.

The high standards of His holiness and righteousness were upheld and underlined for all to see, while at the same time His limitless love was demonstrated. There the Son of the Father, Who had said of Himself "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father", showed clearly the nature of divine love. It was a love that would hold nothing back in self-giving, which would bestow itself on worthless persons. One of the foremost fruits of the cross is the permanence and fullness of this revelation of the heart of God.

Next, verse 32 speaks of recompense to Christ following as an immediate outcome of His death. God would not suffer His Holy One to see corruption: He raised Him from the dead, without delay, and has highly exalted Him. Already He is at the right hand of God, "crowned with glory and honour". Everything will be "under His feet" in subjection, soon. All this is due to Him in righteousness. God delights, and intends, in the fullest sense, to give the supreme place to Him. This too is a sure consequence of the cross.

While in 13:32 the emphasis is upon the present glory given to our Lord, some of His statements in chapter 12 look more to the future widespread aspects of His glory. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all unto Me", says clearly that all will have to pay attention to Him, to honour Him and to recognise His supremacy. **Many** will be drawn to Him in faith, attracted to Him; but the statement seems broader than that. **All** will acknowledge Him. The One Who was once the target of almost total abuse and disbelief, lifted up from the earth at Calvary, deserves, and will receive, no less than total recognition. It is another consequence of what He did there.

Then the hour of Christ's death also had consequences for "this world", and for "the prince of this world". The rebel order which is against God showed its hand to the full when it rejected Christ, and it condemned itself in that action. His death was the point of crisis for this world: it was its indictment, the high point of its shame. Its prince, too, who has misled the mass of human-kind, who has his grip upon this present evil world, scored no real victory at the cross. On the contrary, he was basically and utterly defeated there. Christ has destroyed "him that had the power of death", and set many of his captives free. It was done at the cross. The devil is the adversary to the end, but is aware that he is already defeated (see Hebrews 2:14,15; Revelation 12:12).

Finally, let us return to the picture of the corn of wheat and the consequences of its sowing. Surely this is among the most moving of our Lord's references to His death, because it comes so close to us. One of the truly wonderful results of His death is **life**: life for others, life out of death, multiple life, a common life shared by many, **His** life received and entered into by those who are the product of His death. The identity in kind between what is sown and what is harvested is a point made in another passage (1 Corinthians 15:38). What thankfulness we owe to Him Whose death was our starting point and our entry into the realm where His life and His love are enjoyed, where His Father's Name is appreciated, and His glory is the preoccupation of every mind and heart.

JOHN MARK

FRANK WALLACE

JOHN MARK had wonderful opportunities for spiritual progress and service for the Lord in the early days of the church. Having been brought up in a godly home and a son in the faith to Peter the apostle, he was also privileged to be the companion of Barnabas and Paul, two honoured servants of the Lord Jesus. John Mark joined them when they returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, after fulfilling their charge to carry help for the distressed saints.

As John Mark travelled with Barnabas and Paul from Jerusalem to Antioch, a distance of 300 miles, he had ample opportunities to hear these men of God converse about the great things that were going on in the name of Christ. What an honour for that young man to be a help to these devoted servants! He was not called upon to preach or to expound but he would be able to lighten their burden by doing many needed tasks for them.

When they reached Antioch and entered into the daily life of the assembly, he would see the evidences of the work of the Spirit of God. What he had seen in Jerusalem was now being enacted before his eyes. The movement that had begun at Pentecost was reproduced in Antioch. The supreme Lordship of Christ was owned and the Holy Spirit had freedom to move and operate in the midst of the believers as gathered together in assembly. No doubt his heart would be thrilled as he saw his uncle and the erstwhile persecutor of the church chosen by the Spirit to carry the message of salvation to other parts. As the brethren in Antioch fasted, prayed, and laid their hands of identification on Barnabas and Paul, John Mark saw the happy unity and blessing of that Christian company. At Antioch, the apostles embarked on a ship and sailed to Seleucia and from there over to Cyprus, the home of Barnabas. John Mark accompanied them as their attendant (minister). This word originally meant an 'under-rower', and eventually was understood as a 'subordinate', acting under another's direction. The meaning of this term servant, is important as we shall see later. Though subordinate to Barnabas and Paul he evidently did not obey them and remain with them.

The word of God was preached to the Jews in Salamis and the little band travelled through all the island of Cyprus and the work of the Lord was done. As always, when God is working, Satan attempted to hinder the work through a false prophet, a Jew named Bar-Jesus. His opposition was summarily dealt with by Paul in the power of the Spirit. Thus, at first hand John Mark saw the work of the Lord and Satan's power too. We do not doubt that he had found and seen much that must have had a profound effect upon his spirit, but apparently something hindered him and he left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem, the Jewish centre and where his home was. The separation took place after they left Cyprus and reached the mainland at Perga of Pamphylia.

Why did John Mark leave the Lord's servants and the work he was doing? We do not know as Scripture is silent about this matter. The fact remains that instead of completing the missionary journey with

those who were called of God, he left them and went home to Jerusalem. In Acts 15:36-41, the action of John Mark was the reason for a dispute between the servants of the Lord, Paul and Barnabas. Paul asked Barnabas to go with him and revisit the places where they had served the Lord. Barnabas readily agreed and suggested that John Mark should go with them. Paul dissented from this and pointed out that he had proved himself unreliable by leaving them in their first travels. No agreement being reached, and some feeling arising between them, Paul and Barnabas separated. Barnabas took his cousin Mark and went to Cyprus, his home. Paul chose Silas, and the brethren evidently ratified his choice and action and committed him and Silas to the grace of God.

A careful study of Paul's writings indicates that he was a man of tender feeling and sympathy. His second letter to Timothy (chapter 1) reveals his desires for a young man who was feeling the pressure of the testimony. In the second chapter of 1 Thessalonians he describes himself as a nurse and a father towards the young converts there. His objection to Mark was obviously one of principle. He had no confidence in him. If it had been illness in Mark or some pressing need at home, we can be sure that he would have departed with the apostle's blessing. As far as Paul was concerned it was a serious fault and he was adamant that Mark should not go with them. The word for **departed** in Acts 15:38 is used by the Lord in Luke 8:13 ". . . in time of trial **fall away**". Paul uses it in 1 Timothy 4:1 ". . . depart from the faith" and in Hebrews 3:12 ". . . departing from the living God". It is important to remember that Mark was eventually restored to Paul's confidence and, more important, apparently to the Lord. Therefore the extreme results in the Scriptures quoted were not seen in him. It may be that he did succumb to fears because of trials, or in moments of doubt allow himself to be seduced by Satan's wiles, or in unbelief turn back instead of going on. "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God" said the Lord. In principle that is what Mark did. May God enable us all to go on and not be diverted for any reason whatever.

We must say a word about Paul and Barnabas. How deplorable to see such a splendid team broken up because of Mark's defection! Do we have a solemn lesson here as to the power of nature? Would Barnabas have chosen Mark if he had not been his cousin? Were natural relations governing him instead of faithfulness? How easily we can turn a blind eye to faults in our loved ones! How easy it is to impose principles on others and relax them for our own flesh and blood! The truth of God knows no such distinction; faithfulness to the Lord will lead us to avoid this common fault. Many Scriptures could be quoted to give instances of this type of failure, and experience has taught us that it is a danger to avoid.

But Mark was not finished. There is silence regarding the details of his lapse, and there is silence regarding his recovery, but recovered he certainly was. The three references made to him by Paul in his prison epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to Timothy mention Mark in terms that indicate his restoration to the path of faithfulness

and into Paul's confidence. There is a great deal of encouragement for us in the silences regarding Mark in his failure and restoration. Outwardly we may go on as if we are walking faithfully to the Lord, but yet it may be otherwise. No one but God knows the backsliding that goes on in our hearts. Thank God for His restoring grace and peace! "He restoreth my soul". Many secret confessions of failure have been made to God. Many secret blessings of restoration have been enjoyed through His mercy.

Paul, great-hearted servant of God that he was, enjoyed commending his brethren and fellow-workers. He was not afraid to rebuke them if necessary. In Colossians 4:7-18 there are many excellent commendations given and it is interesting to find Mark referred to in this list. Perhaps Paul is discreetly referring to Mark's lapse when he referred to him as Barnabas' cousin, but how encouraging to read that Paul enjoined the Colossian brethren to receive him. Paul links Mark with Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus and Jesus, called Justus. A delightful company with which to be identified! Paul said of them all, "These are the only fellow-workers for the Kingdom of God who have been a consolation to me" (verse 11 J.N.D. Trans.). What a change in the testimony of Mark! Formerly Paul had refused to accept him as a fellow-servant and now he refers to him as a consolation. May we all, in obedience to the truth, rise above our failures and be a help in the conflict of faith.

In Philemon, verse 24, Mark is mentioned with Aristarchus and Demas and Luke. Again, Paul refers to him as a fellow-worker. How sad that Demas should eventually forsake Paul, and his failure is recorded for our instruction and warning: "he loved the present age" (2 Timothy 4:10). How powerful the attractions of the world can be! The greater attraction of the Person of Christ is the antidote to this kind of failure. We might be in the best of Christian fellowship as Demas was, but unless our motives are governed by devotedness to Christ we shall inevitably fail in some way or other.

Timothy, Paul's devoted son in the faith, was directed by Paul to bring Mark with him when he came to Rome to be with Paul. In the light of the defection of Demas, the presence of the restored Mark would be a great joy and comfort to the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Once he had been unserviceable to Paul, but now Paul writes, no doubt with sincerity and satisfaction, "he is serviceable to me for the ministry". Thus, three references in Paul's letters indicate beyond all possible doubt how complete was Mark's recovery.

Mark was greatly privileged to be in the company of so many faithful and honoured servants of Christ. Not every believer gets such excellent opportunities. No doubt he greatly benefited from his many experiences and talks with them. The greatest experience and privilege was yet to come. What an immense privilege was conferred upon him when the Holy Spirit inspired him, the erstwhile unfaithful servant, to write an account of the faithful Servant of God, Jesus Christ, the Son of God! Many suggestions have been made as to the manner in which Mark acquired the material to write his account of the life of Jesus. We can leave these ideas alone and happily engage ourselves with the con-

tents of Mark's precious Gospel. The Spirit inspired him to write about **the Perfect Servant.** If Mark had been characterised by reluctance and failure in his service, he delights in drawing our attention to the One Who obeyed immediately. It is interesting to know that Mark uses the Greek word **eutheos** forty times in his Gospel. In the A.V. this word is translated as " straightway ", " forthwith ", " anon ", " immediately ", " as soon as ". All these references indicate alacrity in accomplishing what was necessary at the moment. It gives a clear picture of the glorious Servant and His ready obedience to His God's will. How wonderful for Mark to be completely restored to be used for this great work! His work indeed follows him and we have derived great spiritual gain from it.

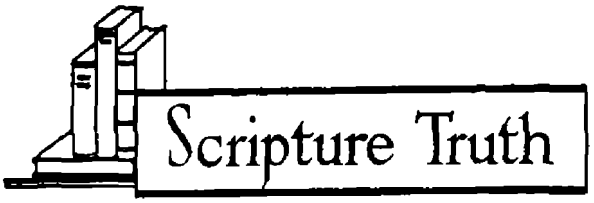
It is traditionally reported that Mark laid down his life in martyrdom. He was faithful unto death. Thank God his work remains. The Gospel of the Perfect Servant was written by one who had been an unfaithful servant but had been recovered to be used for a greater and more noble service. God grant that we may all profit from our brief study of his life.

ADORNMENT ——————————— T. BALDERSTON

WHAT BEAUTY does God look for in His people? Of the variety of possible answers to this question, one comes clearly to light when we examine the ways in which the New Testament applies to persons the word translated **adorn.**

God starts with the heart. Thus, 1 Peter 3:3-4 speaks of an adorning which is not " outward " but is in " the hidden man of the heart . . . a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price ". But what is in must come out ; in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 this inward adornment becomes visible, in " good works ". Good works however do not merely beautify the doer ; they adorn much more beautifully the teaching about the God Whose heart's desire it is to save (Titus 2:10) ; and it was to purify to Himself such a people that Christ gave Himself.

Thus it is, that the Bride who appears in glory adorned for her Husband in the beauty of the New Jerusalem, is also said to be " arrayed in fine linen ", in " the righteousnesses of the saints " (Revelations 21:2 and 19:8).



(incorporating "Words of Help")

SEPTEMBER, 1978

JUDGMENTS

JOHN BARNES

THIS is an area where many of us err often and probably all of us err at times. There are many aspects of this important subject which could be studied with profit but I suggest the following five for our consideration at present.

1. A Distorted View. Matthew 7 : 1

We are not at liberty to make personal judgments about others. It is the Lord Jesus Who is the speaker in the text referred to above, and when He has spoken, we must pay heed. In this place He says, "Judge not . . .". Here is a clear and uncomplicated statement and the simplest could not mistake its meaning. As to what we are not to judge we shall have to be guided by the context. The Lord Jesus goes on directly to speak about the matter, using the now well-known metaphor of the mote and the beam, clearly directing our minds to the problem of the faults and failings which mark us as men. In the figure the Lord uses, there does not seem to be a third class; only motes and beams. (It has been suggested that the Lord Jesus used this illustration with a carpenter's shop in mind, an environment well known to Him Who laboured as a carpenter in Nazareth.) If my view of another's failings is distorted by my own shortcomings, I cannot help my fellow. It is unreasonable to say to another, "You have a fault", if I have faults myself, especially if they are glaringly prominent, as a plank would be. In the matter of personal judgments I am to consider myself to have the larger defect and so refrain from finding fault with my brother whose failings are less conspicuous than my own.

Another point may be important to remember. The Lord is speaking of the kingdom, and in it we are subjects, not rulers. The Ruler is the One Who exercises this power; subjects do not judge one another. James makes a somewhat analogous allusion. (4:11-12) "There is One Lawgiver." He judges and we are to refrain from judging one another.

2. A Deficient Evaluation. 1 Corinthians 4 : 5

We are not in a position to judge the stewardship of another. Although Paul writes here probably of the special ministry given him, his fellow-apostles and leading servants of that day, the principle can clearly be extended to our own time and service. Every Christian has a place and function in the service of God and has been fitted for that

place and function, however lowly it may be for most of us. The Master Whom we serve has attended to that. What guides judgment in this instance is faithfulness to the charge committed to the servant by his Lord. We others are not in a position to estimate this. Paul considers the persons or groups who may judge and sets them out in four categories.

1. The Christian company: v. 3. In the text it is the Corinthians particularly.
2. *Men in general (man's day)* v. 3.
3. The steward himself. v. 3. In the text it is Paul himself.
4. The Lord. v. 4.

If we look carefully at these four possible judges it becomes perfectly plain that only One is really in a position to arrive at a true estimate of a servant's faithfulness in his stewardship. The saints know only what they can see or hear. The motives, the inner springs which make men do things, are largely unknown to them, if not entirely so, and it is faithfulness which is the standard of judgment (see v. 2). The Lord's welcome, "Well done good and faithful servant," is yet further confirmation of this fact. Of man, or man's day, little need be said. Those whose aim it is to develop a system which shuts God out and who would seek to ban Him from the world made by His own hands, could never arrive at any estimate of the faithfulness of a servant of God. Thirdly, even the servant himself is not qualified to reach a totally objective judgment of his own faithfulness. Paul was unaware of any point in which he had been unfaithful; had there been such a failure, he would have put it right; but since, like us all, he was deficient in the needful equipment, he could not come to a wholly right conclusion. We are all in the same position. The only One who can so judge is the Lord. The whole case is known to Him, wholly and fully. He knows what He put into His steward's care and He knows how His servant has acted, and will judge the matter righteously. Isaiah writes of the Stem of Jesse out of which was to grow the Rod, and the Branch *out of his roots; the coming King who, energised by the Holy Spirit* will exercise right judgment. There are two standards He will avoid; the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears (Isaiah 11:1-3). These are the two criteria on which men mainly base their conclusions, and they are often so wrong. This wonderful Person is never wrong — He judges righteous judgment. So Paul was happy to leave his case in the hands of the Lord Who would judge his faithfulness according to true standards.

3. A Disinclination to Judge. 1 Corinthians 11:31

It is a noticeable feature of human character, that while we are ready to judge others we are generally disinclined to judge ourselves. Our first two passages related to judgments we are not to make or are not qualified to make. This scripture directs our minds to a judgment we are to make, but it concerns ourselves. The context of this instruction cannot be passed over lightly. Paul has been thinking of the Lord's Supper and its holy basis and associations. The believer is to

partake of it in a self-examined spirit. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat." A Christian must not go to the Lord's Supper in a spirit of criticism of others; he is to go in a spirit of self-criticism, self-examination, and so partake of the supper. The apostle goes on to speak directly of self judgment. This seems to go deeper than judgment of wrongs done and strikes at the root of such evil, "self", the foul source of such misdeeds. Here is a target against which the shafts of judgment may safely be directed: self with all its proneness to evil and its love of self-justification. We probably all feel that this is a judgment we are generally reluctant to make, but here we are strongly urged to make it.

4. A Discrimination Needed. 1 Corinthians 14 : 29

There is a lot of matter presented to Christians today; in Scripture we are instructed to judge what is set before us in the way of ministry. No speaker or writer can expect what he offers to the Lord's people to be accepted without examination. Indeed, he should desire such exercise; this is healthy and needful. Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren, "Let the prophets speak two or three and let the other judge." This judgment should not be of a harsh, critical nature, but rather one of discrimination. What is offered as spiritual food is not to be assimilated without examination. We have the holy Scripture to teach us and the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. It is incumbent on each believer to use discrimination as he listens to ministry or reads it. A danger of modern Christianity has been that because "Mr. So-and-So" said it, it must be accepted. However, recent church history has proved that it may not be so. We are bound to come to positive decisions between what is true and what is not true; we must receive and cling to the truth and reject the false.

The principle of life is present only in that which is true, and this is surely where the emphasis lies. The sons of the prophets sat down to eat the stew prepared for them, into which one of them had unwittingly introduced a poisonous ingredient. "There is death in the pot." Frequently today there is death in the food that is set before the saints. All kinds of things are said concerning the Lord Jesus which are totally unacceptable to those who love Him, but sometimes these are dressed up in language which can deceive the unwary. We need the "meal" of truth in ministry to correct these seriously dangerous innovations and we need our senses "exercised" to discern both good and evil (see Hebrews 5:11-14).

5. A Duty to Perform. 1 Corinthians 5 : 12-13

Believers in a local assembly are responsible to judge any evil which arises there. While we may not judge our brethren's personal faults we are, nonetheless, obliged to deal with evil when it shews itself in the local assembly. It is fatal to the health and well-being of the local assembly to allow sin to pursue its deadly course unchecked, for, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." What seems to be of great

importance in this connection is that we do not arrive at our conclusions as individuals but as a company. See v. 4 of Chapter 5: "When ye are gathered together." This is not the exercise of a personal judgment, and we should strive to keep personal feelings out of these judgments if it becomes sadly necessary to make them. Unhappily such personal feelings do sometimes come in and distort judgment. Some disastrous cleavages in the church can be traced to this polluted source. The judgment of assemblies must be impersonal and completely objective. The Corinthians had not judged the case of the brother whose moral failure had caused such scandal amongst them. They had judged the Lord's servants, which was not their business: they had not judged themselves, which was their business. They had not taken up the case of their erring brother and they ought to have done this, however unpleasant the task. Had they performed their obligation in this case Paul would have had no need to refer to it, but since it had been neglected, he was bound, as Christ's apostle, to take it up. Paul had judged the man but it should be noted carefully that his judgment was by no means a personal one. Paul judged the case in an assembly context. Although physically absent he had considered himself as gathered with the Corinthian brethren in spirit and had judged the case as though he had sat with them hearing the details of it. He concluded that the particular evil could be met only by putting the offending brother out of fellowship with the assembly. This is obviously no light matter. The brother was to be put away from among **themselves.** Such an action removes any individual element from the decision. The man may have been a cousin or a son of some brother in the local meeting but he would, with the rest of the brethren, come to an impartial view of the case and look at it, not as it may affect him but as it affected the assembly and the Lord's honour. It is the assembly as convened which has this authority to carry out this sentence.

In their own judgments individually the Corinthians had used authority unlawfully. Paul says to them, "Ye have reigned as kings." They had usurped a position not yet truly theirs. Paul gently reminded them of the lowly place which he and the other apostles had, by adding the phrase, "without us". Yet they had refused to withdraw from positive evil when it paraded openly among them. It was in this assembly discipline they had failed so seriously and in all likelihood, their laxity in personal discipline contributed largely to their failure in this sphere as a company.

THE FIRST MIRACLE — E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

John 2: 1-11

THIS miracle has a character all its own, an aura of joy and gladness, an unmistakable touch that reveals the presence of God, displaying that divine beneficence, that overflowing goodness which has ever sought the greatest happiness for its creatures. So in Psalm 81, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt : open thy mouth

wide, and I will fill it . . . He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat ; and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee." And Psalm 103, " Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."

It seems appropriate, therefore, that the occasion of this first miracle should be a wedding, for without doubt the institution of marriage is one of God's best earthly gifts to mankind. However, the wedding is not the subject, but the revelation of the glory of God's Son.

" The mother of Jesus was there," we are told, and apparently she was more or less a central figure. Jesus and His disciples were called to the marriage, and it has been surmised with some likelihood that the recently increased number of the disciples was responsible for the wine running short. At any rate, we readily recognise what a great calamity this was felt to be.

Mary, when told of the shortage, at once turned to Jesus, and to understand this we must bear in mind that hitherto He had done no miracle, although His disciples had come to Him as the Messiah. A miraculous solution of the difficulty was not therefore expected. But Mary's appeal is not to the Messiah, but to the Son with whom she had lived for thirty years, and to whom she doubtless turned whenever she was in a difficulty. His wisdom was never at fault — He always found a way out ! And we can be sure He was always willing to help. But now He replies, " Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

The exact meaning of the words may be disputed, but some things are clear. The address " Woman " it is agreed by all was in no way brusque or discourteous, rather the reverse. But He was apparently telling her that the old relationship in which she, as mother to a son living at home, had claims upon Him, was now finished. Henceforth He would act solely as the Father's Sent One.

But in what sense do we understand the words " Mine hour is not yet come," seeing that He was gathering disciples to Himself as Messiah? As the Lord uses similar language in speaking to His brothers in Chapter 7, it appears that in speaking of His hour He is referring to the future day of the display of His glory and power. So when His " hour " does come, the joy of which the " best wine " is only typical will be brought in abundantly.

If this be so, then we must conclude that when the day of His glory arrives, and His brethren according to the flesh acknowledge Him as their Lord, the mother who so tenderly cared for Him in His childhood will once more be acknowledged, and will receive her due reward, in addition to her place in the Church of God.

Though she may not have fully understood His words, it is remarkable how, without hesitation, she turns to the servants saying, " Whatsoever He says unto you, do it." Not now at her bidding, but because of the grace that filled His heart, He says to the servants, " Fill the water pots with water."

The six stone water jars held, it seems, between seventeen and twenty-five gallons each. That is, at ten pounds per gallon, a heavy jar ; when full of water they were too heavy to carry round. Hence they

were probably filled from smaller vessels which had to be carried in from the well. The whole operation would take some time, and gave the servants plenty of time to think over what they had been told to do. What is interesting is that they evidently intended to carry out the Master's instructions quite literally. He had said "fill", and they filled them up to the brim. It seems a clear indication that now they were looking for a miracle of some sort.

Then Jesus said, "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast," and without hesitation or query, they did as they had been instructed. We are not told at what stage the transformation into wine took place, but it appears to be God's purpose that faith should have the very fullest opportunity to act, so that we may surmise that the water became wine at a late stage — perhaps even when the servants began to carry it in to the governor.

However, that may be, their conduct is a striking lesson in obedience and faith. "**Whatsoever** He says, do it," Mary had told him, and they obeyed. And by their diligence in filling the jars, they ensured the largest possible blessing. How often do we, by our limited faith and expectation, hinder the blessing we might have received, or prevent it altogether by unreadiness to "do" what He has placed within our responsibility?

The Best Wine

The wondering comment of the governor of the feast — "Thou hast kept the best wine until now" — emphasises the difference between man's way and God's: man indeed brings out his best wine at first — earthly joys so often begin brightly and then fade — while what God has prepared for them that love Him surpasses all that the heart can conceive, and never fades.

This first miracle seems to sum up the whole of what the Lord came to do. Whereas the water expressed Israel's state when He came to her — a state calling loudly for purification — the best wine expresses the joy which He will bring to her when she finally turns to Him. How sad that she still persists in trying to solve her problems without Him!

By this miracle the Lord "manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him." Here is an interesting use of the word "glory", which so often suggests to us a visible shining out, as at the Transfiguration. Here it expresses the more fundamental thought of a display of the fulness of power and grace that is in our blessed Saviour. We may compare John's use of the word in Chapter 1 of his Gospel: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

SEARCHED AND KNOWN

COLIN CURRY

PSALM 139

IN a recent paper attention was drawn to the fact that Daniel was a man of deep experience with God. A constant sense of awe and devotion to his God marked his inward life. This was the key to the high quality of his general behaviour. It is clear that Daniel is not an isolated example of this principle. Many of the weighty men of God, in both the Old and the New Testaments, knew deep and searching experiences. Often these were humiliating experiences, involving dark times of self-discovery, as well as causing amazement at the great grace and splendour of God. Saul of Tarsus had a first profound experience of this kind, when shattered and humbled by overpowering light which shone upon him from heaven; many a subsequent testing experience reinforced that humility and absence of self-confidence in all that he did for Christ. Simon Peter gained better knowledge of the love and faithfulness of Christ, and found the true source of strength to serve Him, from experiences which exposed his own weakness; experiences which he bitterly regretted, and which caused him deep shame. Jeremiah, often speaking alone for God, distressed and heavily burdened by the obduracy of his fellow-Jews, shows clearly that close obedience to God in difficult times is demanding and costly, but that it also brings out qualities which are admirable on the proper scale of values.

We propose to consider a few passages where single individuals, alone and thoroughly moved before God, voice their feelings. The first is Psalm 139, and we may follow with Psalm 51 in a later paper. The aim is not that we should understand in a formal way what may go on when a man finds himself face-to-face with God; but rather that we should learn the contents of these passages in our own experience. A truth is only really "known" in the Bible sense, when it controls the life of the learner. An important question therefore will be: "Do we know these things in our own experience with God?" It seems right to consider these passages, and ask this kind of question, since it must humbly be admitted that one of the sources of weakness in our Christianity is a lack of depth in our personal inward experience with God.

The Psalms do not, of course, reflect the full knowledge of God available and possible in the Christian day. Nevertheless we know God today in a way which includes what O.T. persons knew, though it surpasses it. We should be the losers if the great light of the N.T., supposedly received, found us lacking in awareness of God in the way that promotes humility, reverence and wonder, and desires after holiness, of the kind that these O.T. individuals express so well.

Focussing now on Psalm 139, after a brief outline we look a little more closely at three phases in the development of the psalm and conclude with a few short comments.

The Psalm in brief

Certainly this psalm provides some marvellous views of God. It tells of His **omniscience**, and His **omnipresence** too ; His comprehensive discernment of all activities of men ; wherever a man may go there is no escape from that close and thorough scrutiny. Later verses bring to the fore His **sovereignty**, His total and detailed control over all processes, beyond the reach of human insight and understanding ; His knowledge of the end from the beginning, of the before and after of human physical existence too. Then follow thoughts of His **holiness**, of the offence and the affront to Himself that evil presents, of the hatefulness of wicked acts and ways.

But David, the composer of the psalm, is not just marshalling concepts about God. These things are only said because he feels their tremendous impact upon **himself** in a direct personal way. The psalm is filled with his own reactions as he finds he cannot escape their searching effect. At the start he is overwhelmed with awe and wonder, and almost dismayed, as he feels the closeness of that inescapable eye constantly upon him. But later he moves over to a sense of gratitude and thankful praise, when he realises that the manner of God's oversight of his life is not only searching, but also constructive and caring. God's thoughts about him are beyond his understanding, they are innumerable, but they are **precious** to him too. There is value and profit for him in being known so completely and actively by such a God as his. He would not escape it even if he could. The scrutiny which at first is such a disturbing reality to him, becomes at the close of the psalm something he welcomes, something he seeks. Meditation on things too wonderful for him, amazement at the plenitude of God's thoughts for good towards him, give place to resolution, to vigorous agreement with God's view and standards, to strong desire to be free from ways and inward tendencies not in line with those high standards.

" Too wonderful for me "

Awareness of God's close surveillance of all his ways and thoughts, knowing him far better than he knows himself, evokes a mixed reaction from the psalmist. He seems to speak with two voices in the first half of the psalm. On the one hand it attracts and amazes him that he personally should be under the eye of such an all-knowing God. These transcendent truths are confessed in a spirit of adoration, in a manner which rebukes all small thoughts and easy talk about God. He is conscious of realities far beyond his reach, which dwarf his own understanding, and yet are unbelievably marvellous to be involved in. On the other hand, the impulse to escape asserts itself, the thought of flight is entertained. The urge to hide from God goes back to the fall, but there is no possible hiding place for a would-be fugitive from God. Conscience is alive, and disquiet is felt, when God's sharp-eyed scrutiny is faced, and yet there is a tremendous sense of the value of being exposed to His close interest and wise understanding.

This sense of exposure and deep disquiet in the presence of the Lord, and yet of attraction towards Him as His greatness is discovered,

finds many illustrations in the N.T. Consider Simon Peter, for instance, when he grasps the significance of that vast haul of fish, so miraculously produced on the instructions of Christ. Think of the paradox of Peter's reaction when, drawn to his Lord in a new way, falling at His knees, he entreats Him, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). The moral distance between himself and Christ was acutely apparent to Peter, and yet he was drawn towards Him more firmly because of this experience. "Launch out into the deep," had been our Lord's word at the start of this incident, and truly Peter experienced this in more senses than one that day. He learned new depths about the person and capabilities of his Lord, and a profound awareness of his own sinfulness too. Can we really say that we too have known such experiences, and that they retain their wholesome impact upon us?

"How precious are Thy thoughts"

New and equally astonishing considerations fill the writer's mind from verse 13 onwards. From contemplating the nakedness of his own thoughts before God, he now dwells on God's thoughts towards himself. His faith comes more into the open at this stage, as he sees that God is acting for good on his behalf, though in ways far beyond his understanding. If the earlier verses had their choice expressions (verses 8, 9, for example), these verses also show responses to God of a specially profound quality. His faith grasps the fact that God has thoughts about him on a grand scale, perfect in detail as well as vast in their totality. God is deeply involved in his welfare, interested and committed to his care and well-being; he finds this knowledge marvellous, and he values it greatly. God's thoughts are precious to him. God has boundless realms of good intended for him; He is forming him for Himself. As he enters into the sense of this, a response of praise and thankfulness springs up within him.

God's all-seeing knowledge has him in view wherever he may be; but, more than that, it has covered and planned the whole of his time-span. There is nothing casual or fortuitous about God's oversight of his life. All was written in God's book long before he came into being. The developing processes of his life-history, all the complex patterns of his time experience, are being wrought out in intricate detail under the hand of God. He sees the truth of this in the marvels of his physical development, the deeply concealed processes of embryonic growth all meticulously arranged and controlled by God's immense wisdom and skill. Nor does God ever abandon those who are the product of His purposeful working. "When I awake, I am still with Thee" may perhaps be taken in its strongest sense, having a glimpse of resurrection within it. Faith that rests on God brings marvellous assurances of our ultimate destiny, and a confidence that all the intervening days are well catered for too. The long reach of the love of God grasps us everywhere and always. In N.T. language, "neither death, nor life . . . nor things present, nor things to come" can separate us from it. We must allow these great facts to rouse our spirits quite as much as they affected David.

"Lead me in the way everlasting"

The tone of the psalm changes from verse 19. David's appreciation of the unremitting goodness of God stirs within him a vigorous antipathy to all that is evil, around him and within. He aligns himself with God against all that would displease Him or seem to defy Him. Wickedness in this world, flaunting itself against God, is seen in all its horror. He burns with zeal in abhorring it. He wants no part in it himself, nor any link with it. But he is perceptive enough to know that evil outside himself is easier to recognise, and to be indignant about, than evil within. He has no confidence that he can steer a clean course himself. He is aware that he himself has inward capabilities of displeasing God; and it is what God sees that counts, not his own judgments of these matters. His three-fold plea, "search me, try me, lead me", looks to God for help, in humble and earnest desire that God's processes of dealing with him may have their full effect. Deep and thorough though these processes may be, to be in the hands of God, exposed to the sifting and the all-wise care which His goodness provides, is to be moving on a course which is the truly valuable one; it is to be led "in the way everlasting".

Final comments

Two points are worth noticing in conclusion. First, here is an outstanding example of the **spirit** of a man acting in an open and true way. That consciousness of God which lies latent within a human being, is something distinct and unique to humankind. The spiritual side of man, that special endowment from God which he possesses, sets a gulf between himself and the animal creation. Unhappily, man's spiritual faculty is often choked and muted, and his activities confined to the sub-human plane. But when God breaks in, searching and activating a man's conscience, and he faces God with all the awe and wonder that is due to Him, a new dimension of experience is entered upon. Especially when faith awakens, and God's great goodness is discovered and relied on, a man begins to be a true man. He can break out in responses to God; he can commit all his ways to God's control and guidance, with the aim and the desire that all about him may be acceptable to Him. Let us note how well this psalm demonstrates these realities.

Secondly, the depth of the psalmist's feelings in the presence of God, and his readiness to express them, raise questions of a comparative kind about our own experiences of a similar nature. With God known as our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed Him, there is still more to fill **our** hearts with amazement and reverential fear, to humble us and move us to the core. But, according to the parable of the sower, it is possible to hear even the highest truth in a superficial way, which has "no depth" about it (Mark 4:5). This is a highly unsatisfactory response. On the other hand, the good hearer was likened by our Lord to a man who "dug deep" and found a proper bed-rock for his life (Luke 6:48). The psalmist shows clearly in which category he falls. But how do **we** react as we are exposed to the magnificent yet searching light from God which the whole of the Bible directs towards us?

SOME DISTINCTIVE SOUNDS IN SCRIPTURE

R. A. CREETH

The Universal Sound of Creation

IN Psalm 19 creation renders its witness to the glory of God. It is a universal testimony, the sound going out to the ends of the earth. It is to be noticed that the earth has been given to man, and as a consequence has been corrupted by sin and has lost its distinctive witness, yet God receives a testimony from the three heavenly parts of creation which remain uncorrupted by sin: the vast expanse of the heavens, day and night, and the rising and setting of the sun. All the marvels of this wonderful universe testify to the reality of a personal Creator. How striking and positive is this witness of creation, especially of what is heavenly and therefore universal! The heavens, with the day, the night, and the sun bear their testimony for God to all mankind. The sound having gone forth, man is responsible to hear it and to believe such a clear testimony to the glory of the Creator God.

Paul's quotation of the 19th Psalm in Romans 10 is very interesting. It shows that God has been speaking to man from the beginning, in His creation, so it is no new thing for God to speak to Gentiles as He is doing now in the Gospel. "Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." There is thus a universal witness in creation as well as more directly now through the Gospel of God's grace.

The Joyful Sound of Salvation

"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." (Psalm 89:15). The psalmist is thinking of God's earthly people who knew the immense blessing of Jehovah's power in delivering them from all their enemies. They were God's chosen and favoured people: they knew the joyful sound of the salvation that their God had wrought for them, and accordingly they walked in the light of His countenance. How greatly privileged were the children of Israel! They were indeed "a people near unto Him" (Psalm 148:14). But how much greater are your privileges and mine as those redeemed to God by the precious blood of His Son! We are able to "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:11).

The Sound of Priestly Intercession

In Exodus 28 the High Priest going into the sanctuary is a beautiful type of the Lord Jesus entering heaven as the ascended and glorified One, "a great high priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Hebrews 4:14). Garments "for glory and for beauty" were put upon Aaron to make him glorious, but our High Priest is glorious in His own person, and by faith we see Him "crowned with honour and glory". It is worthy of notice that it is the same expression "for glory and for beauty" in Exodus 28:2 that is translated "with glory and honour" in Hebrews 2:9.

The blessed Lord has entered heaven as our representative. Instructions are given to take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel. These two stones are to be put upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord upon his two shoulders for a memorial (verses 9-12). How wonderful it is to know that as children of God we are borne upon the shoulders of our great High Priest, the place indeed of omnipotent strength! Then again we read, "Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually" (v. 29). This speaks to us of the Lord Jesus Who has our names inscribed upon His heart, and Who as our great High Priest represents us before God, ever living to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). How precious is this double figure: inscribed upon His heart, the seat of affection, and borne upon His shoulders, the place of strength!

With these thoughts in mind let us look at verses 33-35. Referring to the High Priest's robe we read, "And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and purple, and scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomengranate, upon the hem of the robe round about." The hem of his garment would point to the saints on earth, while the golden bells and pomegranates clearly suggest testimony and fruit consequent upon the priest entering the sanctuary. "It shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out" (v. 35).

The Lord Jesus has entered within the veil as our Forerunner, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 6:19-20). What followed this? The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as Peter says, "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The golden bells are seen in the witness in the power of the Spirit to the risen and glorified Lord, as is recorded, "With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). There too is seen the fruit of the Spirit, answering to the unselfish generosity of the believers. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (v. 32).

May we not say that the golden bells rang out first on the day of Pentecost, and have been sounding ever since? The gospel is being preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven (1 Peter 1:12), and the same Spirit is bearing constant testimony to the presence of the glorified Christ at the right hand of God. May it be our corporate endeavour to promote the sound of the golden bells of testimony, and individually to see that the ninefold fruit of the Spirit is manifested in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Sound of the Word of God

A great miracle had taken place on the trading route between East and West. In Thessalonica heathen idol-worshippers had abandoned their false gods to be occupied with the living and true God, and were avowedly waiting for God's Son from heaven. The news of this tremendous event had spread far and wide, and in the regions around men were everywhere talking of it. It is beautiful to notice that these Thessalonian converts, though tried by much affliction, were at the same time full of joy and zeal. "For from you," writes the apostle, "sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad" (1 Thessalonians 1:8). What moral power characterised this newly-formed assembly of believers! What devotion and zeal motivated them to publish abroad the glad tidings of God's grace! The divine life of which they were partakers manifested itself, not only in sound doctrine, but in active missionary zeal. May they be "ensamples" to us also, that from us individually and from our assemblies the word of the Lord may be sounded out.

The Trumpet Sound of Resurrection

In 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 the apostle describes what will take place at the Lord's second coming. "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead in Christ shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." What a glorious event this will be! What a marvellous transformation, when those who have been put to sleep by Jesus and those then living will receive incorruptible bodies of glory! This is the glorious hope of His coming, when the whole company of the redeemed will rise to meet the Lord in the air, so to be forever with the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4 gives further details. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." How do we distinguish between these three things that mark the coming of the Lord? It has been said that the shout is the Lord's personal summons of love and relationship. It is the rallying call of the great Kinsman Redeemer to all His redeemed ones. The voice of the archangel would ensure adequate protection from all the power of Satan under the direction of the most exalted of created beings, as the saints of God are caught up to pass through the realm of the "prince of the power of the air". The trump of God would indicate that the final redemptive operation will at once take place.

Why is it called the **last** trump? It seems to be a military figure, in common use with the Roman army. When a Roman camp was about to be broken up and the army about to move forward, a trumpet was sounded in three blasts. The first blast meant, "Prepare to depart"; the second, "Fall into line"; the third or last trump was the signal to

" March away ". Perhaps the apostle had this military expression in mind, and used it to indicate that the Lord's coming would mark the grand culmination of His great work of redemption, and that the moment had come for our bodies to be conformed to the image of God's Son. We have already received the salvation of our souls, but " we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, Who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory " (Philippians 3:20-21 J.N.D.).

How significant are these sounds in Scripture! The sound of creation witnessing to the power and glory of the Creator, the joyful sound of salvation bearing its testimony to Him as the Redeemer, the sound of His priestly service reminding us that He ever lives to make intercession for us, the sound of the word of God going forth in testimony and blessing, and the sound of His coming again to bring us to Himself in bodies of glory like His own!

BOOK REVIEW — J. S. BLACKBURN

B.C. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BIBLE LANDS
by Magnus Magnusson
The Bodley Head and B.B.C., 1977

THIS beautifully produced and illustrated book embodies the broadcast series under the same name which was presented in 1977. We are concerned here with the fact that, as the title indicates, the Bible is central to the theme. The wide attention the series achieved gives great significance to the views thus disseminated.

A quotation from page 8 makes a convenient starting point: " the Biblical picture of the past for centuries . . . was accepted as literal revealed truth ". It is not too much to say that the book is devoted to refuting the belief that the Bible is "literal revealed truth" and it provides an immediate occasion for every evangelical Christian to recognise that he must part company from the author even at this early stage. We will make two comments, and the first is that this quotation describes exactly the faith for which this journal stands. We believe in the Bible's own statement about itself: " All scripture is given by inspiration of God ". Our faith is stated most clearly in the form: the words of Scripture are the words of God. This is not the place to enlarge on our reasons for this faith, which have received so many classic statements over the years. Two briefly stated reasons will serve the present purpose. The first is that in Scripture God has spoken to us. His speaking is in the realm of conscience, and needs no proof. It gives the same kind of knowledge as that by which we know the conscious content of our own minds. Moreover, our Lord and Master has authenticated the Bible as " every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God ". He said " Scripture cannot be broken "; it " must be fulfilled ". The Bible contains no error of any kind. The Christian does not need proof or confirmation, but error must be denounced, lest it overthrow the faith of some.

We shall occupy our space by commenting on one or two typical examples. On the Flood, the book says: "the Flood story in the Bible is obviously a legend, and a borrowed and garbled one at that" (p. 23). The Lord Jesus spoke with absolute clarity about the Flood: "As it **was** in the days of Noe . . . the flood came, and destroyed them all". Was it foreseen that it would be scornfully disbelieved, and why? The apostle Peter has told us about the scoffers in the last days, "For this they are willingly ignorant of, that by the word of God . . . the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are . . . reserved unto fire" (2 Peter 3:3-7). The Lord says it happened. Peter says the scoffers do not believe it because they do not wish to believe. Magnus Magnusson transmits the reasons for the conclusion that the story is a legend, that is, handed down with no historical foundation. The reason is, whole and entire, that it is closely paralleled by ancient Babylonian versions of the story (of earlier date) which have been discovered by the archaeologists. What do **you** thing of this evidence? It is not very convincing to me. Several conjectures about the Black Panther appeared in print before the truth came to light. When the truth appeared, these similar accounts had absolutely no evidential bearing on it, except to *confirm the setting.*

Close to the end of the book (p. 207/8) we have a single sentence verdict on the Book of Daniel. "Now, the Book of Daniel is known to be a very late composition, at least four centuries after the Exile, and it has no historical value whatsoever; in fact it gets its details rather muddled, in that Belshazzar was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar (as it suggests) but the son of Nabonidus; nor was he king, only viceroy, and so on." Several important matters of principle arise from this quotation, and light is cast upon the whole thinking of the school of which the views are presented in this book. We will take the sentence clause by clause.

(a) Before the decipherment of the Babylonian texts it was thought that Belshazzar never existed, and his name was known only in the Bible. It is now well known that his name and position are extremely well attested. But Daniel is still "of no historical value whatsoever"!

(b) While Daniel calls Belshazzar "the king", according to the inscriptions the last king of Babylon was Nabonidus; and Daniel makes the queen call Belshazzar the son of Nebuchadnezzar, while the inscriptions show that he was the son of Nabonidus, and grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Only in 1956 were tablets discovered which told how Nabonidus was self-exiled to Arabia, leaving "the kingship" to Belshazzar. Not only did this show why Belshazzar was called "the king", but also revealed the extreme precision of the Bible account in naming the promised position to Daniel as "the **third** ruler in the kingdom", the first being Nabonidus, the second Belshazzar and the third Daniel. But the book of Daniel remains "of no historical value whatsoever"!

No trace of "Darius the Median" (Daniel 5:31) has yet been found, but the instance just described illustrates how utterly invalid are arguments from absence of a particular name from inscriptions, since so tiny a proportion of the material likely to be available has yet been fully reported.

(c) The real reason for the ascribed date, "four centuries after the exile" is as follows. The eleventh chapter of Daniel gives, in minutest detail, the history of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties until exactly 165 B.C. But the critical school represented in this book works from a prior assumption, a totally unproven assumption, that there can be no genuine foretelling of future events. Therefore they had no alternative but to date the book 165 B.C. "God is not in all his thoughts" (Psalm 10:4).

There are, of course, moderate statements in parts of the work, especially when it has to be admitted that the case for the reliability of the Bible record is strong. The book is less than clear, however, on the whole course of the ebb and flow of faith in the Bible as God's word. From the setting of our first quotation on page 8, we are left with the implication that it was archaelological discoveries which shattered the popular acceptance of the Bible stories as "literal revealed truth". This implication is most decidedly not true. It was so-called Bible scholars, notably Wellhausen (1844-1918) who, on supposedly literary and historical grounds, established so widely the idea that the Bible stories were legends and myths. Since then, archaeological discoveries have been clawing back the recognition that the ancient world and its people were just as the Bible presented them. One of the earliest false assumptions on which Wellhausen and his predecessors built concerned the antiquity of literature. As early as 1910 Professor A. H. Sayce was writing, "among the Hebrews only the most conservative critics allowed that [the use of writing for literary purposes] might have been known in the age of Solomon . . . and Biblical criticism ended by denying the pre-exilic origin of the larger part of the Old Testament . . . But this was merely an assumption . . . and as soon as it could be tested by solid fact it crumbled into dust". In Egypt and Assyria, that is, the world of the early books of the Bible, literature was in use by 3000 B.C., that is 1000 years before Abraham.

Our perusal of this book gives no reason for the disturbance of our faith in God's Word, since the true Christian is "born again . . . by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all the glory of man [is] as the flower of grass . . . But the Word of the Lord endures for ever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you" 1 Peter 1:23-25.

Scripture Truth

NOVEMBER, 1978

(incorporating "Words of Help")

THREE RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD

WILLEM J. OUWENEEL

1. CHILDREN OF GOD: PART ONE

CHILDREN. Sons. Heirs. I hope, God willing, in this series of articles to consider these three relationships between God and the believer. More commonly we find ourselves occupied with our corporate relationships, and naturally so, since it was these blessings, lost sight of in Christendom, which were recovered for us in the last century. But at the same time as we received these corporate blessings as the Church of God, the Body and the Bride of Christ, we received individual blessings. That is to say, every individual believer is a child of God, a son of God, and an heir of God. It is true that nowhere does Scripture describe me in the singular as a child of God. Nevertheless, we read in Romans 8:16 that the Holy Spirit witnesses together with our spirit that we are the children of God. Now each of us has his or her own spirit. Thus we learn that the Spirit bears witness with each of us individually to our relationship.

I may say, then, that I am a child of God. What does this mean for you and me? This is my subject in this article and the next.

1. Born of God

We consider firstly John 1. This is the first place in the New Testament where our being children of God is spoken of; we need, therefore, to pay it especial attention.

As is well known, we have in the early verses of this chapter the Lord Jesus, on the one hand as the Word of God, the One through Whom alone God was ever manifested, or ever will be; and on the other hand as the Creator, "without Whom nothing was made that was made". This is the One Who became flesh to come into the world. And it rejected Him. Even Israel whom God had nurtured for Himself for generations "received Him not". Can we grasp what it meant for Him to be rejected, Who was the "true Light", being Himself God, Who "is in the bosom of the Father", and knew thereby all the secrets of the Father's love, and came into the world to reveal them?

But He is rejected; His testimony is past. The Light has left the world. Did He, however, leave the world (if I may permit myself the word) disappointed? No. There was an Exception to all that rejected

Him, and it is to those who compose this Exception that the right has been given to be called "children of God". What this means is immediately explained. These are they who believe on His name, and are born of God. Here we have the first mark of the child of God. I am a child of God, because I am born of Him. I, who belonged to this world that rejected the Lord Jesus, can be accepted by Him, but not just as I am. I must be born, so to speak, from a totally new source. I now belong to a new generation ; I am born from above, born of God.

The Evangelist defines the newness of this generation negatively. The child of God has not been born of blood, that is, not through any natural relationship. Natural relationships made a Jewish child part of Israel, but cannot make anybody a child of God. Nor is he born of the will of the flesh. It was the activity and striving of the flesh that were responsible for the Lord's rejection ; how could it create the generation that received Him? Nor is he born of the will of man ; of human plans or imagination. God alone it was Who devised the plan to create for Himself an Exception to the condition of all those who refused His Son ; to create a generation so new that it comprises men not merely transformed, so to speak, but born anew, born from Himself.

Why did God create this new generation ? The answer is crucial. It shows us why the Lord could leave this world rejected, but in no way disappointed. It is this. God wants this new generation to do and to be what His Son did and was when here. Now that Christ has gone to the Father, they have to declare what He declared when He was here: Who God is and What God is. The Old Testament prophets spoke words from God, as given to them, but the children of God, much more immediately than they, can declare Who God is, because they are born of Him. Of course they cannot do this exactly as the Lord Jesus Himself did it ; He was God, was the Word of God. Nevertheless, they are born of God, and as such are able to display His Features. We are called children of God in the very same world where Christ has been rejected, in order that we might display that God is light, by walking as children of light, and that God is love, by loving God and loving one another.

Does the Scripture testify to this truth? Indeed it does! In two places we read, "No man hath seen God at any time". Firstly, in John 1:18. The verse continues, ". . . the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him". In 1 John 4:12 however, we also read, "No man hath seen God at any time". How does the verse continue there? ". . . If we love one another, God dwelleth in us and His love is perfected in us". In the mutual love of God's children, His love is manifested in this world.

2. The Objects of the Father's Love

In 1 John 2:29ff. we have a further mark of this new generation. First we read, "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him". It continues. "Behold what manner of love, etc.". The children, who are called on to display the righteousness, obedience and love that the Son Himself displayed in the

world, are the especial objects of His Father's love. Note that the Father's love is said to be bestowed not exactly in our being called, "children of the Father", but in our being called "children of God".* The holiness and righteousness of God should be clearly reproduced in His children. If this is so, we shall learn in practical experience that we are in a world wholly alien to us, because it has a different origin. Such is the consequence of the Fall, that of anyone who loves the world, it must be said that the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). But it is here, in the place where I experience the animosity of the world, that I find myself to be the especial object of the Father's love: especial, because He really is my Father, and I am born of Him. When our own children find themselves in difficult and hostile circumstances, we who are fathers stand ready to help them, and to explain to them how they ought to act. Our children then experience our parent-love for them in a new way. So it is with the children of God.

How is our Father's love described? He loves us as He loved His Son here! Consider, for example, John 17:23, ". . . that the world may know . . . that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me". Here, at the end of these quiet hours spent by the Lord with His disciples before His betrayal, when He told them that He was leaving them, He tells them that the Father will love them as He loved His Son here. I would not have dared such a statement, had Scripture not itself said it.

In a particular way, we are the objects of the Son's love also. The verse which prefaces the "Upper Room Discourse" reads, "Jesus, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). As One Who Himself knew what it meant to be in the world, He loved them. So we enjoy the especial love of the Father and the Son.

3. Keeping the Commandments

But we for our part must fulfil certain conditions. We will not enjoy this love (except in a disciplinary sense) if we are not in practice keeping the commandments of the Son. This is beautifully stated in John 14:21,23.

See the love the Father hath bestowed upon us, but see too in practice how it is to be enjoyed! The Father has left us here as a witness, following the footprints His Son has already made. To do so, means to keep God's commandments, and to keep the Son's commandments (1 John 2:3-8 ; 3:23 ; 4:21 ; 5:2-3). In doing so, we shall abide in His love, even as He has kept His Father's commandments, and abides in His love (John 15:9-10).

But how did He keep His Father's commandments? Did He — I speak reverently — request a list from His Father, so that He should know precisely the extent of His obligations, and, beyond that, please Himself? Never! To Him, every wish of His Father's heart was a commandment. This gives us the secret. Do not ask for a list of "do's

* Note that "sons" in 1 John 3 : 1 A.V. ought to read "children".

and don'ts" which will define your obligations. All the desires of the heart of the Father and the Son are, for us, commandments. If we keep them in this spirit, we shall enjoy Their love.

4. Manifestation in Glory

Chapter 16 of John's Gospel, verses 23-27, provides a further mark of the Father's love for His children. On that day when Christ shall have gone back to His Father, and sent His Spirit here, the disciples will be able to pray the Father directly, "for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me. . . ." To have loved His Son here in this world is a great thing to our Father, and confers credentials wholly adequate to gain us immediate access to His presence where, in childlike intimacy, we can speak to Him, and hear Him speak.

It is in consequence of this that we are privileged to stand by and to listen to the Son speaking to His Father in the words recorded for us in John 17. We hear, for example, the request of verse 23, already referred to. This teaches us a further mark of the children. Not only are we children here in a hostile world, standing where the rejected Christ stood, but we also have the hope of another day when all will be different. In the day of Christ's appearing the world will learn in the One it rejected What God is. It will learn it also in the children. In our being made perfectly one, the world will learn the love of God: that He loves His Son, and loves us as He loves Him.

In that day the world will acknowledge what today it knows nothing of. The "pious" people whom the world failed to comprehend, who were forever speaking to it about God, and letting the light shine on its darkness, the people whom the world distressed and persecuted — these are the people on whom the Father's love is set! the people who appear in glory with His Son! We stand where Christ stood. At the cross God appeared to be "on the world's side"; there was no sign to men that He was the object of His Father's love. So also today. Millions of believers are in trouble, prison, persecution. The world sees no sign of the Father's love upon them. But we shall stand where Christ will stand. The world will be compelled to see that the Father loves the Son, and loved Him too when He was here in it; and that the Father loves His children, in glory then, but loved them when they were in trouble here too. I am convinced that we shall never understand what it is to be God's children until we understand what it means to the Father's heart to have here in the world a new generation which stands where His rejected Son stood, displaying His own nature. It brings us to John 17:26 — "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them".

I return to 1 John 3:1. At present, "the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not". But we read further, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be". This does not mean that **we** do not know what we shall be. We do know: "when he shall appear we shall be like him". But the world does not yet know. In that day, however, the world shall see the proof of the Father's love, for we shall be like His Son. The

world, however, will not see what we see It will see Him in His glory as the Son of Man. But only the children will see Him as He is Inside the Father's house we shall see Him thus in His pre-eminence in all things — ". . . with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24). This aspect of truth has, however, more to do with sonship, as we shall see The relationship of children has to do with our representation of the nature of God before the world. Now in rejection ; then in glory.

5. Displaying the Nature of God

1 John 3 continues "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (v. 3). Christ was entirely pure in His ways here. And what about the children? "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin . . because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (vv. 9-10). So we have again exactly the features of the child doing righteousness, and loving the brethren.

Chapter 4 of this Epistle takes up the question of loving the brethren Not just the brethren who are congenial to us. When we have loved the brethren just because they are brethren, we have mutually recognised that we are born of God, and have in measure recognised in each other the light and the love of God.

Light and love are also considered in chapter 2. Look at verses 8-9: we have a new commandment, "which thing is true in him and in you because the darkness is [passing] and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now" The "new commandment is a commandment of light and love It was fully realised in Christ when He was in the world, but it is true in us also, because the light of God shines in us who partake of God's nature.

In 1 John 1:5 we read, "God is light", in 1 John 4:8 and 16, "God is love" Are you a child of God? Does His light shine through you? His righteousness? His holiness? Do you show His love by loving the brethren, simply because they are born of Him (cf. 1 John 5:1)? Someone born of God, so this Epistle says, cannot help loving those who are born of God. See also 1 John 5·2 We know that we love the children of God when we love God, and keep His commandments. This brings us back again to John's Gospel 14:21-23. It all hangs together. To walk in the ways of God, to love Him, cannot mean anything other than loving the brethren. This is an unmistakeable truth, but what is so clear in Scripture is often so confused in practice. And yet, if you love your brother, that is the way the world will see God The world cannot see the love of God shed abroad in our hearts if it remains shut up there. But when it streams out to the brethren who also are born of God, the world sees true love, and hence somewhat of God. What a responsibility we have!

There are only two kinds of children in the world: children of God and children of the devil. Young people find this hard to accept. But

the Lord says it (John 8:42-44 and especially 1 John 3:10). How, then, in this confused world can we distinguish the two families? It is not difficult to tell the devil's children ; they are in darkness, and they hate you. But it is often hard to distinguish the children of God, because often they display much of the world: darkness and hatred. Can this be? John presents absolutes: "Whatsoever doeth not righteousness is not of God". This does not mean that any unrighteousness committed by a believer shows him not to have been born of God. My children remain my children even when they disobey me. Nothing can alter the fact of their origin. John simply states in absolute terms what is characteristic of God's children in virtue of this. They do righteousness ; the light and love of God is seen in them. This remains their true character even if they often so sadly belie their origin.

FELLOW-WORKERS WITH PAUL ———— T. D. SPICER

1. BARNABAS

THE company a man habitually keeps may almost be said to be a constituent part of his character. His acquaintances must be known and evaluated before a true assessment can be made of his personality and his career. A man's companions receive his influence and reflect his feelings ; and in turn they react powerfully on his own attitude to society and frequently modify his work.

These observations are particularly true of the Apostle Paul. We cannot separate him from his companions. In his relationship with them we can learn much about him, and at the same time, discover something of the sort of men and women who made up the early church. There are studies here which, it is hoped, will be of profit as well as of interest, and for our first character study we will begin with Barnabas.

Generosity

Barnabas came from Cyprus, was a Levite, and like the one who was to become his friend, might have called himself "a Hebrew of the Hebrews". Generosity — or large heartedness — was a keynote of his character and in Acts, Chapter 4, his contribution to the common fund receives special comment. Either the amount he gave was unusually large, or there was something about the way the gift was given which caused him to be singled out for this special mention. What a sharp contrast to Ananias and Sapphira in the following passage, whose story is told for quite a different reason! A generous man like Barnabas is one who is not always thinking of himself, but of the welfare of others ; one who out of his own resources provides for those in need.

Mediation

The next reference to Barnabas is found in Acts, Chapter 9, where Paul returns to Jerusalem after his conversion on the Damascus road. Quite naturally the disciples were suspicious of him, and who can blame them? Here was one who had been a bitter enemy, ready to go to any lengths and to travel any distance if only he could overthrow this new sect ; but now he is professing to be their friend and wishing to associate with them. The mediator is Barnabas who "brought him to the apostles, and declared how he had seen the Lord in the way . . ." (Acts 9:27). The result was entire confidence, and the persecutor became a trusted friend and brother in the Lord.

Misunderstandings are very common today — whether in the assembly, the home, the workplace, or elsewhere. People will differ and take unfavourable views of each other. Sometimes even thinking that they are in opposition when in fact they are not. What are we to do? Look on and do nothing? Or, without even attempting to understand the situation, take sides? This was not the way of Barnabas. If others hold wrong opinions we must do all we can to persuade them to change their thinking. Barnabas at a time of crisis removed prejudice, not by acrimonious arguments, but by warm commendation.

Encouragement

The next occasion where we read of Barnabas is in Acts, Chapter 11. News reaches the church at Jerusalem of many turning to Christ in Antioch and they send Barnabas to investigate. The brief account of what transpired is typical of what we would expect of this man of God. He rejoiced at what he discovered and then "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). Again the warmth of true fellowship comes through, and the result was that "much people were added to the Lord". Then the historian adds significantly, "for he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." In this lay his secret. He was not only committed to a cause but to a Person.

The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Antioch required another fertile mind and accordingly Barnabas left for Tarsus "for to seek Saul". Returning together to Antioch, they exercised such a fruitful ministry that the church became fully established. It was here under the joint ministry of these two men that the Church of Christ first became conscious of itself, so to speak, as a self-existent community and also received its designation (Acts 11:26). From Antioch was sent out the first great missionary expedition in the persons of these two men.

In one sense we can say that God used Barnabas to make Paul what he afterwards became. Barnabas brought Paul out of obscurity and put him in the forefront. Again we see his generous disposition at work. Some folk have no interest in projects unless they can have pride of place in them. They will even seek to profit at the expense of others. Not so the subject of our study. Self effacement was the hallmark of this occasion.

In recording events and biographical details of its characters, Scripture always presents a complete picture. When, for example, we read of David we find not only his mighty acts, but also his ignoble deeds. Many men are depicted in the Bible in their true colours ; and we take courage at this, for we find that they are of "like passions as we are" It is not surprising, therefore, that we find blemishes on the features of Barnabas.

Dissension

The first missionary journey had been happily completed ; but soon afterwards a quarrel took place between the two men who had worked so well together. Their companion, John Mark, a near relative of Barnabas, had been unfaithful in Pamphylia and, fearful of the difficulties and dangers ahead, had returned home. Now they proposed to retrace their steps and visit "their brethren in every city", where they had "preached the word of the Lord" (Acts 15:36). The strong desire and, indeed, determination of Barnabas was to take his young relative with them again, "but Paul thought not good to take him with them . . . and the contention was so sharp . . . that they departed asunder one from the other."

So it was that the friendship which had not been upset by selfishness on either side, or by differences in disposition, broke up over family relationships. The expression used would seem to imply that both were to blame and that temper was lost on both sides. With Paul we are not concerned in this study ; but some comment is required concerning Barnabas' attitude. Warm-hearted and generous, he overlooked the shortcomings of his relative, but this was the fault in Barnabas, and we must take warning to beware of letting family affairs interfere with our work for the Lord. We have not to ignore family responsibilities — it would be a denial of our profession to do so — but they must be kept in their right place. Our conduct is not to be guided by our affections and preferences, but by our desire for the glory of the Lord.

It is good to be able to note as we pass on, that the breach was eventually healed and the young man concerned was ultimately declared by the Apostle Paul to be "profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

Variance

Another glimpse of Barnabas is to be discovered, not in Luke's history, but in the Epistle to the Galatians. Again it would seem that the two men were at variance. Paul is referring to an occasion when Peter was much to blame and had wrongly given apparent approval to those who were mixing Jewish error with the truth. This had a disastrous effect on those around him. "And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity" (Galatians 2:13).

It is not difficult to see from this event the characteristic temperament of Barnabas again in its weakness. His was that kind of disposition

which makes it easy to follow the crowd, and to approve by his acceptance things which ought to be corrected. It is neither easy nor pleasant for a warm-hearted and generous man to tell others that they are in the wrong. When there is a readiness for giving and winning confidence, and for getting co-operation, there may at the same time be a danger of relaxing standards in order to please. The desire to make the going smooth and easy is a temptation to be resisted. Paul was very concerned about this and gave a severe rebuke to Peter, indeed to all those who, like Barnabas, associated themselves with him in this particular offence.

So we find that Barnabas had his faults as well as his better qualities and we ought not to let his faults be our last impression of him. It was not on account of these that he was named the "Son of consolation". When his parents named him they gave him the name of Joseph, but those who came to know him well in Christian fellowship said, "we must give him another name". For everywhere he went he had the ability and the grace to lift up the mood and the spirit of his fellows. So it was that the historian wrote, ". . . Joseph who was surnamed by the Apostles Barnabas (which means Son of encouragement)" (Acts 4:36).

The church today needs many more such men.

"TRUTH IN THE INWARD PARTS" ——— COLIN CURRY

PSALM 51

PSALM 51 is prominent amongst passages which show individuals going through deep experiences with God. The depths of shame and prostration before God expressed here are unsurpassed in any other psalm. Psalm 139, considered in the last issue, saw David overcome and amazed as consciousness of God's thorough oversight over all his ways made its deep impression. His every thought and action were known to God, his movements, his whereabouts, the daily details of his life. From beginning to end his whole life was an open book to God.

But Psalm 51 has a more particular setting in David's life, as its caption shows, and graver things fill David's attention here. "My sin is ever before me"; the story of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite, and his own central part in that story, can never be erased from his mind. His recent actions rise up before him in all their outrageous wickedness. His sin is entirely his own, and completely inexcusable. Note the five-fold "my" in the early verses: **my** sin, **my** transgressions, **mine** iniquity. All the gross and shameful reality of his deeds, their shocking and irretrievable nature, are faced and felt deeply in the presence of God. These are blacker moments by far than those of Psalm 139. Even when the psalm has passed to other stages, the awfulness of his action breaks over him again as he confesses the darkest detail of it (using the word "bloodguiltiness"), and is unable to escape from its weight. Let no man think (in the light of this psalm, and much else too

in Scripture) that sin when pardoned can be lightly thought of A humble and broken spirit continually suits a pardoned sinner, even though he may be given a high status in grace

The spirit of entreaty marks the psalm from first to last While deeply humbled and shamed David is lifted above complete despair by thoughts of the richness of God's mercy From 2 Samuel 12 13 we know that a word of forgiveness was spoken as soon as the enormity of his sin dawned upon him But confession of sin and recognition of its full gravity are part of the process of restoration, and it was right that David should be broken down in this way before God The sense of the affront to God entailed in his actions makes him feel urgently the need for a proper basis for restoration Thorough cleansing, removal of his sin, re-creation, and a new quality of life are vital needs to David if God s high standards are to be honoured The true ground on which these possibilities rest was not known in David s day, but David certainly was aware that the highest of righteous principles must be met if a person like himself was to be reclaimed He takes sides with God against himself, and recognises that basic, rock-bottom treatment is needed if he is to have a standing with God and an acceptable manner before Him

We discuss the substance of the psalm under a few sub-headings

Gross sin ; plenteous mercy

In the opening verses David confesses the dreadful nature of his sin, with deep shame and concern He is brought to see those awful actions from **God's** viewpoint He has dishonoured and totally misrepresented his God he has wrought havoc in other lives, and marred his own too he has sown a seed which will have a dire harvest later Yet there is one other matter which he can fasten on, giving him hope in pleading with God He can seek the mercy of God In pleading for it, he can use marvellous words describing its quality and its vastness The multitude of Thy tender mercies" is something not less in scale than the grossness of his sin Somehow these two things match one another Great guilt, properly faced and admitted, causes amazement at the mercy that can remove it The tremendous fact that God's great mercy **can** remove the accusing record of the deepest sin increases the awareness of its offensive character, and the depth of repentance for it

The convicting arrow of the word of God, through Nathan the prophet, had brought about this great change in David One word from God had exposed his sin From the cunning manipulator of events for his own ends, following up one grave sin with another in order to cover his tracks, he is transformed into the man with the eye of God upon him , who knows that everything is naked and open to God, and is totally broken as he confesses the effrontery of his sin Confession of sin before God is a deeply painful process, but what a step in the right direction it is! What reality, and what important experience, is involved in the profound processes of repentance , and how different is David in this experience from the devious and twisted David lately driven by his

own impulses, and forgetful of his God Let us remember that David was a man of God before this stage in his life, and perhaps more transparent in his faith in those earlier times Let us not dismiss too readily our own inward corruption, our own propensities for thoughts and actions dishonouring to God Christians though we may be, let us not leave behind us, as something that belongs to the past, the spirit of repentance and humility before God

Radical treatment needed

Forgiveness of sin, though an act of great mercy, does not mean simply overlooking it, however David understands this well, as the expressions he uses indicate (verses 1,2) It is urgent that his transgressions should be **blotted out**, the record of them wiped clean, the guilt of them expunged 'Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity," he pleads an exhaustive process is needed, completely removing everything that offends, like filth from a garment David is not asking that the ramifications of his sin should be prevented but that its guilt should be obliterated He takes up the petition again in later verses (7-10) where his inward impurity, the seat of his sinful actions, seems more in his mind. "Purge me . wash me' is his plea He is well aware that dealing with his sin is no light matter But his faith grasps the fact that God can do this great thing "I shall be clean', I shall be whiter than snow It will be a thoroughgoing work if God performs it "Purge me with hyssop" indicates that passages like Leviticus 14 5-7, 51-53, or Numbers 19 18,19, may have been in David s mind , passages which certainly point to the gravity of the uncleanness that needs to be purged, and the sacrificial shedding of blood necessary for its removal Though he could not see its full basis in the work of Christ, the cleansing that David has in mind is something that must stand alongside the fact that God has a total antipathy towards sin The fact that He is absolutely right in judging sin, including David s sin, is clearly present in David's mind in verse 4

The awfulness of his crime, being fundamentally treason and self-assertion against God (verse 4), gives David a new perception of himself Those extreme actions were not the unfortunate aberrations of a normally good person, they were a manifestation of the kind of person that he always had been They were symptoms of his inward corruption he was born in sin and shapen in iniquity (verse 5) There is about him that which is utterly wrong Something new from God is needed, which only the word creation can properly describe (verse 10) Certainly David sees now fatally wrong is the state of all who are of the same stock as he was, and what large-scale action from God is vital if restoration is to be effected

A clean heart; a new spirit

In the middle verses of the psalm (8 15) the dark cloud upon David is beginning to disperse Though not yet experiencing it, he is longing for the freedom and joy of spirit which comes with the sense of being

"in the clear" with God. This awful deed of his has done great damage. Apart from its outward effects it has darkened his own inward life, it has clouded the link with his God, set him at a distance like an outcast, and completely muted the joy that had accompanied his faith in God. These are tremendous losses and he feels it acutely. Yet his urgent prayer rises to the belief that a new start is possible; he is not outside the long arm of God's salvation, and return to the joy of it is not beyond thinking about. What he craves is something which only God can do, yet there is hope in his entreaty as well as transparent humility and dependence. Already he dwells on the relief which a full restoration would bring. In thought he passes beyond the time when conscience has silenced and shamed him, to the prospect of freedom in God's presence, so that he may openly voice his praise and appreciation to God.

It seems plain that what David is asking for is really taking shape within him already. He has no words of excuse for his deeds, nor in mitigation of his guilt. Inwardly he is being true to God, even in confessing his failure and foulness. What God desires and approves, "truth in the inward parts", is evident in his very manner. That purity of heart, that newness and transparency of spirit for which he yearns, is showing itself already in this humble penitence and petition before his God. God's sovereign ways with him are producing this, against the very background of his own evil actions and capabilities.

David understands that renewal at the very core of his being is essential. A clean heart, a right (or steadfast) spirit (10), a willing spirit (12), a broken spirit, a contrite heart (17): these are his priorities now. He needs a frame of mind, and an attitude of heart, compatible with the holiness of the Spirit of God. This is no small request, but God can bring about these great changes. The latter part of verse 11 is often quoted to make the point that, since present-day believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Who abides for ever, such a prayer would be inappropriate today. But let us also press the point that inward urgings towards a holiness suitable to God are as appropriate today as they were with David. The depth of any claim to be right with God is open to question if it is not accompanied with such impulses.

We may note verse 13 too. David envisages a restoration which will be so sound, and so much appreciated, that it could be an example to others of the pathway through repentance to recovery. Learning God in deep experiences fits a man to help others. The spirit of a person rejoicing in the God of his salvation has a certain infection about it.

What God desires

The central message of the psalm, important for present-day readers too, is the need to retain this sense of deep indebtedness, and total genuineness, when we draw near to God. To please God, "truth in the inward parts" is an essential requirement. David returns to this in the closing verses (16 ff.). Without personal humility and reality before God all other responses to Him are merely token responses. However correctly they are done, God views these approaches to Him with distaste.

"Thou desirest not sacrifice" does not mean that God disowns His own ordinances, but it does mean that formalism without deep personal involvement is valueless; many another passage tells us that He finds it objectionable. Needless to say the great basis for approach to God, the one sacrifice of Christ, is an absolute necessity, and God finds great satisfaction in that. Boldness of access is possible, and only possible, through the blood of Jesus. But boldness is not brashness, nor is it off-handedness, nor easy familiarity either. True boldness before God has nothing in common with self-conscious piety: nor, surely, does it resemble that inert attitude which marks us at times, which is so restrained in expressing heartfelt gratitude to God. Many readers can look back over a long period to the time of their conversion, and are well-settled now in those habits of Christian life and assembly activities which form the pattern of our behaviour. Are we particularly prone, perhaps, to follow the letter of obedience to Scripture closely, and yet to have left behind us, to a large extent, the penitent's frame of mind and the abundant gratitude that goes with it?

HINDRANCES TO THE SHINING OUT OF LIGHT

JOHN BARNES

IN 2 Corinthians 4:6 we read, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". Mr. Darby, however, makes a significant alteration in his version: in place of "to give the light of" he translates, "for the shining forth of". The word rendered in this way is used in v. 4 of this chapter for the radiancy or shining out of the gospel. That we ourselves have benefited from the accession of divine light is undeniable, yet it is not given solely for our relief and blessing, but that others also may be helped. So it is intended that light should radiate from us for their blessing. The allusion to earthen vessels, which follows immediately (v. 7), most likely has in mind Gideon and his small band of warriors armed with torches concealed in pitchers. We remember that the very fragility of these vessels was used to cause the light of the torches suddenly to shine out at the critical moment, with startling effect. The vessels were, in themselves, fragile and expendable, and useful for the particular purpose only when shattered. The excellency of the glory must always be God's.

The Lord Jesus, the Supreme Master of illustration, used the figure of a candle or lamp to describe the function of the believer in the darkness of this squalid world. Matthew reports His words in 5:15 of his Gospel and there we are instructed that the lamp is not intended to be concealed under a corn measure but to be placed on a lampstand so that its shining may illuminate the whole house and all may benefit. A particular reference is made in this context to that feature of the light which He calls "good works" and which will bring glory to the Father.

Mark also makes reference to this parable in 4:21 where it is noticed that not the corn measure alone, but also the bed may obscure the light.

Luke also alludes to this figure and mentions it in two places ; 8:16 and 11:33. In these two places four objects are mentioned which may obscure the light or prevent its outshining: a vessel, a bed, a secret place and a corn measure. Perhaps they could be thought of in this way:

1. The vessel: household pre-occupations. Illustrated by Martha (Luke 10:40).
2. The bed: indolence. Illustrated by the bride of the Song of Songs (1:6 and 5:3).
3. The secret place: cherished ambitions or sins. Illustrated by David (2 Samuel 11) or Achan (Joshua 7).
4. The corn measure: business interests. Illustrated by Demas (2 Timothy 4:10).

1. The Vessel

If it is permissible to regard this as representing domestic pre-occupations, Martha becomes an apt example. It is correct to think of this as **undue** domestic concern, because, if we have such responsibilities, obviously righteousness demands that they should be attended to. But a good meal need not be lavish ; a clean and orderly home need not be richly furnished. Fussiness about food and frilliness about furnishing can take up much time and money which could be better used. When Martha was entertaining the Lord Jesus in her home she became somewhat slavishly occupied with domestic matters — possibly cooking and so on. There is no doubt she would be thinking of her honoured Guest, but He would have valued more of her time in His company and more attention to His word. Mary gave Him this and the Lord Jesus valued it greatly. His concern was with His Father's business, things of infinitely greater importance than the small household cares of His hostess. If not kept carefully in its ordered place the home can become a spiritual hindrance rather than a help, and contribute to earthly-mindedness. That the Christian household has a valuable role to perform in the testimony is quite certain. Paul refers to it in 1 Timothy 3:4, 12 and in other places : but this is marred if family conduct is as materialistic and earthly-minded as the world around.

2. The Bed

Many of us are, by nature, averse to effort, or at any rate, to sustained effort. So love of ease or abnormal leisure can be a snare. One of the evils of modern society in Europe is too much time with nothing to do. The believer is saved from this by having the interests of the Lord to care for, yet to devote oneself to service demands time, patience and concentration. There are many things around that can keep our attention without demanding much output from us and it is simple to give way to these interests. It is also possible, for a time anyway, to

detract attention from our own poverty in the field of service by drawing notice to the deficiencies of others. Perhaps this was the case with the bride in the Song of Songs (1:6). It seems she had been prevailed upon to look after (perhaps pass criticisms on) the work of others, but through indolence or carelessness her own work had fallen into a condition of neglect. If this is the case it will eventually be noticed and the person's contribution to the testimony marred, the light obscured. A further reference to the bride's indolence is made in 5:3, and in this instance she loses the treasured company of her Lover for a time. So love of ease may hinder the outshining of the light. It is noteworthy that in both passages in Luke the Lord emphasises that the light is to be **seen** (8:16 last clause; 11:33 last clause).

3. The Secret Place

We may cherish private desires in our hearts, secret ambitions, some of them sinful, which no earthly friend is aware of, only ourselves and the Lord. Our thoughts form a little private world to which no other man has access unless we permit him. These secret things may be a means of ruining our Christian lives and so of spoiling our witness and the shining of the light. The "bright shining of the candle" (Luke 11:36) is not possible unless conditions in our inner lives are such as meet with the Lord's approval. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). All this will come to light eventually. "Nothing is secret that shall not be manifest". David's secret desire resulted in sin with Bathsheba with its terrible consequences for his lover's innocent husband, for her, for himself, for the child of their union, for David's family and for the nation. It also gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and dimmed the shining light of testimony.

Achan, another example of this point, had a secret desire to be enriched, coveting the very goods devoted by the Lord to destruction. He and his whole family suffered, besides which, his action occasioned the defeat of the nation in battle. May the Lord enable us to have the single eye which will ensure that our entire person will be enlightened.

4. The Corn Measure

The corn measure has for long been held to refer to business interests, crowding out the service of the Lord. Here, as in household matters, if we have affairs to attend to in our business or profession, rightous demands must be met. Nothing can be gained by seeking to evade what is our plain duty, but it is only too easy to become unduly engrossed in business and not give adequate time to the service of God in our lives. The Lord Himself has advised: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness . . ."

Demas may illustrate this fourth snare. He had served the Lord in company with Paul and is alluded to in this way by Paul in his Colossian letter. At least one would gather this from his being linked with Luke in the greeting. But apparently he had become absorbed in other mat-

ters. It may be noted that when Paul alludes to Demas having loved this present world, he omits the adjective "evil", with which he qualifies "world" in another place. Could this deliberate omission be intended to suggest that Demas had not stooped to the gross evil of the world but had perhaps become entangled in one of its material aspects? Whatever it was, he loved it. The contrast between "having loved this present world", and "them that love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8), is very striking. If, as may have been the case with Demas, the charm of this world's goods and money has secured our main interest and energy, there will be little if anything left for the Lord and no desire for the dawning of the day of glory. This world's glory will dim the glory of that world for our souls, and vice versa.

We would do well also to heed the warning of Luke 11:35. "Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness." If the light which we are formed to pass on to others is not allowed to shine, by reason of one or other of the objects mentioned, will it cease to illuminate our own hearts? Evidently there is such a danegr, else the Lord would not have needed to prefix His remarks with the solemn warning words, "Take heed". It would be possible to be darkened and yet be pitiably unaware of it. Perhaps the present general condition of the church is largely due to light known but not responded to.

PROPER PASTORS ——————— T. BALDERSTON

PASTORAL work is like gospel work. All of us ought, in one way or another, to be gospel workers. But few are the true evangelists with whom Christ from heaven has supplied His Church.

It is the same with pastoral work. Happy is the place where mature Christians make it their business to be interested in, to care for and show hospitality to those who need help: to the old, the young, the poor, the doubters, the depressed, the apathetic, those with personal or family difficulties. Shame on us if we do not do this! The Holy Spirit once had to say, "Brethren, be not many teachers". He has not (I think) ever found it necessary to say, "Brethren, be not many pastors". We do not ordain 'Pastors'. But if this means that less pastoral work is being done, something is wrong.

And yet, diligence, though essential, will not of itself produce the true pastor. It will ensure that we care for the material and physical wants of those in trouble, and their loneliness. It will not of itself give us the spiritual discernment to understand, to sympathise truly, and, hardest of all, to give godly advice that will carry conviction but cause no unnecessary offence. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. . . . Bear ye one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:1-2). How feeble we often feel when faced with real spiritual problems! How much of the current weakness of our meetings could be traced to this source?

Scripture Truth

JANUARY, 1979

(incorporating "Words of Help")

"THE HALF WAS NOT TOLD ME"

COLIN CURRY

1 KINGS 10 : 1-13

IN papers published in the last two issues we have observed the deep exercises of soul described in Psalms 139 and 51. The psalmist passed through these experiences as the searchlight of God's scrutiny penetrated to the roots of his being. While they were humbling experiences, they were also highly profitable for him.

But when God's light searches out a person, it does more than bring about that self-awareness and self-judgment which is so necessary. It carries with it a positive content; it reveals something of its Source too. David was learning more of God as well as judging himself in these psalms. Light from God exposes the whole truth about its recipients, but it also discloses what God is like. The light of God revealed in the Bible (and especially in Christ) shines brightly with its own excellent qualities; its self-evident and self-revealing nature can startle and continually surprise us with its splendour and magnitude. To be under its impact is a profound experience, hard to take in because of the fullness of what is presented to us, but also beneficial for us in a large way.

We take the story of the queen of Sheba as a picture of this experience, and as a passage on which to base some comments on it.

His fame heard

The story of the splendour of the reign of Solomon, and of the magnificence of the temple that he built, forms one of the few high points in Israel's Old Testament history. Temporarily at least, Jerusalem was at the centre of the picture, and her function as a centre of witness to the nations, attracting them to the place where God was known, was being fulfilled in a limited way. Sadly this was not to continue. It was to be marred and spoiled soon after, and while there were partial revivals later, the bulk of the Old Testament story tells of dishonour to God from His people rather than of a true representation of Him. However, all that God intended for His people is not lost; many a prophetic passage foresees and promises the day of earthly glory, when, centred on Zion, a world-wide display of the glory of God, drawing in the tributes from the nations, will yet take place. Isaiah 60 is a sample of such passages and a rather special one too. (Note the appearance of Sheba among the many quarters from which the response will come;

and let us marvel at the prospect of what God can yet do in an area where the bitterest of tensions still exists.) In those days all adversaries of God have been quelled, and true quietude and blessing for this earth will be known. It will be brought about by One who combines the roles of David and Solomon in a perfect and supreme way.

But our Lord sets the story of Solomon in a new light, stressing its present relevance, telling us that, "a greater than Solomon" has come near to us. The queen of Sheba's way of responding to the report of Solomon's splendour rebukes all slowness in our reaction to the surpassing glory and wisdom which Christ unveils to us. He says it solemnly to those who refuse Him (Matthew 12:42). But clearly He is commending faith that enquires and is active, and which measures up in some degree to the light it receives. Such faith is rewarded by more than it expects. In our day the most glorious things that a man can consider have come near to us in Christ. We do not have to seek Him from afar; He is accessible to us in His great grace. Are these greater things to be met, on our part, by a faith which compares poorly with the queen of Sheba's, which had only a report of material and earthly excellence to prompt it? Having heard of the fame of Jesus, let us feel the urge to know Him better, and let us make purposeful movements towards Him, of a kind that will be worthy of Him.

His splendour seen

Having heard from afare of the fame of Solomon, the queen of Sheba set out to discover the truth of the matter for herself. She took it all in, in all its detail and vastness, and was stunned and amazed at what she saw. In a small way it prefigures the day when the glory of Christ will startle the nations, when "kings (and doubtless queens) shall shut their mouths at Him" (Isaiah 52:15). We use the verb "to see" in different ways; it may imply glancing at an object, happening to notice it; or it may mean looking with attention, carefully considering what is seen; again it may be used in the sense of "seeing with understanding", perceiving the meaning of what is viewed. Plainly the queen did not look briefly and casually at what she observed. It entranced her; the comprehensive detail and grandeur of it all commanded her attention and astonishment. It affected her to the very core: "there was no more spirit in her". She saw it with a measure of understanding too: she saw beyond the superficial splendour. Responses to the Name of Jehovah, the God of Solomon, were promoted by the perception of all the wisdom and magnificence which she observed.

Let us ask ourselves how much we take in, with the eyes of our understanding, of the glory of Christ. How much, and how often, is our attention absorbed with Him; how much do we discern of His excellences, and what is their effect upon us? His personal glories and capabilities are an exhaustless theme for our meditation; His deity, His eternal being, the Son of the Father, the Spokesman for God, the Revealer of God to men, the One Mediator, the man Christ Jesus. We can think of the manner of that revelation, the qualities of that life of the Son of God here on earth, the flawlessness of that perfect

humanity, His deeds, His graces, His faithfulness, His love. We can see the ultimate exhibition of these perfections at the cross. We can think of Him as the Sufferer, the Bearer of sin, alone and uniquely able to shoulder that burden and perform that crucial work on which everything else turns. Passively, in patient grace and submission, He plumbed the depths of those dark hours. Actively and triumphantly, He went through with it all in the power of His love, and with the utmost devotion and obedience. It is a tremedously glorious sight to gaze on. Then, on the other side of the cross, what glories follow! His resurrection glory, His ascended glory, "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", "the glory that excelleth". All the fulness dwells in Him; in all things He has the pre-eminence. He is foremost in every area, and from every point of view. He is the Initiator of the new creation, the Firstborn from among the dead, the Head of the body, His church. He is at the centre of that new realm, and at its pinnacle too. In the wider sense He is also absolutely supreme. His Name is far above every name that is named; He is Lord of all. His public glories are soon to be openly on display, though the Scriptures unveil these things to us in advance. Both now and later, every function that our Lord performs and every office that He fills are discharged in an entirely capable and admirable way. These too are parts of this wide-ranging and moving theme.

It is plain that words fall far short when such an Object fills our vision. But surely our souls should be stirred by these great matters. The queen of Sheba's reaction is a good picture of what our response to such transcendent themes should be. Let us show, by humble and zealous interest, that we are really and thankfully appreciative of our opportunity to be engaged in such a vast field of occupation.

His wisdom proved

Besides the broad outward range of glory which impressed her, the queen of Sheba had inward needs and questionings that were settled too. **Her** problems were more than answered by **his** wisdom. One can easily see that the personal link with Solomon, through speaking with him at close quarters, provided the major part of the satisfaction she gained from her visit. She communed with him of all that was in her heart, and he set her mind at rest on every issue.

Is it not marvellously true in our own experience too that, while a vast range of glories surrounds the Name of Jesus, one of the greatest satisfactions is that we have a personal link with Him? Our contact with Him by faith is close; the bond is a firm and living one. He answers our deepest needs; we know peace of conscience and find rest in His presence. Those that labour and are heavy laden find rest of soul there; burdens are eased and problems are settled as we know His guidance and companionship in life. The hard things, the enigmatic experiences, the anxieties that life brings, are softened by the knowledge of His present love and support. Distresses and restiveness can be calmed in the awareness of His close understanding of our needs. We can accept the mysteries of God's ways with us in the light of His unquestionable love and wisdom expressed to us in Christ.

All the queen's desires were met. Not only are the problems answered, but our souls are filled with the positive satisfactions that our Lord imparts. His wisdom surpasses the solution of our hard questions. We can enter into the realm where Wisdom has her own treasures to unfold. Christ is made unto us wisdom (Proverbs 8:1-36; 1 Corinthians 1:30). It is a hidden wisdom, not recognised on the natural plane, higher than worldly or academic wisdom. Where Christ Himself is pre-eminent, filling the vision of the soul, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found. "The deep things of God" beyond the reach of the natural senses centre on the person of Christ, and can be entered into today by the Spirit of God. All other occupations, compared with these experiences, are of very secondary value. Do we know something of this in our own personal experience?

His bounty received

A further feature running right through the story is the abundance and high quality of all that the queen participated in during her stay with Solomon. There was an **excess** about it, over-topping all that she had heard or expected. His wisdom amazed her. The wealth of her welcome and her reception took her by surprise. What she had heard in her own country was true, but inadequate as a description of the reality. She came with gifts, and very considerable gifts too; but his generosity to her was of a different order of magnitude. All that she desired she received, but his royal bounty added a substantial surplus.

Is this not also a true picture of the exceedingly rich grace of which the New Testament speaks, of the **excellence** of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, of the best robe, the fatted calf and the Father's home, and all the other things (undreamed-of, yet amazingly true) open to us when we find ourselves entering the realm where Christ is supreme? Do we appreciate the wealth of our blessings in Christ with constantly fresh surprise and gratitude? How far does our reaction to our Lord's great wealth and open-handedness match that of the queen of Sheba to Solomon in her day?

Her gifts and tributes rendered

The queen's gifts to Solomon were substantial, and they were willingly given. More than her gifts, there was that response from her heart, in silent amazement first, and then in words which revealed her tremendous esteem for Solomon, and her tribute to Jehovah Who had set him in this place of eminence and wisdom. It was a fitting and deeply-felt acknowledgement of the Source of all the wealth in which she participated.

But in the nature of the situation she could be no more than a visitor to that realm of exceptional earthly magnificence. She did not belong there. The memory of what she had witnessed no doubt remained with her. While there, she spoke of the happiness of those who remained continually in that place, serving and honouring the one who dominated their whole outlook on life. Shall we, who have been translated into

the kingdom of One far greater than Solomon, the Son of the Father's love, act like rare visitors to the realm to which by marvellous grace we belong? May our gratitude be more worthy of that grace: and may our responses to our all-pre-eminent Lord be fresh and sustained, as we live in His presence and are moved by His surpassing love and glory.

OUR THREEFOLD SALVATION——— R. A. CREETH

WHAT an important thing salvation is! Is it not the foundation for the greatest of our spiritual blessings? It has the meaning of deliverance from peril and danger, for sin has exposed us to the greatest danger of all — eternal judgment. And it is God's salvation that brings us deliverance from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

It has been aptly said by another, "As guilty, we need forgiveness. As under condemnation, we need justification. As having lapsed into bondage, we need redemption. As enemies in our minds by wicked works, utterly alienated from God, we need reconciliation. As lost and perishing, it is salvation we need." (F. B. Hole).

Let us link three passages of scripture that together will give us a most comprehensive view of the great salvation that God has wrought for us.

1. "The Gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13)

Writing to the Ephesians the apostle traces their spiritual blessing back to the time when they learned to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." This is what God has wrought for everyone who believes, for having believed we were marked out for God, and thus preserved we are assured of absolute security. But what is it that we have believed? It is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, made known to us through the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. This expression suggests the full and complete deliverance from the thraldom of sin and the power of Satan.

The deliverance of the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt provides a graphic illustration of the salvation God has accomplished for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we have the first mention of salvation in the Bible, in the words of Moses to the people: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:13,14). This reminds us that the great deliverance was to be Jehovah's work from first to last. And when the children of Israel were brought safely to the other side of the Red Sea, walking upon dry land in the midst of the sea, the waters being a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left, we have the divine commentary on this mighty deliverance. "Thus the Lord saved Israel

that day out of the hand of the Egyptians ; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians ; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses."

Thus Jehovah became to Israel a Saviour-God. As one writer puts it, "Salvation always means a great deal more than that my sins are judged in the death of Christ. Salvation means that **I am brought consciously to know God in the triumph of redemption**" (W. Kelly). It suggests Christ's complete victory over all adversaries. God is for His people against all the power of the enemy. And "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

2. "The Captain of our Salvation" (Hebrews 2 : 10)

The previous scripture reminded us of the great work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and the subsequent triumph of His resurrection. In Hebrews 2 our gaze is directed to Him in His present position as the risen and glorified Man. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." And the writer goes on: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

The word "Captain" is the same as "Author" in chapter 12:2. He is the File Leader of His people, undertaking for them in every way, and leading them on to glory. But first, in consistency with the very character of God, He must be made perfect through sufferings. We must remember that He was always perfect in Himself, but having taken up our cause He must go through everything that God's glory demanded. Sin must be dealt with and atoned for, and for the Lord Jesus the road lay right on through all the sufferings of the cross until He became the perfect Saviour in resurrection. Now it is our privilege to look "steadfastly on Jesus, the Leader and Completer of faith ; who, in view of the joy lying before Him, endured the cross, having despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2, J.N.D.).

Let us see what this great Captain of salvation is going to do. He is going to bring many sons to glory! Notice that it is sons that He has before Him ; not servants to be given some distant place in the glory, but those near to Himself, those indeed in the eternal and intimate relationship of sonship. This is His grand purpose, and how we should praise Him for it!

Having accomplished all, He brings His redeemed ones into a place of wonderful nearness and blessing. For He, the Sanctifier, and we, the sanctified, are all "of one"; we are brought into the same position and place of privilege in which He is before God. And He goes on to say, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given Me." We are brought into the privileged place of children and members of the same family. We are all of one as set apart to God.

What a wonderful truth it is that we are even now sanctified for glory! The Lord has set Himself apart in heaven as the glorified Man

in order to form and fashion us now by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. As risen and glorified, Christ is said to be "made perfect", and to have become the author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him (chapter 5:9). And as chapter 2:17,18 tells us, not only has He made propitiation for our sins, but "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

He is leading many sons to glory, and the One Who is bringing us there will surely undertake for us along the way. He is our great High Priest, able to save to the uttermost extent of the journey all those that come unto God by Him, seeing He is ever living to intercede for them (see Hebrews 7:25). This is a present and continuous salvation, a day by day salvation made good to us by the priestly intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. "The hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5 : 8)

The apostle is exhorting the Thessalonians to put on the breastplate of faith and love ; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. This passage presents salvation as a future thing. It is our hope to be realised at the Lord's coming, for "we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory" (Philippians 3:20, J.N.D.). And Hebrews 9:28 tells us that the One Who has already appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, will appear the second time, apart from sin, unto salvation.

This future salvation will be the Lord's last act of deliverance on our behalf. We have already received the salvation of our souls, being delivered from the power of sin and of Satan, as set forth in the gospel of our salvation. We are even now experiencing the delivering grace of our great High Priest on high, the mighty Captain of salvation, Who is engaged in leading us to glory. We await His last redemptive operation at His coming, when the dead in Christ will be raised first, the living saints changed, and together we shall be caught up to be for ever with the Lord.

This glorious hope of salvation we are exhorted to wear as an helmet, which, with the breastplate of faith and love, will protect us from all the attacks of the enemy while waiting for Him. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."

"NOT OF THE LETTER, BUT OF THE SPIRIT"

J. STODDART

2 Corinthians 3 : 1-6

LETTERS of commendation would appear to be the opening topic of 2 Corinthians 3. Are they necessary? Who should require them? Who should provide them? This is sometimes considered to be a sensitive

or even controversial subject in our day, yet the apostle, with the vast skill and gift given him and the gracious unction of the Spirit, turns the question into one of immense profit and importance. And this, not only for the Corinthians in their day, but for ourselves in our day and generation.

Evidently the salutary character of the first epistle had sobered the church at Corinth to the extent that it seemed necessary to them to examine the credentials even of those through whom they had been converted and been instructed in the faith! Little wonder the apostle recalls their extreme concern in chapter 7:8-11, speaking of their carefulness, clearing of themselves, indignation, "fear, yea, what vehement desire, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" But did not such a change of heart overreach itself in demanding a letter of commendation from the beloved apostle himself, who, addressing them as "dearly beloved" (chapter 7:1-2) has to make the sad plea, "Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man?" How deeply touching to heart and conscience! They were rejecting their very father in the faith and the very truth he had taught them. But what kind of letter of commendation would they accept, and written by whom? The answer is beautifully supplied by Paul himself.

Why, the Corinthian believers themselves were the most authentic and convincing "letter" in the immediate situation. How incontestably true it was that **they** were "manifestly declared to be the epistle [or, letter] of Christ", known and read of all men. This was no scrap of paper written with ink but an indestructable commendation written "with the Spirit of the living God". The apostle had been the instrument of that writing "in fleshy tables of the heart". How foolish to demand anything more than this! But to satisfy the genuine conscience graciously (an unvarying principle with Paul), he would say (verse 5), "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able [or, competent] ministers of the new testament [or, covenant]; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Surely to deny reception of the apostle would be to deny themselves as the product of the life-giving ministry of the Spirit. What grace and wisdom are enshrined in the way he dealt with this truly difficult situation!

Alas, as with much New Testament truth, the pattern of divine dealings with the saints is not always recognised or practised, and consequently laxity on the one hand and legality on the other have marked and marred much of the responsible action taken down through the years. However, the precise character both of the apostle's doctrine and of his practice remain for us to this day to guide and encourage us even though it is a day of great weakness. No modification, deviation or exception to this are envisaged in the New Testament. When the apostle says, "Not of the letter, but of the spirit," he refers, of course, to the letter of the Old Covenant (the Law) which "killeth". Truly, it was "the ministration of death" (verse 7), for when Moses descended from Sinai with the Law, three thousand men were slain because of their corruption (Exodus 32:28). And, in contrast, when the Spirit of

God came down at Pentecost three thousand souls were saved and added to the Church. In its primary sense the New Covenant is literally made with Israel and Judah (see Jeremiah 31:31), but the spirit of that covenant in this the Spirit's day is that which Paul ministered by the Holy Spirit, as a "savour of life unto life" to believers. The actual, literal fulfilment of the New Covenant will take place in the Lord's millennial reign. The Old Covenant will never be revived again (see Hebrews 8:7-13). But God remains faithful to His promise.

Let us not make the mistake clung to by some that "not of the letter" means that we should not regard the New Testament writings too literally. This is but an excuse for laxity and a recipe for complete confusion. The most stringent rule as to this is made by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 14:37, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." In principle this surely applies to all the writings of the New Testament, and he would be bold in the extreme who would aver (as some do) that these must not be taken literally. The question may be raised as regards the Old Testament, and here the greatest of care must needs be exercised. Nothing can impugn the truth that **every** Scripture (Old and New Testaments) is "divinely inspired, and profitably . . ." (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16 J.N.D.). Of the Old Testament it is said that "they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Again, "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Thus the two Testaments are complementary, as the Latin quotation expresses it: **In Vetere Novum Latet et in Novo Vetus patet** (The New Testament is latent in the Old: the Old is patent in the New). But we ignore at our peril the difference between the two dispensations they represent. The Old Testament must now be read in the light of the history which has followed its completion; the birth, life and death of Jesus, His resurrection, glorification and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"Not of the letter, but of the spirit," would guard against unwarranted use of Old Testament Scriptures (many of which, in prophetic style, have already been fulfilled and others await a future fulfilment) and it is the Holy Spirit alone Who guides us into all truth (cf. John 16:13), and gives intelligent discernment as to that which is relevant to this day and age. Sometimes the straining of the primary meaning of Old Testament Scriptures in order to give a present day application has been both unwarranted and misleading. But we may value and enjoy the many clear and precious types of Christ and His work which are validated by their inclusion and quotation in the New Testament.

May all our hearts be lifted, encouraged and stimulated by these brief considerations, for His Name's sake.

THE WORD

JOHN BARNES

A STUDY IN PSALM 119

IT is well known that some synonym of "word" occurs in nearly every verse of this Psalm. A good concordance will show the searcher that in the main, eight different words with this meaning are employed throughout the composition. These words do not appear to be uniformly translated in the Authorised Version of the Old Testament but they seem to suggest a considerable body of instruction.

1. Torah (The Law) : v. 1 ff

The lexicons give this important word the meaning of "teaching", with the associated idea of "direction". When we reflect that the life of the godly in this world is often referred to in Scripture as a journey, the concept of instruction as to its direction comes as welcome light from the Lord. We cannot know the way of ourselves without divine guidance ,and this is provided in the Word. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (verse 105). Our natural inclination would be to follow other ways. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man" (Proverbs 14:12). How grateful we are for the plain teaching of the Scriptures and for the gracious signposts set up for our guidance. This guidance is "all the way". Psalm 119 is an alphabet of wonderful instruction. If we are young learners in the school of God and still in our ABCs, there is suitable teaching. If, by grace, we have made some little progress and have reached the LMNs, we still need much help. Even the richly mature, the XYZ believers, confess that they cannot do without the instruction of God's word. One advanced teacher of an earlier day is believed to have said, "If there remains but one step between now and the glory, I could not take it on my own."

2. Eduth (Testimony) : v. 2

Testimony or witness is before the writer's mind in his use of this word. That God has given witness concerning Himself is evident, and that we could not know about Him without it is equally plain. In Psalm 19 the writer brings before his readers in beautiful order how God has given testimony of Himself in creation and in His word ; both speak of Him each in its own way. Thus we not only have teaching concerning the way but also concerning God who has called us to Himself in that way. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19). The relatively uneducated, by the world's standards, may enjoy infinitely valuable insight into eternal truth. The early apostles, known to be ignorant and untaught by accepted standards, were recognised as those who were with Jesus. It was asserted of the Lord Jesus, "Never man spake like this man", and it was He who had taught them and it was His wisdom they had learned.

3. Piqqadim (Precepts): v. 4

There are obvious responsibilities connected with the knowledge of God. To one who has come to know God even in the feeblest sense of the word, things can never be the same again. True joy can only be found as we are in a responsive state towards the blessed Person who has come out in grace to meet us. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them". As creatures in relationship with the God who made us for Himself, we come into the sphere where His will is known. This includes the unfolding to our minds of the kind of behaviour He expects of the members of His family. In this context He has made statements which, as coming from Him who has supreme authority in the universe, are framed in the form of charges. Though Psalm 119 is in an Old Testament setting, we shall find the principle no less clearly stated in the New Testament. This truth runs, for example, through Paul's epistles to Timothy, especially through 1 Timothy, where Paul uses the word "charge" seven times.

4. Choq (Statute)

The idea of appointed task and decreed limit is said to be included in the many shades of meaning possible to this word. We have our work to do for the Lord and few would seek to evade this altogether, though many of us feel we make a poor showing. However, doing this work within prescribed limits tends to make men chafe and fret. We rebel at limitations, but safety often lies in keeping within boundaries. Every aspect of living proves this to be so. Our safety as believers in the sphere of daily life lies in keeping within the bounds the Lord lays down for us. In the Song of Songs a metaphor is used which may help us to see this point. "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (Song of Songs 4:12). In the semi-desert regions of North Africa one can see, here and there, walled-in gardens which are located on sites containing wells or cisterns. The wall is not primarily intended to keep the garden in but to keep the desert out. If we could give a plant personality we might hear it say, "Why cannot I have more room to grow?" and so wish the wall away. But if the wall were removed the same plant would be suffocated by the invading sterility of the encircling waste. We need the wall not only to preserve the amenities provided inside but to keep out the influences which would damage the fruitfulness of the garden and pollute the water in the well. In this connection Isaiah 5:1-7 is relevant. The process suggested above is graphically described there. What Israel rebelled against was in reality salvation to them. Once the fence was removed the nation was exposed to the devastating influences of the destructive forces around.

In John's second epistle there is a solemn warning to us not to step outside of prescribed limits. "Whosoever transgresseth . . ." (verse 9) seems to mean, "Whosoever goes beyond". There is the idea of breaking out of a barrier. The man who goes beyond what is revealed and seeks

to speculate on or to pry into the unknown, moves into the dangerous outside darkness where safety is not to be found. There is safety in the light but not in the darkness. The body of revealed truth may perhaps be described as a circle of light; if in our human curiosity or in the working of the human intellect, we step out of that circle to probe into the occult or the speculative (a real peril today) we step out of light into darkness. We should be profoundly thankful for the divine barriers graciously set up for our protection.

5. Mitvah (Commandment)

This word may simply mean commandment or order in the way in which we normally understand the term. While it is true that the believer today is not under law but under grace, and that the law we know as the law of Moses does not apply to man under grace, yet we have not been brought into a "do as you please" sphere. In the Christian circle we do have commandments. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments". John, in his first epistle, uses the word "commandment" about seven times, and his concluding reference is most encouraging: "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). The old system of commandments related to man in the flesh and made impossible demands on man in that order. The new commandments relate to man in the Spirit, in a region where love pervades all, and the principle is wholly different.

6. Dabar (Word)

It seems that this expression may be pretty well synonymous with our own noun "word", though the lexicons give a fair number of possible renderings. The primary root appears to be based on the idea "to arrange". The Divine Person who has, in infinite grace, put Himself in communication with man has spoken in intelligible terms. Scientists today are trying to decipher the meaning, if any ,of the electronic noises of stellar space. God has, however, spoken to man in clear terms and He has set in order what He had said to us. He spoke in early days in a number of ways, from time to time making further aspects of truth known in a variety of communications. In the age in which we live He has spoken fully and finally "in Son", giving a perfect revelation of Himself in the One who is the Word. That there is order and infinitely wise arrangement in all this need hardly be stressed, and indeed it is the delight of the Bible student to trace these communications through the word and to enjoy their beauty. He who is the God of measure and order speaks in a way true to what He is in Himself, in the One who is His Fellow and His Equal.

7. Mishpat (Judgements)

If we are to arrive at a true estimate of any matter brought to our notice, we must have the facts. However, not only must we know the truth of the matter, we also need a right disposition to handle the details

of the case in such a way as to reach a true conclusion. For example, prejudice would preclude an accurate conclusion, even where the facts are fairly presented. As this is the case in the ordinary judgements of life, of how much greater importance it is in the matter of the soul and of eternity! God has given us a wealth of detailed information in His word but we need more than even this gracious provision. We are also dependent on His Holy Spirit to enable us to take in the truth offered and to promote in us a right disposition to use the truth aright and to make proper applications of its directions. So the need for subjection to the Spirit becomes clear. The Lord Jesus said of the great Divine Person who has taken up His abode in us, "He will guide you into all truth." The ability rightly to make decisions on problems which confront us in life is something we would all desire, and in order to enable us in this wonderful way we have been given the "thinking faculty of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16 N. Tr.).

8. Derek (Way)

This interesting word is understood to have the basic meaning of "a trodden path". All the instructions and precepts of the word may frighten us out of our wits as we consider the hostile environment we live in and our own very evident feebleness and folly. How is it possible to find a safe way through the bewildering maze of this world? Well, the Son of God has been here in Manhood and has trodden the whole pathway from beginning to end.

The Father would not require us to walk "as He walked", unless He had indeed travelled the road Himself; and He has done this. "He has marked out the path that we tread." It is this "beaten path" we are counselled to follow with our eye firmly fixed on Him who completed it. "Looking off unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Some take the view that the preposition "off", which should be supplied, although ommitted in the A.V., suggests the idea that every other object is excluded, that it means looking away from every other object and focussing the attention on Jesus, to the exclusion of everything else. This is the blessed forerunner, Who marked out the path and is ascended to glory.

THREE RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD

WILLEM J. OUWENEEL

2. CHILDREN OF GOD: PART TWO

In the previous article we considered our individual relationship with God as His children, as we found it in John's Gospel and First Epistle. In this article we will firstly examine the teachings of the apostle Paul on this subject, finding that they agree exactly with the teachings of John, though with added characteristics. Then we shall consider the correspondence between our individual relationship as children of God, and our corporate relationship as the Bride of Christ.

1. The Children of God in the Epistles of Paul

John brings the things of God, the heavenly things, down to earth. He shows us that we possess them now. Hence John speaks especially of the relationship of children: in a hostile world here to display God's nature. Paul takes believers up to God, united with Christ, and seated in heavenly places. Hence Paul speaks especially of sonship. Nevertheless, in three places Paul refers to our relationship as children.

Firstly, in Romans 8, especially verses 16 and 17. "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . .". In brief, this is the same truth as we have already found in John. But it contains a new element: the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fact that we are children. We have seen the way in which our being children relates us to the Lord Jesus: we follow His footsteps in the world where He suffered. We have seen the way it relates us to the Father: we are born of Him, and are here to display His nature; and now in this world are the especial objects of His love. Our being children relates us to the Holy Spirit thus: He it is Who has come to earth to accompany us on the difficult journey through the wilderness. To be a child of God is a blessing, but also a responsibility. The Holy Spirit helps and guides us, bringing us to our goal. He it is Who gives us the inward conviction of this heavenly truth, that we are children of God. In the sequence of Romans, after the question of death has been resolved in chapter 6, and the question of the law in chapter 7, so that we are now free from death and the law, then chapter 8:1 tells us that, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus". We are "in" Him. Although still in the world, we are found in it "in Christ Jesus". Christ is on our side, so God is on our side, and so we read in verse 31, "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son . . . how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The Holy Spirit has come into the world where everything is designed to injure the child of God and to destroy his testimony, in order to create the immovable conviction in our hearts that we are children of God, that God is for us and that the Father loves us.

The children of God suffer now, but they have a hope: ". . . And if children then heirs also, heirs of God, and Christ's joint heirs; if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with him". Here also we see the other side of our relationship as children. Children display the characteristics of God before the world, in suffering now, but in glory soon. Paul agrees with John.

Being heirs of God also has to do with sonship, as we shall see in a later article. Here we see that the children's hope is to be glorified with Christ. And not only is it our hope, but it is also the hope of the entire creation (vv. 19-22). What the world of unregenerate man cannot see, is perceived by the animal and plant creation which groans under the consequences of man's fall. When once the children of God are manifested in glory before the creation, it will be loosed from the bonds that at present bind it.

The characteristics of the children of God appear secondly in Philippians 2:14-15. "Do all things without murmurings and reasonings,

that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of light in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life . . ." At the beginning of this chapter we read the testimony borne by the Lord Jesus. But the context is established by words we often omit from verse 5: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . .". Have you read that the Lord Jesus humbled Himself? Let this mind be in you. That He took a bondman's form? Let this mind be in you. That He was obedient? Let this mind be in you. Obedient even unto death? Let this mind be in you.

The truth here is, then, the same as in John's writings. We are to follow the footsteps of Him Who humbled Himself for us. Children, heirs, but we suffer with Him that we might reign with Him. The Lord was harmless, simple and irreproachable in the midst of a crooked generation. So must we be. He was the Light of the world. We are to shine as lights in the world. He was the Word of Life. We are to hold forth the word of life. We stand where Christ stood, now that He has gone back to the Father, having been rejected by the world.

Lastly in Paul, I come to the first verse of Ephesians 5. "Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God as dear children". Yet again, in a third Epistle, we find the same truth! How can we as creatures imitate God? Only as those born of Him, as His "dear children".

Walk in love, we read in verse 2. Walk as children of light, we read in verse 8. Light and love: we are imitators of God. And is it not touching to see that here also the example of what the Lord did when He was in the world is placed before us? ". . . Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour". He was a sweet savour to God because He glorified God in all that He did. Now it is our turn; now we are to be the imitators of God, showing His characteristics, His light and love, to His glory.

2. The Child of God, and the Bride of Christ

Finally, I wish to return to an aspect of the subject to which I referred at the start of the previous article. There I referred to three corporate relationships in which we stand: as the Bride of Christ, as His Body, and as the House of God. Now I wish to show that there is a correspondence between our individual relationship as children, and our corporate one, as Bride.

These distinctions are not sharp. But it is at least clear that in Scripture the Bride of Christ is also a testimony to the world, by the fact that she is united to Him Whom the world still rejects, and that in a coming day she will be a testimony to the glory of God which she will bear.

To consider the former point first. The Bride must be born of the Bridegroom's family, just as the children are born of God. Abraham sent his servant to his own country, and made him promise to take a wife for his son out of his own family. The one hundred and twenty who were gathered together at Pentecost, and out of whom the assembly

of God, the Bride of Christ, was formed, were not up to that point unbelievers, but were already children of God. And these it is who, like Rebecca (Genesis 24) are led by the Spirit through this world to the Bridegroom. As they travel the Spirit encourages them, strengthening in them ever afresh the conviction that they are the objects of the Father's love, and of the love of their heavenly Bridegroom Himself.

On the latter point: that the Bride will bear the glory of God. "Come hither", says the angel to John, "I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife". What did John see? "The great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God . . ." (Revelation 21:9-11). Would you have dared to say that, had Scripture not itself said it? When, in the millennium, the world wishes to see the glory of God, it will see it in this city, in this Bride. The Bride however should already bear the glory of her Bridegroom, as she travels through the wilderness, just as everyone could see that Rebecca, when she travelled, was adorned with the glory of Abraham and of Isaac. And in the day to come, when we return with Christ, the world will see in us individually as heirs, corporately as His Bride, the glory of God. God has planned it thus, that He might vindicate Himself over the world, in the face of Angels and devils. Then the world will see that those who have reproduced His nature now in suffering are united with the Son Whom He has glorified. What a privilege, but what a responsibility it will be to glorify God in that day ! But this is my responsibility **now,** and yours. We have the capacity for this, for we are born of Him. The Holy Spirit is with us. The Father loves us. The Son loves us, and gave Himself for us. He sanctifies and cleanses us, individually and corporately, to present to Himself a glorious church. The result will be seen at the marriage supper of the Lamb. There the "righteousnesses of the saints" will be displayed in the garment which the Bride wears. There the light and love of God which she has been able to reproduce in the world will be seen in glory.

We should rejoice that we are the children of God, but I hope too that we have discerned the responsibilities which attach to this relationship. God saw in the Lord Jesus His Son, His beloved, in Whom He found all His delight. What would it mean for Him if He could see again in us, children who show something of His own nature: light in the midst of darkness, love in a world of hatred? The Lord, the Father, the Holy Spirit give us grace for this.

Scripture Truth

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(incorporating "Words of Help")

FELLOW-WORKERS WITH PAUL

T. D. SPICER

2. LUKE

OF the companions of the Apostle Paul none holds such an important place as Luke, "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:4). Not only was the Apostle to the Gentiles greatly indebted to him for his company during many arduous and wearying journeys, but Gentiles of succeeding ages are indebted to him for the legacy of his writings — the Gospel that bears his name, and the book of the "Acts of the Apostles".

It would appear that Luke first joined Paul at Troas during the Apostle's second missionary journey. This can be deduced from his use for the first time of the first person plural in his narrative. After saying, "they passing by Mysia came down to Troas", he then goes on, "and after he had seen the vision, immediately **we** endeavoured to go into Macedonia" (Acts 16:8,10). But we lose the expression when Paul leaves Macedonia until he returns several years later. Here it is that we detect the presence of Luke again, and by the same method, the change of a pronoun. "These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi and came unto them at Troas" (Acts 20:5,6). From this time on he appears to be in close companionship with the Apostle till the end of the events which are recorded in Acts. He certainly went with him as far as Rome.

The Biographer

Tradition, which is unreliable, says that Luke was a painter; but whether that is true or not, certainly we owe to him the wonderful pen-portrait that we have of the Apostle Paul. The portrait is drawn by the hand of a master and is at the same time that of a friend and devoted companion. See how thoroughly the biographer — although in a sense he is also writing an autobiography — forgets himself and in so doing reveals something of his own character. In what he says of Paul and refrains from saying about himself, he shows his warm, steady friendship and devotion; and at the same time, his modesty and humility.

We learn more about our subject, however, through what is said of him by the Apostle. He speaks of him as, "Luke, my fellow-labourer" and "the beloved physician" (Philemon 24 and Colossians 4:14). The mere fact that his profession and occupation in life are specified is full of interest. There are only two other similar cases in the record which

we have of the Apostle's companions — Lydia, the seller of purple; and Aquila and Priscilla who were tent-makers. Of Alexander the coppersmith, or Zenas the lawyer, we know too little to warrant doing more than mentioning their names. We are justified, however, in believing that Luke's professional life was the occasion of his coming into close contact with Paul who had been seriously ill while in Galatia (Galatians 4:13). It is soon after this that we find Luke with him.

As we have already commented, our greatest debt to Luke today is for his divinely inspired writings; these together form at least a quarter of the entire New Testament and give the story of the Gospel from the birth of Jesus Christ until it reached the whole of the Mediterranean world.

The Historian

Luke has not given us that which cost nothing. The Spirit of God used a man who did not begin to write until he had gathered his material together and marshalled his facts. He claims to be, and is, carefully systematic in the presentation of his narrative — "it seemed good to me also . . . to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). His sources of information are unique and this is seen in the accounts in his Gospel of the nativity and of events in Herod's court; while it may be that the first eleven chapters of Acts owe much under the Spirit of God to his stay in Caesarea in the company of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8).

The writer sets his narratives in the context of Imperial history, and three Roman Emperors are mentioned by name — Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius. One who relates his story to the wider context of world affairs gives his critics many opportunities for checking his accuracy. Luke comes through these tests with flying colours. He is familiar with the proper titles for all the notable persons who figure in his records, and his accuracy in this and other things is confirmed either by secular writers or archaeological research.

The Physician

In his descriptions of various diseases there are indications that the writer was familiar with the technical language of the profession. We read, for example, of "a certain man which had the dropsy" (Luke 14:2) and the term is a technical one showing his interest and enquiry into the nature of the diseases healed by our Lord. With a touch of professional etiquette he refers to the woman with an issue of blood as one who "had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any" (Luke 8:43) and this is in contrast to Mark's account where it is said that "she suffered many things of many physicians, and spent all that she had and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:26).

The Church has always held Luke in high esteem. In the Book of Common Prayer he is specially remembered in these words, "May it

please Thee, that, by the wholesome medicine of the doctrine delivered by him all the diseases of our souls may be healed." As we have seen, Luke's writings have many distinguishing characteristics, but most important of these are the words of consolation he has for those suffering from sorrow or sin. His is the Gospel for the sinner. It brings out the compassionate love of Christ in becoming man to save us. Luke tells of humble shepherds to whom were announced tidings of great joy. "Unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." He shows that Jesus in His baptism took His place among the multitudes, identifying Himself with them: and at the commencement of His ministry He is shown taking His place in the synagogue at Nazareth and applying to Himself the gracious words of Isaiah which proclaimed His ministry of mercy to the broken-hearted. Luke records Jesus' compassion to the widow of Nain and the parables in his Gospel demonstrate His compassion and saving power. Luke alone of the evangelists tells us that when our Lord saw the city He wept over it ; and that even while hanging on the cross He showed mercy to a dying thief, thus gathering the first-fruits of His suffering.

The Evangelist of Prayer

Luke is also the evangelist of prayer. He tells us about Jesus' prayers and how He taught men to pray. Jesus, we are told, prayed before He chose His disciples, at His baptism ; and the transfiguration, according to Luke's account, took place during prayer. Nothing could more clearly indicate a constant habit of prayer than the reference to the terrible "sifting" which the disciples were to experience: but Jesus said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not ; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). We could not find more "wholesome medicine" anywhere. The doctrine given us by Luke is surely the most effective for all the diseases of the soul.

Turning to the Acts of the Apostles we discover that there is no lack of tenderness and affection in this later "treatise". It would be difficult to find a passage of Scripture more expressive of deep sorrow and suffering than the address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. Again, prayer is brought before us in a most emphatic way as the Apostle "kneeled down, and prayed with them all" on that shore (Acts 20:36). Again, at the close of the same journey, we find Paul and his companions at prayer on the seashore at Tyre. In earlier chapters we discover that it was when Peter "went up upon the housetop to pray" (Acts 10:9) that he received the vision of the propagation of the Gospel to the Gentiles, and a little further on we learn the effectiveness of the prayer meeting at "the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:12). How important are both the individual and corporate aspects of prayer !

The "wholesome doctrine" of warm encouragement is also found in the book of the Acts. We may consider the words of reassurance given to Paul at Corinth at a time of trouble, "be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Acts 18:9,10). Or, in the castle at Jerusalem when

threatened with assassination, "be of good cheer Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so thou must bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). We find among the more commonplace encouragements that at the beginning of the journey to Rome, while at Sidon, "Julius courteously entreated Paul and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself." On arrival at Rome he was greeted by the brethren who came to meet him "as far as Appii forum . . . whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage" (Acts 27:3 and 28:15). At these times Luke was still with him to watch over his health and to cheer him with companionship.

So we return to the subject of our study — "Luke, the beloved physician" — faithful and diligent in all these journeys. Indeed, faithful to the very end, for we find him with the Apostle, not only in the first Roman imprisonment, during which the Epistle to the Colossians was written; but also during the last imprisonment of all when others had forsaken him, and he writes with deep feeling, "only Luke is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11).

Let such faithfulness characterise our service for Christ and our companionship of fellow-believers.

THREE RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD

WILLEM J. OUWENEEL

3. SONS OF GOD: PART ONE

IN articles in the last two issues we have examined the meaning of the Scriptural truth that we are "children of God". In this issue and the next we wish to reflect on this other truth, that we are the "sons of God"; and after that, God willing, we shall consider the fact of our being "heirs of God" — if children, then sons and also heirs.

Sonship and the Counsel of God

In this article I shall concentrate on three passages of Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-6, Matthew 3:16,17, and Proverbs 3:11,12. In each of these we read about a "son" or "sons". There is another word common to these passages, and this is the word "pleasure" or "delight". This at once shows us the leading characteristic of sonship. In the Scriptural sense of the word, a man's sons (I am not now speaking about little children) are the objects of their father's delight or pleasure because "sons" are those who can have communion with him, and who can take delight in their father's interests.

This is exactly why God has predestinated us. In thinking about predestination we go far back into eternity, and we see that even then God had sons for Himself in mind. This is a very important feature of Ephesians 1 (but see too Romans 8:29). We read in verse 5 that God had predestinated us "unto adoption of [sons] by Jesus Christ to

himself". Reflection on these few words will give us a better understanding of what sonship means.

It is not primarily a blessing for us; it is a portion that God in eternity has chosen for Himself. When we think about election and predestination, we think of the blessings which God has purposed for **us.** This is true of every other kind of blessing: the God and Father of our Lord Jesus has in His counsels blessed us indeed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (vv. 3-4). But the people who enjoy these blessings are the sons of God; they are the portion which God has chosen for **Himself.** When He thought before eternity of the blessings which He would bestow on us, He also prepared a portion for Himself, and that portion is this fellowship, this company of the sons of God.

And further, what are our "spiritual blessings"? If they were the "heavenly places", then places in themselves would have glory. But it is God the Father and God the Son Who have glory. And so the "spiritual blessings" are what we enjoy in these Divine Persons, that is, in Their fellowship.

How do we receive these blessings that pertain to sonship? In verses 4-5 we perceive that, naturally, we were unable to receive or enjoy this relationship. We were dead. This does not merely mean that we were sinners. Even Adam in innocence could not have enjoyed blessings like these; he was created to enjoy other blessings.

The first thing, then, that we need is found in verse 4: a new nature, which has the same character as the nature of God. Please note the wrong translation of verse 5 in the Authorised Version: "children" ought to read "sons". Children, as we have seen, are indeed born of God, and have a divine nature. Little children, however, enjoy the love of their parents without knowing very much about the interests and affections of their parents. They have to grow up in order to understand them. Here, in Ephesians, "sons" are the subject, those in whom God has implanted a nature capable of sharing those interests and pleasures which His own heart enjoys, and who are therefore a pleasure to Him.

The Image of His Son

Ephesians has shown us the link between sonship and the counsel of God, and the new nature which we have been given to enable us to share the interests and pleasure of God Himself. To find an Example or Model of this in practice we turn to our second Scripture: Matthew 3:16,17. The heavens open above the Lord Jesus Christ, and God Himself says, "This is my beloved Son in whom I have found my delight" (J.N.D. Trans.).

For our subject it is important to observe when God spoke these words. He did not speak them when the Lord Jesus came into the world, true though it is that from eternity He was the delight and pleasure of the Father's heart. God spoke them when He had walked on this earth for thirty years and all that time had been a delight to His Father's heart. The Father's delight was expressed not only in the One

Who is in His bosom, but also in the One Who must be down here, and Who, here as there, was always about His Father's business, always sharing the same designs and affections as His Father. There was a wonderful fellowship between the Father and the Son !

Now, if we want to understand what our sonship is, we see in the Lord Jesus Christ a great Model. For He was a Man on earth Who yet belonged to the atmosphere of heaven, in that all His true interests were there with His Father. The question then addresses me, "Am I a son with whom the Father is well pleased?"

How can I become such a son? When everything I think, say and do is a delight to the Father! This is my responsibility before Him. The object of predestination as it is presented in Romans 8 is that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. God has seen that Son on earth thirty years — "my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". It is to conformity with the image of that Son that God predestinated us in eternity. God desired a company of sons that His Son might be the Firstborn, not only of the dead, not only of the universe, but of "many brethren", all conformed to His image.

But will the heart of God be satisfied that this conformity be realised only in heaven?

No! Immediately after the Lord Jesus came forth from the dead, as the firstfruits of the resurrection, we see Him announce to Mary this wonderful truth of the heavenly company. "Go unto my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father ; and to my God and your God (John 20:17). According to Luke 20.36 (as it should read) the sons of God are the sons of the resurrection. So it was that, as soon as Christ had overcome death, God disclosed His eternal counsel as to sonship, in our Lord's words just quoted, words about a heavenly company, about the brethren who are to be conformed to His image. Brethren, we have that same Father, that same God! We too share the company of His Son as His brethren, sharing His glory!

Notice how this differs from our relationship as children. The children of God are those who in this world share the place of a rejected Christ. The sons of God are those who belong to the resurrection, to heaven, and who share the place of a glorified Christ. Children of God are those who are in the world as the objects of the especial love and care of the Father. Sons of God are those who in heaven bring **their** love and affection to the Father. And when He hears them say, "Abba, Father", His heart takes pleasure in them. He knows those that are His, whose hearts are stirred by love towards the Father and towards the Son Who said on earth, "I love the Father", and Who is now glorified in heaven.

Chastening

In practice we are well aware how dismally we fall short of the image of God's Son. This is where our third Scripture comes in — Proverbs 3:11,12. There we read about something which has no bearing on the life of the Lord — chastening. But our case is different ! Chastening is necessary. People think, nowadays especially, that if you chasten your children you do not really love them. Proverbs says the

opposite. The fact that we chasten our children proves that we do love them. Hebrews 12, quoting from Proverbs 3, confirms this. The fact that the recipients of the epistle were often in affliction proved that they were not "bastards" but "sons".

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord. . . . For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth ; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." When does a father chasten a son in whom he delights? When he sees something about his son in which he cannot delight! God chastens everything in us in which He cannot delight. Do you ever look at chastening in this way? God wants you more wholly for His pleasure. He has sought us out as His own portion, and throughout the centuries He has been waiting for this company which will form His delight. He wants to find His delight in us now. Hence the chastening. It is the proof that He loves us and wants us for Himself.

From these three Scriptures, then, we have seen that the relationship of "sons" is something which God marked out as His own portion before the worlds were made ; that His object in it is to have a company of sons to share His pleasure, who are conformed to the image of His Son ; and that God wants to see this image in us now, and chastens us to this end. "Sonship" is therefore a very practical subject. We shall elaborate this point in greater detail, God willing, in the next article.

PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

TO many Christians the setting aside of a tenth of their income for the Lord's work — which they call a "tithe" — is the supposedly scriptural principle upon which Christian giving should be based.

Let us say at once that there is no reason whatever why a believer who desires thus to set aside a tenth should not do so, but it is nevertheless a mistake to imagine that in so doing he is fulfilling that which an Israelite of old was required to do.

We must not ignore the fact that the tithe was a legal obligation, and vitally connected with Israel's position in the land of promise. To give to God (by giving to the Levites, who had no inheritance in the land) a tenth of the increase of their land and of their flocks and herds was a recognition of the fact that the land belonged to God — they were but sojourners in it (Leviticus 25 : 23) — and that all their prosperity and wealth came from Him. Their tenure of the land depended on their obedience to His law, and the tithing obligation was part of this obedience. We would not however narrow this to pure legality, for in presenting the tithes to the Levites they were passing on to them something of the goodness of their God which they had themselves experienced.

This last is of course a valid principle for God's people in all ages, yet there is an important distinction between the Israelite and the Christian which we must notice. Far from being on probation to see if he would walk in obedience to God, a Christian begins as one "dead in trespasses and sins", lost and ruined till the mercy of God took him

up and gave him a new life and a new standing in Christ. His real life now belongs to another sphere, where Christ is, "hidden in God" (Colossians 3:3), and its true display will not be till Christ comes.

Any legal obligation is thus completely foreign to the Christian position; he is dead to the law that he might live to God. And if God has set us free from the claims of law, He has bound us in the ties of divine love to be like Himself, who is the Giver of all good. That is why Scripture insists that every man should give "according as he purposeth in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). In the light of this verse the tithing principle is seen to be a limiting one, hindering that free working of God's grace in a believer's heart. To one who has plenty of this world's goods to bestow (like Zacchaeus) a half might perhaps be a more gracious response to the overabounding grace of our Lord Jesus Christ towards us. After his death it was found that C. S. Lewis had regularly given away two-thirds of his income. But it must always be a free, personal choice, as to the Lord.

There is always the danger (so deceitful is the human heart), in tithing as a strict rule, of spiritual pride, as with the Pharisee — "I give tithes of all I possess", or of concluding that, having given a tenth to God, the rest is our own, to dispose of as we please. But the believer who is really surrendered to the Lord knows that "ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19,20) — so that **all** that we have and are is the Lord's. Our giving then will be in communion with Him, as we seek, under the promptings of His Spirit, to meet the needs as He shows them to us.

The Unrighteous Steward

The Christian's position in regard to money and other possessions is also illustrated in the parable of the steward in Luke 16. Though saved from the wrath to come, the believer is not restored by grace to the place man had in innocence, but is subject to death in the same way as the unbeliever. As the unrightous steward, accused of wasting his master's goods, was under sentence of dismissal, so our stewardship is liable to be terminated by death. But the Lord Jesus tells us how the steward made use of his master's goods while he yet remained in control of them, to make friends for himself for the future days.

What the steward did unrighteously (though wisely from his own point of view) the Christian is allowed by God's grace to do righteously, though in himself nothing but a saved sinner. We have the privilege of using any wealth entrusted to us in the light of those "eternal habitations" where we shall dwell with Christ.

To help those in need as a testimony to the love of Christ, to forward the work of the gospel, to bring relief to our brethren suffering persecution — in all these and many other ways we may "lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come" (1 Timothy 6:19). Those whom we have been able to help here — how they will rejoice with us when we meet in those eternal mansions!

Incidentally, this gives us a guide as to the charities we should

support, amid the innumerable calls for help. Whatever honours the name of Christ, whether the help given is for material needs or spiritual, is worthy of a Christian's support.

Sowing and Reaping

Here is another principle which bears on our subject. In Galatians 6:7 we read "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Though its message has a much wider application, Paul introduces it here in connection with supporting the Lord's servants, especially those that teach the word (verse 6), and concludes in verse 10 by saying, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith." The key word here is "opportunity" — the present time giving us the opportunity of "sowing" that which we shall "reap" in due time. The thought of opportunity is quite different from that of a legal obligation, but it remains true that to sow sparingly will be to reap sparingly, while to sow bountifully promises an abundant harvest, as another scripture reminds us (2 Corinthians 9:6).

The Motive of Giving

To sow bountifully, however, is not the mere pouring out of wealth. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing," says the apostle. But love is of God (1 John 4:7), and God's own love working in our hearts, not the display of our generosity, must provide the motive for giving. Is that not a chief reason for the Lord's insistence on secrecy — "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" — because it removes the temptation to self-display? If we have the Lord before us, in remembering the immense debt of love we owe to Him, we shall see our own giving in its true perspective.

Purposeful, not Casual

The scripture about purposeful giving has already been quoted (2 Corinthians 9:7), and 1 Corinthians 16:2 adds more detail: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." What better day than this to remind us of all that we owe to our Saviour? And it ensures that we put **first** the needs of the Lord's work. There is perhaps a difficulty where one is paid monthly, and a possible solution is to choose the next Lord's day after. If we desire to lay aside a definite proportion — whether a tenth or any other fraction — let each decide for himself, free from any constraint.

Some Christians put gifts in a box of what comes to hand. Care is needed to avoid being casual about this, and each gift should be an offering from the heart to the Lord. Definitely wrong, in the writer's opinion, is the practice of putting odd change into such a box, as though we were giving to the Lord what was left over. Also let us

beware of countenancing those methods of raising money, current in some circles, in which the motive for participating includes the hope of a reward, or raffle prize. These merit the Lord's scathing comment addressed to the Pharisees, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." Who would want to tarnish in any way the joy which response to **His** giving always brings?

THE "OPENED" DOOR — J. STODDART

IN connection with the Lord's service it is interesting and instructive to consider the difference between an "open" and an "opened" door. An "open" door may be fortuitously so, whereas an "opened" door indicates deliberate action, and the latter expression is consistently used throughout the New Testament. Open doors there were in the labours of the apostle Paul, who was an "apostle separated unto the Gospel of God" (Romans 1:1), and it is understandable that he should see the primary relevance of that Gospel to his own people, the Jews. Such was his love for his kinsmen according to the flesh that he would willingly have forfeited his place of blessing in Christ for their sake and their salvation (Romans 9:1-3). He saw an open door to preach to them in the synagogues around him and seized upon every opportunity to do so. His example might well be followed in principle by all who feel the constraint of the love of Christ for others, for surely our first responsibility is to our kith and kin, "that they might be saved".

The apostle's testimony, therefore, wherever he went, was "to the Jew first". But it soon became apparent that, despite his great love for his people, they were to prove to be his greatest opponents, rejecting for the most part, in every place, the Gospel he preached. Gradually such doors were closed, until at Antioch in Pisidia, speaking in the synagogue, the Jews categorically "spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you ; but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:45-46). But "opened" doors were awaiting him in the sphere to which God had called him, in other fields and among other people. Already the Lord had said to him, "Depart, and I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles (Acts 22:20-21). Thus, obedient to the heavenly vision, he moves through the fascinating pages of The Acts from chapter 13 onwards, becoming involved in missionary work that took him progressively further from his homeland and people. Lycaonia, Pamphylia and Pisidia had heard the Word.

Returning from the first of these missionary journeys to the church at Antioch, his starting point, he "rehearsed all that God had done with them and how He had **opened the door of faith** unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). No human hands could have opened that door — not even the mandatory labours of an apostle. God had sovereignly opened the door to the proper sphere of His servant's evangelistic operations. Nor could any shut that door but He. On his second journey (Acts

15:40 - 16:1) the apostle moves ever further westwards to Phrygia and Galatia, but was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not" (Acts 16:6-7).

Here we have the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit directing the Lord's servant negatively as well as positively. If human expediency had been consulted, it might have seemed better to go into either Asia or Bithynia, geographically nearer and doubtless where many had not yet heard the Gospel. But such was the wisdom of God that Macedonia, then Greece and Asia Minor, in that order, were to hear Paul's preaching. Proving that **this** was his true métier, the apostle receives a vision in the night at Troas, in which the call came to "come over into Macedonia and help us". Immediately Paul and Silas sailed from Troas to Neapolis and from thence to Philippi, the most strategic city in all Europe and the first place to respond to the Gospel in this Continent. It stood at the junction of the road from Asia to Europe, from the East to the West.

The story of Paul's activities in Philippi told in Acts 16 is among the best known and most powerful in the New Testament. Here was a truly "opened door" for the Gospel, and in another quite remarkable sense, too; for while Paul and Silas were in the prison there was a great earthquake, and "immediately all the prison doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosed" (verse 26). Closed doors cannot remain so when God requires it otherwise. Even the "windows of heaven" cannot stay shut when God decides to pour out immeasurable blessing (cf. Malachi 3:10); nor can they be closed when His time has come to release the floods of judgment (Genesis 7:11).

Pursuing our study of the "opened" door into Acts, chapters 17 and 18, we next find Paul at Thessalonica, Berea, Athens (the metropolis of Greek intellectualism), and Corinth, where he stays eighteen months. This was not easy ground, and with fierce opposition from resident Jews the apostle needed special encouragement to continue there. This he assuredly received when the Lord spoke to him "in the night by a vision, saying, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). It was unquestionably an "opened door". Then on to Ephesus to stay there for three years, longer than in any other city, "testifying to both Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Writing to the church at Corinth he says, "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost, for **a great door and effectual is opened** unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:8-9).

What is noticeable in these passages is that the Lord's servant moves to a divinely determined itinerary and time schedule. No doors are forced open or assumed to be so. Eagerly were the signs sought that would direct him to his appointed venue and the opened door. Would that such concern and spiritual sensitivity were seen among the saints in our day! Perhaps we excuse ourselves by postulating that the "opened door" had special reference to apostolic labours in early

Christian days; and there may be truth in that assertion. But dare we say that the Holy Spirit no longer works in this way? Are there no divinely "opened doors" today? Or do we contend that **all** the doors are opened? Surely it would be agreed that this is hardly true and that there are definitely closed doors to many operations of the Lord's servants.

Scripture shows clearly that prayerful exercise is needed in the above considerations, for Paul, now in prison at Rome, writes to the Colossian saints and craves of them to "continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying for us, that **God would open unto us a door of utterance,** to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Colossians 4.3-4). It would be right to believe that such prayer was abundantly answered when, still in Caesar's custody, he "dwelt two whole years in his own hired house and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:30-31). What unremitting, tireless service for His Lord marked this beloved man! It may well be that at the end of his days he had cause to rejoice in seeing those of Caesar's household converted (Philippians 4:22).

Our last reference must be to the book of Revelation (chapter 3:7-8). Here the church in Philadelphia is addressed with this encouragement. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an **opened** [J.N.D. Trans.] door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my Word, and hast not denied my name." Undoubtedly it is possible in this late day to have Philadelphian character without boastfully claiming to be Philadelphia exclusively. And in so far as we exhibit such character, through His grace, the Lord would afford to every exercised heart an "opened" door in His service, where "your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Finally, the door of service on earth is closed, and John says, "After these things I saw, and behold, a **door opened in heaven**; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me, which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must take place after these things" (Revelation 4:1 J.N.D.). Symbolically this would appear to be the trumpet call summoning the Church as well as John, the seer of Patmos, to heaven for her presence is in heaven in subsequent chapters.

The visions continue with events on earth until the end of chapter 22 when the Church, the Bride of Christ, is seen responding to the Bridegroom's call (historically awaiting Him on earth) and in consonance with the Spirit saying, "Come" (verse 17), and again, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (verse 20).

May our hearts be truly concerned regarding the character of the "opened door" of Revelation 3:7-8 and "abounding in the work of the Lord", both in the assemblies of the saints and in the world of the

Gospel field until we hear Him say, "Surely I came quickly", and greet Him with the loving reply, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus."

MEPHIBOSHETH AND EPHESIANS——————JOHN BARNES

2 SAMUEL 9

1.

THERE seems to be a parallel between the story of Mephibosheth and the truth concerning the believer as set out in the Ephesian Epistle. The first feature we may notice in the history of this descendant of the royal house of Saul is that he was in a place of **alienation.** It is perfectly plain that there was no ill-feeling in David's heart towards Saul's household. David had acted honourably at all times towards Saul, sparing his life on at least two occasions when he could easily have rid himself of his persecutor. The antipathy was not mutual; it existed only on Saul's side, and poor Mephibosheth was now living in Lo-Debar as a consequence of this estrangement and his exile was a personal continuance of it.

Man's distance from God partakes of the same character. This alienation from the life of God is stated to be "through the ignorance which is in them." It is ignorance of the true attitude of God towards man, of God's blessed "philanthropy" (as Paul puts it in Titus 3:4), that keeps man at a distance from the God who loves him, and deprives man of the only source of life in the universe. Thus he is, really, in the place of moral death. This is where the Ephesian epistle locates unsaved man, and the Gentile is considered to be in a place of estrangement (Ephesians 2:12).

Mephibosheth was living in Lo-Debar, which is believed to have been over the Jordan in Gilead, probably as far from Jerusalem as it was possible for him to go. Very likely it was also a barren place, as the name suggests. The word **Debar** means "pasture", and is negated by the privative particle **Lo**, so meaning "no pasture", as is well known. It can be thought of as a place which could provide no sustenance, and at a distance from the divine centre; in that place Mephibosheth cowered in secret, in alienation from the divinely appointed king.

A writer of an earlier generation has emphasised that God is frequently misrepresented and that He is "well disposed towards man". This is undoubtedly true, though but little appreciated today.

2.

The second feature which our story brings to mind is that of **affection.** It was the wonderful kindness of God which moved David's heart towards surviving members of Saul's household. He wished to lavish on these members of the household of his former enemy some of the kindness which his God had shown towards him. David had taken on this lovely feature of the Lord, and he is careful to speak of it in

this way so that its true source may not be obscured (2 Samuel 9:3). So John reminds us in his first epistle, "We love him because he first loved us." The Ephesian letter tells us of His great love towards us "even when we were dead in sins" (Ephesians 2:5). David's love reached out to Saul's grandson in his pitiable condition away in distant Lo-Debar. The man was, himself, conscious of the deep depravity of his state and fully confessed it, using the remarkable expression, "such a dead dog as I". Just as the alienation was unilateral, so was the love: the initiative was entirely David's.

In our case, too, the initial movement of love was in the heart of God. It is a source of endless wonder to us that His great love towards us moved Him to take an interest in our case, dead as we were towards Him and in positive estrangement from Him.

3.

We may then consider the matter of **access.** On receiving the relevant information about Jonathan's crippled son, David "sent and fetched him". The poor maimed man was carried, at the king's expense, into a place of nearness. His disabilities were great: he was lame on both his feet and could not move about unaided. He could never have made the long journey on his own. But what he lacked David supplied, and removing the distance which separated them he brought him in divinely promoted compassion to himself. He might have brought him into nearness to the capital and given him some little place to live in. This would have been wonderful kindness, but he brought him home to himself.

This is a feeble, though beautiful, representation of the marvellous grace of our God in bringing dead dog sinners to Himself, into this place of nearness. Ephesians 2:13 speaks of this operation of divine love, and informs us at what expense to Divine Persons this access was procured for us: "by the blood of Christ". It required such a work to remove the distance which sin had interposed between fallen man and God, a holy, sin-hating God.

4.

A further point is that Mephibosheth was brought into the favour and privilege of **adoption.** The lands formerly held by his father were restored to him; all the patrimony which was his in Israel was put at his disposal. David also reinstated Ziba and his sons as servants to Mephibosheth, to manage his estate on his behalf, but of him personally David said, "He shall sit at the king's table as one of the king's sons." So the former poverty-stricken and fearful exile was established in a position of wonderful privilege and dignity.

Ephesians refers to this precious truth in chapter 1:4-5, where we are said to be brought into favour according to the eternal thought of the Father. Chapter 2:19 also mentions the happy fact that we are "of the household of God". No longer aliens in a strange land, beggared and dispossessed, but effectively established in such an inheritance and

adopted into the very household of God. Sonship is an immense favour. It settles the believer in a most blessed position of privilege and responsibility.

5.

A further blessing of immeasurable greatness is that of **acceptance.** There is not only the removal of the distance, the cancelling of the estrangement, the blessing of nearness and adoption, but we are brought into this additional favour of complete acceptance. In the case of Mephibosheth, this was done "for Jonathan's sake". What prompted king David to stretch out the hand of reconciliation to this poor outcast was the kindness of his God and what moved his heart to offer him such a place of nearness was the memory of the old, sweet friendship which had bound David and Jonathan together in mutual respect and affection. This affection which he had once reserved for Jonathan, he was ready to set on the unknown Mephibosheth "for Jonathan's sake". So Mephibosheth came into the security of that place of blessing for the sake and memory of David's lost beloved friend.

The believer today is brought into an infinitely more wonderful security ; he is accepted "in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1 : 6). He is saved and destined to spend an eternity of bliss in the Father's house, but at this very moment, while still on earth in infirmity and failure, prone to unfaithfulness and sin, ignorant and apt to stray, he is, nevertheless, accepted by the Father in the Beloved of the Father. That the expression "Beloved" is used rather than "Christ" or some other name simply enhances the marvel of it. It is not only a judicial acceptance, great though that is, but it is acceptance in the favour of the Father's affections in the value of the One whose eternal home was His bosom. If the type is lovely, the antitype is superlative.

6.

There was, as there should have been, a warm response to all this kindness on the part of the favoured Mephibosheth. There was an **allegiance** to be seen in his behaviour and attitude towards his benefactor. His address to David was appropriately humble and warm with gratitude as he thankfully took his place at the king's table as one of his sons. Later, when David was obliged to flee the capital during the rebellion under Absalom's insolent leadership, Mephibosheth remained faithful to his friend. Though deceived by his cunning servant and slandered to the king, he remained loyal to the friend in need who had treated him so generously. Though unable to follow his king he shared in the reproach of the exile, behaving as though he himself were deprived of the comfort of the palace because of the vicissitudes of war (2 Samuel 19 : 24ff). He was unable to take part in the operations because of his crippled condition but he followed the king in his affections. He did not trim his beard or wash his clothes, matters of toilet which a scrupulous Hebrew would be careful to attend to normally. He

lived like a man in mourning. He had been renewed in the spirit of his mind (Ephesians 4:23), and the old antipathy had been replaced by a lively sympathy which put him wholly on David's side. Perhaps it needed the very circumstances of David's exile to bring into relief the loyalty of Mephibosheth.

The preceptive chapters of Ephesians assume that such a response will be the outcome of the blessings outlined in the earlier chapters and that the loyal believer will happily carry out the instructions of the epistle. It is interesting that in a letter which carries us to such heights of heavenly teaching, the writer keeps the feet of his readers firmly on the ground as to practical details of living and gives detailed directions as to walk here. The verb "to walk" recurs a number of times. Relationships are treated in a very comprehensive way; husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants are all exhorted to behave towards one another in a manner in accord with their relationships with the Lord. The epistle is addressed to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. As saints, we see what God had done for them; as faithful we see what they were in response to this grace.

7.

It is not certain that Mephibosheth actually knew that David would be restored to his kingdom but this was surely his hope, his **anticipation.** His desire was that the king who had shown him so much kindness should be restored to his rightful place. The true Christian hope centres in the Lord Jesus. In Ephesians, chapter 1, it reaches out not only to the course of this age but into the coming age, into what, I suppose, we generally call the millenium. In chapter 3, however, it breaks all bounds of time and space reaching into the rarely mentioned eternal ages in which there will be unending glory for our Lord. This is the hope of the once alienated saints, now brought into eternal relationships with the Exalted One. Let the Zibas and others help themselves to whatever they wish to appropriate; this is our hope, our expectation: eternal glory for Christ Jesus our Lord, and it will be our humble joy to be with Him in His glory and to enjoy its fulness.

Scripture Truth

MAY, 1979

(incorporating "Words of Help")

SON OF THE RIGHT HAND

NORMAN ANDERSON

Genesis 35:16-20	Hebrews 1:3 and 13
Exodus 15:6	Hebrews 8:1 and 2
Psalm 80:17	Hebrews 10:11-14
Psalm 110:1	Hebrews 12:1 and 2

The four readings from the Hebrew Epistle are to be our theme, and I draw attention to the Old Testament scriptures as an introduction to it.

The Right Hand

This touching incident appeals to the heart and stirs the deepest feelings. A mother is travailing in birth, and the midwife is saying it is going to be another son, and "you will have this son also". But she died in giving birth to that son, although she lived long enough to see him, and to name him. She named him in relation to the condition in which she was, calling him Benoni, the son of my sorrow. Rachel had a very prominent place in the divine line. Jacob had his place, a key place, so to speak, in the ways of God, for God is the God of Abraham, and Isaac and of Jacob; and Rachel was absolutely essential in the ordering of God for the accomplishment of His designs. She named her son Benoni, as though, looking with the eye of faith down the passage of history, she saw that blessed Person of whom Isaiah wrote, "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". Jacob, when he renames his son, looks down the page of history with the eye of faith and he also takes account (I say this suggestively) of the Christ of God, not in relation to all that failing, sinful man could heap upon him, but in the light of the purpose and the calling of God. She said, Benoni, son of my sorrow. Jacob says, "that will never do, his name is Benjamin, the son of the right hand". So very early, you see, on the page of divine history, these two things are stamped by divine impression: the path of the suffering of the Christ of God, and the path of triumph and glory that was bound to ensue.

Exodus 15:6, lifted in a sense out of its setting, gives some idea of what is connected with the thought of the right hand. "Thy right hand . . . is become glorious in power"; glorious power is connected with the right hand of God. The hand that has become glorious in power will establish the will of God and put down, as it did then historically in regard to Pharaoh and his host, every opposing element.

When the will of God is established and every evil suppressed, the righteous government of God will be established in the Son of the right hand.

Psalm 80:17, "Let thy hand be on the man of thy right hand". God's hand is laid upon him. Psalm 89:19 says, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty". The Mighty one of Psalm 89 is the Man of the right hand in Psalm 80. God has a Man upon whom He can lay His hand, and if He lays His hand upon Him, it means that He is committing everything for His own glory to Him. There is no doubt who that Man is. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (John 3:35). There is One before Him upon whom He can lay His hand, and in doing so bestows upon Him everything to God's glory. His hand is upon the Man of His right hand, upon the Son of Man whom He made strong for Himself.

Psalm 110 starts without preliminaries, "the LORD said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool". The name LORD in capitals in the AV signifies God's personal name, Jehovah, and "my Lord" has the meaning, my Master. There are thus two Persons. The God of Israel addressed the Messianic King "Sit thou at my right hand".

Obviously at the time of address He was not at the right hand. The Psalm is prophetic. Our Lord Jesus tells of this in Matthew 22. The shepherds of Israel, self appointed, all made an assault against the Son of God. The Herodians were the political faction in Israel; the Sadducees, the rationalists; the Pharisees ritualists. Politicians, rationalists ritualists, all join together, an "ecumenical" movement against the concentrated truth of God presented in the person of the Son of God. They were asking Him questions with the intention of ensnaring Him; but He could not be ensnared, and He asked them a question: "What think ye of Christ, whose son is he?" That put them on the horns of a dilemma. They said, "David's son". He replies, "How then does David in spirit call him Lord (Psalm 110:1) saying, the LORD said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool?" After that, "neither durst any man . . . ask him any more questions". Our Lord gives us warrant to see that Psalm 110 applies exclusively to Himself. It gives us witness to the glory of that blessed Person who was traduced here by men. They dishonoured Him, they brought Him down, they treated Him ignominiously. The Psalmist, speaking by the Spirit of Christ, honoured Him, glorified Him; but beyond what the prophetic Spirit had to say in the rest of Psalm 110, this part of the Psalm has already been fulfilled. "Sit thou at my right hand"; that is where He is today; "until I make thy foes thy footstool". We are living in the "until". Our lot is cast in that word in Psalm 110, "until". "Sit thou" does not mean cessation of activity for Him; it means exaltation, glory and honour for Him. Hebrews 2 tells us, "We see not yet all things put under him", but there is something we do see; "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour". That is where and how He is today, and we have a link with Him in the period covered by the word, "until".

Our Lord occupies a waiting position today, and if this waiting is nearing completion, and the glory of the coming kingdom that belongs to the Benjamin, the Man of the right hand, nearing apace, how much nearer is the end of the "until" insofar as we (believers in the Lord Jesus Christ today) are concerned. In other words, how much nearer must the Rapture be, that blessed moment when He is going to descend into the air, and to give a rallying shout. Then every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is going to leave this world, to join Him in view of coming with Him in the glory of the Kingdom. He is coming for us in order that He might bring us with Him. Thank God we know Him now in the "until" period, know Him as Hebrews depicts Him in the verses which will now be our theme.

In approaching these four passages from Hebrews I feel so inadequate in speaking about Him. He is so great, so glorious that He is beyond human explanation. It does not matter how much we learn of Him, He is always ahead of us. The great apostle of the Gentiles was always saying that there is something about Him that he was still reaching for ; "that I may know Him". This was the great ambition of his affection and life.

He is There in virtue of His Person

The context of Hebrews 1:3, "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high". One of the facets of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ the Son, is that He has **by Himself** made purification for sins. Do you say that forgiveness of sins is elementary? Do you know that it took such a Person as this to effect it? The fifth chapter of Revelation tells me that in the glory they are going to sing a new song, and the burden of the new song is, "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed to God by Thine own blood". Surely that covers the forgiveness of sins. He is the one and He is the only one who could, and who has, dealt with our sins. Having made by Himself the purification for sins, [He] set Himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high. He is there today because of who He is, and every part of these verses sets forth His greatness and glory. One of the facets of His greatness and glory is that He has, by Himself, made purification for sins.

He is There in Virtue of His Pre-eminence

I simply say with regard to Him at the right hand (verse 13), He is there pre-eminent in relation to the myriads of angels. Chapter 5 of the Revelation also tells us there is an innumerable company of angels, and He takes precedence over them all, because of who He is, and because of where He is, at the right hand. "To which of the angels said he at any time, sit on my right hand"? There is only one archangel named in scripture, Michael, but even Michael is not at the right hand ; Michael is at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. Gabriel, now called an archangel, is at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ ; they are all there, and, what is more, the devil is going to be there. He is

going to bow the knee to Jesus and to own that Jesus Christ is Lord. "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him (that is, He is at the right hand), and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly beings, earthly beings and infernal beings", and that takes it down into the nether regions where the devil will be. And when the infernal beings hear that blessed name of Jesus sounded out, they are all going to bow the knee, and the devil will be the first to say, "He is Lord", not willingly, but by power. Our Lord Jesus Christ is positionally pre-eminent above the angelic hosts because they are only ministering spirits, and He is the Lord of all (1:13,14).

He is There in Virtue of His Priesthood

In Hebrews 8:1, He is there in virtue of His office, superseding the priesthood of Aaron. "We have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." There is a wealth of meaning behind the word "such". Our Lord Jesus Christ is set down as priest at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. You will notice here it says the right hand of the **throne** ; it is an official position. Hebrews speaks of the throne, not quite so much on the line of government, but as the throne of grace (4:16). The administration of all the divine support, succour and sympathy that the saints of God need, is embodied at the foot of the throne ; and the One who sits there in the administration of it is none other than that blessed Man who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. "He knows what sorest trials mean, for He has felt the same." He has been through it all and is qualified to act as our priest in the presence of God. But the kind of ministering that I am referring to — succour, support, sympathy and salvation — belongs to Him at the right hand of God to minister to us here where the pressures are, so as to relieve our spirits of the downward pull of it all, that we might be free to join Him as the minister of the sanctuary, giving to Him that which He will offer Godward.

He is There in Virtue of His Sacrifice

Chapter 10:12. He is there on the ground of redemption. He is there in virtue of His sacrifice. Our passage commences: "every priest **standeth**". In the Old Testament order of things every priest stands, and never sits down. He never sat down, because his work of sacrifice was never done. He was daily ministering and offering, oftentimes the same sacrifices, bulls and goats — we read of it in the book of Leviticus — which can never, never, take away sins. There is a difference of only one letter between the exercise of the Aaronic priest and such an high priest as ours. It is the difference between 'never' and 'ever'. He sits forever because the work that he does is done for ever. Thus, ineffectiveness was written over the Old Testament priestly order. How utterly misguided has been the organised priestly order extending over the whole history of Christianity, in imitation of what God has set aside !

Thank God the Lord Jesus Christ, unlike those priests, is brought in here in verse 12, "But this man". Take notice of the 'buts' of scripture; they emphasise contrast. "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down." Note the correction from "one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down" to "one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down"; that is, He sat down in perpetuity. He sat down everlastingly because His work is everlastingly done. After a work so gloriously completed, "He . . . for ever sat down on the right hand of God". When I say, He is there in virtue of His sacrifice, I do not mean that He is there sacrificing. That was done on the cross for ever and the greatness and perfection of His work is here in verse 12. In verse 14 we learn that the results are as good as the work and His saints are as clear from sins and iniquities as the One who has done the work. We read here, "by one offering he hath perfected, [the same language as before] in perpetuity them that are sanctified". Christ is at the right hand in all the glory of redemption's work, and we know Him there, on the basis of what He has done at the Cross.

He is There in Virtue of His Moral Perfection

Let us recall the verses in full, for every phrase is significant. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The witnesses are not spectators looking at the saints running the race. They are witnesses to all that faith can do. It has often been said: faith believes the incredible, sees the invisible, and does the impossible, and this could be written over chapter eleven.

In view of the cloud of witnesses, what are we to do? Scripture answers: "*Let us lay aside every weight and sin which doth so easily* beset us". The words, 'besetting sin' are often misused. It is not in this passage some particular sin, but sin, which easily besets or entangles us, like a piece of rope on the track getting between a runner's feet and tripping him up.

"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking off unto Jesus." What are we going to look off from? Let us look off from the witnesses, look off from our brethren, look off everything else, but look unto Him!

"Looking off unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith." This means that He was the One who began and completed the whole course of faith. He has gone the whole way.

"Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." Just think of Him as the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, yet joy was set before Him. It does not say He despised the cross, but He despised the shame, that is, he despised what men did to Him. The cross was different for it involved His

being made sin, which established the glory of God. He despised the shame of what puny man heaped upon Him.

What is the result? He is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. He is there because of His moral perfection and beauty. Thank God for the true Benjamin, Son of the right hand. May God give us grace to run with endurance, looking off unto Jesus.

THE DISPLAY OF GOD IN THIS WORLD — J. N. SHEPHERD

WE are frequently reminded of the wonderful fact that, in spite of all the wickedness of man's behaviour during the whole history of the human race from the time of Adam, God has never left Himself without a testimony in the world. Creation itself has spoken of "His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:20), and His witness has been presented through men of faith (Hebrews 11) as well as through His more direct speaking "in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Hebrews 1:1). And in addition to all that was made known of Himself to Israel in the law, there has ever been an impression given to men of Him who dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Timothy 6:16).

But now the final word has been spoken, and that, "in the person of the Son" (Hebrews 1:2 J.N.D. Trans.); and what previously unconceived glory has shone in Him who is the very "brightness of [God's] glory, and the express image of his person"! That there ever could have been a Man upon Earth who was able to declare that "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father", and that that blessed One, the Word, the full expression of all that God is, "was in the beginning with God" and yet "became flesh and dwelt among us" — these two great things can surely only bow our hearts in worship now, as they will do for ever. The glory of God's love has now been fully manifested, and if it was told out in every incident, word and action of the Lord's life on Earth, the occasion of Calvary could alone make it known in all its matchless fulness. As it delights our hearts sometimes to sing

"Thy death has brought to light the Father's heart,
And ours has won."

But if the secret of all that was ever in the Father's heart is now made known, so stupendous was that work that He would never allow that 'mystery of love' again to be shrouded. The very light of God was shining, and the truth as to His nature was told and confirmed indeed by the Spirit's voice down all the ages since the Lord's precious death, and authenticated in our hearts by the witness of that same Holy Spirit that as a result of it, we are "the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

The apostle Peter, preaching in the house of Cornelius, told how God "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power", and before he had finished speaking a Gentile company of believers had shared the experience of those Jews who had listened to his address on the day of Pentecost, in receiving the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Individually they had become part of that body—'the body of Christ'—of

which the Lord Jesus had already said to Saul of Tarsus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" It was indeed God's purpose that there should never be wanting in the world a full display, during the time of Christ's continuing rejection by men, of that which was seen in His glorious Person here. This He would bring about through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit in His saints, and through the "fruit of the Spirit" in their lives. But the whole vast company of them on the Earth at any given time would be needed that what was seen in Him might still be seen in the world.

As it was the Father's special delight that the sound of the name of "Abba, Father", which always gave Him such joy when it came from the lips of His blessed Son in such a world as this, should never cease to rise from this world in the power of the Spirit, so it was also His joy that the features of the fruit of that same Holy Spirit in the world should never cease. In order that the continuity of these two infinitely blessed things might be found here, the 'body of Christ' has been present in the world ever since the day of Pentecost, and the Comforter has been sent from an ascended Christ. And so it is said, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians 4:8).

Thus the gifts have been given by the Lord Jesus, but their distribution is sovereignly performed by the Holy Spirit who dwells in each of us. Scripture is very clear that the building up of the body is always in view in the way that this is done. "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you". This is ever the Spirit's object in His gracious work, and what surpassing privilege we have, if in any measure we are allowed to be His instruments in carrying out this wonderful purpose! Men speak of 'ordination', but the taking up of a gift by the Spirit for the display of Christ is the only true ordination: "ordained . . . that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:6). The members of the human body are finely balanced in their function and fully integrated for the efficient working out of the plans conceived in the human mind, and this is God's own picture, so frequently presented in the Bible, of the way in which the body of Christ here, in its many members and by their integration with one another, is to present the glorious Head in heaven, so that He may be truly displayed in the world. The apostle Paul was able to write to the Galatians with regard to the operation of this in Himself, ". . . it pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen . . .". It is important for every Christian to see that the operation of his or her gift is exclusive of any actions of men, and cannot be given by men or by the church, nor is its use normally subject to the church, except as provided by Scriptural injunction. Nor is it given for any self-display or self-aggrandisement, but solely for the display of the Lord Jesus Christ; the misuse of gift which occurred in Corinth, and which had to be so rebuked by the apostle, was not confined to the apostolic age but has certainly been present in the church not infrequently throughout the ages (though it often seems that those failures, already present in early church history,

were allowed as a special warning to us who live in the hourly expectation of our blessed Lord's return).

With what jealous care should we see that every work seen in the Body truly have the Head as its Author, and similarly that in every word spoken through ministry, His thoughts be made known; that everything shown in the church should have no other source but Himself! "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability that God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:11).

In parts of Christendom there are those who speak of their gifts as uncontrollable, but how contrary this is to the clear statement of 1 Corinthians 14:32, that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets"! Only in obedience to God's word can the true 'work of ministry' be achieved. No-one can be done without (1 Corinthians 12), and none can be indifferent to the responsibility for the proper use of that which has been given by God (Matthew 25); it is personal and individual, and subject only to Himself. Some might find difficulty in taking public part in meetings through reticence and shyness; others have almost equal difficulty in keeping their seats. But in order that the whole may operate properly, it must be only by the moving of the Spirit. This is God's order, and everything else in the operation of the church is disorder: clerisy with all its attendant evils, and so much else that has ruined the testimony of the Church of God down the ages, can only thus be excluded.

It has often been said that a man's gift makes way for him. This is probably true, but what is certain is that it soon becomes evident to those who are at the receiving end of its use whether it is the authentic voice of the Spirit or not. It was said of the prophets in the early days, "Let the other judge", and proper humility would always show subjection, not in the operation of the gift (as mentioned above), but in the acceptance of wise judgment as to whether it is being rightly used.

In Christendom around us, the whole concept of the distribution of gifts by the Holy Spirit has been so misunderstood that very often one man — who may indeed have none of these specific gifts — is required to act as though he were given to the Church of God as an evangelist, as a teacher, as a pastor, and even almost as a prophet. But there are dangers for us too. Whilst the true evangelist, for example, is all too rarely seen in these days, and whilst we well know that in such a day especially it behoves us all to "do the work of an evangelist" to the best of our ability, nevertheless there are some more gifted than others in this (and probably in every other) type of work. Thus, it surely cannot further the building up of any company for an excellent pastor to be occupying the gospel-preaching platform, in the presence of unconverted people, on some kind of roster including all the brothers in a local gathering, when much more able gospel preachers are present. This does not in any way suggest that in His wonderful sovereignty and pure grace God does not take up and use any of us as He will, but there are relative amounts of gift (Matthew 25:15),

and these are given for the execution of the purposes of His will — not ours.

In Corinth, there was a desire after showy gifts, such as tongues and miracles, and it is in this setting that the instruction is given to "covet earnestly the best gifts". Surely it is a fault in all if these 'best gifts' are not discernible in operation in the church, because if there is a reality of devotion to the person of the Lord Jesus and commitment to Him, that which God has given will be clearly seen, not only in the local company, as at Corinth, but in the church as a whole, as viewed in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It may be of great moment for us all to be praying the Lord of the harvest that He might thrust forth labourers into His harvest.

Evangelists, teachers, and those with pastoral gifts are all surely needed amongst us in the final hour. Perhaps the challenge of the words of the Lord Jesus might well ring in all our ears: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). We might well be asking ourselves — all of us — whether in fact they do flow from us in this way.

The only opportunity to use these gifts is here and now, and the Gospel day is closing. 'The Lord is near', and the church will soon be in glory, but as we shout our Hallelujahs in the light of this, may we all remember our responsibilities. In carrying them out, too, in order that the apostle's words by the Spirit might live with us, let us see to it that all our things are done with love, for gift without it profits nothing.

WHAT IS THE WORLD? ——————HENRY BORLASE (1834)

. . . The application of the expression of Scripture is often, indeed, sought to be evaded by the question — What is the world? . . . But in fact, they who ask this question are full able to answer it themselves. When they speak of 'rising in the world', of 'getting a credit and a name in it', they know precisely what it means; but when a thing is to be given up for Christ's sake, a sudden indistinctness invests everything, and the unfaithful heart is allowed to draw its own line between what is and what is not of the world. . . . In truth, the great secret of conformity to the world is **taking for granted that things are as they should be.** It has been truly said that, "there are many saints, but very few Christians": many who owe to Christ the unspeakable debt of forgiveness through His blood, few who are willing to follow Him who has so loved them, even to the renunciation of all things . . .

A disciple could not remain in [the world], for the call was ever — "Follow me"; although like Jesus he would be habitually there, as far as he was able to bring God's testimony to bear upon the consciences of men by his own conversation. . . . And this is the true answer to the question — "How far may we mingle with the world?" Even as far and as often as we can witness for Jesus.

THREE RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD

WILLEM J. OUWENEEL

4. SONS OF GOD: PART TWO

SONSHIP is a relationship to be worked out practically in our daily lives. Having ascertained its essential characteristics in our last article, it is now time to ask ourselves the question, "How can we become sons that really please God?"

1. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God"

The first answer is to be found in Romans 8. Verses 16 and 17 of this chapter have already attracted our attention, when we were studying the relationship of 'children'. Now we read verses 14 and 15. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father".

How then, practically speaking, can we become sons? The first answer is, when we have the Spirit of God. Now what is the difference between our reception of the Spirit as 'children', and our reception of Him as 'sons'? As children, left in this world to be the witnesses to the nature of God, we are given the Spirit to be with us **in the wilderness,** to comfort our hearts, to convince us time and again that we are indeed God's children (v. 16). But as sons, associated with Christ glorified, we are given the Spirit as the "Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father". God the Spirit leads us, as sons, to worship the Father and the glorified Son. He is that "well . . . springing up into everlasting life", in order that worship in spirit and in truth may be brought to God the Father.

But God could not be satisfied with our being sons in principle, while there is no sign of it in practice. Notice that verse 14 does not say, "For as many as **have received** the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" — a principle whose truth I do not doubt. Yet in fact we read, "For as many as **are led** by the Spirit of God . . .". This way of expressing it is easy to understand from the light shed on the Spirit's work in John 16. The Spirit has come down to us as a divine witness of the heavenly glory of Christ who has entered the Father's house, having accomplished His work. Having come to present this glory to our hearts, the Spirit leads our hearts up to that Lord; He has come to make us, in a practical sense, Christ's companions, to the delight of the Father's heart.

As sons of God, then, we are worshippers. According to Hebrews, the sons of God belong to that company which blesses our God by Christ the Son, the great High Priest of God's house. As sons, we are privileged to go into the Holiest and to present our love and worship and adoration to the Son and to the Father. Would it not delight our Father if, with hearts full of love and worship, we did these things? A Divine Person has come down from heaven with the express purpose that it should be so. Brethren, we should value this privilege! Teaching,

in all its forms, is for those who need to be encouraged in this scene. Worship is better. There the sons of God come together in the sanctuary with something which belongs to eternity. The Spirit who leads us in worship here, will lead us in worship there, in heaven.

But if the Spirit is to have His way with us in our worshipping together, He must have His way, not only there, but also in all other aspects of our lives. The flesh and the Spirit are in conflict within us (Galatians 5:17ff), but it is the Spirit who must have His way.

2. "No more a servant, but a son"

In Galatians 3 and 4, we have a thought similar to what we have just met in Romans 8. "For ye are all [sons] of God by faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3:26). Then, at the beginning of chapter 4, "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ".

You notice that He who in Romans 8 is called the 'Spirit of adoption', is here called the 'Spirit of His Son'. There is a parallel in Romans 8: the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9-10). You will also observe something else which helps to explain sonship: the difference drawn between 'sons' on the one hand, and 'children' on the other "under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father".

Paul is explaining here the position of Israel. Israel in its entirety was in some sense purposed for sonship. Already in Egypt God spoke of Israel as 'His firstborn son'. Deuteronomy 8:5 speaks of Israel having been chastened by the Lord God in the wildnerness as a man chastens his son. See too Deuteronomy 14:1 — "Ye are the sons of Jehovah" (J.N.D. Trans).

Israel was purposed for sonship, but in practice they were not sons; they were children. Why? Because they were under bondage to the law of Jehovah. But if they were under bondage, they were on the level of slaves. That is what the apostle says here: ". . . the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant . . .". Now those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are heirs. In principle, they have received everything, but when they act as if they are under the law, thereby placing themselves under bondage, they behave as if they are servants, not sons.

Suppose a man has a great business. He has children, and when he dies they will be his heirs. But while they are still growing up, the father wishes to introduce them to his business in order to see whether they have the same interest in it as he has. He may suggest to them that they work in it as his employees, his servants, to acquaint them-

selves with all sides of it. So they begin to work in the business, and though they are 'lords of all', they do not differ at all from servants. The father will continue to deal with them in this position until he knows whether or not his sons really share his interest in the business. A day will come ('the time appointed of the father') when he will say to them, "Are you interested? Will you continue the business after I die? Do you share my concern about the firm I have built up?" When the sons satisfy their father on these points, thus showing that they really are sons of their father, they will take their place alongside him. The relationship of master and servant will be replaced by that of father and son.

Now we can apply this to Israel. A time came when those in Israel who believed, along with those of the nations who believed, were no longer in bondage, but were set free, and with this freedom they received the Spirit of God, that is, the Spirit of His Son. And thereby they obtained the same interests and affections as the Father. And this is the Spirit who will lead them in worship. Into their hearts "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son . . . crying, Abba, Father".

We may seek to be good Christians. We may obey any number of rules under which we have placed ourselves. But this is not sonship, it is hardly being a Christian at all. Have you really the interests at heart of the Father and of His Son? Are your interests centred in the kingdom of God's dear Son into which He has translated you? (Colossians 1 13) Our true existence is there, hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3). Sons are those who are living there in the Spirit. Amid all the circumstances of daily living, the heart is there.

3. Sonship and Overcoming

Let us go to Revelation 21 7. This interesting verse is one of the few places in John's writings where we read about sonship. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son." Here too the practical implications of sonship are emphasised. The verse does not say that those who are saved will be sons of God, true though this certainly is. God is not interested in what we are in principle, so much as in what we are in practice. Christians can be divided into two classes: those who have overcome, and those who have not. Each of the seven assemblies addressed in Revelation 2 and 3 faced certain trials, departures, evils. And in each there was a smaller or greater remnant which did not succumb, which overcame. And here again at the end of the book, the Apostle refers to the overcomers. He says that they shall inherit all things. Once more, sonship is connected with heirship. He also says, "I will be his God, and he shall be my son". God can only recognise us as His sons in this scene if we have overcome. He cannot recognise us as His sons if we are mixed up with the things of this world, or have fallen into the traps, or have succumbed to the trials and evils which once faced those seven assemblies and still face us today. Sonship describes a heavenly company, a company which cannot be mixed up with the things of this world. It is a serious admonition, when God has to say to us, "I cannot

recognise you as my sons I object to being called your God". In our different assemblies there are different dangers, prejudices, problems. We have many opportunities to overcome, many opportunities to succumb Which shall we do?

4. Sonship and the Unequal Yoke

Let us now turn in this connection to 2 Corinthians 6·14-18. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. . . Wherefore come out from among them . . . and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty".

All Scripture fits together. Here we see the relationship between Christians and those who belong to the world we have left behind, from which as sons of the resurrection and associated with a glorified Christ, we are separated by death Such are not to pursue this world, nor to yoke themselves with unbelievers. There cannot be fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, believers and unbelievers Only such as act upon this can be addressed by God as His sons

5. Conclusion: "Waiting for the Adoption"

To conclude my subject, I return to Ephesians 1 and Romans 8, for there we find the secret of sonship. Sonship is not just a blessing for us, although indeed it could not but be a blessing to belong to a heavenly company, to be the companions of Christ glorified, and to belong to those many sons whom He is bringing to glory. But this is not the point of sonship. Its main purpose is that we should be a delight, a pleasure, a blessing to the Father. Thus it is true that if you are not a son in the practical sense of the word, you will miss a lot of blessing But I put it differently if you are not a son in the practical sense of the word, you are withholding from God the portion which He has sought out in eternity for Himself.

And finally, Romans 8:23. There it speaks of the expectation of sonship: ". . . waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body". Sons are already in heavenly places according to Ephesians, but in Romans there is something to look forward to. We are waiting for sonship. That is, for the redemption, for the taking away of everything that now hinders our enjoyment of the full experience of sonship. Are we looking forward to this hope, dear brethren? Not only to being freed from all that hinders, not only to being there with Him, but perhaps henceforth also looking forward to being there as a pleasure and a delight, in the full sense of the words, to the heart of God. This is our true place, accepted (or, acceptable) in the Beloved, our true atmosphere of blessing, to be a pleasure to the Father and to the Son for eternity.

THE STEPS OF A GOOD MAN — J. STODDART

A MEDITATION ON PSALM 37:23

THE importance of a step in our lives can hardly be exaggerated. A single step in a wrong direction, if pursued, could take us a very long way from our intended destination. A person under the influence of alcohol, for instance, could take one step and fall to his severe injury or even death. The first steps of a tiny child are eagerly watched by its loving parents, since these early steps can often indicate whether the child will walk normally or with some unfortunate defect. And what lessons that could illustrate!

Steps in our Christian pathway are, therefore, matters for careful concern and possibly some anxiety, but thankfully we are assured that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way" (Psalm 37:23). Alas, we may often consult our own wisdom or inclination, or seek the advice of others incompetent to give it. What lasting regret to discover that we or they have been mistaken or misled! Scripture offers many warnings against such folly; for example, Jeremiah 10:23, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Again, Psalm 73, vv. 2 and 17, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped . . . until I went into the sanctuary of God: then understood I their end." Only as we consult the unerring wisdom of God, by prayer and attention to the Word, can we obtain the necessary guidance by the Holy Spirit as to the step which may be our immediate concern. Our natural inclinations or those of others may influence us to take a different or even opposite direction; and we do well to recall that "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). But, happily, the "good man" accepts the inspired counsel of Solomon in Proverbs 3:6, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths."

If the foregoing gives the impression that all decisions in the life of faith are easy and spontaneous this would be quite fallacious. Often a step of some grave importance requires long patience and persistent prayer before the clear light of the Lord's guidance and His ordering of the next step becomes apparent. Many a Scripture could be adduced to support this, and readers may be well acquainted with these, but a further quotation from Psalm 37:7 will suffice for the present, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. . . . Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself." Is it not striking that our text does not say that the Lord directs our leaps and bounds, but our **steps**, one at a time? It may be natural for us to desire to see far in advance what the future holds in store for us, but how wisely and mercifully this knowledge is withheld from us. And need it be said here, that the example of many today who give ear to the incantations and predictions of the necromancer is unworthy of the Christian and totally contrary to the Word of God. It was with more than a grain of sagacity and faith that John Henry Newman penned his well-known lines, "Keep Thou my feet: I

do not ask to see the distant scene — one step enough for me". Such sentiments we might well take to heart. Was it not such longings that led the Psalmist to pray, "Order my steps in thy word" (Psalm 119: 133)? Only then would his course be safe from the uncharted perils that might mean shipwreck on the high seas of life. O Lord, let this be my prayer!

When engaged in fighting the good fight of faith it is of vital importance to be sure of our steps lest the enemy should gain a tactical advantage through our uncertainty. David, having vanquished his many enemies, including the remaining giants of the Philistines, was conscious of his own feebleness and rightly attributed the victory to God, his "strength and power". His inspiring song of triumph is given us in 2 Samuel 22 and in verse 37 he declares his secret thus, "Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, so that my feet did not slip". How could anything but victory be the result? Do our steps need to be enlarged as we "wrestle not against flesh and blood" but against a foe immensely more swift and powerful than Saul and the giants of his day? Listen to David's jubilant notes again. "By [my God] I have leaped over a wall; by thee I have run through a troop" (v. 30). Are we faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles, a veritable wall that defies our steady progress, a troop too strong to run through? Let David's God enlarge our steps, so that the swift and powerful 'giants' of our day shall be compelled to concede victory to those whose trust is in the mighty God. And, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

How then may our steps be "ordered by the Lord"? In days of confusion and deception on all sides and a howling babel of voices in the world, is it still possible to know this experience? Claims and counter-claims bid to exert their influence on the direction of our lives. But the believer in Jesus who humbly, sincerely and prayerfully seeks to walk the next step with Him will assuredly realise His guidance in the most unmistakable and wonderful way. Even if our present direction is questionable, as with the two sad disciples trudging their mistaken way to Emmaus in bitter retreat and disillusionment (Lue 24:13-35), He will come alongside and measure His steps to ours; and as He "talks with us by the way", all unrecognised, yet revealing Himself more and more, our hearts will strangely burn within us, as did theirs. Also, He will "open to us the Scriptures", about which we may have been confused; and soon our steps will be reversed, as theirs were, to find the company of those who love Him and who make Him the Centre of their gathering. Surely this is a message of comfort to the many who are grieved by the sad and perplexing state of the Christian profession generally and know not where to turn. Good it is to remember that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14).

Examples are always helpful to illustrate the truth and Scripture abundantly supplies them. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord", says our text, and few might be so bold as to claim the quality of absolute goodness. Most Christians would readily own that they fall far short of that qualification. But examples of good men

in the Word are given for our encouragement. Joseph of Arimathea is upheld as a 'good man' in Luke 23:50-53, and his steps were ordered to beg from Pilate the body of Jesus so that it might be interred with honour. Barnabas is called 'a good man' in Acts 11:24 and his steps were ordered to encourage saints to "cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart" and then to travel to Tarsus, far from his home, to seek out Saul (Paul, the apostle) and bring him to Antioch, from whence Paul was to commence his far-reaching missionary journeys. The common denominator between these two 'good men' was their love for the Lord and zeal in His service. But who of all the sons of men more richly deserved this title than the lowly Jesus Himself, who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38)? Indeed, "some said, He is a good Man" (John 7:12). Therefore His steps must forever be the perfect pattern for all who would follow Him. Hence in 1 Peter 2:21 we read, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps". "In the steps of the Master," may be an attractive title for a book which describes beautifully the country scenes traversed by the Saviour's blessed feet. And many find it fascinating to travel to these venues of historic interest. Such helps, in the end, depend on the superbly told and accurate stories of the inspired Gospels, which lay the greatest emphasis on the grace and beauty of the Son of God Himself, whose exemplary steps are there so faithfully portrayed.

May the Holy Spirit so engage and inspire our hearts with Him that we may gladly, at whatever cost, follow His steps for God's glory and the blessing of all around. No other steps will ever afford more joy.

THE INCARNATION

HAZEL DIXON

Through the night calm of Bethlehem,
A new-born cry . . .
Run, shepherds, and find Him,
Sing, hosts in the sky!
Tremble, dark powers,
Shake, portals of Hell,
In the fulness of time
Comes the Gift all sublime,
Marvellous
God with us
Immanuel!

Scripture Truth

JULY, 1979

(incorporating "Words of Help")

THE DOCTRINE OF DELIVERANCE IN ROMANS

J. S. BLACKBURN

IT has many times been said that the Christian does not make very much progress, and indeed often does not get real assurance, until he has in some measure entered into the experience of deliverance. I use this word in the sense of Romans 6:22, "made free from sin and become servants to God", and of Romans 8:2, "the Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death".

For this reason it is very right and good that one so often hears explanations and exhortation on this theme in this scripture. Generally, it appears to be thought that a basic concept is the distinction between 'sin' in Romans 5:12 to 8:4 and 'sins' in chapters 3 to 5. (Although, in fact, 'sins', in the plural, only occurs once in chapters 3 to 5, i.e. 4:7, and 'sins' in the plural once in the later chapters, i.e. 7:5. The concept is, of course, sound, for one ought to bring in the plural, 'iniquities', also in 4:7.) This distinction between 'sin' and 'sins' is often illustrated by saying, for example, that 'sin' is the root, and 'sins' are the fruit: or 'sin' is in the nature, and 'sins' in the practice. So far, so good, but the question I wish to raise in this paper is: has the concept of 'sin' a single meaning throughout chapters 5 to 8, or are there two clearly distinguished meanings?

I have heard it said that W. J. Hocking, in addresses for the training of young men in Christian service, used to say, "keep pegging away at Romans 1 to 8". This was very good advice, for at least two reasons. A large proportion of believers pass through 'the Romans seven experience', a period of intense distress at finding that, although they are believers and know their sins forgiven, they are powerless to get the victory over indwelling sin: "for the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do". To see the way for oneself through this darkness and anguish, and then to be able to help others, is sufficient reason for an open ear and heart to the teaching of these chapters. Many young believers (and older ones too) seem to adhere to the thought that so long as we experience the deliverance, the doctrine does not matter. It is surely a sufficient answer, that if the Spirit of God has given so much detailed teaching in Romans 5 to 8, we must need it, and will certainly be the losers if we ignore it. All this is, of course, a plea for the closest, most painstaking and prayerful attention by the reader to this doctrine, so that this paper may give enlightenment to any earnest seeker.

First, we look at an illustration, and justify taking the illustration first in that it is itself Scripture, and, being so, comes in the Bible before

the doctrine of Romans. Let us distinguish three occasions when Israel, during the history of Exodus and Numbers, were in an impasse: the first, when they were confronted by God's judgment, the destroying angel, and the death of the firstborn (Exodus 12); the second, when there was no apparent escape from destruction by Pharaoh as they approached the Red Sea (Exodus 14); and the third, when they faced death from the serpents' bite (Numbers 21). At each point there was the terror of imminent destruction until God stepped in and rescued His people.

In the first, the question was between Israel and God, and it arose from their liability to God's judgment. It was answered by the Passover lamb, and God's word, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you". In the second, the problem was between Israel and Pharaoh, until God intervened through Moses, and destroyed Pharaoh's power and set the slaves free, in the sense that Pharaoh had no further control over them.

The Lord had said, "Let My people go that they may serve Me". As long as Israel was under Pharaoh's control they could not serve the Lord. Now they are delivered from Pharaoh's control. Will they now serve the Lord? Will they now show themselves to be under the control of His will? At this stage a new dimension enters the story. Their real inability to serve the Lord was with them all the time, but it was only when the will of God was given by Him the form of **law**, that it was demonstrated that, free externally as they now were, there was something within themselves, something in their nature, which, until corrected, made them incapable of pleasing the Lord. Instead, they lusted after the fruits of Egypt, immediately broke the basic commandment by their idolatry, and wandered in the wilderness, whereas the repeatedly expressed will of God was their immediate entrance into the delights of Canaan. The end of their wandering was marked by the brazen serpent, through which, after their insubjection to the Lord had become symbolised in the serpents' poison in their veins, they received life.

The third impasse, then, was brought about when the people were about to succumb to the serpents' poison. There was no way but death, until God stepped in, and through the likeness of the killer, the serpent of brass, caused them to live.

The three rescues from impasse may be summarised thus: The first was from guilt before God. The second was from servitude under the power that ruled in Egypt. The third was from the poison within themselves. And now for the application to Romans, chapters 3 to 8. The first illustrates our **sins** (transgressions, iniquities) which made us guilty before God (Romans 3:19). The second signifies our servitude to **sin**, as the power that rules **in the world.** The third corresponds to control over us exercised by **sin** dwelling **in me.**

Our understanding of these chapters will be illuminated by the following thoughts:

(a) Central to the teaching of Romans 6 is baptism. All Christians have been "baptised unto Jesus Christ" (v. 3). Compare this verse with 1 Corinthians 10:2, "baptised in the cloud and in the sea", words referring to Israel's exodus from Egypt, precisely the subject of our

second illustration. Israel's passage through the Red Sea put them under a new service, a new obedience, a new leader. It is not, therefore, in the least fanciful to take Exodus 14 as a divinely intended picture of Romans 6, since both deliverances centre on a baptism. Christian baptism likewise puts us under the new service, a new joyful obedience to a new Leader, Jesus Christ.

(b) Can there be any doubt that Romans 8:3, "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (the explicit means of the deliverance from the control of indwelling sin), is intended to draw the reader's attention to the brazen serpent?

(c) I find it very compelling to note that there is no hint in Romans of sin "that **dwelleth in me**" before 7:17, and that it comes in after the work of the law, just as the law in Israel was given after the passage of the Red Sea and before the poison in our nature was symbolised by the serpents' poison. It is surely quite unjustified to read back the consequences of this devastating discovery, arising from the effect of the law, namely, that this frightful principle has a home in me, into such a statement as "reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin" in 6:11.

(d) It is instructive to compare the process of thought by which, led by the Spirit, the apostle postulates these two things so distinctly: sin ruling in the world, and sin dwelling in me. For the origin and existence of the former, he reasons from the history of the race. "Sin entered into the world," and , entering, "reigned" (5:21). But for the ground of the frightful discovery that sin "dwelleth in me", Paul does not reason from the history of the race, but from a process of looking within himself and examining his own experience, so vividly devastating in its truth to the experience of every Christian (7:15-24). Examining his experience, he sees that the 'I' that wills has lost control of the 'I' that performs and concludes that some alien power, sin, has taken up its abode within him and has control of his actions.

A kind of chart may help to seize the teaching with greater completeness. We can distinguish at each stage an aspect of the human **plight** without God; an aspect of the death of Christ, which is the **ground** on which God can bless; the **means** whereby we make this **deliverance** our own; and an aspect of the great salvation.

The Plight	**The Ground**	**The Means**	**The Deliverance**
Guilty before God 3:19	Christ Jesus, a propitiation 3:25	Faith in His blood 3:25	Justified 3:26
Servants to sin 6:20	He died unto sin once 6:10	Reckon yourselves dead unto sin 6:11	Made free from sin 6:22
In captivity to the law of sin in my members 7:23	God sending His own Son ... condemned sin in the flesh 8:3	The Spirit's control of life in Christ Jesus 8:2	Free from the control of sin and death 8:2

This paper has been largely devoted to explanation, but we can never think too much of all that there is for the heart, especially in the details presented in the second column above. As the eye runs down the brief words, what wonders of the giving love of God, what treasure of the down-stooping grace of Christ, are there found to move the heart, to give the lips their thanksgiving and worship! In connection with Romans 3, like the Passover lamb, He bore the stroke. From 8:32 we bring back the retrospective comment, God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all". Regarding the deliverance of Romans 6, we read of "the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which was by one man, Jesus Christ" (5:15). Let us take particular note of the work of Christ at this point, that is, for our deliverance from sin as the power that rules in the world. "He died unto sin once," that is, His response to a sin-ruled world was that He passed out of it by death; and His death becomes the way out for His people. This deliverance is made good to us by reckoning ourselves "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God" through Him. How could the sin "unto" which He died be indwelling sin? There was no indwelling sin with Him. The entire difference between the bearing of His death in Romans 6:10 and 8:3 is no small part of the proof that the word 'sin' is used with a different meaning in the two verses.

Further thought must be given to the concept of 'sin ruling in the world'. Does this find confirmation in experience? Lust and pride are in the world according to 1 John 2:16. The sin inherent in these two principles illustrates the meaning of being 'servants to sin'. The sin to which lust and pride drive men is indeed in the saddle so far as the world is concerned. Living under servitude to bodily appetites, including drink and drugs, is manifestly being enslaved by the power ruling in the world. This kind of servitude under a galling yoke is, of course, connected with being captive to indwelling sin, but very many realise the pressures exerted by sin seen around as a ruling power, without ever suspecting that sin also dwells within the believer, as well as ruling in the world around him. It is unlikely that deliverance from captivity to the law of sin-in-the-flesh will ever be thoroughly realised until the break with the world is decisively made. In fact, the clean break with the former worldly life is often an immediate part of a person's conversion.

In Romans 8:3 again the heart finds the wonders of divine love in the words, "God sending his own Son". The bearing of His death in this aspect is that the sting of indwelling sin is removed in that He has suffered death under its condemnation. A flood of light is cast for us on the practical benefit of the teaching of this passage, if we see an immense difference between the effect of Christ's death regarding our sins in Romans 3 and our indwelling sin in Romans 8. In the former, our sins are remitted (3:26), forgiven (4:7) and therefore removed (Psalm 103:12). When we come to say, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" in relation to the discovery that sin dwells in us, God has dealt with the matter quite differently. He has not taken away, that is, removed the sin; not yet! The way He has taken is to give a new power, a far greater power, no less than the Holy Spirit,

also to "dwell in me", and it is by walking "after the Spirit" that His delivering power is realised by the believer. An aircraft stationary on the ground is under the control of the force of gravitation. But in flight the greater power, aerodynamic, of the engines, gets the victory over gravity, and is in effective control. So it is with the Spirit's power exercised in the believer. "The Spirit's control of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free (says the apostle) from the control of sin and death".

We conclude with a thought which might also be found helpful to understand and to benefit, in living, from the description, in the first person, of how the deliverance works. It is the thought, illustrated by the opposing forces of gravitation and aerodynamics, that in Romans 7 and 8 the word 'law' seems to pass from the 'law in commandments' to the related concept of 'control'. The purpose of such a study as we have undertaken is that the Spirit of God in His word might enable us to find the "walk after the Spirit" described in detail in 8:5 - 15, for "to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace", because, in such a mind, God is pleased.

CONFIDENCE — JOHN BARNES

CONFIDENCE is a fine and stabilising quality but we need to ask, "In what or in whom does my confidence rest?" In his epistle to the Philippians Paul refers to his confidence in God that He, having begun a good work in those saints, would perform it until Jesus Christ's day (1:6). Later in the same epistle he speaks of having "no confidence in the flesh" (3:3). Confidence in God and confidence in the flesh are clearly mutually exclusive. Confidence is sometimes illplaced, and if this is so with me, I am in a false position. When it concerns matters relating to the soul and to eternity it is serious indeed to be wrong. The three texts we look at refer to this matter in three ways.

1. The Confidence of Presumption. Psalm 10 : 6

"I shall not be moved." The speaker to whom the Psalmist attributes this confident assertion is one who relies upon himself and to himself alone he looks. His proud boast is that whatever life may bring he would remain unmoved; his circumstances could never be such as would shake him from this confidence. "I shall never be in adversity." His strength being in himself, he feels that he needs no outside support but can, unassisted, cope with whatever comes along. It is remarkable that this sentiment, at all times widespread, has gained favour in our own days in the very terms of those ancient times. We have all heard vociferous crowds of football supporters on their way to a match singing this very line, "We shall not be moved". But we know also, to our public cost and inconvenience, that they **can** be moved even to violence if their team should suffer a defeat. Their vaunted confidence

is soon shattered. This is the "man of the earth" (v. 18). The fact is that such a man has not sufficient resources to enable him to rely with assurance on himself.

In the early verses of Psalm 10 the writer refers to some of the motives which govern the behaviour of the kind of man he has in mind. The first of these is pride (v. 2). Such a man is set up in a vast impression of his own greatness and his own resources and places a blind trust in them. In looking wholly to himself he necessarily leaves God out of his reckoning altogether. "God is not in all his thoughts" (v. 4). He also looks with disdain on others and despises them in the poverty of their resources (v. 2 — the poor). Those whom he admires (if he can be persuaded to take his eye off his own image for a moment) are men similar to himself in character (v. 3). In his presumption he makes the foolish boast, "I shall not be moved". However, it takes but little of life's shocks and disasters to shake most of us severely. Man, at his best, is but a broken reed.

2. The Confidence of Prosperity. Psalm 30 : 6

This kind of confidence is, perhaps, more dangerously misleading because its foundation is more subtle. Even the sincere believer may have his confidence fixed on the wrong object. Many men, even thoughtful heathen, would deplore the vain-glorious boast of our first man, being aware of their own frailty. But when circumstances are favourable there may easily be developed a sense of security. It often pleases the Lord to keep some of His people in relative poverty while others prosper materially, but it would be dangerous to rely on prosperity for its own sake. For the ancient Hebrew, success was an indication of the Lord's favour, in general. Might he not, therefore, in the confidence of favour, say "I shall never be moved"? But the special favour of comfortable conditions may not be permitted to continue. It is sovereignly bestowed and may be sovereignly removed. Circumstances of life often change dramatically. Job was prospered above many of his contemporaries but he did not look to his success in affairs alone ; he looked beyond them to his God. When his disaster came in a series of devastating strokes, he was shaken severely but not moved from his faith in God. His sublime utterance, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him," is deeply touching and shows how real his faith was in God. Had his confidence been solely in the abundance of his possessions, when all was taken from him he would have been crushed completely. It may be easy when conditions are favourable to say, "I shall never be moved," but these things are too uncertain to be depended on. Job's case is proof that even divinely promoted prosperity may suddenly be removed for reasons perfectly known to the Lord though imperfectly understood by us.

The Psalmist had enjoyed a period of prosperity but when reverses came he was troubled. The perfect sovereignty of God has to be taken into account whether in giving or in removing. "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord."

3. The Confidence of Piety. Psalm 16 : 8

We love to think of this composition as the Psalm of the Perfect Man. It puts us on altogether different ground from the two previous texts. There is no presumption to be detected here, nor does prosperity in affairs govern the outlook of the Speaker ; but there is utter confidence. The reliance we read of here is neither in self nor in surroundings : it is in God. "Preserve me O God for in **thee** do I put my trust." This man looks to God as the Object of His trust. "I have set the Lord always before me : because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved."

The Lord Jesus was never moved. He could not be deflected even a fraction from the path of obedience to the Father's will. "I do always those things which please him," He declared on one occasion (John 8:29). He was not speaking in ignorance of what was to befall Him, for in the previous verse He mentions His lifting up. It was in the full knowledge of that He spoke. He was not to be diverted from the path which that Will would require Him to tread, nor could He be persuaded to deviate ever so little to avoid some of its more difficult features. "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." In the garden, when the betrayer arrived with his armed band to arrest the Lord, He went forth to meet them. Again it is clear that all the facts were before His mind. "Knowing all things that should come upon Him," He went to meet them (John 18:4). These things could not move Him. One of our hymn-writers has captured the thought in these lovely lines:

"Unmoved by Satan's subtle wiles,
Or suffering, shame and loss,
Thy path, uncheered by earthly smiles,
Led only to the cross."

So, with the Lord, it was no blind assertion which did not take all the facts into account ; it was simple truth itself: "I shall not be moved." It was because His God was at His right hand that He had this confidence.

We know who the Speaker was and how rightly His confidence was set upon His God. In our measure this can also mark us. His God is ours ; His Father our Father. Complete confidence in God can be our strength too, because He is completely reliable. So, in dependence on Him the simple believer may be enabled to "withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand." The believer who can so stand will not be moved. Paul was anxious that the Colossians should not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel (1:23). He was concerned, also, that the Thessalonians should not be moved by afflictions (1 Thess. 3:3). Paul was, himself, an example of this steadfastness. Afflictions awaited him wherever he travelled in the service of the Lord but, he says with confidence, "None of these things move me" (Acts 20:24). And in that context he commends the brethren to God as the source of their strength. If in any small way we are to have a confidence like this it must, it can only be as we lean wholly on God.

A PARTAKER OF THE DIVINE NATURE – T. BALDERSTON

> Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.
> (2 Kings 5:3)

What prompted the girl to speak these words? Where did she learn them? I wish to ask three questions about them.

1. **What was there in her own experience to justify such an expression of faith?** In an instant, I suppose, she had been snatched away from her family and home, her abductors having, more likely than not, murdered her family and burned her village in the process. In that instant, childhood was gone, with its comparative irresponsibility and pleasures; in its place came the prospect of lifelong servitude. In the world's eyes, who could have been more justified in exclaiming, "Don't talk to me about a God of love with all the trouble I've had! What has God ever done for me?"

But trouble only nourishes the seed of unbelief in our hearts; it does not plant it there. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). And she had it.

True, things could have been worse. She was in service to Naaman's wife. But prosperity is no guarantee of faith either. She might just as easily have attributed her circumstances to Naaman and Naaman's gods. Since her chances of returning home were minimal, she could have taken the easy way out, and have opted for her captors' religion, as doubtless many another captive did.

As is obvious, she didn't do that either. Neither oppression nor favour shook her faith in the living God. Out of the fulness of her heart she spoke of His loving kindness. We have met Christians like that too. But are we ever like them?

2. **How did she know that Elisha would recover her master of his leprosy?** "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:27). Yet "she staggered not through unbelief".

True, God was working many miracles, comparatively speaking, at that time in Israel. On a nation that had refused His word in Elijah, God was pouring the ministry of Elisha — free, undeserved grace. But hardly anybody seemed to notice. An unbelieving king is saved from certain defeat, and is an unbeliever still (2 Kings 3). A believing woman is granted a son, and then receives him back from the dead — her own faith is answered (2 Kings 4:8ff). But a girl enjoys (outwardly) not a morsel of the grace for herself; yet it is she who is able to point a heathen to it, and that for a defilement she had never known Elisha remove. And Naaman is brought to worship the true God.

Christ is rejected and has gone to the Father. And now is the time of grace. 'Greater things' can be done today by the Holy Ghost through the believer because He has gone there (John 14:12). A greater than Elisha is to be found, not in Samaria, but in the heavenly country. Have we assimilated too much of our captors' religion to be able to point them to Christ where He is?

3. ***Who taught her to love her enemies?*** Evidences of the sovereign love of God are not absent from the Old Testament, but nothing to compare with the clear light of teaching of the Lord Himself (Matthew 5:44) or of the Epistles (Romans 12:20-21 ; 1 Corinthians 13). And, it may be added, she must have loved, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. Why otherwise would the great lady have believed her enough to tell her husband, and he the king? Paul's life also exhibited the message of the cross and the glory which he spoke (2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:13). Error, backed up by the utmost dedication, is still error. Truth, spoken by a hypocrite, remains truth. But God wants **our** lives to depict the truth He has given us to speak. Most of us had best fall quiet at this point. If she, without Gospel or Epistle, could expunge from her heart all bitterness concerning the man who had master-minded her captivity, where do we stand, surrounded as we are with the heavenly light that has come to us in Jesus?

"I believed, and therefore I spoke" (2 Corinthians 4:13).

THREE RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD WILLEM J. OUWENEEL

5. HEIRS OF GOD: PART ONE

WE are children of God and we are sons of God. And because we are both of these things, we are also heirs of God.

'Children' and 'sons' are distinct, yet complementary relationships, as I have sought, in the preceding articles, to show from the Scriptures. The relationship of 'children' faces, so to speak, towards the world. The relationship of 'sons' faces, so to speak, towards God. Children now share the rejection of Christ. Sons share the glory of Christ glorified. Children are those who are born of God, and who show towards the world the character of the God who is light and love, now in rejection, soon in glory. Sons are those whom God has appointed to Himself, for His own portion and pleasure.

Now we reach the third of the three relationships that concern us — the fact that we are heirs of God. Our relationship as 'heirs' is an aspect both of our relationship as 'children' and as 'sons'. We are heirs because we are children (Romans 8:17), but we are heirs also because we are sons (Galatians 4:7). And because this is true, it also follows that there are two sides to our heirship, two distinct yet complementary aspects to our inheritance. These we now proceed to examine.

The Promise to Abraham

Let us begin with the promises made to Abraham. That, interpreted as types, these promises apply to us, is clearly set forth in the Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians and the Hebrews.

Abraham was called out from his country and kindred to a land that God would show him — to an inheritance. Now 'inheritance' denotes always God's possession, which He shares with us. (It does

not necessarily involve the thought of the death of its owner.) God said of Canaan, "The land is mine" (Leviticus 25:23). And He was going to possess it in and with His people. He was going to give it to them as an inheritance.

This is the promise that was made first of all to Abraham. In Genesis 15:7, God tells him, "I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it". Centuries later, when Israel stood at the borders of the land, God repeats this promise: He will give them this land to possess it; Joshua will cause them to inherit it (Deuteronomy 3:18,28). The promise to Abraham was fulfilled in his seed, in the people of Israel.

But the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 15 says more than just this. **In whom** was the promise to Abraham to be made good? In Eliezer of Damascus — the steward of his house? No, not in the servant, the one born in the house, but, as we read (v. 4), "he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir". Of whom does this speak? Who is the son of promise?

It is the One of whom we read in 2 Corinthians 1:20, that, "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen". It is in Him (that is, Christ) that all the promises of God are made good to us. And now we know that **we** can inherit the land of promise, the richer, bigger land of heavenly places spoken of (as we noted in considering sonship) in Ephesians 1. The land of Canaan is a picture of the heavenly places; the blessings of Canaan a picture of the blessings to be found there.

Galatians 3:16 identifies the seed to whom the promises are made. "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." By **this** seed of Abraham, according to Galatians 3, we are sons of Abraham; in Christ Jesus we will possess the inheritance, the land of promise; by faith we are heirs of God.

But in the foregoing I have touched on only one aspect of the inheritance. There is a second aspect. We shall find both aspects if we read the promise to Abraham contained in Genesis 22:17-18. Abraham and his seed would not only be blessed (v. 17), but also be a blessing (v. 18). They would not only receive an inheritance, but all nations, all families would be blessed in them. These are the two aspects of the inheritance.

The promises of Genesis 22 echo those first made to Abraham in chapter 12:2-3. They are repeated here, after the offering up of Isaac and the receiving of him back from the dead "in a figure". The promises of the inheritance, in both the aspects just described, are the wonderful consequences of the sacrifice and the rising again of the Lord Jesus.

This is true for Israel. There is a blessing for Israel: ". . . in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (v. 17). And there is a blessing through Israel to all nations: ". . . in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (v. 18).

There are Christian people today who do not believe that there is any future for Israel, outside of the Church. But here, as you see, there **is.** One reason why people fail to discern this future prospect of Israel, is that they discern only the **second** aspect of Israel's inheriance. They see only that in the seed of Abraham there is blessing to all nations (salvation is of the Jews — John 4). They can see that through Israel blessing has come to us, but they fail to see the first aspect of Israel's inheritance: that there is also a blessing which Israel itself shall possess. Israel will again possess that inheritance which God promised to Abraham. God will again possess the land 'in' them, or rather 'in' Christ, and **thus** 'in' them. This will be in the millennium, and at the same time, through Israel all nations and all families will be blessed.

The same is true for us. We apply Genesis 22 to ourselves as a picture, and see that our inheritance too has a double aspect. There will be an inheritance for us, in heaven, which we shall share with Christ. It will be ours, that land of which God said, "It is my land": the heavenly places with all their spiritual blessings. Of that inheritance with the Lord Jesus in the house above, the world will know nothing. But there is a second side to our inheritance. We shall also inherit the whole universe together with the Lord Jesus. We shall reign over all things together with the glorified Christ. When He appears, when all things are put under the feet of the Son of man, we shall share that position with Him. The whole world will see that. They will see the glory which will be shared with Him by those who have suffered with Him. But what they will not see is that **first** aspect of our inheritance, the portion that we have in the 'land', within the house of God, within the family of the sons of God.

Now let us go carefully through some of the Scriptures that bear on this subject. For the remainder of this article I shall confine myself to references in Romans and in Ephesians, and in a subsequent article, God willing, deal with references in other Scriptures.

Heirship in Romans

I start with Romans 4, because this chapter establishes the link which we have been making between our subject and the promises to Abraham.

In Romans 4:12-14, we read that Abraham has become "the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect." Here we see a reference to Genesis 15. The inheritance (the land as well, as it says here, as the world) was not made good to Abraham through the law, but through his faith in God, which was imputed to him for righteousness.

How does the promise of this inheritance come to us? Abraham is "the father of us all" (Romans 4:16), and then Paul quotes from

Genesis 17:5 where God says to him, "I have made thee a father of **many** nations". We are of those 'many nations' who are all the children of Abraham inasmuch as we have believed in the same way as Abraham did, and thereby are justified on the same principle of faith as he. And as his children, we are also heirs of the same promise, heirs of the world. It is **our** inheritance.

Paul returns to the theme of 'heirs' in Romans 8:17, where, as we have seen, it follows from the fact that we are children of God. Because we are children of God in suffering now we shall share that position that belongs to Christ as the true seed of Abraham, as the One who went into death on Moriah and who came out of it again. He, the true seed, will be heir of the world. This was in the mind of God before creation, for in Hebrews 1:2 we read that God has appointed Him to be heir of all things, before we read that by Him God also made the worlds. But when God fulfills His word and puts all things under Christ's feet, the people of God, who have shared the sufferings of His Son, will share that glory with Him.

Heirship in Ephesians 1

Let us now see what Ephesians has to say on this subject. Chapter 1 clearly sets forth both aspects of our inheritance. See verse 3 again. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ . . .". This is the inheritance within, which will not be seen by the world, let alone be shared by it. It is for the sons of God in heaven, together with Christ.

But verses 9-12 of the same chapter show us the second aspect of our inheritance. "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times [that is, the millennium], he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth ; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."

You see how beautifully this chapter portrays the two aspects of the inheritance. There is a portion in heavenly places reserved for the sons of God. And there is the council of God, to put all things in heaven and in earth under Christ, and not only that, but also "in [him] we also have obtained an inheritance". This is the 'mystery of God's will' — not only that Christ will reign in the millennium, but also that we shall reign with Him over all things.

With this in mind we can see the importance of the Apostle's prayer at the end of the chapter, for it is very important that these things should have their right place in our lives. Therefore he prays (v. 18), "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may **know** . . ." — not just a mental registration of doctrine, but a heart-enlightening, a degree of spiritual understanding, wrought by the 'spirit

of wisdom and revelation' (v. 17). He prays that his readers might know three things. "That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe . . .".

Firstly, the 'hope of His calling'. This has to do with sonship. It refers to verses 3-5 of this chapter where we have adoption to sonship disclosed. The knowledge of the hope of His calling is the full realisation that we are sons of God ; it is the enjoyment and realisation of spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Are you aware that you are called, as a son, to realise your inheritance there?

Secondly, "The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints". If "the hope of His calling" refers to the first aspect of the inheritance, this clause refers to the second. He refers to our reigning over all things with Christ. But it is **God's** inheritance, just as it was God's calling. "The land is mine," He says, and the world is His as well. He is going to possess the riches of the glory of that inheritance **in the saints.** This will be brought about when the world has been subjected to the Son of man ; then God will possess His inheritance once again, and He will possess it in the saints, because they are those with whom Christ will reign over that world, over all things in heaven and earth.

This thought is illuminated, I believe, by reference to another figure used in this Epistle — the house of God. In the millennium and in the eternal state, God will have His house in the midst of the universe. We find that in Revelation 21, where the tabernacle of God is with men (Revelation 21 : 3). God will be dwelling then in His own inheritance. He will be in possession of His own universe. How will He dwell there? **In the tabernacle**, which is the Church of the living God, the temple of the Holy Spirit. When, as Colossians 1 : 20 says, all things will have been reconciled to God, He will possess them in His saints.

In the third part of his prayer Paul asks that his readers might know, "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe". What kind of power has God used toward us? The same as that power which He used toward Christ: ". . . according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ". And what was this power? God "raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath 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 been raised with Christ, and in Christ Jesus we have been seated in heavenly places (Ephesians 2 : 6). And there God has given Christ — the One who is Head over all things (and indeed, **as** Head over all things) — to the Church. That Church is the Body which is His fulness. It is not just the Head that will rule over the world. It will be the full man — the Head and the Body. God gave the Body to the Head, and made a perfect unity. We are His fulness — the fulness of that Man who Himself is the living omnipresent God! What a blessed thing! "The hope of his calling", you know. The house

of God, in which He will possess His inheritance, you know. Now also, the Body of Christ, united with Christ, sharing everything with the Head. What He will possess, we will possess. What an inheritance: the inheritance of the sons — that heavenly company within the policies of heaven ; but also, the inheritance of the Body, sharing the wide universe which the Son of man will possess!

FELLOW-WORKERS WITH PAUL ———— T. D. SPICER

3. LYDIA

A FOOTHOLD for the Gospel in Europe was first found at Philippi where a flourishing church was quickly established. The Apostle Paul and his travelling companions arrived in the city in mid-week and on the Sabbath, because there was no synagogue there, found the place on the river bank where a handful of Jews were in the habit of meeting for prayer. Among those who gathered there that day was a certain woman named Lydia who sold purple-dyed goods which she imported to Philippi from Thyatira. The facts are stated very simply by Luke in Acts 16:13-15.

A Weekly Habit

The first thing to be noted is that the success of the Apostle's visit was due to prayer ; an essential preliminary before true progress can be made with any undertaking. Moreover, it is not merely an act of prayer that catches our attention at this point, but the habit of prayer. Lydia and her friends met in the place "where prayer was wont to be made". A place and a time were fixed and the engagement was kept. In every enterprise in the Name of our Lord and Master we must, if we are to look for continuing blessing, begin with prayer. It does not matter whether it is a weekly confrontation with a small class of restive children, or the occasion of an elevated pulpit before a large congregation ; the principle is essentially the same. One commentator has suggested that these praying women proved to be the man of Macedonia who had beckoned for help.

But notice further, the day on which these meetings and prayer took place. It was a fixed day and, obviously from the account, an established practice on the part of a small section of the Philippi community. It was the Sabbath, and therefore a Jewish gathering. In the New Testament, Christians set aside the first day of the week for the Lord. There are many people who disregard the setting aside of one day in seven as a day of rest from ordinary activities, but they do so at their own peril, and one day may well have to answer for their neglect.

A Work of Grace

So it was that a small group of Jews and Gentile proselytes were meeting in Philippi each week for Sabbath observance when Paul and his friends arrived. However, the account becomes more personal and and individual. At these meetings there was "a certain woman named

Lydia whose heart the Lord opened, so that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul".

Now it is important that we should take account of the work of grace: that grace which comes to man in answer to prayer and the use of appointed means. There must be instructive teaching of the Word of God; there may be a most logical, reasoned and convincing argument; there may be an impassioned appeal to respond to the claims of Christ: but, unless the Lord opens the heart, all will have been in vain. This work is none other than the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. When we read or hear of those who turn to Christ and open their hearts to Him, we may be very sure that the Spirit of God has been at work, and that this is in answer to much earnest prayer.

Jesus said, "the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (*Luke 17:20*), and we see this truth illustrated in this episode at Philippi. Here, with the first setting of the Gospel on the shores of Europe, there is no ostentation. There is no big crusade meeting, there is no advance publicity for the servants of God, no appeals, no organisation. That little gathering by the riverside was essentially simple and unobtrusive. It was more like a cottage prayer meeting, or an informal Bible class, than anything else.

Those shores had seen great and mighty movements as conquering armies had passed on their way. The city itself was named after Philip of Macedon who made it a fortified city, and history books will supply all the details; but they had passed and their influence was almost gone. The movement that began that day when the Apostle attended the prayer meeting is still continuing, and will do so until the return of Jesus Christ.

There is encouragement for us in this thought. Only a very few can occupy any place of prominence in the world. On the other hand there is a modest beginning which becomes extensive in its results. Was there not a very small congregation in the chapel that morning when Charles Haddon Spurgeon first encountered the Gospel; but what a mighty oak grew from that modest acorn! Each one of us, no matter what our circumstances, provided we observe the same principles as Lydia, may bring help and blessing to countless numbers.

A Company of Women

Another remark which may be made of this little company in Philippi was its composition. Were they all women? We do not know, we cannot tell; at least no men are mentioned. Records Luke, "we . . . spake to the women who resorted thither." Afterwards, when Paul wrote his epistle to the Church at Philippi he said, "help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel" (Philippians 4:3), and a particular message was sent to two of them, Euodias and Syntyche. That godly women have exercised a particular ministry in the church, within the framework provided by obedience to Scripture, none can surely deny. From Philippi the Apostle went to Thessalonica. There we find among the true and active believers "of the chief women not a few"

(Acts 17:4). From there on to Athens where of two converts who are named, one was a woman, Damaris (Acts 17.34). Then on to Corinth with which we find associated the names of Chloe, Priscilla and Phoebe. Why mention these? Simply to show that the example of Lydia is not an isolated one. Sometimes, it may be, Christian women have thought, "What can I do towards the evangelisation of my neighbourhood, to extend the Kingdom of our Lord?" Possibly even more than a man! There are things which women can do, and often more effectively than a mere man ; and there is no need for a "liberation movement" to prove it!

A Willing Hospitality

In this series of articles, however, we are considering those who were 'Fellow-workers' of the Apostle Paul and we must see how Lydia fills this role. For this we turn to the end of verse 15 where Lydia's own words are recorded. "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, then come into my house and abide there," and the final comment added by the historian, "and she constrained us". With this we must link part of verse 40, "they [Paul and Silas] went out of prison, and entered into the house of Lydia".

When the Apostle wrote later to Timothy of "those given to hospitality", as a frequent traveller he knew what he was talking about. For as Lydia received the Gospel into her heart, so she received the servants of the Gospel into her home. She gave them a starting point for their work ; a basis from which they could operate. Moreover, they were apparently not unwilling to accept Lydia's hospitality ; and the narrative is sympathetically recorded so as to reveal not only her humility but also her zeal and determination to show, by doing good, her gratitude for the great blessings she had received.

Further, it would seem that this was not something which was done merely on impulse, but was a continuing labour of love and a spirit which ultimately pervaded the whole of the Church at Philippi. The sustaining ministry of Philippi was undoubtedly a continuous one. Remember what Paul writes to them. "When I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. . . . I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you. . . ." (Philippians 4:15-18).

Out of Lydia's initial act of hospitality sprang the support which the church continued to supply as the Apostle journeyed among the other churches. He thus permitted the church at Philippi to support him as he did not allow any other church to do.

So, among the names of those who were "Fellow-workers" with the Apostle Paul, we may include that of Lydia. Why she is not mentioned by name in the Philippian Epistle we can only conjecture ; she had perhaps returned to Thyatira. However, it is certain that the Apostle would have considered her as "one of those women which laboured with me in the Gospel . . . whose names are in the book of life."

Scripture Truth

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THREE RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD

WILLEM J. OUWENEEL

6. HEIRS OF GOD: PART TWO

IN the last article I drew a distinction between two aspects of the inheritance that has come to us as children, and as sons, of God. It can be illustrated thus:

Imagine a city with, at its centre, a marvellous palace on a mountain, which every eye can see. That is the way God will inhabit His universe in the millennium: in His palace, the house of God. Now there is a clear distinction between the outward glory of the palace, toward the city, and the inner life of the palace, the life of the royal family. The children of the Queen of England are her subjects, as are all English people, but to describe them as her subjects is awkward, because, although formally it is true, they enjoy a far more precious relationship with her: they are her children. Once, it is said, when a Queen of England was being crowned, everybody was admiring her robes and the regalia which spoke of her royal dignity; but a little child was present who saw her as well, and the child said, "That's my mummy!" Nobody else in the country could say that. The child knew her as Queen, in her royal glory. But she knew her also as her own mother, and there is nothing higher than that.

Now we are the house of God, and shall partake of its glorious display towards the world. But we shall also share the life within the house, and this life will be the secret life of the royal family; it will be hidden from those who are outside. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). We have been brought inside, as we read further in chapter 3:6. "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel." Fellow heirs — together with Jewish believers, belonging to the same Body, the same House, and sharing the same sonship. We belong to the same heavenly family.

The blessings within the house

And now, what is the blessing that is enjoyed within that family? It will be "all the spiritual blessings of the heavenly places". This is the promise of which we partake in Christ by the gospel, reminiscent of the promise to Abraham, but in fact much older. It was made before

the ages of time. In eternity, when there was no earth at all, no people of Israel, no Canaan, the heavenly places were in view, and every spiritual blessing was the object of the eternal promise.

We find this in the beginning of Paul's Epistle to Titus. "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." This promise which was made before the world began is summed up in a single phrase: eternal life.

Eternal life defines the spiritual blessings of the heavenly places. The third chapter of John's Gospel confirms this. There the Lord speaks of earthly and of heavenly things (John 3:12). When He describes the heavenly things, He employs the same phrase: eternal life.

Eternal life can be enjoyed in different degrees, and many will be introduced to it on this earth. The phrase is used in Matthew 25:46, when the sheep are rewarded at the throne of the Son of man with the enjoyment of the blessings of the millennium. But we for our part will enjoy eternal life according to the measure in which God is revealed to us. The revelation of God is according to the name by which He relates Himself to His people. For the earthly people of the millennium, this will be the name of the Most High God. But this name would not measure His self-revelation to us. For us, God is revealed as the Father, and as the Son of His love. We will know the true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). We will know the true God as Jesus Christ knew Him — as His Father. And we will know Jesus Christ as His Father knew Him — as His only begotten Son, the Son of His love. This is eternal life; we possess and can enjoy it now. Already we are seated in the heavenly places; now we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings there. This is so even though we still have the **hope** of God's calling, that is, even though we do not yet enjoy our blessings in perfection.

And here perhaps we can pause to take full stock of that phrase in Ephesians 3:6 — "fellow heirs . . . and partakers of his promise". Many saints, when they think of the inheritance, think of it in the sense of Ephesians 1:9-12 only. They confine their attention to the fact that all things will be brought under the feet of the Lord Jesus and that we will reign over them with Him. But they forget the heavenly side. They forget that the highest promise is eternal life (Titus 1:2; cf. 3:7; 1 John 2:25). They forget that which is of "the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who . . . hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:12-13). They forget the inheritance of the saints in light, that is, the light of God, the inheritance of the **Son of His love.** This is the inheritance of the household of God. It is the life of the royal family, the inheritance within, that the world will not see. It is the inheritance also spoken of in 1 Peter 1:4 — "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you". This is the life behind the windows of the royal house. It is the experience of being introduced to the fellowship of the Father and the Son.

Where God commanded the blessing

There is an Old Testament Scripture which aptly sets this forth: Psalm 133. This is one of only two Old Testament passages which speak of eternal life (Daniel 12:2 is the other). Psalm 133 depicts the brotherhood brought together, and dwelling together; and there we see the High Priest with his oil. And it is there, where these things are found, and nowhere else, that God commands the blessing — even life for evermore.

This Scripture underlines that as Christians we are not left to live our own lives in this world. We are to dwell together as brethren. Life for evermore is the blessing that is shared by the sons of God when they dwell together as brethren, and are conformed to the image of God's Son, and when He is the Firstborn amongst them. And this is never more the case than when we come together on the Lord's Day morning, because that is the place where as a true heavenly company of the sons of God, as a divine brotherhood, we approach God, bringing worship to Him. There God commands the blessing. It is "all spiritual blessing" that He commands. In Ephesians 1:3 the phrase is properly in the singular, because it comprises everything. It is **the** blessing of Psalm 133 in heavenly places — the true blessing.

The blessings God commanded

And finally, I will turn to a vivid Old Testament picture of the blessings which are connected with eternal life, to a passage where Canaan is an apt picture of our heavenly blessing. It is found in Deuteronomy, the book in which God shows the people all the blessings of the land they are preparing to enter. While I could refer to any number of places, I confine myself to Deuteronomy 11:13-14. "And it shall come to pass . . . That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season . . . that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil". (Recall Galatians 6:8 — ". . . shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting".)

Here are three aspects of that reaping, that gathering in: the corn, the wine, and the oil.

First, the **corn**. We have a good deal about the harvests of corn in the Feasts of Jehovah — the harvests of barley and wheat. This represents to us the blessings available to us in the Son of the living God. It is the fellowship with the Father and with His Son. Fellowship with the Father, because we share His delight in His beloved Son; and fellowship with the Son, because He has made known to us the Father.

And next the **wine** speaks of joy, as we learn in Jotham's parable (Judges 9:13). The 'corn' and the 'wine' are brought together in the first few verses of John's First Epistle, for, "fellowship with the Father and the Son" leads us on to the result (v. 4), "that your joy might be full". It is "that eternal life" (v. 2), in which we experience true joy.

Then the **oil** speaks especially of the anointing, of which we read in 1 John 2:20. We enjoy this anointing as priestly sons (the way in which we are represented in Hebrews). Worship in the fourth chapter of

John's Gospel is collective, and with this thought we come back to 1 John 1:7 — "we have fellowship **one with another**". This being together in worship reminds us in turn of Psalm 133. Here the anointing appears as "the precious ointment" in the midst of the brethren dwelling together, with the blessing of eternal life.

"Behold how good and pleasant" is this scene! Brethren dwelling together in unity! The precious oil runs down from above, into the midst of a house of sons, the house of priests. Our Great Priest raises our voices and stirs up our hearts to worship the Father. What a blessing! What a portion! All glory to His name!

[This series is now concluded]

THE COACH AND THE CONTENDER —— J. STODDART

2 Timothy 2:5 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

IN the world of athletics perhaps nothing is more coveted by a contender for awards than the help of a competent coach. Experience and track record are the essential qualifications of the coach who would instruct and encourage potential participants in the games. Every reader of the Pauline epistles is surely impressed with the apostle's acquaintance with, and frequent reference to, this area of human activity. His object, in the many places where he mentions it, manifestly has nothing to do with the actual Olympic games of his day ; his aim was rather to apply principles, already well known and understood, to the spiritual arena. Hence his frequent references to running, the goal, combat, wrestling, rules for training, discipline, and so forth.

Let us, then, for the moment consider Paul as a coach, experienced and competent, giving valuable instruction to Timothy, his young "son in the faith" and a keen contender in the spiritual contest. "And if also anyone contend in the games, he is not crowned, unless he contend lawfully [that is, according to the rules]" (2 Timothy 2:5, New Trans.). In its application to Timothy and to all engaged in the spiritual arena, this meant that, as disciplinary rules were to be observed in physical contest, with disqualification for breaking them, so also in the Christian sphere there were divinely decreed principles or guidelines, obedience to which alone ensured success and the coveted crown. How explicitly these were seen to be kept in the many and varied activities of the Apostle! He took no short cuts, evaded no duty even though it entail personal suffering and hardship (as so often it did), but showed strictest loyalty and obedience to His Lord and Master, and His will predominated in everything. Indeed, only one so eminently fitted and experienced as he could say to his young protégé, "Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it" (2 Timothy 3:14, R.S.V.).

In the Christian race powerful influences are continually at work either to distract the runner and thus slow down his pace, or to suggest a short cut (disregarding the rules) to the desired winning post. We are

taking short cuts when we avoid responsibilities which call for sacrifice, when we take the easy way out of difficult decisions that have to be made. The constant exercise of the Apostle was necessary to counteract all such influences directed against him, and how indebted we are to share the results of his triumph! We may recall at this point his vigorous words of encouragement to his Corinthian converts. "Know ye not that they who run in the racecourse run all, but one receives the prize? Thus run in order that ye may obtain. But everyone that contends for a prize is temperate in all things: they then indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore run, as not uncertainly ; so I combat, as not beating the air. But I buffet my body, and lead it captive, lest after having preached to others I should be myself rejected" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, New Trans.). This "rejection" was not, of course, as to his salvation, but as to his service, his "disqualification from the games". What an exemplary coach this man was to other contenders!

However feeble or inexperienced he may be, every true believer in the Lord Jesus is a contender in the heavenly race (truly an obstacle race!) and he cannot opt out of its obligations. The strength and stamina needed to stay the pace and to press on to the finishing line are, thankfully, not in us, but are freely supplied by Him who is "the leader and completer of faith", who has gone every step of the rugged path before us and leads us on, in His grace, to complete and final victory. We may be confined to home, or perhaps to a wheelchair. We may be hospitalised for a long period. Yet the race goes on, and even when greatly restricted we can make progress as our spirits are sustained by Him, as we are "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). For, "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). What triumphant progress has been seen in saints whose bodies are racked with pain! And just here is the wonderful bond between coach and contender, for possibly no one could have experienced as much suffering, weariness, pain and apparent frustration as the apostle Paul ; yet all of this but added to his competence to coach every other contender in the games. How favoured was young Timothy to be under the training and tuition of one whose track record and experience were unequalled, and who, by the Spirit, had the ability to impart the value of what he had learned! And Paul imparts it, not to Timothy only, but also to every other contender in the Christian arena from that day to this. For verification of this, and encouragement in it, we would profit by a careful study of 2 Corinthians 11 and 12.

It is striking that as Paul wrote these words to Timothy he was already thinking of his own departure from the scene of contest. This is to be observed in his second epistle, written (apparently) within a year of the first. Awaiting his trial under Nero, he calmly reviews his life of service, and the prospect beyond. "For I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is come. I have combated the good combat, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge [in contrast to Nero], will render to me in that

day ; but not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8, New Trans.). His "release" was before him, not his imprisonment ; death would but be "to depart and to be with Christ ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

The present lines are written by one who is nearer the end of the contest than its beginning, having had considerably more than half a century of active service for the Lord, through His mercy and grace. But who (and I least of all!) could assess the past years in the confident terms of the Apostle? No doubt most of us would rather incline to say from the heart, "We are unprofitable servants" (Luke 17:10) as the Lord taught his disciples to say. We may have learned much or little from the apostolic writings, but how encouraging to hear Paul assert that "the Crowning Day is coming", and not for him alone, but for all contenders in the race, all who love His appearing. However unprofitable we have been, it is love for Him and His appearing that will receive the glittering crown, the "crown of righteousness". With no empty boast we can all say, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). May this be the great stimulus and incentive to still fuller love and unwearied service for Him who is soon to appear in manifested glory with His reward, "to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). "Even so, come, Lord Jesus".

A MESSAGE OF GOOD CHEER ———— R. A. CREETH

HOW welcome is a word of encouragement in times of stress and strain, when life seems difficult, and evil abounds on every hand! There are four occasions in the Gospels when the Lord Jesus used the exhortation, "Be of good cheer", or (as the phrase is sometimes translated), "Be of good comfort"; and there is one occasion recorded in the Acts. The words were also used by the multitude to blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:49), and by Paul to the shipmen (Acts 27:22,25).

This is a word of encouragement we may take to ourselves, living as we do in the perilous times of the last days (2 Timothy 4:1). If violence and corruption characterised the days before the flood, they are surely in great evidence in the world at this present time. In human society the moral standards of earlier days are set aside, and people generally are giving full rein to their lusts and selfish desires. How comforting to the believer in such a world as this to find that the blessed Lord would draw near to us as He did to His disciples in Matthew 14:27, and whisper, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid"!

The Cheer of the Forgiveness of Sins

The first occurrence of this encouraging exhortation is in Matthew 9:2, and it is associated with the forgiveness of sins. A palsied, or paralysed, man was carried on a couch to Jesus, and, to the astonishment of all, the Lord said to him, "Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee", thus meeting his spiritual need before dealing with his bodily weakness. It was a word to lift up his head, to meet his con-

science as to sins, before healing his body and bidding him arise and walk. The forgiveness of sins is surely the great initial blessing of the believer, and is found alone in Christ and His work, as we are reminded in Ephesians 1:7, "In whom we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins". It is the first positive blessing we receive upon conversion (see Acts 26:18).

The Energy of Faith brings Good Cheer

The second occurrence of this phrase is in the same chapter (Matthew 9:22), where it is translated, "Be of good comfort". This was addressed to the woman who had suffered from a serious disease for 12 years and was steadily getting worse. You remember how she pressed through the crowd to touch the Lord's garments, and she was immediately healed. Our Lord commended her great faith, and tenderly said to her, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole". It is interesting to notice that both Mark and Luke add, "Go in peace", or, as the R.V. translates it, "Go into peace". Receiving the forgiveness of our sins, we are justified by faith, and we go forth to enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1-2).

Good Cheer through the Banishment of Fear

The exhortation, "Be of good cheer", next occurs in Matthew 14:27, and was addressed to the terrified disciples as they were battling with the winds and waves while crossing the Sea of Tiberias. The Lord who had gone up the mountain apart to pray, now came walking towards them on the sea. The disciples, believing Him to be a spirit, cried out in fear, but the Lord at once comforted their hearts and banished their fear. "Be of good cheer", He said, "it is I; be not afraid".

What a striking picture this is of our passage across the sea of Time, amid the difficulties, trials and sorrows that threaten to overwhelm us! At such times how comforting and assuring it is to recall the Lord's last words to His disciples before He ascended: "Behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age" (Matthew 28:20, New Trans.). And let us remember that He has also said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee", so that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6). The Lord is ready to draw near to us with His own delivering grace in every time of trouble, cheering us with His own presence, and comforting our hearts by His word, so that we may say with the Psalmist, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). The hymn-writer expresses this confidence in the verse:

"It is Thy perfect love that casts out fear;
I know the voice that speaks the "It is I"!
And in those well-known words of heavenly cheer
I hear the joy that bids each sorrow fly."

The Good Cheer of Victory over the World

Our Lord was about to leave the world and go to the Father (John 16:28), and so He prepares His disciples for the time when He would no longer be with them. He had given them the legacy of His own peace (John 14:27); He had promised them the presence and advocacy of the Comforter, and had warned them, not only of the antagonism of the world (15:18-25), but also of the testing that was about to come to them personally when, as He tells them, "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone". Then He adds, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but **be of good cheer**; I have overcome the world" (John 16:32-33). What a comfort these words must have been to those sorrowing disciples about to be left in a hostile world without their Master to sustain and support them! One has remarked, "As Christ alone could so feel and bless, so these words are worthy of him; and one knows not whether to admire most their divine authority, or their matchless grace and suitability to our needs here below. As He is absolutely what He also speaks, so He speaks what He is to the unfailing comfort of the believer" (W. Kelly).

The Lord's great desire was that the disciples should find their peace in Him, just as He had possessed peace in the Father. Moreover, throughout His pathway He had overcome the world with all its subtle temptations, and He was soon to vanquish the very prince of this world. Now he pledges that overcoming power would be at the disposal of His own. In the face of the world's hatred and opposition the believer's safety is in Christ, in whom alone is our peace, and by whom alone we can obtain the victory. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5-6).

The Good Cheer of Assured Testimony

The next occurrence of the phrase we are considering is found in Acts 23:11, and the words were addressed by the risen Lord to His suffering servant Paul as he lay despondent and imprisoned in a Roman castle. The context shows that Paul had somewhat marred his testimony by reviling (though unwittingly) the high priest, and had resorted to human wisdom in seeking to divide his antagonists into two groups, setting the Pharisees and the Sadducees against each other. In the great tumult that followed, the chief captain, fearing that Paul would be pulled to pieces, ordered the soldiers to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

We may well imagine that when night came the apostle would be feeling sad and discouraged, and possibly unable to sleep, as he deeply regretted what he felt had been a dishonour to the Lord whom he served. Then it was that the Lord Himself came and stood by him. He did not call to him out of heaven, or send an angel to carry his message. The Lord Himself came right down into that prison, and stood

by His grief-stricken servant, not to reproach him for his failure, but to comfort and reassure him with the message, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness at Rome".

It is interesting to notice that some add a word here, and translate, "as thou hast fully testified of Me" (W. Kelly), or "as thou hast borne full witness" (F. W. Grant). How beautiful this! There is not a word of blame; the Lord mentions nothing but his faithful testimony, and assures him that he would testify at Rome also. How gracious of the Lord in this tender and intimate way to come down and sustain the faith and lift up the heart of His tried and despondent servant, then a prisoner in a Roman castle!

And are there times when you and I are cast down and discouraged? Do we feel perhaps that we have failed in our testimony and have dishonoured the One whom we are privileged to serve? May we at such a time recognise His voice as He draws near to us with a sweet word of comfort, "Be of good cheer; you may serve Me still!"

The Good Cheer of Confidence in God

The last occurrence of this exhortation is found in Acts 27:22-25, and was uttered by Paul to the shipmen when they were threatened with the wreck of the vessel and the loss of life of all on board. The advice given by Paul earlier had been rejected (vv. 9-11), and complete disaster now faced them, so that all hope that they should be saved was taken away (v. 20). But Paul, with full confidence in his God, boldly said to them, "I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." And then he gave them the basis of this calm assurance as he continued, "For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me".

Here is the secret of being of good cheer and of full assurance: "I believe God, and I believe His word." What an object-lesson to us, and what a rebuke to our own lack of faith often in times of difficulty and danger! It is written, "My God shall abundantly supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19, New Trans.). Can we not believe this, and rest in the assurance that what He has promised He will certainly fulfil? Paul lived in the very presence of God, enjoying constant communion with Him, and proving experimentally what he himself had written to the Philippians, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". Let us then be of good cheer, for "if God be for us, who can be against us? . . . For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:31,38-39).

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

COLIN CURRY

1 Timothy 3:16

FEW verses in the New Testament have a theme so profound as 1 Timothy 3:16. This tremendous verse says so much in a small compass that it is worthy of a separate meditation. In this article we focus mostly on the verse alone, though first we mention briefly the effect and value of the verse in its context.

Looking at the surrounding verses it is clear that Paul is pressing the importance of godly behaviour in the Christian community. In view of possible delay in his going to join Timothy, Paul writes this letter in the meanwhile about suitable patterns of behaviour amongst the local body of Christians. Proper conduct, from Timothy and from others whom he must instruct, is spelt out here so that the believers might honour the God who had called them, and who dwelt amongst them. Chapter 4, immediately following this verse, tells Timothy about a suitable demeanour and outlook on his own part. In addition he must think carefully about his influence on others. His manner and his example must be helpful, to the end that all the believers may have their conduct shaped into a godly pattern.

Verse 16 comes in as a great buttress to this argument which presses right behaviour amongst Christians. It is the great lever which Paul uses in pressing home the rightness and the desirability of Godliness. The life of believers is to be consistent in quality with the truth which they believe and confess. Beyond all doubt, Paul seems to say, there is a tremendously weighty truth close to the heart of every Christian life which ought certainly to promote a manner of living in agreement with it.

A Massive Theme

The sheer size and weight of the theme that moves and motivates Christians is the primary point stressed in the verse. The emphasis in the sentence is on the word 'great'. There is no greater subject than this. Indeed it is not to be put alongside other matters in a comparative way. It stands absolutely and uniquely apart in its grandeur and its magnitude. Surely, says the apostle, there is a tremendous truth at the root of our Christianity, which must never cease to amaze us: the right reaction would be an increasing wonder as its depths and magnificence continue to dawn upon us.

The theme of the verse is factual; it centres on a certain epoch in time, on events which took place in that period and their significance. It speaks about real historical happenings; it begins at Bethlehem and it finishes at the Mount of Olives. It dwells on the wonders and the meaning of all that occurred between the birth of our Lord and His ascension; it covers the interval between His arrival here and His return into the glory from whence He came.

God was manifest in the flesh: this momentous fact is **indisputably** great. Beyond all controversy it is so. It is possible to shut one's eyes

to it, or to hide from its light: but nevertheless here is the true Light which, coming into the world, shines for every man (John 1:9). It has those self-evident and self-confirming qualities that light has; only preference for darkness makes people miss it. This great matter is almost unbelievable in its fullness, and it is really inescapable. "This thing was not done in a corner"; it confronts everyone.

Some translations, however, give a more positive content to the words "without controversy" in the A.V. This theme is "confessedly" great. It is not only undeniable, it is to be believed and confessed. This great truth is actively confessed, in word and life, by Christians. The truth concerning the incarnate Saviour, and the revelation of God in Him, so catches the vision of those who properly see it that it promotes a response. It promotes confession of its worth, agreement on its great value, and a loyalty to it in the manner of life of those who take in something of its quality. The mystery of godliness is great beyond our measuring. It has to be agreed that our faith is founded on massive facts, and a life of faithfulness and godliness would be the only true outworking of this great truth on which our Christian lives are based.

A Mystery

The truth enshrined in this verse is well described as a mystery. Any consideration of this matter must keep well in mind that we are facing sublime and fathomless facts here. God was manifest in the flesh: there must inevitably be depths far beyond our soundings associated with such an event. We must be ready to stand in awe and astonishment, and to drop entirely any casual or familiar approach, if such be the truth. The day would be a sad one if the foundation facts of our faith ceased to have their proper grip on us, if we were to lose the sense of their breathtaking character, of the ineffable and overwhelming nature of the truth that we believe. The facts of our faith are so transcendent, and so soul-subduing, that we must continually stay wide awake to their glory. They are so surprising and so profound as to rivet our attention, and to carry us along in the sense of their mystery and their magnificence.

Often the gospel narratives tell us that men felt out of their depth in the presence of Christ. "Never man spake like this man", was the reaction of those who found themselves quite unable to arrest Him, though sent to do so. One can see the problem He presented to His enemies; the sense that He was too big a person to handle. The fear that their plans might go wrong, their relief when He allowed Himself to be taken and led away to trial and crucifixion, are plain features of the story. Never, before or after, had Pilate a case like **that** to settle, and he knew it well. On the other hand, the incredible grace and compassion demonstrated here amongst men were seen and welcomed by many. It was appreciated as a thing unprecedented, as something entirely unique, and marvellous beyond words. Though it happened right down here on earth amongst men, the unearthly character of the love and grace so displayed shone out, and shines out still from the

Gospel pages. The love of Christ is something to be known, and yet it passes knowledge. We must not lose the sense of mystery surrounding the story of His visitation here and all that it implies.

A Manifestation

The word 'mystery' in the N.T. often relates to some profound matter once obscure but now disclosed. It refers to an **open** secret, shared by those to whom it has been revealed. What a wondrous fact it is that God has declared Himself! While this mystery is beyond our grasp in its greatness, it is by no means a matter so remote and impenetrable that we can know nothing of it. Something quite the opposite is true. God has been **manifested** in the flesh. The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. The only-begotten Son, the One being in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. Eye-witnesses beheld the glory of it, and received from the fullness of His grace, and have passed on its fullness for later recipients. Here is something not at all aloof and remote from us. One who is no less than God has come near to us, a Man amongst men, to be observed, to be trusted, to be known, to be appreciated. This unveiling of God is for us to absorb, and to be affected by. Other observers than human beings witnessed and marvelled at this action from God. Amongst human-kind, however, it has a content wonderful and definite enough to be preached, to be believed, to be presented in Scripture, and to be welcomed when its light really enters into our hearts. Some of the other phrases in the verse show that this truth, held so dearly by believers, is not at all vague or diffuse, but clear and well-defined in substance, clear enough to be proclaimed and valued on a broad scale.

The six phrases forming the close of the verse deserve separate attention, though we must do this briefly here. They speak about areas where this manifestation has been on view, and where it has been appraised. First, this manifestation took place "in the flesh". It had the fashion of a man. Here was a Man not only in appearance but in very truth ; a gracious, kind, approachable man ; a man who was pure and holy and sinless too, whose love to men and faithfulness to God were perfect and faultless. He became flesh ; He came into that condition. A human body was prepared for Him, in which the will of God was done, from the beginning to the end. That body was used in untiring service to God and men. It was given, at the end, as a spotless offering to God ; our sins were borne in His own body on the tree. Profound things, indeed, happened in the days of His flesh.

But there were happenings "in the Spirit" too. He was justified in the Spirit. This profound statement cannot do less than focus our attention on the mystery of the Person of the Lord Jesus, and the quality of the life He lived. One who was ever the beloved Son of the Father came into human form. Conceived of the Holy Ghost, anointed too with the Holy Ghost and with power, picked out in a special way by the Holy Spirit descending upon Him (the Father's approval also shown at His baptism), led by and filled with the Holy Spirit — what a story this is of a Man here, flawlessly subject to God! His human

spirit, and all His ways and movements, were perfectly in line with the Spirit of God. The phrase must at least include the thought that in the area of the spirit (in His manner, and in the quality of His thoughts, His attitudes, and His demeanour), things took place which were wholly special in kind. They stand out in their unique and beautiful character, justifying themselves as what they are, having the stamp of the Holy Spirit of God upon them.

This great manifestation was not only witnessed by men, approved by God, and certified by the Holy Spirit; it was also "seen of angels". We must think of it as the key event with which heaven and earth and all created beings and intelligences are concerned. Angelic onlookers were moved at the sight of these events. The burst of praise from the angelic hosts at His birth shows that there was great ardour in heaven about this occurrence, and a great interest in all that ensued. The angels may not share the joy of the redeemed, but they have a good awareness of the worth of the Lamb that was slain. They can, and will, say so with a loud voice, and all creation will join in (Revelation 5:11-14). Out to the remotest ends of the universe there is good cause for wonderment about the Person and the events pointed out in this verse.

The news of these great facts has been heralded out "to the Gentiles". The limits where men can receive it are no less than worldwide. It has been "believed on in the world", though not by all. The preaching of this great message has been part of its impact, under the hand of God and in the power of His Spirit. Not only those who saw, but those who have heard and believed have received its blessing too. There are no limits, in the way of distance or unworthiness, which need shut a man off from this. The scale of the effects of the grace of God in Christ is another of its marvels.

Not the least of the realms where Christ has been welcomed and appreciated is the last in the sequence. He has been "received up into glory". He has been appraised aright where it matters most, in the glory. The high standards of that glory have been maintained and underwritten by Himself, and now we can behold the glory of God: it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, the ascended Man, and will never be quenched. Let us not forget that while our verse speaks of events on earth, over a limited period, those events have **issues** which continue. The One who lived and died and rose again is "alive for evermore". Christianity is not solely a matter of facts and teachings from the past. It is a living thing stemming from the present life of Christ, risen and ascended to the right hand of God. It nevertheless stands firmly based on those vital unrepeatable past events, whose grandeur and importance have been shown by this verse.

The Motivation and Model for Godliness

We have considered this verse in isolation, and the amazing yet factual truth that it states. But Paul is also saying (in this verse as well as in the context) that such weighty matters cannot leave a person who appreciates them unmoved and unaffected. The description, "the

mystery of godliness", draws attention to the sublime and unearthly nature of this profound revelation. But the word "mystery" also contains the thought that this surpassingly great matter is a **secret spring** within the believer's life, promoting a likeness to it, providing a **perfect pattern** for godly lives. Non-Christians may not understand the Sources of the kind of lives that Christians live. But we believers have caught the vision of the revelation of God in Christ, and it throws everything else into the shade. We need to be engaged with it more, so that we may reflect the great Light that we have received, and so that our lives may be moulded into agreement with it. We can see how strong is Paul's case, after writing such a verse, in moving on to tell Timothy about practical godliness in his own life. May we too have a deepening sense of the magnitude of the foundation facts of our faith, and find there the impulse for ways of life which befit the truth that we confess.

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION ———— E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

Luke 22:31-34; Job 1:8-12

"AND the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

"That he may sift you as wheat" — what a vigorous action these words bring to our minds! In those days the sifting of wheat was a familiar spectacle — a sieve full of wheat grains being shaken from side to side so that the dirt and some chaff which the winnowing process had left behind should fall out, leaving nothing but the pure wheat in the sieve. Here we have pictured for us God's purpose in allowing His saints to pass through times of trouble and stress. Satan's hope is to destroy our faith; God's purpose is to remove from us what is not of Himself.

The well-known story of Job is a perfect illustration of this, and we almost shudder at some of the things which that poor man in his desperation utters. It is the same with most of us — under stress we tend to show by some unworthy word what our hearts are like — as the sieve lets through what is not the pure wheat. Then we try to excuse ourselves inwardly, and sometimes openly too, by saying, "Of course, I was upset, I didn't know what I was saying."

In the Lord's words quoted above the plural "you" shows that He was speaking of all the disciples, though He adds a special word for Peter — "I have prayed for thee". No ordinary emergency would have led those men to run away as they did — the power of darkness was there, as the Lord had said (Luke 22:53) — but they **did** forsake Him in His hour of need! Yet Satan failed to shake their faith entirely — they still gathered together in their Master's name in the upper room. But Peter was in special danger because of his self-confidence, and the Lord lets him know how He had prayed for him, that his faith might not fail.

When he was tested with the assertion, "You are one of this man's disciples", what came out was Peter's self-love, rather than his love for

Christ, and he denied Him, even with oaths. His love for Christ was real, but Peter was unaware of the strength of his self-love, which led him to seek to stand well with his fellows.

It was so again at Antioch, years later, in the controversy over the circumcision question. Peter, hoping to retain the approval of the strict Jews who had come from Jerusalem, withdrew from Gentile believers and declined to eat with them as he had done up till then. Paul's faithful rebuke upheld the truth of the Gospel; but it is important to note how retentive of self-love the human heart is, even in so great a saint. Our various trials so often reveal the same thing in us. We ought, in such a case, not to excuse ourselves, for that is to lose the benefit of the trial — better to confess to the Lord what is unworthy, and seek His help in overcoming it.

"I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," the Lord had said. Doubtless Satan had hoped to drive Peter to despair, as he drove Judas; but the Lord's gracious intercession prevailed, and we find Peter on the Resurrection morning, coming with John to the sepulchre. Later, in his first epistle, Peter writes to the believers, "that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Peter's concise sentences will bear careful examination. It is "faith" which is more precious than gold; gold will perish — that is, its value will disappear, though literal fire cannot destroy it. But faith will never lose its value, for the One in whom we believe will keep us, and raise us up at the last day (John 6:40). Yet faith must be tried or tested in one way or another, so that its reality may be proved, and so that all alloying elements may be purged away.

For some believers there is the fiery trial of persecution, for others daily contact with an unbelieving and scornful world serves to test more subtly the reality of our faith. Peter reassures those who might think that their sufferings indicated God's displeasure — on the contrary, he says, this trial of faith will result in praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. For the sifting effect of these trials, while it helps us to mortify the flesh, leads to increased dependence on the Lord, and makes us realise increasingly the value of our eternal heritage.

These truths abide. Satan is still at his old game, but that same love which prayed for the sustaining of Peter's faith continues to intercede for us now.

Christ our Advocate

"And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1, 2).

We may easily assume, when reading this scripture, that our Advocate seeks to mollify the Father's displeasure at our sin. But this cannot be, because we can be sure that our holy Saviour, the Son of God, is just as displeased at our sin as the Father is.

The work of an advocate is to advance his client's cause, and the first need we have if we sin is to be brought to repentance. Was it not for this that the Lord Jesus in the High Priest's palace turned and looked at Peter? To bring us to repentance then is the first thing that the Lord's intercession seeks from the Father — if need be by His chastening — while always the value of the precious blood ensures our perfect acceptance — He is our propitiation.

Christ our High Priest

The distinction we are accustomed to make between the Lord's functions as Advocate and High Priest — that as Advocate He deals with a believer's sin and as High Priest with his weakness — must not be pressed too far. It is the same intercession of the same gracious Saviour which operates in both ways. Indeed it seems likely that we find the priesthood of Christ mentioned only in Hebrews — an epistle addressed of course to Jewish believers — because only they, with their familiarity with the Old Testament, could readily understand it. To those who had been heathen a priest would call to mind only the shameful practices of idolatry.

It is just when in repentance we realise how weak and unprofitable we are, that the priestly intercession of our Saviour becomes so needful for us, lest we should despair — not perhaps of our salvation, but of the possibility of ever making progress. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." So it was with Peter. As he went out in the bitterness of his grief and self reproach he would recall, as he thought of the Lord's last look, all the mercy and compassion he had learned to associate with his Master, while the sustaining power of His prayer kept Peter's faith alive.

Sin in a believer gives Satan an immediate advantage, and it is not for nothing that he is called "the accuser of our brethren". But "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" Thus Christ as our propitiation is the answer to Satan. Yet the holiness of our Father means that He cannot tolerate unholiness in His children. He intends to have them "holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1 : 4), and in all the experiences which He leads us through He is working to this end. The thought of the patient, gracious love of the Father and the Son working for us, through the mighty ministry of the Holy Spirit within us, provides us with a theme for constant thanksgiving and praise, and ought to spur us on to walk in holiness.

Scripture Truth

(incorporating "Words of Help")

NOVEMBER, 1979

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

COLIN CURRY

IN 1 Corinthians 12 a pattern for harmonious and constructive activity in a local assembly of Christians is provided, using the functioning of the human body as an illustration. The body operates as a unit, yet within that one activity there are contributions from many members. Believers belong to a single living entity, the body of Christ; they have a common Lord who is recognised and obeyed, not in word only, but by the One Spirit who indwells them all. Yet at the same time their functions are of various kinds; there are differences in their responses to their Lord, differences in gifts of the Spirit, and in the contributions which, by these means, they are enabled to make. Each of the many members contributes a distinct part to a total activity which is mutually helpful and under a single control.

Moving now from the immediate context of this chapter, a number of scriptures come to mind in which this pattern of "unity in diversity" is prominent. We consider a few of these, in which the common feature is agreement from different quarters about the worth of Christ, bringing about a total response to Him which is greater than that of the separate parts.

At His baptism (Matthew 3:13-17)

The divine, heavenly, agreement about the role of the Lord Jesus, and His entire fitness to fulfil it, came to the surface in a remarkable way when He was baptised by John in Jordan. It occurred at a significant point in time, as He entered His public life, when His whole course of open faithfulness to God lay immediately ahead. Yet at that moment a glimpse was given of something which in its nature is timeless; a pleasure and a purpose belonging to the eternal scene. To human sight and hearing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave a manifestation of their essential concord of life and love, of perfect unity in fulfilling the divine pleasure, and of singleness of intention in expressing a love which is unearthly and eternal.

John the Baptist was (rightly) reluctant to baptise Jesus, and other observers were perhaps little aware of what was happening. But the concurrence of the great principal Participants is clear. The Lord Jesus, telling John that it was fitting that He should "fulfil all righteousness", bending Himself in submission and total faithfulness of spirit to the course of obedience to which He was committed. The Father, speaking

from heaven, expressing pleasure and the utmost satisfaction in Him, focusing attention upon His beloved Son. The Holy Spirit, descending upon Him like a dove, certifying the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus, marking Him out as pure and perfect and utterly fit for the service He was to undertake.

This unison of divine Persons, this self-revelation of God here on the earthly plane, stands alone in its great character quite apart from its appreciation by others. Yet, amazingly, it invites attention. It calls upon people like ourselves to receive the benefit of such a disclosure. Such is the quality of those bonds of eternal love that they must express themselves. The verses suggest something of a spontaneous outflow from heaven, in this twofold appraisal of the obedience and devotion of the Son of God here on earth. How appreciative we should be that such disclosures have been made within our reach and that their blessing is directed towards ourselves!

"They made Him a supper" (John 12:1-3)

The incident described in these few verses took place at a time when unfavourable reaction to the Lord Jesus was rapidly hardening into determined and bitter opposition. Against that background, this move was made by a few devoted persons, who loved Him and owed a great debt to Him. They made Him a supper. It was basically a private occasion, not of great consequence to the masses; but it must have provided some compensation to Him as the pressure upon His spirit was mounting. It is clear from two other passages (Luke 10 and John 11) that Martha and Mary and Lazarus were already on close terms with Him. Their individual characters appear in these earlier places too: Martha, welcoming Him, busy and anxious to do her best for Him; Mary, sitting at His feet, giving Him her fullest respect and attention. All three, separately, loved by Him. When trouble came, the two distressed sisters in turn unburdened their grief to Him, each in her characteristic way, treating Him as One they loved and relied on. Lazarus heard His voice and felt the very power that raises the dead; while the two sisters, in their acute sorrow, knew first His utter sympathy and understanding, and then saw the glory of His person in that act which restored their brother to them. It was a tremendous experience, both in its depth and in its demonstration of His greatness and His love.

So, from closeness of contact with the Lord, from hearing His word, from finding His support in hard experiences in which they learned more of Himself, came the impulse to honour Him in a special way, and to join together in a proper response to Him. Each of them was wholly taken up with the Lord. It is an experience not confined to Bethany, though wonderfully illustrated there. Still today our Lord is rejected in the broad sense; yet those who have experienced His love can be in unison, focusing upon Himself and feeling the urge to respond to Him. Lazarus' very presence there, quickened and made alive to commune with Him, and sitting at the table with Him, contributed a weighty testimony to His Lord. Still today, if times of closeness to

the Lord Jesus mean much to us, if we prize our opportunities to show our gratitude to Him, it is entirely the outcome of His marvellous life-giving intervention with us in the first place. The life that we possess and enjoy is summed up in our knowledge of Himself.

Martha and Mary each take a more active part in this united response to Christ. Martha fulfils her role of service to the Lord in an entirely suitable way. Though most of the effort falls on her shoulders, she does it entirely for His sake, with no sense of a heavy demand upon her. Happy are those who do not measure the work they do for the Lord, but readily spend themselves to the full because it is right that He should be served in that way. Mary, too, holds nothing back in her response to Him. She pours out her most precious possession on her Lord ; demonstrating that quiet overflow of worship which, while costly, is also unrestrained in its feeling for the greatness and worthiness of its Object. The atmosphere of heaven marks this occasion at Bethany. Soon, in proper appreciation of Christ, the whole created scene will be "filled with the odour of the ointment". Meanwhile, a few gathered here and there can anticipate the wide-scale tributes to the Lord Jesus, and can join together in harmony in their appreciation of Himself.

Christ in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27,44)

The separate parts of Scripture were written over many centuries by a whole range of individuals, and these different contributions are extremely varied in kind. Yet Scripture is a coherent whole, a fact which derives from its ultimate authorship by the Holy Spirit, and the common Theme which underlies and unites it. Scripture is about Christ. He is not only central in the picture ; He is first and last in the story that the Bible unfolds and in the teaching that it yields. All its diverse parts join in the fullest agreement about His supreme place in the total scheme of things. The key to the understanding of the Scriptures consists in grasping that all the several writings focus upon Himself. He made this clear on the road to Emmaus, and again in Jerusalem, late on the resurrection day. The old writings immediately took on new meaning to His followers. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, bear witness to Him. The New Testament, too, centres on Himself. The Gospels clearly do this: the Epistles too are part of that ministry of the Holy Spirit which He said would follow His departure. Here the Holy Spirit through His chosen channels takes of the things of Christ and makes them real and accessible to us. Witness to Christ was to be borne, by the Spirit, in writings as well as in other ways, and the New Testament is the fulfilment of this. In New Testament prophecy also, Christ has an absolutely pre-eminent place. The main book of this kind is well described by its title, "the Revelation of Jesus Christ". The word, "revelation", has the sense of "unveiling", and certainly Christ is unveiled here for present-day believers. But, simultaneously, the curtain of time is drawn aside, and the seer looks ahead to days when Christ will assert God's righteous mastery on earth, and our Lord's supremacy and glory will be acknowledged by all.

The Gospels themselves illustrate our theme of "unity in diversity" in a striking way. Each Gospel is complete on its own, having its special qualities as a particular account of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. Yet, how much **more** full is the four-fold gospel which the Holy Spirit has been pleased to present to us; and how substantial and perfect, and infinitely valuable in its own right, is this many-angled view of Him found in these few short writings. The objectives of the writers differ from Gospel to Gospel, as does the selection of subject-matter suited to those aims. The Gospels differ in the order and style of what is written, in the characteristics of the Lord Jesus specially underlined, and yet a marvellous common Theme, an all-glorious and gracious Person, unites them all. The Light of the world shines out from the Gospel pages in all its magnificent and self-confirming nature, and those who follow Him do not walk in darkness.

Unanimity on the grand scale (Revelation 5)

The book of Revelation takes us behind the scenes into the world of eternal values and judgments; it shows us those eternal principles of wisdom and righteousness which always prevail, and are in complete control at all times. But it also takes us forward, giving a preview of times when these principles will be openly insisted upon, when the final showdown with evil will take place, and God will assert His mastery, His supremacy and His glory, bringing all His purposes of blessing into effect. Chapters 4 and 5 provide a behind-the-scenes view of heaven's unanimity in recognising the authority and rightness of God's ultimate interventions for these purposes, and of heaven's zealous recognition of the worth of the One who can act for God in this ultimate way. The throne of God is also the throne of the Lamb; the Lamb once slain underwrites the integrity and unquestionable righteousness of all God's actions, whether in judgment or in filling the earth with His blessing.

So, in chapter 5, "the book" is about to be unsealed and opened, and God's judgments on earth are about to follow their course. At the end "the kingdoms of this world" will become "the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15). But meanwhile all attention is directed to the key Person who alone is able to effect these things.

From the standpoint of this paper the striking feature of chapter 5 is the agreement of the many voices in heaven (of many kinds, and in vast numbers), producing one massive and harmonious expression of the unique worth of the Lamb. One Object commands the attention of all. Every observer (human or otherwise) is thoroughly affected, and the response is quite unrestrained as the Lord Jesus, bearing still the marks of His death, fills the whole scene with His glory.

The redeemed are there, conscious of their indebtedness to Him, specially close to Him through wonderful grace, each one redeemed to God by His blood. Men of all kinds are there, from all parts of the earth. They are free and ready in His praise. They sing with joy, addressing Him directly, able to speak face-to-face with Him: "Thou

art worthy . . . for Thou wast slain". The highest of created intelligences, the living creatures, join in, falling down before the Lamb, adding their Amen to the totality of the acclamation. The whole host of angels, impossible to number, makes its own loud and clear statement: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain". Praise is part of the service of unfallen angelic beings; and here they fulfil that service with real energy, greatly wondering at what they see. But the final two verses move on into eternity; there are no time limits to what they describe. A full and proper response to God and the Lamb is to continue "for ever and ever". Nor are there any space limits in these verses; every created being is involved, whether in heaven or earth or under the earth. On the widest scale of all, in the universal sense, Jesus is worthy to receive the fullest praise. What an opportunity is ours to be aware of this now, and to co-operate with others in honouring Him today.

"THY WILL BE DONE" ———— E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

THESE hallowed words of our Saviour, uttered as part of His prayer in Gethsemane, are commonly understood as words of resignation to the will of God, and are used in this sense by believers in their own prayers. It is true that the word "resignation" here means the resigning of one's own will and the acceptance of God's will, yet did not our Saviour, when He used the words, mean much more than mere acceptance? If we consider how at all times the fulfilling of His Father's will was His one purpose, His meat and drink, we shall see that it was indeed so. Let us examine His threefold prayer as Matthew records it (Matthew 26:36-44).

The first time He prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt". His return to the Father was assured — the only question was, by what path? For the abandonment at the cross was not to be, could not be, a **severance** from the Father. It was not as Moses said when he prayed for his people, "Blot me out of thy book". The Saviour prayed to be spared the suffering, but the words, "if it be possible", declared what was paramount in His mind. It had nothing to do with the forces arrayed against Him, though that be the whole Jewish and Roman worlds, energised by Satan. Twelve legions of angels were available for His deliverance, if He but asked the Father — this He declared to Peter **after** His prayers in the garden. No, the only issue was, was it "possible" for the Father's will to be brought to pass if He did not suffer? So He prayed, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt".

The second was slightly different. "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Out of the agony of His wrestling in prayer He had the answer: avoidance of the suffering was not possible: the cup would indeed pass away but only when it had been fully drained. But the words, "Thy will be done", sound a note of triumph, not resignation. He knew that through the agony of the cross the Father's will would indeed be brought to pass, even as every step of His from the beginning of His life here had

been directed to that end. This was the delight of His soul always.

In the third prayer He used the same words. There could be no further advance, only confirmation to Him that all that the Father had sent Him to do was going to be fulfilled.

We must not, then, narrow the words of our title to a mere acceptance of suffering. What the Saviour intended was the **whole** of God's will with its eternal consequences — the glory of God displayed in the blessing of sinful man, the manifestation of God's heart of love, the deliverance of creation from its bondage. It was also, of course, the entry into glory for the Lord Himself, and the satisfaction of His love.

How can we profit from our Saviour's example, who shall never be faced with a decision as awful as His, and who cannot even compare our devotion to God's will with His? Yet He does call us to follow Him. Resignation of our own will is, of course, the essential first step to blessing in any situation of difficulty or peril, spiritual or otherwise. Then, whether His will for us involves endurance of suffering or the undertaking of a task from which we shrink, let us say, "Thy will be **done**", in the light of all that the Scriptures reveal to us of the wonder and blessing He has in store — blessing that He is working out day by day in our lives. Let us enlarge our vision to ponder the grand purpose He has revealed in His word, a purpose in which He has given each of us a place. And if, as so often happens, the outlook seems hopelessly dark, let us view it in what Peter calls, "God's marvellous light", — the light of Redemption that has shone into our lives and has transformed them — the light that shines from the Cross. This, then, and nothing less, is His will. Can we do other than wish it done, fulfilled, in its entirety? If not, it must begin for us here and now, in what we are faced with at this moment. God help us to rejoice in that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Romans 12:2).

THE COMING OF THE LORD IN 2 THESSALONIANS

JOHN BARNES

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VERY likely, when we think of the Lord's return, our minds tend to centre on the thought of the "rapture" as we happily call that event. But we know that references in Scripture deal predominantly with the Lord's appearing in glory, the one being the prelude to the other. The catching up of the saints is much before Paul's mind in the first letter to the Thessalonians and it is there, in chapter 4, we are given details of a special unfolding to Paul of this joyful event. The second letter seems to put little emphasis on the "rapture", the "appearing" being central to the apostle's message to the saints, for it is in regard to this they had been led into confusion. Where epistles come in pairs, they tend to deal with the same subject but from different points of view, second epistles generally considering failure or apostasy as having come in, and warning the brethren to keep clear of that which will come under judgment. 1 Peter, for example, is known to give teaching about the government of God exercised in favour of the saints, while 2 Peter

treats of the same government but as opposed to the ungodly. Both the Thessalonian letters deal copiously with the second coming of the Lord but in the first the writer concentrates much on the "rapture" and the comfort and encouragement of the saints, while in the second letter he gives considerable instruction about the effect of the Lord's return on His enemies.

Paul in his first letter commends the Thessalonians for their faith, hope and love (1 Thessalonians 1:3), but in his second note to them he speaks of their faith and love but not of their hope (2 Thessalonians 1:3), thus showing that in this respect failure had come in. There is, perhaps, a hint in 1 Thessalonians that this was expected and should have been guarded against. Scripture tells us that a threefold cord is not quickly broken, but if an enemy can succeed in damaging one of the strands the whole cable is, to that degree, weakened. In the last chapter of the first letter (v. 8), Paul writes of the parts of the Christian's armour. He links them with faith, love and hope in a significant way. They are to put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. A helmet protects the head and may lead us to think of the Christian's mind, for this is under attack. It may be that the helmet is referred to separately in order to call attention to it. It is in this area that Satan was successful against the Thessalonians. In 2 Thessalonians 2:2 we have the expression of Paul's yearning for them: "that ye be not soon shaken **in mind**". They had evidently not been careful enough here, and though there was nothing amiss with their affections, they were endangered by the weakened strand of hope. So there are dangers and this short letter sets out a number of them and deals with them in view of the Lord's coming again.

1. The Peril of Deception

We are constantly advised to be careful in our reception of teaching. The Lord Jesus warned His disciples, "Take heed **how** ye hear" (Luke 8:18). However, He also warned them, "Take heed **what** ye hear" (Mark 4:24). We must not accept what is not truth but we must receive the truth and be subject to its requirements. There is so much teaching about today, a vast amount of it very dangerous, and we need to pay heed to the advice "Prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Having ascertained what is conveyed in the truth we are under obligation to be obedient to it and to hold fast to it. The Berean believers were commended for their diligence in searching the Scriptures for confirmation of Paul's teaching. It is worth noting that in these matters they were commended above the Thessalonians. Now, these latter brethren had allowed their minds to be influenced by false teaching about the Lord's return. It is a serious error to underrate the importance of "belief of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). It is a common mistake to overemphasise behaviour and to minimise the value of divine teaching, which is sometimes misrepresented as dry and irrelevant to life today. Some go so far as to say, "It matters little what we believe so long as we behave properly". However, this epistle, with others, shows that to be astray in belief leads the feet astray. Deceptive teaching results

in defective walk. There is a solemn word concerning the ungodly in 2:12, "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." While this may not be applicable to true saints, the principle of refusing the truth can be seen to have serious results. Belief of the truth would result in love of righteousness.

In this letter we can see how false teaching led to undue despondency and so to irregularities in daily living. Our behaviour is, of course, of enormous importance and the whole of Scripture affirms this, but there is no doubt that what we really believe controls how we act. If I do not believe my house to be on fire I take no steps to save it. There seems to be a divine order in the relationship between teaching on the one hand and doing on the other. In the case of the Lord Jesus, we read "of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach". What He taught arose out of what He was in Himself. In the case of the saints the order seems to be reversed. Paul tells Timothy: "Ye have fully known my doctrine, manner of life, etc." (2 Timothy 3:10). In our case, how we act is consequent on what we are taught. We need to be instructed how to walk in a godly manner. There is a lovely little thought in Hosea 11:3, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms". The figure is that of a father teaching his little child to take its first faltering steps, while he supports it by its arms. If we consider the Lord doing this for us the importance of attention to teaching cannot be lightly passed over.

Deceptive doctrine concerning the Lord's return had been set before the Thessalonians. If they had duly heeded Paul's words and not allowed their minds to be swayed by deceivers they would not have suffered damage. Paul refers to the work of the Spirit (2:13), his spoken word to them (2:5) and his written ministry (3:14). He also mentions his spoken and written ministry in one verse (2:15). He spoke to them while he was there (2:5) and wrote after leaving them, and so presses on them close attention to the word. These holy documents are authoritative and we must heed them (3:14). Another apostle urges us, "Try the spirits" (1 John 4:10). The Holy Spirit could not possibly speak out of accord with the writings He Himself inspired men to write. These false teachers used these media — spirit, word and letter — with great skill, claiming apostolic authority for the messages (see 2:2). We are in conflict with a foe of immense cunning. Chapter 2:9,10 shows that the wicked one to be revealed is empowered by Satan. He comes "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders". So, with great skill, the very means used to convey the truth to the saints were counterfeited to convey falsehood. Hence the need for care.

The false teachers were distorting the apostle's teaching about the Lord's coming, His appearing and His day, asserting that His day had come and was running its course. The brethren were certainly enduring tribulation at the time but this was not from the Lord ; it was from His and their enemies. When He came and it was His day there would be trouble for the enemies of the truth and it would be initiated by the Lord Himself, but at that time they would no longer have to endure trouble ; they would be at rest with the apostle and the whole Christian company in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

2. The Peril of Depression

There can be no doubt that true peace is only to be found as one is in the presence of God in the conscious sense of His own love and of one's place there on the ground of the finished work of Christ. But truth is many-sided, and as we seek to understand it we have many considerations to weigh up. Not the least of these is the fact that the One who died for us and who lives, ever to intercede for us, is also coming again to take us to be with Himself. If we are to enjoy tranquility of heart about the future we must have a clear understanding of this great truth. It would seem that the normal outlook of the Christian is to rejoice in hope. In his first letter to them Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they did not sorrow in the loss of their loved ones as those who have no hope. Hope has an effect which counters depression. Expressions such as, "a living hope", "a better hope", "full assurance of hope", "abound in hope", are all such as would exclude the thought of depression. Paul asserted that the Saviour whom they had trusted was their "Deliverer from the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The idea that they were, in one way or another, enduring that wrath must have had a seriously depressing effect on their minds. How could He be their Deliverer from the wrath if they were actually suffering under it? We need to remember that the truth holds together; no part of it stands unrelated to the whole body of truth. So it is vital to keep our minds clear of what is false, otherwise our grasp of truth as a whole is muddied and we tend to lose the full value of aspects of truth which we love and cherish greatly. But He **is** our Deliverer from the coming wrath, and any teaching contrary to this happy fact distorts the whole structure of truth. If we were to look at ourselves and our own faulty response to the truth we might be justified in feeling depressed, but we can never, for a moment, have such a feeling about Him. "He is faithful that promised." If our hope is centred in Him, it will burn brightly through the dark night.

3. The Peril of Disorder

As we have already remarked true Christian behaviour is bound to be closely linked with the truth. Job speaks of "a land of darkness without any order" (Job 10:22). Indeed our Bible opens with a scene of chaos from which light was absent. Erroneous teaching promotes this condition. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that from their own midst men would arise who would teach perverted things with a view to attaching disciples to themselves and their own false systems. He reminded them of the bases of his own teaching: repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glad tidings of the grace of God, the kingdom and, finally, the whole counsel of God. Perhaps these teachers would refrain from open denial of these fundamental facts but would give them a twist to suit their theories and add that bit of poison which would envenom the entire system. The principle is a very old one. The father of lies used it in Eden. After listening to the voice of the tempter, Eve gained an impression of the forbidden tree

which was, in most respects, such as Scripture described every other tree in the garden, "good for food and pleasant to the eyes". But there was an element added at the tail-end, perhaps deliberately slipped in to allay suspicion, an element which contained all the evil that has troubled the human race since that day: "a tree to be desired to make one wise". From that moment man's mind has been busy devising schemes founded on his own wisdom. The first of its inventions was the fig-leaf apron and it continues its defiance of God till now. Disorderly behaviour is the inevitable result of refusal to preserve the truth of God (cf. Romans chapter 1).

The Lord is coming back to take the saints away out of this world which lies under judgment. The saints will not be judged with the world but will be with the Lord when those judgements take place, when everything contrary to God will be swept away with the besom of destruction. It has sometimes been asked, if these things are to occur after the rapture, why does the apostle concern our minds about them? Perhaps the answer is that the "mystery of iniquity doth already work". Its fully developed state is future but in its foetal state it is with us now. The Lord would have the saints to be aware of what is at work so that they may keep clear of what will soon fall under His judgement. The acceptance of any "working of error" could not but have disastrous consequences. The sure antidote to this is "belief of the truth".

FELLOW-WORKERS WITH PAUL ———— T. D. SPICER

4. APOLLOS

APOLLOS was, for a while at least, in close communication with the Apostle Paul and played no small part in the affairs of one of the churches which the Apostle founded. Our information on these points, and on the character of Apollos, is derived almost entirely from the Acts of the Apostles and the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The account in Acts shows him to be quite independent of Paul; and, if we had no other source of information concerning him, we might conclude that their paths had never crossed.

His education

As a beginning, let us look at Apollos' background. We are told that he was "born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures" (Acts 18:24). Alexandria was a meeting-place of East and West, and was characterised by both commercial and intellectual activity. Here the Hebrew Scriptures had been translated into Greek; and a famous school of Biblical interpretation grew up side by side with schools of Greek philosophy. Among these influences Apollos was nurtured and the knowledge he gained was to prove of benefit to him in his future work. We find that he was taught in the Old Testament Scriptures and that he had received some instruction, if only elementary,

in "the way of the Lord . . . knowing only the baptism of John". How he had acquired this knowledge, we cannot tell.

Apollos, we read, arrived in Ephesus and began to attend the synagogue and to "speak boldly"; but he met Aquila and Priscilla who, when they heard him, "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly". They became teachers to this Alexandrian stranger, who in their hands was a willing learner. So the Lord prepared one who was to convince the Jews mightily "and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:28). In similar ways all the Lord's servants are prepared for their work. He brings every part of a man's experience into harmony; nothing is lost or unnecessary in the Lord's economy; but there must be a willing, teachable spirit. This was characteristic of Apollos.

His commendation

Alexandria, Ephesus and Corinth were connected by trade routes and the name and importance of Corinth would be familiar to Apollos. Quite likely his new friends, Aquila and Priscilla, would be frequently telling of Paul's work in Achaia, where they had first met him. Apollos was, not unnaturally, drawn to the city and indeed the brethren in Ephesus wrote "exhorting the disciples to receive him" (Acts 18:27). The mention of this fact is full of interest, for it is the first recorded instance of the use of commendatory letters. Apollos crossed the sea to Corinth and the result is recorded in forcible though simple language: "when he was come, [he] helped them much which had believed through grace".

Now we trace the endeavours of both Apollos and Paul in the cause of the Gospel; and although starting from different points they are brought under one lens. Attempts were made at Corinth, only too successfully, to separate the church into opposing factions, the names of both men, as well as that of Peter, being used as those of party leaders. It is here that the Apostle's First Epistle to the Corinthians enables us to continue the biography of Apollos.

The Epistle, soon after its opening, makes some pointed allusions to Apollos, for after his greetings, thanksgiving and advice, the Apostle begins to rebuke his readers. "It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:11,12). After an interval, he returns to the same subject (ch. 3:1-6). It is worthwhile to notice, in passing, how exactly the facts here implied confirm the history we find in Acts.

The unintended consequences of his Ministry

The arrival of this learned and eloquent man, though intended for the building up of the church, had been followed by the formation of cliques. Some of these Corinthian Christians had a preference for Paul, some for Apollos, others for Peter. Another group rejected all three and said that it was Christ's. So they separated and called themselves

by different names. This is all so very true to life, though very wrong. Each of these men had his own gifts and means of influence. The ministry of Apollos was evidently more attractive to some ; but on the other hand, Paul had founded the church in Corinth and came with Apostolic authority. This carnality brought about a party spirit which has had its counterparts ever since in all ages of the church, and is only too readily seen today.

It is not necessary to attempt to define the exact nature of these cliques, nor is it easy to do so ; but it is important for us to find the cure for this tendency among ourselves. The true remedy is to be found in the general principles which the Apostle lays down in this Epistle. We are to recognise one common foundation, Jesus Christ, and not to glory in men. Whoever our teachers are, they are labourers together with God. One is not to be exalted at the expense of another. They are "ministers by whom ye believed", and sent by God.

His forbearance

The question arises and ought to be faced: was this party spirit in any way attributable to Apollos and, once established, did he do anything to encourage it? Another passage from the latter part of the Epistle gives the answer. The Apostle wrote, "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren ; but his will was not at all to come at this time ; but he will come when he shall have convenient time" (1 Corinthians 16:12). We see from this that Apollos had left Corinth, and that he and Paul were in friendly personal communication. They had opportunity to talk about the state of affairs in Corinth, and, seen in this light, the verse is very instructive. There is no doubt, that with so much zeal, learning, eloquence and popularity Apollos might have made himself prominent as a leader. But this he would not do. Although Paul wished him to go to Corinth at this time it seems he was unwilling, especially when his presence would be likely the more to inflame party spirit.

How commendable is the conduct of these two men towards each other. We are thinking of them as companions ; and their obvious fellowship and friendship ought not to be overlooked. From Paul we find the greatest generosity for he had perfect confidence that Apollos would not abuse such an opportunity: and, on the other hand, Apollos showed thoughtful respect for the Apostle, and the utmost reluctance to run any risk of self-aggrandisement at the expense of his friend. What an example of self-restraint and mutual consideration there is here! It is this kind of forbearance which maintains and strengthens fellowship, and secures the continuance of common Christian activity.

Friendships so made and kept last long and bear many strains. We are not surprised, therefore, by the last reference we find to Apollos, when we see the anxiety shown by Paul for the comfort of Apollos on his journeys. In the Epistle to Titus there is this message, "Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them" (Titus 3:13). It well exemplifies the loving and lasting care of one servant of Christ for another.

"O YE OF LITTLE FAITH" ——————R. A. CREETH

FOUR times, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus uttered these words. We do well to take heed to them for, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). It is salutary for us to remember that it was disciples whom the Lord rebuked for their little faith, while He commended two Gentiles (the Roman centurion (Matthew 8:10) and the woman of Canaan (Matthew 15:28)) for the greatness of their faith. If we as followers of the Lord are to prosper spiritually, and triumph over the subtle temptations and attractions of the world around us, it can only be on the principle of faith, for, "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Lack of faith leads to anxiety

In Matthew 6:19-34 the Lord Jesus is warning His disciples against being unduly concerned about the ordinary things of life, important as they are in their place. Even at Bethel when God had drawn near to bless the runaway Jacob, the patriarch's great concern was for "bread to eat and raiment to put on". And is it not just here where we so often fail? Hence our Lord says to His disciples, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on". "Take no thought", is better rendered, "Be not careful" (New Trans.) or "Be not anxious" (R.V.), for taking thought is surely to be commended, while aniety is to be rebuked as not being consistent with trusting the Lord.

God's care for His creatures

As God's children we should cultivate a simple trust as to the necessary and temporal things of life, and exercise a childlike confidence in our Father's love and care for us. We have experienced His great mercy and love in redeeming us and bringing us to Himself, so that we can say with the apostle, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). But does God really concern Himself with the needs of our bodies, even in regard to our food and clothing? The Lord Jesus answers this question. "Look at the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into granaries, and your heavenly Father nourishes them. Are not **ye** much more excellent than they?" (Matthew 6:26, New Trans.). The birds know no anxiety: they accept and enjoy the bountiful provision of the Creator. Then cannot we who are so precious to Him as His redeemed children trust him to supply our every need?

What of our clothing: what shall we put on? Our Lord says, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin ; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." If God clothes the lily of the field with such beauty for so short a time, can we not trust Him to clothe us here while we "await the glory that shall be revealed in us"?

The lily blooms but for a day, but we are to be conformed to the image of God's Son, and we shall shine in His glory throughout eternity. Hence the force of the Lord's rebuke, "Shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith" (Matthew 6:30)?

The apostle Paul expresses this implicit confidence in God's loving provision when he says, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11). He had known what it was to have nothing, and what it was to have abundance, and he was content with whatever God provided for him. Such was his perfect confidence that he could say to the Philippians, "My God" — the God that I have proved for myself; I can count upon Him for you as well as for me, and He "shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Let us then learn from the birds and flowers around us to banish the evil of anxiety, and to rest in simple trust in a loving God who so lovingly cares for His own.

Little faith leads to fear

The second occurrence of the phrase is found in Matthew 8:26, and this time it is in connection with fear. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" The disciples were crossing the lake, and the Master was with them in the boat. He had entered into a ship, and His disciples had followed Him. They followed where He led: all then must be well. But a great tempest arose, and great waves covered the ship. The disciples were filled with terror; they had never faced a storm like this before.

The Master, where was He? In the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow (Mark 4:38) — asleep amid the raging of the wind and the fierce pounding of the sea. How perfect the peace and serenity of His soul! The disciples, what of them? They were filled with fear, and in their terror they awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us; we perish". It has been aptly said that the storm without had stirred a storm within. A storm of fear was raging in their souls. But how perfectly the Lord deals with the situation! He first speaks to them and calms their fears: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. What a transformation when the Lord takes control! Even the shipmen marvelled saying, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!"

Can we not see in these disciples, so full of fear and foreboding, a picture of ourselves in times of trouble and affliction? We too are crossing the sea — the sea of Life. And the storms of trial are bound to come upon us. Many dear brethren in other countries are facing bitter persecution, some threatened with death. Yet we know that in our divine Master's loving and all-powerful hands all is well, and in His own good time He will rebuke the raging elements and usher in a calm. Let us see to it then that the Lord has His honoured place in our vessel. Let us give Him His rightful place in our lives — Lord in all that concerns us — Lord in our home life, Lord in our work life — Lord in all things.

Doubting rebuked

The third occurrence of the Lord's words which we have been considering is found in Matthew 14:31, and it is Peter's doubt that is particularly rebuked. The disciples are again crossing the lake, but this time the Master is not with them. He had just fed the five thousand with the five loaves and two fishes, and He had gone up into a mountain apart to pray — a picture of His present service on high, ever living to make intercession for His own.

Meanwhile the ship was in the midst of the sea, tossed by heavy waves and a contrary wind. But the Lord on the mountain top knew of their distress, and in the fourth watch of the night He went to them, walking upon the sea. The disciples, thinking they saw a spirit, cried out in terror, but the Lord reassured them with His comforting words, "Be of good cheer ; it is I ; be not afraid". Peter then cried, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come to Thee upon the waters". Receiving the Lord's welcoming "Come", Peter came down out of the ship, and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. But seeing the wind boisterous he became afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me". And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" As if to say, "O Peter, you were quite right to leave the ship and set out in faith upon the waters at My bidding, but why did you doubt? Could you not trust Me to undertake for you?"

A venture of faith

Like Peter, we too are called to make a venture of faith. It is our privilege to go forth to meet the Saviour, to turn from all support of nature and of organised religion, to go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach (Hebrews 13:13). We walk by faith, not by sight, and our faith will be tested as Peter's was, but if our eye is upon our risen and glorified Lord all will be well, for He has control of all things and He will uphold us. Remember that it was only when Peter lost sight of Christ, and his gaze was upon the tempestuous wind and waves that doubt assailed him and he began to sink. Peter failed, as the Church has failed, in walking the untried way of faith, but as with Peter, so with ourselves, He abides faithful, and deliverance comes in His own good time. It was so here. "When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased."

The danger of forgetfulness

In Matthew 16:8 we have the fourth occurrence of the words, "O ye of little faith". The Pharisees and Sadducees had been tempting the Lord, asking for a sign from heaven. Now having left them, He with His disciples crossed to the other side, and the disciples had forgotten to take bread with them. The Lord said unto them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees", and the disciples at once linked the mention of leaven with the forgotten loaves.

They were thinking only of bread, "the bread that perisheth", but the Lord was concerned with something far more important than the need of their bodies. His thought was to safeguard them in regard to doctrine, particularly the teaching of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. The Lord was grieved at their slowness in understanding His words, and said to them, "O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?"

If the needs of the body loomed large in the eyes of the disciples, is it not often so with ourselves? How much of our time is taken up with the need of the natural man, with the bread that perisheth! Should we not be equally concerned about the need of the inward man, about the food of the soul? It was our Lord Himself who said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And how careful we are as to the purity of the food we eat, yet how careless we may be as to the purity of the doctrine we receive! We need to take heed what we hear (Mark 4:24), and to feed continually upon the living bread, the bread that cometh down from heaven (John 6:33,51).

What was the root cause of the failure of the disciples on this occasion? Was it not forgetfulness, which consequently led to lack of perception? Not remembering how He had wonderfully and fully provided for them on previous occasions, they failed to understand what He said, and so missed the meaning of His warning words. The children of Israel were bidden to "remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness" (Deuteronomy 8:2), and we too need to remind ourselves continually of the Lord's unfailing care of us throughout our earthly pilgrimage. Then in times of trial and affliction the memory of the Lord's great goodness and the consciousness of his love will quieten our spirits and calm our fears, as the hymnwriter expresses it:

"His love in times past forbids us to think
He'll leave us at last in trouble to sink:
The Lamb in His glory is ever in view,
The pledge and the proof He will bring us quite through"

Let us then give earnest heed to this fourfold warning of our blessed Lord. May we guard against worry and anxiety about the temporal things of life, against undue fear and alarm when faced with trial and danger, against doubt and uncertainty as we tread the path of faith, and against the tendency to forget how richly He has blessed us all along the way.