

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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1. THE PERSON AND HIS MIGHTY WORKS

(Matthew 13: 53-58)

AT a conversational Bible Study the subject being considered was Romans chapter 6 and a great deal of care had been taken to try to understand the teaching of the Spirit of God in this chapter. At the end someone spoke up, "I have been listening to all this explanation and this attempt to understand. I would like someone to tell me what they do when sudden temptation comes." This, innocent as it may sound, was something of the nature of a bomb-shell and it seemed to imply, "Let's have done with all this doctrine and let's get down to action." Now our subject in these studies will certainly involve a good deal of attempt, seeking the help of God, to explain and to understand and I am in no sense of the term apologising for this. If we had not been intended to understand, the Spirit of God would not have set out the teaching of Holy Scripture in the detail that He does. We need to pray that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened, but we do desire also that the attempt to explain and to understand may not minimise the challenge of what we are going to consider about the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit. And therefore I would like to start by trying to present to you the challenge.

In its direct meaning, Matthew 13: 53-58 has in fact nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, but I want you to see that there is here a Person Who is God. He is here present amongst men. He possesses all the power and all the love and all the wealth of blessing to enrich those who surround Him, beyond the dreams of men, but "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Having heard of the Lord Jesus, Herod said: "This

must be John the Baptist raised from the dead and mighty works do shew forth themselves in him." I want to pinpoint these words: "mighty works". Here is the Saviour. Here is the Creator and Upholder of the ends of the earth. Here is the Son of God, with the power to do these mighty works, for their good, for their blessing, for their happiness, for the glory of God, and He could not do His mighty works because of their unbelief.

Now we are considering the fact that another Person is here, Who is God. The Spirit of God has come — about Whom all the Scripture is full, the same One Who moved upon the waters and God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. Right through to the end of the sacred book when the Spirit and the bride say come, the Spirit effects in the hearts of those who hear the Word a response to the love of Jesus. The One of Whom the Holy Scripture speaks, the Spirit of God, is here. He is indwelling us. He has made the church His home. If this be true, we may well ask "Where are His mighty works?"

We lament the feebleness of the impact of our witness on the world around. In the Acts of the Apostles, multitudes of men and women by that free action of the Spirit of God were swept into the kingdom. We read about the brethren being assembled together in one place and how the Spirit of God took the things of the absent Lord, and made them good, and like a holy priesthood, they offered up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. We may thank God to any extent of which we see these results, but the challenge to us today is: "Where are His mighty works?"

And then we lament our own feebleness in face of temptation. When we lament our own feebleness to meditate the glory of Christ shining in our lives, then we must remember that it is not anything inadequate in what God has done. Christ Jesus has offered Himself for our sins upon the cross. He has been raised as a victor from the dead, and He has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to make good in and through His people all His mighty works. There is the fact of the presence with us of the Spirit of God. There is the fact of His power, the fact of His purpose, and the challenge is, if this be true, where are His mighty works?

When we think of the fact that the Holy Spirit of God is here, then it is necessary, because of a great confusion that abounds, to ask the question whether it be true that the Holy Spirit is an Influence or a Person. That the Holy Spirit is the greatest of all possible influences, there can be no doubt, but this is not sufficient. We have to see that the Holy Spirit is a Person and that He is a Person of the Godhead. He is a Person and He is God.

In an attempt to explain, this brings in the need to speak about the Trinity. I was once listening to a conversation about all the difficulties and troubles that have arisen amongst the people of God due to false doctrine, and someone said: "It seems to me that all is well until people begin to use words that are not in the Bible at all, words like Person and the Trinity. It is only then that they begin to get into trouble." I want to try to explain how wrong this is, and although it is in fact true that these words, in the sense in which we are now using them, do not appear in Holy Scripture, yet they are a necessary safeguard to the truth which we believe and declare,

the truth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit — one God.

If we do not find these words in Scripture, the question arises, why do we need them and where do they come from? The fact of the matter is that everybody who has tried to do without these words in speaking about these holy things, and treading upon this sacred ground, has got always into the greatest possible trouble. How did they arise? These two words, in the sense in which we are now using them, arose in the second century, and they were first used by Tertullian, who was called the Bishop of Carthage in the end of the second century. In the providence of God, the burning heat of the African desert had entered into the very fibre of his being and he was a man of unsurpassed zeal and enthusiasm in the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ. What was the problem for the true believers of those days? It was very much the same as ours. They were concerned only to find out and to hold to the last drop of their blood, the truth of the Scripture about the Saviour and the Father and the Spirit. What the apostles had taught, what the Spirit had written down in the pages of Holy Scripture was being disputed, attacked and whittled away, and they realised that it was absolutely vital that they should get at the truth. As they read their Bibles they saw certain Bible facts, which I hope you will have the patience to consider carefully, because they do show that the doctrine of the Trinity, and of the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are indeed Scripture truth.

The first of these Bible facts, which they saw and we can see, is that there is one God. With unanimous voice in the Old and the New Testaments the Holy Scripture declares that there is one God. "Jeho-

vah, our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6: 4). "There is one God and Father of us all" (Ephesians 4: 6). "Though there be . . . gods many, and lords many, but to us there is but one God, the Father" (1 Corinthians 8: 5, 6). "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2: 5). The first great Bible fact about these subjects is that there is one God.

The *second* Bible fact with which we have to reckon is that there are three Beings Who are in the New Testament frequently spoken of together, it being constantly implied that this is God. Two of these passages are very well known, but it is very necessary that we should see how widespread in the New Testament is the kind of fact we are now speaking about. The first is in the passage called the Benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13: 14). You see how you have these three Beings spoken of in one breath, it being implied that here is God with all His power to bless, and all His grace and His love and His power to keep. The other well known passage is the baptismal formula the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the disciples. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the Name (not the Names) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28: 19). These are the best known of very many passages. Let us look at two in Ephesians. "Through Him (that is Christ Jesus) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephesians 2: 18). In this one verse you have once again the three Beings mentioned together. In the verses in chapter four, which describe the unity of the faith, verses 4, 5 and 6 each present

its own sphere. In verse 4 "There is one Spirit," in verse "There is one Lord" and in verse 6 "There is one God and Father of all." I think perhaps one further quotation might suffice, out of many others that might be given. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1: 2). These are but a few examples out of many found in the New Testament to show that there are three Beings mentioned, Who are together spoken of as God.

The *third* Bible fact is that each of these three Beings has, in the Scripture, the attributes of God. For our purpose, I will not speak about the deity of God the Father, nor of the deity of Jesus Christ the Son, but I will speak of the fact, that in the Scriptures, it is indisputably plain that the Spirit of God is called and known as God. The attributes of God are attributed to Him. "Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God" (Hebrews 9: 14). As God is eternal, so the Spirit of God is eternal. In Psalm 139, the Spirit of God is said to be omnipresent. It is impossible to hide from Him. He is everywhere. In 1 Corinthians 2: 10 "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." The Spirit of God is omniscient. He knows all things. In Psalm 104: 30, the Holy Spirit creates. In John 6: 63 we are told the Holy Spirit gives life. In 2 Peter 1: 21, we are told that the Holy Spirit, by the test the prophets applied, is God because He foretells the future. Holy men of old who prophesied the coming of Jesus, spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the most definite of these passages is the sad story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 3, 4). "But Peter said, Ananias, why

hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" What he had done was described as lying to the Holy Ghost. "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." There is a plain statement that in lying to the Holy Ghost he was, in fact, lying to God. Thus the plain Scripture teaching is that the Holy Spirit is God.

So far as His being a Person is concerned, the *fourth* of these classes of Bible facts which they saw and we can see, is that to each of these three Beings the Holy Scripture unquestionably attributes the actions of persons. In the first place the meaning of personality is that that being is a distinct and separate centre of experience, and this is very largely concerned with memory. I am aware of the fact that last week I travelled by sleeper train from the North-East coast to Bristol. The next evening, I took a tiny eight-seater aircraft and flew back from Bristol via Cardiff and Liverpool and Newcastle, and I remember it. Now, it is this memory, whereby I am myself a centre of experience, what I looked out upon, what I said, what I heard, distinct and separate from all other beings, really constitutes me to be a person. Now when you think of the sacred things concerning these Beings, how clear it is, for example, that Jesus Christ was a Person whose history and experience distinguished Him completely from the other two Beings of which we have spoken. He was in the form of God. He emptied Himself and took the form of man. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He has been raised from the dead, and has gone back to the right hand of God. So it is with the Spirit of God. He was active in certain individuals in the Old Testament, but after the ascen-

sion of Christ He was given to come down from heaven, appearing in cloven tongues of fire, and from that moment, the Church has been His dwelling place on earth. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost, and when the Church goes back to heaven when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and takes His own to be with Himself, the Spirit of God will go back from this earth and His home will be in heaven, though He will still, in a way, be active on earth. He is a distinct centre of experience and this is what constitutes a person.

But also, the Spirit performs actions which can only be performed by persons. In the same passage quoted already (1 Corinthians 2: 11) we are told the Spirit of God knows. Now an influence cannot know. Only a person can know. In 1 Corinthians 12: 11, the Holy Spirit wills. In Romans 15: 30 the Spirit of God loves. In Romans 8: 26 the Spirit of God intercedes. Perhaps we ought to pause at this point because this is the one place in the Bible which appears to say that the Holy Spirit is a thing or an influence rather than a Person because it says there "the Spirit itself". We need not spend much time upon something which is merely a grammatical point. The word "spirit" in the original language goes back to the word for wind or breath, and it was a neuter noun and therefore could be, by a lack of understanding, translated "itself" instead of "Himself". Of course this is not to say that the Holy Spirit is not a Person. That the Spirit of God intercedes for the saints and adds His strength to their weakness proves that He is a Person, because only a Person can intercede. In 1 Timothy 4: 1 the Holy Spirit speaks. The Holy Spirit also forbids, when He forbade certain preachers to go to a certain place in Acts 16. Of all this long list of Bible facts which show so clearly

that the Spirit of God is a Person, there is none more striking than Ephesians 4: 30 which says: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." You cannot grieve a thing. You cannot grieve an influence. You can only grieve a person. The burden of the message is that we might be urged and shown how not to grieve the blessed Spirit of God so that His mighty works might be shown in us.

These four classes of Bible facts abundantly support these early Christians in confessing that the truth in these matters is to say there is one God in three Persons. Everyone since those days who has tried to dispense with these words and these thoughts has fallen into great trouble. It is of course, a very natural thing that modern Christians should feel impatient. Perhaps you feel now impatient with this laborious attempt to understand what the Scripture says, but I will give you three reasons which might persuade you to a different point of view. One is that when these men gathered together as the so-called bishops of the church at the councils beginning at the Council of Nice, though many sad things took place yet we must never forget, that many of them bore in their body the brands of the Lord Jesus. They had been mauled by the lions; they had narrowly escaped the fate of their brethren in being put to the fire and they realized that above all other things they must understand what was the truth as to the faith for which they had suffered so much. The second great fact is that these questions are vital. These men saw very clearly that if the Spirit is not God, we have no revelation of God, and if the Lord Jesus Christ is not God, we have no divine Saviour, and therefore they realised

that the very foundations of their salvation were concerned in the truth of these matters. And finally, a third reason for which we are not to be impatient is that these matters are live issues today. The Jehovah's Witnesses who besiege our doors and gain converts every day, deny that the Holy Spirit is God; and many a liberal, modern theologian would look askance at the idea that the Holy Spirit is a Person and God. Therefore, we can commend to each other, to seek patiently, not fully to understand, but to know what Scripture teaches, and that we may hold it dearly and the power of it might be made known to us.

When we think of the three Persons in one God, the sacred truth of the Trinity, the way God has revealed Himself, the Father through the Son and the Spirit, then we understand that it is the part of the Father to originate, and it is the part of the Son to carry out. There is one very striking passage which we must always try to remember, which tells us this. The Lord Jesus Christ said in John 5, "The Son can do nothing from Himself but what He seeth the Father do." The Son only does the things that the Father shows Him. There are two things abundantly plain there. One is that whatever the Father does, the Son can do; there is the abundant demonstration of the absolute deity of the Son of God. But the Son can do nothing from Himself. It is of the Father to originate. He is the source of all. The river of all existence flowed out of Him. It is of the Son to do the work. And from the beginning to the end of our Bibles we see, it is the work of the blessed Spirit of God to make good here upon earth what God has decreed. This is seen from the beginning when He made good the Word of God in bringing light in the primaeval darkness, to

the end when He creates in the saints a response to the love of Christ and the Spirit in the bride says "Come".

In these papers we are to consider the Spirit and His mighty works. The first great fact is that the Spirit of God is here. With the sound of a rushing mighty wind, and cloven tongues of fire, He came in those early days and from that time He is with us forever. We shall think of this, the coming, the gift, the presence of the Spirit of God here amongst us. And then, among His mighty works there is the Holy Scripture. What a blessing it is that there is a Book in which the will of God is embodied, and which, in the hands of the Spirit of God, Who indited it, is effective to produce in us, not only the new birth, not only being brought to faith in Christ, but everything that is pleasing to God and to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ! We shall consider the mighty work of the Spirit of God in inspiring the Holy Scriptures. And then we shall think of the work of the gospel. We lament the poverty of the effectiveness of our witness and God would have us to realise that there is no substitute for the power of the Spirit of God in the work of the gospel. See in the Acts how the Spirit of God by these men "cut through the matted layers of tradition", and blew away like a refreshing breeze the mists of prejudice, and men and women were swept into the kingdom of God. The fifth paper is on the Spirit of God acting in the Church. When the saints are gathered together in one place, the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. Then there is the holy priesthood, the spiritual sacrifices rising up to God, acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ. And so God is glorified, and the name of Jesus is magnified by the mighty work of the Holy

Ghost in the Church. Finally, although we are involved in all these others, what about ourselves and the work of the Holy Ghost in us? If He has His way, if we walk in the Spirit, then as Paul said in stating his desire, then Christ will be magnified in us whether by life or by death. When, in Acts chapter 4, the disciples were hauled up before the authorities for preaching the Name of Jesus, and they were scourged and their backs were bleeding and they were let go to their own people, what did they do? They prayed. One of the most striking facts imaginable is that when they prayed, there was not a single word about those bleeding backs. There was not a single word about a desire to be spared or saved or delivered from it in future. What they wanted was mighty works in the Name of Jesus. What they wanted was boldness to declare Him, and it was when they forgot themselves and they were consumed with the desire to magnify Him that they were filled with the Spirit and the place where they were was shaken.

And indeed, so it will be with us, in every part of those mighty works, in the measure in which we walk in the Spirit, and realise that the Spirit of God has not been given us to occupy us with ourselves, but to occupy us with the consciousness of the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is His work. That is the stream in which all His activity flows, and if we live in that stream, if we walk in that Spirit, in the measure in which we do so, the lovely fruits of the Spirit, love and joy and peace, will flower and fruit and flourish and the ugly works of the flesh will wither away. And then we shall say:

*"Every virtue we possess and every victory won
And every thought of holiness are His alone."*

2. POWER UNLIMITED !

(John 14: 15-18; Luke 24: 49; Acts 1: 5-8; Acts 2: 1-18; Acts 2: 33, 38, 41)

HOW easily we may take for granted the many gifts that come from God, Who is the Giver of "every good gift and every perfect gift"! This was forcibly brought home to the writer recently in a dream in which the precious gift of hearing was lost to him. Deafness to every familiar sound was complete and the voices one loved to hear were now but meaningless motions of the lips. On awakening, the stillness and silence of the night seemed to suggest that it was no dream but a tragic reality, until the illusion was shattered by the nocturnal tones of a cat in the street outside! Once again I was thankful to be back in the world of sound, even unpleasant sounds like this! The experience enhanced one's appreciation of the gift of all five senses, and challenged one's gratitude to God for such wonderful free gifts.

This great dispensation of grace was inaugurated by two outstanding gifts from God. First of all the gift of His Son, Jesus, to be the Saviour of the world; and secondly, the gift of His Holy Spirit to empower His Church. How often do we say, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift" and mean more than the quotation of this Scripture? How often have we really thanked Him for the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, Who has come to make Christ real to our hearts? The Scriptures to which reference has been made may well stir our hearts and give us to think afresh of all we owe to God, our Father for His gracious gifts — "the precious Saviour *and* the power that makes Him

precious, too."

Our present consideration is that of the promise of the Lord Jesus regarding the Holy Spirit, and the fulfilment of that promise by the arrival of the Spirit at Pentecost. In order to understand the promise Jesus made in John 14 it is necessary to see the context in which it was given to the disciples. Previously He had indicated in chapter 12 that His death was an absolute necessity. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone," and again, "And I if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die." Following this, in chapter 13, we find Him kneeling at the feet of His disciples, girded with a towel and from a bason of water removing the weariness and defilement contracted on their journey, so that they are refreshed and fitted for His company.

Thus He would show them (and us) that beyond the Cross, through which their sins would be removed, He would take up a new ministry on returning to the Father by which they would be kept in touch with Him there. The sequel to this is His promise in chapter 14 that from the Father would come "another Comforter", Who would abide with them forever. The touching use of the word "another" reminds them that they had known Him in that precise capacity. He had been their defender at every turn, and had met every challenge and assault upon His own to the very end. And when at last wicked men came with swords and staves to arrest Him, He said, "If, therefore, ye seek Me, let these

(disciples) go their way." Thus His power, even in such extremity, provided safe conduct for His own. Yes, indeed, He had been their Comforter in every situation. But leaving them, would they become defenceless orphans? No, the Father would send "another Comforter" to abide with them forever. Now babes need a comforter, but men who would have to face assault, persecution, testings and temptations need something more than that, and indeed much more than comfort is built into the Greek word *paraclete*. This word is used only five times in the New Testament, four times in these chapters and once in 1 John 2: 1; not only does it mean Comforter and Advocate, but "One who manages our cause, our affairs for us" (see footnote to J.N.D.'s New Translation). Just as a family solicitor would employ his special knowledge to safeguard the interests of his clients, so He Who is spoken of here as the Spirit of Truth would act on behalf of His own.

So we see that all the power and value of the Lord's new ministry when He returned to the Father would be sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit with them and in them. But although they would consciously know the Spirit's presence when He came, He would not be recognised or received by the world. This would be so because the world could neither see nor know Him. The assessments of men are largely determined by what can be seen. In a recently published book entitled, *No Two Ways About It*, the Christian writer tells about the Soviet cosmonaut who looked out of the window of his space capsule while orbiting the earth and said, "I see no angels! I see no Heaven! I see no God!" Poor little man, imagining that a scientific device had exploded the myth so dear

to many! But not only cosmonauts are blind to such realities, for in a well-known book by a Bishop we are told that God is not "up there", nor is He "out there", this having been conclusively demonstrated by scientific investigation! Such is the yardstick applied by the natural man in his assessment of reality, but Jesus said the Spirit would neither be seen nor received in that way.

When the Lord said of the Spirit, "He dwelleth with you and shall be in you," He defined one of the important distinctions of this dispensation. In Old Testament days the Spirit had been with men, even wicked men like Balaam and King Saul, of whom the astonished people said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" But the Spirit of God left such men and went His way when His purpose through them was completed, and even King David, "a man after God's own heart", is heard to cry to God, in Psalm 51, while confessing his sin, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." He was with these men but not in them. So no true believer can pray David's prayer today, for not only is the Holy Spirit here to abide with us forever but He is in us, too. Having given such assurance as to the Spirit, Jesus adds, "I will come to you." Here is an experience which must be cherished by every believer today. Elsewhere His promise is, "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." How sweetly this promise is realised at the Prayer Meeting or in remembering the Lord in His death. But how can He be in the midst of every such gathering when He is corporeally in Heaven? Surely the sense of His presence is vouchsafed by the Holy Spirit. Who is *with us corporately* and *in each one individually*.

The promise in John 14 was made

before the Cross, and lest His disciples should fear that that awful event had weakened His word, He "showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days." On one of these occasions, Luke 24: 49 records the Lord's confirmation of His promise in John 14. "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Their joy and enthusiasm at knowing He was risen from the dead was not enough in itself to equip them as His witnesses. They must wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come from His Father, and this alone would be adequate for such service. How needful it is for us, too, to learn that our most boundless enthusiasm is no substitute for the energy of the Holy Spirit in our service. But some have deduced from this that we too must tarry and agonise in prayer for the Spirit. Now while we must "be filled with the Spirit" and depend upon Him entirely for power, we have clearly no need to tarry in the sense that the disciples did. We might as well insist upon going to Jerusalem as take this instruction to tarry! No, it was simply that the Spirit had not yet come, and they must therefore wait there until He did, for their witness was to commence there.

At the end of the forty days, Luke records that they were with Him on the Mount of Olives when their wondering eyes saw Him "taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Obedient to His command, they returned to Jerusalem and waited and prayed for ten days together, until the Day of Pentecost. The thrilling account of what took place then is now before us in Acts 2. Do we sometimes give the book of Acts a secondary place — as

being "merely historical"? But was there ever more eventful history than this, and was ever any story more dramatically told? "Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence," He had said to them in chapter 1: 5, thus indicating that it would be one great historical act, never to be repeated. It would be one act, not a continuing process. The result of that baptism would be that they would be witnesses to Him, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Rather like a pebble dropped in a pond, spreading out in concentric circles from Jerusalem at the centre, then outwards to limitless horizons. How wonderful, that such waves of blessing should be the primary action of the Holy Spirit coming into a guilty world! And to this fact we owe our blessing in these favoured climes.

The dawn of the Day of Pentecost found the faithful little band of disciples still waiting, united and expectant. Would this be the day of the fulfilment of His promise? He had now been away ten days; how much longer to wait? Suddenly it happened; their waiting was over; "a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Do we wonder why we do not experience the fire and power of the Holy Spirit today? Let us ask ourselves if the moral condition of the Church bears any resemblance to those which the Spirit found on that day He came. Perhaps we know much more than these early believers did, but are we not fragmented and splintered in every direction so far as visible unity is

concerned? Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit who came with such demonstration of power at Pentecost is still here, with us and in us. All that has changed since that memorable day is the willingness of believers to be filled with His power and obedient to His authority. May we not seek the recovery of this in each one of us? In this great, authentic account of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world two things are worthy of special note. First, the house where the disciples were gathered was filled, indicative of the *baptism* of the Spirit; and secondly, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost", denoting the *indwelling* of the Spirit. Here is that which distinguishes the present day of grace from every previous dispensation.

In the baptism of the Spirit we have the external effect of His presence, whereby all believers are "baptised into one body" (1 Cor. 12: 13). How good it is to know that we have a place in the body of Christ, His Church, however young or feeble we may be, by virtue of that mighty baptism! But each and all of those in Acts 2 were also filled with the Spirit, a subjective condition which appears throughout Acts to have been normal to believers. There is a kind of teaching abroad that the filling of the Spirit is an abnormal, ecstatic experience, only reached after a prolonged period of agonising prayer or some such self-inspired contrition. Nothing of this, however, appears in Scripture, which enjoins us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5: 18), a command to be obeyed, rather than an experience to be attained. True, the appearance of cloven tongues of fire at Pentecost, sitting upon each of them, postulated the need for "refining the silver" (Zechariah 13: 9), in contrast to the dove-like descent upon

Jesus in Whom was nothing but perfection and the Father's delight. But for the disciples, this was no terrifying happening, for was it not the very fire of Calvary, the fire from the altar that touched the lips of an Isaiah and fitted him to answer the challenge, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" by his reply, "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6). So with these men; "they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Much could be learned about the significance of Pentecost from Leviticus 23, where the seven great feasts of the Lord are commanded, the fourth of these being the feast of weeks or Pentecost. Seven weeks were to be counted from the feast of firstfruits and the fiftieth day would usher in the feast of Pentecost (a Greek word meaning "fiftieth"). Thus the Lord Jesus, raised from the dead as firstfruits of the great harvest, was with His Own for forty days before He ascended, and ten days later, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down from a glorified Christ. Here was a feast to which no specific duration was applied, unlike the other six, thus suggesting the long drawn-out day of grace in which the Holy Spirit would operate for man's blessing. How wonderful to see the first powerful evidence of the Spirit's arrival in causing men of every nation to hear, every man in his own tongue, "the wonderful works of God"! In his helpful book, *Another Comforter*, the late Dr. W. T. P. Wolston comments beautifully on this situation by saying that "God would ring the great bell of the universe to gather such an assortment of people to hear about His Son." And thank God that bell still rings throughout the world today and power unlimited may accompany its glad message.

Let us observe in passing that in Acts 2 it was no gentle zephyr breeze that blew that day, but a turbulent, vehement "sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind", to announce that God by His Spirit was bursting into this dark world of sinners, anxious to make known His great salvation.

The puzzlement of the hearers over the breaking of the language barrier was very natural. But mockers always have ready answers, in most cases as ludicrous as the one they gave here. "These men are full of new wine," they explained. Be it noted that Peter roundly rebuked such nonsense before proceeding to preach with such Holy Ghost power that three thousand souls were brought to solemn repentance and glad reception of His Word. Diversity of language had begun with the judgment of Babel, when men were scattered upon the face of all the earth and confounded. Now the Spirit's day has dawned and men of "every nation under heaven" (doubtless Jews and proselytes attending the Jewish feast) are gathered to hear in their native tongues the message of God's salvation. In plain and sensible language Peter accounts for the phenomenon in two principal ways. In the first place it was in accord with their own ancient Scriptures, notably such a prophecy as Joel 2 (not necessarily the fulfilment of this passage, but in character with it emphatically), and secondly it must be recognised as a corollary of what they knew so well as to their rejection of their Messiah. God had given His answer to both of these, by raising up Christ from

the dead and making Him both Lord and Christ, then by "pouring out this (the demonstration of the Spirit's power) which ye now see and hear" (v. 33). So convincing and convicting were these declarations that thousands were moved to cry out, "What shall we do?" How every true Gospel preacher longs for this moment when the Word, driven home in mighty conviction by the Spirit, compels the cry, "What must I do to be saved?" How gladly is the answer given, and with what blessing received!

Contrast all this with the giving of the Law. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai (Exodus 32) with God's Holy Law in his hands, he found a naked people dancing around a golden calf. His anger burned, and breaking up the holy tablets of the Law, he called out, "Who is on the Lord's side?", and then the sword of Levi was drawn, and three thousand men of the people were slain that day. Such indeed was the effect of the ministry of condemnation, but the blessed antithesis of this is seen at Pentecost when three thousand souls are swept into the Kingdom and saved. To quote once more from Dr. Wolston's book, "The first great service of the Holy Spirit in this world was to unfurl the flag on which was emblazoned the message: "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved."

May we all have a deeper conviction as to the Spirit's power unlimited, with us and in us still today, ready to carry out His mandate of blessing wherever He can find empty vessels willing to be filled.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

J. A. MACGREGOR

3. THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

(Matthew 22: 43; John 14: 26, 16: 13, 14; 1 Corinthians 2: 9-13)

WE will consider in this paper primarily what our Lord Himself had to say about the Old Testament Scriptures and what He promised concerning the Holy Spirit in relation to the New Testament, and at the same time what the Scriptures themselves say about this very important subject. Let me stress from the very outset the fact that the accuracy of all the tremendous truths and the wonderful vision of the future which we have in the Scriptures depends on the inspiration of the Word of God by the Spirit of God. I propose shortly to say something about this in another context.

The subject is so vast, so interrelated with such subjects as the Authority and Translation of the Scriptures, that it could become a cold, academic, and in other hands scholarly topic. I would therefore remind you, and my own heart, of what a great Cambridge divine, Charles Simeon, used to say was always in his mind when he preached — that if preaching was to be of any use, it must do three things: humble the sinner; exalt the Saviour; and, arising out of these two, it must promote holy living. My prayer and earnest desire is that what we are going to consider will do all of these three things; will humble us in the presence of Almighty God, will exalt the Blessed Saviour Whom we trust, and will promote in each and everyone of us holiness of life.

The story is told of an old saint of God who was dying, and a clergyman called to see her on her death-bed. After they had been chatting for a few moments she said: "Minis-

ter, I want you to read to me from the Word of God." He said, "Where is your Bible?" "Oh," she said, "it's on the shelf over there." He went over to the shelf, but could not see a Bible, but did see something that looked like a Bible. "Yes," she said, "that is it." He took it down and brought it over, saying, "There's nothing in it; there are only two covers." "Of course there are only two covers," she said. "All my life I have been sitting under your ministry and almost every sermon you ever preached, you said something like this: 'Of course we cannot believe that. That's not really the Word of God. We can't trust it.'" Then she said: "When I got home, after hearing you say that, I thought the only thing I could do was to tear out those pages from my Bible, and sir, that's all there is left; no message for a soul about to embark on the journey into eternity." We are indeed closed up to a simple choice of either rejecting as unreliable, or accepting as infallible the fully-inspired Word of the Living God.

Before I examine with you the Scriptures that have been read dealing with this great subject, I want to say something else, in another context. Consider with me a very brief passage in the Gospel of Luke. I turn to this because this could be an uninspired record. It could be mere history, if you like to call it that, from one point of view. We do not look at it like that because it is part of the inspired Word, but Luke, in his introduction says he has diligently considered all the records concerning Jesus Christ, and

has sat down as a historian and compiled an accurate record of Jesus Christ. As part of that record we have the following passage, known, I am sure, by all of us: "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Now just for one moment, let us consider this as a plain record of history which Luke claims it to be — the Son of God, proved to be such in His movements among men, in all the greatness of His Person, suffering in this way for us. Is it sensible or logical, to think that the mighty God Who made the universe, would leave the account of all this suffering, this tremendously stirring record of God Himself sweating great drops of blood, to the fallible minds of men? Commonsense gives the answer, No it is not, even if the Scripture itself was silent. Such an event, such a Christ, such suffering demands that God should ensure that the explanation of it comes from Himself. This then is the subject we are considering that the Lord Himself, in talking to His disciples told them emphatically that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all things which He said and did in the Gospels, and more than that, that He would bring them into all truth concerning the future. In doing so He was showing how important, how vital, and essential it was that concerning the facts of His death, and the establishment of the early Church, we should have the infallible Word of the Living God to guide and direct us.

Many of us will have had the dread experience of trying to drive home in a dense fog, groping our way by having the windows of our cars down and trying to find the kerb or the verge of the road. Soon we may have some sort of an electrical device which is going to operate on our main roads to guide us unerringly through the fog to our destination. A poor illustration perhaps, but I believe it gives a picture of what the Scriptures can be to us. In a world of uncertainty, a world of philosophy and vain babblings God has not left us alone to stumble on our way as a motorist in a fog unable to see the landmarks, unable to make a sure journey through this life. He has given us a Guide, a Comforter, a Paraclete, One Who will go beside us. He may be unseen, our natural eyes may not be able to see Him, our natural ears may not be able to hear Him, but Jesus Christ has told us He is here, He is with us, unseen, but ever present as our Guide. The apostle told Timothy that these Scriptures have been given to us by the work of that Spirit to be our hope, our guide, our shield through life.

The Holy Spirit's work of inspiration is seen in both the Old and New Testaments. Regarding the Old, "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1: 21). One of its writers described his work in these lovely words: "The sweet psalmist of Israel said: The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue" (2 Samuel 23: 1, 2). Moreover, as Christians, we are to accept the Old Testament in its entirety because our Lord Himself put His seal upon it. He ranged many of its books in His references; He founded His own teaching on its promises; He claimed to be equal with it in authority and power. As

Christians, it should be a simple matter for us to accept His estimate of the Old Testament; if we believe Him to be our Lord and Saviour then we can believe the Old Testament to be infallible.

Because He promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples to bring them into all Truth, because He was God, because He was omniscient, because He was omnipotent, we can also rely upon the New Testament. The apostle Paul, speaking for himself and the other New Testament writers, claimed to write or speak under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. In fullest detail, this is explained in 1 Corinthians 2: 9-13. His actions are, first, to *reveal* (v. 10) the things beyond the reach of man's means of knowledge, but which God has prepared for them that love Him. Second, it is by the Spirit that the apostles *knew* the things revealed (verses 11 and 12). The human spirit knows only human things, but the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. Third, as we noted in pondering the story of Gethsemane, the Spirit gives the words (verse 13) to be the only adequate vehicle for such immense revelations, matching spiritual words to the spiritual truth.

We would mention the Scripture in which Peter refers to those who wrest the words of the apostle Paul and then goes on to say "as they do the other Scriptures". Here is a fellow apostle prepared to state in a letter that the writings of Paul are to be considered together and viewed with the other Scriptures — those Scriptures which Christ confirmed and fulfilled.

I hear someone saying about the Old Testament, "How can we be sure? How can we accept what you say? Could not the Lord have been wrong in His accepting it? Was He not just as some of the critics say,

accepting the error of His day and teaching this?" I think not, because if we read the Gospels, we find that this is just what he did not do. He was constantly coming into contact with leaders of the day, and challenging what they were teaching and on every occasion He challenged by showing that what they were saying was not in accordance with the Old Testament. Many people find it hard to accept the New Testament, because they say that it was put together by the edicts of Church Councils. But it was certainly not so as a matter of historic fact. All those Councils did, was to confirm that the books we have in the Bible had been accepted from the very earliest days as the inspired teaching of God through His holy apostles.

We have these 66 books in our Bible. What has happened to all the others? Someone has said that we could say of these books what the apostle John said of other people. The books served their tiny day and generation, but now they have gone. The fire has come and burned them up as dross and left the seven times purified and refined Word of the Living God, and it can be said concerning them as John said of these other people that "They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2: 19).

At the end of the Bible in the Revelation we are given a solemn warning, although I realize that primarily it refers to the book of Revelation itself. This is that if any man take from this book, God shall take away his part out of the book of life (Revelation 22: 19). This book is the one that fulfilled the promise that Jesus Christ himself made that He would send the Holy Spirit to

bring His disciples into the light of all truth concerning the future. One is tempted to halt there. In this space age, this day of probing the universe, when men are trying to fathom what is going to happen, are men ever going to land on the moon? Are men going to go beyond to Mars and Venus? Are we to explore the universe? For such a time God has given His people an inspired record of what is going to happen, and we are warned that no man must touch it, no one must add to it, no man must take away from it, and I believe we are justified with the Spirit's help in saying that what is said in this connection at the end of this wonderful book, applies to the whole of the Bible. God has warned us not to touch it, like the clergyman that I told you about. What is such a man going to say when he stands in the presence of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ said "Heaven and Earth shall pass away but My Word shall never pass away." All that we see, all that we know, all that lies in the immediate range of our telescope and our space craft He tells us will pass away but "My words shall never pass away." Thus, what will the critic say when he stands in the presence of Almighty God, when the heavens and the earth shall have fled away from Him that sits upon the throne?

Satan never believed the Word of God. He always casts doubts upon it. Away back in the Garden of Eden he comes along and says, "Hath God said? Has God really said this?" He started then. He hates the idea of man listening to the Word of God. Did he have some knowledge, I wonder, of Revelation 19, when we are told that He who comes out on a horse to lead the armies of Heaven is referred to as "the Word of God" and a few

verses further down as Lord of lords, giving the identity of the Word of God with the Lord Christ Himself. Satan hates it. Satan would take it from Adam and Eve. Satan was rebuffed, as has often been said, on the mount of temptation. What a lesson to the higher critics! When the devil comes and tempts our Blessed Lord to leave the pathway of the will of God, what does Jesus do? He quotes three passages from the despised book of Deuteronomy, and what happens? The devil is silenced on the spot. We have a weapon in the Scriptures that will silence the enemy if we use it. It is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. May we all learn to use it, and may the Lord of the universe teach us to be skilful in its use.

He has protected it. He has given it to us in the power of the Holy Spirit. All those who have written it over many years in many places using all kinds of methods and styles of writing on parchments and tablets, have all been protected and guided by the Holy Spirit. But you say Moses wrote this and Isaiah wrote that. This is true, but only in the sense that, using the personalities of these men, the Holy Spirit laid hold upon and used them to write only those words which God decreed. Christ has put His seal upon the Old Testament and upon the New. The apostles have confirmed it. The early Church have accepted it. It stands solid, secure, permanent, and we can rest our souls on it.

It is the Holy Spirit also who alone can make good what has been written to the heart and in the lives of believers. In other words the inspired Word is taken by its Divine Author and in His own Power applied to heart and conscience. The Spirit therefore not only gave the Word in the sense in which He in-

spired the Bible but also takes that same Word and from it produces first, life in the unbeliever, and subsequently fruit in the lives of believers. Our responsibility is to be responsive to His leading and obedient to the Lord.

I have not dealt with the question of alleged error, because others have covered the ground and covered it adequately. When I was a young man I was somewhat bewildered about these things, but they all melted away when I realised that the blessed God has not left us without a rudder. God Who loved us, Christ Who died for us, has insured that we can have a certain and positive guide to take us through the rocks

and currents and adverse tides of circumstances down here.

God is infinite! By the power of His Holy Spirit in movement through the Old and the New Testament, from Genesis to Revelation, we have actually the pure gold of His revelation for us. What are we going to do with it? Is it just going to be a head study for us? Is it just going to be something to read once or twice a week may be? Is it going to be a holy book? May this not be so. May it be the Living Word of the Living God to us, laying hold upon us, finding a place in our hearts, and bringing us daily to the feet of Him Who gave His precious Life to make us His own.

CORRESPONDENCE

Miss E. Bernstein writes from London:

I have been puzzled by the difference in the account given by Matthew 27: 5 of Judas's end and that of Peter in Acts 1: 18, 19. Is there an explanation?

TAKING the whole accounts in each case, there are three main discrepancies. 1. Who bought the field? Matthew says the chief priests: Acts says it was Judas. 2. How did Judas die? Matthew answers that he hanged himself: Acts that he fell headlong and burst asunder. 3. Why the name, "Field of Blood"? Matthew gives the reason that it was bought with the 30 pieces of silver. Acts states it was because Judas died there.

These two accounts of frightful events provide an excellent example of the difference between true but independent accounts of the same events, and a forgery. Forgers are only concerned with the appearance of truth and will always exclude discrepancies. There is in fact never any need to doubt the veracity of two accounts given apart

and without collusion, *merely* because there are discrepancies. This is true whether we can supply the missing links or not, so long as the witnesses are otherwise reliable.

Questions 1 and 2 are easily reconciled by supplying additional information the original writers were not concerned to give. If land bought by the chief priests with money thrown down by Judas were *legally* Judas's property, no discrepancy would remain. And other facts could conceivably supply the missing links. If in the course of an attempt by Judas to hang himself the rope broke, both accounts could be simply true.

Question 3 really presents no difficulty at all. One name could well have two mutually supporting origins.

4. HIS WORK IN THE WORLD

(Genesis 1: 1-3; John 16: 7-11; 6: 60-63; Matthew 5: 13-16; Philippians 2: 12-16; 2 Thessalonians 2: 7)

THE verses in Genesis 1 present to us a very wonderful outline with regard to the Spirit's activity. There we read in very terse and yet wonderful language, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Then in the second verse, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

I am not going to say anything about what may have happened between verses one and two, but I think we are all agreed that something terrible did happen. Other scriptures bear out quite clearly that the earth was not formed in its original condition as described in verse 2. Isaiah tells us it was not formed void and waste. It was formed to be inhabited, and therefore some catastrophe must have taken place between those first and second verses. Men will speculate, but the believer falls back upon that wonderfully superb verse in Hebrews, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God."

This word "God" in the first verse is a plural one. But "created" is a singular verb, giving us the idea of the Trinity acting as one in the creation of the world. When you come to verse 2 you find that the first Person in the Trinity to be named is the Spirit. When there is a movement to bring order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos, to transform a thing of desolation into a scene of beauty and grandeur, it is the Spirit of God we read of as moving upon the face of the waters.

While this is true of the creation,

this picture that we have in Genesis 1, is clearly an indication of a moral condition, all the failure and breakdown of man and of all his rebellion against God, and the darkness which prevails in men's hearts as the result of the fall. When there is a movement with regard to that moral condition, it is the Spirit of God Who is spoken of as operating in that movement. In all God's activities in the rescue of man from his terrible condition and the darkness in which he lies, and the sin which has enswamped him, the first movement is by the Spirit of God. That is important, because we see as we go on to speak of His work in the world, that the Spirit of God must be the first active agent in any work that there is for God today.

When we reach the verses in John 16, we find that there the Spirit of God is spoken of in a very particular way. John 14, 15 and 16 are the three chapters which give us in very good detail the Lord's own words with regard to the mission and activity of the Holy Spirit, but in these verses we read of His work in the world, "When He is come" into the world, it says what He do. The word which we have in the Authorised Version is "reprove", "When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." The margin gives "convince", and the New Translation, that the Holy Spirit will "bring demonstration". I am inclined, for my own use here, to take up the New Translation. Someone might say if the Holy Spirit comes to convince the world of sin (as the

margin puts it), everyone in this world is convinced of sin, and that is not true. But the presence of the Holy Spirit here in this world is a demonstration of these three things: of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. And apart altogether from what response there might be, the Spirit's demonstration still remains. He, coming into the world, brings that demonstration with Him. I want to emphasise it is not simply that there is a wonderful power, but there is a glorious Person here, and we need to remember that when the Lord Jesus went back up into heaven, as great a Person came down as went up. That blessed Person, the Holy Spirit, is here and He brings this demonstration of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment.

We are not left to guess how this demonstration is brought. The Scripture tells us: "Of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." There are three holidays, Good Friday, Easter and Whitsuntide. It might help if we think of these three days as corresponding to the three things which are mentioned here.

"Of sin, because they believe not on Me." The Holy Spirit is the witness of the refusal of the Lord Jesus Christ, the indication that sin in men's hearts makes them disbelieve the Lord Jesus Christ and His presence in this world. The cross, which Good Friday commemorates is a terrible indictment of man's guilt. We may sing as a sentimental theme "I will cling to the o'd rugged cross" but "the old rugged cross" is more than a sentimental theme. They refused the Lord Jesus Christ, they gave their verdict.

"Man the cross to Him awarded; man the Saviour crucified; this world's judgment stands recorded," and the Holy Spirit's presence here is the demonstration of that judgment, that man in his sin and unbelief has refused and cast out the Lord Jesus Christ.

After Good Friday we come to Easter Sunday, and if the one tells of man's refusal of the Lord Jesus, the other tells us of God's answer to man's refusal, of God's demonstration that man's judgment is false, for the One Whom they rejected, refused and set at naught, is the One Whom God has raised from the dead and set at His own right hand. "Of righteousness, because I go to the Father." The fact that there is a real, living, glorious Man in the presence of God and that the Holy Spirit is here is the proof that man's judgment was false and that God has reversed it. The Holy Spirit is here to demonstrate God's righteous judgment with regard to what man has done to His well beloved Son.

"Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." And so we come on from Easter to Whitsuntide, or in olden days, Pentecost. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came down here, arriving in the domain of the enemy, right where sin was rampant. He took up His place in every believer on earth and He demonstrates that He Himself is a greater power than even the prince of this world. It is a wonderful cheer and encouragement to realise that in this world today there is One Who can give you the sense of Christ's victory over Satan, so that you can reverse the judgment that man has passed, and in doing so you can become yourself indwelt by that Holy Spirit and have the power to appreciate what God has done to His well beloved Son.

In John 6: 63 you read these half-dozen words, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth." I said earlier that when there was a movement in relation to the recovery and the rescue of creation, the Spirit of God was the Person of the three in the Trinity Who was named. Now when you come to the question of bringing out of the moral and spiritual darkness and the sin that men are found in today, the Holy Spirit is the One Who makes the first move. I think that bears a little more explanation. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing," not even the best of flesh. Even Nicodemus found that out, and I suppose he was about the best of flesh that day. It has been said that Nicodemus was a prize champion of the stock show, not just any old bullock that was brought in from one of the fields. He was the best that could be produced, but when he came into the presence of God, into the presence of the Lord Jesus, he learned that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. And whatever people may be trying to do in the world today in the way of reformation, nothing can be effected for God unless it is by the Holy Spirit. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." People are trying to tell us that all we have to do is to educate the flesh, give men a better outlook, and improve the conditions. It is not so; the flesh profits nothing; it is the Spirit that quickeneth, and He is in this world today for that very purpose.

What is the difference between quickening and conversion? In John's Gospel the Holy Spirit is presented to us in three ways: as Quickener, as Sanctifier and as Comforter. No matter how you look at it, the quickening must come first, or the other two will never take

place at all. I believe that both quickening and conversion can take place at the same time. Someone can be brought under the Spirit's influence and be gloriously converted there and then. I also believe that the Spirit spoke to us quite a long time before we were converted. We felt the pull of the unseen a long time before we gave in. We felt the desire for other things growing with us before we realised that it was the Spirit picking us out of that morass in which we lay, and turning our eyes upon Jesus, that we might find in Him our Saviour. There is a saying, "The farmer will get any old Irishman to come and reap his crops, but he will sow them himself." The Holy Spirit's work is this sowing and it is going on — the preparation of the soil, and the sowing of the seed. If we get the wonderful joy of reaping, praise God for it, but the work did not start there; the work was started by the Holy Spirit.

How does this affect us and our service for the Lord Jesus? It is to bring us to realise that whatever we do must be part of the Spirit's work in the world today, taking us up and using us for His glory, in the blessing of others. A hymn I am very fond of starts: "Brightly beams our Father's mercy from His lighthouse evermore." The story is that the writer of that hymn knew of a part of the coastline at which, on the top of a cliff there stood the lighthouse, sending out its broad, bright beam across the ocean. Down at the bottom of the cliff there were some very treacherous rocks and though the lighthouse was shining vessels were being wrecked because they could not see their way in, round these treacherous rocks, so they put little lights, lower lights round the bottom of the cliff to guide these ships into safety. One

night a vessel was lost, and lives perished, not because the lighthouse was not sending out its beams, but because one of these lower lights had gone out. And the hymn says :

*"Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From His lighthouse evermore;
But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.
Let the lower lights be burning !
Send a gleam across the wave !
Some poor fainting, struggling
seaman
You may rescue, you may save."*

"Among whom ye shine as lights in the world." The Holy Spirit is pleased to take us up and use us to shine out the light of the glorious gospel and let others see the way back to God.

A story is told of the time when men who kept the railway crossings had to signal on the train with a lantern. On one occasion there was a smash and the gateman was taken to the court. The judge said : "Were you at the gate?" "Oh yes, sir, I was there." "Did you wave your lantern?" "Oh yes, I waved it backwards and forwards." The good man was exonerated from any blame, but afterwards he said, "I was afraid he was going to ask me another question. I was waving the lantern but the lantern was out." It was not much good waving a lantern with no light. The Holy Spirit has implanted in our hearts the desire to be light-bearers, torch-bearers. I am pleading for torch-bearers, those who are going out

into the darkness of this world, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, to spread the light of the gospel, amid the gathering gloom, to bring others into the joy of God's salvation.

Finally, we have another activity of the Holy Spirit in 2 Thessalonians 2: 7, "Only He Who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way." That word "let" is the old word which really means "hinder" or "restrain". Now if you look round you will see the rising tide of apostasy building itself up, and the storm is just about to break. The one thing that is holding that storm back, keeping that terrible onslaught at bay, is the fact that the Holy Spirit is here. It is part of His work, by His mighty power to hold back these forces of evil until His work is completed here, and every blood-bought soul that has been won for Christ has been caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Do we play a part in this? I think we do. "Ye are the salt of the earth." The salt is for preservation, and the presence of the saints of God amid all the voices of the modern world, lifting up the banner of the cross — if you are not afraid to say : "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord or to defend His cause" — is the means the Spirit is using as a restraining influence to keep at bay the forces of evil. The Holy Spirit, in His gracious ministry, uses us and puts us just where we are in the world, that we might be used by the Spirit not only as shedding forth that light, but in His mercy and grace as a restraining influence in this world of evil.



5. HIS WORK IN THE CHURCH

(Ephesians 2: 11; 1 Corinthians 3: 9; 1 Corinthians 12: 1)

SINCE our subject is the action of the Holy Spirit in connection with the church, we must first enquire, What is the church?

In any large city there are numerous companies of believers, taking different names. The persons connected with those bodies all in some way or other speak of themselves as members of this church or that church. Our enquiry on this occasion will be an enquiry which will help us under the Spirit's guidance to see that such a conception of the church of God is entirely foreign to the truth. There is only one church, and we desire to get help from God to enable us to see the glory and the dignity of belonging to such a church. I have no doubt in my mind that the persons who profess to belong to such a church do so in sincerity, but in dealing with the things of God, we must be guided by the Word of God, not what man thinks. No matter how sincere he may be, no matter how ancient and venerable the institutions are, there is no criterion that what he professes to hold and what he believes is the truth. It may seem a presumptuous thing to say, but we believe that it is the truth. We must be guided by the Word of God.

The Scriptures have used figures to help us to understand the truth of the church. If we think of it in relation to Christ, one figure employed is that of a body. We all know the human body expresses the person; what the person thinks and feels and desires is expressed through his or her body. So it is that Scripture has employed this figure, the body of Christ. It also uses the figure of a bride, to help us to understand

how much Christ thinks of His assembly, the love that He has for it, the beauty that He sees in it, to understand something of the response of the assembly to Christ and her affection for Him. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." The figure of a pearl is also used to show the value of the assembly to Christ, how precious it is. It was so precious that He gave His all to obtain it. The figure of a treasure is used, once again to show the value and the variety of beauty that is to be found in the assembly for the pleasure of Christ. When we come to God, the house is used. It enables us to understand that God is dwelling in the midst of His people. God finds delight to dwell in the midst of His people. Then the figure of a temple is used, showing where God is dwelling in all His holiness and glory, and persons are privileged to come into His presence and worship Him. The figure of a city is used, the grand finality, we may say, when all that is of God is gathered up into this great expression of His glory and administration of the world to come.

All those figures help us to understand the truth of the assembly, or the church. I think it is better to use the expression "the assembly". We have become so accustomed to the word "church", that it conjures up in our minds the thought of a building, something great, imposing, something ornate to look at in the architectural sense. Generally speaking I think that is the idea that we associate with a church. But the New Translation refers to the assembly. I believe the word is excellent to set out what we understand by

the one church, the one assembly, simply meaning persons who are called out from the course of this world's movements and desires and ambitions, to form a people for God, where He can centre His interests and where He can dwell. Just as Abram was called out from Ur of the Chaldees to be the father of many families, just as Israel is called out from Egypt to become the favoured nation of God and to occupy the land of Israel, the land of promise, so today, people are being called out. Ever since Pentecost people have been called out from this world's course, from this world's ambition, from this world's desire, to be governed by the will of God, and to be by the Spirit united into one assembly in which God could find His delight and pleasure.

Now this is all very simple in so many terms, but I know that when we come to study the detail of this matter, we find that complications have crept in, and yet we would seek to understand this great and glorious truth. It was all clear enough at the beginning. There were Jews; there were pagans; and from those two classes of people, God by the gospel, called out to Himself, one here and one there. Through one common object, faith in Christ, through one united power, the power of the Spirit, He formed them into one united company, having the same object, the same desire, the same affection, the same nature, for we are all partakers of the divine nature. He formed His assembly. And in spite of all the complications, all the opposition, all that has been against it, the assembly, the house of God abides; it is here today; it remains, in virtue of the power and presence of the Spirit of God. We cannot enjoy the presence of God if we are worried about our sins; we cannot enjoy the presence of

God if we are torn asunder by enmities or national or social distinctions; it all has to go in the death of Christ and we only find our true place in the presence of God because we have one common object, Jesus our Saviour, our glorified Lord; we have one common power, the Spirit of God. In that way God uses His material for His building by bringing in persons who are entirely set free from guilt, from national distinctions, from social distinctions. Everything goes by the death of Christ, and persons are fitted in carefully, one here and one there, all put in together to form this wonderful structure.

The Spirit of God is our special subject and we must now endeavour to show some of the ways in which the Spirit of God is connected with the assembly. The first indication of the house of God was when Jacob was away from his home and had the dream. He said: "This is none other than the house of God," and he anointed the stone that he had for a pillow. I believe we have there the figure of the anointing of the Holy Spirit to indicate to us the importance of the Holy Spirit in connection with the house of God. When we come to the tabernacle we find it set up in all its structure according to the mind of God, every part fitting together, every part according to the instructions from God Himself, and after it was set up the whole structure was anointed with the anointing oil, again I believe a reference to the Holy Spirit. In connection with the temple we find great stress laid upon the olive wood, the tree from which olive oil is obtained. Quotations from the New Testament will show us how the anointing oil speaks of the Holy Spirit. When Peter was preaching in Cornelius' house he said that Jesus was anointed with the Holy

spirit and with power. John writing to the saints in his letters says "ye have an unction" or an anointing. I believe those scriptures show us that anointing involves the Person and power of the Holy Spirit.

Two thousand years ago the assembly was formed by the descent of the Holy Spirit. As we shall see in Corinthians, in the power of one Spirit we were all baptised into one body. Now after two thousand years what can we say? Does the house of God abide? Does the body of Christ abide? Is there such a thing in this world as the bride of Christ? Is there such a thing as the temple of God? The presence and power of the Holy Spirit is the divine guarantee that the house of God abides, that the body of Christ abides. No matter what the destruction and havoc that have been caused by the infidelity and the unfaithfulness of man, the presence of the Holy Spirit here is the divine guarantee that the house abides. If it had been dependent upon the faithfulness of man, long ago the saints would have been overthrown by the power of the enemy, and Satan would have been successful in obliterating the name of Christ and testimony for God; but the Spirit of God, a divine Person, is here in the assembly, a divine guarantee that it will be kept until the very end. The promise of Christ has been maintained to the end: "He shall abide with you forever."

At the end of Ephesians 2 there are two important references to the Spirit of God in the church. Firstly, the apostle shows that all national distinctions and enmity between Jew and Gentile have been removed in the death of Jesus. Every person who enters into the presence of God known as Father must do so in the power of one Spirit. The Spirit delights to empower those who wish to approach the Father through

Christ. There remains no need for earthly or heavenly mediators, no need for ceremony or any other arrangement of man. There is direct access to the Father through Christ, and the Spirit gives the power. Never let us think of this privilege with familiarity. Let us be ever impressed that the Son and the Spirit are at our side to enable us with due reverence, liberty and affection to approach God in worship, prayer and communion.

In verse 22 Paul sets out a wonderful truth. God is dwelling in the midst of His people by His Spirit. Peter, in his first letter, speaks of a spiritual house, and this is the impression we gather from this verse. God is a Spirit. Solomon said He did not dwell in temples made with hands. But He *does* dwell in this house, which is composed of persons who are likened to living stones. Every person who has trusted Jesus as Saviour and has the gift of the Holy Spirit is a stone in this wonderful structure. This aspect of the church is a universal one and is true at any given moment on the earth. God could never dwell amidst the moral filth of this world, but He does dwell where Christ is known and enjoyed and where the Spirit alone is the recognised power for worship and testimony. The reference to the habitation of God in the Spirit is the guarantee we have mentioned that no efforts of Satan will ever destroy this house. What has been committed to men in responsibility always fails, but when Scripture states that things and persons are in Christ and in the Spirit, this is to indicate the divine ideal and it is good for us to receive an impression of the dignity of this wonderful position of blessing.

Now when we come to 1 Corinthians, we find a different aspect of the assembly. We find Paul speak-

ing to a company of believers in a particular place, Corinth. He addresses his letter to them in this way: "The assembly of God which is at Corinth." Now if this letter had been written to Ripon, it would have caused a tremendous amount of confusion. The postman would have great difficulty in knowing where to deliver this letter. I suppose the first place would be the cathedral and then he might have thought somewhere else, and so on. You see the havoc that Satan has caused, introducing many companies, all claiming to be churches in some way or other and this presents confusion in many minds, and makes it so hard for us to understand the simple truth that there is one assembly of God, one house of God. How are we to arrive at the truth? Again I say, let us look to the word of God.

This letter to the Corinthians was written to counteract some serious evils there, but while he does draw attention specifically to those evils, he also takes the opportunity to state basic truths. Those truths appropriated would cure the evils he deplored. In chapter three he uses the great truth of the church as the temple of God and the Spirit dwelling in it as a correcting truth. Their conduct was to be governed by this great truth. They were to be intelligent as to it. It was a fact and their lives should correspond to it. What wonderful dignity yet solemn responsibility: "Ye are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." No doubt there is an allusion to their pagan temples and the evil spirits that dwelt there (10: 20). The Spirit of the living God dwelt in the church, therefore their conduct must be regulated accordingly. It would seem that this is a local expression of the great truth stated in Ephesians, but the respon-

sibility to labour in accord with this truth seems to be the force in Corinthians 3. If we really apprehended the immense favour and privilege of collectively being instructed by the Spirit of God, and the holiness of the temple where God dwells and is worshipped, it would greatly help us in our service.

I just want to say one word on 1 Corinthians 12 and the way in which the Spirit's activity in the assembly is there set out. In that chapter it says that we are all baptised by one Spirit into one body. There again we have the reference to the mighty incoming of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, where not only did He come in Person, but He baptised each person into this cohesive whole, this organism, this body, and it remains in virtue of His presence and power.

Persons were accustomed to demons expressing themselves and the apostle is indicating that no demon could possibly say that Jesus is Lord, and that no person could say that Jesus is Lord except in the power of the Spirit. No person speaking in the power of the Spirit could ever say, "Curse on Jesus". The assembly is the coming together of believers, to be a sphere where Christ is glorified. With the disciples on the Emmaus road, the Lord "expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself," and their hearts burned within them as He talked with them, and opened to them the Scriptures. This is exactly what the Spirit (using the gifts) is now doing in the assembly. This has been our experience, and it is the quality of experience awaiting all who desire it. And this is what we want to see in our gatherings. We want to come together as one whole, humbly before God, that there might be liberty for the Spirit to take of Christ's things, and show

them unto us, and thus glorify Him. And this happens. This is something that we know and experience. This is now not only a conception as far as we are concerned; we know it to be true. We know, thank God, that in our gatherings there is liberty for the Spirit of God to come amongst us and to glorify Jesus. In another chapter it says that if an unbeliever comes in amongst you, he will be so impressed with what he hears and sees, that he will fall down and he will say that "God is amongst you, of a truth". Let us all be exercised that this should be so.

We are all, young and old, responsible to examine ourselves in the presence of God as to how our endeavours are being directed, and to what end. If we do not see the divine objective we shall not reach it. We require to see that in every place where God has worked He desires to see expressed His own truth in relation to His assembly. He wants to see His people coming together, simply, without pretension, but definitely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He wants them to sit down together with one mind, one desire, working together with one earnest endeavour to pro-

vide a place where the Spirit of God can make much of Christ.

Is this wonderful conception to be only an ideal? Is it only to be something beautiful seen in the pages of Scripture? Or is it going to be a glorious reality here and now? Are we not going to answer to this challenge in our day, so that in the towns and villages where God has set us, there is going to be an earnest purpose on our part to carry out the word of God in this respect also? Let us continue to preach the glorious gospel of Christ, but always having in mind that when people are converted, your aim is that they should form part of God's house. You want them to sit down with yourself in those towns and villages, part of this living structure, and to experience the fulfilment of this special promise of Christ regarding the activity of the Holy Spirit in the assembly.

In closing, let me refer to the prophet Haggai 2: 5. In a day of weakness and failure akin to our own, the word of God came to the people: "The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: *Fear ye not.*"

THE HOLY SPIRIT

J. N. SHEPHERD

6. HIS WORK IN ME

(Romans 8: 1-17, 26, 27; Galatians 5: 16-25; John 3: 8, 4: 13, 14, 7: 37-39; 1 Corinthians 6: 18; 2 Corinthians 3: 17, 18; Romans 5: 5; Ephesians 5: 18)

BELOVED, we have come a long way in many senses, as we have considered together the work of God's Holy Spirit, in the world, the Scriptures, and in the church. Now we are to consider His work in ourselves.

Our responsibility is to answer to what God has done in the matchless grace and love of His heart. "What love to Thee we owe, our God for all Thy grace." Certain it is that we can never repay the debt of love. But there is an instruction to us to

direct this response and I believe this to be a command from God, that we should be filled with the Spirit. But, you say, that is an impossibility. They may have been filled with the Spirit in the days of the Acts, but whoever has seen anyone filled with the Spirit now? I do not believe that God commands us to do things that are impossible. It may be a very great rarity, I do not say that it is not. But I do not believe that God commands us to do that which is impossible to do.

There never would have been a movement of our hearts towards God at all, if God's Holy Spirit had not been the prime factor in moving us. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." If through the infinite mercy and grace of God, you find yourself on the road to glory and you know yourself to have been saved through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, this is solely as the result of the movement of God's Spirit in your heart. You trusted the Saviour, and this is your side of it, nevertheless God's side of it comes first, for "so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

What happened then? "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The moment when you opened your heart to the Saviour, was the moment when the Spirit of God came to dwell in there, to be supreme there and never to go out any more. And so you found yourself converted, indwelt by the Spirit of God and sealed. He put His stamp upon you to show that you were Christ's. You belong to the Lord. How can we ever rightly appreciate the privilege of belonging to that blessed Man?

You probably sang: "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free." The liberty into which you have come is a subject at which I wish to look now. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Nothing else could have done it. All kinds of things we tried, and none was of any avail. But at that moment I found myself free. Are you free? We speak a lot of this freedom; sometimes I wonder whether we practically consider it at all. Are you really living in victory over sin? Am I really living out of the bondage of Satan? Of course, you say, we are out of the bondage of Satan. Yes, but are we practically living free as though we belonged to Christ? This is an extraordinarily serious question. I want you to face yourselves with it now. What is the thing that makes you free? How do you become free?

The first thing that happens is that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts". What a privilege! For the first time I really know what love means, because the love of God is put into my heart, and shed abroad in my heart by the Spirit of God. And that love begins to flow out to my brethren, to all those I know in Christ. I find myself bound to them, bound with them. Then it flows out to others who I would like to see brought to this same Person.

So many imagine that the Spirit of God has come into our hearts in order to help us to obey certain rules and regulations, to live along a certain line, almost like the law of Moses. They think that the Spirit of God has come into our hearts to do that. He has not done anything of the sort. He has come from an ascended Christ in order to engage your heart with Christ, in order that the beauties and glories of that blessed Man might come before you in

such a way as to be the real motive of your life in future. He occupies us with Jesus. He does not occupy us with ourselves and our attempt to keep regulations, or anything like this. How do I know whether I am filled with the Spirit of God? There is only one certain rule for this, I believe, and that is whether my eyes are upward to where Jesus is. He does not speak of or from Himself. He engages our hearts with that glorious Person. If our hearts are really filled with the love of Jesus Christ then we are filled with the Spirit. He is "the object bright and fair to fill and satisfy our hearts", and He will do this and can do it, and He delights to do it for every heart that will trust Him fully.

Then, beloved, we are filled with the Spirit of God. It is not then a question of being under the law. Indeed, the first freedom is from the law of sin and death. Our second freedom is from the law itself. But we still find that there is an awful kind of fight going on within, waged day after day, week after week, year after year. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." But, do you see where the victory is? The victory in that fight belongs to the Spirit of God, so that we are free from the victory of the flesh. Once we were under its bondage altogether. The devil only had to suggest something to my flesh and I would go and do it, and the same applies to you. This is not something different in one and another of us. It happens in every one of us, this warfare. But now the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts and He has the victory. Have you got the victory in your life? Liberty, absolute liberty, liberty to be for the Lord Jesus here in a world which has rejected

Him, and rejects Him still: that is the lot of the Christian. If you are still in bondage, if you are still under the grip of the temptations which come to you, then there is something wrong, something terribly wrong, in your life.

What does it mean to have life in the Spirit? Now, the Spirit is our life. The Spirit cannot be anything else but our life. We were not alive at all before we possessed the Spirit, but the Spirit is now our life. What happens now? I want to take you back to the challenge which we had at the beginning, what has happened to the mighty works of the Spirit of God? In the Acts these men were filled with the Spirit of God. With great power gave the apostles witness and great grace was upon them all. This was the testimony. This was what was seen throughout the early church. Has the Spirit changed? The answer is, No. He is still the same. His power now is every bit the same as His power on the day of Pentecost. Why then are there no mighty works? What is wrong? I wonder if we see anything at all of the great grace, let alone the great power. Are we filled with the Spirit of God? Or what are we filled with?

No one was allowed to carry a covered package through the temple. I do not know whether any one of you has noticed that curious verse. And a very important verse it is. What is there covered in our lives? It is going to come out. How much better that we should face it now! I do want to plead with you to allow the searchlight of the light of God's glory to shine into your heart. I do not know, with regard to another, what particular things there are which might be hindering the full possession of our lives by the Spirit of God. For each individual Christian, as well as for the whole church,

"your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost — and ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price : therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's ".

So it becomes an increasingly important matter for us to look inside for this moment. I do not believe in pointing people often to look inside, but I am only asking you to do it now, in the light of that glory shining from the throne, to see what there might be in our lives which is preventing our being filled with the Spirit of God. It may be something very trivial. Sometimes with us it may be a question of mixed motives. We want to have a place, to be thought to do things well, to speak well it may be from the platform. There is only One Who has a title to all that is best. "Give this Man place" is the word that is going to ring through the universe very soon and He is going to have all the place and all the glory. No other Person in the universe has any place at all, but Jesus. There is no room for us in this respect.

Inevitably one thinks of the young at a moment like this. There are all kinds of thoughts and evil desires that come so often, particularly in the young. Are you beset with these? Young man, are you beset with these? And you have no victory over it? I suppose it falls more to my lot to see the awful results of these things I am speaking about than it does to most people. But I would plead with some of you young girls to be very careful what temptations you throw in the ways of young men. Not, of course, thinking of any person, but I do plead with you in this direction, because if you go on with practices of this sort, you are not filled with the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of purity and holiness. I wonder if all our income tax returns

are absolutely right. I wonder if we are always strictly truthful, whether it may be, perhaps, we steal things, even if only people's reputation. What a solemn thing that would be! This could not possibly be associated with being filled with the Spirit of God. Do you know what it is to be obedient to your parents? Is this your practice always? As the searchlight from the glory of God shines into our hearts, what does that searchlight reveal? There is something in many hearts which is impeding us from being filled with the Spirit of God. I have no means whatever of trying to tell you what yours is, but I would plead with you that God might be glorified and that the Lord Jesus might have full control. He is Lord. You have owned Him as Lord of your life. He wants to be Lord of every compartment of your life.

Is the problem with you some friendship? I feel this is a thing I must say. When young men and young girls are together particularly, I believe it to be vitally important that we should say this. It is possible for you to form friendships which ultimately go on to marriage with people who are not the Lord's. Of all the appalling catastrophies that can happen to a Christian this is probably the worst, for it absolutely ruins that life for a testimony to God from that time onwards. Listen carefully to this. If this is possible for any one of you who reads these words, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ it must go. You have nothing in common with such a person. You have the light and nature of God within you, but he or she has not, if they do not belong to Christ. They have no such life and nature. You have nothing to share with them. How vital that that must go!

Are you angry suddenly? Alas,

how much one has to say these things to oneself! I once heard Dr. Barnhouse say about how he was writing a letter giving help to some Christian. Suddenly the telephone rang and he went to answer. It was something rather trying, something annoying, and he answered very quickly, annoyed, then came back and sat down to his letter. It would not go; he could not write it. What was wrong? He could not think what was wrong for the moment. Ah, yes, that telephone conversation. How simple a thing may break in a moment the communion which exists in the light, walking in the light, which is where we must be if we are filled with the Spirit of God! How simple the ways of God are for us! He wants us to come to Him immediately; He calls us that we might confess our sins; He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If, at this moment, you can see in the searchlight of God something of this kind in your own heart, may I plead with you to do just this. Say, "Lord, this is what it is." I can tell you that if you are desirous of getting rid of that thing, God will flood your heart with His joy in obedience to Himself under the Lordship of Christ. These are not things to be passed over, thinking of somebody else, whoever we are. Let us allow God to have His way with us that we might be filled with the Spirit.

When we are filled with the Spirit, the word of God becomes our daily food. Now the Spirit clearly shows us what God has for us out of His Holy Word. We would not understand a word of it if it was not for the Spirit of God. The people in the world take this book up and read it, but do not understand it. It never has any effect upon them because they have not the Spirit of

God in their hearts, and it is only by the Spirit of God that the things of God can be revealed to us. We could not possibly know anything at all about them if it were not for the Spirit of God. We are joined to Christ, joined to that Head in heaven and it is from Him, by the Spirit, that the nourishment comes. It is so important that the channels are perfectly clear.

The Spirit has a way of making us like Him. We are called upon in this world to walk also as He walked. Alas, how unlike Him we are! There is coming a day when we shall be like Him, but we are called to walk even as He walked. Beloved, how can we live in accordance with a standard of that sort? There is only one way in which we can attempt any such standard, and that is in the power of the Spirit of God. This is what is meant by life in the power of the Spirit, to be found here in a world which is still in the hands of the evil one outwardly, walking well pleasing to God as the Saviour walked through it. He was holy. He was spotless. He was without rebuke. He was separate from sinners. If all the other has been a negative thing, this is very positive. If we have to get rid of things then as we look to Jesus, and have Him as the object of our gaze, we shall become like Him.

Where is He now? At the Father's right hand, and 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 Lord the Spirit. Do you want to become like Jesus? Then turn your eyes upward. If you spend your time looking there, you will grow like Him. If you spend your time looking inside, you will get miserable. If you spend your time looking around you, you will get terribly depressed; but if

you spend your time looking upward, all is well. What are you going to do with your time? Which world are you going to live for? Which power is going to be supreme in your heart and life? These are supremely important questions and they come to every one of us; there is none left out. Are you filled with the Spirit? If not, why not? If you are, what kind of a life are you settling to lead?

Let us consider the outflow. Christ spoke to the woman at the well about living water, something that was going to satisfy her heart and there is nothing so wonderful as to be satisfied by Jesus. He satisfies the longing heart and if He comes into your heart to fill it, He will satisfy it through time and eternity, living waters springing up into everlasting life. And the Lord Himself said (it may be a slightly different figure), "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, . . . out of his inward parts shall flow rivers of living water." What about us? Are those rivers flowing out of us? There is a thirsty world around us. There are thirsty hearts in it, at any rate. Is the water flowing? Are the rivers flowing? They ought to be. "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified."

The likeness of Jesus is called the fruit of the Spirit, because those traits which are so different from the kind of trait which we find in the world around us should be coming out in our lives now: love, joy, peace — are these found in us? Peace, in a world where everything is turmoil; peace, when men's hearts are failing them for fear; the joy of God in our hearts; love, shed abroad in our hearts — these are the things

and many more of them — gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. These were the things found in the Saviour's life. "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls." What is it with us?

As the eighth chapter of Romans pursues its course, I particularly want to draw your attention to the cry the Spirit produces in the hearts of those that belong to Jesus, "Abba, Father". What an infinitely precious thing it is to be brought into the relationship of sons before Him, and that from our hearts there should be wrought continually this cry to God, "Father, Abba Father"! Beloved, do we know anything about this? He has an immense interest in everything concerning us. We are brought into a wonderful relationship before Him, a relationship connected with glory, and it is our privilege to speak to Him in this wonderful way, to enjoy the favour of God. "The Father Himself loveth you," the Lord Jesus said, "because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God." Is this love calling from our hearts the answer "Father"?

One more thing, we are going soon to see the One Who died for us. The Spirit is in our hearts as the earnest of our inheritance. He has come to dwell there to speak of that which is to come. When Rebecca was found (Genesis 24) and when the servant asked the household where she was, whether she could come with him, because he had Isaac to whom he would like to take her, they said, "Well! Ask her." And the question was asked, "Wilt thou go with this man," along a desert road, a tremendous distance? Her answer was, Yes, because Isaac was at the other end. I know this is a collective thing in one way, but it applies to the heart

of each, because the Spirit would make it good in us. He is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, and that is going to happen very soon. We are going to see the One Who died for us. We are going to meet Him in the air, and until then the Spirit is speaking to us, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, of the word of God, of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's blessed Son, of the glory which now belongs to the greater than Isaac. Does He do it to us at all times? Does He engage our hearts with Him? How wonderful a blessing this is for us if this is really the truth.

There was a small town in the State of Colorado in America which got its water supply from a lake high up above and because this water supply was wonderfully clear and good and everything about it solved the necessities of this small town, the small town prospered, grew, and more people came into it. One day the housewives turned on their taps and nothing happened. This was an awful tragedy: the water supply had failed. So the council of that town went up to the lake to see what had gone wrong with it. But the lake was just exactly as it was before, so they looked down the length of pipeline and it appeared to be perfectly all right.

There was nothing wrong with it. What then had happened? All this trouble went on, and there was very great difficulty, and people began to move out of the town. Its prosperity went, until one day one of its councillors got a little note delivered to him. It was in very, very bad English. It suggested that they should remove the plug at the top. Some tramp had stuck a plug down the water supply from the top of the lake. They went up and removed the plug and the water flowed again. It only took a very small plug to stop the water supply to that town.

It may only take a very, very small plug to stop the flow of the Spirit in our lives, to prevent us, beloved, from being of value to God in a world which needs Him so badly and in which our Lord Jesus Christ is soon going to be supreme. But now, while He is absent we are left here for Him, to be here for Him in the power of the Spirit until that wonderful day when we see His face. What are you going to do about it? Are we prepared to face this issue and see that there is no corner of our lives from which the lordship of Christ is banned, so that He is absolutely supreme in the office, at school, in our homes, in everything we do, in our language, in our thoughts, that our Lord Jesus may be glorified, for His Name's sake. Amen.

THE PROCESSION OF THE SPIRIT (John 15: 26)

As in the language of Scripture the relation of the Son to the Father is described by the word "begotten", so that of the Spirit is termed "proceeding", both being ineffable, eternal relations. The Son is begotten of the Father: The Spirit is proceeding from the Father. The temporal mission of the Spirit is not referred to.

Adapted from T. H. BINDLEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

The following question has been received from Mr. Ernest J. Green, of Whickham, Co. Durham :

Reference is made to the Scriptures as follows: Genesis 1: 1, In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. John 1: 1, In the beginning was the Word. 1 John 1: 1-3, That which was from the beginning . . . declare we unto you.

It is often said that the "beginning" of John 1 goes further back than that of Genesis 1, and that the "beginning" of 1 John 1 is more recent than either. Does Scripture so teach, or can these statements be fairly deduced from Scripture?

THE QUESTION is most appropriately put in the second form. Can these statements be fairly deduced from Scripture? The answer is surely found in the context of each quotation.

The "beginning" of Genesis 1: 1 is the creation of heaven and earth. It is probable that angels were created earlier, since the "morning stars sang together" to celebrate the creation of heaven and earth. The "beginning" of Genesis 1 is not therefore, the earliest our minds can conceive.

In John 1: 1 the manifest intention of the writer is to present the *unique* glory of the Word. This purpose would not be served if the statement referred to the "beginning" of Genesis 1: 1, since the Word would not then be unique, but only one among many beings who already existed at the creation of Genesis 1. Therefore, to serve its purpose John 1: 1 requires that the "beginning" should be the earliest our minds can conceive, the beginning when the *first* created beings began to exist. At this threshold of time the Word, uniquely, already existed. This is confirmed by verse 3, "without Him was not anything made that was made". No created being shared with the Word the glory of existence prior to them all.

In John's Epistles the expression "from the beginning" is of frequent and characteristic occurrence. It is a reasonable assumption that its meaning is always the same. What

is this meaning? Taken by itself, 1 John 1: 1 could mean that the things their eyes saw belonged to a person who existed from the beginning, without indicating any connection between the time of that beginning and the things seen and heard. Even here, however, this is an unlikely meaning, since for such a purpose "from the beginning" is much feebler than "in the beginning". Taking account of certain other occurrences of this expression in the Epistles it becomes evident that this "beginning" was our Lord's earthly life.

One of the evil teachings being combatted in John's Epistles was that what they had heard "from the beginning", that is from the Lord's earthly life, was good enough for an early stage, but there was need to progress to something higher and to leave behind the earliest stages of the Faith, including the Lord's earthly life. It is in combatting this heresy that John so often emphasises "that which was from the beginning". A few examples will confirm this. "An old commandment which ye had from the beginning" (2: 7). The "beginning" here can only be the Lord's earthly life. "Let that therefore remain in you which ye have heard from the beginning" (2: 24).

We conclude, therefore, that the teaching stated in the Question is entirely consistent with the context of the passages quoted, and that vital truth is involved in the distinctions made.

IN the study of Christian baptism in an earlier article it was seen that baptism is an observance expected of Christian people, important in itself, yet more important still in what it signifies. A further outward act with an inward meaning is the Lord's Supper, and some of the scriptural instructions regarding the purpose and the observance of the Lord's Supper will now be discussed. While baptism is a single initial event in the history of any individual as a Christian, the Lord's Supper is a repeated and joint activity amongst Christians; it will appear later that these are amongst its important features, being closely connected with its purpose and character.

Again, as with baptism, alternative procedures for the observance of the Lord's Supper have been followed, and alternative versions of its meaning are held. There is perhaps less room for legitimate variety of interpretation here, however, since the direct teaching of Scripture on the significance and conduct of the Lord's Supper is fairly clear. Our concern will therefore be almost entirely with this teaching. It will be sufficient to note that some distortions of the simple and scriptural understanding of its meaning have taken extremely gross forms. The confusion of the symbol with the reality has led in the limit to the doctrines of transubstantiation and of the mass, coming close to idolatrous practices and the denial of much vital truth regarding the "once-for-all" sacrifice of Christ. This is indeed a sad and serious misconstruction of the Lord's Supper; and the need to adhere to the scriptural teaching impresses itself more

closely on this account.

A MEMORIAL

This first feature of the Lord's Supper is prominent in the accounts of its institution which appear in Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11. "This do in remembrance of Me." Clearly it was to be an act of remembrance. By its regular repetition the intention was to keep fresh the responses of Christian people to their Lord. That aim has not changed; by this means still today our minds may be revived with thoughts of our Lord in the hour of His supreme suffering and self-sacrifice on our account. Here is something which, though now long past, should never lose its wonder or its significance for those who derive so much from it. The solemnity of the institution of the Supper, and the profound and unparalleled nature of the theme which is to fill the hearts of the participants, are very clear in the scriptural accounts. "When the hour was come" our Lord sat down to eat that final Passover with the twelve, and at the close of it to institute the Supper. "The same night in which He was betrayed" He took the bread, and also the cup, and set the pattern for the repeated remembrance of Himself. The observance which He instituted and authorised was distinct from what it represented, yet closely related to it as regards the time and urgency of its inauguration. Aware in His own mind of the suffering that lay immediately ahead, in all its depth and detail, He was "troubled in spirit", and sought for understanding and affection from His followers at that time in a peculiar way. With this in our minds participation in the Lord's Supper will surely be no mere formal mat-

ter. Thoughts of His limitless love, which is only measured by the barriers it would surmount in order to reach its objects, are thus prominently in mind in the partaking of the Supper. Such thoughts have the power to promote their own responses; and this too was part of His aim in instituting it.

But these are not the sole themes which should be in mind. There is a grandeur and a finality about our Lord's accomplishment in His death. As well as something which He passively endured, and in doing so felt its depths to the utmost, it was also a mighty and irresistible *action* of divine love; there is much to celebrate and rejoice in in this wonderful theme. It is "*the Lord's death*" which is borne witness to in the Supper (1 Cor. 11: 26); He is more than ever "*the Lord*" on account of His death. The future belongs to Him. The Supper is to continue until He returns. His rights in the future are kept in mind by this means, as well as His accomplishments in the past.

The linking of the institution of the Lord's Supper with the keeping of the Passover is significant too in this sense. In the Passover feast the element of memorial and thanksgiving for deliverance was plain; in it the mighty act of God which brought deliverance to His people was recalled. That indeed was "a night much to be observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12: 42). But in addition to commemoration of what was past the Passover feast had figurative and forward-looking aspects. Ultimately the substance was to replace the shadow, and the true Passover-lamb was to be slain (1 Cor. 5: 7). Much else in the Old Testament is also of this kind; its main importance lies in the fact that it is "the shadow of good things to

come". As we read of the introduction of the Lord's Supper, much of what the Old Testament anticipated was on the point of realization. The old was about to be replaced by the new. This is clearly indicated and intended by the Lord Himself in His reference to the cup as "the new testament in my blood". This point is made in each account of the Last Supper, and is evidently a central feature. In the words of Hebrews 10: 9, 10, "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second." "The offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" was to be made. "The blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God" was to be shed. These are the very things which are signalized by the bread and the cup; and no words other than those of Scripture can express the magnificence of that one supreme event which is brought to mind in this way.

AN ACT OF OBEDIENCE AND RESPONSE

"This *do* in remembrance of Me." Here is something which our Lord requested, and which we are to *do*. No more straightforward command was ever directed by our Lord to His followers, and it would seem strange and surprising if it can be considered in any way optional by those who profess allegiance to Him.

That it is *the Lord's Supper* implies the authority of His instruction to do this. That authority is doubly strong because of the love which is behind the request. It is the appeal of a love that gave its all for us. Our indebtedness to our Lord is beyond assessment and quite beyond repayment, but all who genuinely know this must feel the obligation to respond to His will. Such a response will surely be given with

a readiness which springs from a real love for Himself, which is the product of His own causeless love in the first place. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4: 19). The evidence of this can appear in several ways, but perhaps in no more real way than in partaking with understanding in the Lord's Supper.

In the accounts in the gospels of Matthew and Mark our Lord is said to have "blessed" the bread and to have "given thanks" for the cup; in Luke He is said to have "given thanks" for the bread and likewise for the cup. It may not therefore be necessary to press closely the distinction between these expressions. But it seems clear that the spirit of blessing and thanksgiving is appropriate at the time of observing the Supper, and that this is part of the original instruction as to what is suitable. 1 Corinthians 10: 16 shows that the early Christians understood this. The attitude of thankfulness can hardly fail to be dominant when the significance of the bread and the cup is being considered, and expressions of gratitude are entirely in place. The cup is a "cup of blessing", and the reminder of the great blessing in which we share, and of the basis of it, should surely lead to expressions of appreciation and of praise to the One Who is its source. Thus the partaking of the Lord's Supper seems naturally linked with the opportunity to respond in the fullest sense to the divine love which has reached us, and which seeks and claims our response. According to John 4: 23, the Father looks for worship "in spirit and in truth" from those who are the objects of His love; and the Lord's Supper entered into with understanding promotes the very characteristics and attitudes which underly a response of this kind.

AN ACT OF COMMUNION

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *communion* of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the *communion* of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10: 16). The thought of fellowship, or joint-participation by all who are Christ's, is an important feature. Partaking of the Lord's Supper is an expression of the unity of the body of Christ, of which all true Christians are members. "For we being many are one bread . . . one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (verse 17). Distinctions among Christians are not important and should be kept out of sight in this context. Though many, we are all alike and together in this most vital sense, benefiting equally from the shedding of the blood of Christ, all members of His body. It is the link with Himself, our common Lord, which is the important matter here. We share much together, of His love and of His blessings. We meet together in His name; we possess a common Object in Himself. We owe much to Him, jointly and equally. Note how the Lord's Supper is spoken of as a common act, done jointly and mutually by all; "The cup . . . which we bless, . . . the bread which we break . . .". The unworthiness of forgetfulness of this is being exposed and corrected in this part of the letter to the Corinthians, especially in chapter 11 (verses 17 ff., for instance). The Corinthian Christians were supposedly keeping the Supper, but their way of doing so practically denied its meaning. There was a good deal of disunity and disorderly activity, and distinctions and cleavages within the body of Christians were allowed to be prominent. The attitudes of self-importance and self-pleasing amounted to a virtual denial of the Lord's authority, and of the

bond between them which existed in Himself. It is still needful to be on our guard against overlooking this very point. A partaking of the Lord's Supper restricted to membership of a particular group of Christians contradicts the true significance of the Supper; divisive and undisciplined activities also imply that its true intent is being missed.

A DISCIPLINED APPROACH NEEDED

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11: 28). The teaching in 1 Corinthians (chapters 10 and 11) regarding the Lord's Supper is brought forward in a context where the main stress is upon the correction of unbecoming attitudes and practices. Certain activities are said to be incompatible with a proper partaking of the Supper (10: 21, for example), and a strong warning is issued against careless participation, without self-examination as to the suitability of our ways. The attitudes of disunity, of fostering distinctions within the Christian body, of a limited view of the extent of that body, have been referred to. But these chapters deal generally with broader issues than these. Some of the other matters raised are evidently as important today as in the first century. One such matter is the need for orderliness and moderate behaviour when the Supper is being celebrated. The sense of a higher control, the control of the Holy Spirit, is felt when there is a proper subjection to our Lord; this clearly is no less needful today than at any earlier time.

Other matters referred to seem at first sight to be of less relevance in our day. Idolatry, and the extent to which a Christian could be involved, in its fringe activities if not at the centre of it (the eating of meat

sacrificed to idols, for example), seems a remote subject in our circumstances. It would be unwise to dismiss any of this instruction as unimportant, however. Idol-worship may not be a snare to us; but men still today devote themselves to many things which claim and dominate their lives. Still in a certain sense there are "gods many, and lords many" in our 20th-century world, "but to us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8: 5, 6). A Christian, for whom this is true, ought not surely to enter headlong into any of these pursuits to which others addict themselves; and partaking of the Lord's Supper should raise the question whether what he allows himself amongst other activities is really allowable. There can be no question that what is evil must be avoided without compromise (see, for example, 1 Cor. 10: 14, 21; 2 Cor. 6: 14, 15). But the present passage also makes it clear that neutral and even lawful things are not always expedient. Such things can be a diversion from our proper goal in life, and hence a snare to ourselves as well as harmful to others who may follow our example.

It seems quite clear that the attitude which allows itself freedom to indulge to the limit in borderline activities, on the pretext of the harmlessness of what is done, receives a good deal of criticism in these passages. An over-critical judgment of others, on matters which are not of central importance, is also not approved. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (10: 31) sets a high objective for Christians, but a worthy one; and no lower an aim in life than this is a suitable one for those who enter into the meaning and enjoy the privileges of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

A DOUBLE PORTION

ELISHA means "God is salvation"; and it is interesting to note that he came after Elijah, whose name suggests, "God is Jehovah". First there must be the declaration of God in greatness and power, so making way for the fulness and blessing of His salvation. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1: 1, 14). The salvation of God, relating to fallen man, could be brought to us by none other than Jesus, the Son of God, and secured through no other work than His own death and resurrection on our account. Also, the display of divine power will be seen in the day to come, when the Son of Man will subdue all enemies, and bring into glorious realisation His kingdom of righteousness, salvation and blessing.

The steps of Elisha are delightfully in keeping with the movements of Elijah as they traverse together the pathway from Gilgal to the Jordan. At least two things are brought to light at this time; God's preparation of Elijah's successor; and the fervency of spirit on the part of Elisha to follow his Master. Very soon the moment would come when one would be taken to heaven in a victorious, triumphant way, and the other left to continue the work appointed to him by Jehovah. In the service of Elijah we may see the task of pulling down the enemy strongholds, while the work of Elisha seems to be the establishing of the things of God, for praise and blessing.

Left now without Elijah's guidance, Elisha, equipped with a double portion of his master's spirit, re-

traces the path previously taken by the two of them. Let us here take note that the double portion of Elijah's spirit was given for use, and not for ornament. So it is not remarkable to contemplate that twice the number of miracles are done by Elisha, than by Elijah.

The re-crossing of Jordan must be the first manifestation of power, for the God of Salvation must be also the God of Resurrection. The waters of death and judgment are smitten by Elisha, who said, "Where is the God of Elijah?" This is quickly answered by the display of His mighty power, for the waters are parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over.

Truly, the power of death has been broken, to make way for the resurrection of Christ: soon there will be a second display of divine power over death at the resurrection of the just, which is the first resurrection, unto eternal life. The scoffer may say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" being willingly deluded to destruction; but at the challenge of Elisha, "Where is the God of Elijah?," every opposing element is vanquished.

Passing on to Jericho, it is manifestly declared to the sons of the prophets that the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha. This they acknowledge by bowing to the ground before him. It is very evident, however, that they are not in the blessed knowledge of Elijah's translation, and being earthly-minded they make diligent search over valley and hill, all to no purpose, for the one who had been taken to heaven. The men of the city of Jericho are concerned with the prevailing conditions of the country, in view of the maintenance

of life. They rightly bring their troubles to Elisha, telling him that the situation of the city was pleasant, but the water was naught, and the ground barren.

Surely, if the power of death had been broken by the parting of the waters, the fruitfulness of life must be maintained in a scene which betokens poverty and barrenness. In a day gone by, the ground had been cursed for man's sake, and the way to the tree of life had been barred, because of sin. What can be done for the need of Jericho? What are the resources of God's salvation? "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein," says the prophet. There must be no patching up of the old conditions, or some kind of reformation to make things better in Jericho.

The new cruse, denoting a new vessel in Christ, is needed; and salt, declaring the holiness and righteousness of God, must be cast into the spring of the waters. Christ is made a curse for us on the tree, that the holy and righteous claims of God might be met. No sacrifice had to be offered without salt. So we see by the casting in of the salt, the waters are healed, and death and barrenness are overcome. To the people of the cursed city was communicated the power of God in blessing; for all around them was that which spake of life and fertility.

The scene at Bethel is not at all in keeping with "the house of God", and Elisha has to face an infidel crowd who openly mock and insult him. They despise the word of the

Lord, and mock at the thought of ascension, saying, "Go up, thou bald head: Go up, thou bald head." No doubt the news had reached them of the translation of Elijah; and rejecting such unique and amazing testimony, they deride and mock at the prophet before them. Such open blasphemy and unbelief can only be met by the curse and judgment of God. To those who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and deny the Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ, is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

So these "young men" are cursed by the word of the prophet, in the Name of the Lord, and the judgment came swiftly upon them. Two she-bears emerge from the wood, and tear forty-two of them; a solemn warning to others of the terrible danger of mocking God. What a contrast in the two incidents! In the one, the curse is removed from the barren land and polluted water, through willing obedience to the prophet's word; in the other, the curse pronounced in death and judgment upon the mockers.

Finally, the prophet Elisha reaches Carmel, the hill of fruitfulness. Here in the place of elevation, the scene of Elijah's victory over Baal, Elisha can rest and review the fruitful work of God. Thus refreshed in spirit by the fruit of Carmel, he is invigorated for his return to Samaria, the scene of Elijah's activities, and the stronghold of Ahab's son, Jehoram, who did evil in the sight of the Lord.

THE CHURCH IN THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD

(continued)

J. N. SHEPHERD

OF all the beautiful types and pictures given in Scripture of the church in its relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ, there is one which has the distinction of having occurred prior to the fall of man, and this of course is that towards the close of Genesis 2.

We have sought to see that the special joy of the Father was in giving to the Son exactly that which gave Him surpassing pleasure, for His "delights were with the sons of men". But if they were ever to dwell in His wonderful company, how could it be brought about? Adam had been made that his race might people the earth as the very height of God's creation for this world; but such a race in itself would never have been suitable to walk the courts of glory with God's beloved Son.

And so God has given to us in Adam, surveying alone all that God had put into his hand to keep, the thought of the Son viewing the vast work of His own creatorial glory and yet being alone in it: "it is not good that man should be alone". It is easy for us to look upon the picture as the reality and that of which it speaks perhaps becomes difficult for us to grasp; but here let us realise that although what took place in the garden of Eden is indeed true, it is simply the picture of that far more wonderful thought of the Son of God without "an help meet for him". So again is it that although in human relationships, God has been pleased to grant to us the most precious pictures, known to us in all our affairs of life in this world, He gives them to us in His kindness

that we might see the great answers to them in the realities of the life in God's world. In the connection in which we are now considering this, surely the man and his wife would tell us how wonderfully God in His purpose had in view to unite Christ and the church.

An "help meet" for Jesus must be "of Him, for Him made". There certainly was no other of His order in the universe, who could be brought to Him as an "help meet for him". How impossible it would have been for God to have been honoured in any other way than this, that His companion to be suitable to Himself, must come from Himself and be a companion truly of His own order! And all this was true even before sin's advent into the human race at all, although of course, in the ways of God, the plan and the counsel of grace were always in the light of it.

For a brief moment in the world's history we see a glimpse of Adam in a position of dominion and glory and with authority over the handiwork of God in the world. It was for this position especially, that he needed a help meet for him. What joy there is to our hearts to see in the moment of Adam's glory — albeit so brief because of his utter failure — just a glimpse of that transcendent glory which for ever belongs to the last Adam: He is above all others, nay "far above all principality, and power . . . and every name that is named, not only in this world (where Adam named them) but also in that which is to come". All power and authority have been given into His hands by the Father

Who loves the Son, and yet in the very scene of His coming glory, there is going to be a companion with Him, "the Lamb's wife". Who can tell why He should need an help meet in that day save to be one more object — and that the nearest to His heart — to reflect His glory? But a wife is that person upon whom the Bridegroom's heart is set in affections, proved through the wondrous ways by which He has sought and found her, and yet it was His Father's thought and so Calvary alone could show the depths of His love for her and at the same time was the only means of revelation of the Father's heart and mind.

As we turn back in thought to the shadow, we see God's hand in it in the expression "*the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam*". We so commonly think of His precious death in the setting of man's hatred of God and rejection of His own beloved Son as in "We will not have this man to reign over us" and again as part of the great victory of the Lord Jesus over every foe of God and His people that perhaps we do not contemplate as much as we should do the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God". How well we know that neither wicked men nor Satan himself were prime causes in that awful scene! The One Who hung there was "a lamb — foreordained before the foundation of the world", and although we cannot understand these words in all their fullness, it ever remains true that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief". And so we see that "the Lord God caused" it, and in all the purposes and counsels of His heart, the motive force was the mighty, unfathomable love of God.

That the figure of sleep should be used could not come as any surprise to us in the light of the

New Testament use of this figure — for example in John 11 and 1 Thessalonians 4, but we might well remember with adoring worship in our hearts the significance of the adjective "deep" which God applies to it. There is no human language surely which could ever give true expression to its meaning, but we might well consider Jonah's description of that which the Lord Jesus Himself owned as another picture of that hour: "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever."

But just as surely as "woman" was "taken out of man", so certainly was the church brought into existence from Christ alone and that in the circumstances of His death. There is yet another reason for its special preciousness to Him. Conceived in eternal counsel, given to Him as the Father's love-gift to be a suited companion for Him for ever, yet bought by Him at such infinite cost, and now we see it finding its origin in Himself alone: "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh". It is inconceivable surely that the use of these words by Adam did not mean a very special preciousness even to him, in the woman whom God had given to be with him because of the fact that he was the source from which God had made her; and most surely too it was intended that he should think in this way, because could not God have created her just as perfectly from nothing had He so chosen? But again, as we have so frequently thought, this is simply the picture, and the great anti-type supplies us with the answer to the question: our hearts gladly acknowledge that nothing which was not made from

Himself could even have been suitable to Him and with what special preciousness to Him does not this clothe His church and bride. As we have so often been taught only that which has its origin in heaven will go in there, but she will go in, to be the occasion for added glory yet to the One Who brought her there.

Whether it be in the world to come with every contrary power put down and the Name of Jesus owned by every tongue, or in eternity where God is "all in all", it is the plan and purpose of God that she shall be there — a city, yet a bride — where God dwells at last with men! and all His thoughts of love and grace and glory will be brought to fruition. And as our minds go on to view it, this is not for a season only, but the love between Christ and the church is still in its full bridal freshness when all crea-

tion's ages have run their course. And who can tell the joy, as His chosen and loved companion, for her to find new aspects and splendours of His glory in the wonderful nearness of that place to Him, as still eternal ages roll?

It was ever the thought of God that He should dwell with men and no effort of the enemy could for one moment affect the mind of God as to what He was going to do. How great the grace which has used the enemy's intervention in relation to His creature man, to bring out into wonderful display a glory of love which could never have been fully seen without it!

"The motives, too, Thine own,

The plan, the counsel, Thine!

*Made for Thy Son, bone of His bone,
In glory bright to shine."*

SERVICE AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

J. S. BLACKBURN

A TRUTH which wise men have recognised in part for ages past is that man is not by constitution a solitary creature. He is not really himself save as part of a larger whole, a society. As in so many other branches of thought, wise men have posed the problem, recognised the aspiration, but have not supplied the answer. They have tried to visualise the *state* as an organism in which a man may realise his true self in serving others. The complete answer is not found outside divine revelation. One of the massive results of the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit is that all believers

are baptised into one body. They are not called upon to form a society on the pattern of the human body, but it is revealed that God, working all in all, has by the Spirit formed a body comprising all the saints. To devote oneself to a man-made society — even though, as in Plato, that state were conceived as a harmony, in which each individual finds his fulfilment in serving the purpose for which his nature fits him — is to devote oneself to something destined soon to be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel. To devote oneself to serving the Lord in the Body which His Spirit has formed is to

work in conformity with the patterns of eternal truth. One of these patterns is the human body, formed to be a figure of something eternal, the Church united to Christ, which shall never pass away, and yet also intended to be living truth here and now.

This paper considers one particular aspect of the Body of Christ, to wit, the special light it casts on the service of the saints, and this will necessitate the omission of most other facets, in themselves of the first rank. Towering above all others is the fact that Christ is the Head and the saints compose His body, made one with Him by the Holy Ghost. In and from Him alone comes the wisdom and power and love by which such service becomes possible. His headship is a kind of topstone added in Ephesians and Colossians: the realisation of it must lie behind all thoughts on the subject of the Church as Christ's body, but it is not the present theme.

In Scripture the church is viewed at times in a restricted, local sense, and at others in the widest possible way as composed of all the saints from Pentecost. This also, for the time being, will be substantially ignored, in order the better to study one basic purpose of the use of the figure of a body, and if each reader will constantly keep in mind the application of this truth to himself or herself in the local assembly to which each belongs, then the greatest benefit will be received. Later reflection will bring the realisation that these truths are equally important and applicable in a wider sense.

The figure used — the human body — will now be considered step by step in order to bring out how each element has its counterpart in the church, and especially in the service of the members.

THE PURPOSE OF THE FIGURE

Human bodies work to serve ends. Broadly speaking, they have an end internal to themselves and ends external to themselves. The end within themselves is their own development, growth and sustenance. The ends external to themselves are the activities of work or play for the time being in hand. The internal members (for example, heart, lungs, stomach) are occupied in the processes of building up and sustaining the body; and several visible members occupy themselves in the supply of food or the other kinds of care the body needs for nourishment and growth. On the other hand, human bodies as wholes work to achieve aims outside themselves, or in other words, set about tasks, pursuits or games.

In the application to the church, the New Testament has a great deal to say about the care of the members for each other and their contribution to growth and nourishment, but very little indeed, if anything at all, to say about the job it exists for outside itself. The whole concentration of attention and teaching is on the care and growth of the church itself, as will readily be seen by a careful reading, without preconceptions, of the passages — Ephesians 4: 12, 15, 16; Colossians 2: 19; 1 Corinthians 12: 25. And please note that this includes the gospel, for is not the gospel the indispensable means whereby their is increase in the body of Christ? Thus, in terms of the Scriptural use of this figure of speech, the aim of the service of the saints is the building up of the Body of Christ, increase with the increase of God. Is there any form of service which cannot be thus considered?

THE NEEDS OF THE BODY

The human body has a very wide

variety of needs and hence of jobs to be done to meet them. Each body is one, but the growth and well-being of each demands many activities. Eating, digesting or breathing quickly come to mind, but what a story can be told of unseen processes indispensable to the body for its well being! Temperature control is a good example. 1 Corinthians 12: 17 names some of these — hearing and smelling — and underlines the truth that the body has many and various needs, and not only one or two.

This was for the benefit of those who thought that speaking with tongues was everything, for this truth applies to the church, and all the passages dealing with the church as the body of Christ give their lists of the needs to be met, the jobs to be done, necessary to its increase. In Romans 12 the list includes prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, hospitality. 1 Corinthians includes helps, government, care. Ephesians 4 mentions evangelising and shepherding. An assembly cannot prosper unless these needs are being met, they cannot be met by any merely human arrangement, but only by the Lord's administration, by the Spirit's gifts, by the working of God.

THE FITNESS OF THE GIFTS

How are these needs met in the human body? 1 Corinthians 12: 14-26 dwells at great length on the answer. For every job (seeing, hearing or temperature regulation) divine and perfect wisdom has provided a member of the body fitted to do that job. This is not to imply that every one member performs only one job; but for every need of the human body God has formed a member fitted perfectly to fulfil that function. We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, as the Psalm says; curiously wrought in the

lowest parts of the earth; in God's book all our members were written which in continuance were fashioned. The astonishing adaptation of our members to their functions could be illustrated in a thousand ways: the focussing of the eye, the design of the foot to support the body upright, the manipulations made possible by the opposition of the thumb and the fingers.

Notice that each member is adapted and fitted, not for itself, but for the body. What a perfectly useless object is a finger, or an ear, or a pituitary gland, by itself! But what amazing co-operation they provide as members of a body!

Notice also that the members do not compete with each other: they are not envious of each other's functions: they do not strive for mastery. Each member is itself and realises the purposes of its existence in fulfilling its function. The most perfect harmony normally exists among them and they all rush to the assistance of an injured or suffering member.

It is easy to see the meaning of all this applied to the church. For every one of those needs or functions enumerated above, including not only evangelisation and ministry but also helps, giving, hospitality, ruling, care and shepherding, God has formed and fitted members of the church. This truth is stated from different points of view in the different epistles. In 1 Corinthians 12 the Spirit of God has given gifts to individuals. The gift in this case is evidently the divinely given capacity to do the work. In Ephesians 4 Christ has given individuals to be evangelists, or pastors and teachers. The gift here is an individual Christian endowed with the divinely-given capacity to do the work. Note particularly the following: Ephesians 4: 7, "unto every

one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift." Ephesians 4: 16, "that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part." 1 Corinthians 12: 7, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." You are one of these gifts. Do you know what is your work? Have you ever asked the Lord to show you what it is? Are you doing it?

THE INDISPENSABILITY OF EACH MEMBER

Certain expressions in 1 Corinthians 12 are worthy of particular attention. Of no member can the words be pronounced, "no need of thee". "Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem feeble, are necessary." The body needs every member and its work, and some unseen members, apparently feeble, are astounding examples of patient continuance in well-doing. The heart, unseen, and usually unthought of, day and night, year after year throughout life, goes on doing its indispensable work.

You have often judged there is something wrong with the assembly. Could it be because *you* are the member not functioning? What is the quality of *your* contribution?

Paul addresses a young man in 1 Timothy 3: 1. "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." I wonder whether everyone who ought to be devoting himself to the care of the church in this way is doing so. A Christian community may flourish and cause others to look with envy at its growth and wellbeing. Under God and by the grace and gift of Christ, it flourishes because someone is working at it. The appropriate action on the part of any person who sees what is wrong in a local community is not to find one that is right, but humbly

to enquire what his own part should be, and do it. The challenge to each of us — or it might be the renewal of a challenge — is to think soberly and prayerfully of ourselves, as we ought to think, according as God has dealt to every man the necessary faith, as Christ has given to every man his work, and to do it.

WHO IS SUFFICIENT?

Who is sufficient for these things? The answers to such a question crowd in from the Word. What motive is adequate? It is love, responding to God's love. This is the more excellent way. This is the militant, enduring virtue we need, the love that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, the love that never faileth. It is surely right and permissible to take account of 1 Corinthians 13 as a hymn in praise of love in the widest subjective setting: but it is equally not to be forgotten that its place in Holy Scripture is not accidental. It occurs in the very connection we are now considering, presenting the spirit and motive animating those who aspire to be in line with God in His working in the local assembly. Love is the more excellent way because the best gifts are nothing without it. The most angelic speaking, the deepest understanding, and the most mountainous faith are nothing without love.

In what power can these things be carried into practice? The Spirit of God, sent down as the fruit of redemption to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts is the power needed to serve and obey the Lord. "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." It is especially as the power for the working of the members of the Body of Christ that the Spirit appears in these chapters. An

unceasing snare in connection with divine things is to esteem better arrangements a substitute for the Spirit's power. The framework set by 1 Corinthians in which the Spirit of God operates includes "let all things be done decently and in order", and this makes suitable arrangements important. But improved arrangements without an increase in the release of the Spirit's power make things in reality not a wit better. There is no substitute for

the power of God's Spirit.

Why are these things — the motive, divine love and the power, God's Spirit — so important? It is surely because they are the accompaniments and manifestation of the fact that God is there, and is at work. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but the same God which worketh all in all."

A SABBATH REST

ROBERT DAVIES

(Hebrews 4: 9 (R.V.))

IN reading the Gospels, one finds numerous occasions when there was conflict between the Jews and the Lord Jesus on the question of keeping the Sabbath. The Jews contended that by healing on the Sabbath Day, the Lord was breaking the Law (e.g. Luke 13: 14 and 14: 3 following). The most striking example is that recorded in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel, where the Lord not only healed the man by the Pool of Bethesda, but told him to take up his bed, an action bound to arouse the opposition of orthodox Jewry. The Lord's reply to his critics on this occasion is of the deepest significance: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5: 17). The Jews were not slow to apprehend His meaning: "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (verse 18). This is, of course, consistent with the evangelists' stated purpose — "these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God . . ." (John 20: 31) — but for present

purposes the important verse is the seventeenth — "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." To some the idea of God "working" may seem strange, but from the context it is clear that God's work is the making of men whole. "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5: 6). The Lord Jesus is saying to the Jews in effect that this is not the Sabbath of the Lord their God; it is the day of man's misery and God is therefore "working" for man's blessing.

This takes us beyond the thought of a literal Sabbath, as does the scripture quoted as the title of this article (Heb. 4: 9). The Sabbath rest is undoubtedly that new heaven and new earth of which the Scriptures speak, viz.: "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3: 13). "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain . . ." (Rev. 21: 1 following).

The Pool of Bethesda presents one of the most pathetic scenes in the

Gospels. A crowd of sick folk, some (more fortunate than others) with friends to lend a helping hand, hoping that some day they will reach the waters in time and be healed — a system under which the less needy seem to have had the greatest chance of success. It has been frequently pointed out that this is a picture of Judah under the Law, impotent to meet its demands, powerless to walk in the path of obedience. This is certainly true, but in a wider sense it pictures the world as a whole. Men desire peace and yet humanity is torn by the demands of conflicting ideologies, political and territorial ambitions, and racial tension erupting into violence. The world is, in this sense, a vast 'Pool of Bethesda' — its five porches a true symbol of human weakness — and yet amidst it all, the Lord may be heard speaking: "Wilt thou be made whole?" Salvation lies outside the whole system. "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2: 9). It is significant that on this occasion (as in others in John's Gospel) the Lord Jesus takes the initiative. This reminds us that the Gospel is of Divine origin; it is the news of God's grace, concerning His Son. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son . . ." "The Father sent the Son, the Saviour of the world . . ." The call of the Gospel is an individual call; it is addressed to the heart and conscience. ". . . The word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4: 12 R.V.).

The fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews indicates that when God created the heavens and the earth, He had in His purpose a rest for His creation — "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." In the twenty-third chap-

ter of Leviticus, which describes the "Feasts of the Lord", the Sabbath is given precedence and kept distinct from the feasts which follow (see Lev. 23: 1-3). The Sabbath symbolises that eternal rest to which reference has already been made — the new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells. This is not to set aside the practical value of the Sabbath as a day of rest for man or beast. "The sabbath was made for man . . ." (Mk. 2: 27). The Christian does not keep the seventh day, however. For him it is the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. Nevertheless there is value, physically, mentally and spiritually, in having one day of the week which is "different".

To return to our main theme, sin has come in with its attendant misery for man, but contrary to some philosophical ideas, God has not prolonged the rest of Genesis 2: 3 indefinitely. God, having once created the world, has *not* left it to its own devices. "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." God has intervened in the sending of His Son for the blessing of men. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son . . ." (Gal. 4: 4). God has purposed a day of rest for His people and that purpose will be achieved. "An evil heart of unbelief" may have hindered a past generation from entering into rest, but there still remains "a sabbath rest for the people of God."

This fourth chapter is, therefore, one of warning. There were those in their day who heard the good news of God's rest, but the word was "not mixed with faith" (v. 2). The good report of Joshua and Caleb about the land of Canaan, confirmed by the grapes of Eshcol and the pomegranates and the figs did not find a response in their hearts (see Num. 14). "They could not enter

in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3: 19). Were there some amongst the company, to whom this epistle was addressed, who were in the same danger — some in whom the word had not been truly "mixed with faith?" "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us. . . ." Is there not a warning for the present day also? Is there not a great deal of lukewarmness — a lack of personal convictions sincerely held — a danger of indifference to the promises of God and consequent failure to lay hold of them? The Scripture is emphatic; it is those who have *believed* who enter into rest. "Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after *the same example of unbelief.*"

The history of Israel may serve as an example and as an illustration, but Canaan was not the rest of God. If Joshua in his day had given the people rest, then hundreds of years later the psalmist would not have been writing of "another day". Neither Joshua's entry into Canaan nor the glory of David's reign were the rest of God. "There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God."

Clearly this is not the day in which the Christian has ceased from work "as God did from His" (v. 10). This is not simply a reference to the need to earn our daily bread, though Scripture has important things to say about this, but to the fact that the Christian lives in a world which is opposed to God's claims. There is firstly the pressure of the world upon the believer himself, seeking to bring him into conformity with its system. The Christian is like a swimmer going against the tide or an oarsman pulling upstream. To use Old Testament language, the people of God are still journeying through the wilderness, i.e. they are

in the place of trial, testing and responsibility. Secondly, the Christian is called upon to make known (by his actions as well as by word of mouth) the good news to those around, many of whom are indifferent, if not openly opposed to the message. Opposition and indifference are not necessarily confined to what we may term "men and women of the world" but seem to pervade the sphere of Christian profession. Hence the need for the apostolic warning ". . . exhort one another daily, while it is called Today . . ." (Heb. 3: 13).

There is, however, a sense in which we *who believe* are now entering into rest. Faith "is the ground or confidence of things hoped for" and by faith Abraham "looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11: 1 and 10). So in the present day, faith brings us the present enjoyment of the new creation's joys.

Hebrews 4 is then a chapter of warning and of comfort. There are clear warnings against indifference and the dangers of presuming on a mere nodding acquaintance with Christianity. God is not deceived — everything is open "unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (v. 13). On the other hand, there is comfort for the man of faith in the fact that God's purpose cannot be defeated — "there remaineth, therefore, a keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God" (A.V. margin).

The reader may feel that the chapter makes great demands upon the Christian — "let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest. . . ." "Let us, therefore, fear lest a promise being left . . . any of you should seem to come short of it" (seem to have failed — J.N.D. New Trans.) — but the close of the chapter reveals a wonderful provision for our weakness, viz. a great high

priest "who hath passed through the heavens", who has also been tempted just as we are, sin apart.

"Let us, therefore, come boldly (with every confidence) unto the throne of grace. . . ."

CORRESPONDENCE

The following question has been received from Mr. Ernest J. Green of Whickham, Co. Durham :

Our Lord said, "When ye pray, say, Forgive us our sins." Yet it is frequently said in certain circles that a believer does not need to ask for forgiveness because all his sins, past, present and future are forgiven. In other circles one has heard it said that a Christian's unconfessed sins are not under the blood and therefore not forgiven.

Is there any such thing as absolute forgiveness? How much of these statements is error, and where does the truth lie?

A SURVEY of the references to forgiveness in the gospels sees them all as governmental (*i.e.* repeated events in God's parental control of the details of His peoples' lives, rather than a single and final verdict). In the Lord's prayer quoted in the question, forgiveness is requested on the ground, "for we also forgive". In John 5: 14, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." This kind of forgiveness persists into the epistles, for in James 5: 14, 15 we have something very near to a believer's praying for forgiveness: "Let them pray . . . and the prayer of faith shall heal the sick, . . . and if he have committed sins they shall be forgiven him."

In contrast with these quotations, there are several in the Acts and Epistles which appear to speak of forgiveness in a final and once-for-all sense. Acts 13: 28, 29. "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things." Perhaps the clearest teaching is in Hebrews 10, which should be carefully pondered. In verse 2 it is implied that if a perfect sacrifice

were achieved, "the worshippers once purged should have no more conscience of sins." "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (v. 14) and much more to the same effect. Also, remember 1 John 2: 12, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."

We conclude, therefore, that there is a once-for-all forgiveness and in this connection an instructed Christian would surely not pray for forgiveness once the door of repentance and faith has been entered.

To pray for forgiveness in the conditional and governmental sense, on the other hand, seems to be in accordance with James 5: 14, 15.

1 John 1: 9 — "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins" — should not be thought of in the governmental, but in the absolute sense, and the idea that unconfessed sins (in the governmental sense) "are not under the blood", is due to a mistaken application of this verse to governmental forgiveness.

THE RAPTURE

HAMILTON SMITH

THERE is a very definite feeling amongst the people of God that the day of grace is about to close. In the words of the prophet we may say. "The day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." For the Christian, we may add, in the words of the Apostle, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand".

Even men of the world have a vague uneasy feeling that some great crisis is approaching. What form it will take, and how to meet it they know not. Christians, however, with the Bible in their hands, Christ in the heart, and the Holy Spirit to guide, are not left in darkness. They know that Christ is coming, and that His coming is very near. We realise in some measure the deep need of this sad world, and we know that all the efforts of men to meet that need will be in vain. Kings and Dictators, Parliaments and Committees, may for a time, and in some limited measure, relieve local distress, but they cannot remove the universal misery of a world under sin and death. Neither conferences and leagues, nor treaties and pacts, will end the sorrows of the Jew, the misgovernment of the Gentile, nor the corruptions of Christendom.

There is only **One** who can deal with all the evil, end the sorrows of the earth, hush creation's groan, maintain the glory of God, and bring in universal blessing for man. Whether realised or not, the great need of the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church, is the coming of Christ; as we sometimes sing,

*Lord, Lord Thy fair creation groans,
The air, the earth, the sea
In unison with all our hearts,
And calls aloud for Thee.*

The condition of the professing people of God, in these last closing moments, may well solemnise our hearts, and humble us in the dust. It is foreshadowed in the condition that existed among the people of God in the closing days of Old Testament history, for history has a strange way of repeating itself. At that time Israel had utterly broken down; the little remnant who had returned from captivity had completely failed. But in the midst of all the prevailing corruption there were a few godly souls who feared the Lord, thought upon His Name, and spake often one to another. One thing marked them above all else — they looked for the coming of Christ. They did not look for improvement in the world; they had no thought of seeking to put things right in Israel; they made no pretension to be anything themselves, but they looked for the Son of righteousness to arise with healing in His wings. Their only hope was the coming of Christ. Amongst themselves all was weakness; behind them all was failure; around them all was corruption; but before them stretched the glory to be ushered in by the coming of Christ.

Their position, in very many ways, sets forth that of the people of God today. The Jew has crucified his Messiah, and has been scattered over the world; the Gentile has so utterly broken down in government, that civilization seems on the verge of being lost in a welter of lust and violence; the Church has utterly failed in its responsibility as a witness for Christ; and those who, in the midst of the ruin, have sought to answer to the mind of God, have utterly broken down. The failure

on man's side, is absolute and irretrievable. But our only hope remains, Christ is coming; and in spite of all the failure behind us, and around us, the glory lies before us.

If then the coming of Christ is the great hope that is set before us for our special encouragement and comfort, in a day of ruin, we shall do well to examine Scripture, not with the vain idea of attempting to fix a date for the coming, or indulging the fleshly love of prying into the future, but with the desire of having our affections awakened towards the One who is coming.

First let us turn to Scriptures which establish the great facts that the Lord Jesus is coming to reign in glory, and that when He comes His saints will come *with Him*. Then we may look at Scriptures that tell us how the saints will be brought to Christ, in order to come with Him.

Turning to the last Epistle in the New Testament we find we are carried back by Jude to the first Book in the Bible, to learn that in less than seven hundred years after the Creation of man the world had become apostate. In the days of Enoch the world was approaching the great crisis of the Flood. No hope was held out of any recovery of an apostate world; but, in view of the judgment to come we have the first great prophecy of the coming of Christ. Enoch says, "Behold the Lord cometh *with ten thousand of His saints*" (Jude 14). The world passes on to judgment, the saints are preserved to come with Christ in glory.

Passing on to the prophet Zechariah, who prophesied in the day of Israel's ruin at the close of the Old Testament history, we find he holds out no hope of the recovery of the nation; but, in view of another great crisis, there is again held out before

the saints the hope of the coming of Christ. The prophet says, "The LORD my God shall come, and all the saints *with thee*" (Zechariah 14 : 5). Again the world passes on to judgment, but the saints are preserved to come with Christ.

Now may we listen to the testimony of the Apostle John, as declared in Revelation 19 : 11-16? His prophetic utterances close the witness of the New Testament. John speaks in view of another great crisis in the history of the world — the complete break down of the nations and of Christendom. As in the days of Enoch before the close of the Old World, and as in the days of Zechariah before the close of the Old Testament, so in the days that will close the course of this present world, we learn there is no hope but in the coming of Christ, and that when the "heaven is opened", and the "King of kings" comes forth, the armies of heaven will follow Him. Thus again we learn that the present world rolls on to judgment, but the saints are preserved to come with Christ.

To anyone subject to the Word of God these Scriptures, with many others that might be cited, definitely prove that the Lord Jesus is coming to earth the second time, in power and glory, and when He comes His saints will come with Him. Seeing, however, that from the beginning of history to the present day, generations of saints have passed away, and their bodies have been laid in the grave, and that, at the present moment, millions of believers are living on the earth, while Christ is in heaven, the question naturally arises, How will the saints join Christ to come with Him?

This important question was allowed to be raised very early in the history of the Church, that we might have an inspired answer through the

Apostle Paul. His first Epistle to the Thessalonians was written to give us the answer. In the first chapter of this Epistle we are told that these Thessalonian saints had been "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven . . . even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come". When Christ appears the second time it will be in wrath, or judgment, upon the nations that have rejected Him; but with complete deliverance for His people who have suffered persecution for His name's sake. These Thessalonian saints were sustained in the midst of their persecutions by rightly looking forward to a glorious answer to all their sufferings at the appearing of Christ, when they would share with Him in the glories of the Kingdom.

This hope will not be disappointed; but as time passed on, and the coming of Christ was delayed, some of their number "fell asleep". This troubled them with the thought that possibly the saints who had passed away, would miss all the blessings and glories of the reign of Christ, that would be enjoyed by those who were alive on earth when Christ appeared. They probably had no question as to their eternal blessing, or that they would enjoy the heavenly blessings of the Father's house, but they feared they would miss the Kingdom glories. The Apostle meets this difficulty in the fourth chapter of the Epistle. He first sets their minds at rest in regard to those who had been taken from them. He would not have us ignorant "concerning them which are asleep" (verse 13).

These saints were in ignorance, and sorrow was the result of their ignorance. The Apostle wishes to dispel their darkness, and wipe away their tears. And the way he takes

is the only effectual way of dispelling the clouds and ending the sorrow. He presents Christ. He reminds us that Jesus has died and is risen again; and that His death and resurrection is the great pattern of them that sleep. Christ's resurrection was secret; so, indeed, will be the resurrection of His sleeping saints. Just as we believe one, so we can believe the other. Unknown to the world they will be raised again in order that God may bring them with Jesus (4: 14).

Still the question remains, How will these risen saints, and how will the living saints, be brought to be with the Lord, so that they may come with Him? This question the Apostle proceeds to answer in the parenthetical verses, 15 to 18, of chapter 4. The Apostle stresses the importance of this passage by specially reminding us that he is speaking "by the Word of the Lord". We know that all his Epistles were inspired, but there are truths of such special importance that he introduces them with the reminder that he speaks by special revelation. The truth of the gospel, the truth of the Mystery, the Lord's Supper, and, in this passage, the truth of the Rapture of the saints, are all introduced in this way (Galatians 1: 12, 1 Corinthians 11: 23, Ephesians 3: 3, 1 Thessalonians 4: 15).

This, perhaps, is the only Scripture that directly tells us how we shall be taken to be with the Lord. There are, however, two other Scriptures to which we may profitably refer before examining this passage.

First, 1 Corinthians 15: 51-53. In this chapter the great subject is resurrection. The coming of the Lord is not actually mentioned, though we know, from 1 Thessalonians 4, that the events of which these verses speak, will take place at His coming. The Apostle says,

"Behold I show you a mystery," and then he tells the secret that "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." That we are coming with the Lord was no secret, for, as we have seen, Enoch and the prophets had spoken about this great event. But no prophet had ever hinted that a number of saints would never pass through death. This, indeed, was a secret reserved for the New Testament times. But if all will not pass through death, all will be changed. The sleeping saints will be "raised incorruptible", and the mortal bodies of the living will "put on immortality". The passage, however, does not go further. If we only had this Scripture we should not know into what likeness we are changed, nor what would happen to us when we are changed. This then is the first step in the great event that leads to our being with Christ. "We shall all be changed."

Passing on to the second Scripture, we read, in Philippians 3: 20, 21, that "we look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour who shall change our body of humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His body of glory". This Scripture throws further light on this momentous event. The Epistle to the Corinthians has told us we shall be changed. This passage tells us we shall be changed into the likeness of Christ. Not only shall we be morally like Him, but we shall have bodies of glory like His own. In the light of this revelation we may well ask ourselves, Why this amazing grace? Why are poor sinners such as ourselves going to have these bodies of humiliation fashioned like His own glorious body? Ah! we know the answer, we are going to be like Him that we may be the everlasting witness to the worth of His Person and the efficacy of His work. Think of that poor degraded thief on the

Cross, think of the proud Christ-hating Pharisee Saul of Tarsus; then pass on in thought to heaven and as, in the day to come, we gaze upon these men as glorified saints shall we not see the amazing efficacy of the work of Christ, that removes every trace of sin, and enables these men to be changed into the likeness of Christ. And what is true of these men will be true of all the saints in that vast scene of glory. When we come out in His likeness it will be according to the riches of His grace, and to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Thus we learn from Philippians that when changed it will be into the likeness of Christ, but this passage does not state what will happen to us when changed. For this further truth we must return to the fourth chapter of the First Epistle of Thessalonians. There, in verse 16, we read that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven". Here then we have the blessed intimation that the Lord is coming for us. The language is very explicit. It is not simply stated that the Lord shall descend, but that the Lord, *Himself*, shall descend. This is in accord with the Lord's own words to His disciples, "I will come again and receive you unto myself." He will not be accompanied with the great host of His holy Angels as when He comes to earth. He will come alone to meet His saints, even, as in the beautiful type, Isaac goes forth alone at eventide to meet his bride as she comes up from her wilderness journey.

Then let us notice, it is not a descent to earth, as when He appears to reign, and His feet stand once again on the Mount of Olives. It truly says He will descend, but it very precisely says it is a descent from heaven, not a descent to earth.

Moreover, we are told, that at the

moment of His coming there will be a triple summons. The assembling shout, the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God. From 1 Corinthians 15, we know that the trump of God raises the sleeping saints. The voice of the Archangel does not imply that the Archangel is present, or that the Archangel speaks, as our translation might suggest. The true translation is "with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice, and with trump of God". There is no article before Archangel and trump. It is simply characteristic of the Lord's voice. He speaks in this way, with Archangel's voice, and it may be this is the voice that changes the living saints, as the trump of God raises the dead. Then with an assembling shout He gathers both classes of saints together, and calls them to Himself.

Having assembled His saints we are *caught up together*. How blessed to know that, in this happy moment, so soon to come, all the things that have divided the saints will vanish away, and the humiliating divisions that have rent the Church of God, and scattered the people of God, will be for ever past. At last for one brief moment, it would seem, in the very scene of all the failure, His people will be together. For it will not be in little companies or groups of saints that we shall be taken. It will be no partial rapture by detachments, as some falsely teach today, for the word is "We . . . shall be caught up together."

Further, we learn that the meeting will take place in the air. Then how blessedly it all concludes, "So shall we ever be with the Lord." It is the Lord Who will bring us together, and the Lord Who will hold us together; never more to be divided from one another, never more to be separated from the Lord. "Where-

fore," says the Apostle, "comfort one another with these words."

Here, then we have the mystery of His coming, the secret rapture of the saints by which they are taken from earth to meet Christ in the air, that they may be with Him when He comes.

Nevertheless, this great passage does not go beyond the meeting in the air. It is silent as to what happens after that wondrous meeting. Turning to the first three verses of John 14, we hear of a further stage in our journey to the glory of the Kingdom. Here the Lord tells us that He has gone to prepare a place for us in the Father's house, and that when He comes again it will be to receive us unto Himself. That meeting, we know from Thessalonians 4, will take place in the air. Having received us to Himself, He will conduct us into the Father's house, as He so blessedly says, "that where I am, there ye may be also." He is leading us along the path of life which He Himself has trodden, and which leads to fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore in the Father's house.

The last stage in the path to glory will be when Christ comes forth to reign. At His first coming He came in humiliation, and in circumstances of weakness. At His second coming the heavens will open and He will come forth as the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. His mighty angels will accompany Him, the armies in heaven will follow Him, and, Enoch's prophecy will be fulfilled, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints."

These are the stages on our way to glory. First the meeting with the Lord in the air; then to pass in to the joys of the Father's house; lastly to come forth with Christ to share His Kingdom and His throne.

This then is the blessed hope that lies before us;

The joy of the Lord's presence.
The fulness of the Father's house,
and
The glory of the everlasting kingdom.

We may add, in the great eternity

beyond there lies the eternal state in the new heaven and the new earth where God will be all in all.

Seeing then that we wait for these coming glories, we may well say, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God."

ELISHA

ROBERT THOMSON

THE THREE KINGS AND THE POT OF OIL

THE ways of God in power and grace, are seen in Elisha, who is not persecuted and threatened as Elijah had been. His word is given with authority, manifesting the might of God to be with him.

The wicked reign of Ahab had terminated; and his son, Jehoram, taking up the throne of Israel, continued to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Mesha, King of Moab, who had paid a yearly indemnity of sheep and rams, with the wool, rebelled against Israel. For this, Jehoram made war with Mesha, and called upon Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to help him. To this appeal, he readily responds, and an unholy alliance is made. His words are, "I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." What a sad condition of things, both for the king and the people, and what a display of unfaithfulness to Jehovah! Such breaking down of separation, whether for gain or revenge, could only lead to trouble and dishonour upon the Name of God. They are joined by the King of Edom, a descendant of Essau, and choosing their own way which led through the wilderness, they quickly realise that there is no water.

Considering now their folly, and reviewing the difficulties of the campaign, the king of Israel is the first to speak of the Lord, as a judge. "Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hands of Moab!" What a reproof for Jehoshaphat, king of Judah! It is now for him to acknowledge Jehovah, and he enquires for a prophet of the Lord who can seek guidance of the Lord for them. Why could he not send immediately for Elisha? Was he out of touch with him?

It is a servant of the king of Israel who draws attention to the nearness of the prophet of the Lord, and recalls how he had poured water upon the hands of Elijah. Blessed, humble service, only surpassed by Him who washed His disciples' feet. Jehoshaphat is sure that the word of the Lord is with Elisha, and they go down to him. How humiliating, seeing that he had not availed himself of his services before this. Should there be the word of reprimand from the prophet, there will be also the blessing in its due season.

Elisha addressing the king of Israel, disclaims all associations with him, telling him to go to the prophets of his parents, who were

of Baal. This he refuses to do, acknowledging that it is the Lord who had delivered them into the hand of Moab. The presence of Jehoshaphat is taken note of by Elisha, and it is only because he is of Jehovah that he will do anything in the matter. However, the spirit of the prophet is grieved by this unholy conduct of Jehoshaphat, and calls for a minstrel. The sensitive heart of the man of God cannot condone the sin and dishonour which had been done to the Name of Jehovah. His refreshment of spirit comes as the minstrel plays, for it is the means to him of turning aside into the Presence of God, with its quietude and peace.

Now, the call is for action, as thus saith the Lord, "Make this valley full of ditches." Make room for the blessing of God. "Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water." Their need was to be met in grace; and the Moabites delivered into their hand. This would take place in the morning, at the offering up of the meat offering. As the fragrance of Christ ascended in the offering, the waters came by way of Edom; the way of the perfect One who bore the curse for us on the tree. The enemy saw the shining of the sun upon the water, in the morning, which to them was as blood. They are thus allured to their destruction and complete defeat.

So the prophet of God delivers Jehoshaphat, a backslider in heart and ways, and preserves the three kings against Moab. Truly, the godly servant is called to testify in places of defilement, but his own spirit finds true fellowship and communion only in the Presence of God.

THE POT OF OIL

Coming from that which concerns

kings and nations, we consider the simple and gracious dealings of the man of God toward an individual of the nation, and the meeting of the need of extremity inside the house. It concerns a widow of the sons of the prophets, who, being in debt, is called upon by the creditor to pay the debt, or sacrifice her two sons to be bondmen. In this strait, she cries to Elisha for help. What can he do to assist her, and at the same time glorify Jehovah? Her own faith needed to be stimulated, and the question is asked her, "What hast thou in the house?" The only available thing seemed to be a pot of oil, which was enough for God to use for the meeting of the present need. "Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil," is her reply to the prophet's question.

The widow's part is now to borrow from the neighbours at once, as many empty vessels as she could, and not be content with a few. What a lesson for our hearts, to seek others, that the enlargement of God might be manifest! Then we behold the inside scene; with the door shut upon the household, she pours forth the precious oil from vessel to vessel, until all are filled. She asks for more empty vessels, but there are none. Every available vessel is filled, and the oil stayed. There is no leakage. May we ask ourselves today, "Do we, in our spheres of busy activity, know much of this secret proving of God, as experienced in the enclosed room, behind the shut door?"

"According to your faith be it unto you," is the word of the Lord to the two blind men. No doubt this is the language of the miracle of Elisha; for as long as the widow brought the empty vessels, the pot produced the oil. Her faith measured the active resources of grace, of the God of Israel. The oil waited on

the vessels, and the vessels were the measure of the oil. It is always seasonable that what we have should be put into use. Moses had his rod; the lad had his loaves and fishes; and of another it was said, "She hath

done what she could." Thus every need is met by the abundance of God; the creditor is discharged, life is maintained for many days after the payment of the debt, and the God of Israel is glorified.

DAVID'S THREEFOLD WITNESS

IAN I. ROSS

(Psalm 34: 6-8)

IN these three short verses of this Psalm we have clearly set out the threefold testimony of David and surely that of every true Christian.

In verse 6

The Lord is my Salvation

In verse 7

The Lord is my Security

In verse 8

The Lord is my Satisfaction

1. *The Lord is my Salvation* — "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

David had wandered far from the will of God. He had fled from the anger of Saul, he had lied to the priests of Nob, a sin which brought with it fearful consequences for the inhabitants of that place. Further he was seeking refuge and help from those who were the inveterate enemies of God — and even they were suspicious of him — "Saul hath slain his thousands but David his ten thousands." David had reached rock bottom; fear filled his heart and so to escape the wrath of the King of Gath he feigned madness. It was at this point in his downward career that David in his desperate need turned to the Lord. And here in

simple language, the language of every seeking soul, is his testimony — "this poor man." Repentant, contrite, knowing that he had sinned and grieved the heart of God, In Isaiah 66 we read, "To this man will I (the Lord) look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" — not to the religionist, not to the cultured, not to the ignorant, but to those who come in sincere contrition of heart. "This poor man cried" — he poured out his heart in confession of his sin. This was not the prayer of a great orator, nor was it the prayer of a great theologian. It was the simple sincere heart-felt cry of a repentant child.

"This poor man cried unto the Lord," no longer seeking refuge from the theologian of Nob, no longer seeking help from the rulers of Gath, but seeking his help from the Lord. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth," declares David in another Psalm.

"And the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." This was a direct cry from the heart which received a direct and wonderful response from the Lord. Is this

not always the case? "Lord save me," cried Peter — and the Lord saved him. "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed," cried Jabez — and the Lord granted him that which he requested. And surely this has been the experience of every true believer and calls forth from grateful hearts: "The Lord is my Salvation."

2. *The Lord is my Security.* "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." David had known this to be true in his own varied experience. He had been wonderfully preserved from the javelin thrown by the warrior king at point blank range. He had known the care of the Lord as he had been hounded like a partridge upon the mountains by the hate-possessed monarch. But David himself had times when he doubted and his faith was weak. And as David was, very often so are we in the experience of our lives day by day. The enemy would seek to destroy our confidence in the Lord and fill our minds with doubts and fears, to question our salvation and our ability to hold on to Christ. God would teach us most clearly from His Holy Word again and again of the nature of His keeping and preserving power. When we receive Christ as Saviour we receive something which we never had before. We receive new life — eternal life. True conversion is the evidence that God has transmitted life. The apostle declares that on receiving Christ "we are made partakers of the Divine Nature". And John states that "to as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to be called the children of God". We receive a new life, a new nature and a new relationship. And this relationship can never be destroyed. A son may bring endless sorrow to his parents; he may go to

the far parts of the earth away from them, but forever he remains a son, and nothing can alter that relationship. My folly may take me far from Him. My sin may keep me from enjoying His fellowship, but nothing can alter the relationship into which His grace has brought me. The Lord Jesus said, "My sheep . . . shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. . . . No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Here is double security — "My hand" and "My Father's hand".

Joy in communion may well depend on our holding on to Christ. Eternal security depends on His holding on to us.

Our hold on Him may sometimes weaken. His hold on us never slackens.

Our love for Him may fluctuate. His love for us never changes.

He is indeed the same yesterday, today and forever.

Paul declares that "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ". He has taken us into His arms and He will never let us go. We, as Peter, declares, are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

*"The soul that on Jesus has leaned
for repose,*

*I will not, I will not desert to his
foes.*

*That soul though all hell should
endeavour to shake,*

*I'll never, no never, no never
forsake."*

3. *The Lord is my Satisfaction.*

"O taste and see that the Lord is good." Because David has experienced the salvation of the Lord and knows security in Him, there now arises from his deeply grateful heart this spontaneous expression of praise. God had been exceedingly

gracious to him and David recognised this and knew the inward happiness of the man whose trust is in the Lord. And so he would plead with us from his own experience in these words, "I beg of you, I beseech you, from what I have proved in my life in my daily experience, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good' for 'He satisfieth the longing soul and filleth the hungry soul with goodness'."

And having tasted the grace and love and kindness of the Saviour we can echo the words of David,

"Happy is the man whose trust is in Him."

"There are heights of sweet communion

That are all awaiting me.

There are ocean depths of mercy

That are flowing full and free.

There are precious pearls of promise

That can ne'er be priced in gold.

There's a fullness in my Saviour

That has never yet been told."

May this then be our sincere testimony. The Lord is my Salvation, my Security and my Satisfaction.

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

A FRAGMENT — HEBREWS 13: 5, 6

THE fourth verse of this great chapter speaks of marriage, its honourableness, its duties and its uses, so guarding the Christian as to this divinely ordained relationship and instructing him in reference to it. Verse five begins by guarding us amid the cares of life. Our walk is to be without trust in riches, content with such things as we have. How this can be — and the why of it — is that He has said "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The Lord's presence with us down here may well suffice to make us "content" and "without trust in riches". Verse six seems to allude to some such state of things as does James 5: 1-5; a time of great difficulty when man's hand is against his fellow. But what then? Surely the presence of the Lord with any one in such circumstances has more in it to make free from cares and content than have the trials of such

times power to give anxiety. The Lord's presence is everything and the heart can be satisfied with it.

There is great force, too, in the way the statement is made. "Himself has said, No, never will I leave thee; never, no, never will I forsake thee." Observe how emphatic it is! *Himself* has said, and said it to *thee*, the individual, not you, merely, in the mass; and then the repetition of the negatives "no, never" — "never, no, never". Clearly He would have us to know that there is one thought which neither has, nor ever can have, any place in His mind, that of forgetting His people down here. And, mark it well, it is Himself with His own down here. Not only has God given to us all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus and assured us too of eternal glory and bliss when the wilderness is passed, but more than this, He is with us to conduct us Himself right

through the present life. Israel's hard circumstances in the wilderness only gave to God the occasion of showing Himself and His grace and His power and His resources as being with them. There are two things to be noticed, His presence and our faith in it. (See also Exodus 17: 7; Haggai 2: 5). He is with us always and unto the end. But if we know not how to put our "Amen" to this, surely we shall not be established (Isaiah 7: 9).

Look upon trials in the darkness of your own shadow and they will

seem black. Look upon them in the light of the presence of the Lord with you and then they will shine.

Truly, as we go along we find that the relative bearing of things to us is according as we regard them in faith or "with the eye", in grace or in nature. It is God or my poor frail self that characterizes my path as I go along.

"No; *never* will I leave thee; *never, no, never* will I forsake thee."

This is the Lord's banner for His saint, a banner of love that floats over every circumstance.

ANON.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN JOY

J. STODDART

MUCH has been written and said regarding the human search for pleasure, happiness and joy. In better words than mine a well-known Christian writer says, "Our materialistic world rushes on with its eternal quest for the fountain of happiness! The more knowledge we acquire, the less wisdom we seem to have. The more economic security we gain, the more boredom we generate. . . . So the search continues! Men will kill, lie, cheat, steal, and war to gain for themselves and their particular group peace, security, contentment and happiness." But for the Christian the elusive quest can be said to have ended — not in acquiring these *things*, but in his personal knowledge and satisfying experience of the Person in Whom alone they subsist.

Attempts have sometimes been made to differentiate between joy and happiness, but vastly more important than such fine distinctions is the deeper realisation of the experi-

ence such words describe. To this end the study of a few verses in Psalm 33 is commended as disclosing the very foundations of Christian joy, and helping us to understand the essential difference between this and what the world so vainly seeks. Indeed the absence of any foundation for its uncertain joys is a marked characteristic of the human plight.

A legitimate question might arise in the mind of the dispensational student as to finding what is truly Christian in such an Old Testament Scripture. Of course, we would look here in vain for Christian doctrine or distinctive dispensational truth. But here, in the five books of Psalms, we find a wealth of recorded experience in trials, testing, joys, sorrows and aspirations common to faith in any day. And good it is to note that all culminates in the grand Hallelujah chorus of the last five Psalms, each of which ends with the words, "Praise ye the Lord." This

may well be the great lesson of the one hundred and fifty Psalms, that every experience undergone in faith will at last eventuate in swelling notes of joyous praise to Him Whose wisdom, love and power have been learned through all.

It might be true to say that to "Rejoice in the LORD" is the very pinnacle of faith's experience, for nothing either here or hereafter will ever surpass this. Even in heaven this surely represents the climactic moment of moments (see Revelation 19: 7). Thus Eternity has already begun in the hearts of those who, in their measure, here and now, have learned to rejoice in Him. The encouragement to "Rejoice in the LORD", with which Psalm 33 begins, is echoed and re-echoed in the Epistle to the Philippians (see ch. 3: 1 and 4: 4) the supreme N.T. letter of Christian experience. Also, in Romans 5, faith's ascending scale from verse 1 reaches its highest note in verse 11 which asserts, "not only so, but we joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ".

But what are the great, imperishable foundations upon which such real and ineffable joy rests? Clearly its indestructible quality does not derive from our fickle and fluctuating experience, but from the unchanging character of Him in Whom we rejoice. Thus in verse 6 it is *The Stability of His Word* to which we are directed. How secure indeed is such a foundation for our joy! "By the Word of the LORD were the heavens made." "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast" (verse 9). Is there any wonder then that at the moment His creatorial fiat went forth "then the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38: 7). How good it was for the tearful prophet Jeremiah to discover the divine prescription for joy,

when in 15: 16 he says, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." But surely the Christian's joy overflows to hear the Incarnate Word declare that "these things (of the Father's love and care) have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full". "And your joy no man taketh from you" (John 15: 11 and 16: 22). We learn, therefore, that our joy is forever linked with and founded upon the stability of His Word.

Another fundamental element of Christian joy comes to light in verse 11 of our Psalm. "The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations." Here then *the Steadfastness of His Counsel* is seen as a cause for our rejoicing in the LORD. What striking contrast this affords to the comparatively puny and ineffective counsels of men, which come to nought! (verse 10). When confronted with the weakness and frailty of our own indecision, what strength is derived from the fact that "He worketh all things after the counsel of His Own will" (Ephesians 1: 11). Nothing can ever annul the decree that "He hath chosen His people for His own inheritance" (Psalm 33: 12). We shall find this truth developed for the encouragement and joy of N.T. saints in passages such as Ephesians 1: 18, Colossians 1: 12 and 1 Peter 1: 4. How often such Scriptures have lifted the spirits of despondent saints, conscious of failure within and without, and their joy has been restored and strength recovered. We recall that in a day when the people wept and mourned, Nehemiah valiantly rallied their drooping spirits by admonishing them to "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send

portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8: 9, 10). Oh, downcast, defeated saint of God (and the writer of this page) remember where your joy is secure! Not in your imagined faithfulness and superior piety, but in the steadfastness of His counsel, which will prevail when all else is gone. But let me not forget when joy is my portion to "send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared". How much are you and I concerned about bringing the joy of the Lord to others who have never tasted it? A clear responsibility rests upon all to whom such joy is given to share it with the needy. And let us not ask where *they* are to be found! Hearts and homes and nations are perishing today because Christians have failed to impart their joy like sunshine in the dark and sinful shadows of the world's gloom.

Thirdly, verse 18 of Psalm 33 yields yet another sound reason for our rejoicing in the Lord. "Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy." Now it is *the Scrutiny of His Eye* that promotes our joy in Him. By nature we would shrink from the fact that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4: 13); for in our sins none of us could bear His searching glance, "Who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity" (Habakkuk 1: 13). But the believer in Jesus can now sing, "Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like thee His praise should sing?" "Accepted in the Beloved" and clad in His worth alone, we can find comfort and joy in the fact that God's scrutinising eye beholds "our downsitting and our uprising and understands our

thought afar off" (Psalm 139: 2).
*"His wisdom ever waketh, His sight is never dim,
 He knows the way He taketh, and I will walk with Him."*

When other eyes fail to assess the value of what little service we attempt for Him, it does not escape His notice, and may be we shall hear Him say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Matthew 25: 40). Who of us would not dearly covet such an appraisal? But it entails service under His eye, and possibly personal sacrifice of comforts that are dear. The story is told of one of John Wesley's missions to a place near Land's End, Cornwall. With him was one of his companion preachers, John Nelson by name, and it is he who relates that "all the time Mr. Wesley and I slept on the floor. He had his greatcoat for a pillow, and I had Barkett's Notes on the New Testament for mine! After three weeks of such "comfort" one morning at 3 a.m. Wesley turned over, clapped me on the side and said, "Brother Nelson, let us be of good cheer, I have one whole side yet, for the skin is only off one side!" Such men exhibited the power of Christian joy to endure, and were glad to labour under the eye of their Master alone.

It should deepen our joy in the Lord to know that His eye takes in the whole situation on earth at any given moment. Much of our despondency comes from our necessarily limited human-eye view, while at the same time our horizons should be continually expanding as "the eyes of our understanding become enlightened". We learn from 2 Chronicles 16: 9 that "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself

strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him." Had king Asa heeded this wisdom from the lips of Hanani the seer, he would not have acted as impulsively as he did, and incurred wars upon his people and himself. We shall be wise to take these words to heart and rejoice in the Lord, and yet again rejoice (Philippians 4: 4) in knowing the scrutiny of His eye.

A basic law of life is that joy and happiness depend not so much upon things or places, but always on persons. With the right person little else matters, whereas with the wrong person the most congenial things and places can utterly fail to satisfy. In his rectorial address to students of St. Andrew's University J. M. Barrie quoted from a memorable letter which Captain Scott of the Antarctic wrote to him when the chill breath of death was already on the expedition. "We are pegging

out," said Scott, "in a very comfortable spot. We are in a desperate state — feet frozen, etc., no fuel and a very long way from food. But it would do your heart good to be in our tent, and to hear our songs and our cheerful conversations." To these men the company they shared under the most appalling conditions meant everything to them. If this is true at the natural level, how much more ought it to be so for those to whom the company of the Lord Jesus is everything, for His promise is, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13: 5). And it is He whose promise in Psalm 32: 8 is, "I will guide thee with Mine eye."

Having considered these foundations of Christian joy, may we conclude, as the Psalmist does in verse 21, "Our heart *shall* rejoice in Him, because we have *trusted* in His holy Name."

GODLY CONCERN AND GODLY CONFIDENCE

COLIN CURRY

"Give me neither poverty nor riches . . . Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, . . . and take the name of my God in vain."

"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

(Proverbs 30: 8, 9; Philippians 4: 12, 13).

THE link between these passages is plain to see. The full Christian attitude, expressed by the writer of the New Testament passage, is an advance on that of the godly man of the Proverbs. He is confident

that, whatever the situation through which he may pass, Christ will not fail to support and sustain him in it. The Old Testament writer, on the other hand, is preoccupied with his own weakness; hence he is less con-

fidant, and asks to be spared from situations in which he might let the Lord down.

Though the verses in Philippians show what is possible to a Christian, the statement is made by one single Christian, with a long and special experience with Christ as the ground of it. It would be inappropriate therefore, and perhaps not at all in the same spirit as his, for ourselves to express the same confidence with an easy readiness. Indeed, rather than claim such a high level of experience it is salutary first to face the Old Testament passage, and to ask to what extent we are characterised by the attitude shown there.

It must be agreed that a high standard is set even in this passage. The concerns and aims of this godly man are not those current in the world today. This man knows well the principle that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". He thinks not at all of his own advantage, but of God's name and honour. His anxiety is "lest I deny Thee" . . . "lest I take the name of my God in vain". He understands his own weaknesses and tendencies, and is on his guard against them. Hence his prayer is free from self-centredness. If he asks to be saved from poverty, he does so because he cannot trust himself in such a situation; he fears lest his faith should fail, and his God be dishonoured by his failure. Equally, he is afraid of his attitude should his circumstances become specially favourable. He seems to know intuitively what is taught elsewhere in Scripture, that there are dangers in easy situations — the dangers of self-satisfaction and self-congratulation, of the independent spirit, and of dullness of response to God and His claims (see, for example, Deuteronomy 32: 15; Matthew 13: 15; Revelation 3: 17, 18).

Do we, who read these verses, ever pause to consider whether the most successful paths are necessarily the most profitable ones, whether the aim to pursue the most pleasant objectives is necessarily in the direction where the real values lie? "Remove from me vanity and lies, feed me with food convenient for me . . ." is the prayer of this true man of God. To what extent do our aims in life correspond with such an attitude as this? How much of our time is concerned with shallow and insubstantial objects? Is avoidance of the truth, with its power to control and influence our ways, a known tendency which we confess and seek to be helped to overcome?

Paul the prisoner at Rome, writing to the Christians at Philippi, provides an excellent example of one whose values had been set right, and whose aim in life was single and clear. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." With these words he refers to the time when the great reversal of values came about. And still his attitude remains the same: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3: 7, 8).

Much in his past once gave him cause for satisfaction and self-esteem, and might well have done so still. But he had been brought to a different and lower view of self. The Hebrew of the Hebrews found himself to be also the chief of sinners; he no more than others had any real cause for "confidence in the flesh." We Christians, he writes, are characterised as follows: "We . . . worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (chapter 3: 3). Certainly he exemplifies this himself, and the letter is full of evidence that he had found a far

higher Object than self to serve and to rejoice in.

Not only did Paul count all things as loss, but he actually suffered the loss of all things, as the same verse informs us. With him what he writes is not only what is possible, but it is his actual experience. He writes from gaol, but he is not dispirited at all. He has his encouragement and his joy in the Lord, and from experience he knows the sufficiency of this. Whatever comes, he can face: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This is a confident statement, but a right one, since it is confidence in Christ and experience with Christ which underlies it. When he says "I know how to be abased and how to abound" it is not merely meant that experiences of either kind could be faced if necessary, but that he has known a good deal of both already, and of the Lord's support and presence in them. The level of his own material well-being is not of high importance to him, such is his equipment in Christ for all his needs. If the Philippians remember him and alleviate his position to some degree, he rejoices mostly in the evidence this supplies of their own good spiritual state and progress. Only in a secondary sense is he thankful for the relief to himself which this brings.

To read of such a confidence in Christ, deepened and made more firm by the tests in which He has been proved, may perhaps affect us in more than one way. First, we must be thankful that the Christ in Whom the apostle rejoiced, and with Whom he faced every situation with assurance, remains ever the same. Paul's advice in this chapter has as its aim that his readers too should appreciate the Lord in these ways. We too, who read these words

written so long ago, are invited to rejoice in the Lord always. We also are advised to allow no anxiety to rob us of the awareness of His support, but to accept all that may be our lot with a calm and yielding spirit, referring all to Him Whose presence and peace can keep our hearts. We too are encouraged to be busy in the pure and truly profitable lines of thought and activity (verses 4-9). There is no lack whatever with Him Who, if we allow it, can be our resource and companion in any circumstance. Christ is indeed magnified in these verses, and our will to know Him more and to prove Him more is greatly stimulated by the example shown by their author.

But perhaps a further effect of these verses may be to humble us as we feel the contrast between ourselves and the writer. Who does not read the passage without being made to feel the relative shallowness of their own experience of Christ? To some extent at least it must be wholesome and right to feel a sense of unease at the comparative poverty of our own appreciation of our Lord, in so far as it affects our approach to the experience of life. Comfortable and stable circumstances appear to be the lot of many Christian people today. The possibility that this can detract from a proper valuation of the vital and eternal matters is a real one, and it is needful to be continually alert to this. We need to be kept from dependence on false supports and false confidences, and to have our eye only on Him Whom the apostle knew and trusted. In our measure we know and trust Him too. May that knowledge and that confidence continually deepen, and may all that would deter us in that progressive experience be recognized and put on one side for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE APPEARING

HAMILTON SMITH

WHEN the history of the world is closed, it will be found that the two events in time which incomparably transcend all others, are the first coming of Christ in humiliation, and the second appearing of Christ in glory.

It is on the second coming of Christ to earth, to reign in glory, that we desire to dwell. This great event is not the mere dream of a few visionaries, but the sober truth of the Word of God. Many Christians may be ignorant of this truth, the pulpits of Christendom may often pervert it, or, be altogether silent as to it, but, in spite of ignorance, neglect, and perversion, the second appearing of Christ is clearly foretold by God as the next great event in the history of the world.

This great truth has a much larger place in the Word of God than many believers are aware. The Old Testament prophecies are full of glowing descriptions of the glories of the reign of Christ that will be ushered in by the Second Appearing. In the New Testament it has a prominent place in every Gospel: it is proclaimed in the Acts, and has a large place in the Epistles and the Revelation.

First, it will be well to examine some Scriptures that establish the great fact of the Second Appearing.

Secondly, we may seek from Scripture, the main reasons why the appearing is kept so prominently before us.

I. SCRIPTURES THAT PRESENT THE TRUTH OF THE APPEARING

In the ninth chapter of Hebrews,

verses 26 to 28, we find the two appearances of Christ presented in one passage. First, we read that, "In the consummation of the ages *hath He appeared* to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself". When the trial of man, during the ages, was completed and all men were proved to be under sin, there dawned that great day when Christ appeared in humiliation to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself on the Cross.

Secondly, we read He is going to "appear the second time", not to take up the sin question, but for the salvation, or full deliverance of His people from every pressure and opposing power under which they may be held.

Here then, we have the first and second appearances of the Lord Jesus. All who are subject to the Word of God must admit that this passage clearly establishes the great fact that Christ is going to appear the second time in this world.

It will however, be well to turn to passages in other Epistles, that show that the Apostles Paul, and Peter, and John, all unite in setting before the believer the appearing of the Lord Jesus, as the glorious prospect which is to govern the believer in His path, and sustain him amidst his sorrows and trials.

First, the testimony of the *Apostle Paul*.

In Titus 2: 11-13, we again have two appearances brought before us. In verse 11 we read, "the grace of God . . . hath appeared"; and in verse 13 believers are said to be "looking for that blessed hope and

the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ". Thus we have the appearing of grace, and the appearing of glory. The glory is going to appear where the grace appeared. Grace leads to glory. This passage does not speak of the believer appearing in glory in heaven; but of the glory appearing on earth. At the present it is the glory of man, such as it is, that appears: in yet a little while it will be the glory of God. Grace brings to us salvation. Being saved, grace teaches us how to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in view of the coming glory. The appearing of the glory of Christ is to govern the life.

Turning to 1 Timothy 6: 14, we find a certain charge given to Timothy which he is exhorted to keep, "without spot, unrebukable *until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*". In the early part of the chapter the Apostle has been speaking of the evils of the flesh — pride, envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings (verse 4); hurtful lusts, and covetousness (verses 9, 10). Then addressing himself to the man of God, he says, in verse 11, "*flee these things*". Moreover, we are not only to flee evil, but we are to *follow* good; so the Apostle says, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness of spirit. Furthermore, we are reminded that there is something to *fight* for. Men are engaged in fighting, in a carnal way, for material advantages. This is a poor fight, in view of this life. We are to fight the good fight to maintain the truth, in view of eternal life.

Thus the charge can be summed up by these three words, flee, follow and fight. Nor must we forget that fighting comes last. It is useless to attempt to fight for the truth unless we are fleeing from evil, and

following good. Then, indeed, we can fight for the truth. Fighting without fleeing and following, will only end in defeat.

This charge is to be kept, not simply in view of death or going to heaven, but in view of coming out with Christ at "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" on earth, for, only then shall we receive the recompense for the responsible life here below with all the suffering, sorrowing, and toil involved in the fleeing, following, and fighting. Again, it is not in view of producing great results down here. We may see little present result from fleeing, and following, and fighting; at times we may grow weary in the fight, but let us seek to keep the charge, for it will have a glorious answer at the appearing.

Turning on to the Second Epistle, we have in the fourth chapter, verses 1 and 2, a further charge also enforced by the appearing of Christ Jesus. There we read, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead, and by His appearing, and His kingdom. Preach the Word, be urgent in season, out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all longsuffering and doctrine" (New Translation). Here Timothy has a charge to preach with urgency, in season and out of season. Two things will give him "urgency". First the judgment that will come upon those who refuse the gospel, and secondly, the glorious results for those by whom it is received at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, too, the appearing is linked with the Kingdom of Christ, for the appearing introduces the Kingdom.

Further, there is one more passage in this chapter, in which Paul speaks of the appearing. In verses 6-8, he refers to himself. The aged

Apostle sees that the time of his departure is at hand. He has been exhorting Timothy to fight the good fight, and what he preached to others he practised himself. So here he says, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith". And as he looks on to the bright future, he sees that the Lord has laid up for him a crown of righteousness. While he had been laying out his life for the Lord, the Lord had been laying up a crown for him. He had walked the way of righteousness (2: 22); and followed the instruction of righteousness (3: 16); and he looks forward to wearing the crown of righteousness. But when will he wear the crown? "At that day". And when is that day? Was it at the day of death, or the day of martyrdom, or the day when his happy spirit took its flight to be with Christ? Ah no! It will be the day of the glorious appearing of Christ on earth. When Christ comes forth crowned with many crowns, then Paul will have his crown, and not only Paul, but all those also who "love his appearing". Loving His appearing supposes that we are living in a way that is suited to His appearing. We should hardly love the thought of His appearing if not walking in the way of righteousness. Immediately he speaks of some who did not follow righteousness. Demas turned back to the world; he did not flee these things. Alexander, did the apostle "much evil"; he did not follow good. Then we read in the presence of opposition "all men" forsook Paul; they did not fight the good fight (10, 14, 16).

Secondly, the testimony of the Apostle Peter.

In the first Epistle of Peter (chapter 1), the Apostle reminds believers

that we have an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for us (verse 4).

Then, in the fifth verse, he tells us that, as we pass on our way to the inheritance we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. However, in the present time, says the Apostle, "ye are in heaviness through manifold trials". Still God's people are often put to grief through manifold trials, and for our comfort, the Apostle tells us three things in reference to these trials (verse 6).

First, says the Apostle, they are only "For a season". In Hebrews 11: 25, we read that the pleasures of sin are only for a season. The pleasures of the world and the sorrows of the saints are only for a season.

Secondly, Peter says there is a needs be. There is never a trial, or a sorrow, that we pass through small or great, but what there is a need for it. Our Father does not willingly afflict His children, or cause a needless tear. We may not always understand the way He takes, nor understand the need of the trial: some day we shall know. The Lord may have to say to us as He said to Peter. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." In that hereafter we shall see all things clearly, and we shall sing,

*"With mercy and with judgment,
My web of time He wove :
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lustered with His love.*

Thirdly, to comfort us in our sorrows we are told that all the trials of the present will have a glorious answer in a day that is to come. Now it is the trial of faith, then it

will be the reward of faith, when the trials will be found unto praise and glory and honour. But when will this day be? The day of death, or the day when we go to heaven? Ah no! It will be at *the appearing of Jesus Christ* (verse 7).

Thirdly, *the testimony of the Apostle John.*

Turning to 1 John 3: 1-3, we are reminded by the Apostle of the manner of the love the Father has bestowed upon us. It is not simply the fact of the love that John brings before us; but the greatness of the love which is seen in bringing us into the place of children. The world cannot see we are the children of God. It does not know us as such because it knew Him not. If the world could not see that that blessed lowly man, with all His infinite perfection, was the Son of God; there is little wonder that they cannot see that poor feeble failing people like ourselves are the children of God. However, they will see, but at present it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Now we look much like other men with the marks of age, and care, and disease upon us; but wait a little; in God's good time we shall come out in the likeness of Christ. When will this be? Not when we die, or go to heaven: but, says John, "*When He shall appear* we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

These passages suffice to show that the Holy Spirit used the Apostles Paul, and Peter, and John, to manifest that the present life is to be governed by the prospect of the second appearing of Christ in glory.

II. THE RESULTS OF THE APPEARING

We may ask, Why is so much made of the second appearing of the Lord

Jesus Christ in Scripture, rather than of the fact of our going to heaven. The Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, and chapter 1, gives us three definite reasons for the importance of the Appearing. First, it will be the day of retribution for this world. Secondly, it will be the day of rest and recompense for the people of God. Thirdly, it will, above all, be the day of Christ's triumph, the glorious answer to His lowly path of humiliation.

1. *The appearing is the day of retribution for the world.*

For long centuries God in mercy has remained a silent, though not indifferent, witness to the progress of evil in the world that has rejected, and still rejects, the Christ of God. When, however, God at last intervenes it will be in flaming fire taking vengeance on the wicked. People ask, Why does God not publicly intervene in the affairs of men? Why is war, wickedness, and corruption, allowed to go on? The answer is very obvious; it is of God's mercy that He does not directly intervene in the affairs of men; for, when He does, it must be to deal in judgment with *all* evil. For the moment God holds back the judgment, while in grace He proclaims forgiveness of sins to a world of sinners. But the day of grace hastens to its close, and will be followed by the direct intervention of God. This passage (2 Thessalonians 2: 6-9), tells us that when God intervenes, three things will happen in regard to this world.

First, are there those who have persecuted God's people? Tribulation will be recompensed to such (verse 6). Secondly, are there those who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge", rejecting every creation testimony? (Rom.

1: 28). Vengeance will overtake them (verse 8). Thirdly, are there those who have added to their ignorance of God the positive rejection of the revelation of His grace, in the Gospel? They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

But when will this take place? This same Scripture tells us plainly it will be at the appearing of Christ, for we read it will be "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels".

2. The appearing will be the day of rest and recompense to the people of God.

Let us remember that during the centuries since the Cross, and indeed before the Cross, the history of God's people has been one long history of suffering, shame, and continual persecution in one part or another of this hostile world. From the death of Abel in antediluvian days to persecution in our days, there has been little but opposition and tribulation for the people of God from a God-hating world.

Perhaps no true estimate can be formed of the appalling number of Christians done to death under Pagan Rome; but it has been reckoned that under Papal Rome, and through other religious persecutions, over fifty million Christians have been hounded to death. Think what this means. Millions and millions of men, women and children abandoned to violence, outrage, martyrdom and massacre, in the most hideous forms that devilish hate and human ingenuity could devise. For the gratification of the holiday crowds of cultivated Rome, the Christians were thrown to lions by thousands. Disguised in the skins of wild beasts they were

worried to death by dogs. Wrapped in pitch shirts they were impaled on stakes, and set on fire to illuminate Nero's garden parties. Later they were subjected to every form of agonising torture in the dungeons of the Inquisition. They were mutilated in the most revolting forms; they were stretched on the rack, they were buried alive, they were burned at the stake one by one, and they were massacred by tens of thousands.

And then, as our minds travel back over this history of persecution, let us remember another fact, which at first sight seems so mysterious — *there was no intervention of God*. The tortures, the martyrdoms, the massacres, went on unceasingly, and God did not intervene. The world, the flesh and the Devil seemed to have it all their own way, and God, apparently took no notice. The agonising cries of God's tortured people went up to heaven, but the heavens were silent. Their hands were uplifted in prayer, but no deliverance came.

Has God, then, been an indifferent spectator to the persecution of His people? Is He unmindful of their sorrows and their trials? Is He deaf to their prayers, and blind to their tears? A thousand times, No. The God that keeps a book for our names, and a bottle for our tears, and that has numbered the hairs of our heads, cannot remain unmoved by the sorrows of His people. Every tear they have shed, every sorrow they have passed through, every trial they have endured for Christ's sake, will have a glorious answer. The sorrows and trials are not forgotten, are not in vain, are not *lost*; for God says "they will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory". But when? "At the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1: 7). Millions of believers went out of the

world amidst abuse, dishonour and shame. They will come back with praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe. Therefore, says the Apostle, "You who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels (verse 7).

3. *The appearing will be the day of Christ's triumph.*

Incomparably the greatest event that the future holds for this world is the appearing of the Lord Jesus. In its vast importance it is only exceeded by the first appearing of Christ to accomplish the work of atonement. Let us gladly admit that the Cross stands in all its solitary dignity, unrivalled in time, and alone in eternity. The victories of man, that loom so large in the history of this world, will soon shrink into their own littleness, and pass into utter oblivion; but the mighty victory of the Cross will remain the one outstanding event in the history of the world. The glory of men's great victories fade even in time, and are forgotten in eternity; but time only adds fresh lustre to the Cross, and eternity will never cease to unfold its glories. But, while remembering the unique glory of the Cross, let us not forget the coming glory of the Kingdom which will be ushered in by the second appearing of the Lord Jesus. It will be the triumphant answer to His first appearing in humiliation. It will be God's answer to all the shame, insult, and indignities, that the world heaped upon the Son of God at the Cross. In the midst of

those insults the Lord could look beyond all the shame, the suffering, and the sorrow, to the day of His coming glory, and utter these solemn and triumphant words, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven". He was crucified in weakness, He will come in power. At the Cross man crowned Him with a crown of thorns; at His appearing He will come forth crowned with many crowns. At the Cross, in righteousness He bore the judgment to make peace; at His second appearing, we read, in "righteousness He doth judge and make war". The Christ of God was last seen by man nailed to a cross between heaven and earth. The next time the world sees Christ He will be coming in the clouds, and "every eye shall see Him; and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him".

Then will be displayed the "glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1: 10).

Thus from this great passage we learn that the appearing of the Lord Jesus from heaven, with His mighty angels, will demonstrate before the whole universe, first, that God has not been indifferent to all the evil, corruption, and violence that has been accumulating through the ages; secondly, that God has not been unmindful of the sorrows of His people; and, thirdly, above all it will declare that God has not passed over the dishonour and insults that men have heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

J. N. SHEPHERD

WHEN the Lord Jesus was here in the world, the temple of God in the world was "the temple of his body". No longer was there a special association between Jehovah-God and a tent of meeting, nor yet with a magnificent building at Jerusalem; but we read that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" or "in a body". So it is that we find God's Holy Spirit referred to in the Scripture as the "Spirit of Christ", and so too do we see displayed for the first time in this world — and that in complete perfection — those wonderful traits which are described in the Epistle to the Galatians as "the fruit of the Spirit". All this we can see and understand and adore, although we enter so poorly into the appreciation of it, but oh the grace which had a plan that, when He went back to glory to take His rightful place on high, the temple of God should be found in this world in a building composed of men and women.

The Holy Spirit of God has taken up His abode in a company of people here, and that company has the unspeakable privilege and the awesome responsibility of being the only temple God has in the world in the age in which we live.

The place where God placed His name of old in Jerusalem was — as well it might be — the most wonderful building ever yet seen on earth — pointing as it did and as the tabernacle did, even further back in history, to the coming of God's Son. It was all only a shadow and its excellence was only really derived from the fact that it spoke so eloquently of Jesus and His great glory. But the temple of old was concerned with one race of men

and was the centre of a scheme of earthly blessing. But when "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" a far more wonderful kind of blessing — spiritual blessing, heavenly blessing — became available not to one race of men but to everybody.

In spite of all that God has so clearly spoken in His holy word about this wonderful subject, the extraordinary fact is that by far the greater percentage even of truly Christian people in our day apparently still associates the dwelling of God with some kind of earthly building.

But God has the desire to see in this world still reproduced year by year and day by day down the ages those glorious qualities and traits which were found in our Lord Jesus Christ when He was walking in lowly grace in this world. They are found only as they are produced by the Holy Spirit of God in the company of His own. In spite of the continual work of the Spirit in our hearts, how poor is the reproduction surely in each of our lives, and yet God is able to find some small reflection in each one; and out of the whole there is perpetually going up to Him out of this world a savour of Christ. This is the privilege of the company, representing the Head in His absence, to reproduce in the lives of all who compose it the features of that life — eternal life — which has been imparted to us.

Our minds go on to consider the responsibility of the company, realising that in no other way does the world see what our blessed Saviour is like. The Father in wonderful kindness sees what is of Christ and delights in it. Even the principalities and powers in heavenly

places see God's all-varied wisdom in a many-sided figure in the church, but what of those around us in the world? Mixed with those moral traits of beauty which are, through God's wonderful grace, seen wherever His people are found, there are the division, the back-biting, the lack of affection, the spiritual pride and desire for position and authority which have alas characterised so much of that which has borne the Saviour's name down the ages in this world.

God's building is made of living stones and every stone has an important part to play in the structure of the whole: so that the privilege and responsibility of showing what our Saviour is like, rests upon us all and we cannot evade it on the plea that this is collective in the whole church of God. The church is composed of individuals and the body is composed of members and each has his or her responsibility in the whole.

A temple is a place from which worship arises, and this is especially true of this company. Unbounded, incomparable love has been poured out upon us, told in all its surpassing greatness at the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: and it has won our hearts. Thank God, He has produced in the heart something for Himself in the answering affection of which the Scripture speaks, "We love because he first loved". And

this affection leads to worship: it is the Lord's joy to lead it to the Father and as our hearts are touched by a sense of it, we take our place to join in the singing. "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee", He says to the Father, and how great the delight it must give to Him when that praise is led and attuned by the One Who is ever the joy and delight of His own heart.

The apostle, writing to the Corinthians, reminds them that this temple is "holy". This was, of course, in marked contrast to all that with which they had been previously associated: unholiness and evil of every sort had been found in the idolatrous temples of their city and they had been partakers with those who worshipped there. But God had ever maintained, even in the Old Testament pictures in the wilderness and in the land the unswerving holiness of that which was concerned with Himself. Then, when the pictures had gone and that blessed One Himself had stepped into the world, He was found here "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners". God has not lowered His standards of holiness and what was ever suited to His temple, is suited to His temple still. Let us never forget that the Holy Spirit of God dwells in us and that we are called to be filled with the Spirit.

ELISHA

ROBERT THOMSON

THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

GOD can be glorified in the everyday duties of life, and small things may lead to greater

ones, whereby honour and majesty can be brought to His Name. The occasion of Elisha's visiting Shunem

was to be of this character. As he passed by, a woman of noble birth desired to show him kindness by inviting him into her house to eat bread. This she did for him repeatedly, as he passed by, and the prophet was cheered as he availed himself of her hospitality.

Observing his manner of piety, she said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither." It is good to notice that she provides this hospitality in conjunction with her husband, although he may not have the spiritual discernment of his wife. The things provided are simple, yet so necessary to the prophet. Nothing suggests extravagance or luxury, but such as would meet the present need, affording refreshment of spirit, soul and body to the servant in his service for God.

The *bed* is for rest, so very essential for the furtherance of the work in its due season; the *table* may speak of fellowship, where things needful for life and energy are enjoyed; the *stool* could suggest the thought of meditation, and a means of humility and grace to refresh the inward man which is renewed day by day; and the *candlestick*, the vessel providing light. Thus the spirit of watchfulness is maintained. All this seasonable provision is provided by another who is likeminded, understanding the mind of God for the moment, and is appropriated by the servant who needs it.

As we fully know, God will be

no man's debtor; so the word of the prophet, given to Gehazi is, "Call this Shunammite". Her kindness to him is to be acknowledged, and he says to her, "What is to be done for thee?" The offer is given to her to be introduced to the king, or the captain of the host. No doubt his word to them would have gone a great way, seeing he had delivered them in battle! Her becoming spirit of humility is wonderfully outstanding: "I dwell among mine own people." With no thoughts of greatness, or personal importance, she is contented with her present lot. Truly, godliness with contentment is great gain!

Little did she realise that she was speaking with the prophet of the God of life and power. Gehazi had informed him that she had no child, and her husband was old, so she was called again to stand before Elisha, and he said to her, "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son". The God of Sarah and Abraham can be the same to her, as in a day to come He would be to Elizabeth and Zacharias. The wonderful news is thus conveyed to her, and faith believes the promise, though so staggering at first. The God Who quickeneth, the Origin of all life, is also the same God Who raiseth the dead, as she is to know in its appointed season. What joy of faith must have filled her heart when the child was born, and she saw him growing up in the sphere of usefulness!

A further testing was soon to come upon her when the sorrows of sickness and death were to roll in upon her spirit, by the removing of her dearly loved son in death. What can she do? To whom can she turn? For no possible relief from earthly sources can meet her present sorrow and need. Her hope and faith are

in God, and the prophet of God upon whose bed she lay the body of her son. Then shutting the door upon him, she departed to seek the man of God. In faith, she left him with God, Who seeth all, and doeth all things well. She now asks for an ass, and a servant for the journey, from her husband, who cannot see or understand the vision of faith. He is more concerned with times and seasons, which show no flexibility of grace or power. With the determination of peace, in the expression, "It shall be well", she sought with diligence the man of God until she found him at Mount Carmel.

Elisha recognises her and sends his servant to enquire after herself and her household. Again, the same answer of peace is given, "It is well". Here we see her faith laying hold upon the God of resurrection, in the darkest hour of trial; and falling down at the feet of the prophet, she finds a refuge for her sorely tested spirit. Gehazi is not in the spirit of his master, and like the disciples of Jesus, he sought to thrust her away. "Let her alone", is the word of the man of God, and he graciously listens to the outpouring of her sorrow. Now, to Gehazi is given the prophet's staff, the symbol of power, and he is commanded to take it to the child in death. It is a matter of grave urgency, requiring girded loins for the journey, which must not meet with any interruption whatsoever. The woman, however, not having proved the staff, or Gehazi, will not for a moment leave Elisha.

Perhaps Gehazi would speak of profession with no power; for every detail of Elisha's word is done; but there lacked with the servant, the true spirit of the master. Like Sardis in Revelation 3, "Thou hast

a name that thou livest, and art dead". With Elisha, we see a deep searching of heart before God, for on reaching the house and beholding the child in death upon his bed, he went in, shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord. Truly there had been the "shut door" with the woman and the oil, proving God in secret; and now the circumstances of another scene of deepest gravity call for the "shut door" and the secret of the presence of God.

The heart is released in prayer, and the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. But there is more; the contact of life with death must be made; and in the blessed secret of God's mind, Elisha lay upon the child, and with mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, and hands to hands, he stretched (or maybe contracted) himself upon the child. Now the flesh is warmed, but there is yet no visible sign of life showing. Coming to the scene again, the prophet walks to and fro in the room, suggesting to our hearts the exceeding deep exercise of soul regarding the present situation of death and life.

Again to the movements of intimate reality he applies himself, going through the same actions upon the child as before. Life is restored, and made evident in the sevenfold sneezing and the opening of the eyes. Outside the room was the mother, probably in keeping with all that the prophet was doing, and waiting upon the God Who quickeneth the dead. Gehazi is instructed to call her, and as she enters the room, once the scene of death, she is asked now to take up her son again, in life. No words are recorded by her as she obeys the prophets's request, but her actions speak louder than words. She fell

at his feet, bowed herself to the ground, took up her son, and went out. What a scene of holy reverence! The power of death had been

broken; and the joyful heart freed to contemplate God, not only as life-giver, but as the One Who can raise up from among the dead.

CORRESPONDENCE

The following letter has been received from Mr. W. M. Dunn of Coventry :

I am troubled about the use of the word assembly instead of church. The dictionary describes "assembly" as a gathering of human beings in one place; "church" as the house or home of God. These meanings give assembly a very poor standing when compared with church. I think they indicate the one to be purely human, and the other to be of God; and in practice this is borne out by the assembly being raised to a position of authority not of the Holy Spirit, but purely human. This can be seen in that these exalters of assembly have a "care" meeting, which is nothing less than an inquisition bringing those in an assembly into bondage and fear. They encourage young brethren to report on other brethren. . . . This I feel shows how vastly different is the constitution of the assembly from the home of God, "where love divine doth rest". No wonder Isaiah 1: 13 says "The calling of assemblies I cannot away with".

PERHAPS THIS LETTER arises from Mr. Wallace's paper in the March-April issue on "The Holy Spirit in the Church", in which it is explained that the word assembly is a more helpful translation than church.

It appears also that the letter refers to the Taylorites in their use of the expression "care meeting".

The latter point is of importance because of the danger of concluding that since the Taylorites have fallen into universal disrepute, everything they have stood for must be evil. Such a conclusion would be very foolish. They still eat and drink, but their doing so does not make these activities evil. Indeed many good things for which they have stood need more than ever to be reiterated for this very reason.

The question really is as to which English word most helpfully translates the original word *ecclesia*: and

in the world of the New Testament the word *ecclesia* meant just this, "a gathering of human beings in one place", usually for political purposes, when all the citizens could assemble in one place for legislative or other reasons. The word never meant a building, but always people. There can be no doubt whatever that the truest translation of *ecclesia* is assembly. The word church has become so confused in the popular mind with the idea of a building, that it has this fault in addition to being in no way a true translation of the word *ecclesia*.

In either case, however, we need to get at the fuller significance of the original word, in that it means "called out", and this does indeed fit in with the New Testament use. Several recent papers in *Scripture Truth* have endeavoured to set out the importance of the assembly in

the mind and heart of God, and therefore of His people.

Pride and treachery and cruelty remain enemies to be dealt with by each of us, first of all in himself.

They are indeed evils, but it is to be doubted whether they can fairly be attributed to the use of one word rather than another in this connection.

Several letters have been received putting the question presented in the following quotation from one of them :

In the last of the addresses on the Holy Spirit, "His work in me", there is this statement. "No one was allowed to carry a covered package through the temple." I shall be grateful if you could enlighten me as to the location of the passage.

Dr. Shepherd replies as follows :

IN THE NEW TRANSLATION of Mark 11: 15, 16, the reading is as follows. "And they came to Jerusalem and entering into the temple, he began to cast out those who sold and who bought in the temple, and he overthrew the tables of the money-changers and the seats of the dove-sellers, and suffered not that any one should carry any package through the temple." For a brief moment the only One who truly cared for the holiness of God's house wielded that authority in Jerusalem's temple and all that was concerned with man's affairs had to go. Men had converted the affairs of God's house into mercenary matters — as indeed they have done all too frequently in the religious outlook for the world today — and when men get their eyes on money, covetousness and greed so frequently

make them dishonest and deceitful. So the effort is made to bring in things under cover. The Authorised Version uses the word "vessel", but it appears to have implied anything covered: and the Lord Jesus turned it all out.

In our day that house is made of living stones, and for all who have a place in that building of which Paul writes, for example, in Ephesians 2, how vitally important it is that we should apply the lesson of openness and transparency in all our doings. Holiness becomes the house of God and if we try to countenance in our lives that which has to be covered up continually, this Scripture should be a challenge to us. Let us see to it that every department of our lives is characterised by transparency in our relations both to God and to men.

STEDFASTNESS

F. A. HUGHES

IT must be conceded by every honest mind that we are living in a day marked in every sphere by

vacillation. Irresolution, uncertainty, wavering of opinion and compromise seem to be the order of the

moment. That these features have intruded into the circle of religion is only too sadly evident. The authority of the Word of God, with its voice of divine certainty, is neglected, and often absolutely refused in favour of the vague and contradictory teachings of men.

In such circumstances the believer is exhorted to "stedfastness", a word which signifies that not only are the eyes fixed in a definite direction, but that the foot is resting on a firm base.

Before considering further the principle of stedfastness in relation to the believer, it will be well for us to see this same feature expressed in divine Persons Themselves. It is an axiom of Christianity that the blessed God will never form any feature of the truth subjectively in the believer without first showing that truth in all its perfection in Christ Himself. In Daniel chapter 6 the faithfulness of God to His faithful servant Daniel is recorded in the latter's remarkable deliverance from the den of lions. The impression made upon Darius caused that Gentile monarch to exclaim, amongst other things, "The God of Daniel . . . He is the living God, and *stedfast* for ever". The Psalmist (Psalm 102) says of God "Thou art the SAME" — a Name which persists throughout Scripture. Paul writing to Timothy in days marked by compromise and unfaithfulness, calls attention to the fact that God "abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2: 13). James refers to God as the One "with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning". (James 1: 17). We read too of our blessed Lord that "He stedfastly set His face resolutely in one fixed direction". We who love Him know something of the unutterable sorrow

and yet the mighty triumph which that pathway involved!

It is recorded of God's earthly people (Psalm 78) that "they lied to Him with their *tongues*, for their *heart was not right with Him*, neither were they stedfast in His covenant". The terribleness of that indictment is seen in the fact that whilst they did *not* continue in His covenant, the force of the verbs used indicates that they *did* continue in their deceit and outward flattery. We do not wonder that it is later said of that people they "could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance". Let us ever remember that "these things . . . are written for our admonition".

How delightful it is to see in that same Psalm the attitude of the "faithful" God to His unfaithful people. "He . . . chose . . . Mount Zion which He loved" — reminding us of the sovereignty of mercy which "endureth for ever"; "He chose David" — a man after *His own heart*, who "fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands" (cf. 2 Samuel 5: 2).

In our own dispensation — the Holy Spirit's day — we read of Stephen who "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up *stedfastly* into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7: 55). This view of heaven was for the peculiar joy and encouragement of Stephen himself — the present position of exaltation and power of Him who had "stedfastly" moved towards Calvary, and who "endured the cross, despising the shame". Stephen's *personal* portion was this view of Jesus in the glory of God, the consummation of His faithful pathway in Manhood here;

Stephen's *testimony* was "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God". The One rejected by that guilty nation was now crowned in highest glory! The words used imply that this exaltation was *permanent*.

It is not difficult to discover the secret of Stephen's steadfastness. He was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6: 5). He was also "full of grace and power" (verse 8, New Translation). The unseen filling of "faith and of the Holy Ghost" was abundantly witnessed to in the "power" of his testimony and the "grace" of his intercession.

In Acts 2: 42 we read of believers who "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers". This was the result of the Spirit-empowered preaching of Peter and the other apostles who so definitely testified to the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. Would not this indicate the character of ministry which in our day might be effective in producing the feature of "steadfastness" in those that believe? The word "steadfast" in Acts 2 might be rendered as "giving diligent attention to every detail". An unbalanced apprehension of the truth will lead to wavering and uncertainty; if stability is to be evidenced we need to be maintained in "simplicity" (singleness of heart) in regard to the truth as it is manifested in Christ.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul says "He that standeth stedfast in his heart . . . doeth well". Whilst this verse has what is special in view, the principle involved would, without question, cover every detail of the Christian pathway. Steadfast-

ness is not the result of fleshly effort, it springs from the affections being right with God. We have seen from Psalm 78 that steadfastness was absent from God's earthly people because "their heart was *not* right with Him" (verse 37). Nothing is more calculated to regulate our affections than the wonderful expression of God's own love in the gospel — "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15: 3). As we read this most remarkable chapter we see the mighty results of Christ's holy movements into and out of death — the triumph of the resurrection; the establishment of the Kingdom and the ultimate glory of the "day of God". But the end of the chapter reveals that we are ourselves to be an integral part of this wonderful matter — "thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord".

Finally, we may refer to that most beautiful verse in Hebrews chapter 3 — "For we are made partakers (or companions) of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence (assurance) *steadfast* unto the end" (verse 14). In chapter 1 verse 9 we are shown our *privilege* as companions of God's Anointed, while He is ever supreme and pre-eminent, anointed "with the oil of gladness above His (Thy) fellows". As *steadfast* may we be increasingly marked in a *practical* way by those features of faithfulness and endurance so perfectly seen in Christ.

METAMORPHOSIS

A. H. STORRIE

A RARE experience was that of the three favoured disciples on the "high mountain apart" (Matthew 17: 1-8). How thrilling actually to see the faithful Moses and the intrepid Elijah! But it was "Jesus only" who fully filled their vision, His glory eclipsing all beside, His face shining as the sun, and His humble garb dazzlingly white as the light! Thus was He transfigured, or metamorphosed, before them. And then spoke the voice "from the excellent glory". "THIS is My beloved Son . . . hear ye Him." Bright and blessed preview of the "kingdom come in power"! As Peter wrote later: "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty."

The word "metamorphosed" or "transfigured" does not actually occur in the story of Stephen in Acts 7 and 8, but the fact is there. "His face as the face of an angel" commanded the astonished gaze of his inveterate foes. "The glory of God and Jesus!" "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" He who is truly Christ-occupied becomes truly Christ-like. It was thus that Stephen "fell asleep." And his name means "a crown". "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life", is the word to the overcomer in Smyrna of tribulation days. Are we all walking in the light of the opened heavens?

"Justified freely by His grace . . . justified by faith . . . and justified by His blood." Such is the happy lot of the believer, according to the great Roman epistle: delivered, cleared before God of every charge of guilt by the righteous God Himself!

Then comes the appeal of chapter 12: 1, 2; not a command, but a beseeching founded on the compassions of God so blessedly set forth in the former part of the epistle. What do we know of sacrifice today? Have we each one responded to the appeal to yield our body — in which we express our mode of daily life — to God? It is only reasonable so to do — "a living sacrifice" in contrast to the dead offerings of former times. Are we *negatively not* conformed to this world, and are we *positively being* transformed (metamorphosed)? How is it done? Or in Paul's language: "What shall we then say to these things?" First, it calls for a strong and definite "NO" to the world and to all worldly influences. Then it demands an equally strong, but joyous, "YES" to the will of God. And how do we renew our minds? Surely by occupation with the new things of God: "If any one be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new . . ." (2 Corinthians 5: 17, 18). We have only to look at the size of our Bible of sixty-six books to see how much we have to learn.

We have looked briefly at the position of the individual Christian in Romans. 2 Corinthians deals with us collectively. And there again, in chapter 3 we meet with the word "metamorphosed", rendered, "transformed" in the Darby translation. The Lord is the spirit of the former Scripture writings referred to, and now the Spirit of the Lord leads us into liberty unknown under the Levitical system. Thus the in-

spired apostle is able to add: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are transformed (metamorphosed) into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit." Thus it is that we are transformed, and that progressively — from glory to glory. The progress will have its culmination: "... we shall be like Him,

for we shall see Him as He is . . ." (1 John 3: 2). Bright and blessed hope! Meanwhile let us:

*"Turn our eyes upon Jesus,
Look full on His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow
strangely dim
In the light of His glory and
grace."*

FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Luke 6: 12

Let us not miss the lesson which these facts should teach to everyone who seeks to follow Him. When we are most wearied by the world, then does our love of God and men call us to the solitude — "up into the mountain to pray". We must learn that the moment when earth has drained us of all strength is heaven's opportunity to help us. Wounded in the house of our friends, exhausted with the cares and trials of the day, tired out by the changing problems of life, we learn to understand the blessed paradox of the call to the weary — "Take my yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

This is the key to the discipline of prayer. The last effort of the soldier who has been fighting all day the battle of the Cross must be to climb up into the secret places of the Most High that he may rest under the shadow of the Almighty. The first act of returning consciousness after the rest of night must be to lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help. Thus shall the evening and the morning make up the new day of the soul's life.

H. S. LUNN

*Studies in Prayer, Meditation
and Discipline*



1. AN EXAMPLE OF THE LIFE OF FAITH

Exodus 3: 1-13; 4: 1, 10, 13, 14, 18-20. Hebrews 11: 23-27

FROM a purely natural point of view, Moses stands in the annals of the human race as one of the greatest of leaders. He was responsible for gathering together what must have been little more than a rabble of slaves shockingly degraded by their masters, the Egyptians. He led them out from the power of the then foremost nation of the world and from this rabble formed within months an ordered, civilised people who were themselves to become one of the major nations of the east.

But beyond all this, Moses was in fact a great man of God. He it was who was chosen by God to give man the moral law; a moral law the like of which the human race had never seen before and one that has formed the basis not only of Jewish legal practice but to this day is recognised as the basis of our own legal system. He it was who was entrusted with the details of a pattern of worship and service appropriate to the nature of God. It was a service speaking magnificently of the majesty and glory of God, of His love, of His grace and of His forgiveness. He was indeed further a man who lived right in the very presence of God. He communed with God in a most amazing and intimate way, he understood God's thoughts and intentions to the point of arguing and pleading with Him to change His mind. In the presence of God he learned the details of God's will and could then come forth to declare that will to the people and to put it into practical effect.

MOSES' BIRTH AND TRAINING

But from the particular story of this

great man who lived the life of faith to an astonishing degree, what general principles of that life can we extract for application to ourselves? Let us begin with the start of the whole matter for Moses. What was square one? What were the conditions from which he started? If we examine the circumstances into which he was born, the environment in which he was brought up, and the training and experience he had for the first third of his life, we discover that even square one was one determined throughout by God, indeed it was itself a square of faith, the outcome of the faith of his parents. After Pharaoh's daughter had saved Moses from the bulrushes, and he had been nursed by his own mother, he was brought up in the court of Egypt with all the facilities and luxury of the palace. He was educated to the highest possible degree, and if tradition is correct, trained not only as an administrator within the law and institutions of Egypt but as a military leader as well. This then was background and training God chose for this man. None of it was fortuitous. God went to great lengths to ensure that Moses was brought up and educated in Egypt, for the whole of it was part of the purpose of God for him. The general principle about square one in everyone's life of faith is I think this. Our background, our abilities and our training are all given to us of God. The family each of us belongs to is a setting fixed by God. Every bit of education we have had is part of God's plan. God knows exactly where we start in the life of faith and none of it is a fluke.

MOSES' FUNDAMENTAL DECISION

But this is just the background. The life of faith itself really began for Moses when he made the fundamental decision to leave the court of Pharaoh and to side with the people of God. Now this decision had two sides to it both of which are as important for us today as they were for Moses and on which our decision must be as clear as his. First he came to see that the society to whose way of life he was committed was based on thoroughly rotten moral ideals. He saw that the degradation of his own people was the direct result of the rule of the very court to which he belonged. He saw that all the power and luxury of that court was built on the tyranny, injustice and cruelty under which his people suffered so appallingly. And there was he, supported at such a dreadful price, in a way of life committed to pleasure, the fabulous pleasures of Egypt renowned through all time, the pleasures of the unlimited indulgence of the senses, the satisfaction of all the immediate desires of man. Against this moral system whose rottenness he now saw, he decided clearly, once and for all. He forsook the court.

Yet this decision was not only a moral one. No doubt from the time when his mother nursed him he had learnt the details of his own nation's history. He knew not only about the superstitious gods of Egypt, he knew about the God of his fathers, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And he had come to recognise that to live one's life solely in terms of the things of time and space and sense is but to play with life. Beyond the experiences of what can be seen and heard and touched, beyond pleasurable sensations and emotional thrills, lie the ultimate issues of life. For ultimately man's life is in

the hands of God. He recognised that for Israel, God's purpose was something far beyond either their present state or even the pleasures of Egypt. His plan for them was something glorious, a way of life in which there would be peace and righteousness in which men would find the ultimate satisfaction of their being in a life in harmony with God, one lived to His glory. It was to this Moses committed himself. He saw what was invisible. He became gripped by what he saw by faith and joined the people of God. His decision was thus based on two things, a recognition of the moral rottenness of the life of Egypt and a grasp of the reality of what is spiritual and eternal.

Surely the parallels in our case are clear. Is not the society in which we live most blatantly addicted to the ideals of the life of sensual indulgence? Surely even the advertisement for cigarettes which goes "When it is pure pleasure you are after, then only Player's please so much" is most fundamentally immoral. The assumption is that what you are really after in life is pure pleasure, the sensations derivable from touch and taste. The James Bond, paper-back image of life is the same — what matters most are the sensations of casual sex, of a perverse delight in the infliction of suffering on others and so on. Is not all this flatly in opposition to the life of the man of faith and is not the decision to cut with it as morally necessary for us as it was for Moses? If we are to launch out from square one in the life of faith we must recognise the moral rottenness that is denounced by God for exactly what it is.

Surely, too, our society is characterised by an alarming addiction to the things of time, space and sense. There seems to be almost

no attention given to the things the eye of faith would see. Even the existence of God, let alone His moral law and His righteousness and holiness, is rarely even seriously considered. Yet the world of time and space is set in eternity and starting out on the life of faith involves getting hold of and being gripped by just this: that what really matters in life, even in questions to do with time, space and sense, is the purpose and will of God for the world and for each of us. Seeing all this Moses forsook Egypt and joined the people of God. To us come precisely the same moral and religious demands whatever their contemporary form.

MOSES' MISTAKEN BEGINNING

But if we make the parallel decision ourselves, what then? What particular positive things are we to do? What are the specific actions each of us is called to in the life of faith? Moses was quite clear about God's ultimate goal for his people, so he obviously thought the immediate thing for him to do, was to set about helping things in the right direction as best he could. Committed to the right principles and ideals he therefore tried to use his position and training to further the interests of his people. Clearly when he came across an Egyptian and a Hebrew fighting he must do something about it. When two Hebrews fought among themselves he must cope with that too. But for all his certainty on moral and spiritual questions these actions were not part of the life of faith. Now here is a very important point, for even if we are committed on the moral question and quite sure about the general truth and purposes of God what exactly are we up to in our lives? Are we simply setting about things ourselves, doing the

best we can with what we have got, using our education and training, relying on these general gifts from God as enough, if we use them sincerely? If this is so then the result will be exactly the same as with Moses. He achieved nothing. When he sought to help his people they simply turned round on him saying "Who do you think you are?", "What right have you to interfere in our lives?" Moses discovered that he could not judge what was to be done in the life of faith as he judged things in the life of Egyptian affairs. A shift of principles and ideals was not in itself enough for him and it is not enough for us. So Moses had to leave Egypt for the inconspicuous life of Midian, as if his march of faith was halted. In fact, however, God was educating him still further, not now in the high civilization of city and court but in the life of unsophisticated simple people, another chapter in the natural training this man of God had to have, if he was to be fully used later. Yet none of this education could bring the answer to the question about what exactly he was to do for God. Only by the call of God could he know that.

MOSES' CALL OF GOD

It is one thing to decide what side you are on in life but it is another thing to discover what to do when you are on the right side. This question is in fact an intensely personal one. What precisely is God asking of you? What is He asking of me? What is your job to be professionally? What is my service in the Christian community to be? The answer is invariably something that will come as a call, and that call for you, as for Moses, is something which in its detail will ultimately affect every area of your whole life. The problem for each

of us then is to recognise God's call, so what principles can we discover from what happened to Moses? In the course of his everyday life he was one day faced with this marvel of a perfectly natural and ordinary bush ablaze with what he discovered was the glory of the presence of God. Out of this intense awareness of the reality of God and of His nature came the call to actions in which the life of a perfectly natural and ordinary man would become the vehicle for the will of God Himself. The principle in this for us is, I think, clear. The call of God in a job, in service, whatever it may be, will come to us only when we are first intensely aware of the reality of God. It cannot be found by direct hunting around. It will come when we are close to God. What is more, it will come as something absolutely consistent with the glory and honour of God, nothing that is the slightest bit morally or spiritually shady can be God's call.

Reading further into the story we can, I think, extract several other principles. The job to which he was called did not in any way appeal to Moses as the perfect thing suiting him down to the ground. The emphasis in the account is nowhere. "Here is something that suits you perfectly Moses, don't you agree?" What came to Moses was not a sense that something was tailor-made for him. It was a vision of a mighty task, of something that God wanted him to do. Moses and his satisfaction were clearly not the point. God in His calling men never appeals to them in terms of what they will get out of it. He comes to them, shows them a task to be done for Him and tells them to do it. When the call of God comes to us it will show us a need for God, a need for service, a need for a job to be done to His

glory, a job to be done by us.

Far from his thinking the job suited him fine, Moses' immediate reaction was to be quite sure it was not for him. He saw all the immense difficulties it involved. "Why me?" he said, "I haven't got the position, I wouldn't know what to say, I have no right to do this, they won't listen to me. Send someone else." But God persisted, answering every question and objection until Moses had no more to say. What this implies, I think, is that the call of God comes to us as something that persists, on and on. He will push us and push us and answer all the objections giving everything we need for the job he is thrusting us into. The principle is surely that because the task is something to be done to His glory, it will be a task that naturally strikes us as impossible, one that just cannot be done. Maybe you are being called to teach in the Congo. Then perhaps you are arguing that you have not the right qualifications, that you cannot speak French and there are family difficulties. Moses and God wrestled with their problems, and you and God must wrestle with yours. If it is the call of God then the problems will be overcome and your conviction will grow and grow until your state of mind will be like that of the Apostle Paul when he said "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel". You will know then that to do anything else can be only the grossest sin and the destruction of your life of faith. God calls, directs, leads and pushes men. They are not to push themselves.

Finally we must, I think, note in this passage that the response of Moses was a most sober and serious matter made in his maturity by a man with all his wits about him. He knew exactly what he was doing. Although faced with the glory of

God, this was certainly no merely emotional experience. Moses was cool enough to recognise perfectly what was involved, to argue back and probe the situation to the full. We must never confuse the call of God with a merely emotional beat-up. Manifestly the call is something to be talked about, even argued about, with God and needs our fullest soberest attention.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF MOSES' LIFE

So Moses became fully launched into the life of faith. To go through the stages of that life trying to learn its lessons would take a long time. The central principles of it, however, were those we have seen in its beginning. Let me therefore in summarising what I have had to say try to emphasise the importance of these principles not only in the first steps of the life of faith but at every point of it. At the same time, as the principles run counter to so many of the principles of our everyday world, let me in these six points try to indicate where the biggest struggles must come for those who seek to live the life of faith today.

First, as Moses rejected the pleasures of Egypt and as he stood firm when, descending the Mount with the law, he saw the degeneracy of his own people, so we must stand firm against any fashionable morality which is contrary to God's will. Secondly, we must, like Moses, when tempted by the life of pleasure and frustrated by the practical difficulties of the desert journey, hang onto the invisible things of faith. Thirdly, as Moses recognised not only when in Egypt but also when faced with the ambition, rivalry and jealousy of others, so must we recognise that the will of God is never accomplished by pushing, plotting and scheming for ourselves and for others. Whatever

others may do the Christian must know that in his job or in his Christian service the pushing is to be done by God.

Fourthly, the man of faith, like Moses, must be a man of self-control. Endlessly in his experience with the people this came out. In the end, pressed almost beyond bearing, he slipped once, lashing out in anger. That he thereby lost the privilege of entering the promised land only highlights the truth that the life of faith is essentially one of the control of one's body and mind, never one of undisciplined indulgence. Fifthly, as in the case of Moses, so in our case, everything hinges centrally on prayer and communion with God. Over and over again Moses claimed God's promises, thrashing things out in communion with Him whenever he was faced with difficulties. To the non-Christian this is all at best a waste of time, at worst an immoral escapism from the realities of the situation. Sixthly, Moses knew that whatever the public context of his life, his communion with God must be in absolute privacy. In the modern world it seems almost impossible to be alone. Doing things together sometimes seems almost an obsession and indeed there seems to be such a widespread fear of being alone that the radio, television and juke-box are perpetually being used to fill in every minute not occupied by others. But the story of a man's spiritual life with God is something essentially private and without this flourishing source the life of faith for you or me is doomed.

Moses' life of faith ended as it began, alone in the presence of God. Having made every possible provision for the people, he was summoned by God up Mount Pisgah. We can imagine his climbing into the clouds as he had done so many

times before and then the clouds clearing to reveal in a great panorama the promised land itself. Here indeed was at the last a triumphant confirmation of all that he had seen by faith. And finally we are simply told that Moses died "by the word of the Lord". Another translation expresses this more beautifully saying that he died "by the kiss of

God" — a more perfect seal to that life of intimate communion between God and Moses it would be hard to imagine.

May God grant that everyone of us may so walk the life of faith that to the very end we may, like Moses, know the intimate presence of God, even until He calls us to cease from our labours to be for ever with Him.

MOSES

COLIN CURRY

2. A TYPE OF CHRIST

Acts 7: 17-25, 35-40. Hebrews 3: 1-6

A CONSIDERABLE problem arises in attempting to outline the prophetic aspects of the story of Moses. The relevant biblical material is extensive and diverse, and not easy to reduce to a brief and coherent whole. But there are the plainest of statements in Scripture that such an approach to the biblical teaching which centres around Moses is a valid and important thing to attempt. In each of the present passages statements of this kind are to be found. Stephen (Acts 7: 37) quotes Moses as looking on to One greater than himself, and in some senses like himself: "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me;" The writer to the Hebrews, too, speaking of the faithfulness of Christ, finds the illustration of it in Moses: "Christ Jesus, Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful. . . ." Such verses can be treated as some compensation for the problems of this undertaking, and also as encouragement to tackle them.

Attention will be restricted to the person of Moses alone, and to some of the ways in which it is possible

to see beyond him to Christ. Other matters, closely connected with his story (like the brazen serpent, the manna, the tabernacle details and procedures, for instance) must be passed by as side-issues to the main theme. The passages in Acts 7 and Hebrews 3 not only justify this way of considering Moses, but seem also to indicate lines on which to proceed. Using the narrative of Acts 7, parallels can be drawn between Moses and Christ from the story of the birth and the early life of Moses, from the kind of reception he was given by others, from the various aspects of the mission entrusted to him by God. Over and above this, is that spirit of faithfulness and service with which he accomplished his mission, emphasized particularly in the passage in Hebrews. Not only in what he did, but in the way he did it, lessons are to be learned from Moses as to the work and spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF MOSES

No-one can read the story of the child Moses without thinking of the parallel in the early days of our Lord. A cruel edict was in force

at the time of his birth, and his survival was a matter of providence. So too with our Lord Jesus, soon after His birth, His enemy was at work and the flight into Egypt was necessary for the defeating of his intentions.

But first, attention may be drawn to other points in the passage relating to the birth of Moses. His birth was *timed*, it was *opportune*; and his early life was virtually *unnoticed*, except by those most closely concerned. "The time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn unto Abraham, . . . In which time Moses was born . . ." (Acts 7: 17, 20). It was all according to plan. At the right time God had His man to meet the situation. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4: 4, 5). That it was the opportune moment needs no pointing out. The oppression, the slavery and the groaning in Egypt were very real, and God had not overlooked it. The enemy had reached his limit, beyond which he would not be allowed to go; his power was to be shattered and the people of God released. Yet God's intervention, in its first stages at least, was unnoticed. Great things were afoot and practically nobody knew. Pharaoh was increasing his grip on the people of God, yet God's deliverer survived unscathed and was growing up and being prepared for his mission, unknown to almost all concerned. Indeed it was happening in the closest proximity to the adversaries of God and of His people. How easily this brings to mind the story of the greater adversary than Pharaoh, and the greater deliverer than Moses in the early stages of His life on earth.

THE ATTITUDES SHOWN TO MOSES

Moses' reception, on almost every hand, was the opposite of recognition for what he was. The enemy of God was busy, yet missing the real mark of his enmity, though causing much havoc and sorrow in other senses. Apart from this outright opposition to God there was unawareness by those who might have been aware. This seems to be a repeated aspect of the story of Moses: ". . . he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not" (Acts 7: 25). Of our Lord it was said "He came unto his own, and his own received him not". This in a sense is almost worse than "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (John 1: 10, 11). From Pharaoh the only response to Moses was resistance and hardening of heart, until nothing but complete overthrowing could be his. From those whom God sought to save and bring out from bondage there was delay in recognition of the one who could do it. "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" was their reaction to him. Even when God was manifestly working for them the tale of unbelief still continued. "To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back unto Egypt" (Acts 7: 35, 39). In the speech in Acts 7, Stephen is gradually working towards the crowning act committed by men in the rejection of Christ; and he fastens the guilt of it especially on the leaders of the people who ought to have recognized and received Him. He argues that throughout their national history their attitude had always been the same. The parallel between Moses and Christ, in the treatment

given to them, is clearly implied; the guilt of refusal of Christ exceeds that of those who rejected Moses, of course, yet the features of that unbelief are similar.

THE MISSION OF MOSES

Despite the general adverse reception given to Moses, he had a God-given mission to achieve, and he fulfilled all that he was raised up to do. Some of the functions which Moses performed in that mission from God clearly have their parallel, in a greater way, in Christ; and most of these are indicated in the passage in Acts 7.

"This Moses . . . the same did God send . . . to be a ruler and a deliverer" (verse 35). First in sequence in the passage, and emphasized in the other passage too, is the thought of Moses as God's *agent*, God's *envoy*. He was sent by and acting for God in effecting the redemption of His people. "I have seen the affliction of my people, I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt" (verse 34). The writer to the Hebrews speaks of Christ as "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession", and immediately makes the comparison with Moses. The word apostle simply means one sent on a mission, and it needs no demonstration that Moses was the apostle of God to his people in a special way, more outstandingly perhaps than any other Old Testament character. How frequently, too, does the New Testament page draw attention to our Lord in this way, as the great and unique One Whom God sent into the world, through Whom He has acted in the fullest and final way?

Secondly, the object for which Moses was sent was "to be a ruler, and a deliverer", and this aim was

achieved in the great exodus from Egypt and the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host. The need for that deliverance was acute; the misery of His people, beforehand, had been noted in detail by God, and allowed up to a point. But the intervention when it came was effective and complete. Not without opposition, but nevertheless drastically and decisively, God acted through His servant Moses; the enemy was routed and his grip on them broken. What a view this provides of the work of the greater Deliverer than Moses! It is indeed a graphic and moving illustration of His great victory for His people.

From that moment Moses was their *leader*. "He brought them out . . ." (verse 36); a mighty exodus from all the misery and bondage took place. "Our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10: 1, 2). They were committed to him as their leader and ruler. His was the authority, given by God; on their part, obedience and readiness to follow were expected. To challenge that leadership was a serious matter (see, for example, Numbers 16). So Christ, in a greater way still, is the Lord and leader of His people, and confidence in Him in every situation must always be right and wise. The lesson of those who displeased God, and fell in the wilderness, is a searching one for ourselves too. A nominal committal to Christ is not enough; it is the faith that will follow and obey Him that counts.

In the third place, the functions of *spokesman* and *prophet* are among the prominent ones which Moses fulfilled. In the various situations which arose, in Egypt and later too, he represented God in passing on His word and message

for each occasion. How frequently, for example, was the expression "Thus saith the Lord" used by Moses to Pharaoh alone. The voice of God to His opponent came through Moses and met with increasingly determined opposition. With similar directness, too, words of guidance from God were given through Moses to His people in all the details of their journey as it took shape.

Yet again, and of great importance, it was Moses who was raised up to act as *mediator* of the covenant. In a special way he acted as God's spokesman in introducing that great revelation of God which was given at Sinai. Moses "received the lively oracles of God to give unto us" (verse 38). There the mind and character of God was revealed. In our Lord's day there were many zealous disciples of Moses, with a high regard for the revelation and teaching which he introduced. "We know that God spake unto Moses", they could say, "but as for this fellow we know not from whence he is" (John 9: 29). They did not accept Christ as the One Who represented and revealed God in a still more wonderful way. Yet such was His claim, and its truth is proved by those who commit themselves to Him. God had spoken in earlier days through the prophets, and not least through Moses; but He has "in these last days spoken unto us in his Son" (Hebrews 1: 1-3). Here, at last, is the full and complete declaration of God, which surpasses by far all the limited and preparatory communications which preceded it.

It was nevertheless a unique and wonderful revelation of God which was given at Sinai. His law, His lofty standards, His character were made plain; but along with this the impossibility of meeting His require-

ments was immediately demonstrated. It was a two-party arrangement, and men were incapable of fulfilling their part in it. So, while it was, and is, a glorious display of God, little or no comfort for men was to be found in it. Fear overwhelmed the recipients of the law when it was given. "The law . . . was weak through the flesh" (Rom. 8: 3); "If that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second" (Heb. 8: 7). The need for the "better covenant", of which Christ is the mediator, was immediately apparent. This, by contrast, is a unilateral agreement; it is dependent on God alone, and is made effective in the death of Christ. It should however be seen clearly that what was revealed about God at Sinai has not been cancelled, or lowered in any way, in the greater manifestation of God which Christ has made. Our Lord held high the standards of the law. He ratified it, and gave it a deeper and more searching meaning too (see, for example Matthew 5: 17ff.). He fulfilled it in more senses than one. He kept it perfectly, in both the letter and the spirit of it; something which no other than He could possibly do. He fulfilled it too in the sense that the law prepared the way for Him; He was the end which the law awaited, and towards which it pointed. The need of men, discovered by the law of Moses, could only be met in Christ: the power too to live in ways which are suitable to God, could only be provided in Him. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17).

THE SPIRIT OF MOSES

Finally, the passage in Hebrews draws attention to the way in which Moses performed the services to

which God called him. In this, as well as in the services themselves, features of Christ are to be recognised: and it is the *faithfulness* of Moses which is picked out as his outstanding characteristic, suggesting and illustrating the faithfulness of Christ Himself.

The general impression gained from the biblical account of the life of Moses is certainly of this kind. His was a consistent life of faithfulness to God and to His people, over long years. A failure is mentioned on a rare occasion, it is true, but the general impression remains, and is a strong one. Moses was indeed "faithful to him that appointed him". To the people in his charge, too, again and again he showed his concern for their interests and his patience with them in difficult and trying experiences. We are easily reminded here of One Who was like Moses, though above and beyond him, in these characteristics. As well as the similarities some differences are also to be noted, as the verses point out. Moses was high in rank among those who have served God, but Christ is greater than any servant of God. Christ's faithfulness was perfect in every detail: there were no shortcomings there, no wrong reactions whatever the provocations He received.

But in a few special places the likeness of Moses to the One Whose attitude he reflects is very striking indeed, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the incident which appears in Exodus 32; and it seems appropriate to refer briefly to this in conclusion. The people under Moses' care had committed the grossest sin in his absence, making and worshipping the golden calf, and this so soon after their solemn undertaking to fulfil all that God had commanded. In the whole of the life-story of Moses possibly

nothing is more moving than the account of his urgent pleading with God on behalf of his people in that situation.

One part of the attitude taken by Moses was an intense jealousy that God's honour should not be stained as a consequence of their sin. He makes a fervent plea, based on what the enemies of God would say if He now abandoned the people for whom He had acted so signally in the past. This plea is an effective one too: God will continue with the people to whom He is committed, though His wrath is stirred against their sin. Nor does Moses belittle their sin in any sense; he concurs entirely with God's assessment of it. "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin . . ." he says, on returning to the mountain, feeling the shame of it and the great problem it creates.

Yet, along with this deep concern for the name and the honour of God, he also shows a devotion to the people he represents, in spite of their great sin. In great earnestness he proposes a solution which indicates how selfless is his zeal that they should be spared and reclaimed. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin —; and if not, blot me I pray thee, out of thy book which thou has written" (verse 32). He would forgo everything himself, in order that they might be restored to favour.

What Moses suggested could not be accepted by God, and it was in fact quite beyond his ability to undertake. Only Christ could suffer for sin, the just for the unjust. No mere man, however eminent, could do this. Our Lord is the one true mediator between God and men; His work in suffering for sin is unique and incomparable. Perfect devotion to God, perfect love to the sinner, in action as well as intent-

ion, show themselves in Him in ways which are beyond adequate description, but which command our admiration and response.

Every illustration which focusses our thoughts on this is of value; and it must surely be agreed that con-

sideration of the story of Moses, mere man though he was, yields some wonderful insights into that great work which our Lord Jesus has undertaken, and into the spirit of grace and faithfulness of the One Who has accomplished it.

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD (continued)

J. N. SHEPHERD

THE human body is a very wonderful structure designed in the wisdom of God for the special purpose for which man was fitted with regard to his life in this world for the pleasure of God. In common with all other parts of God's handiwork, it is as perfect when examined under the microscope as it is in its overall appearance when seen simply as a whole: and every organ is ideally suited to the function for which it is provided in the body. But our bodies are not just collections of organs suitable to sustain life: each is an integrated whole and functions under the control of a head marvellously adapted and connected to exercise that control over the whole process of life, both voluntary and involuntary. Certainly the psalmist was right in saying that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made". From our heads, we receive the nourishment of our bodies: from our heads also the actions of our bodies are directed and these actions are co-ordinated in our heads as well. Thus, if we desire to walk, all the complicated

movements of muscles necessary to this end are brought into play by impulses conveying messages to them from our brains: these movements have to be co-ordinated or they would be useless, for example, the muscles of one leg would not work in harmony with those of the other.

How gracious it is of God to have given to us such an effective picture of what He intends to be the method of working of His church in the world.

It is a striking fact that the great ecclesiastical organisations of Christendom do claim to represent in one way or another, the body of Christ — usually spoken of as His "mystical" body. So evident and important are the passages of the apostle Paul's writings on this subject in the Scriptures, that it would be obviously impossible for them to be ignored by any organisation of this character: it surely must also be essential for every individual Christian to examine his or her position in the light of them.

The first mention of this subject

is to be found at the close of the supremely important discussion of the doctrine of the gospel in the epistle to the Romans. Having elaborated his theme of the mercy of God in the gospel over its first eleven chapters, the apostle challengingly presents the only reasonable answer to it in the lives of all true Christians at the beginning of chapter 12. If our bodies are truly yielded to God as he so forcibly urges that they should be in the first two verses of that chapter, we shall indeed be brought to a true measure of ourselves. And as we are so brought we shall find that we have a place and a function along with all others who belong to the wonderful designation of being "in Christ".

Whether we read in the epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians or the Ephesians, we are met with the same consistent emphasis on the origin and the constitution of this "body".

Certainly its source is divine: it is "the body of Christ", "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" and again "now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him". So that we may see the whole Godhead concerned in its establishment.

Again in each Scripture there is the evident setting forth of the fact that every one who belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ has a place and function in this organism. Indeed in the Corinthian Epistle the apostle (1 Corinthians 12: 21, 22) clearly shows that each member is a necessity in the whole and that none can be dispensed with by others. But it is possible that some might so well have learnt the lesson of their own personal "nothingness" that they might not consider themselves

to have a place in the body at all: this error too is carefully corrected (1 Cor. 12: 15-18) and in this connection how great a lesson it is still to discover that the particular place that we occupy in the body is God-given and God-ordained and is pleasurable to Him. What a dignity there is in fulfilling a function which has been marked out individually for us in the counsels of God! This is a great and high privilege and can only be carried out in the Spirit's power. The very thought of our proper places as members of this body should remove every element of jealousy and envy in the carrying out of our particular function and yet the Christian church down the ages has given all too many occasions for the enemy to exploit, of dissensions arising from the desire of a Christian — often a devoted one at that — to carry out some other member's work.

If we look again for one moment at the figure it will be at once apparent that no human body could function if it were merely a multiplicity of one organ: it would not be a body at all and 1 Corinthians 12: 19 applies for us exactly the same lesson with regard to the body of Christ. And yet how many so-called "churches" have over them men who have presumed to claim the functions of many members in their own persons.

As we consider the grace which has given to each of us a part to play in the work of the church in the world in our day, may we all be challenged personally to seek from God to know for what He has fitted us individually, and then, without jealousy for other peoples' work and also without desiring to do things for which we have not been fitted, may we endeavour in dependence upon Him, humbly and consistently to carry it out.

PROVING GOD

R. THOMSON

Malachi 3: 10

THE prophecy of Malachi, coming as it does at the end of the Old Testament, is given as an encouragement to the people of God, who were living in a very dark and dismal day. The spiritual condition of the nation of Israel was very low, when materialism was exalted, and God was despised. This was a very serious matter indeed, calling for divine judgment on them. Yet we see the sovereign goodness of God towards them, speaking of messengers who would bring them good tidings and prepare the way for great blessing. The name "Malachi" means "my messenger", and there is also a reference to John the Baptist as My messenger, who shall prepare the way before Me, and to the Lord Himself, as the Messenger of the covenant, Who shall suddenly come to His temple (Malachi 3: 1).

The first part of Malachi 3 declares that Christ will come suddenly to His temple and establish the covenant of blessing with Israel. Everything will be purged and purified by Him, and those who practice evil, dealt with in judgment. Because of His unchanging character, like the One Who dwelt in the bush, the sons of Jacob were not consumed. The middle part of the chapter deals with the charge of guilt against the nation. They had wandered from God, had not kept His commandments, and had robbed Him through their covetousness, withholding that which was His due. Looking beyond this despicable treatment, He offers them the blessings of repentance which would eclipse their deepest thoughts or desires. It was when they had

brought ALL their tithes into the storehouse, for the maintenance of God's house, that He promised to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing upon them, which they would not be able to contain. This would be earthly blessing, consequent upon their proving Him. The last section of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4 wonderfully describe the response of the remnant and the Lord's very sweet remembrance of them. He hearkened (bended low His ear), He heard, He wrote a book of remembrance concerning them. He said, "They shall be mine", and "I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him".

There are two sides which must be taken into account in connection with proving God, if we are to know the fulness of the blessing He has to bestow. First of all, as belonging to God, we must willingly give Him all which is rightly due to Him. "Bring ye ALL the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house". Secondly, there must be the appreciation of the faithfulness of God, that He will fully meet the need with richest blessing from Himself. "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3: 10). In tithing, a tenth had to be given to God for His work and service, according to the law of Moses, as also other freewill tithings (Nehemiah 10: 38). So the appeal was to bring ALL the tithes into the storehouse. Render bountifully unto God, and He will render

bountifully unto you, for He loveth a cheerful giver. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9: 6). With God is the ability to make the fulness of His grace abound toward us, so that not only is our need completely met, but when we abound in every good work, much thanksgiving ascends to God.

The farmer who gave much for Christ's sake, was asked the reason why he was so prosperous when he gave so much away. His happy reply was that God used a larger shovel than he did.

An opposite instance was the case of a man who was so poor that he said he would have to take his aged father to the "poorhouse". Having to carry him on his back, he rested him upon a stone by the way, whereupon his father began to weep. When the son asked him the reason for the tears, the father said that it was just thirty years since he rested his father on the same stone on his way to this place. Then the son, with a sorrow-touched conscience, picked up his father and brought him back home to care for him as long as his life should last. How true it is that, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap".

God delights to be proved as to His promises. As to giving, He says, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom" (Luke 6: 38). The leper proved Jesus, when he said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean". How readily the answer came, "I will, be thou clean". Also the woman of Syro-Phenicia in all her desire for her daughter, could prove Him in a very blessed way,

although she herself was an outsider in relation to Israel. She could behold, by faith, the windows of heaven opening upon her, as she exclaimed, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." No doubt there would be a handful of purpose allowed to fall for her, bringing the abundance of divine mercy within her reach.

Perhaps an outstanding instance would be when Peter addressed the Lord walking on the sea, saying, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Immediately the answer came in one word, "Come". Could Peter really experience this power? If so, he must step forth from the boat, and rely completely and absolutely on Jesus. This he did, and proved the marvellous, sustaining power of the Lord drawing him to Himself, above and beyond every natural means of obstruction. We know that he soon began to sink, as his eyes were taken from beholding Jesus, to the storm around. Then, as the cry of need came from him, "Lord, save me", the salvation of the Lord was present to preserve him.

Considering Abraham in the place of intercession before God, we behold him proving the Judge of all the earth for His mercy upon the stricken cities of the plain. Plea after plea was requested from the One Who delights to answer the sincere petitions of faith, which in their boldness and fervour sought deliverance for the cities if ten righteous persons could be found therein. At this figure of ten (from fifty) Abraham stopped interceding, and God was prepared to stay His judgment if such could be found, for His friend Abraham's sake.

The poor widow also proved God in her own way, by giving her all to the treasury of the temple. The

two mites, her sole possessions, were given gladly and willingly to Him Who could meet the need of the widow with His unfailing abundance. Another instance of the excessive giving of God is seen in the experiences of the apostle Paul regarding his service for the Lord. Writing of his many and varied afflictions for the gospel, he says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen" (2 Corinthians 4: 17, 18).

Again, the same writer would exhort us to present our bodies to God, upon the altar, as living sacrifices, which is our intelligent service (Romans 12: 1). We are to be separated from the system of this

world, and transformed by the renewal of the mind, proving what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. He is looking for those who are ready and willing to be dedicated, sanctified and consecrated to Himself, experiencing His goodness as He takes complete charge of our lives. Once we walked in darkness; now we are light in the Lord and should walk as children of light, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. By this blessed experience of proving what is excellent in His sight, we manifest the fruit of the light, in goodness, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5: 10).

May we know more of proving God in reality and truth, and also experience the blessed results which flow from such wonderful occupation with Himself.

FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

" WITH ONE ACCORD "

THE use of this expression in the Acts casts a most interesting light on Christian unity. There are ten occurrences in the book of Acts, and one in Romans 15: 16, although in the latter case the same expression is translated "with one mind". The more naturally story-telling instances present a clear picture of a number of people *acting* under an impulsive feeling, rather than as the result of considered thought of an intellectual quality. On other matters than the subject of the impulsive feeling, they might be of profoundly divergent points of view, but these differences are engulfed in the surge of emotion leading to action.

The effect described can well be

for evil as well as for good, and vigilance is needed to exclude conditions which nurture the impulses leading to evil action. Nevertheless it is the instances to be discerned. In Acts 7 we have the story of Stephen's defence and martyrdom: his speech before the council is recorded. The council was composed of men of the most diverse views — Pharisees and Sadducees, normally literally ready to be at each other's throats. But under the sudden impulse of hatred arising from the pangs of conscience awakened by the fearless speaker, "they cried out with a loud voice; and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the

city, and stoned him" (Acts 7: 57, 58).

The scene in Acts 19 is in some respects similar. After Paul had been more than two years in Ephesus, "there arose no small stir" about his message. In fear of loss of trade in making silver shrines for Diana, the silversmiths and others of related crafts stirred up the whole city to confusion and uproar. This immense crowd, not knowing why they were so tumultuously assembled, and some crying one thing and some another, seized the preachers and "rushed with one accord into the theatre". All the limitless personal differences of a whole city were at that moment engulfed and caught up in the stream of greed and hatred and acted in harmony.

One can imagine a building filled with brethren of all shades of judgment and belief, and all maintaining their differences; but if the cry arose "Fire", everyone — ecclesiastics and evangelists, intellectuals and others — would act in complete unison and harmony — to find the quickest exit!

In those instances in the early chapters of Acts where the principle acts for good, what, in place of the hatred, greed and fear supplying the impulsive feeling in the evil cases already considered, is the origin of the impulse at work? It is impossible to escape the impression that it is the Holy Spirit so recently given from heaven. His power and action, according to the Saviour's promise, was to be a stream with an *upflow* in worship to God, and an *outflow* to a needy world, witnessing of Christ (John 4: 4 and 7: 38). Surely this was the origin of the impulsive and intuitive surges of feeling which lifted these disciples right out of and above themselves and their

differences and divisions, and carried them along in action "with one accord", bringing glory to God and gospel blessing. Their differences of judgment and viewpoint were not removed, and never will be, until we all arrive in heaven at the unity of the faith. But they were lifted out of the whole realm of dispute and disagreement (which still existed) into the realm where Christ is all and in all, and hence they acted "with one accord".

The references are Acts 1: 14, 2: 46, 4: 24, and 5: 12. In the first, the waiting disciples "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women". After the addition to the Church of three thousand souls following the descent of the Spirit, the whole company were continuing daily with one accord in the temple with gladness of heart. It is once again relative to prayer that we read in 4: 24 that they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and this leads to the stirring description that "the multitude of them that believed were one heart and soul" (not "of one heart and soul"). Then there follows the catastrophe of Ananias and Sapphira, with the consequent great fear, while the disciples were continuing with one accord in the temple.

It is finally very interesting that after the council described in Acts 15 to deal with the most bitterly divisive of all the controversies of the New Testament Church, we read of a "one accord" in judgment and decision which was not an impulsive feeling, but the result of deliberation. Was this success in the attainment of one mind on a deeply controversial subject based on and made possible by the one accord of heart and feeling already so much in evidence?

1. THE WORD

IN a great organ pipe, as also in that other most marvellous instrument, the human voice, the primary sound produced by the sounding cord is of tiny magnitude and mixed content: but the sound heard, which fills a great building with music, is the one which is in resonance with the size and shape of the pipe or other resonating chamber. It is this resonance, this exact fitting together of the separate agencies, which produces so impressive a result.

In the story of the Acts there are in operation four parties: God, the Word, the Servant, and the Hearer, and it is only when these four, under God, are in resonance, in proper co-operation with each other, and response to each other, that the hearers are brought into the Way, with new life from God. In this first paper we shall consider one of the four: the Word.

In this book of Scripture, the Word is spoken of as a thing of living energy. The Word grew (6: 7, 12: 24, 19: 20) multiplied, (12: 24) spread itself (13: 49) prevailed (19: 20). This naturally calls to mind the working of the Word in the parable of the sower. It is the appointed instrument by which the work of God proceeds. It is living and working. Like seed it grows and multiplies, and by multiplying it spreads and has in itself the power to get the victory.

This living activity of the Word first appears in Acts 6. When the apostles gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, then "the Word of God grew, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the

priests were obedient to the faith."

Herod Agrippa I was an able and influential king, brought up in Rome as an intimate of the imperial family. In Acts 12: 21 he was probably about to proclaim himself Emperor of the East in Caesarea, and on a set day he appeared in such dazzling splendour that his audience acclaimed his speech as the voice of a god. At that moment the angel of the Lord intervened again and smote him so that he died of a loathsome and horrible disease. Thus came to a full stop the plans by which his power was to grow, multiply, spread and prevail — *but*, "the Word of the Lord grew and multiplied".

In the next chapter is preserved the address given by Paul in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. At first many Jews believed, but when, on the next sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God, the Jews were filled with envy, and as they rejected the Word, their refusal became the occasion of Paul's turning to the Gentiles and so "the Word of God spread itself abroad throughout the whole region".

After spending three months in the synagogues at Ephesus speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19), Paul based his ministry for a further two years on the lecture-hall of Tyrannus. From this place all in Asia heard the Word, and striking signs accompanied it. It proved itself superior to sickness and demon-possession, to vagabond Jews and curious arts — "so mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed".

The manner in which this vigorous and effective influence was let loose and spread abroad appears to

have two main facets. The first fulfils the command to go out, and concerns the places where the crowds of all sorts and conditions of men could be contacted in a listening mood, places such as synagogues and market places. According to the second facet, interested hearers were separated and given further instruction for longer periods, as in the case just mentioned, when Paul separated the disciples and taught them daily in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus. To these two facets correspond the two main classes of words descriptive of the activity of the preachers. On the one hand they were heralds, making a public proclamation in the name of the highest authority, that of God. On the other hand the Word was taught and reasoned.

What was the Word which manifested such power and produced such happy results? The Bible is, of course, the Word of God; and the Son is Himself the Word who was in the beginning with God, and indeed was God. In the narrative of the Acts, it appears that the Word of God combines these two ideas. "Preach the Word", says Paul to Timothy, "Be instant in season and out of season," and there can be no doubt what was the Word which they preached. They preached Christ out of the Scriptures. That all-glorious Name was the sum and substance of their message. The reason for the great joy which came to Samaria is described in two parallel phrases. "Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them, and the people with one accord gave heed" (8: 5). Then (verse 14) "the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God". To receive the preaching of Christ was to receive the Word of God. Preaching the Word of God is

preaching Christ. The next part of the history takes Philip down to the southern desert, and there he meets the eunuch returning from Jerusalem and reading the prophet Isaiah. The place of the Scripture which he read was "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter", and beginning at that Scripture Philip preached unto him Jesus. Philip took his stand on a passage of the Word which is the Bible, and preached unto him the Word which is Jesus.

The fullest account of Paul's synagogue addresses is that mentioned earlier, the record in Acts 13 of his discourse at Antioch in Pisidia, but the theme is summarised most tersely in 17: 3, the account of another synagogue address in Thessalonica. There he "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging" two things: first "that Messiah must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead", and second, "that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Messiah".

A great central feature of all the preaching of Christ in the Acts is the witness of the Resurrection. Once and again "they preached through Jesus the Resurrection from the dead" (4: 2); "with great power gave the apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4: 33); "he preached unto them Jesus and the Resurrection" (17: 18).

Such was the message by which the world was turned upside down; by which great joy was brought to cities; by which the worship of false gods was overthrown; by which haughty Pharisees and strangers from distant lands were brought to the feet of Jesus; by which the Lord added daily unto the Church such as were being saved.

It is not the prime purpose of this paper to ask the question, but it is worth asking. What is the content of the message you preach from the

pulpit or teach in the Sunday School, and from what source did you get it? Many preach what they have heard others preach, and this may be good in result, but it may not! The message we preach should be the Word of God, and whatever help we may receive from others, it should come immediately from God through the written Word. Others

will really help us only insofar as they lead us to receive the message ourselves from this pure fountain. "The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of those that published it." "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake".

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

J. STODDART

Gleanings from Cheltenham 1965

CHAPTER I

WHY should we read the Epistle of James? It is possible that this and other related questions suggest themselves to the mind when challenged to study this epistle. Did not the scholarly reformer Martin Luther at one time reject this, calling it "an epistle of straw"? Was there not indeed much dispute as to its inclusion in the canon of Holy Scripture? Were such objections not based on the lack of distinct Christian features such as the death of the Lord Jesus (only vaguely referred to in chapter 5, verse 6), His shed blood and His resurrection (not mentioned at all)? And true it is that only twice in the epistle is the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned. Such considerations, indeed, cannot be lightly dismissed, but much profit and instruction would be lost if we allowed them to deprive us of the inspired message clearly gained from a study of the Epistle. Let us encourage our hearts, therefore, to seek the Lord's mind and His help in our present study, devoting ourselves less to the purely literary and academic points than to the intensely practical teaching of the Holy Spirit in James.

Not in this epistle do we find the build-up of wonderful doctrine which takes us into the heights of Christian revelation; for this we would rightly refer to Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. Our first impression of James might be an assortment of unconnected and unrelated verses on a wide variety of themes. And yet careful examination makes us conscious of a weight of truth which challenges our faith in its practical expression and outworking. Our present study has in mind, therefore, not only that we should learn the language of the epistle but feel the impact of its teaching upon our daily lives and seek to obey. Herein lies the whole value and authority of this or indeed any other Scripture, rather than in prolonged and tedious efforts to establish the identity of the writer or find the answers to critical objections.

Another has already said that a mistaken impression of James is that of a hard, legal kind of man, laying down the law rather severely for us all. Practical and scathing of hypocrisy he certainly is, but not without a great affection for those to whom he writes. And affection

is always a sure way to our hearts! He remembers that although there are twelve tribes in the mind of God, and therefore in his own thoughts as he writes, they are nevertheless "scattered abroad" and in need of encouragement. Affection sees the need for encouraging one another, and though we may not be numbered among the twelve tribes we know the experience of being among the scattered people of God who are nevertheless one in His sight.

The note of joy at the start of this letter is surely a stimulus to all who know the testings and rigours of Christian testimony. The relevance of this to our day and generation is thus established at the very outset. Hebrew people who became Christians quickly knew what it was to "fall into divers temptations" (or testings) but they were to "count it all joy" when they did. So begins the major theme of this chapter, that of temptation. We shall see that the word "temptation" has two distinct meanings in our chapter, readily dividing it into two sections; firstly its meaning is that of testing, proving by adversity up to verse 12. From verse 13 onwards its meaning is that of inducement to evil from within or stimulated from without. With regard to its first sense of trial and adversity, the true Christian reaction is to "count it all joy". This is surely the reverse of what comes more naturally to us, to say, "Why should this happen to me?" It has been said that what happens to us is less important than our reaction to the happening. This is true, and the joyful Christian reaction is produced by his knowledge that the testing of faith is to produce endurance (patience) in his life (see verse 3). It is not a matter of mere natural fortitude but active

faith strengthened by the testing, resulting in joy and endurance. How we would covet this much needed quality, but endurance or steadfastness must in turn "have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (verse 4). We believe that God has a very wise and loving purpose in every trial that happens to us, and it springs from His desire that we should be complete and lack nothing, that we should be mature (perfect), growing from babyhood into full-grown Christian men and women.

But are we not often lacking in the wisdom, the know-how to understand the lesson He would teach us in the trial? So often we say, "Why does God allow this to come my way?" because He doesn't work by surrounding us with merriment and pleasure. In this way we are made aware of the need of a wisdom we lack, but a wisdom which is available to us. So says verse 5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, Who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." We cannot fail to get an answer to this prayer, provided that we ask in faith, without doubting or staggering. We read that Abraham staggered not at the promise God made to him, though he might well have doubted it. It was said by another that God does not want staggering men, who ask something one day and another thing the next day, or ceasing to ask at all. Doubting and faith are mutually opposed; wavering and obedience are irreconcilable; thus we see at the start the value and importance that the inspired writer James places upon faith. It is faith that asks aright from God the gift of His wisdom, as did King Solomon, above every other priority. With such a gift we may

profit by all the temptation, trial and testing that comes our way, because it drives us into the presence of God and produces (to use a clinical expression) a therapeutic effect upon our lives.

Thus from the first part of the chapter we see how the testings and buffetings of life can yield great profit, this being treated as external temptation or trial of faith. The nature of such testing may be anything from persecution to ill-health, poverty or many other things displeasing to us as natural men and women. The trials of Job are fair comment in this context. Here is a man who is described as "perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil", yet in one day he loses his property, servants, and his family of ten children. The patience or endurance of Job is seen in his reaction to such tragedy, as he exclaims, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord." It might even be in the trivialities of the common round that we succumb more quickly to life's pin-pricks than in its major testings. But with the wisdom which is from above, we may learn what God is about in our lives, whether we are "men of low degree" exalted by the dignity conferred upon us by grace or "rich men brought" low to share His place, Who for our sakes became poor. So in the last verse of this first section (verse 12), we have a man who is happy (blessed) because, having asked God for wisdom, he has endured the temptation, testing of trial. His joy is in learning that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" (Heb. 12: 6), because here and now this "yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby." This man has been proved (tried) and as well as the present gain, he

is assured of receiving "the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those that love Him." Even greater than the day-to-day compensations for faithfulness and endurance, which are not inconsiderable, is the incentive of what lies at the end of such a course, the promised "crown of life", the victor's crown of endless joy from the Lord Himself (see Rev. 2: 10).

Coming to the latter part of chapter 1, temptation is clearly spoken of in a very different sense. Perhaps it is in this aspect of the subject we find ourselves most concerned in the context of a Young Christians' Conference. For temptation is now considered as arising from within, from the ever-present old nature asserting its desires. The story told at a previous Conference has remained impressively with some of us, concerning a Bible reading where the great doctrinal passage of Romans 6 was under consideration. Much care and patience had been taken to understand its meaning and bearing, when a young person ventured to say, "I have listened to all that has been said, but will someone please tell me what to do when sudden temptation comes?" What urgency and relevance lie behind this question, and, young or old, the answer is terribly important to us all. After all, if we have no answer to this, then weighty doctrine and lofty truths will pass right over our heads.

But James comes quickly to our help with such practical issues. If we think of Paul's writings to the Ephesians and Colossians as taking us into the banqueting house of divine counsel and purpose, then we suggest, beloved, that James deals with matters at the workshop and kitchen-sink level. And surely we need to be right at this level or we shall be right nowhere else! So let

us encourage one another to be frank and earnest as we give our minds to the subject of temptation from within. It is in this connection that verse 13 says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God'." This kind of thing does not originate with God, although we may be ready enough to blame Him. How like our first parent we are, when overcome by temptation, to say, "The woman *Thou gavest me*, she did it." It was the poet Robbie Burns who penned the lines —

*"Thou knowest Thou hast formed
me
With passions wild and strong —
And listening to their witching
Has often led me wrong."*

How bad can poetic theology be! And how very close this comes to blaming God for temptation which, far from coming from Him, arises in our own hearts. No, the Lord Jesus plainly told us where such desires come from. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications," etc. (Matt. 15: 19) and "He knew what was in man" (John 2: 25). Thus the Christian learns to trace things to their true source, and this is the true short-cut to overcoming temptation from within. For then we are ready to learn what *does* come from God, and James, by the Holy Spirit, who now declares that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variable-ness neither shadow of turning" (verse 17). Nothing but what is good and perfect originates with Him and is given to us. It was His sovereign will that begat us anew, by His Own Word of truth, in order to make us new creatures, with ability to resist evil and do good. Thus new birth itself is one of His

perfect gifts. And how many another we at once recall; His unspeakable gift of His Son, the gift of His grace, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of eternal life. Let us truly thank Him for every perfect gift. Perhaps the suggestion could be made that "perfect" gifts are those of a spiritual and abiding nature, whereas "good" gifts are temporal and in the natural order. A thankful appreciation of the gifts that come from God is a bastion of strength when temptation, sudden or otherwise comes, as come it does to us all. Had Eve remembered the thousand and one good gifts around her in Eden's garden, she would not have so readily succumbed to the Tempter's lying suggestion.

The repetitions of the words, "my beloved brethren" are a great stimulus to our attention to and reception of James's admonitions. How he loved his fellow-Christians, and we are prepared to listen to a man who loves us. With these words he introduces a passage in verses 19-21 which is essential to victory in our lives. There must be the ruthless avoidance of those things that tend to stir up native passions within us; hasty words, wrathful spirits; and "strip off like a dirty garment" (for such is the force of the words "lay apart" in verse 21) all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. Knowing the tendency of our hearts, what determined prayerful exercise this demands, but the real power is in the implanted Word which, received with meekness, has the power to save our souls. This is the same Word by which God has begotten us anew, and therefore how right it is that we should know its delivering strength in our moments of weakness. In our contemporary lives there is the constant need for drastic action if we are not to be swept off our feet

by the current, perhaps a better word would be avalanche, of appealing things, designed to indulge and stimulate every wrong desire. We must reject literature, however attractively produced, which kindles the suggestive spark and fires the imagination with lust. Glossy magazines are available by the million, each with its quota of stories and pictures cleverly composed to lead the mind in one direction. Even the unavoidable advertisement nowadays must include such features to be successful, it seems. In such days only the implanted Word can strengthen our resistance and give us moral courage to refuse.

Now the objection may be levelled just here that so far our considerations have been negative, and that much depends upon the strength of mind of the individual. And this would be true if it were to be left there, but our verses now take up the necessary positive accompaniment. Thus the *doing* of the Word and not merely hearing it is emphasised as the effective remedy and power for victorious living. Is this positive enough? The mirror of God's Word is that which at once reveals the dirty patch and also what to do about it. How deceived is that man who enjoys reading his Bible and even rejoices in discussing it, but who is not prepared for action in obedience to it. Verse 25 calls the Scriptures, revealing to us God's will, the perfect law of liberty. What a difference from a book of irksome rules and regulations! "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5). So there is happiness (blessing) in the doing of the Word (verse 25). In Ezekiel's day (see 33: 30-33) he was warned about people who would gladly listen to the prophet as they would to a

beautiful musical entertainment, but to act upon his words they would not. Is this our kind of obedience? Then our strength will fail, as did theirs.

Religion in the sense of verses 26 and 27 is not the degenerate thing called this today. It is what is externally becoming to faith, but unless it flows from faith it will only "seem" to be religious, and prove to be nothing but a vain deception, and a useless piece of affectation. But if we have true desires for practical (external) piety — and we ought to have — then we are given to know that which is pure and undefiled before God and the Father (not merely before men). An unbridled tongue would be most unseemly, but a very commendable way of outward expression would be "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Do we know of a present-day call for such service? Could we not translate this into modern work to be done? Do we not know of lonely saints who long to be visited, to say nothing of other lands where hunger at starvation level abounds, and the desperate needs of the displaced persons camps in Europe is heart-breaking? Here lies a veritable battle-field challenging our participation, and precluding self-indulgence and yielding to temptation. Is this not the very cure for the second kind of temptation which we have mentioned? If we had less leisure and were more actively engaged in work for God, we would be less tempted to indulge in selfish gratification. King David in 2 Samuel 12 illustrates this remarkably. We read that it was "the time when kings go forth to battle", but "David tarried still at Jerusalem." His mind was on other things than battle, and instead of ac-

companying his field-marshal Joab to fight the enemy, he thought of rest and pleasure. But when sleep deserted him, he paraded on the roof of his house until he saw what he wanted to see. It only remained for an order to be given, and the desire of his lusting heart to be consumed in terrible sin which not only seared the life of David, but as Nathan said, gave "great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme". When we are tempted in the upsurging of evil in our hearts, it is a sobering thought that in yielding to the temptation, we may involve others and bring much dis-

honour upon the Lord's Name.

Finally, may we remember that victory in temptation, in the sense of external testings and proving, is gained by meeting it joyfully, and asking God for wisdom which he promises liberally to all. This enables us to see His end in view, and to endure till the victor's crown of life is received. Victory in temptation from within our hearts is gained by "stripping off" all that excites and stimulates lust, and positively allowing the implanted Word to be received with meekness and done obediently in glad and unremitting service for others.

RESURRECTION AS A PRESENT POWER IN THE SOUL

D. W. PATERSON

THE general truth of resurrection has always found very wide acceptance throughout the world. God has not left himself without witness as, for example, in the change of seasons, the phenomena of seed-time and harvest, night and morning, or sleeping and waking. The heathen nations in many places give evidence of their faith in an after life. The Egyptians and Babylonians constructed elaborate systems of hope. The Greeks believed in resurrection, but only of the soul. The Jews, as Hebrews 6: 2 shows and John 11: 24, regarded resurrection of the dead as foundational but probably looked for a resurrection body like our present one. Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, and philosophers, who mocked at its mention, are both noticed in Scripture, but were they as numerous and virulent as their counterparts in modern life today?

We could not of course be Christians apart from belief in the truth of resurrection. The Lord Jesus is declared Son of God by resurrection from the dead (Romans 1: 4). If Christ be not risen we are yet in our sins (1 Corinthians 15). Again, "if thou shalt confess Jesus as Lord, and believe that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10: 9). It would seem, however, that as Christians we often have contracted thoughts in regard to resurrection. Like Martha (John 11) we feel the full truth of it is too much for us. That Lazarus would rise again in the resurrection day is grand truth, but it is only part of the truth. There is much more, and this is the present subject before us.

That the Lord Jesus is master over death the Scriptures give adequate testimony. Jairus' daughter, at the point of death, the widow of Nain's son, carried to the place of burying,

and Lazarus, four days dead already, may well be only a selection of the cases where our Lord raised individuals from among the dead — “the dead are raised up”. That the Lord Jesus Himself arose from the dead we have no fewer than ten separate sets of witness. The power of God (“He is able to subdue all things to Himself”), will touch “every family in the heaven and upon earth” and a scene “which His own hand hath dressed” is one of the ingredients of the hope of all those who “love His appearing”.

The purpose of this paper is to show that all this is to have a present moral effect on our souls. Let us turn briefly to the three principal writers of the New Testament, Peter, John and Paul. They each describe the resurrection world in prospect for the Christian, in greater or less detail, as suits the purpose given them by God. But they also dwell with equal emphasis upon the effect which God is looking for in those who by grace embrace their teaching. Peter tells us much of the resurrection world. The Kingdom, a unique Kingdom, marked by love, centred in the Lord Jesus, is his chief subject. We look forward to salvation at the end of the pathway. But resurrection is to have a present moral effect upon the soul. We are begotten again to a *lively hope* by resurrection of the dead (1 Peter 1: 3). If he speaks of the inheritance *undefiled*, that *fadeth not away*, reserved in heaven for you (1: 4) already we rejoice in it (verse 6). If the apostles were eye witnesses of His majesty, who shall fill that scene, already we rejoice in Him — “whom having not seen we love, in whom, though now we see him not, we rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” And these grand heavenly prospectives and objectives have another effect

upon our souls; we are to arm ourselves with the mind to suffer (1 Peter 4: 1). We are saved by glory, in prospect, and virtue, the soldierly quality that carries us through (2 Peter 1: 2). Let us not forget the modern instances of this. Some tell us there have been more martyrs in recent decades than at any moment in this world's history. In Congo recently not a few instances have come to our notice of Christians dying well. There are also bright instances of those who live well. John and Mary Gadsden were wealthy Americans. During the 20's a missionary came to their little church in Virginia. They felt the call to China, sold all and went. During their training volunteers were asked for a lonely station near Tibet. They went. God was in it. Their testimony was blessed. Souls were saved. Then one day the youngest child died of a fever. Ten days later the second child also died. Would they stay? Amid their tears they stayed. Then Mary took ill. It was too much. Down river, there was a mission station, a doctor and hope. John built a raft and set out. The first day passed, and the second, but on the third morning Mary said, “We won't go down river today, John. I am going over the river” — and then died. But before she died she called her husband near and whispered something in his ear. What was he to do? Downstream home, friends, money, ease? Upstream, his work, alone? Surely the price was too much? But he went upstream. His wife had said, “Go back.” This is the obedience of the Christ. We must arm ourselves with the mind to suffer. Did not He? Should not we?

But John also speaks of the resurrection world. In the Revelation he tells us five times that the earthly reign of the Lord Jesus will be for

1,000 years. That eternal life, ever in the Son, made known in the Incarnation, will then be enjoyed in full measure. The Father's house speaks of the undisplayed joys of that eternal life. But John is equally emphatic and plain that future joys are to be known and enjoyed here and now. The "many mansions" of John 14: 2 find their present counterpart, if the conditions are fulfilled, in the individual abodes of John 14: 23. (The word for "mansions" and "abodes" is the same in both places.) Again, John's epistle is largely devoted to eternal life known and enjoyed by the Christian community now. Its principal features are righteousness and love. In a word we are to enter now into the enjoyment of heaven in our souls. No element of blessedness to be known in that day is denied to us here and now. The best wine is not kept to the last, but kept for now (John 2). And have we not met individuals who have proclaimed in their lives that these things are true? "Contented godliness" described Mr. John G. Bellett. "Satisfied with favour, full of the blessing of the Lord" were favourite words of Mr. Robert Chapman. May we also have this testimony a little more before we are translated, that we also have pleased God.

Now let us look for a moment on the Apostle Paul. He too speaks extensively of the resurrection world in its future aspect — "the world to come of which we speak". In Ephesians 1 he speaks of the heading up of all things in Christ. In Philippians 2, "every knee shall bow". 1 Corinthians 15 is almost exclusively devoted to resurrection, here however, the resurrection of the body. But what of resurrection as a present moral power in the soul? This he illustrates in his own history as well as

in his doctrine. Galatians 2: 20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," etc. How is this done Paul? The answer is simple. Union with Christ. Most Christians readily acknowledge a blessing by Christ. Paul teaches us also, plainly, blessing *with* Christ. Thus we read, buried with Christ, dead with Christ, quickened with Christ, raised with Christ, seated with Christ, our life hid with Christ and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. Paul doubtless was a chosen vessel, but he was also a pattern saint (1 Timothy 1: 16). It was shown him how great things he must suffer for His name's sake. Look at the catalogue in 2 Corinthians 11. Now what was it that kept him going? "Tell me the secret wherein thy great strength lieth." "That I may know Him" he says, "and the power of His resurrection, being made conformable to His death". The same power can keep us going also. This is precisely what we find in two passages in Ephesians. In 1: 19 we get the power of resurrection in relation to Christ — "*power*", "*working*" and "*mighty power*". In 6: 10 we have exactly the same three Greek words in the exhortation "Be *strong* in the Lord and in the *power* of His *might*". The Apostle Paul knew it, and exhibited it. We are to walk in the same steps now.

Then again, in an especial way, resurrection power is of all importance to us today. Our lot is cast in the last days. Well says the Scripture "perilous times" (1 Timothy 3: 1). The profession is marked by "a form of godliness, denying the power thereof". Philosophers are with us in great numbers. They mock. Sadducees surround us on every hand. They do not believe.

What saith the Scripture? "Remember Jesus Christ of the seed of David raised from the dead" (2 Timothy 2: 8, New Trans.). The Apostle Paul again gives personally as well as in his doctrine the true Christian position. Although suffering as though an evil doer (the same word as for the malefactors crucified with Jesus) even unto bonds, nevertheless he was not ashamed. Adversaries were never more virulent. He knew them, and named them. Was he discouraged? In no wise. Never was he more confident. The Word of God is not bound. The elect obtain salvation with eternal glory. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. But are you not about to die, Paul? "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, and not to me only but unto all them which love His appearing." The man is irrepressible. "Cut off my head," he says, "and you will only liberate me to the Person and into the sphere that I know and love right well. And, let it be said, Paul writes here not as an apostle but as a man of like passions with ourselves. The experience he describes is normal Christian experience. The excellency of this power is of God. It wrought with Paul. It can work with us.

One final and practical question

confronts us. If all this power is available to us, how is it that we oft times fail in drawing upon it? There are probably two reasons for this. Firstly, we are slow to learn that it is resurrection power that is available to us. As such we have to accept *death* first. Man is incorrigibly bad, after 4,000 years of testing. God has condemned sin in the flesh. Our old man has been crucified with Him. This runs exactly counter to our natural mode of thought. In these days of humanism it is confidently proclaimed that man is the master and centre of things. Even beloved Christian people think we must keep the best of the flock, as Saul did, to sacrifice to the Lord. But God's word is irrevocable and final — "the flesh profiteth nothing". Until we embrace this decision resurrection power will attract us not one whit. Then secondly, accepting gratefully God's marvellous provision of power, perhaps we need help as to God's pattern of power and blessing in closing days. It is a day of little strength, and little things — "be not thou ashamed of the testimony of the Lord nor of me His prisoner."

*"O teach us so, the power to know
Of risen life with Thee;
Not we may live whilst here below
But Christ our life may be."*

ELISHA

ROBERT THOMSON

THE BREAD OF LIFE

(2 Kings 4: 38-44)

ELISHA came again to Gilgal, which, to the man of God was ever a place of spiritual importance and significance. There, the flesh had been rolled away by circumcision, and typically it was the place

of self-judgment. On this occasion, however, instead of the features of blessing and victory, there was a dearth in the land. What was wrong? Ecclesiastically and outwardly all seemed to be right, for the

sons of the prophets were sitting before Elisha ready to hear his word. The great need in a time of dearth was for food, that which spoke of nourishment and fellowship. What command would he give them? What miracle would he perform before them? In the place of subjection, sitting before him, they were ready to hear and do any request which he should give them.

The word spoken was remarkable, fully consistent with godly faith, "Set on the *great* pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets." The spiritual calibre of the man of God is seen here, for he did not call forth for a small pot to suit the present conditions. The great pot would imply the fulness and plentitude of the resources of God for His people and ever available to faith. One of the sons of the prophets in his desire to help, went into the field to gather herbs to be food for the pot. Perhaps the field would speak to us of the world (the field is the world, Matthew 13 : 38), and nothing in the way of suitable, spiritual food can be found there. There was certainly an abundance from the wild vine which was there, for he gathered his lap full of the gourds. These proved to be of deadly character and it was evident there was a lack of discernment with the company, for they knew them not, allowing him to shred them into the pot.

At Corinth there was a spirit of carnality in the assembly, and the fellowship was marred; while at Galatia, others were teaching the works of the law, and bringing souls into bondage. The trouble at Colosse was that many were turning to philosophy, deceit and traditions of men, not holding the Head; and at Thessalonica, false teachers were saying that the day of the Lord was at hand, thereby causing great dis-

tress of heart and mind to the saints concerning those who had died in the Lord. These, and many other things of worldly origin, cannot be brought into the truth and holiness of the fellowship, as they have neither part nor lot in this matter. The wild gourds were typical of the old nature, untamable, and carried with them the savour of death. That which was in the pot, calculated to be unto life and its maintenance, was quickly found to be unto death.

They cried out to Elisha, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" What could be done? Only he who was in touch with God knew the divine remedy for that present serious occasion. How very solemn and searching it should be to discern that there is death in the pot by the introduction of that which is of the world, and not brought in by the Spirit of God! They could not eat thereof; for the new man can only be renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. The need was met, as meal was brought at the request of Elisha. We are reminded that the meal offering of Leviticus 2 had to be of fine flour, with oil poured upon it and frankincense thereon, truly speaking of the perfect, fragrant and acceptable life of Christ to God, and the corn of wheat which must fall into the ground and die, for the bringing forth of much fruit. The meal must be cast into the pot! "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, . . . and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead" (Acts 3 : 14, 15). Now the triumph of His resurrection can be extolled, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15 : 55). So the meal was cast into the pot of death, and the word from Elisha to

the sons of the prophets was, "Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot." The fellowship was restored and the evil thing had been removed.

*"Jesus, of Thee we ne'er would tire:
The new and living food
Can satisfy our heart's desire,
And life is in Thy blood."*

Immediately following the incident of death in the pot, we have recorded that which speaks of food for the maintenance of life. A man from Baal-shalisha brought Elisha bread of the firstfruits. Our minds would readily reconsider the wonderful fact of how Christ Jesus, in Whom all fulness was pleased to dwell, came forth in manhood to accomplish the glorious victory of the cross. In resurrection life and power He was proclaimed to be the first fruits of them that slept, for in all things He must have the pre-eminence. He is also the firstborn of many brethren and the first-begotten of the dead.

Also, the man brought twenty loaves of barley, perhaps signifying the blessing of God in salvation, through the risen Man, Christ Jesus. We are sorrowfully aware that the first man, Adam, failed in his responsibility to God, but we are glad to know that the second Man, Christ Jesus, fulfilled all the will of His Father, glorifying God in all the responsibilities laid upon Him.

Along with the gift were full ears of corn, declaring that there was no deficiency whatsoever. The whole picture would give us the outlook of divine fulness and sufficiency, where every need is met. How rightly the word was given, "Give the people, that they may eat". They are almost the same words as given by the Lord at the feeding of

the five thousand (Matthew 14: 16). In this happy scene before Elisha, one cannot see how there could be any room for doubt; but the servitor was very apprehensive as to how this could be done really to satisfy the hunger of the people. Philip could say, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone of them may take a little." Andrew, too, could remark, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"

*"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."*

Again, the word is given to feed the people, with this blessed addition, "For thus saith the Lord, they shall eat, and shall leave thereof." Then the food is set before them. Well may the Lord say, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Luke 12: 42, 43). What a privilege it is to be waiting, watching and working in view of the Lord's sure and speedy return, having the spiritual welfare of His saints ever in mind! They did eat and left thereof, according to the word of the man of God. "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Psalm 36: 7, 8).

"PILATE WROTE A TITLE"

COLIN CURRY

ALL the gospels mention the superscription over the cross, and they agree completely as to the substance of what was written, though some of them report it in briefer form than others. John's version, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", covers all the elements which appear in the other gospels.

An indication that the wording and the content of the superscription are not unimportant also appears in John's account. With his characteristic "What I have written, I have written" Pontius Pilate showed his unwillingness to change it to a form more agreeable to the Jews. Pilate's own character, and his contempt for the Jews, was revealed in this; but it must surely be clear that a higher hand than his was involved in retaining the words as we read them today. Pilate could not have foreseen that the brief sentence which he caused to be written on that momentous day would become part of holy scripture; that it would have a meaning and a truth quite beyond what he himself believed or intended, and that it must not be changed because of the tribute to Christ which it really contained. These words, in spite of their immediate authorship and the circumstances of their writing, retain their significance over the years. They are with us still, to affect us as we give consideration to the truth which they contain.

THE FACTS STATED

Matthew and Mark speak of the words over the cross as "His accusation", and it is clear on consideration that what was probably the normal procedure was being followed. What purported to be a neutral and dispassionate state-

ment about the criminal and his crime was being made; the superscription stated the facts of the case. He had claimed to be the King of the Jews and this was the official reason, if not entirely the real one, for His crucifixion. The outward form of correctness and justice was being maintained, though it was a hollow justice in reality. In answer to Pilate's cross-questioning about His claim to be a king, He had not denied it, but He had made it plain that His claims and His kingdom were not of a kind which constituted a threat to Caesar. "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight . . ." (John 18: 36). Pilate, though puzzled about much else about Him, had understood this quite clearly. But the facts of the case are more than can be put in an official and impartial form. The enmity and the weakness of the men who crucified our Lord are there, deeper than the superficial proceedings; and these too seem to be suggested by the wording of the inscription.

THE FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES OF MEN EXPRESSED

Looked at in a different way, the words of the superscription can be read as an expression of the enmity and opposition of men to Christ. *This* is what we think of this Jesus and His claims, it seems to say. The words suggest derision as well as disbelief. The generality of this attitude of men is also clearly implied. The writing was in Hebrew, and Greek and Latin. All are involved, though in different ways and perhaps not all to the same degree. Christ and all that He stood for was not wanted. In return for His love

he received hatred. Men loved darkness rather than light. He was in the world and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. "We have no king but Caesar" was the statement made, to their own great shame, by those who had most reason to recognize and accept Him. Christ Himself had placed the blame for His rejection where it mostly belonged, in His words to Pilate "... he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (John 19: 11). These words, needless to say, did not exonerate Pilate completely. As he himself had said, *he* had the power to have Him crucified or else to set Him free; and indeed his was the ultimate decision in the matter, though in reality he had not the strength of character to be decisive and to do what he knew to be right.

The words on the cross, though they can be read as a united verdict of refusal of Christ, draw attention also to the disharmony amongst men which flourishes when Christ and His gracious influence and authority is disowned. As written by the Romans, whose was the ultimate responsibility for the crucifixion, it reflects hatred of the Jews rather than of Christ. This was felt in a special way by Pilate himself, whose hand had been forced by them, against his will, in this particular matter. As regards his attitude to Christ, it was not his intention to be against Him; though none-the-less the saying of Christ was especially true in his case "he that is not with me is against me" (Luke 11: 23). He does not disguise his thoughts about the Jews, however; he shows his scorn and annoyance with them openly. This is the kind of king *the Jews* deserve, and the only kind they will ever have, seems to be the kind of thought which was in his mind.

THE TRUTH ABOUT CHRIST UPHELD AND DISPLAYED

The united opposition and enmity to Christ which we have considered is graphically described in Psalm 2. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed . . ." (verse 2). But the Psalm goes on to show that God's intention is not in the least altered by this attitude of men. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (verse 6). In spite of the adversaries, his purpose stands unchanged; it is so sure that it is spoken of as fulfilled already. These words were remembered in the days of the early church, when persecution was awakening (Acts 4: 24-28). Comfort and confidence was derived from the awareness that, whatever the opposition, God's end would be accomplished through it, as had plainly happened when Christ was rejected. In combining against Christ the opponents had actually helped in achieving that which God had "determined before to be done".

Hence it is not surprising to find, in the same words which portray men's united disbelief in Christ, a statement which can also be taken as an assertion of God's determined intention about Him, which will certainly find complete fulfilment whatever His adversaries may wish or feel. Beyond the action of men, here was God fulfilling His own ends. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Psalm 76: 10); and here we see men doing their worst, and yet in the process writing and emphasizing the truth about Christ, that He is the king. Written in Hebrew, and Greek and Latin, it is the truth for all to see, and to read, and to accept and benefit from if they will. The

breadth and the scope of God's message for men, with the blessing it contains if its truth is accepted, is clearest to be seen at the moment when Christ died; and it is suggested by the very title over the cross on which He died. The fact that universal tribute is due to Christ, and will be insisted on in due time, is also implied in that multi-lingual and unalterable sentence about Him.

THE BENEFIT FROM IT CLAIMED

In the gospel of Luke the reference to the writing over the cross is made in a context which seems to suggest some of the reactions of those who read it. "This is the king of the Jews" is Luke's version of the wording. In the previous verse the mockery of the soldiers is described: "If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself." Then, in the verses which follow, the story of the malefactors, and of the way in which they took opposite sides on this same issue, is recounted. Bearing this in mind, the way in which the penitent wrong-doer framed his appeal to Christ seems especially striking. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." It is at least possible that the thought of a coming kingdom for Christ was suggested to him by the words of the superscription. We may never know whether he actually read the words; but it is clear that the grace and bearing of our Lord in His sufferings, and the injustice of what He suffered, were very apparent to him. "We . . . justly . . . receive the due reward of our deeds . . . , but this man hath done nothing amiss". He saw in our Lord One Who was good, and unique, and trustworthy. With or without the help of the written word over the cross, he had the insight to realise that there must be a reversal of this situation, that Christ had

rights into which He must enter in due course. He also sensed that hope and opportunity existed, even for a person like himself, in this One Who was being "numbered with the transgressors", yet Who was so entirely different from them. Though it was indeed a last-minute hope, and though his case was a near-hopeless one, yet the sight of Christ which he obtained at that moment brought hope to him; a hope which, needless to say, was not an ill-founded one. To place such a bold and outspoken faith in Him, especially at that moment, was indeed a worthy tribute to Christ, and it received a ready response from our Lord too. He confessed himself a would-be subject of the king, and was confident that our Lord would accept him as such. His appeal was welcomed and granted in a way which exceeded what he asked. He asked to be remembered in a future and perhaps distant day, but in wonderful grace our Lord gave him something which was both immediate and of a peculiarly personal kind with Himself. "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Still today the evidence of the rejection of our Lord is plainly to be seen. Equally plain, in a day long awaited, will be the evidence of His universal supremacy and dominion. To see beforehand His worthiness for this, and to own Him as Lord despite the prevailing attitude to Him, is given to faith today. Such a faith receives much in return, an individual portion and a rich experience with Himself, in life and in death. To such a faith the future will confirm what is already known and enjoyed in a deep and inward way, that He is the Lord pre-eminent and supreme; the One Who will soon appear, to be acknowledged not only as King of the Jews but as King of kings and Lord of lords.

GRACE AND JUDGMENT

2 Kings 5

NAAMAN was an outsider, a Syrian, ready to perish; but an object of God's grace and salvation. He was also a great man of power and position, yet, because of leprosy, he was unclean. This awful disease in his body and blood, brought about a defilement which could not be cleansed by any human means. Such was the condition of the man through whom God had given deliverance to Syria. In His ways of government, Israel was made to suffer ignominy and defeat; but at the same time there was blessing opened up for the needy. The testimony of God was expressed in a most simple, cheering way through the captive Israeli-tish young maiden. Her godly faith was stimulated by the wonderful display of miraculous power through His prophet, Elisha; and the message of grace conveyed in secret to her mistress, was quickly declared in a public way to the one in need of cleansing. It was a very personal word, and of extreme importance, for it was a matter of life and death.

Naaman was a leper, and knew it; he heard of cleansing, and sought it. However, he thought to do what was best in his own eyes, and appealed to the king of Syria for help. This favour was quickly granted, and a letter of introduction to the king of Israel was given, asking that he might recover Naaman of his leprosy. Also, he took with him great wealth of presents as a means to purchase the cleansing. This we know, was of no avail, for God's salvation and grace are from Himself, without money and without price. "By

grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2: 8, 9). Even the king of Israel could do nothing in the matter, except to acknowledge his own inability and worthlessness by rending his clothes.

Now for the first time in the chapter we have reference made to Elisha by name. He had heard of the dilemma of the king of Israel, and immediately sent word to him of the remedy, with an invitation to send Naaman that he might know that there is a prophet of God in Israel. Here we observe the initial stages of the working of God's grace toward the unclean, proved only through implicit obedience to His word. Pride, betokened by Naaman standing at the door of Elisha, with horses and chariots, can have no place in the sight of God. The prophet, however, does not in any way pander to his pride, but sends his servant to him with a simple, straight-forward message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." What significance could there be in this unusual way of meeting the need of the leper? Seven, in the Holy Scriptures, is the number of divine perfection; and the river Jordan is typical of death and judgment. It was the river used for baptism, and was also the last river to be crossed from the wilderness before entering Canaan, the promised land. This, too, is a typical illustration of the cleansing work of Christ, by His atoning sacrifice and the shedding of His preci-

ous blood.

The assuring word to Naaman was, "Thou shalt be clean", yet although so simple and effective, the proud spirit of the man would not accept it, but turned from it in a rage. He thought there would have been a consideration of his greatness, and a show of publicity which would have exalted both the prophet and himself. This is always the working of the flesh and nature in sinful man, which would seek to rob God of His glory and claim it for self. At the cross of Christ, the first man, Adam, with all his fleshly activity, is ended, and cannot by any means be mended for the approval of God.

The rivers of Damascus, which Naaman suggested for washing, may have been better in many respects according to the natural standards of men; but only the river Jordan, the river of death and judgment, could cleanse from the vileness of leprosy. Turning away from the messenger who had declared to him the means of cleansing, Naaman was spoken to persuasively by his servants to consider the matter seriously. They spoke of his personal prowess to perform great things, and appealed to him to do this lowly, simple thing straightway, and be clean. He heard their wise counsel and obeyed; and though he disliked the treatment, he went down in the spirit of humility. Seven times he dipped in Jordan, according to the prophet's word, and he was cleansed. The divine means of cleansing had been proved to be true, and the God of Israel was honoured through His servant Elisha.

Being immediately cleansed, he confessed it, saying, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." What a

glorious climax to a simple word spoken by an Israelitish maid, and used by God for salvation and blessing! Also, what an encouragement to us, to use every available opportunity to speak of God's salvation in Christ. Naaman was grateful, and showed it by offering Elisha a gift, which was courteously refused by the prophet of God, as he was not using the goodness and grace of God for personal gain.

Such was Naaman's rapidity in gaining the knowledge of the true God that he desired a portion of the promised land, two mules' burden of earth, to be given him that he might use it as a place of offering to God. Also, he acknowledged that he would offer sacrifice to no other God, but unto the Lord. This was good, true progress indeed; but he had a conscience as to how far he could go in serving his master in the worship of his idols. Evidently, through bodily infirmity, the king needed physical help as he went into the house of Rimmon, and leaned on the hand of Naaman. Would God be pleased to pardon Naaman, His servant, as he bowed in the house of Rimmon, along with his master? The beautiful answer came forth from Elisha, "Go in peace." He was to have no conscience about it, for his heart was right in the sight of God.

How very sad to behold, by way of contrast, the spirit of avarice in Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. He had seen, no doubt, the unselfishness of his master in refusing the offered gift, and hastily coveted it for himself. How could he obtain it, and hide it from Elisha? To do this, he resorted to lying, a most degrading thing for one who was associated with the service of God. What a vastly different answer he gave to the question of Naaman,

"Is all well?," as contrasted with the woman of Shunem to Elisha's question! Similar words are used, "It is well!" but with Gehazi they sprang from a selfish motive, and brought dishonour upon God. The request to Naaman was based upon lies, with a desire for acquisition of money and clothes. What a solemn warning to us; lest through the cares, riches and pleasures of this life, the good seed of the word of God is choked, and no fruit can be brought forth to perfection. Naaman, on the other hand, displayed a lovely spirit, and gave him twice as much as Gehazi requested. Having now received the goods, the difficulty was how to smuggle the things into the house without the knowledge of Elisha. Again, there has to be the strong tower of lies, into which the guilty culprit flees, only to find that it will tumble upon him, and bring permanent injury of a very degrading

character.

The searching question of Elisha was, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" This brought forth readily a blatant untruth from Gehazi, "Thy servant went no whither." Little did he realise that he was in the presence of one who was there on God's account, and knew all things concerning what had taken place. Then, solemnly before him, Elisha iterated the meeting with Naaman, and the awful warning of judgment because of doing the work of God for filthy lucre. Then fell the stroke of divine wrath upon Gehazi, and the leprosy of Naaman came upon him and his posterity for ever. What a sad end to a great chapter — the salvation of God ready to meet a true seeker after the blessing, who showed the lovely spirit of humility; and the judgment of God upon another who despised His goodness, and practised covetousness and lies for self-gain!

PREACHING THE WORD

J. S. BLACKBURN

2. THE HEARER

ON 14th October 1735 John Wesley committed to his diary that in company with his brother Charles and a few friends, he took boat from Gravesend in order to embark for Georgia to preach the gospel to the Indians. He continues, "our end in leaving our native country, was . . . singly this, to save our souls." In February 1738 he returned to England, very much disillusioned with the outcome so far, of the long and arduous process of labouring to save his soul. "It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native

country in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity; but what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I least of all suspected), that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God."

A few days later (on a day "much to be remembered") he fell in with a Moravian, Peter Böhler, from whom he soon began to learn the futility of his scheme of salvation as the result of a long and arduous discipline. On a subsequent meeting with Peter Böhler,

Wesley writes, "I had now no objection to what he said of the nature of faith. . . . Neither could I deny the happiness or holiness he described, as fruits of this living faith. . . . But I could not comprehend what he spoke of an *instantaneous* work. I could not understand how this faith should be given in a moment; how a man could at once be thus turned from darkness to light, from sin and misery to righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost. I searched the Scriptures again, touching this very thing, particularly the Acts of the Apostles. But, to my utter amazement, found scarce any instances there of other than instantaneous conversions."

If, two hundred and thirty years later, we tread in the steps of John Wesley, and search the Acts to see whether these things are so, do we find that Wesley was right? It is true, of course, that in contrast with the idea of salvation by works, at the end of a long process of self-discipline, then instantaneous conversions are found in Scripture. But what is equally true, Wesley did not note at the time, that there is scarcely a case of conversion recorded in the Acts where there is not a (sometimes lengthy) process of *preparation*. The purpose of this paper is to dwell on this preparation of the hearer, about to come to the moment of saving faith in Christ, and particularly to see how this preparation bears all the marks of being distinctly above the plane of what can be planned or achieved by any merely human agency.

In the majority of cases the process of preparation of the hearer is more hinted at than described, but these delicate touches leave no doubt at all of its existence. In the case of Saul of Tarsus, he had been subjected to the persuasion of the

goads — "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks". When Paul came to the riverside at Philippi, he found there Lydia, "whose heart the Lord had opened", so that she was prepared to attend to the Word. These evidences of the ubiquity of a prior work in the souls of those who, on hearing, received the Word, give the greater weight to those instances in the earlier chapters, in which the preparation is minutely described, and shown to be effectuated often by agencies different and distant from, and indeed unknown to the persons through whom the hearer was brought to final decision. And with this agree those other Scriptures where *birth* by water and the Spirit clearly implies a process prior to the instant of saving faith and entrance into the light of life.

The preparation of the Ethiopian eunuch began more than 1,000 miles away from the scene of his conversion, in Meroë, where the rulers of Ethiopia held court. In that distant land the eunuch's heart was reached by the power of the Scriptures, read in the synagogues, sufficiently to bring him to the home of the Scriptures, Jerusalem, to offer his worship. Returning from Jerusalem in his chariot, he was already reading one of the greatest of those Old Testament Scriptures which testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. His heart was filled with an enquiring hunger for a greater knowledge of the Sufferer there described: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth." He was as exactly ready for the preaching of Christ as it is possible to imagine, and so it is small wonder that he gladly received the Word, and went on his way rejoicing. The custo-

dian of the queen's treasure returned to her court the possessor of a treasure above all earthly treasure.

Equally clear is the fact of the preparation of Cornelius for hearing and receiving the Word. When he first appears in 10: 2, he is already in one sense a prepared man. He can only have become devout and God-fearing and devoted to prayer and almsgiving under the influence of the Scriptures, and he seems to have been consciously expecting that God would eventually grant in answer to his prayers some signal message from Himself. It was to a gentile thus waiting for God that the word came, "Send for one Simon, whose surname is Peter, he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." Thus it came about that when Peter opened his mouth and preached the Word, he was speaking to men and women already hungering for all things commanded by God.

Does this kind of preparation of the hearer, on a plane quite outside the possibility of mere human arrangement, occur today? Everyone with experience of the conversion of souls knows that it is so. One example from within my own experience must suffice to illustrate the point.

A few years ago there lived in a certain town in the north of England a man of about thirty years of age, by upbringing a church member, and therefore under the sound of the reading of the Scriptures. But he came to realise that he did not really believe in God, and that this anomalous position would have to be faced. He decided to live as though he did believe in God, and see how it worked out. In this "faith" he lived for several years, continuing as a church member, and even found some victory over temptation to drink. He was eventu-

ally brought to a more definite decision, which was to live as a Christian, that is, to read the Bible and pray, and about this time became a lay-preacher. He was a bachelor, living with a sister and her husband, and he used to gather a group of friends in their house to read the Bible and pray. Thus was formed a little cell of men and women, devout, fearing God, and praying to God always.

The lay-preacher's brother-in-law fell seriously ill and was face to face with death; he recovered, however, and during his convalescence the lay-preacher procured for him Dorothy Sayers' "The Man Born to be King". Man and wife read this book together, and it greatly influenced them. On Easter Sunday they were able to walk to church together, and had a strange feeling that they were walking together on "the Calvary road".

At this juncture they all heard the gospel most faithfully and clearly preached every night for a week. They were all converted almost immediately; and last of all the lay-preacher. Up to this moment, they had never heard of the need to receive Christ for salvation.

These thoughts should prepare us for the realisation, if we have not realised it before, that the real and ultimate worker in the Acts is God. At first reading, it might appear that the book is arranged on the basis that in the earlier chapters Peter is the worker, and he eventually gives way to Paul, as the vessel for the revelation of what completes the word of God. All this is true, in the sense that God uses Peter and Paul and other men and women as His instruments: but the Person really at work is God, and what lies before us is to look more distinctly at this fact.

THE FIRST MARTYR

HAMILTON SMITH

Acts 6 and 7

IN the touching story of Stephen, the first of a long line of martyrs, we see the complete exposure of the wickedness of Israel on the one hand, and the display of the blessedness of Christianity on the other hand.

In the course of his address, Stephen recalls the history of Israel to show that the flesh, even in the professing people of God, invariably resists the man that God is with. This he proves from Scripture by recounting the way the patriarchs had treated Joseph, and the way the nation had resisted Moses.

The patriarchs, moved with envy, hated and persecuted Joseph. But God was with him, and highly exalted him. In his exaltation Joseph sends a message to his brethren presenting himself as their saviour and deliverer. Thus Joseph becomes a striking type of Christ, their own Messiah, whom for envy the leaders of Israel had delivered up to be crucified. But God had exalted Christ to His own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, and from His place of exaltation there had come, through the Holy Spirit, the offer of repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of their sins (5: 31, 32).

Then Stephen recalls the history of Moses who, in order to help his own people whom he loved, turned his back on all the glory of Egypt. But Israel "thrust him away" and "refused" the one that God had sent to be "a ruler and a deliverer". In the wilderness they would not obey him but in their hearts turned back to Egypt. Thus again they resisted the man that God was with.

As we listen to Stephen's address we learn the true character of the flesh, whether in the believer or unbeliever, for the flesh never alters.

It is marked by "envy", for the patriarchs in rejecting Joseph were moved by envy; it is ignorant of the mind of God, for when God would deliver Israel by Moses, we read "*They understood not*" (25); it is openly hostile to the man that God is with for we read concerning Moses that Israel "*thrust him away*" (27, 39); it is governed by sight in contrast to faith, for Israel said, "Make us gods to go before us" (40); and it rejoices in its own works rather than in the work of God, for we read that, having made an idol, "*they rejoiced in the works of their own hands*" (41).

Having reviewed the history of Israel, Stephen concludes his address with a solemn exposure of the condition of the nation. They are rebellious against God—a "stiffnecked people". Whatever outward show of religion they may make, inwardly the flesh is unjudged; they are uncircumcised in heart, and their ears are deaf to the word of God. Thus, he concludes, they are a people who "do always resist the Holy Spirit". As their fathers had done so do they. The fathers had persecuted and slain the prophets, and the children had betrayed and murdered their own Messiah. Moreover the law, in which they boasted, they had not kept.

Up to this point, in the history of the Acts, the Apostles had by the Holy Spirit proclaimed the offer of repentance and forgiveness of sins to the nation of Israel from the exalted Christ, and, they were told, that, if they repented, Christ would come back and bring in the times of refreshing (4: 19-21). This final testimony, for that generation, is utterly rejected. The witness of Christ's heavenly glory is cast out of the city

and stoned without mercy. Thus as the witness of Christ on earth had been rejected, so the witness of the Holy Spirit come to earth from the exalted Christ is now rejected.

Thus, for the time, all is over with Israel, and the testimony of God is no longer to Christ reigning on earth, but to Christ glorified in heaven. The position of Christ will ever determine the position and blessing of His people. Is Christ reigning on earth, then His people will be earthly and their blessings take an earthly character. Is Christ glorified in heaven, then His people will belong to heaven and their blessings will have a spiritual and heavenly character. Thus, at this great crisis, we pass from Jerusalem as a centre, where Christ was crucified, to heaven where Christ is glorified. In the great ascension scene, described in the first chapter of the Acts, two angels say to the disciples, "why stand ye gazing up into heaven?", for the door was still open for the earthly blessing under the reign of Christ if the nation repented. Now, for the time, all is over with Israel, and Stephen rightly looks up to heaven and no angels will call in question his heavenward gaze.

Thus we pass from Judaism to Christianity, from earth to heaven, from Christ reigning on earth to Christ exalted in glory. A new era begins during which believers are called out from Jews and Gentiles to form the Church united to Christ in heaven. During this period God has no earthly people, no nation in relationship with Himself and no temple as an earthly centre. Alas! Christendom has sought to act on the old footing and revive Jewish ritual. We have countries spoken of as Christian nations, and favoured people, and again magnificent cathedrals have

been erected which are called houses of God, and Christianity is viewed as merely a religious system for the improvement of man's social position and the betterment of the world.

It is of the deepest importance to apprehend that Christianity calls us out of the world and gives us a place in heaven. As believers we shall only be practically saved from earth as we realise that we have a place in heaven. As the Apostle Peter can say, "An inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, *reserved in heaven* for you". No evil can touch this fair inheritance; no power of the enemy can rob us of heaven.

In Stephen we see set forth a believer who enters into the new Christian position, the heavenly position, and the character consistent with this position. Thus we do well to ponder the brief but instructive story of this the first Christian martyr. He comes before us marked in a striking way by Christian qualities, for He is described as a man "full of *faith* and the *Holy Ghost*", "full of *grace* and *power*", and marked by "*wisdom*" (6: 5,8 N.Tn., 10). These are the outstanding marks of a Christian. Faith, of necessity, comes first, but having believed the gospel of our salvation we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Having the Spirit we are exhorted to "be filled with the Spirit". If filled with the Spirit we should be marked by the grace that meets every evil in the spirit of Christ, by power to rise above every circumstance, and the wisdom to meet all opposition. Such Christ-like qualities will not bring the possessor into favour with mere religious profession: so it came to pass that "there arose certain of the synagogue" who "stirred up

the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and brought him to the council." Here false witnesses charge him with speaking blasphemous words against Moses, against God, against the temple and against the law.

How will Stephen act in the presence of these violent acts and lying charges? All the council turn to look at Stephen. Will his face depict indignation and resentment in the presence of these lying charges? How will his Christianity stand the test of such an ordeal? To their surprise they see no trace of resentment or proud contempt on that face. Looking stedfastly on him they saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel. They saw a face lit up with the light of heaven. We may well challenge our hearts as to how we should have looked and acted under such terrible circumstances! Is it not possible that, in the presence of such gross and wicked charges, rising indignation in our hearts would betray itself in angry looks? What, we may ask, was the secret power that enabled Stephen to look like an angel when opposed by the Devil?

This brings before us four outstanding marks of Christianity, when lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, so blessedly set forth in Stephen in the closing scene of his life described at the end of Acts 7.

First, the Christian, full of the Holy Ghost, will be one that *looks up stedfastly to Christ in heaven*. He realises that all his resources are in Christ — the Man in the glory. He does not look within in the vain endeavour to find something in himself in which he can trust. He does not look around to find support and guidance in others. He looks up, and he looks up stedfast-

ly. He realises that in Christ in glory there is One who is the Head of His people with all wisdom to guide, who has the heart with all love to sympathise with them in their sorrows, and who has the hand with all power to support them in their trials. So the Apostle Paul, at a later date, exhorts us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of our faith" (Heb. 12: 1, 2). We are running the race that ends in heaven, and in that race there will be trials to meet and insults to endure, and it is only as we, like Stephen, look up stedfastly into heaven and fix our gaze on Jesus that we shall be able to endure. Thus in Stephen we see set forth the great fact that if the Holy Spirit came down from Christ in heaven it is in order to lead our hearts up to Christ in heaven.

Let us, however, remember that Stephen who looked stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus, was a believer who not only was sealed with the Holy Spirit, but was "full of the Holy Spirit". One has said, "To have the Holy Spirit, is one thing: to be filled with the Holy Spirit is another. When He is the one source of my thought, I am filled with Him. When He has possession of my heart, there is power to silence what is not of God, to keep my soul from evil, and to guide in every act of my life and walk" (J.N.D.). Thus being full of the Holy Ghost Stephen looks up to Christ in glory. He does not behold the glory with his natural vision, he was full of the Holy Ghost. But let us remember that this is not confined to Stephen for says the Apostle, "We all beholding the glory of the Lord are changed into His image."

Secondly, the believer that looks up steadfastly to Christ in the glory will be *a man that is supported by Christ in heaven*. This does not necessarily mean that the Christian will be kept from trial. He may, indeed, be allowed to pass through the most terrible trials, even as Stephen who was falsely charged with blasphemy, cast out of the city, and stoned out of the world. But if Stephen is not kept from trial, he is sustained in the trial and brought through the trial. In these terrible circumstances he realises the truth of the Lord's words, "When thou passest *through* the waters, I will be with thee: and *through* the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest *through* the fire, thou shalt not be burned" (Isa. 43: 12). Thus, with the stones falling upon him, Stephen is called to pass "through the valley of the shadow of death": but he fears no evil for the Lord is with him to support him, and glory is before him.

Thirdly, sustained by the Lord, the Christian becomes *a man that is representative of Christ in heaven*. Gazing upon the Lord in glory we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. It is only as we are looking at Christ in the glory that the world will be able to look upon us and see something of Christ. Thus Stephen becomes like Christ — the One, Who, in His humiliation was charged with blasphemy but witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, and, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; and when He suffered, He threatened not". Stephen, with his eye steadfastly fixed upon the Lord, follows in the steps of the Lord. When reviled he utters no taunt, and when he suffers he pronounces no threat. No hard thoughts arise in his heart; no black looks mar his face; no

bitter words fall from his lips. One has written, "He bears witness to his Master, forgetful of himself, or his danger, without a thought of consequences. His heart was filled with Christ to the exclusion of care for his life, or what should follow. Christ was the only object before Him" (J.N.D.). Thus, gazing upon the Lord in glory, Stephen becomes changed into His image, and like the Lord, he prays for his enemies, and commits his spirit to the Lord. Thus the man on earth becomes representative of the Man in the glory. He looks up steadfastly into heaven and sees Jesus in the glory, and the world looks steadfastly on Stephen and sees Jesus in Stephen.

Lastly we see that having represented Christ, and his race run and his course finished, the Christian is one that *departs to be with Christ in heaven*. So Stephen falls asleep and his spirit is received by Christ in the glory. The path of suffering for Christ leads to the glory with Christ.

Thus we see in Stephen a beautiful setting forth of true Christianity according to the mind of the Lord. We see that a believer, filled with the Holy Spirit, is one that will carry out the words of the Lord, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Entirely occupied with Christ, such an one will, like Stephen, deny himself, make no effort to save his life here, and will follow Christ into the glory. He *looks to Christ in the glory*; looking to Christ, he is *supported by Christ in the glory*; supported by Christ, he becomes *representative of Christ in the glory*, and having finished his course, *he departs to be with Christ in the glory*.

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

J. N. SHEPHERD

(Continued)

ONE of the most striking features of the history of the Church in apostolic times is the sad failure which followed, and is always seen when man has any kind of responsibility given to him. Never in human history was a company so signally blessed; never had such wonderful things previously fallen upon human ears as the story of God's purpose of love for it. And this love had been so perfectly declared: the glorious Person Who from eternity past had been the object of that love and so was fitted alone, and so wonderfully, to make it known, had come here and told it out in all its fulness. With what delight do we listen to His blessed voice telling us that "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father", and that "the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God". And yet the depths of that love had to be told in the very darkness of death.

And so it was that this company of those who had put their trust in the Lord Jesus learned the secrets of the Father's thoughts, the secrets of the personal affection of Jesus and the secrets of the Father's eternal home which they were to share with Him.

Exulting in it all, in the early days those who composed the church were all filled with the Holy Spirit and the wondrous consequence was that "great power" and "great grace" of which we are told in the Acts of the Apostles. The power present amongst them was incomparable — the mightiest force ever seen in men in this world — and it was the power of love and of grace because it was the power of God,

and "God is love". So far have we become removed from all this that even amongst God's people, so often, men seek to move others by the force of their own wills and very often the last thing to be considered is the power of divine love.

It is surely not only pertinent but essential that we should ask ourselves in our day what factors have changed in all this. We know well that God is for ever the same and that the power of the Holy Ghost has not altered in any sense whatever, and that those graces which are the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of men have not changed either; there is assuredly no reason why "great grace" should not still characterise God's own people. But it would be well for us to look to see what actually fills our lives now, and surely it is a great rarity to see anyone walking here even for a brief time "filled with the Spirit".

The fact is that the products of our own wills are so often the things which are seen in our lives and in our assemblies. It may be that in worship, through the infinite goodness of our God, we find ourselves transported sometimes — and all too infrequently at that — almost into heaven itself and we rejoice greatly and rightly, but even then the devil often tries to tell us how very elevated we must be to have achieved such spiritual exaltation in our gathering. But alas, much more frequently is it the case that there's powerlessness with us and if challenged we would have to confess that we know very well that there is no kind of reproduction even of the power of meetings in the 1830's let alone of those of the early church.

The church is composed, as we have seen, of individual men and women who have been "bought with a price" beyond human computation and who have acknowledged with glad hearts — at least at the beginning of their Christian experience — their total allegiance to the glorious Person Who paid that price in His own precious blood. Real allegiance to Him is the practical owning of His Lordship in all the circumstances of our daily lives — at home, in the assembly, in the office, the school, the university or wherever our lot is cast. And if we were entirely subject to the Lord Jesus in everything, then surely we would be really "filled with the Spirit" for it is the Spirit's joyous work to occupy us with him.

Now all this is true of us as individual Christians and so we receive the challenge for it in the first verses of Romans 12, prior to the opening out by the Apostle Paul of the collective aspect of this truth. If we have presented our bodies in accord with that scripture and they are daily held by us for His use and dominion alone, then we shall find others in like case with whom we are associated. In the lack of response in reality of heart to this challenge, may we not find the secret of a great deal of our poverty? We are infinitely rich but so often we appear as paupers: we have all in Christ and we do not enter into our possessions in any great measure at all.

God has shown us so clearly in His word that we are here, each in his or her separate capacity, to act as a member of the body of Christ under the control of the Spirit of God with a view to the building up of the whole church. The Scripture speaks of a variety of gifts, bestowed from an ascended Christ

(Ephesians 4), and by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12), all of which have this object in view. There is no one in the church who is entirely without gift, and all that is required for its true edification is actually given to it. Of course, under the circumstances in which many Christians gather in the world today, it is not possible that the gifts can be exercised: the evangelists, the teachers, the prophets may find themselves sitting perpetually listening to men whose only gifts relate to the visitation of the sick or the pastoral functions required in the church. These pastoral gifts are of great importance in their setting but they do not qualify a man to stand in a pulpit to preach or to teach continually. Each gift is as needful as the other but only men could be so foolish as to expect a man with the gift to do one of these, necessarily to be able to do the others too. And so the Holy Spirit of God, Who has seen fit in His gracious wisdom to divide "to every man severally as he will" is not given that sway in the gathering of God's people which is essential if the various functions of that company are to be carried out according to the will of God. We are told that this is for the sake of order in the church. What kind of order could it be that denies to God the authority in the company of His own? We might well ask this simple question and challenge our hearts again as to whether we are causing or indeed countenancing this kind of thing in the circumstances in which we ourselves gather. Do we really expect "great power" and "great grace" to be manifest when the very divine Author of them is denied His place?

Or it may be that we do acknowledge the possibility in our

gatherings of the presence of those with gift and even try to arrange for them to exercise that gift, forgetting that the Author of the gift alone is able to make any arrangement rightly for its use. This is another specious attempt to produce "order" in the church and the truth is that it is disorder, as we shall find if we carefully peruse the instructions in 1 Corinthians 14. God is not the author of disorder or confusion and every human arrangement of the church must really be disorder.

But it may be that some will protest at once that surely the Scripture suggests in, for example, the Epistles to Timothy and Titus that there were those in the very early church who were appointed to do these very things. If we read these epistles and the other Scriptures concerned, with care, we shall find that there were in the early church two and only two offices: these were quite distinct from the gifts, although manifestly a man might possess both a gift and an office.

1. The elder, presbyter or bishop, whose function was in the nature of the oversight of and looking after the local church. In the New Testament, the local church normally had a number of these people and their qualifications were spiritual and moral qualifications generally. There is no church marked out as having only one elder and there is no possible doubt on reading Acts 20 that the church at Ephesus had at any rate a considerable number, and the elders of a number of other churches are referred to in the Scripture.

2. The deacon. It is evident from Acts 6 that the object of the appointment of deacons — again spiritually and morally qualified — was that the church should not be

distracted from its normal collective functions, by side-issues which might arise in the assembly, so men who could be trusted to deal rightly with these matters, were appointed over them.

It will, of course, be observed at once that neither of these two offices relates to the governing of the other churches or areas of land and it is also clear that it was not necessary in any way for the holder of them to be an evangelist, a teacher, a prophet or a pastor. Indeed an evangelist he was quite unlikely to be, in one sense, because those thus gifted appear generally in Scripture as going with their gift over long distances proclaiming the word of God.

If there is with us an earnest desire to be obedient to the Spirit of God, how blessed it would be for us and for the local assembly of God's people, if we were to seek that God would show us individually what function in the church He has fitted us to carry out, and not to seek to carry out someone else's function and not to seek to dominate what we have no authority to dominate but that the Spirit might lead us in everything we do.

It may be that we gather under circumstances in which the Spirit's leading is recognised and earnestly sought. If this is so, let us seek to maintain this happy position when others are giving it up, and let us too in humility seek not prominence but dependence, and that in everything the Lord Jesus Christ and His glorious interests might be more and more before everyone in our particular local company.

The Lord Jesus is soon going to meet His own in the air. May we seek to please Him alone in all that we do individually and collectively until He come.

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

J. STODDART

GLEANINGS FROM CHELTENHAM, 1965

CHAPTER 2

AS we consider together the 2nd chapter of James, it is perhaps right to say that this passage has been one of the battlegrounds of the centuries. It was remarked that Martin Luther called this epistle "an epistle of straw", and it was, in particular, against the background of this second chapter that his feelings were so aroused that at one time he endeavoured to have the book expunged from the Scriptures. It is in fact the only part of the epistle that can properly be described as a doctrinal passage, but it is nevertheless of extreme importance to read it carefully and seek to understand the message of God to us in it.

A few more words as to the setting of James's epistle may be helpful at this point. As already said it was written to Jews who were "scattered abroad", and from Acts 2 we know how widely they were scattered. Although Christians, they still considered themselves in many ways under the Law of Moses, and in most cases were still meeting in the synagogues. We have already seen that first of all James writes with regard to the testings and temptations they would inevitably encounter, and how these were to be met. This is essentially practical, for if Christianity is not practical it is nothing. Its intention and purpose is to work in the lives of us men and women, and doubtless each one of us feels the challenge of truth with so practical a bearing.

The next thing of which James speaks in chapter 1 is the effect of

the Word of God. Working in us, it is that by which we are begotten of God's Own will, a fact supported by other passages of Scripture. It is also the means of bringing salvation to us. It is "able to save your souls (lives)" (verse 21), and it is a mirror (verse 23) to reveal us to ourselves. It would not do to spend too much time gazing into any ordinary mirror, but how important it is to look long into this mirror of the Word, and learn what we should do. The story told at a Conference a year or two ago might profitably be repeated here. It concerned a man who had suffered from lumbago, with its dreadful pain in the back. His doctor prescribed the application of a belladonna plaster for his relief, and indicated how this should be applied with a mirror before and behind. This carefully done, he had difficulty in understanding why after due time his pain still persisted. Returning to his room to look again, the explanation was obvious. There was the plaster carefully stuck to the mirror instead of to his back!

In yet another sense the Word is spoken of as "the law of liberty", and a little more may be said about that. This is the will of God, and to the Lord Jesus Christ the will of God was always the law of liberty. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work." It was the Saviour's joy and delight, for this to Him was the law of liberty. But for one who is a sinner to attempt to do it, this would be bondage, for he finds himself quite incapable of doing what is

required. How then does it come that to One it is liberty and the same thing to another is sheer bondage? Well, the answer is surely the difference of life and nature. Therefore if the Christian has the life and nature of Christ, as he surely has, then to him the will of God can be the "law of liberty" in which he can find his joy. An illustration of Mr. Darby's comes to mind in this connection. If a father's child has his nature, the child would want to do what the father wished. But if a child must be bound with a rope to stay in a room when this was the father's wish, then this is nothing but bondage to the child. God's will is not that we should be in bondage, but that in the power of the new nature we should find our joy in obeying His Word, which is the law of liberty to us. Having said this as a background to the chapter before us, let us now look at this chapter (chap. 2).

Here we find the Lord Jesus spoken of in a way which is found nowhere else in Scripture. From the New Translation it should read, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ (Lord) of glory, with respect of persons." Perhaps the nearest expression to this is found in Hebrews 1, which speaks of Him as the outshining of the glory of God. Oh, the wonder, the excellence of the Person Who is our Lord! But how can we consider His greatness, His glory, and still be chasing the higher opinions of men? The remarks which James now makes are addressed to feelings and inclinations we may find in our own hearts, the tendency to favour the great among men. If a duke or an earl were to come into our meeting would we incline to accord him the place of honour at the front, while giving a back seat to the poor tramp

who has come along? Alas, in some so-called places of worship, this does actually happen, because those who can afford it may rent their pews and choose the best places. When Jesus was invited to the house of one of the chief Pharisees (Luke 14), "He marked how they chose out the chief places," and He taught them by parable that if invited to a wedding it is wisdom to take the lowest place (probably already accorded to Him in the Pharisee's house) for it is possible that the host might bid you go up higher. But if you take a high place you may be humiliated when asked to take a lower seat. How well James had learned the lesson of this wisdom, "for every one that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." We see this worked out perfectly in the Lord Jesus Himself, the Lord of glory, once humbled here (and voluntarily humbling himself) now crowned with highest glory. If we see Christ in our poor brother how gladly we will honour him for Christ's sake.

It is characteristically the poor of this world God has chosen, and just such whom men despise. Conversely, it is the rich who are characterised by oppression, and when satiated by their riches "they blaspheme that worthy Name by which you are called" (verse 7). But the true believer in Jesus has no regard for the world's standards and assessments, for his desire is "to fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." How good to note that this is called, "the royal law", and two good reasons for this may be, (a) that the King Himself fulfilled it, and (b) that it is the law of His kingdom, not for salvation, but for the true expression of our citizenship.

God has so wrought that "the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Rom. 8: 4) But partiality and regard for the persons of men are a transgression of the law, and this is important for us, for while in no sense under the law, our pattern of life is Christ, "Who magnified the Law, and made it honourable." (Isa. 42: 21). Therefore no disobedience to God's Holy Law in my life is Christlike. The story of the Samaritan in Luke 10 is surely very relevant at this point. The priest and the Levite were the professed exponents of the Law, but they failed utterly to practice it, as they passed by the half-dead man by the roadside. The Samaritan, regarded as an outsider, was he who really fulfilled the law by freely giving all the needed help and kindness. And well we know the story as illustrating exactly what Christ has done for us, but He regarded us as His neighbour and loved us who had no claim whatever upon Him. Do we remember that having told this story, the Lord said to His questioner, "Go thou and do likewise"? "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Again, we are to speak and act as those "that shall be judged by the law of liberty" (verse 12). When all our lives are reviewed in a coming day, it will not be by merely legal standards we shall be judged, but by the law of liberty. That is, God has liberated us from sin and judgment, by His grace, and His will is therefore the law of liberty to which we are committed. How good it is to be set free and empowered to do that which is pleasing to God. Christ's life is our life by the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and so John

says that the believer abiding in Him, "ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1 John 2: 6). And solemn it is to be reminded by James that judgment will be without mercy to him that has shown no mercy (v. 13). "For with the same measure with which ye mete (deal to others) it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6: 33).

There was, doubtless, great need among the Christians, believing Jews, to whom James wrote in his day, and there is need among God's people today. This is the challenge to our practical Christianity. Do we boast of our faith and refuse to relieve the needs of others when we have the ability to do so? Can such be saving faith? asks James (verse 14). There may be kindly words of compassion, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," but without giving what is needed, of what avail is this? Where true faith is, this is not the practice, for "faith, if it have not works, is dead by itself" (verse 17). But some would make the grotesque remark, "You've got faith and I've got works," as though the two could be absolutely separated and held apart. How shattering is the wise reply given here (verse 18), "Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." What an invincible argument! For faith could never be demonstrated to any man without the works which are its very evidence. Yet another objection is dealt with. "Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well. The demons also believe, and tremble." Here is an attempt to show faith without works, but this is only common ground with the demons, and they certainly have no faith. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is

dead?" (verse 20).

Now the Epistle to the Romans, and other Scriptures, clearly show that to be right before God, justification by faith is His invariable principle. No amount of works, however seemingly good, could ever gain the favour of God, without faith. But there is no contradiction of this truth, when James insists that Abraham was justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar. His faith (by which he was justified before God) "wrought with his works, and by works faith was perfected," and thus before men was Abraham justified by works. Whether men saw, approved or disapproved such action is not the point here, but rather that here in this world of men he took action consistent with his faith in God. So that as Romans 4: 2 says, "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God." He certainly could glory before men in that his actions were perfectly consistent with his faith. Similarly with Rahab, whose faith was so clearly confessed in her words, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2: 9-11). She then took action based on such

faith, when she hid Joshua's spies from her own countrymen, and sent them to safety another way. She was thus also justified by works, even though such works would be abhorrent to the men of Jericho. In the eyes of Joshua and his men she was unquestionably justified. We may well ask again, why did Martin Luther regard such teaching as inimical to the doctrine of justification by faith?

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (verse 26). Could emphasis be more emphatic than this? Is this not a proof of Luther's contention? No, surely not, for does it not underline that works are the fruit of faith? A dead body may look very like what it did when alive, and the art of the mortician nowadays strives to achieve this. But, alas, there is no action which would even resemble a breath of life. If man's spirit has fled, he can do no more, action has ceased. So the analogy here is that faith (if so it can be called) which produces no corresponding action can be diagnosed as dead. In its very nature faith is the dynamic of every true movement for God, and therefore must give evidence of itself before men in works.

A BELIEF THAT BEHAVES

James was an eminently practical Christian, and he just could not conceive of a merely theoretical faith. I suspect that he would have listened with something like glee to the old Negro preacher who declared, "My bredren, dere be two sides to de Gospel; dere's de beliebing side, and dere's de behaving side!" You might think of this Epistle as an essay on that theme.

GUY H. KING.

THE MILLENNIUM

THE following question has been received in a letter from Mr. Tom Tyson of Crewe:

Are we justified in fixing a period of 1,000 years for the duration of the Lord's coming reign? I believe this period is only mentioned in Revelation 20, and as we acknowledge that most of the other figures in this book are symbolic, can we select this one as being mathematical? I believe there are important implications in this question in view of the numbers of evangelical teachers who find it difficult to believe in a coming Millennium. There are so many Scriptures in Old and New Testaments speaking of the Lord's reign that it is difficult to see how doubts arise.

IT IS OUR firm faith, as a matter outside any real possibility of doubt or question, that the Scriptures teach a future earthly reign of Christ. That the duration of this kingdom will be 1,000 years is perhaps a matter of not quite the same importance. Nevertheless there is good reason for accepting the 1,000 years, in that, in Revelation 20: 4, "they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." In this book of Scripture Christ appears everywhere under symbols: the Lamb, the Man-child, the Word of God, etc. In 20: 4 such symbols are dropped, and the familiar and certain Name appears: "they . . . reigned with Christ." If symbols are at this moment dropped in the Name, then it is likely that symbols are also dropped in the statement of time.

Some time ago a paper by the editor on this subject appeared in *The Christian Graduate*. It is reprinted below with permission, with the proviso that it is remembered that *The Christian Graduate* adopts no particular line of interpretation on such matters. The paper is over-condensed, and will therefore have to be read with attention, but it does attempt to explain when and why doubts arose.

THIS paper has for its purpose to show how the Scriptures promise a yet future earthly reign of Christ. That there are difficulties remains true, but this provides no reason for rejecting plain teaching, even though we may not be able to construct an all-embracing system.

In setting out a point of view briefly, it is not possible to justify each detail. Detailed discussion and proof will have to be reserved for critical and decisive points. Proceeding on this understanding therefore, let us consider the section of the Revelation from 19: 1 to 21: 8,

which, with the exception of a few devotional interludes, unfolds a succession of events in chronological order as follows: the marriage of the Lamb (19: 1-10); the second advent of Christ (19: 11-16); the destruction of the beast and his followers (19: 17-21); the binding of Satan during the millennial reign of Christ (20: 1-6); Satan loosed for a "little season" (20: 7-10); the general resurrection and the last judgment (20: 11-15); the new heavens and new earth in eternity (21: 1-8).

For the purposes of this brief

statement attention must be concentrated on the question, Does this prophecy foretell a future earthly reign of Christ of 1,000 years duration? The alternative suggestion is that it refers to the reign of Christ at present being manifested in the gospel and the Church, and that the period of 1,000 years is simply symbolic of an extended period of time.

W. H. Simcox¹ gives an admirable paper on this question, which is here summarized. The dominant belief up to the fourth century favoured the millenarian view. From the fourth to the sixteenth centuries the millenarian view was generally rejected. At the time of the Reformation, the re-acknowledgment of the supremacy of Scripture was accompanied by a tendency to revive millenarian doctrine, and when current controversies died down, many Protestants returned to belief in the older tradition.

It is especially to be noted that the general revulsion from millenarian views in the fourth century and the partial revulsion after the Reformation were strikingly alike in cause. The cause in both cases was the extravagant and carnal extremes associated with the Scriptural details by its contemporary devotees, and not the doctrine as found in Scripture. In the fourth century an unduly carnal element was apparently universal. In the Reformation period and after, the extremists included Anabaptists and Fifth Monarchy men. Augustine explicitly says the millenarian is an acceptable view of Scripture if shorn of carnal extremes.

Simcox then deals with the binding of Satan and the first resurrection as the key points. Is it possible for anyone honestly to believe that

Satan has been bound since the first coming of Christ in the sense that he does not deceive the nations? Every Christian believes that the general resurrection of Revelation 20: 12 will be a bodily resurrection, why not the first resurrection likewise? Yet Augustine and those who follow his a-millenarian doctrine believe that the binding of Satan of Revelation 20: 2 is the same as the binding in Matthew 12: 29 and that the first resurrection of 20: 5 is the spiritual resurrection of John 5: 25 and introduces men into the Church, within which Satan's power is restrained.

"If anyone can think this a legitimate interpretation of St. John's words, he may, . . . but it seems straining . . . not to take the whole of this chapter as chronologically subsequent to the preceding, and really any view but the literal one seems exposed to insuperable exegetical difficulties. If the true sense be *not* the literal one, it is safest to regard it as being as yet undiscovered' (End of summary of Simcox).

A careful re-reading of this part of the Revelation will at this point show in relief how confused and encumbered the passage becomes on the Augustinian view, according to which 20: 1-6 is a resumption of the whole Christian period, leading to a repeat description of the revolt of antichrist in 20: 7-10. In contrast, is it any wonder that those nearest the apostles in time never questioned the simple, chronological and millenarian meaning as that intended by St. John? Some would not admit the canonicity of the Revelation for the very reason that it so indubitably taught millenarianism.

It is conceded, of course, that Revelation 19: 1 - 21: 8 is the only

¹ *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges: Revelation, Excursus iv.*

Scripture which specifies the duration of 1,000 years and sets the millennium explicitly in its chronological setting. I am not hoping to convince those who do not recognize one word of God as enough for our acceptance. Moreover it is not surprising that the last book of the Bible gathers up and clinches the partial glimpses of the truth on any subject of revelation vouchsafed during the progress of revelation.

We now proceed to pass rapidly in review one or two of those earlier disclosures relating to the yet future earthly kingdom of Christ.

Of these the most important are the visions of Daniel recorded in Daniel 2: 31-35 and Daniel 7: 2-27. On the assumption that the reader has carefully perused these two passages, only two points need emphasis. The first is the focal point in Daniel 7: 13: "behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man . . . and there was given him . . . a kingdom . . . which shall not be destroyed." And with this agrees Daniel 2: 44 "in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed". There are, as everyone admits, uncertainties in the interpretation of these verses, but on one point there can be no uncertainty for anyone who reveres the New Testament. Daniel 7: 13 refers to the "coming" of Christ and, quite specifically, the *second* coming of Christ. There are at least six New Testament references to this idea of "coming with the clouds" and in every case the *second* coming of Christ is beyond doubt the meaning. The most familiar example is Matthew 24: 30, "they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". It is to be noted in passing that this, like the host of other prophecies of the

coming of the Messiah is not to be spiritualized.

The second and crucial point is, of course, what is the nature of the "kingdom" which in Daniel 2 and 7 follows the second advent?

The key words giving the answer to this question are "kingdom" and "earth". The relevant extracts are important enough to be set out in full. I shall set out first the use of these key words regarding the kingdoms before the coming of Christ. "Thou, O king (Nebuchadnezzar) art king of kings, unto whom the God of heaven hath given the *kingdom*" (Dan. 2: 37). "And after thee shall arise another *kingdom* . . . and another third *kingdom* . . . which shall bear rule over all the *earth*" (2: 39). "And the fourth *kingdom* shall be strong as iron" (2: 40). "The fourth beast shall be a fourth *kingdom* upon *earth* . . . and shall devour the whole *earth*" (7: 23). Next, let us note the use of the same words in the same passages which relate to what follows the second advent. "And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole *earth*" (2: 35). "And in the days of those kings shall the God of Heaven set up a *kingdom*, which shall never be destroyed . . . it shall break in pieces and consume all these *kingdoms*" (2: 44). "And there was given him . . . a *kingdom* . . . which shall not pass away, and his *kingdom* that which shall not be destroyed" (7: 14). "And the greatness of the *kingdoms* under the whole heaven, shall be given to the saints of the Most High" (7: 27).

Granting all the divergence of view on the identity of the four kingdoms, what "kingdom" means for the first four, it also means for the fifth. Those four kingdoms were kingdoms upon earth; the kingdom of Christ is a kingdom

upon earth. There are other elements where there may be legitimate divergence of view as to the meaning (the duration of the kingdom for instance) but as to this there is simply no doubt at all; those kingdoms ruled the earth and were on the earth; God's kingdom rules the earth and is on the earth. The earthly kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar would be followed by the earthly kingdom of silver, then of brass, then of iron, then God's earthly kingdom. An earthly kingdom of God and of heaven replaces and succeeds all previous earthly kingdoms, and this passage is the root of the New Testament expressions, "kingdom of God", and "kingdom of heaven".

Once the chronological framework is set by the passages already given, a vast area of Old Testament prophecy deals with this earthly kingdom of Christ and can only be made to refer to the present gospel period by paring away their plain words. Isaiah 2: 4 declares "and they (nations and peoples during a period when the Lord is judging between nations) shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more". These lovely and moving words can have no meaning apart from the millennium. They either promise a millennium or they are false. Can anyone believe that they have had a fulfilment in the spiritual results of the gospel? Similar examples are Isaiah 11: 9 "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" and Isaiah 32: 1 "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness."

It remains to touch on the same

subject in the New Testament. The following is a typical statement by those who apply all these promises to the reign of Christ at present being manifested in the gospel and its results: "Nowhere in the New Testament is Messiah's reign applied to some future earthly millennium: rather it is a reign which began at His resurrection and ascension and proceeds throughout this gospel age until the final climax".¹ It is easy to make such statements; but it is only possible to maintain their truth by ignoring large parts of the New Testament. Let us review it in the light of a few New Testament passages. In Luke 19: 12-27 we have a parable given for the benefit of some who "supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear". These misguided persons held a view in some respects similar to the one we are now considering, to wit, that the only fulfilment of God's kingdom is that realized consequent on the first coming of Christ. To these our Lord said in the parable that the appearance of His kingdom was to be deferred until His second coming, when it would be a kingdom of the kind in which an administrative system would be set up when the few faithful in His absence would reign over the many. 1 Corinthians 6: 2 says "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" This occurs in a context which shows that the word "judge" means "sit in judgment" as in a regular court. According to the view here being examined, the "world" is to know no other age than the gospel age. After this will come the final climax and absolute conclusion of evil in eternity. Where in such a scheme is the place for 1 Corinthians 6: 2? On the other hand it perfectly suits

¹ K. F. W. Prior in the September 1959 issue of *The Christian Graduate*.

a future earthly reign of Christ under whom, as in the parable of Luke 19, His saints shall reign and judge. Let us consider 1 Corinthians 15: 24. The previous verses say that after the resurrection of Christ, follows the second coming. The "then" covers all the centuries (more than a millennium) which elapse between His resurrection and second advent. Verse 24 says "then cometh the end", the final climax. Equally the "then" can and does cover a millennium, this time the millennium of His earthly kingdom, which is the kingdom of verse 24. It will be answered that Christ is reigning now. Is Christ reigning now? He is reigning now only over the faithful few of Luke 19. But the reign preceding the final climax of 1 Corinthians 15: 24 is a reign when "all (other) rule and authority and power" has been subjected to Him.

All this is not to say, of course, that there is not a present aspect of the kingdom of God. The truth is that the basic promise from the Old Testament is of a future earthly kingdom ushered in by the sudden public coming of Christ like the lightning. But our Lord Himself first began to speak of a preliminary "mysteries" form of the kingdom begun by the quiet sowing of the seed, Matthew 13: 11, 35. The parables of Matthew 13 and perhaps the majority of New Testament references refer to this. But the passages above cited in Revelation, Luke 19 and elsewhere are sufficient to make it abundantly clear that the future kingdom has not been abrogated.

The expression "the day of the Lord" evokes large areas of Old Testament prophecy concerning the time when the Lord reigns. It is maintained we are now living in this time and in the fulfilment of

these glorious promises. When did we enter on this period of fulfilment? The explicit purpose of 2 Thessalonians 2: 2 was to assure the Christians that the day of Jehovah had not begun. It must be preceded by the great apostasy (falling away, verse 3) to be destroyed by Christ at His second coming. Then (verse 1) after the second coming and the gathering of the saints to Him the day of the Lord will come. This single expression "the day of the Lord" brings at a sweep a vast range of Old Testament prophecy into a future fulfilment. The exact purpose of the passage is to assure us that it is a delusion to believe that the promises of the Old Testament kingdom are already being fulfilled in the gospel age.

For the present writer, there is a great spiritual impoverishment in refusing the Scripture teaching on the future earthly reign of Christ. That the triumph of God does not include the cleansing of the same earth which has been defiled by sin involves the loss of Romans 8: 21: "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God". That the rejection of Christ on earth is not to be matched by His enthronement on or over the earth, is looked upon by some as spiritual gain, but this is not the view of Scripture itself in Isaiah 52: 14, 15. Such promises of the reign of the Prince of Peace as that already quoted from Isaiah 2: 4 represent, when rightly understood, such glimpses of Him who, as the Sun of Righteousness will yet arise on this earth with healing in His wings, that the song arises: "Believing, we rejoice to see the curse remove; and bless the Lamb with cheerful voice, and sing redeeming Love."

THE sanctuary of God is the place where He dwells with His chosen and redeemed people, as seen in the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 25: 8). There, a holy God could associate with those of His sovereign choice on the ground of the sacrificial victim offered on the brazen altar, and the bringing in of the blood to be upon and before the mercy seat. As in the Tabernacle, which was a shadow of good things to come, so now, consequent upon the finished work of Christ, God dwells in the assembly of His beloved saints, which is His habitation by the Spirit (Eph. 2: 22).

The other side of the picture for us is, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91: 1). Here we find a place of perfect safety and security for the godly and faithful. Another Scripture says: "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee" (Psalm 84: 4). So we find the sanctuary to be a place of worship which can be enjoyed by all believers who avail themselves of God's holy presence through the Spirit; and it is also the place where divine secrets are made known, according to His mind and will. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Psalm 25: 14).

It is the privilege of every believer to meet with God, and there learn all things according to His mind and will. Occupation with Christ is the means by which we can enjoy the privileges of this hallowed place, for, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1: 18). The two disciples who heard John the Baptist speak, and followed

Jesus, were constrained to abide with Him that day. We can be assured that they were so deeply impressed with the blessedness and sweetness of such fellowship with the Son of God, that their hearts were securely attached to Him (John 1: 39). Also, Mary of Bethany sat at His feet and heard His word, which enabled her to become a devoted follower of Christ (Luke 10: 39). Others, too, were willing to come to Him, bearing His yoke and learning of Him, the meek and lowly One (Matthew 11: 28-30). Such had not only rest of conscience, but rest of heart also, as they learned these wonderful lessons of the sanctuary.

In Psalm 73, the two key-words of the discourse are "they" and "their". The Psalm is the experience of one who takes a look out upon the wicked and their temporal prosperity, and is *distracted* in heart and mind. He rightly acknowledges the goodness of God to Israel and to all who are upright in heart, but puts himself in the position of a backslider, who is filled with envy at the apparent affluence and fulness of the wicked. He cannot understand their immunity from the judgment of God, when they treat Him with disdain. Had he made a mistake by taking the side of God and cleansing his heart from evil? His present portion seemed to be one of chastisement and trouble all the day long. He could find no comfort in speaking to others of his faith in God, lest they should be offended. Where could he turn for relief and find a solution to his problem?

Then, in the sanctuary of God he saw all things clearly from the side of the One Who is infinite in knowledge and power. He also was given to understand the end of the wicked and to know what was his own portion as a child of God.

Their end was judgment, which would overtake them suddenly, and that without remedy. Their feet were set in slippery places, and it was the God Whom they had despised, Who would cast them down to destruction in a moment. The terrors of hell would then be their portion, and God, once set at naught by them, would despise and disdain them in the hour of deepest misery and need.

How good it is for us to turn from the judgment of the wicked and consider the blessings which belong to the simple believer in the living God. He enjoys the nearness of companionship, saying to God, "I am continually with thee" and has divine support too, for "Thou hast holden me by my right hand" (Psalm 73: 23). God also makes known to him the way he should take, making no mistake in this, for it is according to his counsel. This, too, is followed by the reception into God's eternal presence in the glory (verse 24). Well might the Psalmist be lifted to the platform of praise and joyful satisfaction when he says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psalm 73: 25). So God in His mercy has manifested His sufficiency to His poor, failing servant, causing him to exult in the glorious fact that He is his portion for ever.

In Psalm 77: 1-10 the two key-words are "I" and "my", and the one who looked inwardly was marked by *contraction*. As if in relation with God, he cried to Him with the voice, but apparently not from the heart. For him it was a day of trouble and his hand was stretched out in search of comfort but it would not be found. There can be no comfort in self-occupation when passing through sorrow and trouble; it is only found in the God of all comfort. Every thought

of God brought trouble to him (verse 3) and being filled with complaining, his spirit was overwhelmed. Sleeplessness brought him more trouble, and when he communed with his own heart he began to wonder if God had turned away from him. He asked himself six questions concerning Him, which sprang from a doubtful heart (verses 7, 8 and 9). "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" He doubted His love. "Will he be favourable no more?" He doubted His mercy. "Doth his promise fail for evermore?" He doubted His promises. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" He doubted His grace. "Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" He doubted His compassions. Little wonder then that such a person was overwhelmed with sadness and depression.

Acknowledging his infirmity, he allowed his mind to remember the things which were for his benefit and blessing. He called to mind the years of the right hand of the most High, which endure for ever, and the works which spoke of His power, also His wonders of old which had brought redemption and blessing to Israel. The outlook now is changed from self to God, from being overwhelmed to having his heart filled with thanksgiving and praise.

Entering the sanctuary (verse 13) he is brought to know two things connected with the ways of God: firstly, His greatness in redemption, and secondly, His skill in leadership. The One Who has bought us at such infinite cost by His own precious blood, is well able to guide our footsteps for the whole of the wilderness journey. Then his attention is blessedly drawn to consider the inside place where God dwells and to know how His people have been brought there. The greatness of God has been declared

in redemption and His sovereign choice made known in taking up the sons of Jacob and Joseph. (The twelve tribes came from Jacob but of these, two sprang from Joseph). So, extricating them from the bondage of Egypt by blood and power, God overturned every obstacle which was in the way and brought His redeemed people to Himself. The sea was divided, the heavens poured out water, and the earth trembled and shook by reason of the thunderings and lightnings.

Truly, God had declared His way to be in the sea, and His path in the great waters and His footsteps were not known. Then, finally, manifesting His shepherd care over His people, He raised up Moses and Aaron to guide them through the wilderness and minister to Him in the sanctuary.

As we consider Psalm 63, the key-words here are "Thee" and "Thy" and the outlook is one of divine *attraction*. The Psalmist is evidently in the blessed, sweet enjoyment of communion with God, and desires more of it. It is strangely contrasted with the scene around, described as a dry and thirsty land where no water is. The prophet spoke of the Lord as being a root out of a dry ground (Isaiah 53: 2): also, of Mephibosheth, it was said that he dwelt in Lo-debar, a place of no pasture (2 Samuel 9: 4). There is nothing in this world and its systems for the child of God.

When the sanctuary is reached (Psalm 63: 2) every whit of it declared the power and glory of Jehovah, power on the behalf of His redeemed people, and glory shining forth from the One Who filled the scene. There was also lovingkindness, more excellent than life, producing praises from the lips in glad response. So the blessing of God which had come down

to bless His creature man, was now given back to Him in perpetuity. What the law could not do by its rigid commands, is now accomplished by kindness and love from God Who delights in grace and blessing.

It is a scene of satisfaction, for in no other place could it be found but in the dwelling place of God Himself. The soul of the Psalmist is completely at rest as one who is delighting in fatness. Praise fills his mouth, and with joyful lips the song bursts forth to Him Who engages and fills the heart with Himself. The hands also are lifted up in supplicating praise and thanksgiving, invoking God for further blessing, according to His holy Name. Even in the night season, the pleasure of meditation and remembrance of His unfailing strength gives occasion for further rejoicing. He recalls the seasonable help he had received from God, and finds the shadow of His wings the place of safety, where all anxiety is removed. In this sense of freedom, the soul is drawn out to follow after Him with diligence, and divine support is given for every step of the way. By this means, his soul is preserved, and the adversaries who would seek to destroy him are dealt with in judgment by God, Who is the strength of His people.

This is a Psalm of great rejoicing in God, Who will honour all who swear by Him, by bringing glory upon them. The circumstances of David were very hard and difficult at this time (1 Samuel 22: 5). Hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, he found his resource in God Who caused him to indite such a Psalm of praise and triumph for our encouragement and strengthening of faith. May we know more of these wonderful lessons of the sanctuary, entering with hallowed liberty into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus.

3. "GOD WHICH WORKETH ALL IN ALL"

ONE of the outstanding features of modern evangelistic work is the extreme ramification of the *organisation* involved. The stage is elaborately set and the scenes managed. The date and venue are chosen months or years ahead. Offices and H.Q. are established as for a military campaign. Every department of effort is then organised beforehand to the last detail: finance, counselling, follow-up, transport, relays, broadcasts. Even prayer is marshalled and organised and regimented.

Turning again to the pages of the Acts the story bears the marks of the most astonishingly exact co-ordination of all the agencies concerned. We are now to look at this facet in closer detail. The stage is certainly being set and the scenes managed; but not by men, even men of God. God is behind the scenes and is moving them Himself. There is no other conceivable explanation for the perfect co-ordination of all the parts.

Two other general remarks must be made at this point. In the first place none must make the mistake of imagining that in modern evangelism the organisational structure described above is the *whole* story. Regarding the leaders of the evangelical movement themselves, we have to recognise with deepest thanksgiving three features which accord most fully with the conditions of gospel blessing we are finding in the Acts. These three are: their absolutely exclusive *dedication* to the work of bringing men and women to Christ: the prominence accorded to *the Bible* as the Word of God: and their reliance

on *prayer* as expressive of their dependence on God. The part played in Acts by the Word of God we have already considered, and to the other two we shall return in the last paper.

The second general remark concerns the kind of world in which the events of the Acts took place. It might be objected to the point of view here being taken, that to organise is part of our contemporary world, and that it was not part of the world of the New Testament. Anyone with knowledge of the Roman world knows how far this is from the truth. There can be no question that the inspired author of the Acts was well acquainted with the elaborate degree of organisation existing and operating in the Roman world. The supply and movement of armies, the corn supply of the city of Rome, the collection of taxes, the administration of the provinces, were only possible because of the genius for organisation available. In the work of the gospel rudimentary and simple arrangements were made, of course, as in the use of the school of Tyrannus, but the gospel did not rely on organisation, not because they did not know how to organise, but because they knew "a more excellent way", which we would do well to learn.

The management of the scenes and the setting of the stage are convenient headings under which to look again at the Acts to see how clearly the Person at work is God Himself. The former is on the surface for all to see; the latter requires a rather closer observation.

1. *The Scenes Managed.* The three

agencies at work under God in the Acts were noted at the outset: the Word, the Hearer and the Servant. In the detail of chapter 2 ("The Hearer"), it became clear that God alone could bring together the Word and the Hearer in the way of preparation of the latter. Reviewing now the same narratives it will become manifested how the movements of His servants are dictated by God, deploying nothing less than omniscience in doing so. Can there be any man-made substitute for this?

Taking some outstanding examples in the order in which they occur in Acts, the case of the Eunuch comes first. Immediately following the exciting and even dramatic events connected with Philip, Samaria and Simon, "the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.' And he arose and went." God is now managing the scene, and quite independently of, and superior to the knowledge of, His servant. The eunuch had to travel more than a thousand miles, with the luxury of his chariot and a train of attendants. Philip had to finish with one great work of God, and to travel seventy or eighty miles, evidently on foot. They met at the exact moment for the eunuch's blessing, for so it had been ordained of God, and the really crucial matter was that His servant's ear and will were so attuned that he was simply and instantly at God's disposal.

In the stories of the conversion of Saul and of Cornelius, the servants of God manifested some reluctance, in the one case due to very understandable fear, and in the other due to equally understandable Judaistic

prejudice. In each case there is the same delightful directness of communication between our ever-patient God and His reluctant servant, reminiscent of patriarchal days. The coincidence of events, if attributed to chance, would be unbelievably astonishing. When the messengers of Cornelius set out on their journey, Peter was of a mind in which he would have shown them the door. When they arrived at Joppa, a prepared Peter received them kindly. We should not lose the full wonder of the coincidence because we can see so clearly that the worker is God.

A rather different aspect of the matter is illustrated in the history of Paul up to the point of his special commission for the work of the Lord in Acts 13: 2. There is no trace of an idea that Paul planned for himself a kind of "career" in the gospel. After his conversion and contact with the apostles in Jerusalem, his action is most interesting. He does a very humdrum-looking thing, that is, he simply goes home to Tarsus (Acts 9: 30) and there remains until (11: 25) Barnabas comes to Tarsus to bring him to help in the new work at Antioch. There he continued in the ordinary course of assembly life until (13: 2) the Holy Ghost, by prophecy, separated him for the great work to which God thus called him. The same principle is exemplified in the life and work of Luther. He had no idea of planning the immense achievements now universally linked with his name. After his conversion, from the moment when he was so outraged by the sale of indulgences that he nailed his theses to the church door at Wittenberg, he faced each situation as it arose, and in this way God led him step by step until the great work was done.

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

J. STODDART

GLEANINGS FROM CHELTENHAM, 1965

CHAPTER 3

IN the course of our study, it has already become clear that the key idea of this epistle of James is the need to show our faith by our works. Now what is involved in the use of the expression "works"? It is perhaps one of the archaic uses of words as found in our Authorised Version, meaning what we do as distinct from what we believe, and in its context here it covers every kind of action, including speech. It has been said that two key verses of the epistle are verse 26 and 27 of chapter 1. Verse 26 is the negative statement that "if a man bridleth not his tongue, he deceiveth his own heart, and this man's religion is vain." His speech is evidently inconsistent with what he does, and therefore both are useless. But stated positively, verse 27 says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Here faith is seen in action, and both the faith (before God and the Father) and the action (before men) are seen to be consistent.

Once again our chapter commences with that characteristic expression of James', "My Brethren." The repeated use of this term before pressing home some important exhortation, proves the great affection of this man for his brethren to whom he writes. And if these were Jewish brethren in the first place, let us remember that the Holy Spirit indited these words for us in this day. The exhortations are thus given in love and not in any hostile spirit. And surely, on our part, love is the true spring of every

action we must take to benefit from our consideration of these chapters. We may, of course, fall into the trap of seeing the dangers of which we are made aware and doing nothing about it. Again, we may argue that it is possible to do things in the flesh, and that this would be quite wrong. Or we may say that works can be done merely to be great in somebody's estimation. The net effect of such talk is that we do precisely nothing about it, whereas James is urging upon us the need for action, action that springs from faith and therefore cannot be wrong in its motives. Let us therefore duly consider the dangers pointed out, but from that point proceed to prayerfully take the action enjoined.

Now there are two broad divisions in this chapter, the first one extending down to verse 12, and the second from verse 13 to the end. The first of these deals with warnings and exhortations about the tongue and its activities; and the second, still much in the same context, speaks of that wisdom in the heart out of which the tongue would speak aright. For surely the words of the Lord Jesus are ever true that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh", and this is true whether it be good or evil under consideration. That which James sees to be important is to trace things, words and actions, to their source. We have already seen this in chapter 1, where the second aspect of temptation is traced to the inward lust and enticement of man's sinful nature. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth *sin*; and *sin*, when it is finished

bringeth forth death" (verse 15). Here is the sad, sad source and stream that emanates from the heart of man. But James pursues his quest for sources, when he comes to consider "every good gift and every perfect gift". Where do such things have their source? They are "from above and come down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (verse 17). Their source is in the heart of God Himself.

In verse 17 of chapter 3 this is the source of that wisdom that is "from above, and which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated". But another kind of wisdom is traced to its source in verses 14 and 15. It does not come down from above, "but is earthly, sensual, devilish" and emanates from "bitter envying and strife in your hearts". This expresses itself in "confusion and every evil work" (verse 16). Thus again, we see the source and the stream, as applied to the great subject of this chapter, which is the tongue. We may ask why the tongue occupies a place of such importance in connection with James' insistence upon the works of faith. It evidently stems from the introduction of masters, or teachers, as the word should be, in verse 1. It is the primary tool of the teacher in instructing others, and hence the need for true teachers, not simply those whose aim and ambition was to teach others. It would seem that there was a multiplicity of teachers in those days, or perhaps it would be truer to say too many aspiring teachers, as is manifestly the case today. Paul warned Timothy (2 Timothy 4: 3) that "the time would come when . . . they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." Also to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4: 15) he says, "for though

you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you have not many fathers." Teaching, speaking and the use of the tongue in general are fraught with the most immense possibilities for good and evil. We are reminded in Proverbs 18: 21 that "death and life are in the power of the tongue", hence the need now emphasised for its proper control.

Attention is drawn to the littleness of the tongue as a member of the human body (verse 5) and the greatness of what it can do. Three similes are used to illustrate this. First, the bit put in a horse's mouth brings the animal into complete obedience, so that its whole body can be turned about at will. Secondly, a comparatively small rudder enables the helmsman of a great ship to control the vessel's direction as he pleases. (This is even more true today than when James wrote.) Thirdly, the little fire, like a burning match, can set a whole forest ablaze. Perhaps having this verse in mind, Burns neatly phrased it that "a little spark makes muckle wark". Surely we feel the impact of this truth upon ourselves, for truly James says, "in many things we all offend" (not that we offend all). To avoid offending in word constitutes one a perfect man, able to control his whole body. But the question is, Who can tame man's (or woman's) tongue? Man has succeeded in taming all kinds of creatures, some much more powerful than himself and greater in size by far. "But the tongue," insists James, "can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison". But what is impossible to man, God can do by His power and grace, and can replace cursing lips by lips that bless God, even the Father. The bit in the mouth of the horse is under the control of the driver, and the

rudder is controlled by the helmsman, so must we submit our unruly tongues to the control of God's power. But it ought not to be that out of the same mouth should proceed blessing and cursing. This phenomenal condition, possible in man, is seen nowhere else in creation. A fresh water fountain yields fresh water only, and a fruit tree bears its own particular fruit and nothing else. How sadly strange that we men should be the exception to this law! Here is a deplorable comment upon the two natures in a believer.

If we read the first three verses of Psalm 39 we shall find a true soliloquy upon this subject in these words. "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue." Picture this man, desperately trying to control his tongue by silence. But what is in his heart is stewing up and fermenting all the time, getting hotter and hotter until like a fire beyond control it bursts out from his lips. What ignominious defeat and failure! In sharp contrast with this is the opening of Psalm 45, "My heart is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things which I have made touching the King. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer." What a difference, when the heart is full of Christ! The lips are then ready and glad to speak of Him, for here indeed is "good matter". Here then is the challenge to us as to what really fills our hearts, for to that source must be traced anything about which some action is needed. A

monastic silence is not the solution, for whatever is entertained in the heart, must eventually break out in speech.

A great hymn-writer of the last century was Mrs. C. F. Alexander, and her best-known hymn is such a classic that as long as hymns are sung it will never die. It is, of course, the choice lines of, "There is a green hill far away." Someone once said to her husband, who was the Archbishop of all Ireland, with fulsome flattery, that he would be remembered for all the great works he had done. In reply he said, "When I am gone, I shall be remembered as the husband of the woman who wrote, "There is a green hill far away." It is most striking to remember that Mrs. Alexander wrote such hymns for a handful of children in a kind of rudimentary Sunday School class which she taught. As we read them and feel their grip and power, we must think of a little circle of poor bairns gathered round the wife of the great archbishop. She writes the hymns for them and gets them to repeat the lines, and yet in the most vivid way she describes in them the very problems we are facing today. One such hymn comes to mind, and is, of course, set in the language of the social distinctions of her day. We shall all recall these simple yet profound lines —

*We are but little children weak,
Nor born in any high estate;
What can we do for Jesus' sake,
Who is so high and good and great?*

*When deep within our swelling hearts
The thoughts of pride and anger rise;
When bitter words are on our tongues
And tears of passion in our eyes.*

*Then we may stay the angry blow,
Then we may check the hasty word;
Give gentle answers back again,
And fight a battle for our Lord.*

*With smiles of peace, and looks of love,
Light in our dwellings we may make :
Bid kind good humour brighten there
And still do all for Jesus' sake.*

*There's not a child so small and weak
But has his little cross to take,
His little work of love and praise
That he may do for Jesus' sake.*

These childish lines portray most vividly the kind of problem we are now considering. The writer had seen those tears of passion in the eye, perhaps seen children stamping with frustration and rage. Now she teaches them how to stay that angry blow, how to check the hasty word, and so to fight a battle for the Lord. She knew that what explodes in the heart must come out through the lips.

It may be our impression that James chapter 3 is very largely negative and this would be true, but for the last two verses, verses 17 and 18. Here we come to what is blessedly positive and that which is only seen in absolute perfection in the Lord Jesus Himself. "The wisdom that is from above" is that which characterised Him in every detail of His earthly life. It is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy". He Who was the eternal Wisdom of Proverbs 8, manifested every gracious feature of wisdom from above as described in this verse. In Isaiah 50: 4, we hear Him say (prophetically), "The Lord God hath given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: morning by morning He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." Again in Psalm 45: 2 we read that grace is poured into His lips. Is there any wonder then that as He stood up and preached in the synagogue at Nazareth, "all bare Him

witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4: 22). Or again, that when the temple guards were sent to arrest Him, they returned without the prisoner. On being questioned their very valid reason was given — "Never man spake like this man" (John 7: 46). His words had arrested them!

We rightly admire and adore these lovely moral features of the Lord Jesus, but the bearing of James 3 is that the wisdom that is from above is that which should govern our hearts and lives. How is this possible? Only in the measure in which He dwells in our hearts by faith. To this extent we may be known as "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy". How very much we need to pray for this wisdom, as enjoined in chapter 1, verse 5, then as we are occupied with Him "Who is made *unto us* wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1: 30), others will observe in us the words and ways of a wisdom that is from above.

Doubtless the salutary effect of reading a chapter like this is felt by us all, and without the positive and powerful contents of these last two verses, it would leave us fairly shattered. The frustrations of business life, the irksomeness of ill-health and pain and the provocation of a thousand things in the daily round may test us sorely, and I am to remember that a little word of mine can be fraught with the most serious repercussions. The saddest commentary on the life of Moses, the man of God, is in Psalm 106: 32, 33, where we read that his people "angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes. Because they provoked his spirit, so that he

spoke unadvisedly with his lips". And because Moses called God's people "rebels" (Numbers 20: 10) he was prevented from entering the land of promise.

As we take, therefore the warnings and encouragements of James

3 to ourselves, may we do so with prayerful intent, emulating the desires of David in Psalm 19: 14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my Strength and my Redeemer."

THE HYMN OF LOVE

G. A. C. BINNIE

REFLECTIONS ON 1 CORINTHIANS 13

THIS chapter is well called the "Hymn of Love", for here are seen the highest points of Christian living, Christian character, and, in its context, Christian gifts. The chapter can be considered in three ways:

- (1) As a guide to the exercise of spiritual gifts.
- (2) As it speaks of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- (3) As a guide to us in our own contemporary individual and corporate Christian lives.

(1) This Hymn of love must first be considered in its context, and its context is evidently an answer to some questions asked by the Corinthians about Spiritual gifts. The Corinthians seemed to have an abundance of the more obvious and more prominent gifts, so much so that these were being used with pride and with lust for admiration, rather than with humility and with desire for the profit of the body of Christ. So Paul reminded them that the greatest of all Spiritual gifts is love: the gift that lies within the reach of the most weak and feeble Christian — and the gift that paradoxically perhaps, is most easily missed by the leaders and prominent men in the life of the Church. Paul deals with love in its relationship to gifts in three sections.

a. In verses 1-3 is seen what has been called the Priority of Love, where the importance of love in the use of spiritual gifts is stressed and the absolute uselessness of gifts without love is emphasised; love is the essential thing, love is what matters, love is what demonstrates the power behind the use of any gift of God.

b. Verses 4-7 show the Practice of Love in the life of the Church, with its working out in a practical way in relation to the gifts which were present in the Corinthian Church.

c. Verses 8-13 show the Persistence of Love after all other gifts have done their work and disappeared; these verses demonstrate the supremacy and permanence of love over all other gifts, for it alone will last into eternity, whereas all the other gifts of the Spirit are but temporary and for the help of a Church which cannot as yet see its Lord except with the eyes of faith.

(2) This chapter speaks to us of the love of Jesus, and the Lord Jesus in His life and character was and is the complete manifestation of all the facets of love on which this portion touches. The three sections of the chapter reveal in three different ways the love of Christ.

a. Love alone counts — verses 1-3; His voice always spoke in love;

even when scarifying the Pharisees, He sought their salvation, and finally He gave His life and His all — in love for us sinful men and women, whose sins were responsible for His being on the cross.

b. Verses 4-7 show how love alone conquers — the love which made the Lord become of no reputation, and the love which allowed the Lord of Glory to be reviled without destroying those who reviled Him. The very words speak of the patient love for mankind which was the essence of the Saviour's life and message — love is patient, love is kind, and so on, to give some fifteen characteristics of love which are most perfectly demonstrated in the person and work of our Lord Jesus.

c. Finally, verses 8-13 show how love alone continues. The love of God revealed in the Lord Jesus is the most certain fact in the world today; faith will cease, hope will become of no value, but love will continue for ever, the love of God shining in the face of His Son in glory, the love and the place which every child of God will be privileged to share.

(3) This hymn of love acts as an up-to-date guide and plumbline to us today in all our doing and thinking. The practice of love gives the answer to all our divisions, quarrels and misunderstandings — if we all followed its precepts and lived in the light of the love of which the chapter speaks. As we consider this portion in 1966, bringing it into a present day context, the chapter can again be considered in its three sections.

a. The priority of love is seen in the first three verses and this reminds us again of the first importance of love in all that we are or do as Christians. Gift without love is unavailing; charity without love is valueless; mortification of the flesh without love is futile.

b. The practice of love in the Church today is the application of verses 4-7, and if love were practised today as the Corinthians were exhorted to practice it in these verses, how different would be our own personal lives as well as our corporate church lives. Love would prevent abuse of the open meeting for ministry — "love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly". Love is consistent with encouraging true gift — "follow after love, and desire spiritual gifts."

c. The persistence of love is seen again in the last six verses, and this fact is what makes love so important. For not only will love live on in this life, but love will persist in the life that is to come; our way may seem dark and we may seem to stumble like people using sun-spectacles on a foggy day, but once love comes to fruition, then we shall see clearly and face to face. Then will the desire of God to have a people for Himself be realised, then will the love of Christ for His Church reach its fulfilment, and then the myriads who have needed faith and hope to sustain them until the climax of the ages, will find that love is all that will be needed.

Love is the Christian's highest aim, and Christian love is seen in its greatest and noblest form in that love which finds something precious in its object — that love which is a true reflection of the love which Christ had for mankind. This is an attitude of the heart, mind and will, which is possible only in those who live in the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. This is what God desires: this is surely the desire of our hearts until the day dawns when faith and hope are gone for ever, and love is fully revealed to the Church in the presence of our living Lord.

3. "GOD WHICH WORKETH ALL IN ALL"

(CONTINUED)

IT has been seen on the surface of the narrative how God is at work, with a touch so much surer than the touch of any human agency, managing the scenes and disposing His servants. It is easy to overlook, however, that God is not only managing the scenes, but is doing so on a stage prepared by Himself. It was "in the fulness of the time" that God sent forth His Son. It was in "due time" that Christ died for the ungodly.

It is an often told story how that wherever Paul and his company journeyed preaching the Word, things were prepared for them in that they found ready:

- meeting-places for Jews and prepared Gentiles — synagogues;
- a common language — Greek;
- the Greek Bible;
- ease of travel over many countries.

The fact that the messengers of the gospel found *synagogues* nearly everywhere was due to the Jewish Dispersion, to which several references are made in Scripture (John 7: 35; 1 Peter 1: 1; James 1: 1). A modern historian, unlikely to have much interest in emphasizing the providential preparation of the world for the spread of the gospel, writes: "The most remarkable phenomenon presented by Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period is its dispersion along the shores of the Mediterranean." Probably we have to look for the commencement of the process with the Jews who remained in Babylon at the time of the return of the Remnant under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, but even in those early days the process seems to have been on a wider scale, since there was a military colony of Jewish mercenaries in the time of Nehe-

miah located at Elephantine in Egypt. Movements of Jews to Egypt are, of course, often witnessed by Isaiah and Jeremiah. Probably the most important movements for our purpose took place in the sections into which the realms of Alexander the Great fell apart after his death in B.C. 323. Since relations with God's people were mainly in the hands of two of these successors, they are singled out in Scripture for special mention as the King of the North (the Seleucids, reigning in their principal city of Antioch in Syria), and the King of the South (the Ptolemies, reigning in their principal city of Alexandria in Egypt). During the fluctuating fortunes of these two dynasties the Jews were spread far and wide around the Mediterranean coast from Rome, through Greece, Asia Minor and Syria to Egypt in the south. Among these widely dispersed settlements of Jews the Pharisees organised and developed the synagogues in the second century B.C.

These communities of Jews were not small in either number or importance. Their number in Egypt in the time of Christ was estimated at one million. They everywhere made a powerful impact, and many Gentile proselytes or God-fearers were numbered among the regular synagogue congregations. Thus, when after numerous Bible hints, we come to the clear light of the Acts, we find that the Pauline party found everywhere ready-made audiences, first of Jews, but always giving immediate access to Gentiles divinely prepared for the reception of the gospel of Christ.

It is a fact often overlooked that the Epistle to the Romans was written, not in Latin, but in the Greek

language, and this is a striking instance of the immense importance of the existence of a universal language in the world where the first preachers travelled. It was, of course, the conquests of Alexander which spread abroad the Greek language in this way. In the process, the classical language of Plato became modified for everyday use, and one of the most interesting of comparatively modern discoveries has been papyri preserved in Egypt containing records of everyday transactions. These not only show the extent to which the Greek language had become "domesticated" throughout the world, but also furnish important illustrations of the contemporary meanings of New Testament words. The result of all this was that a knowledge of the Greek language would take a traveller anywhere in the civilised world. The language question is prominent in the Acts. "Canst thou speak Greek?" said the chief captain in Acts 21: 37, and the narrative glides easily over the facility with which Paul switched from speaking Greek to the chief captain to addressing the crowd of Jews in Aramaic. To contemplate the language problem of today in the same area, and consider a land journey round the eastern shores of the Mediterranean from Egypt to Rome, or even to Spain, reveals a very great contrast, not to the advantage of the present day. All this was not by chance, but was an element in God's working, leading up to "the fulness of the time".

The language question, greatly important for preaching, is yet more important because it made possible the *Greek Bible*. In our first chapter we saw that the Word preached was "Christ out of the Scriptures", and now we observe that the audiences were composed

of Jews and Gentiles who knew the Scriptures and understood and received such addresses as that given in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13). The natural outcome (and yet so much more than natural) of the facts of the Dispersion of the Jews and the spread of the Greek language was the translation of the Old Testament into Greek about 200 years before Christ. This took place at Alexandria in Egypt, and since it was the work of seventy-two elders, it was called the Septuagint (LXX). This was the book being read by the eunuch. This was the book in the hands of the synagogue audiences in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and so many other cities named.

Among the works which the world of the New Testament owed, under God, to the Romans, as distinct from the Greeks in the subjects of the preceding paragraphs, was the "majesty of the Roman peace" and the *Roman roads*. This is as well exemplified in Britain as anywhere else. Right until the advent of the motorways, which deliberately set out to avoid cities, the main roads of England follow the network of roads made by the Romans. It is rather striking that while there is a good deal of explicit reference in Acts to ease of sea travel, road travel seems to be taken for granted, until we come to the Appian Way suggested in 28: 15 and well-known today to every visitor. Apart from seasonal delays due to weather, it seems to have been the easiest thing in the world to book a sea passage. Ease and security of travel was no small element in the providential preparation for the preaching of the gospel. The "perils of robbers" noted in 2 Corinthians 11: 26 were indeed real sufferings, but they did not prevent travel.

The sum of these particular facts is that it is beyond human power to

arrange things on the scale (in both time and space) in which God orders them. What really matters is not to have a wide-spreading organisation, but to give absolute priority to

being available to God for the work which He is surely doing, so that His servants may be set each in his place to act for God as He orders.

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

J. STODDART

GLEANINGS FROM CHELTENHAM, 1965

CHAPTER 4

IN our study of this Epistle thus far we have been impressed with the number and variety of ways in which the unbridled will of man expresses itself. In the case of unregenerate men this is readily understood, but to see this in evidence alongside the fact of the new nature in the believer is as strangely common as it is true. Surely this would underline the sober truth that the flesh is indeed incorrigible and utterly incapable of pleasing God, whether it is viewed in believers or unbelievers. The power of the new nature alone can produce action in line with God's will, because it is directed and inspired by the "wisdom that is from above".

The theme of chapter 3 is thus projected into chapter 4. The basic question here is whether our aim in life is our own pleasure and self-will, or pleasing God and doing His will. Only the Christian can be confronted with this choice, as the natural man is not concerned with doing God's will. Alas, the spectacle of wars and fightings "among you", that is, among those who profess Christ's Name, shows most patently that self has dictated the aim, with the most dire and inevitable consequences. It is the broadest possible truth that the pursuit of pleasure becomes, as another has said, "a competitive arena in which men trample each other down in the rush to grasp the same things and eliminate their

rivals". This is in abundant display in the world, but if self-will is permitted in the Christian circle its end-product is no different. Have we not seen even there what has shamed us, resulting from the insistence of men for power, for prominence, for leadership and the like? Let us remember that the word "lust" in this chapter is not gross physical indulgence, but simply self-pleasing, which can be exercised under the cloak of extreme piety and so-called "maintenance of principles". On the other hand, the aim to do God's will and to please Him is most truly expressed in loving and serving one another, the unfailing power which draws us together to maintain "the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace".

It was felt that this chapter might make a special appeal to the young Christian, while challenging the oldest, in the recognition of the struggle between mutually opposing and powerful desires within, the product of two very different natures. Reference was made by way of illustration to the story of Genesis 25 where we read of Rebecca, just before her twin sons, Esau and Jacob, were born, being troubled that "the children struggled together within her". The interminable opposition of these two different natures was already taking place. But Rebecca rightly wondered (as our struggles have no doubt caused us to do!),

why this state of affairs should be. Wisely she took her problem to the Lord, to enquire of Him. Do we take our problems there to get His answer, then we shall find as she found that divine light can explain everything and set the heart and mind at rest. We are encouraged in this chapter to, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you" (verse 8). It is in this action that a personal history with God is established, not merely as occasion or need may necessitate our approach to Him, but in habitual drawing near to God every day and every hour of our lives. It is thus we prove that, "He giveth more grace", and in submitting ourselves to God we can "resist the Devil, and he will flee from you" (verse 8).

The suggested divisions of this chapter are verses 1 to 10, verses 11 to 12, and verses 13 to the end. Thus we have seen in the first section, not only the shameful results of self-pleasing and determined self-will among Christians, but the viable solution to such problems in cultivating the practice of the presence of God, in humbling ourselves in His sight, leaving it to Him to lift us up. Self-seeking can only ally us with the world whose friendship is enmity with God. Would we wilfully align our aims with those of the world which crucified Christ, our Saviour? God forbid, but in order that we might see the gravity of such a position it is called here adultery, not in the physical sense, but spiritual adultery, an unholy affinity with that which is at enmity with God. Ruth, the Moabitess, belonged to a world of this character. Her name means "friendship", and with a heart won for God, she turned her back upon that world and its friendship to follow after one to whom she vowed, "Thy people shall be my

people and thy God my God." Her allegiance to God was expressed in her allegiance to God's people, and never again would she court the friendship of her native Moab. How essential is this lesson if our faith and our works are to correspond in lives that seek to please God and do His will!

The subject of the world's friendship could profitably occupy more space in this paper, and may well be pursued elsewhere. In the context of James 4, however, we are to see it as one of the many evidences of the will in action and opposed to the will of God. There are other manifestations, too, of self-will, and this may be seen in the second section, verses 11 to 12. The subject of evil speaking here recalls the lesson of chapter 2, but now it is the question of judging one's brethren and speaking evil of them. How easy it is to permit oneself to indulge in this practice, and that with a sense of righteousness and maintenance of the truth. If ever we feel tempted on these lines, let us betake ourselves to the most clear instructions from the Saviour's lips in Matthew 7: 1-5. These unequivocal commands, repeated and quoted so many times throughout the Scriptures, are possibly the most violated in the whole of Christian practice. James warns us that in judging our brother we put ourselves above the law of God and sit in the superior seat of the judge. "Who art thou, to do this?" he asks. There is indeed One competent to administer the law, "Who is able to save and to destroy" (verse 12). When His enemies challenged the Lord Jesus to judge according to the Law in the clear case of John 8: 1-11, He chose with perfect right to exercise saving grace.

In the final verses of our chapter,

we may well see something which has a striking relevance to our day. With the wonderful facilities for modern travel, how much easier it is for us than in James's day to say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and spend a year there, and we will trade and make a profit." Forward planning is one of the key ideas of modern commerce and industry, and how convincing are the arguments which support it. Indeed a planned economy is regarded as essential to survival in a highly competitive world. What then can be wrong with such thinking? Surely some degree of planning ahead must be practiced even in the life of a Christian. And in 1 Timothy 5: 8 it is stated that, "if any provide not for his own, and specially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." He has taken no regard for the future of his household. But James, with equal wisdom and truth, reminds us that the future (as to time) is unknown to us. "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (verse 14). And yet again we read, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27: 1).

There is a great call for realism at this point, and James faces the issues squarely. His question, "What is your life?" (verse 14) is answered in the most undeniable way and gives the true perspective. "It is even a vapour appearing for a little while, and then disappear-

ing." Like steam from a kettle, it is there, and it is gone. All our plans for future days must be geared to this fact, therefore, and submitted to the Lord's will. For indeed Job reminds us that "in His hand is the breath of all mankind" (12: 10). But it is not God's intention that life's uncertainty should be the cause of fear or inaction. It is simply His purpose that we should recognise the supremacy of His will in connection with all we plan for the future. "We ought to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.'" Paul writing to Corinth says, "I will come to you shortly, *if the Lord will*" (1 Corinthians 4: 19), and again, "I trust to tarry with you a while, *if the Lord permit*" (1 Cor. 16: 7). This is considerably more than adding a perfunctory D.V. after our purposes! It is, as said earlier, the test whether our aim in life is the determined exercise of my will, or the glad submission to and proving of "that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God." A solemn end to the chapter reminds us that man's vaunting and glorying, in spite of the fragility of his life, is evil. But lining this up with the theme of works and action in Christian life, "To him therefore who knows how to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin." Nothing must ever paralyse us into inaction, and the very brevity of life should spur us ever onward in the pursuit of good within the context of the will of God.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

T. S. DAVISON

IN the sphere of nature, life and growth are intimately connected. In every department — whether it be animal, insect, or bird, marine

life in its many forms, or the vast variety of plant life — growth commences from the embryo stage and is continued until the final

form proper to maturity is attained. Similarly in the human family normal growth proceeds from infancy through childhood and youth to the mature man or woman.

There are, however, adverse factors which can retard, temporarily arrest, or completely bring to an end this normal process, *e.g.* insufficient or unsuitable food, disease, or the attacks of predators leading to disablement or death. The presence of these and other abnormal factors inimical to both life and growth is due to the irruption of sin, through Adam's fall, into the world, whereby the latter has become a "groaning" creation, awaiting deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8: 19-23).

These natural phenomena — both normal and abnormal — have their counterparts in the spiritual realm. Every true Christian, while continuing to share the life derived from Adam, is also possessor of divine life, being born of God and having received eternal life from, and in, the Son (John 17: 2 and 1 John 5: 11). From another point of view all such, being originally in a state of spiritual death in trespasses and in sins, have been quickened together with Christ, raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2: 1-6). These blessings, amongst many others, are the fruit of God's purpose and grace, and are established on the immovable moral foundation of the death and resurrection of Christ, and are made effectual in the believer, through faith, by the sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit. Not only so, but perfect provision has been made for the sustenance of the spiritual life of the believer (passing through a hostile world) in (a) the gift and

indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is the sole power of Christian life, worship, and service; (b) the ceaseless high priestly service of intercession maintained by our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God (Hebrews 7: 24, 25); and (c) the possession of the inspired Word of God, by which the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17, N.T.).

Thus, on God's side, nothing is lacking which is necessary for the continuous growth of believers in spiritual stature, from the condition of "babes" in the family of God, through the stage described as that of "young men", to the maturity of the "fathers" (1 John 2: 12-27).

There is, however, not only God's side of the matter, but ours. Scripture reveals in fulness and detail the place of relationship, dignity, privilege, and blessing into which every believer is brought through the purpose and grace of God and the work of Christ; but it also reveals the commensurate responsibility attached to such a place. It is as responsible individuals that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5: 10), and, "every one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14: 12). The pathway through the world leading up to this appointed end is where the "adverse factors" mentioned in the second paragraph of this paper come into operation. It is manifest in Scripture (to say nothing of our experience) that from various causes spiritual growth is often retarded, spasmodic, or completely arrested. The Apostle Paul wrote of the Corinthians as being babes in Christ. Because they were in a carnal condition and "walked as men", they had never

progressed from spiritual infancy, notwithstanding the "gift" which was so abundant among them (1 Corinthians 3: 1-3). Similarly the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, desiring to unfold the glory of Christ as High Priest after the order of Melchisedek, reproached his readers with "dullness of hearing". Had their growth been normal, they ought to have been teachers, but "they had need that one teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God, and they *had become* such as have need of milk and not of strong meat (Hebrews 5: 11-14). Not only had growth been arrested, but there had been retrogression.

These Scriptural examples have been, and are, paralleled, in varying degrees, in the experience of believers; and the object of this paper is briefly to examine what the Word of God indicates as to some of the causes of unsatisfactory spiritual progress, and also the remedies.

PETER'S TESTIMONY

Spiritual life begins with new birth. The Apostle Peter, reminding his readers that they had been born again by the Word of God, immediately exhorted them to desire the sincere milk of the Word, that they might grow thereby (1 Peter 2: 2). It cannot be too often re-iterated and emphasised that the Word of God is the normal food of the Christian, whether in spiritual infancy or in maturity, and that nothing can take its place, however excellent and desirable the substitute may appear to be.

But if normal growth is to proceed, the "adverse factors" must be dealt with. There are certain things which must be laid aside, *i.e.*, malice, guile, hypocrisies en-

vies, evil speakings (1 Peter 2: 1). These are the hateful features of the flesh in the Christian which, if allowed to act, will effectually prevent spiritual growth until they are judged and laid aside.

PAUL'S TESTIMONY

The Corinthian saints had had the benefit of a prolonged stay among them of the Apostle Paul (Acts 18: 11). They were "his work in the Lord", and "the seal of his apostleship in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 9: 1, 2). They also had many endowments through the "grace of God given them by Jesus Christ", being "enriched by Him in all utterance and in all knowledge", and they "came behind in no gift" (1 Corinthians 1: 4-7). Notwithstanding this bountiful provision from God their spiritual growth had been unsatisfactory. Paul could not, at that juncture, minister to them the deep things of God. Neither could he speak to these gifted believers as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. He had fed them with milk and not with meat. Their carnal condition was evidenced in the envyings, strife, and division among them. They were "walking as men", *i.e.*, natural men. They admired worldly wisdom and excellency of speech.

Two correctives for this carnal condition were applied by the Spirit of God through the Apostle. The first was the preaching of the cross. Christ crucified is the wisdom of God and the power of God, although to the blindness of worldly religion a stumbling block, and to the worldly-wise philosophers foolishness. In the light of the cross of Christ, the world, its wisdom, its power, are "brought to nought, that no flesh should glory in His

presence". "He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1: 27-31).

The second corrective is the instruction given in chapter 2 as to the prerogative, function, and power of the Holy Spirit of God in relation to the "deep things of God". The Corinthians had now to learn that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him". Spiritual things were revealed to the Apostles by the Spirit; communicated by them to others through the Spirit; and can only be received and discerned by the believer by the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 2: 9-16).

The instructive example of the Corinthians shows, therefore, that spiritual growth is hindered by carnal pre-occupation with the wisdom of this world, and that the divinely indicated correctives for this, and other evidences of a carnal condition, are (1) the truth of the cross of Christ, not only as dealing with sin and sins, but as the means whereby God has completely set aside man, his world, and his wisdom; and (2) the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in opening up to faith the deep things of God.

JOHN'S TESTIMONY

The different phases of spiritual growth in the believer are clearly shown by the Apostle John as he writes to three categories in the family of God — the babes, the young men, and the fathers (1 John 2: 12-17).

Selecting the "young men" for more detailed consideration, we note that these are said to be "strong", and to have overcome the wicked one — this spiritual vigour and victory over the enemy being consequent upon the Word of

God abiding in them. The Word of God can only abide in those who habitually feed upon it, and here is revealed one essential feature of spiritual growth, and victory in conflict with the enemy.

It is almost startling, and certainly a sobering thought, to find that it is especially to this spiritually strong and healthy class that the solemn warning against love of the world is directed. The world and the Father are set in opposition, and it appears that love of the one precludes love of the other. Under the searchlight of the Spirit of God, the underlying and controlling principles of the world are exposed, i.e., the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The world system has been ruled by these principles ever since our first parents so easily succumbed to the temptation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The same principles were inherent in the temptations offered to our Lord Jesus by Satan in the wilderness, and which He victoriously met by the "it is written" of the Word of God.

No stage of spiritual growth, however advanced, renders any Christian immune from the appeal of the world, which can assume the most subtle and specious forms. Hence the warning to the "young men" of John's day was never more necessary or timely than at the present moment. The world has changed drastically in outward appearance; material progress has been phenomenal; knowledge has increased, as predicted in the book of Daniel (Dan. 12: 4); but the moral principles actuating this present evil world are precisely the same as those introduced when Adam and Eve fell in the garden of Eden nearly six thousand years ago.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to the subject under consideration

to refer to the last written words of the apostle Peter, when he desired that those to whom he wrote might "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3: 18). All that has been said, and a very great deal more, can be comprehended in this, the daily increasing knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequent growth in grace. After many years of Christian experience and service, Paul's great ambition was still "that I may

know Him," and he was willing to count as refuse everything which would have added distinction to him as a natural man, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil. 3: 4-11).

This is truly ambition of a godly character, and where pursued steadfastly with purpose of heart, must lead to that spiritual growth which is in accordance with the will of God for every Christian and which is pleasurable in His sight.

"FILLED" AND "FULLNESS"

T. TYSON

(Ephesians 5: 18; Colossians 1, 2)

A LITTLE CHILD may gaily run with his bucket and spade to the water's edge and fill his bucket, and carry it back to his sand-castle in triumph. He has filled his bucket from the Atlantic Ocean. Yet what does he know of the extent, the depth, the volume, the majesty, the power of the mighty Ocean? So we can be filled with the Spirit, even "filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3: 19), but only of Christ Himself can it be said "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead" (Colossians 2: 9).

We should all be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5: 18). Whatever may be the sphere of our Christian service, whether ministry, prayer, exhortation, healing, serving tables, or perhaps just "walking worthily", if it is not in the power of the Spirit it will not be honouring to God. When the early disciples chose men to look after the money of the assembly their first choice was Stephen — a man full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 6: 5). This was what characterised Stephen and

should characterise us. Nevertheless there will be times when the power of the Holy Spirit in us is more marked than at others. We note that in Acts 7: 55 it is again said of Stephen — "being full of the Holy Ghost he looked steadfastly into heaven" — as though at this point he became so much under the control of the Holy Spirit that the only realities to him were those which concerned Jesus in glory. We get similar verses in Acts 4: 31 when the disciples prayed. These had all received and been filled with the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, but this empowering in Acts 4: 31 was in response to their prayer for boldness, and the result was that they "spake the word of God with boldness".

These examples help us to grasp what Scripture implies by being "filled with the Spirit". We sometimes hear references to this subject which appear to view the Holy Spirit as a substance of which God gives us a certain measure according to our capacity or desire. The

Holy Spirit is a Person and the key thought in being filled with Him is control, "Be not filled with new wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5: 18).

When we speak of a man being filled with alcohol we are not really thinking in terms of his physical capacity in pints, but of the fact that he is completely under the influence of the drug. This, as Scripture says, is evidenced by his excess, or lack of control. To be filled with the Spirit means that we allow Him to control every activity of our mind and body. The evidence of this will be, not excess, but Godly control in all things, temperance, the last fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 23).

This leads us to consider the results of being "filled with the Spirit". Should we not expect that if a person is completely controlled by God's mighty Holy Spirit he will experience, act, speak, believe in a way which may be beyond explanation. We have already noted Stephen's vision in Acts 7: 55. Perhaps in this scientific age in which we live we are loathe to acknowledge this. Perhaps our prayer meetings would more often end as did the one in Acts 4, if in our minds we did not limit the power and manifestation of the Spirit.

On the other hand the Corinthian saints — and they have their modern counterparts—were stressing these "special" signs of the Spirit's control and forgetting that the object of His work is always the magnification of Christ in the development of Christ-like individuals or the edification of His Church. So when we are looking for Spirit filled men and women let us look for those whose lives speak to us of Christ. Who remind us of Him not

only by their words but by their character. For the fruit of the Spirit is —

LOVE — we may not be called on to lay down our lives for the brethren, but do we find time to pray for them, to visit those who are sick, to help those in need.

JOY — not a superficial gaiety, but the personal gift of the Lord himself made good in our experience.

PEACE — the men of the world are marked by care and anxiety, if they think at all, or by careless indifference. It is a witness to them if we can move in thoughtful tranquility, in the assurance that "all power is in His hands"

LONGSUFFERING — towards those who are difficult.

GENTLENESS — towards those who are weak.

GOODNESS — towards all.

FAITH — towards God to meet all.

MEEKNESS — in relation to our fellows.

TEMPERANCE — in relation to ourselves.

These are the marks of the man filled with the Spirit. May we examine ourselves to see if these things are seen in us.

Now let us consider the word "fulness" in relation to Christ. Only in Him do we see a man who was completely and at all times subject to the Spirit. Not only anointed with oil but mingled with oil.

His birth (Matthew 1: 18; Luke 1: 35).

His presentation in the Temple (Luke 2: 21-32).

His baptism and public ministry (Luke 4, etc.).

His death (Hebrews 9: 14).

His resurrection (1 Peter 3: 18).

These are all specifically mentioned as connected with the Spirit. Not only was He filled with the Spirit, but He was announced by John as the One who would baptise with the Holy Ghost and with fire. "Having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this" (Acts 2: 33). On Him alone could the Spirit descend as a dove, for in Him is no sin. Only He could say, "I do *always* those things which please the Father".

Let us now consider briefly the use of this word "fulness" in relation to the Lord in Colossians 1 and 2. In Colossians 1: 19 we read, "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." This comes in a passage where the glorious pre-eminence of Christ is being brought before the Colossian saints to draw their hearts from the traditions and philosophies that were ensnaring them.

He is pre-eminent in relation to God. He is the image of the invisible God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Because of this He must take precedence over every created being.

He is pre-eminent in relation to Creation. Everything that is related to time and sense, whether material or abstract was created in Him (verse 16). "In Him was life." But not only *in* Him, but *by* Him as the One who carried out the Divine plan, and *for* Him. "For Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4: 11). Still more, "He is before all things." "Before Abraham was I am." "In the beginning God created." "In the beginning was the Word." It is good to remind

ourselves in this age of space discovery that He did not only create, but He still maintains a unique controlling influence, for "by Him all things consist". Such is His pre-eminence in relation to creation.

He is pre-eminent in relation to the Church, not as its creator in a far distant history, nor even as its present but remote controller, but "Head of the Body". How precious — how intimate! Nor is His pre-eminence now based on the glory of His person, but rather on the glory He has won; "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead". Not only was He the beginning of the physical creation but He is also "the beginning of the Creation of God" (Revelation 3: 14). This meant that He must be "obedient unto death". He, the firstborn of every creature "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death". His rights in creation will be vindicated in power and by judgment. His rights in the Church are upheld in life and love. So in all things He has pre-eminence "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell."

When we come to the second chapter of Colossians verse 9 we have a very similar statement but with the significant addition of "bodily" or "in a body". The complete revelation of God was seen in Christ here in manhood. "God was in Christ." "God was manifest in the flesh". But here in chapter 2 Christ's fulness is seen in relation to our need. "We are complete in Him." In this "mystery of God, and of the Father and of Christ" are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. How sad it is to

see saints "kidnapped" through philosophy and vain deceit following the traditions of men and the principles which belong to a life which has been put away in the death of Christ (see verse 8).

Our completeness in Him rests on these facts —

Firstly — "He is the Head of all principality and power," and so we need not, nor should not, subject ourselves to any authority save His.

Secondly — In His death the "body of the flesh" has been put off. This passage does not refer to our sinful body but that natural part of us to which philosophy, religion, tradition and regulation appeal. We are risen with Him into a life where these things find no place.

Thirdly — While living without Christ, ordinances, even Divinely given ones, brought only condemnation. "When the commandment came, I died" (Romans 7:9). These have been nailed to His cross. The account is paid and the receipt there exhibited. Why then put ourselves under debt again?

Fourthly — The powers of darkness which then held us in bondage have been laid low and put to open shame. Death was Satan's invincible weapon for by its fear he held all in bondage all their

lifetime. The Lord has not only wrested it from him but used that very thing in His own Person to open the floodgates of God's eternal blessing. What a victory!

So we are brought into the glorious liberty of Sons of God. Let us beware that we do not put ourselves back again under the yoke and burden of these things which brought bondage and death before we came to Christ.

Let no man judge you . . . (verse 16). Don't let us be occupied with the A.B.C. outward pictures of spiritual truths when we have the full revelation in Christ. What boy of 17+ given a sports car by his father would want to go back to his babyhood pedal car! But this is sadly possible in spiritual things.

Let no man beguile you. There is much that sounds good, even right, in the religious teachings of men, but test its fruits very carefully. If I follow in this teaching or practice will it eventually "puff up my fleshly mind" and satisfy the flesh, or will it attach me more closely to the Head? Will He become more necessary, and nearer to me, or will He be replaced and moved into the background? Only from Him can true nourishment flow to His people.

ELISHA

R. THOMSON

"AT THEIR WIT'S END"

(2 Kings 6)

THE self-centred sons of the prophets find that their association with Elisha is very trying and

testing to them. Perhaps his godly way of life had an effect upon their heart and conscience, and the acti-

vities of the flesh in them were under restraint. They had their own plans of activity, and courteously asked leave of Elisha to go to Jordan. Each one was to do his part, carrying a beam for the dwelling they would make for themselves. It was to be a centre for "us" and "we"; but how could they leave out the man of God? Perhaps they may need his advice and help, although not desiring his continued presence with them. However, one of the company petitions the prophet to be pleased to go with them. To this, Elisha readily agrees, firstly because they were travelling toward the river Jordan, which is typically the place of death; and secondly, he knew they would very soon be needing his help, as they learned their own weakness and inability. He answered, "I will go," and went with them to Jordan.

The sons of the prophets went quickly into action, and were, no doubt, very enthusiastic in the work of cutting down the trees. Perhaps it was a scene of busy activity as they laid low the noble and stately trees which had stood the test of many years. Then a cry of desperate need and sadness was raised as the axe head of one of the workers fell into the water, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed." What could he now do as the deep waters swallowed it up? Was it beyond recovery? The loss must have been felt most acutely, for it was the property of another. How very noticeable it is that he turned to Elisha, who alone had the practical knowledge and experience of Jordan! Had he not passed through with Elijah, when the waters were miraculously divided? Had he not crossed it again, in the self-same way when alone? It was truly the river of death and judgment, but

now, once more, its power must yield to one that is greater.

The very place of loss is soon to be the place of recovery. A stick is cut down by Elisha, not a dead stick picked up from the ground, and he cast it into the river. How truly significant is the precious truth of Christ concerning His being cut off, when He took the place of death for us! "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off and shall have nothing" (Daniel 9: 26). Also, "He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Isaiah 53: 8). The iron did swim and the miracle happened. The power of Jordan had been superseded by a greater power, and that which had been held down by the water, a type of the greatness of death, is now set free by the application of the tree, the power of the cross of Christ. The inexperienced "son of the prophets" had been working with a borrowed axe, and it ended with disaster. Surely, it was imperative that the axe-head should be recovered, and the man of God only, knew the way of restoration. As the iron swam on the surface of the water, the man was told to lay hold of it and take it up. Having learned this very personal lesson, he would now use the axe with a new outlook on things, for had it not been in the place of death! Now it was the object of a power which was beyond nature.

*"O teach us so the power to know
Of risen life with Thee;
Not we may live while here below,
But Christ our life may be."*

Elisha had given a word of warning to the king of Israel regarding the activities of the Syrian enemies. Time and again Israel was advised not to pass by a certain place, for

the Syrians were there. By heeding the warning they were preserved and the adversary frustrated in his purpose. These deliverances were so marked that the king of Syria feared that there must be in his own ranks those who were for the king of Israel. This was not a question of espionage or treachery, but said one, "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Therefore the command was given by the king of Syria secretly to observe where Elisha was, and to fetch him. Finding the prophet at Dotham, a great army with horses and chariots is sent to capture him, and the city is encompassed by night. What an evidence of weakness!

Elisha's servant going forth early, saw the mighty host, and the city surrounded. He is afraid and dismayed, saying, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" There is no fear with Elisha, and in perfect confidence before God, he said to his servant, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." What a comforting word this must have been! And we can say truly in our day, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8: 31). The prayer of Elisha was that there might be enlightenment from God for the young servant. This was granted, and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. What a feeling of security this sight would give him! Had not Elisha seen and known this heavenly power and protection at the translation of Elijah? Did not the apostle Paul know the secret too, when he said, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4: 18)?

We must also realise that the Lord's power, now manifest in blessing toward His beloved saints, can also be used for judgment against the ungodly. Hence, the next prayer of Elisha is that the Lord would smite the besieging Syrians with blindness. This was done, and the enemy now without sight are taken captive and led away to Samaria by Elisha. Upon reaching the city of the king of Israel, the prophet asked the Lord to open their eyes, and then they saw their awful position of helplessness and impotence. Immediately, the king of Israel thought of revenge, but first of all asked permission of Elisha to smite them. What a wonderful answer of grace and mercy is given him! "Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master." This was the lesson to Israel's king, and he prepared great provision for them.

May we too, pay heed to the Word of God which says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12: 19-21).

While the bands of the Syrians came no more into the land of Israel, the enmity was still there, and at a later date Benhadad with his host came and laid siege to Samaria. It was a time of great famine and testing for the beleaguered city; so much so that food of any description was of

great value. The horror of it all was revealed to the king when a woman crying to him for help informed him that she and another woman had agreed to the killing and eating of each of their sons, and when she had fulfilled her dreadful part, the other woman had broken the bargain and hid her son.

The prophet Elisha had not been mentioned by name up to this point, but now, the king seemed to think that all this evil had come upon them because of him. Why he should think thus, one cannot tell; and alas, God is often blamed for disaster and loss by those who know Him not; whereas, if they would seek His face, and call upon Him for help, deliverance would most surely be given. So the king sent his executioner to take off his head. How quickly the monarch had forgotten the goodness of Elisha shown to him on a past occasion! However, the man of God was well prepared and forewarned of the danger, no doubt by the Lord, and was quietly sitting in his house with the elders before

him. Precious thought, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26: 3). Mary of Bethany sat at His feet for instruction and heard His word; and in the time of sorrow and bereavement she was found sitting still in the house, knowing the secret of the Lord's love and power.

As the executioner drew near to the house of Elisha, the prophet spoke of him as the son of a murderer, and commanded that the door should be shut, with the man held securely at the door. Presently the messenger arrived and said, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"

This interpretation from God was surely to be given by the prophet, and how astounding it must have sounded in the ears of the unbelieving king and his personal attendant! "Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria."

JOHN 17: 20, 21

These words of the Saviour have been perverted to the doing of a world of mischief. Ecclesiastics have fallen asleep; and while asleep have dreamed a dream — a dream founded upon the letter of the Saviour's words, of which they discern not the spiritual sense. They have proved in their own case, as has been proved in thousands of others, that the letter killeth, and only the spirit giveth life. The ecclesiastics have dreamed a dream of a great confederation, presided over by a number of ministers, these again governed by superior officers, and these again by others, and these topped at last by a supreme visible head who must be either a person or a council: this great confederacy containing within itself kingdoms and nations, and becoming so powerful as to work upon states, to influence politics, to guide councils, and even to gather together and move armies.

True, the shadow of the Saviour's teaching, "My Kingdom is not of

this world", must have caused an occasional nightmare in the midst of their dream, but they dreamed on; and what was worse, they turned the dream into reality, and the time was when the professed followers of Christ were all one, when looking north, south, east, west from the centre of the Vatican, one united body covered all Europe. And what was the result? Did the world believe that God had sent Christ? The world believed the very opposite. The world was persuaded that God had nothing to do with that great crushing, tyrannous, superstitious, ignorant thing which called itself Christianity; and thinking men became infidels, and it was the hardest possible thing to find a genuine intelligent believer north, south, east or west.

All professors were one, but the world believed not; the fact being that this was not the unity which Jesus had so much as thought of. It never was his intention to set up a great united body to be called a church which should domineer and lord everywhere over the souls of men. It was never Christ's design to set up a conscience-crushing engine of uniformity; and so the great man-devised machine when it was brought to perfection, and set to work with the greatest possible vigour, instead of working out that the world should believe that the Father had sent Christ, wrought out just this, that the world did not believe anything at all, but became infidel, licentious and rotten at the core. Yet people dream that dream still; even good people do so.

But what did the Saviour mean, "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me?" We must begin at the beginning. What were the elements of this unity which Christ so anxiously desired? The answer is very distinctly given in this chapter. The unity was to be composed of people who are here called "they": "that they all may be one". Let your eye run down the chapter to see who they are. Look in the second verse: "That He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." The unity proposed is that of persons especially given to Jesus by the Father. It is not all men who happen to dwell in a particular province, district, or city, but a unity of persons who have received, not common life as all have it, but life eternal. Special persons, then, who have been quickened by God the Holy Ghost, and have been brought into vital union with the Person of the Lord Jesus are to be one.

Look the whole chapter through and you will discover that the unity which the Master intended was that of chosen persons who by the Holy Spirit conferring life upon them, are led to believe in Jesus Christ; a unity of spiritual-minded men, who live in a realm of spirit, prize spiritual things, and form a confederacy and a kingdom which is spiritual and not of this world.

Above all, the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer, is the true fount of oneness. Though the manifestations may vary, yet the same Spirit of God works the same graces, the same virtues, the same excellencies, and thus helps all saints to prove themselves to be of one tribe. This is a very different bond from that which men try to impose upon each other in order to create union. They put straps around the outside, they tie us together with many knots, and we feel uneasy; but God puts a Divine life inside of us, and then we wear the sacred bonds of love with ease.

C. H. SPURGEON.

HOW TO OVERCOME THE DEVIL

J. T. MAWSON

(Judges 4: 1-16)

THE Canaanites, with Sisera as the captain of their hosts, are figurative of the devil and his power, and we shall see in the victory of Deborah and Barak the way in which the devil has been, and still may be, a defeated foe.

There are several features in the story which prove that we have the devil's domination and defeat before us.

(1) Sisera was the great leader, and his name means, "he that binds with chains", and we are well aware that the great captive-maker is Satan himself. He was finally destroyed by that which was very weak in itself — his head was bruised, even to death, by a woman and a nail of the tent, and Jesus, the woman's Seed, has bruised the serpent's head. Men despised Him, because He was meek and lowly; His death was weakness and folly in their eyes, but —

*"By that which seemed defeat,
He won the meed and crown,
Trod all our foes beneath His feet,
By being trodden down."*

(2) It was a woman who raised the song of thanksgiving at Sisera's overthrow, and this links our story with the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and of Goliath in the valley of Elah. Each of these incidents sets forth different phases of the Lord's victory over Satan, but they all have this one striking feature — the women appreciate the greatness of the triumph. At the defeat of Pharaoh "Miriam . . . took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously" (Ex. 15: 21). At the overthrow of Goliath "the women

answered one another as they played, and said . . . David has slain his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18: 7). And now, at the defeat of Sisera, Deborah sings: "I, even I, will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel" (Judges 5: 3). This sets forth the grace of God most beautifully, for the woman was the first to fall before the wiles of Satan, and the woman is typical of the Church — the Bride of Christ, which is made up of all who have believed the gospel of our salvation. None will appreciate the triumph of the Lord over death and the devil like this ransomed host and from them will rise the fullest and sweetest song of praise. The angels must rejoice at Satan's overthrow, but we, who have been deceived by his lies, and known the bitterness of his bondage, can enter most truly into the triumph of the Lord over him. We can say, "Bless ye the Lord!" For "where sin abounded grace does much more abound".

(3) In Deborah's song we have, for the first time in Scripture, the expression, "captivity led captive", which undoubtedly refers to the Lord's victory over Satan, and of which we will speak presently.

HOW SATAN WORKS

It will be well for us clearly to understand what Satan's real work is, and how he has succeeded in enslaving the human race. From the very outset his effort has been to blind the eyes of men to the true character of God, so that instead of loving and praising God they might hate and curse Him, and instead of walking in the highway of His will they might wander in the dark and crooked paths of their own lawless

desire. And so, in the story before us, we do not get the song of praise until Sisera is overthrown; and Deborah has to confess that, throughout the twenty years of Israel's captivity to the King of Canaan, the highways were unoccupied and travellers walked in the crooked paths (5: 6).

We know that man was made upright, and so long as he remained faithful to his Creator he was possessed of everything that could make his life one thrilling anthem. God beheld the work of His hand and saw that it was very good, for His noblest creature stood before Him as a well-tuned instrument of praise. But Satan succeeded in turning men from God and light and liberty and song. He looked upon that fair scene with eyes of malice, and, that he might spoil it all, lied concerning God. He maligned God's character to the woman, and thus proved his right to the title: "A liar, and the father of it" (John 8: 44). His proposal was: "Break God's command, and ye shall be as gods" which meant, God is not as good as He pretends to be, listen to me, and you will do better for yourselves than God has done for you; put self first, and leave God and His will out of your reckoning. The temptation succeeded; the lie was believed; sin came in and light went out. The chord was lost, the music died out, and man, that fair instrument of praise, lay broken and spoiled in the power of the foe. It seemed as though God had met with defeat and that Satan held the field, for he made the heart of man, in which God ought to have been enshrined, his citadel, and succeeded in enlisting men in his rebellion against God; and to this day he keeps them in captivity by keeping them in darkness; for we read: "If

our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4: 3, 4). And our Lord declared: "Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8: 12). So that we see very clearly that Satan gained his power over men at the beginning by blinding them to the truth of God's character, and he keeps them in bondage in the same way.

HOW SATAN'S POWER HAS BEEN OVERTHROWN

But how has Satan's power been overthrown? There are three things which were prominent in connection with Sisera's defeat. First of all we have Deborah. Deborah means "activity", or, "like a bee". She was wedded to Lapidoth, which means "light"; and in Deborah's song she finds much cause for thanksgiving in the fact that the people willingly offered themselves. "When the people willingly offered themselves" (5: 2). "The governors of Israel that offered themselves willingly" (5: 9). "A people that jeopardized their lives unto the death" (5: 18).

Here then are the three things which are essential to victory over Satan: (1) Light. (2) Activity. (3) The willing offering. These three things were seen most blessedly in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He, by them, overcame the devil completely. It is in the Gospel of John that we have the statement: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (12: 31); and it is in the

same Gospel that we have these three things of which I have spoken made prominent:

- (1) "I am the light of the world" (8: 12; 9: 5).
- (2) "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (5: 17).
- (3) "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (10: 11).
"I lay down my life" (10: 17).

Darkness is ignorance of God, and, when Jesus came to earth, gross darkness covered the people. He came to declare God's true character, and to make known His heart of love. But this light was not passive; it shone forth in all the activities of God's beloved Son. Light and activity were wedded together in Him, nor can they be divorced. We see that light shining in the works and words of Jesus. He fed the multitude when it fainted with hunger. He gave relief where sorrow held sway. The sick received health, and the dead, life. He blessed the children and wept over sinners; but in all these things He was but displaying the character of God. The words and works were all His Father's, so that He could say: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (14: 9). Now the light that shone forth in the activities of His grace was for the deliverance of men from the thralldom of Satan, who had held them in darkness and ignorance of God; and the shining of this light was not in vain, for some could say: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (1: 14). But more was needful than the display of God in His life: He had to become a willing offering, for only by His death could the prince of this world be cast out and the power of death taken out of his hand. It was only by the death

of Christ that the light of God's love could reach you and me; but in that death the light of love, the activity of infinite compassion, and the offering up of the devoted sacrifice were combined.

Let us recall that notable scene. When Pilate brought Jesus forth wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and, presenting Him to the multitude, exclaimed: "Behold the Man!" — the world was on its trial. Did it, in that supreme moment, return to its allegiance to its Creator, and signify such a return by bowing down in lowly submission to His Son who stood before it? Oh, no! Instead they cried: "Away with Him, crucify Him!" "Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus and led Him away" (John 19: 16). In that culminating act of rebellion we see how Satan dominated men. They were so completely under his yoke that, there and then, they attempted the murder of their God.

I am firmly of the opinion that if the Lord had used His power, and destroyed that devil-deceived and rebellious multitude by the breath of His mouth, Satan's object would have been gained; for then would men have remained in ignorance for ever as to God's love, and sin would have proved greater than God's grace. All the powers of darkness were marshalled against the Lord, and men were so blinded and driven by those same powers that nothing would still their frenzy but His blood. Did the devil hope that that would be the unpardonable sin? and that in pouring out his own inveterate hatred against the Son of God he was involving the whole race of men in his own irretrievable and eternal ruin? How complete then has been his defeat, for instead of Jesus manifesting His

glory as the Judge of all, we read, that, "He bearing His cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha" (19: 17). He went forth that the blood which sinful men were determined to shed might be efficacious for their redemption.

"They led Him away": in that their guilt reached its flood tide. "He went forth": in this was manifested the great victory of divine love over human hate. He was not dragged forth, nor driven forth: He went forth. No man took His life from Him: He laid it down Himself. The shouts of the rabble smote His ear, and, with a holy sensitiveness, He keenly felt it all, and yet no thought of saving Himself was in His heart. In majestic lowliness He went forth, bearing His cross, to accomplish that for which He came.

He knew, to its last bitterness, all that the cross meant. He was not taken by surprise, nor did He go forth on the impulse of a moment. On the night that was passed in Gethsemane's garden He had looked into the darkness and had fully counted the cost. He had talked of it on the holy mount with Moses and Elias. This hour had been planned in the council chamber of Eternity ere ever He came, and He could not draw back. There was no resistance, no regret, and every step He took towards Golgotha, shook the kingdom of the devil. And "there they crucified Him"; and the crucified Christ is God's answer to the devil's lie in Eden. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16). If God had left us to reap the bitter harvest of our rebellion and sin, we

could not have complained; but, instead of this, He undertook to dispel the darkness and overthrow the power of the devil, by this mighty and convincing proof of His love to us. Satan had made men believe that God was a hard master, gathering where He had not strawed. God has proved that He is full of love by giving the very best gift that heaven contained, even His own beloved Son, to bear the penalty of our sin, and it is when the glorious light of this love shines into the hearts of men that Satan's thralldom comes to an end. Jesus was lifted up upon the cross, and that lifting up has declared the whole truth, and we who believe it have been drawn to Him. He has become our great attractive centre, and the devil no longer holds us as his prey. The lie is laid bare, the darkness of ignorance past, and God has triumphed; for the prince of this world is cast out of the hearts of those who believe. He no longer holds them as his citadel. They have surrendered themselves to the God whose perfect love has been demonstrated in the cross of Christ.

How great is the splendour of Calvary! By its glorious light we have been awakened from our night sleep as by the rising sun at morn. We have been compelled to exclaim: "Then God did love us, after all!" The entrance of His word has given light, and with light has come liberty. The curtains of darkness have been torn asunder, and our souls have stepped forth into the day.

Science has revealed to us the fact that light, like sound, is caused by vibrations, and with all vibration there is music, and if the auditory nerve were as sensitive as the optical we should hear the music of the light as well as see its

beauty. Certainly the light of God's love brings sweetest melody with it — even the melody of heaven — and the chord that was lost in Eden is found again; only the music is sweeter, the strain higher, and the glory of the praise more wonderful. As we gaze upon Him, who is now upon the throne, and in whose face all the brightness of God's grace shines, our hearts are kept in tune, and our whole souls vibrate in responsive praise to the love of God.

Nor have we any doubt as to the completeness of the triumph of Jesus, for He is alive from the dead, and His glorious words to us are: "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1: 17, 18).

Since the Lord has gained so signal a victory over Satan, it is the privilege of those who have been delivered from his power to overcome as well — to be "more than conquerors, through Him that loved us". And if we turn again to the overthrow of Sisera we shall be helped in seeing how this can come about.

BARAK WAS CALLED FROM KEDESH

He dwelt at Kedesh, which means, "sanctuary — the place of refuge". It was, in fact, the first-named of the cities of refuge which were set apart for the manslayers in Israel, and in which such dwelt securely. Whether Barak had been compelled to seek refuge there from the avenger of blood or not we cannot say; but it is certainly true that it is from the position typified in Kedesh that we go forth to the conflict with the foe. Christ is the true and great antitype of Kedesh. Death was the penalty due to our

sins, and we were held in bondage by the terror of it, but we have fled for refuge to the only hope of death-doomed sinners — the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we have salvation and a perfect deliverance from the fear of death. The devil can no longer hold us in abject bondage by the thought of it, for Jesus died "to deliver those who, through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage". And, being safe in Christ — dwelling in the true Kedesh — we can face the enemy boldly, and take up the song of triumph: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15: 55, 56).

But our great foe is full of wiles. The activities of Satan are tireless, and many an ambush will he lay in which to ensnare us; and, if we are to be overcomers, we shall need to be sober, vigilant, and watchful.

HOW WE OVERCOME

There are those who imagine that the Christian pathway is one of ease; that, since the future is all secured for them, all must be peace for ever, and that they may dream themselves into heaven without trouble or exercise. How mistaken are such. We have peace with God, and may always have peace as to our circumstances, but there must be no peace with the foe. We are exhorted to —

"Be strong in the Lord. . . ."

"Put on the whole armour of God. . . ."

"Stand against the wiles of the devil."

"Wrestle against . . . principalities and powers."

"Give no place to the devil."

"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

"Whom resist, steadfast in the faith."

This is not the language of the

couch of down, but of the battlefield, and we need to be fully equipped if we are to be overcomers in the fight.

You will remember that three things have already been made

prominent in Sisera's overthrow, namely: Light, Activity, and the Willing Sacrifice. These three things, so perfectly displayed in the Lord, will need to be reproduced in us if we are to become overcomers.

(To be continued)

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

J. STODDART

GLEANINGS FROM CHELTENHAM, 1965

CHAPTER 5

WE commenced our studies with the question, "Why should we read the Epistle of James?" This seemed pertinent because so many reasons abounded to discourage our doing this. Some of these have now been reviewed, and as our thoughts have been given to the contents of each chapter, it is hoped that our opening question has found many good and stimulating answers. The most convincing answer, however, would not be simply a more intelligent acquaintance with the epistle or the challenge of its teaching, but the resultant obedience produced in our lives.

As we come to the end of the letter, we cannot escape the echoing insistence of each succeeding chapter upon the need for an active response to its disclosures. Unlike the demands of the Law, this is seen to be the fruit of the new nature begotten in the believer by God Himself through the Word of Truth (1: 18). Let us not, therefore, discredit James (as some have done) as a reviver of legalistic principles, but rather feel the encouragement of knowing that obedience to the will of God is really possible for us.

May be we are shocked by the opening of chapter 5 and find it hard to think of its application to

Christians. But in every age the voice and spirit of a prophet has been heard reproaching the ways of men in general and God's people in particular. It is thus James speaks here, as "the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ", surveying broadly the characteristics of those of his day and generation. Alas, the Christian profession shamefully resembled them in many ways, an ever-present danger in every generation and perhaps never so blatantly seen as in this our day. Warnings of impending judgment upon the ungodly are intended to have their salutary effect upon those who have ears to hear. If our motives and actions are little different from the world around us, we are not entitled to console ourselves that its judgment can never touch us.

A parallel to the outcry of James may be seen in the prophecies of men like Isaiah, Ezekiel and Amos, who solemnly condemned the ways of the nations around Israel, these pronouncements being primarily intended as a warning to God's people who envied and imitated them. Some have referred to these utterances as the cry for social justice in those days, but a closer study of them reveals an urgent call for God's own people to return to Him.

And so with our writer James. Easily discernible in chapter 5 are the marks of modern materialism, which is therefore not so modern after all! The sophisticated programmes of modern society reflect the same native greed and avarice that has ever spumed from the human heart. The great harvest of material riches is and always has been the target of human endeavour, but the test is whether that harvest will endure. Here is the precise argument of these verses and, indeed, of the Lord's own teaching in Matthew 6 where we recall His words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." How closely James endorses this valuable and heavenly admonition.

Those to whom James wrote were soon to prove the wisdom of his words and the accuracy of his prediction of coming miseries. Their treasured investments were, alas, vulnerable because they were both earth-bound and ill-begotten. It would seem that he refers to the coming destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70 (on the assumption that the epistle was written before that date, as some scholars think). Of that tragic event it has been said that it was caused as much by the insolent and complacently defiant attitude of the Jews to their Roman superiors, as by any intention of the emperor Vespasian. They vaunted that God would protect their city and safeguard their interests, though their hearts were far from Him. How dangerous it is to boast of *position* when the *condition* is unrighteous and corrupt! Even those of "the twelve tribes scatter-

ed abroad" may have felt that their interests in Jerusalem were secure, but they were to be reminded that such hopes belonged to a nation in moral decadence, which had "condemned and killed the just; and He doth not resist you." Jerusalem's claim to fame was now to be the city "where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11: 8).

But to his brethren whose hopes and aspirations were not earth-centred James had a different prospect to present. For such, it was the coming of the Lord which was drawing nigh. How elevating is this note amidst the discord of man's world with its crazy rush for gain! In contrast to the impetuous haste and impatience of men, they were to be patient, and their hearts to be stablished. The farm labourer (husbandman) contented himself to patiently await the early and latter rains which guaranteed the harvest, after the sowing of the seed. So they, too, could confidently wait for the Lord of the harvest, when their truest gains would be realised; and when all that was wrong would be righted. Here is the specific remedy to lift us above the banal effects of modern materialism around us or the depression which is inevitable from gross self-occupation. What else matters so much to us as the fact that the Lord is coming, "when all that grieves shall pass away, and saints shall see a glorious day".

All too little is the joyful note, that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh", heard today. Long years ago the midnight cry was sounded, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh", and with what glad response many were aroused from lethargy, as they "went forth to meet Him" (Matt. 25: 6). Alas, who goes forth to meet Him today? And how often is the Bride's responsive voice

heard, "Even so come, Lord Jesus?" (Rev. 22: 20). The writer's heart is challenged as he pens these words, but we have been reminded that morbid introspection is a danger and not a cure for anything. May we pause, here, as I am sure James by the Spirit intended, and take a deep draught of this refreshing, reviving truth that Jesus is coming again, coming to "make up His jewels" (Mal. 3: 17), His loved and His Own. Our joy will be great, but His even greater, when "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53: 11).

Solemnly, however, we are reminded that He for Whom we wait is also "the Judge, Who stands before the door" (verse 9). For "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ . . . and every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14: 10-12). Is this intended to make us afraid and dread what would otherwise be the moment of supreme joy? No, indeed, on the contrary here is the great incentive to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord." We may well feel the inadequacy of our service, and its relative obscurity from human eyes, but how stimulating it is to know that all true service, great or small, seen or unseen, rendered for Christ will be assessed and rewarded by Him. As we stand before Him in that day, it will be in His worth alone, already like Him, and we shall be in glad accord with His appraisal, as our earthly lives are reviewed. See how encouraging is the comment of 1 Corinthians 4: 5 on the issues of that day of review, "Then shall each have his praise from God" (J.N.D. trans.). Not one faithful word or action will be

overlooked or forgotten then, as is so often the case now, and praise will not be stinted.

The latter half of the chapter thus develops what is consistent with the fact that the Lord is coming. What more powerful motive could there be to regulate our ways, words and works? Instead of grudging complaints against others there would be patient endurance. For an example of this we are reminded of Job's proverbial patience in circumstances of extreme trial and hardship. The Lord had an end in view in permitting Satan to all but destroy this very great saint. Satan's end was to utterly spoil and demolish that wonderful life, but God frustrated that and brought to light His Own glorious end by rescuing, restoring and enriching Job mightily. So it is the end that declares Satan to be the Destroyer of men's lives, while the Lord is "full of pity and tender compassion".

It has been asserted that to every action there is a resultant reaction. Our reaction to life's vicissitudes, its changes and chances, is more important than what happens to us. Under circumstances of pressure at the Cross, Peter reinforced his denial of his Lord by swearing, cursing and oaths. This reaction is not to mark the true disciple in any shape or form, because he would thereby fall under condemnation. The indwelling Holy Spirit puts us in a very different position from Peter at that moment. While this may not be the only or most precise application of v. 12, it is clear that James means exactly what the Lord Himself taught in Matthew 5: 33-37.

The Christian's reaction to affliction or suffering is not to be moaning and groaning, but prayer. Not always the easiest course, but certainly the most helpful if we are

not to allow ourselves to be devoured with self-pity. In sickness many, claiming in faith the promise of v. 15, have proved the therapeutic value of prayer in the restoration of body and soul. This would not seem, however, to warrant the emphasis laid upon certain "faith-healing" or "divine healing" campaigns in our day, since the context here is intensely individual. But no question is intended in that remark as to the sovereign power of God to heal the body in accord with His Own will. Much evidence could be produced to prove that God also answers the prayer of faith by using the normal means of medical and surgical and psychiatric skills to heal both body and mind, in our day. Closely allied to prayer is praise, and v. 13 also shows that the reaction to happiness is to overflow in songs of praise. We would all agree that our singing leaves room for much improvement, but maybe if our hearts were happier, great improvement would be realised. An unhappy moment of Jewish captivity is recorded in Psalm 137. Having hung their harps upon the willows, they became depressed and dejected. When their captors tauntingly demanded that they sing one of the songs of Zion, they mournfully replied, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Their hearts were truly unhappy and consequently their song had wilted. Doubtless, we too, feel the effects of being in "a strange land", but we are enjoined to sing and make melody in our heart to the Lord (Eph. 5: 19). Let us not, therefore, hang our harps upon the willows, nor utter the unharmonious groans so customary, but "admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3: 16).

The chapter closes with some well chosen comments on the subject of effectual prayer. The injunction of verse 16 to "confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed", may have much to say to us as to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of our prayers. How ready we are to vindicate ourselves rather than confess that we are at fault in some matter. If we think of the Lord's words in Matthew 5: 23, 24 and Matthew 18: 15-20 we shall see how relevant this is to our prayers and perhaps even learn why some have not been answered. Can we pray for revival, for instance, if we harbour a grudge or a hostile spirit towards our brethren in Christ? James says, "the effectual, fervent prayer of a *righteous* man availeth much," and we may notice with profit the operative words governing prayer that avails, viz. effectual, fervent and righteous. Again drawing upon the wealth of Old Testament examples, he cites Elijah, "a man subject to like passions as we are", as one who prevailed in prayer. In the matter of withholding and sending of rain, we do not read of Elijah's prayer in the story of 1 Kings 17 and 18. But it says that "Elijah went up to the top of Carmel, and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees". Here was a man in earnest before God, and with or without words he poured out his heart in an attitude that betokened his sincerity. Do we really know what prayer is?

A gracious touch closes the epistle in verses 19, 20. To err from the truth is something to which we are all liable in unguarded moments. Yet in others how often we deplore it and find no solution but to separate from such. James inspired by the Spirit suggests another way, in-

deed "a more excellent way". Convert or bring back (J.N.D.) the erring ones, he says; not separate from them — an action only to be taken in the last resort and with sorrow. How much have we tried

this remedy for our differences, brethren? It could result in saving a soul from (spiritual) death, and at the same time cover a multitude of sins. May His grace enable us to do so.

*Search me, O God! my actions try,
And let my life appear
As seen by Thine all-searching eye —
To mine my ways make clear.*

*Search all my thoughts, the secret springs,
The motives that control;
The chambers where polluted things
Hold empire o'er the soul.*

*Search, till Thy fiery glance has cast
Its holy light through all —
And I by grace am brought at last
Before Thy face to fall.*

*Thus prostrate I shall learn of Thee,
What now I feebly prove —
That God alone in Christ can be
Unutterable Love!*

F. BOTTOME.

GODLINESS

COLIN CURRY

(1 Timothy 3: 14-16)

THE word *godliness* occurs with some frequency in the pastoral epistles. The term is a general one, describing an attitude to life and a way of living which goes with it. The importance of this is pressed in the letters to Timothy and the theme is worked out in considerable detail. Departure from the faith was already in evidence when the letters were written, and the need for true Christian people to continue to live the godly life became more than ever urgent when trends of the opposite kind were developing. The advice to Timothy was not for himself alone, and is in a sense still more relevant today when those trends

have taken fuller shape. Not by any means all that takes the name of Christian is characterized by the features of godliness presented in these letters, and to follow and continue along the lines which they press is no less urgent a need in our day.

The verses selected are central to the epistles; they say plainly why Paul was writing to Timothy. Proper *behaviour* by those who belong to the Christian company, where God dwells and where He is represented here in this world, is of great importance. To contribute to this is the duty of every believer; one ought to conduct oneself suitably as

a Christian, and here is guidance about this. It was a matter of such moment to Paul that possible delay in passing on the teaching was not to be risked. He expected a response too, though the standards set are the highest. To him there are deep inward springs, in the appreciation of the manifestation of God in Christ, which can move us to live such a life. Great indeed is "the mystery of godliness". The power which underlies the godly life may well be the most important part of the matter, and we shall conclude with a consideration of this. Other aspects, collected from various parts of the two letters, will be indicated first.

THE PROFESSION OF GODLINESS

A Christian profession unaccompanied by an appropriate manner of living must inevitably have little value as an evidence of the reality of what is professed. Indeed, profession without practice can only detract from the Christian testimony, and the seriousness of this must not be belittled. But to profess to be a Christian is plainly not wrong in itself, nor is it to be discouraged or avoided because of the responsibilities which are entailed. Clear profession of faith in Christ, unashamed and witnessed by others, has its own peculiar excellence and needs courage today perhaps more than ever before. When such a profession springs from a sense of the worthiness of Christ, and of great indebtedness to Him, it is not likely to be lacking in the devotedness which will continue in godly living. Such a profession is termed "a good profession", and Timothy was one who had made it clearly and commendably in his day. Nevertheless, the keenness of early Christian devotion needs to be maintained, and the exhortation is

not unnecessary to "follow after . . . godliness . . . lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6: 11, 12).

But such reality does not accompany every profession of the name of Christ; and at the other extreme the solemn possibility of a completely hollow profession is indicated in 2 Timothy 3: 1-5. The possibility of "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" is envisaged, and is to become a reality in "the last days" according to this passage. The shamefulness of the ways, listed here, which can characterize those who at the same time can maintain an outward profession of godliness may well cause us to marvel. This is pure *imposture*, the profession to be what one is not; and Timothy and all who would be his successors are well advised to turn away completely from such persons and their attitudes.

But in many more subtle and perhaps smaller ways it is possible that what appears on the surface of our lives may be *inconsistent* with what is professed. An example of this kind of possibility appears in 1 Timothy 2: 9, 10. Good works are the most fitting adornment for women who profess godliness. Though the verses are immediately directed to Christian women, the principle is broader than this. There are practical ways which suit and support the profession of godliness; other things are less appropriate. What is it that is apparent to others when they watch us? Timothy was enjoined to let his profiting appear unto all (1 Tim. 4: 15). To what extent are we known to be people of purpose, of direction, and of weight for God? Or do those who know us best gain the impres-

sion of superficiality, so that our profession carries little conviction?

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS

Evidently then the practice of godliness is a matter of importance, and the encouragements and instructions about this are numerous in these letters.

The general impression gained from the two epistles is of the need for purposeful and personal application to the business of godly living, not intermittently but steadily, even though such a life may be beset with problems to be faced and overcome. The instruction to pray "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2: 2) recognises that events are in the control of One Who allows no more of adversity than is good for His people. The opportunity to live the godly life cannot ever be said to have been withheld from us. These words also suggest that, in spite of its problems and difficulties, there is a restfulness and a value connected with such a life which more than compensates for the self-discipline which is needed to lead it.

But many verses do make it clear that this kind of life has to be pursued with effort on our part. "*Follow godliness . . . fight the good fight of faith*" (1 Tim. 6: 11, 12). "*Exercise thyself . . . unto godliness*" "*Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them*" (1 Tim. 4: 7, 15). Single-mindedness, decision for oneself, not waiting for others to take the lead, are here urged upon the readers of these letters. Continuance in a path already begun is also stressed as important again and again. Others may fail to do this, turning aside to error, to teachings without substance, to shallow attitudes and ways; but the man of God is to per-

sist in a God-honouring course. Many are the illustrations of the disciplined life which will be needed, and the effort required. In chapter 2 of the second letter a sequence of illustrations is given. It is likened to the toughness of a soldier's life with all the stringencies that war brings to a person who is actively engaged; to the hard striving in a contest where the rules must be carefully followed but the rewards are great; to cultivating the ground by one's own hard work, with the faith and the patient certainty that there will be returns in proportion to the effort expended. Study of the Word of God and allowing it control over life is likened to the dedicated work of a craftsman, the very work being worthwhile for its own sake, while the product of the work brings pleasure and benefit to all who behold it and, not least, honour to the great Master for Whom it is done.

Activities of a questionable and unhelpful nature, as well as those that may be plainly discreditable, will need to be recognized and left aside in pursuing such a life. The chapter in which these illustrations are found also gives repeated instructions regarding things to be left alone. "*Shun profane and vain babblings*", "*foolish and unlearned questions avoid*", "*Flee also youthful lusts*" "*depart from iniquity*"; to stand clear from all that is dishonourable is an essential part of what is needed to become "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use".

THE PROFIT OF GODLINESS

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come". "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 4: 8,

6: 6). There will be true all-round gain arising from a life on these lines. The Christian character of the person who bends himself in this direction will be developed, to his own great benefit now as well as in the coming life. He will become a "man of God . . . thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 16); he will be equipped for activities of many kinds for the God Whom he serves and represents. Others will be helped by his words and by his conduct. In his whole demeanour he will become an example to the believers, saving both himself and those that hear him (1 Tim. 4: 12, 16). Above all, there will be pleasure and honour for Christ in a life which shows evidently that He is its Lord, and such a life must inevitably have its influence and its uses for Him. A person of this kind is assured of God's approval, and has no need to be ashamed whatever other judgments may be passed upon him (2 Tim. 2: 15).

Contentment is the natural accompaniment of a life after this pattern, and is part of the gain of it. Such a life has confidence and stability and depth; it rests and trusts, not in uncertain and non-permanent things, "but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6: 17). There is a deep-seated joy about it, despite its problems and testings. To be engrossed in living this life, with all its claims and interests, is to be preserved from much that might be harmful. "Snares", "hurtful lusts", "many sorrows" can engulf those who set their minds on other pursuits (1 Tim. 6: 9, 10), but the single-minded Christian is guarded from these dangers.

What such a person has to say, in general conversation and discussion, as well as in direct instruction

to others, is helpful and profitable. His words are "wholesome words", his speech is "sound speech which cannot be condemned", his teaching is "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6: 3; Titus 2: 8). His contributions are sound and substantial, because his life agrees with what he professes. The effectiveness of his activities derives ultimately from the God Whom he serves, the source and object of such a life of godliness. All the God-given aids and equipment for such a life are recognized and relied on. He rightly divides the Word of truth. He is under the control of Holy Scripture, gaining for himself and able too to pass on to others the profit which it contains "for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness."

THE POWER OF GODLINESS

The clear statements of Scripture already referred to leave no doubt that Christian people ought to live the kind of life which has been outlined, and that there will be great value in doing so. But the humble Christian will rightly feel at this point that the task is a formidable one and is quite beyond his own capabilities. His attitude will be the exact opposite of those who have the form but deny the power of godliness. Satisfaction with the mere outward form must involve denial of the need for any inward enabling for such a life, but those who truly know God cannot share such an attitude. They live their lives before Him who sees the realities that are there. Yet they also know that He has in grace revealed Himself to them, through Christ, and has entrusted them to represent Him in this world. This being so, they can surely rely on a full supply of all that will be needed to respond to such a manifesta-

tion and to fulfil such a trust.

It is along such lines as these that Paul seems to write in the key verses at the close of chapter 3. The aim of his letters is to provide urgent instruction about Christian conduct, having in mind that actions of Christian people take place in "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth". The people of God on earth today form God's house, the place where He dwells, and only those standards of conduct which suit Him are right for those who comprise that company. This is where he is represented too, for others to see, and it is of the greatest importance that He should be represented aright. But that same company is of His own making, of His own life-giving choice and call, of His own sustaining presence and power. Of Himself comes the power to value and to hold and to live for the truth. Herein lies the hope and the encouragement for successful Christian living.

And so in the closing verse of the chapter the writer falls back in thought upon the greatest and most fundamental matter of all, the manifestation of God in Christ. The words convey his own sense of wonder at a theme so profound and so undeniably great. They reveal also his confidence that there are deep and hidden resources here,

more than sufficient to supply both the basis for a life of godliness and also the incentive and the power for its continuation. Great indeed is the mystery of godliness. Here is the secret spring from which a godly life draws and maintains itself, the source and perfect pattern of all that is pleasing to God. In the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the moment of His incarnation right through to His return and reception into glory, there has been a perfect and unique manifestation of God here on earth. There is no denying this. The graces and the glories of that revelation of God are specially apparent to those who have been given the faith to appreciate it, and this they gladly confess.

Thus "the mystery of godliness" signifies something which is no longer secret but is now openly disclosed. It refers to the great self-revelation made by God; it is appreciated and effective in the lives of those who are moved by it. The word "mystery" nevertheless retains a certain appropriateness in describing it, for it is also a matter so surpassingly great as to be beyond full comprehension. Reflection on this must always cause a continuing wonder at its magnificence and its grace. With such a theme to prompt us we shall not set our sights on a lower objective than a godliness after the pattern which these letters press.

CORRESPONDENCE

IN correspondence with Mr. W. K. M. Sinclair of Wadhurst, Sussex, the following questions have been asked.

Question *What is the place of the sister in public and vocal service? Can your answer include explanations on the definition of a "church" gathering, other permitted occasions for sisterly "praying and prophesying", their doing so in the presence of men, Adam and Eve's discipline, sisters' participation in prayer and other functions.*

Answer There are two basic Scriptures which regulate this matter. They are:

1 Corinthians 14: 34, 35. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak . . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

1 Timothy 2: 8-15. "I will therefore that men (*i.e.* males specifically, and not mankind of both sexes) pray everywhere. . . . Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach . . . but to be in silence."

Several attempts to evade the plain meaning of these commands are fashionable. It has been maintained that the women at Corinth were chattering during meetings and that they were merely being re-proved for this. The word "speak" occupies so central a position in 1 Corinthians 11-14 that its meaning is inescapable. It means to speak in the sense of ministry or prayer, and this is what is being forbidden to women. Some hold that the apostle solved the difficulties at Corinth by enforcing the conventions of the day, with the implication that we in our day can safely follow the conventions of our times and ignore the apostle's commands. This interpretation, on any impartial and objective view, is absolutely untenable. In both 1 Corinthians 11: 3-12 and 1 Timothy 2: 13, 14 the apostolic directions are based on God's creation of man and woman, the relative positions of men and women under God, and also the implications of the Fall. Such facts take these instructions right out of the realm of local and temporary customs. Yet another argument is that if keeping silence in the church means what it says,

women should not join in singing hymns. As an argument, this is, of course, extremely feeble. It might prove (what is most unlikely) that women ought not to join in singing hymns, but it leaves completely unaffected the clear prohibitions regarding praying and prophesying. It has even been maintained (I have only seen it in a pamphlet written by two unmarried women) that the women who had to keep silent were wives only! This is just as certainly erroneous. The word employed does often mean wife, but not necessarily so.

Once this point is clearly established, there is the fullest scope for the service of women, and in particular, for praying and prophesying and teaching. The Scriptures are:

Acts 21: 9. "Four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."

1 Corinthians 11: 5. "Every woman praying or prophesying."

Titus 2: 3, 4. "The aged women . . . that they may teach the younger women."

Taken together with the earlier Scriptures quoted, the meaning is sufficiently clear. Women are to be silent "in the church", and in the presence of men. The latter is either included in, or additional to the former: but women may pray, prophesy, and teach in the presence of women.

A precise understanding of the expression "in (the) church" is not essential therefore to obedient action, since obviously the presence of men is the guide of wider scope. Nevertheless its meaning is an interesting question, for it is possible that all assemblies in New Testament times were of this character. I do not think that we can decide the matter by saying, as many do, that this or that modern gathering (usually the breaking of bread, the prayer meeting, an open ministry

meeting, and a disciplinary gathering) are "assembly meetings", and others are not. The Scriptural expression is "in church" or "in assembly", several times in 1 Corinthians 11-14, and it applies to any occasion when there is freedom for any man present to speak to edification, and there are two or three speakers. But these are not the only kind of meetings in which silence is enjoined on women.

In dealing with these questions, the greatest prominence should be given to the positive wealth of

scope there is for women to serve the Lord acceptably, without breach of these commands, for such they are (1 Corinthians 14: 37). When we consider the immense amount of blessing which has resulted from the work of women in bringing up children, guiding the house, hospitality, assisting in the work of the gospel, ministry to other women, then it is realized that these commands are not grievous, but simply the channelling of women's work into outlets for which women are especially fitted by God.

Question *According to Leviticus 23 the Feast of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover Feast, beginning on Sunday the 15th day of the month, and ending on the Sabbath, Saturday. Yet, in Matthew 26: 17 the disciples start preparing the Passover Feast on the first day of unleavened bread. Were the feasts transposed? Were they a whole week in preparing, i.e. did this enquiry of the disciples occur on Sunday, relative to the Passover taking place on the following Friday, due to commence at 6 p.m.?*

Answer I think the answer is much simpler than those suggested. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, though originally distinct, as shown in Leviticus 23, were so intimately connected that almost immediately they came to be treated as one under the name of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Deuteronomy 16: 2, 3 they are already coming together: "thou shalt eat unleavened bread *with it*: seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread *therewith*." Between Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16 there is not contradiction but development, drawing attention to the intimate connection between the two. Finally, in all the Gospels, the Passover is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and this latter name takes

in the Passover on 14th Nisan, as well as the seven days beginning 15th Nisan. Most clearly the truth comes out in Luke 22: 1: "the feast of unleavened bread . . . is called the Passover." After all, the eating of the original Passover in Egypt was with unleavened bread, and all that Leviticus 23 was saying was that what was begun on the Passover day was to be continued for seven days after.

The spiritual meaning of the close drawing together of the two feasts is given in 1 Corinthians 5: 7, 8. Anyone claiming the benefit of the true Passover sacrifice must joyfully accept the consequence, a life in sincerity and truth, and the exclusion of malice and wickedness.

GOD AS FATHER

F. A. HUGHES

THERE is today a rapidly growing movement in religious circles which has for its object the establishing of a common ground for worship, upon which professing Christians, Jews, Muslims and others may meet. Implicit in this is the recognition of the universal Fatherhood of God and, in consequence, the universal brotherhood of men. These are doctrines which carry an appeal, and have an attractiveness to the natural mind, and such passages as Malachi 2: 10 and 1 Corinthians 8: 6 are torn from their context to support what is asserted. We propose to examine the question in the light of Scripture, in which, and in which alone, is revealed the true basis of man's approach to God in worship.

First, let us consider briefly the awful errors to which such a pathway would, if followed, lead. If all men (we use the word as expressive of men and women — mankind) are the children of God and He is their Father, then quite obviously the doctrine of eternal punishment must be cast aside, for there is no suggestion in Scripture that one of God's children will ever eternally perish. This in turn makes the atonement unnecessary, and thus the Cross—the glorious centre and outstanding theme of Christianity — is no longer needed. The atoning work of Christ is belittled, if accepted at all, and He is stripped of glories which are unique to Himself. We shall refer to this point later.

Now we concede at once that all men are the offspring of God. This is made perfectly clear in Paul's address to the Athenians (Acts 17).

It is also made abundantly clear in that chapter that Paul is referring to men as being part of God's creation, and as standing in the relation of creatures to God as Creator. It is also clear that the Athenians had no knowledge of God as their Father; He was "unknown" to them; they were "ignorant" of the way of approach to Him, but in infinite mercy He had made it possible for them to "seek the Lord" and to "feel (to "search for") after Him". The context shows that man had become estranged from His Creator and the whole tenor of Scripture makes this clear beyond doubt. It is this *creatorial* relationship which Malachi refers to, in a book where men are shewn to have lost reverence for God.

The reference in 1 Corinthians 8 completely refutes the suggestion of "universal Fatherhood" — in no way does it support such a heresy. The apostle says, "To us there is but one God, the Father." Who are the "us"? We are left in no doubt at all! In chapter 1 of the same Epistle Paul tells us to whom he is writing. "All that . . . call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Those who are "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ", and have been "called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord". These are they who stand in relation to God as Father. Thus the *touchstone* of the relationship is the One who is completely left out by those who propound these errors, *Jesus Christ our Lord*.

In 2 Corinthians 6: 14, the Apostle writes, "Be not unequally

yoked together with unbelievers", and then goes on to describe the outstanding features of both believers and unbelievers — urging believers to separate themselves from the company of unbelievers in order that they might know the blessedness of God's promise — "I will . . . be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters." Again therefore we see that the thought of God's universal Fatherhood is not in accordance with Scripture.

If the Fatherhood of God applies to all men, why did the Lord say to the religious leaders of His day "*If God were your Father*", adding those terribly solemn words "*Ye are of your father the devil*" (John 8: 42-44). Note carefully that these are the words of "*a Man that hath told you the truth*" (verse 40).

Unquestionably the most serious feature of this teaching is the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ is left out, and this in the face of the Scripture "*All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father*" (John 5: 23).

Let us then enquire from God's Word as to the way in which we *may* know God as Father, and rejoice in the consciousness of relationship to Him as children. The Scriptures are abundantly clear as to this.

In John chapter 1 we read, "*As many as received Him (the Lord Jesus) to them gave He power (or right) to become the sons (children) of God, even to them that believe on His Name.*" In the previous verse (11) He had presented Himself to "*His own, and His own (the Jewish people) received Him not*". Galatians 3: 26 reads, "*Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" Thus we see that

our relationship to God as Father is dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ having His place, through faith, in our hearts.

Let us now consider the actual words of Christ Himself in reference to this vital question. Matthew 11: 27 reads — "*Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him*". Further in John 14: 6 we find these conclusive words, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*". Thus for the knowledge of the Father, and for the way to Him, we are dependent absolutely upon the Person of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and there is *no other way to God as Father*.

We must ever remember that He who is to be known in the blessed relationship of Father is God, and the dwelling place of Deity is "*in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see*" (1 Tim. 6: 16). God is righteous and holy — ever was such and ever will be; He has "*purser eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*" (Hab. 1: 13); the stars in their scintillating beauty "*are not pure in His sight*" (Job 25: 5). Many scriptures show the moral distance between man and his God because of sin. Perhaps Romans chapter 1 portrays it in its clearest form, man actually preferring to worship the lowest creation and indulge in the most revolting sin, rather than retain and appreciate the knowledge of God. Of His earthly people — the Jew — God has to say "*they are all estranged (foreigners) from Me through their idols*" (Ezk. 14: 4); and of the Gentiles Paul writes "*being alienated (non-participant) from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them*" (Eph. 4: 18). Foreigners and non-partici-

pants — this is the condition of mankind as in sin — idolators and ignorant of God. We do well to face the truth of Scripture, solemn and searching though it be!

Into this dark scene of moral departure from and ignorance of God, there came One — God's blessed Son, He who in speaking to God as Father could say, "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 24). As God looked upon Him here in Manhood He opened the heavens and said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3: 17). He, and He alone, could remove the distance existing between man and his God. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2: 5, 6). It is through Him and His finished work on Calvary's cross that man can be reconciled to God. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5: 10 - cf also 2 Cor. 5: 18; Col. 1: 21; Eph. 2: 16). This glorious Person is presented in the Gospel to men as Saviour and Lord, and we have already noticed that it is "by faith in Christ Jesus" that we are made the "children of God".

Having completed the work of Calvary the Lord Jesus has "risen from among the dead" ascended from this earth to the Father. Before He left the scene in which He had suffered, He uttered those memorable words to Mary Magdalene, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the *disciples* that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her" (John 20: 17, 18). The link between these lovers of Christ had been forged in

His precious death and victorious rising — and they were now to be introduced through Him, *and as in association with Him*, to His Father as their Father, to His God as their God. Thus we see the truth of the verse already quoted:

"No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14: 6).

"For *through Him* we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2: 18).

Coming to, and knowing the Father, is one of the most precious privileges enjoyed by those "who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity". It is a privilege open to all Christians — it is the possession of the "little children" in the family of God, those of whom it is said, "Your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake" (1 John 2: 12). "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father". Blessed knowledge! to be shared by every redeemed heart. Yet completely unknown by the unregenerate whatever their ecclesiastical pretension may be.

The blessings connected with the knowledge of the Father are boundless. In Luke chapter 12 the Lord Jesus tells us that the Father knows all that we have need of in our pathway through this world; but there is much more than this! "Every good and perfect gift . . . cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness". Unchanging in His constant love the Father delights to flood our hearts with the bounty of His own affections from the boundless resources which are His in that scene of unclouded light (James 1: 17). He is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (1 Cor. 1: 3). No sorrow, no care, no anxiety, no pressure upon spirit or body — escapes His eye, and from

Himself as Father comes the needed sense of mercy and comfort. He is the "Father of glory", and as in affectionate communion with Himself He would flood our hearts with the wisdom and intelligence of His glorious purpose in Christ, and of the "exceeding greatness of His power", which give us to know our place as an integral part of that vast inheritance of glory (Eph. 1). He is the "Father of spirits" and as such is engaged with the inward refining of our affections, having in view the blessed fact "that we might be made partakers of His

holiness" (Hebrews 12: 9, 10).

As in the enjoyment of this precious relationship to God as our Father may the features of the children of God be manifested in our walk. "In this the children of God are manifest . . . that we should love one another" (1 John 3: 10, 11). "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5: 1, 2).

HOW TO OVERCOME THE DEVIL

J. T. MAWSON

(Continued)

(I) WE OVERCOME THE DEVIL BY THE WORD OF GOD

Our text for the first shall be: "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2: 14). This is light, for the Scripture saith: "The entrance of Thy words giveth light" (Ps. 119: 130). The young men in the Christian sense of the word know God in His true character. This light is in them, and they are fortified and made strong by it, and the devil can not shift them from their position. They are enabled, moreover, by the word of God, to overcome him — to make him flee from them. The devil can only overcome by darkness and lies, but these must fly away before the light and the truth.

The Scriptures must be our constant study, and so shall we be able

to build ourselves up in our most holy faith: then the truth of God will be our shield and buckler. It was by the word of God that Jesus overcame the devil, and as God's word is hid in our hearts, so shall we have it ever ready to meet the foe.

Thousands who have really trusted in the Saviour are still greatly harassed by the devil, and are kept in constant doubt and fear, because the full light of the gospel is not theirs. If it were his attacks would be in vain. When the devil brought the long catalogue of Luther's sins before him, in the hope of overcoming and affrighting him, his reply was: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth me from all sin." And with that blessed truth abiding in him he was able to overcome the devil.

But there are others, who, in times of stress and trial are attacked

by the enemy in another way. He would tempt them to doubt the love of God towards them. "How can God love me and permit me to be in such trying circumstances?" is the question in many hearts. A Christian of our acquaintance, who was thus tempted, exclaimed: "Though He slay me I will trust Him!" and the devil was put to flight. But, if all Christians who are tempted, truly believed that they are loved by an unchanging and almighty love, would they give way to the temptation and allow doubts and murmurings and complaints a place in their lives? No, for their hearts would be garrisoned by the knowledge that, if God loves them perfectly, that which He permits must be the best for them, and so Satan would have no power to make them doubt the God whom they know.

We must remember that Satan gains the victory when he makes us doubt God. It was thus that he triumphed in Eden; it is thus he triumphs still; and only as the truth of God abides in us are we strong to resist his attacks.

(2) WE OVERCOME THE DEVIL BY THE ACTIVITIES OF DIVINE GRACE

It would be wrong for us to sit at ease, and, being blessed ourselves, to eat our morsel alone. To do so would be undoubted proof of our complete failure to be what God would have us, and thus also prove that Satan had gained an advantage over us; for Satan triumphs if we falsify the character of God, which we are here to display.

"As My Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20: 21), are wonderful words for us to listen to, and set the high standard for our life down here. It is God's intention that we should be kept

in the activities of His grace, showing forth His character in that corner in which He has put us.

I know that some people are very fond of harking back to Luke 10. 38-42, and putting Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, in contrast to Martha, who busied herself in service; but the story is often set in the wrong light, and the interpretation is in consequence very much fogged. Let us go back and consider the Lord's words that precede this incident. In verse 37, there are two words which we will put in capitals — they are, "GO" and "DO". You could not find two smaller words than these in the English language, but it would be impossible to find any more forceful and vigorous. They pulsate with life; they vibrate with energy; and they are the command of Jesus. But, He adds "likewise", and as the meaning of that qualification forces itself home, we see at once the necessity of sitting at His feet. How can we go and do like Him unless we learn of Him? It was here that Martha failed. She had got the words "go" and "do", but she forgot the qualifying word "likewise", and as a consequence her service was marred by worry and trouble, and she served in a cross and carping spirit. Mary's place at Jesus' feet must indeed be ours. It must always be the attitude of our souls. But be assured that those who sit there will most truly and constantly be found in the activities of the grace of God.

This grace must first show itself in the innermost circle, amongst our fellow Christians. If we fail here we shall be terribly crippled in the wider circle of the world: and that the devil is anxious to trip us in this inner circle is evident from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. There was in that church a

brother who had grievously sinned, but repentance had done its work, and he was full of sorrow and longed to be restored to the comfort and fellowship of God's people. But they evidently kept him at arm's length, and were not ready to forgive him. The keen-sighted apostle sees in this reluctance of theirs a wile of the devil, and he writes earnestly to them to let grace flow out, or Satan would get an advantage. Had they done other than that urged by Paul they would have failed to display God's character, and the repentant brother would have been swallowed up with sorrow, and Satan would have triumphed over both (2 Cor. 2).

It had evidently forced itself upon Peter that this was the spirit in which the Lord intended that His disciples should act when He said: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18: 22). There must be no limit to the activities of grace in this circle. We must not be weary in well-doing, but ever keep in mind that word "likewise".

Let us awake to the fact that harshness and legality in our dealings one with the other spells victory for Satan. Let us also keep in mind that gentleness, forbearance and love are for the glory of God.

But these activities also manifest themselves in seeking the good of souls. When Christ ascended on high He fulfilled the prophetic song of Deborah and led captivity captive. From that place of power He has bestowed gifts upon men, for the edifying and building up of His own people, so that in spite of all the enemy's attempts to throw them down, and his *cunning craftiness*, they might not be deceived by

him or turned away from the truth (Eph. 4: 9-14). It is within the reach of all who are near the Lord to carry sweet thoughts of Christ about to others, with the result that joy takes the place of depression in the hearts of those who hear, and the temptations of Satan thus lose their power.

GOD'S GRACE TO THE WORLD

It is our privilege also to tread in the steps of Jesus, our Lord and Pattern, and carry to those who have fallen beneath the power of the devil that which can completely deliver them. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty and the lawful captives delivered?" was asked long ago. We have the answer to that question today, for the gospel concerning God's Son has delivering power, and *every soul saved is a fresh bit of territory wrenched from Satan's domination — a fresh bit of territory added to the Lord's kingdom*. How glorious to see the dark flag hauled down and the devil driven out; to see the Lord come in and take possession and use that new bit of territory as a vantage point from which fresh victories may be gained.

This is the Lord's own work, but He is pleased to put it into the hands of those whom He has delivered, for we read:

"How shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10: 14).

"They so spake that a great multitude believed" (Acts 14: 1).

"He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5: 20).

But the conflict is real and fierce, and foot by foot the devil will contend for the ground that he holds. We must realize that we are confronted by his power, then shall we

turn away from any fancied wisdom and strength of our own to the Lord alone. We shall desire earnestly to carry out the glad tidings, but we shall seek constantly the place where true power and wisdom are to be found — even the presence of the Lord — and so shall we prove that dependence on Him alone is the way of victory.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and *your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked [one]. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; *and for me, that utterance may be given me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel*" (Eph. 6: 10-20).

The gospel of the grace of God makes way for that which is behind it, and with this end in view, Christians are exhorted to wrestle and pray; for the ultimate result of the preaching of the gospel is the triumph of what God is in His

nature and activities, and the utter confounding of the enemy.

"Curse ye Meroz." Are any who profess Christianity indifferent as to this conflict? Let them hear the solemn words: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (Judges 5: 23). Oh! why did Reuben abide by the sheep-fold while the great conflict waged? Why, oh, why do Christians today, loving ease and comfort, abide in the safety of the sheepfolds, when God's glorious gospel is going forth, and is opposed by all the power and ingenuity of Satan? Surely where such indifference holds sway the devices of Satan have been successful, and he has got an advantage. The Lord grant us grace so that we may forget ourselves, and go forth to the conflict, led by the light of the knowledge of Himself and the activities of His grace, until the morning dawns, when all His enemies shall perish, and when those that love Him shall be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might (Judges 5: 31).

(3) WE OVERCOME SATAN BY BEING READY TO SACRIFICE OURSELVES

Now, if the devil fails to make us doubt the love and goodness of God, and to hinder us from seeking the good of others, he will endeavour to overcome us by making us think much of ourselves — putting self first instead of God. This was the first evidence of departure from God in Eden. Eve thought of herself, and when she put forth her hand to take the fruit of the tree, she proved that she had begun to love *self* rather than God, and this has always been natural to men

since that sad day. It was this that Satan cast in God's face when he said in the presence of the Almighty: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face" (Job 2: 4, 5). Satan understood well the character of the fall. He knew that men were utterly selfish; that they would sacrifice everything, even their God, to save themselves.

In the Lord Jesus Christ, our Pattern and our Guide, we have a perfect example. He willingly sacrificed everything, even His life. When tempted by Satan to pity Himself and refuse the cross, He maintained His blessed pathway of perfect devotion to God. He loved the Lord, His God, with all his heart, His soul, His strength; and His perfect answer to the great temptation was: "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"

The saints of God have the victory through Him, and Satan will be bruised beneath their feet. We have the character of this victory made plain in Revelation 12: 10, 11: "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and *they loved not their lives unto the death.*" Here, indeed, is victory over Satan, for here are those who, in spite of all his subtlety and temptations, loved God better than themselves, and willingly laid down their lives for His testimony. God was more to them than life itself. This is God's triumph

over Satan in the hearts of His people. They love God: but this is the result of His love to them, as manifested in the blood of the Lamb. That blood is the undeniable token to us of a love that would overcome every opposing force; a love that could not be quenched by the many waters of death. And this love so triumphs over them and takes captive their hearts, that it, and the truth of the God whose love it is, becomes everything to them — all else is of no account. Thus it was with the martyrs, who sang their songs of triumph amid the flames at the stake. Thus it will ever be where the love of God holds sway.

But, how do we stand in this matter? In these days we are not called upon to go to actual martyrdom for Christ's sake, yet it is our privilege every day to prove that we love Him better than ourselves. Is not this the secret of true discipleship? Do we not find it set forth in the Lord's words? "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14: 26, 27).

"Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8: 34, 35). There is here not self-denial, but the complete denial of self — the constant sacrificing of self, if you will, for bearing the cross means this; and in so doing — in losing our lives thus — we tread in the footsteps of the One who was ever victorious, for He —

*"Trod all His foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down."*

As we tread this path we are more than conquerors through Him. "What is it to be more than a conqueror?" was the question asked. "To kill six men and be ready to kill a seventh," was the reply given. But, was this the right answer? Ah, no! but exactly the reverse. *It is to be killed six times ourselves and be ready then to be killed again.* "For Thy sake we are killed [not killing] all the day long" (Rom. 8: 36). When we are thus prepared to sacrifice ourselves for His sake, we have the victory, and God is glorified in us.

But see what precedes and follows the verse quoted, and you will then understand the secret of this victory, and see how it is possible for us, who are by nature always self-centred, to rejoice in suffering. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or sword?" (verse 35). None of these physical sufferings can separate us from His love, though oft-times our souls may lose the sense of it. Then we get down-cast and prone to murmur in the midst of trial: and thus Satan gains an advantage. But, if our hearts are right, and we are dependent upon the Lord, our great Intercessor, the tribulation does but drive us closer to Him, and we are thus made to

prove afresh the blessedness of that love which is greater than the greatest trial. Then can we glory in tribulation: then do the dews of sorrow shine like unto precious gems, and we are content and happy with God's way for us, and are true overcomers. Then follows the blessed conclusion: "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" (verses 38, 39). If the first list are physical trials in which we need the love of Christ as our support, here are spiritual foes, and against these God Himself is opposed. They cannot separate us from His love, for His love is greater and mightier than them all. All the power of these spiritual things was marshalled to separate us from the love of God and to hold us in bondage, but the cross of Christ destroyed their dominion, and through His precious death, the love of God has secured us in spite of them all, and since this is a glorious fact we need not fear. Oh, may the light of this matchless love so fill and move our hearts that we may be always ready to be killed all the day long for Jesus' sake, and so be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

PHILIPPIANS 3: 13, 14

Let no man think, that sudden, in a minute
All is accomplished, and the work is done.
Though with thine earliest dawn thou shouldst begin it,
Yet were it not completed with thy setting sun.

MYERS.

"ALL THE DAYS OF THY LIFE"

J. R. JAMESON (extracted)

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psa. 23: 1, 6).

THE words of our title, "All the days of thy life" are to be found about twelve times in Scripture with the slight variation, "his life", "our life", "my life". We will look at a few of them, and they will surely yield to us some spiritual refreshment.

(1) "That thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life" (Deut. 16: 3). God has a purpose in view and He says, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Ex. 19: 4). Think of the sweetness of those words, "brought you unto myself". This was God's object and it is still in His heart to bring people to Himself. We should most certainly remember the day that He brought us to Himself all the days of our lives.

(2) "And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (Deut. 17: 18, 19). This daily reading out of the book which he had written would be a very real blessing to the king. Being alone with God and His word each day would minister strength and wisdom for the duties as they presented

themselves. The history of the kings of Israel and Judah would have presented a much happier picture if they had been reading therein all the days of their lives. Dangers abound and we are not yet home. It is our privilege also to be found reading God's word all the days of our lives.

(3) "One thing have I desired of the Lord, 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, and to enquire in his temple" (Psa. 27: 4). His heart's desire was to "behold the beauty of the Lord". No wonder he says in another place, "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God has blessed thee for ever" (Psa. 45: 1, 2). So "the beauty of the Lord" may fill our hearts all the days of our lives down here, and then satisfy us for ever in the bright home above.

(4) "And Hannah vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt . . . give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life" (1 Sam. 1: 11). Many a child has thus been dedicated to the Lord; perhaps the reader has been so favoured. Others have been led to dedicate themselves to the Lord. If things have lapsed in a spiritual way, it would be well to renew the covenant. It will mean great searchings of heart, but how small the cost will be if looked at in the light of eternity.

May we seek grace to serve the Lord acceptably with reverence and godly fear all the days of our lives.

(5) "That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1: 74, 75). Note the four expressions, "without fear", "in holiness", "in righteousness", "before him". These four expressions refer to our state of soul, which may vary from day to day. Hence the need to be kept in tune with the One above Who loves us, the Lord Jesus Christ, all the days of our life.

(6) "Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all

the days of our life" (Isa. 38: 20). Let us look at the steps which led Isaiah to speak of singing all the days of his life.

a. "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption" (Isa. 38: 17).

b. "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

c. "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day" (Isa. 38: 19).

"Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life."

(7) "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psa. 23: 6).

ELISHA

ROBERT THOMSON

A DAY OF GOOD TIDINGS

(2 Kings 7: 1 - 8: 6)

THE chapter opens with a remarkable promise from Elisha, relating to a soon-coming moment when scarceness of bread would be displaced by abundance of provision. Truly, God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. Who could have foreseen a wonderful deliverance from famine in so short a time but God Himself? Even before the miraculous circumstances did come to pass, the word was given by the prophet concerning the supply of food, and even the place of its selling. Where sin abounded did grace more abound; and where famine

abounded a plentiful supply would very soon be superabounding.

There was also a deeply solemn warning to the scoffer who doubted the Lord's power and goodness, by proclaiming, "Now *behold*, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be?" God is not mocked, and the word of quickly coming judgment upon him was announced. Now we have the second "*Behold*", this time coming from Elisha, "*Behold*, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." How very sad for anyone to hold up the goodness of God to ridicule, and then to reap the

awful consequences of divine judgment!

THE FOUR LEPERS

The material to be used for the deliverance of the city was just at hand ready for His service. It was not the strong, or the wise, or the noble, but four men who were at the point of death. They were lepers at the entering in of the gate of Samaria, waiting for death to overtake them. That which was reckoned to be hopeless and worthless in the sight of men God will take up and use for the furtherance of His salvation and glory. The lepers decided to proceed to the camp of the enemy, expecting nothing but death to be the end to their miserable existence. Waiting until the twilight they went forth upon their apparently mad venture, only to find, to their great relief, that not a man remained in all the camp of Syria.

The Lord had been working before them, causing the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots, horses, and a mighty army. Under the impression that this noise must be the allies of Israel, hired against them, they fled for their lives, leaving everything of the camp behind. This was proof of the working of God's grace: Himself alone vanquishing the enemy and bringing the fruits of His victory to the needy and perishing. For the poor, benighted lepers, the finding of this food must have filled their hearts with joy, as well as meeting their present hunger and need. There seemed to be an abundance of everything, food, drink, silver, gold and raiment, all left behind by the Syrian army, which apparently had fled in great confusion. Following upon this great find and the satisfying of their gnawing hunger, the lepers rightly began to think of

others who were desperate in the city through famine.

"They said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." What a seasonable word for us today! Ours is a day of good tidings, for it is the day of God's salvation; let us go now and tell others that it is the acceptable time for eternal blessing. In the persecution of the early Christians, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8: 4). To one who had been dispossessed of demons by the Lord, He could say to him, "Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke 8: 39). "And he went his way and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him." Of the dear saints at Thessalonica the apostle Paul could write, "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad" (1 Thess. 1: 8).

So the lepers came and found the porter of the city, declaring to him the good tidings of plenty and sufficiency. He passed on the word to the others porters, who brought the good news to the king's house within. Thus the wondrous message penetrated from the outside to the inside, from the lowest to the highest, and from the meanest to the greatest. The king arose in the night, but his sceptical mind could only think of this goodness as a ruse of the enemy. How sad it is that the god of this world is blinding the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God,

should shine unto them!

Like Naaman, of an earlier scene, the king is prevailed upon by a wise servant to send and see if this thing is really true. Then the word of the king is given to go and see; and they went in pursuit of the enemy as far as Jordan. All along the way were to be seen the spoils of victory; not the triumph which had been wrought by their own efforts, but that which had been accomplished by another, even God and His power. There, before their wondering eyes, was the evidence of fulness of supply, and the people went out to spoil the tents of the Syrians.

God delights to honour His promises; and as He had said, so it came to pass. A measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord. Another could write at a later date, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11: 33). God is full of compassion toward the needy, meeting their extremity with His abundant sufficiency. For the scoffer, however, there must be the severity of righteous judgment; and the one who dared to mock God's goodness, must reap the awful result of his folly in ignominy and death. He saw the good given by divine promise, but was not able to eat of it, "for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died".

Remembering the kindness and hospitality of the Shunammite, and the restoring to life of her son, Elisha advised her of the coming famine, and the urgency to leave the land. It was to be a famine of seven years duration, called for by the Lord. Perhaps this was the divine way of judgment upon the nation for their diversion from following after Him

and not walking in His ways. Strongly contrasted with this, we see the Shunammite and her son obeying the word of Elisha and finding a place of sojourn in the land of the Philistines. The seven years of testing came to their completion according to the word of the Lord, and the woman and son returned from the land of the Philistines. Like Naomi, of a bygone day, she found no permanent abode in another land, and returned to enjoy the goodness of God in her own sphere and life.

However, during the years of her sojourning in Philistia, her house and land in Israel had been taken over by others, which circumstances caused her to go forth to the king and ask for the restitution of her possessions. God was preparing the way, as He always does for those who trust Him wholly, and as she approached the king, he was in an earnest conversation with Gehazi, desiring him to declare all the great things that Elisha had done! What a moment! For here standing before the king was the proof of the power of resurrection from the dead. The woman, with her son, now introduced to the king by Gehazi, is given the happy privilege to declare to him the greatness of Elisha as she had realised in her own circumstances.

God is glorified, the king is enlightened, and the way is opened for the full restoration of all that was hers, with all the fruits of the field since the day that she left until that present moment of time. Well may we say, "Thanks be unto God!" "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the assembly by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

4. THE SERVANT

OUR present reading of the Acts will have failed in its purpose if it has not awakened the question: How can I be available to God for the work He is surely doing? 2 Timothy 2: 14-16 deals with this question, and especially verses 20 and 21. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

A Vessel fit for the Master's use. This verse suggests another form in which the question can be put: How can I be a vessel serviceable to the Master? How can I be a vessel readily available to His hand for use for His purpose?

Here is one of those numerous cases where we have a picture presented with a wide and inclusive sweep, but we shall only grasp the point if we use the general details as stepping-stones to direct our thoughts, and then forget all other details except the one specified. We need not even consider an application for the rest. The picture presented here is of the utensils, instruments or tools available in a large house. It is a large house because several persons will be requiring the use of utensils, for example the servants, the family and the master. In such a case there could be a sharp distinction between the utensils and tools for anyone to use, and the utensils "fit for the master". In many a modern home, woe betide nine-year-old Peter if he thinks that father's best wood-chisel is suitable for Peter to hack away at his boat! The exact picture coming to us from the ancient world

through Paul's page is of the distinction between the possibly earthenware utensils suitable only for lowly and even degraded use by the slaves, and the gold and silver vessels "fit for the master", to shine at his table and do him honour. And having reached this concept we forget all the rest with their degradation, and think solely of the idea of being "fit for the Master". We want to know the description of a "vessel fit for the Master".

Throughout the Bible we meet the truth that the instruments God uses are not primarily methods, but men and women consecrated to Him. Good methods without good men are useless to God; and the right men might be expected to use the right methods. The order, in the scale of availability and usefulness to God is first, consecrated men and women (and therefore filled with the Holy Spirit), and afterwards good methods as He guides them. Through the Bible story we read of the great succession of men and women who have been God's instruments: Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, Jeremiah, Priscilla and Aquila, and so many others. How can I be in this great succession of men and women available to God?

Vessels of gold and silver will shine, as we have said, but in this case they shine for the master, and show forth his glory. Close to each other in Westminster Abbey are two tablets. One is on the wall ostensibly to honour Milton, but, alas, out of a dozen or so lines, only two refer to Milton, and all the rest show forth the praises of — the man who paid for the tablet! Close by, in the floor, is a small stone, and there is scarcely a visitor to the Abbey who has not heard its fame and looks for it. It contains only

four words: "O rare Ben Jonson." The watchword, spoken in the heart, of those who will be vessels shining for the Master and serviceable to Him is that with which our first chapter closed: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory."

A Cleaned-out Vessel. Our verse describes the vessel unto honour in both negative and positive terms. Negatively, it is a purged vessel, a vessel which has been cleaned out. It is not sufficient to be a vessel of gold or silver. The vessel must also be cleaned out, and only if this is done will it be a vessel fit for the master. If it has not been cleaned out he will put it down and call for another! The cleaning out is negative, a separating of all that is evil. In John 13 the Lord teaches us that a disciple who has undergone the once-for-all cleansing also requires oft-repeated washing. The once-for-all cleansing is perhaps analogous to being a vessel of gold or silver. The oft-repeated washing may perhaps be likened to the cleaning-out of a vessel to renew its fitness for the Master.

Psalm 66: 28 raises the question of what we regard in our hearts, and Psalm 51 prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me". Ignatius Loyola, emerging from a monastic retreat, was seen to be so chastened and alarmed that his companions asked what he had been shown, "a cage of devils?" He replied, "Worse than that, they showed me my heart." These epistles name many uncleannesses which can be regarded in the heart, covetousness, strife, youthful lusts. In passing from 2 Corinthians 6 to 7: 1, Paul passes from the need for a positional separation to a spiritual cleansing. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and

spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

If action requires adjustment, then it is because the heart needs cleaning out, and the agent for this cleaning out is ever the Word of God. It is worked out by prayerful application to ourselves of the Word of God as we read it day by day. The Psalms are full of this dual action of the Word of God and prayer in the cleansing of the saints. The Psalms are themselves the prayers, and within them is contained the application to himself by the Psalmist of God's law. Psalm 19: 7-14 is a great example. The perfect law of the Lord converts the soul: the pure commandment of the Lord enlightens the eyes: the clean fear of the Lord endures for ever: yet are they "more to be desired than gold, . . . sweeter also than honey". In the end he applies all this to himself and his errors in his prayer: "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. . . . Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer."

A Sanctified Vessel. The vessel unto honour is described positively in that it is a sanctified vessel, that is, separated (not only from evil, but) positively "unto the Lord". As we know, sanctification in Scripture is often the action of God's Spirit as a result of which a person believes (1 Peter 1: 2) or the sanctification by the will of God, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10: 10). In other cases it describes a feature of the actual life of the Christian for which prayer is made. "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. . . . And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17: 17, 19). "The

very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thess. 5: 23). It is in the latter sense it is used here, and translated into well-known phrases, it means that only if I am "out and out", wholeheartedly out and out, am I available for the Master. F. B. Hole and A. J. Pollock, as young men, were once conducting a preaching campaign, and the latter remarked that some Christians want to be all heart and some all head, but (he said), it is better to be evenly divided. Afterwards, F. B. Hole said to him with gentle irony, "I was delighted with your definition of the ideal Christian—half-hearted and half-witted!" We are not often satisfied with being thought half-witted, but too often we know very well that we are only half-hearted in this matter. Whole-hearted and exclusive dedication to the Lord and to His service is the sanctification which is indispensable if we are to be fit for the Master's use. And this is brought about by the constraining power of the love of Christ, realised ever afresh in the believer's heart.

*I'd look to Him till sight endear
The Saviour to my heart;
To Him I look who calms my fear,
Nor from Himself would part.*

*I'd look until His precious love
My every thought control,
Its vast constraining influence prove
O'er body, spirit, soul.*

Prayer. Returning finally to the story of the Acts, what is the predominant character of those who are found so outstandingly usable by God? What is the habitual attitude in which the conditions outlined in the preceding paragraphs are most powerfully encouraged? The servant fit for the Master's use cleaned out, and sanctified, is a praying servant. This waiting on

God, this awareness of His holiness, this power of His love are realised through prayer. When, in the Acts, men and women were found available to God for the work He was doing, they were men and women of prayer, and, indeed, often at the moment engaged in prayer. A concordance of the Acts would cause praying to stand out as a dominant activity.

Someone has remarked that when some problem, obstacle or distress fell upon any of their number, the disciples "simply rushed to prayer". Especially note their prayer when assembled in 4: 24-31. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." In 12: 5, when Peter was in prison, "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him". Especially we shall wish to note how often the same theme recurs concerning individuals: The Apostles (6: 4, 6), Peter (9: 40, 8: 15, 10: 9 — much emphasized and repeated) Ananias (9: 10), Paul (9: 11, 16: 25, 28: 8), Cornelius (10: 2, 30), the Church at Antioch (13: 3). In the story as we have followed it in the Acts, these are the individuals found available to God for the work in which He was engaged.

At the beginning of these papers, four parties to the work of preaching the Word were distinguished; God, the Word, the Hearer, and the Servant. God cannot fail: His Word never changes: hearers are brought into blessing therefore, when the servant is available to God, a vessel fit for the Master's use. It is for the Lord's servants, by ceaseless, importunate, prevailing prayer to seek the Lord's help to fulfil this condition.

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

1. INTRODUCTION

THE New Testament letters can be classified in various ways. A distinction can be drawn, for instance, between those which were written as a matter of some urgency because a definite situation required a letter to meet it, and those which are of a more purely expository nature and where the background to their writing is less easy to determine.

Confining attention to Paul's letters, and taking only into consideration the limited group of those which were written to churches rather than to individuals, it is still possible to draw this distinction within this group. The letters to Rome and to Ephesus, for instance, show little trace of malpractices or misconceptions which needed correcting amongst the recipients of these letters; though this is not to say that they do not contain good advice and teaching about worthy conduct amongst Christians. Nor is there any strong evidence in these letters that the believers at Rome or at Ephesus were in outstanding and urgent need of encouragement or stimulus in Christian things; even though one effect of the kind of teaching they contain is to bring great light and encouragement to the reader.

At the other extreme, some of the Pauline epistles clearly have as their first aim the correction of some distortion of the truth or some deviation from proper practice amongst the Christians who were to receive them. This is the very reason for the existence of these epistles. Galatians and I Corinthians are of this kind. Also in this category are those letters

which set about providing teaching which will counteract a clearly-seen vulnerability to misleading lines of thought, or a really-existing tendency to discouragement. Colossians and the Thessalonian epistles are of this nature.

The boundary between the two divisions is not a clear-cut one. A good example of a letter which is not decidedly in one category rather than the other is the letter to the Philippians. First of all this letter is an acknowledgment of a gift, and along with this it provides an avenue for a spontaneous demonstration of a true Christian spirit in commending and encouraging a group of Christians who were very much at one with Paul and with his aims and interests. Yet even here there were small matters which required his advice and correction; so that this epistle does contain a corrective and hortative element, though this may not be its major concern.

It is hoped to consider in turn, in a series of papers, some of the Pauline epistles of the second type, in which an element of corrective teaching appears as part of their content. The aim will be to pick out the features which made this necessary in each case, and to outline the teaching which is provided to meet these tendencies. The main lines of incipient departure from Christian truth and practice do not alter over the years in any fundamental sense. We may surely be thankful that defection and deviations of the kind we shall consider, whether of a major or more minor character, made their appear-

ance at such an early stage. The existence of misconceptions and unsound attitudes amongst early believers led, in result, to clear and specific particularization of such matters as part of the biblical teaching. Erroneous teachings, wrong ways and attitudes have been pinpointed, and the appropriate corrective teaching supplied in authoritative form. This has been done in a way which has had its value as guidance and instruction for all who over the years have accepted the authority of Scripture, a much wider circle than those who received the letters in the first place.

We may well reflect upon a matter of such interest and wonder as this. Here are letters which have supplied light and benefit, and warning and exhortation too, for the whole Church of God throughout the long centuries; and the need for their teaching is still clear today. The provision of this is in the first place traceable to failings and shortcomings which appeared in the earliest Christian days: the sensitivity and foresight of God's chosen servant Paul, who was not slow to

act in such situations, also played its part. Without either of these factors these letters would not have been written, and their help and benefit would have been lost. Yet who could doubt that behind these immediate reasons for the existence of this important part of the New Testament lay the sovereign and gracious control of God? On the greatest scale of all, as well as in more particular instances such as the present one, this great principle is clear. The failure and the weakness of men is never the end-point of the story; nor is it really the beginning either. Above and behind all is the great and gracious God, bringing into effect His own designs; a God known and revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose ways are nevertheless past finding out, Who overcomes evil with good, and Who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will.

May we approach this study in awareness of His great concern and provision for our good, and of our need to be governed by the teaching which has been furnished in such an impressive way.

THE PLEASURE OF THE LORD

HAMILTON SMITH

"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, He shall see his seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53: 10).

THREE great truths stand out clearly in the above words of the prophet Isaiah. First, it is revealed that God has His pleasure; secondly, we are told that the pleasure of the LORD is going to prosper; thirdly, we learn, that the

pleasure of the LORD will prosper in the hand of one Person — the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the beginning of the world's history, God has had His pleasure, but it has not prospered in the hands of men. There have

been men of God, who, on occasions, have done great deeds, and in particular acts have wrought the will of God; yet it could not be said that the pleasure of the LORD had prospered throughout the ages. All things were created for God's pleasure (Revelation 4: 11); but sin marred the fair creation. In Noah God established government to restrain the evil of the world; but at once God's pleasure is set aside, for the one who was set to govern others failed to govern himself. The law was given to regulate man's conduct toward God and his neighbour, to secure the blessing of man on the earth; but at the outset man breaks the law with the golden calf. God establishes a priestly order to intercede with Himself on behalf of guilty man; at once the priest fails by offering false incense. God institutes royalty, and the kings lead the people into idolatry. God sends prophets to recall the people to Himself, and they stone the prophets. He places the government of the world in the hands of the Gentiles, and they use their power to exalt themselves. At last God sends His Son, and the Kings of the earth and the rulers of the Jews take counsel together against the LORD and His anointed. They nail the Messiah to the Cross. Thus it becomes manifest that the pleasure of the LORD has not prospered in the hands of men. Nevertheless the words of the prophet remain in all their inspired force; the pleasure of the LORD is going to prosper, but it will be in the hands of one Man, CHRIST.

Fixing then our gaze upon Christ we shall see, first, that the pleasure of God for man is set forth in absolute perfection *in Christ*: secondly, we shall learn that the pleasure of God is secured *by Christ*.

THE PLEASURE OF GOD SET FORTH IN CHRIST

To see the pleasure of God set forth in Christ, we need, first of all, to look back, and "consider Him" where He was in the midst of a world of sinners; then to look steadfastly on Jesus where He is in the glory of God.

Looking back at His wonderful pathway through this world we see the Lord Jesus, a Man amongst men, in whom God was well pleased. We hear Him say, "I do always those things that *please Him*" (John 8: 29). In the midst of a world of sinners, who but one who is a Divine Person as well as perfect Man could utter such words? Others might say, "We desire to do the things that please God," but only the Son could say, "I do always those things that please Him." The One who speaks thus must be either the Son of God, or an imposter. This the Jews clearly understood; but, alas, refusing to own Him as a Divine Person, they are compelled to charge Him with being an imposter, for they say, "Thou hast a devil," and "then took they up stones to stone Him."

Faith, however, delights to own His glory, and see in Him "the Word become flesh, "the glory as of the Only begotten of the Father". Tracing His footsteps on earth as we see at last a Man according to the pleasure of the LORD. As one has said, "Men seek their own glory. He sought His Father's alone. Men do their own will; His Father's will was His only business. . . . Think of One who for three and thirty years of His sojourn on earth never did one thing to serve Himself, spare Himself, exalt Himself, but for every moment of His life was and *did*, spoke and thought, and felt, exact-

ly as God would have Him."

If then this blessed Person could truly say, "I do always those things that please Him," the Father could, with great delight, justify such words, for after those thirty years in private at Nazareth, the heavens open over Him, and the voice of the Father is heard saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And again, when the three and a half years of His public life draw to a close, we hear the Father's voice declaring on the Mount, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Thus at last we see on earth One who is altogether lovely and wholly for the pleasure of God. Moreover, as we look at Christ in His moral perfections, we see all that God desires to be set forth in a Man, and nothing short of His perfection will meet the pleasure of God for man. It is God's good pleasure to have a great company of people morally *like Christ*.

But we not only look back to see the moral perfection of Christ shining out in the midst of sinful men, in a world of sorrow and death, but we look up and see Jesus crowned with glory and honour in that scene where all tears are wiped away, where "there will be no more death neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain", and, as with Stephen we look up through the opened heavens, and see "the glory of God and Jesus" at the right hand of God, we see that it is the pleasure of God to have us *with Him*.

Thus as we look at Jesus, we see the pleasure of God set forth in Him. We see that it is God's pleasure to have a great company of people saved from the wreck and ruin of this fallen world to be *like Christ* in His moral perfection as

set forth in His path down here, and to be with Christ where He is in that home of light and love.

THE PLEASURE OF GOD SECURED BY CHRIST

Alas! this wonderful presentation of the pleasure of God in Christ made manifest the true condition of man under the power of sin, Satan, and death. The natural man desires to be left alone to go his own way, do his own will, and gratify his lusts. Naturally we prefer the pleasures of sin to the pleasure of God. The light of the presence of Christ only proved that men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. The light was too strong for sinful men, and so they rejected Christ, nailed Him to the Cross, and put out the light of the world.

Thus, as we look upon Christ in all His moral perfection — His holiness, love, grace, gentleness, patience, meekness, and lowliness — every trait of His lovely character, every word that fell from His lips, every act and every step in His perfect path, only convicts us of being exactly the opposite. How then is it possible for God's pleasure to be secured by having a people who are morally *like Christ*, and suited to be *with Christ* in glory?

There is only one answer to this great question. The pleasure of God for man can only be secured by the death of the One who is altogether for His pleasure. This, indeed, was realised by the prophet Isaiah, for he says, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." One has said that "He who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked was pleased to put His righteous Servant to grief — not, of course, because the death of agony was a pleasure

to look upon, but as a means to the fulfilment of a great purpose". Thus immediately that great sacrifice is accomplished, the pleasure of the LORD begins to prosper. "*When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin,*" and not till then, the pleasure of the LORD shall begin to prosper. Before God could secure, out of a world of sinners, a people made like to Christ for His pleasure, God's holiness had to be met and our sins removed. This great work was done when His soul was made an offering for sin, and "He was wounded for our transgressions". So, in the New Testament, we see the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, and we read, He "offered Himself without spot to God" to meet the holiness of God; and of believers it is written, "He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification."

This great work being foreseen by the prophet, he tells us the results that will follow. He says, "*When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed.*" For the natural man death would cut off all hope of a seed, but, by death this blessed Man secures a seed. So we hear the Lord, Himself, saying, "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). Thus He secures His seed — a spiritual seed — composed of a great host of the redeemed gathered out of all nations, who at last will sing the new song, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5: 9).

Then we read, "*He shall prolong his days.*" Death that ends the days of fallen man, becomes the means of prolonging the days of this perfect Man. What a seem-

ing paradox is this! As one has said, "He is 'cut off from the land of the living'; is buried, and yet He shall live and have continuance of days." The resurrection is the glorious answer to this paradox. It is no part of the pleasure of God that man should lie under the sentence of death, any more than that he should come under judgment for his sins. We see Jesus delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification, and we hear Him say, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I became dead, and behold *I am living for evermore*, and have the keys of death and of Hades." The Psalmist can say, "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even *length of days for ever and ever*" (Psalm 21: 4). Thus we see the pleasure of the LORD, not only set forth in Christ, but secured by Christ.

We look on beyond all the failure of man and we see the day is coming when, as the result of all that Christ is, and all that He has done, the great host of the redeemed will be like Christ and with Christ. Then, indeed, the words of the prophet will be fulfilled, "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (N.T.). What a day of triumph will that be, when at last all His people are gathered home; when every trace of the wilderness journey is past, and they are presented to Christ all glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but are holy and without blemish. Then indeed, He will rise up and say, "I am satisfied", and the pleasure of the LORD will be accomplished. We shall be there "According to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1: 5, 6).

Such is the eternal pleasure of God for Christ and His people, that will be most surely accomplished. In the meantime, as we pass along our way to the glory, God is working in us both to will and to do of *His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2: 13-16). It is God's good pleasure that even now there should be an answer in His people to all that He has purposed for them. It is His pleasure that the flesh with all its murmuring and reasonings should be set aside; secondly, that Christ morally should be displayed in us by

a life that is blameless, and harmless, and without rebuke; thirdly, that we should be a witness for God by shining as lights in a dark world, and holding forth the word of life in a world of death. If then this is His good pleasure for believers while yet in this world, may we join with the Apostle in praying that we may be made perfect "in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is *well-pleasing* in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever" (Hebrews 12: 21).

DO WE BELIEVE IT?

A. H. STORRIE

"Again I say to you, that if two of you shall agree on the earth concerning any matter, whatsoever it may be that they shall ask, it shall come to them from my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18: 19, 20).

*Blest hour of prayer, when the Presence we enter,
Lovers of Jesus, we meet in His name,
He in our midst, our one true living Centre;
All other ground we disown and disclaim.*

IF the above Scripture and lines express the truth, why is it that the assembly prayer meeting is, generally, so neglected throughout these favoured islands? Whilst, we admit, even in these days of easy transport, allowance must be made for the aged and infirm as to attending meetings, it is to be feared that, in very many places the bulk of those meeting for the Lord's Supper are never seen at the prayer meeting from one year's end to the other. And yet, in the first place, it was in connection with collective prayer that our Lord promised to be

in the midst of those so gathered to His name. That He is in our midst when we meet to remember Him in the Supper, we prove to be most blessedly true: but surely the assembly prayer meeting is the next in importance to the Supper. The simple fact that references to prayer and praying occupy three whole columns in *Cruden's Concordance*, indicates how true are the poet's words: "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath." And what is true of the individual Christian is applicable to the collectivity.

We may well reflect on WHO He

is who has promised to be in the midst of those that gather to His name. Think of His many names and titles, and of their significance:

"But I say unto you, that there is here what is greater than the temple" (Matthew 12: 6).

"... behold, more than Jonas is here" (Matthew 12: 41).

"... behold, more than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12: 42).

Also let us remember that we all belong to one family, the family of God. It is a strange family where the members are indifferent to meeting one another: "And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God love his brother also" (1 John 4: 21).

The words: "Let us," are often addressed to the background Hebrew believers. May we take them home to ourselves: "And let us consider one another for provoking

to love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some; but encouraging one another, and by so much the more as ye see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10: 24-26).

Finally. How can we expect people to assemble in our Gospel meetings if we ourselves neglect the sacred privilege of assembling to pray as is enjoined on us in 1 Timothy 2: 1-5?: "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all that are in dignity, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all piety and gravity; for this is good and acceptable before our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." And Paul practised what he preached. He was a great man of prayer.

ELISHA

R. THOMSON

FRUIT IN OLD AGE

(2 Kings 8 to 13)

ELISHA came to Damascus! (2 Kings 8: 7-15). How significant that God was directing His servant-prophet outside the borders of Israel; and that he was highly respected by Ben-hadad, the king of Syria. Perhaps the knowledge of Naaman's cleansing had created a deep impression upon many in that land, so much so that the power of Elisha was considered to be even greater than that of the king of Israel. In the personal case of Ben-hadad, who was stricken down with sickness, the coming of Elisha was of special interest, as one with

whom he could have contact in view of recovery. How very often do we see this manner of outlook even in our day and generation! A person may have no concern for God or for any who belong to Him; but when sickness, bereavement or pressure of circumstances come upon them, they enquire about relief from those who know God.

Ben-hadad, once the avowed enemy of Israel in the days of Ahab, sent a present to Elisha, the prophet of Israel, by the hand of Hazael asking that he might enquire of the Lord for him, saying, "Shall I re-

cover of this disease?" Hazael was evidently a very close and intimate servant of the king, and is spoken of by Elijah in prophecy that he would be king over Syria in due time (1 Kings 19: 15). Perhaps Hazael did not know this in an official way, although he may have had personal desires and ambitions for the throne and the kingdom of Syria. So the servant came to Elisha, bearing the present which was of no mean proportions, forty camels burdened with every good thing of Damascus, and addressed the prophet in a most loving and friendly way, "Thy son, Ben-hadad, king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

How very solemn and important it is to realise that nothing can be hid from the eyes of God, and the hypocrisy of Hazael was known and revealed to Elisha, the man of God. The reply was given, "Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover," inferring that the disease was not fatal, but an additional word was also given, "howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die." Upon hearing this, Hazael put on a show of hypocritical sadness until he was ashamed. However, seeing Elisha really and truly in tears, he enquired the cause of his weeping. It was then that the truth concerning the evil heart of Hazael was declared, how he would spare neither women or children and perform much evil and bloodshed in the land. The mention of such atrocities caused Hazael to say, "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" Finally, it was stated by Elisha, through the word of the Lord, that Hazael would be king over Syria.

Thus the prophetic word given to Elijah in the cave concerning

Hazael was confirmed by Elisha, and conveyed to Hazael himself. No evil plan or deed was too great for this man to get the kingship; and on his return to Ben-hadad he only spoke to him of his certain recovery from the disease, saying nothing whatever of the other matter concerning himself. The day following, the awful crime was committed, when Hazael took a thick towel and having dipped it in water, spread it over the face of the king that he died. Truly the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?

In the incident of the anointing of Jehu (2 Kings 9: 1-3), we behold the readiness of Elisha to perform the will of God, but he has no communion or joy of heart with Jehu himself. The whole matter had been pre-determined of God to bring judgments upon the house of Ahab, to avenge the blood of His servants, the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord at the hand of Jezebel. This anointing of Jehu was given to one of the children, or sons, of the prophets to perform, acting implicitly upon the instructions of Elisha. Perhaps the prophet Elisha was getting aged, and as this particular business required haste, he delegated it to a younger servant. The young man had to gird up his loins, take the apparently long journey to Ramoth Gilead, seek out Jehu and bring him to an inner chamber. Thereupon he had to pour the box of oil on his head, anointing Jehu king over Israel, then open the door and flee, with no tarrying. This was done with no little personal danger, and the Word of the Lord was given concerning the sure judgments upon Ahab, his house, and Jezebel his wife.

The anointing of Jehu with a box

of oil is of striking significance, suggesting that the character and duration of his reign would have certain dimensions. This is borne out in 2 Kings 10: 30. "And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." So the reign of Jehu was to be unto the fourth generation, and then terminate.

King Saul was also anointed with a similar vessel (1 Samuel 10: 1), but king David, on the other hand, was anointed with a horn of oil (1 Samuel 16: 13), perhaps suggesting the power and endurance of his kingdom, soon to be taken up by David's Greater Son, Jesus, the Son of God, whose kingdom shall have no end.

Truly, the ways of God are past finding out; for He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder He will restrain. Jehu was taken up of God to execute His righteous judgment upon Israel for their idolatry and wickedness. Jezebel was cast out of a window and eaten of dogs; Joram, king of Israel was slain, and Ahab's seventy sons in Samaria were put to death. A very solemn word to our hearts is that the king of Judah was in league with Joram, and he, too, was slain in battle. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6: 14). As we have noticed, Elisha had no personal association with Jehu, although he received word from the Lord to anoint him king over Israel. Yet God sustained His prophet and performed His work of judgment

through Jehu, another appointed vessel.

We now come to the closing scenes of the life of this man of God, for Elisha had a sickness which was unto death (2 Kings 13: 14). He does not pray to the Lord to prolong his days, as Hezekiah, or for him to take away his life, as Elijah. Rather, like the description of the righteous in Psalm 92: 12-15, we see him *still* bringing forth fruit in old age. Called by God to the work in the days of Elijah, we behold him continuing steadfast and diligent to perform it. Had he not asked for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, and it had been given him? Now having passed through many testings according to the will of God, we see the prophet of grace drawing to the close of his life here below. Still fervent in spirit, and in close touch with his Lord, he is ready and willing to be of service, acting from a bed of sickness and weakness. Like another veteran for Christ at a later date, he could say in spirit, "I am now being poured out, and the time of my release has come; I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4: 6, 7).

Joash, the grandson of Jehu, hearing of Elisha's sickness, came to see him and wept over his face. It is good to behold the esteem of the king for the prophet, reminding us that in the New Testament a bishop "must have a good report of them which are without". Perhaps Joash sought to cheer Elisha with the words he himself uttered when he saw his master, Elijah, translated to heaven, saying, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." At that time there had been the rending of the mantle and the display of power at the river Jordan. These features of surrender and devotion to God are

absent with Joash, for it was probably a fair show of the flesh, declaring the best side of the natural man. This was proved in the incidents that followed.

Elisha asked Joash to take his bow and arrows, and to put his hand upon the bow. Then Elisha placed his own hands upon the king's hands, and desired him to open the window eastwards. This was the way of the sunrising, and perhaps the dawn of a new day for Israel. Could Joash lay hold of this in the strength of faith? Then he shot the arrow, and Elisha cried out, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." Here was the power of the Lord available for Joash and Israel with assurance of victory, if he could receive it. That which followed proved him to be other than a man of faith, eagerly ready to lay hold of the Word of God. "Take the arrows. Smite upon the ground," said Elisha. This he did three times and no more, shewing his slackness in appropriating the promises of the Lord. Elisha was wroth, and told him that he should have smitten five or six times. "Then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice."

This was Elisha's last recorded word but not his last act. He died

(2 Kings 13: 20, 21): but he being dead, yet speaketh. He was buried; and no doubt many sorrowing hearts laid his body to rest, for he had been a good man for God, and the people also. The land of Israel at this time was subjected to raids from Moabitish bands, and on one such occasion a funeral party was surprised as they were burying a man. In their haste and fear they cast the body of the man into the sepulchre of Elisha, and when it touched the bones of the prophet, the man revived and he stood upon his feet. Elisha had brought life out of death in the days of his activities, as directed by the Lord (2 Kings 4: 35). Now, on this occasion, himself in the sphere of death, the God of life will use the dead body of His servant prophet to declare the power of resurrection.

So we come to the end of the account of a great man of God, Elisha, whose name means "God is salvation". What shall we say of that Blessed One who, in the fulness of time, brought God's salvation to us in His own glorious Person! On one occasion He could say, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5: 25).

May our hearts be so engaged with Him, who is the Resurrection and the Life, that we shall gladly acclaim His worthiness as the Son of the living God.

J. T. MAWSON on ELISHA

"Open the window eastward," said the prophet. Surely a word to us to keep our faces towards the sunrising. We must not be occupied with the failure or grow depressed in the dying dispensation. It may be true, and it is, that the day is far spent, but we look for the Saviour. Hope of the glory yet to come is a great tonic for the drooping spirit.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE following questions have been received in correspondence from Mr. W. Spencer Dixon of Stockport.

Question. *Your reply in the September issue of Scripture Truth to Mr. W. K. M. Sinclair on the ministry of women must have raised further questions in many minds in its comprehensive application of the rule of silence. Are we to infer that you consider the rule applicable to women discussing the Scriptures informally in a house, whether impromptu or by invitation, men being present; or engaging in prayer with husband, fiancé, or family, or with colleagues in service, such as Sunday School work?*

Acts 18: 26 seems to imply that Aquila and Priscilla were both engaged in instructing Apollos in their house.

Answer. I am indebted to the questioner for drawing attention to the need for further explanation added to the previous answer. I am sure the questioner is quite right in concluding from the case of Pris-

cilla, Aquila and Apollos that silence is not enjoined on women in the home circle. The prohibition refers to a public gathering, and, of course, the previous answer was intended to mean this.

Question. *Would you please explain the meaning of the expressions Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God. Are the two expressions entirely synonymous? In what respect can the church be regarded as the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God, as the case may be?*

Answer. Perhaps it will be convenient to take first that part of the question which asks whether the expressions the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are entirely synonymous. I have myself found it helpful to consider the statements heard and read about alleged differences between them.

It is commonly believed that a difference exists in that the kingdom of God includes only what is real, while the kingdom of heaven includes all persons professing faith in Christ. I think that this belief is based on John 3: 3 and 5, which say that only those born again can see or enter the kingdom of God. If this passage stood alone, it could have this meaning, but since it does not stand alone, and since other of the Saviour's words clearly state that the kingdom of God includes more than what is real, we must understand that John 3: 3 and 5

have another meaning, which is that what is real in the kingdom of God must result from the new birth. It is analagous to another of John's statements, for instance, "Whosoever is born of God . . . cannot sin." Both passages must be understood in a particular sense.

It is to the parables in which both expressions occur that we must look for guidance on this point. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are interchangeable in the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13: 31, 32 and Mark 4: 30-32). Similarly in the parable of the leaven in the meal, Matthew 13: 33, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Luke 13: 31, "The kingdom of God . . . is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

It is therefore indubitable that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven both refer to a wider circle than that of true faith.

Again, it is commonly believed that the kingdom of God covers all history, back to the beginning. Since God has always been King, He must always have had a kingdom, and this is held to be the meaning of the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the kingdom of heaven is differentiated in that it is a dispensational term, and belongs to the New Testament only.

Here again, reflect on the following passages. Matthew 4: 17, "Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Mark 1: 14, 15, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching . . . and saying . . . the kingdom of God is at hand." Consider also the following: Matthew 11: 11, "There hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Luke 7: 28, "There is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." It is from these Scriptures equally certain that whenever the kingdom of God began or will begin, the kingdom of heaven begins at the same time, and this beginning is in New Testament times.

Luke 16: 16, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached." This verse also shows that the kingdom of God began to be announced when the law and the prophets, that is, the Old Testament, were ended.

The most plausible of these alleged distinctions is the suggestion that the kingdom of heaven is the name given to the kingdom of God during the period when the King is

absent in heaven. This is certainly the period covered by the parables of Matthew 13. However, I cannot personally believe that the word heaven (or rather, heavens) in the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" has so naïve a meaning as this: and I am reinforced in this belief by the Scripture origin of both phrases in Daniel 2: 44. "And in the days of these (10) kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." Thus, pursuing the imagery of the dream, Nebuchannezzar's kingdom and Alexander's kingdom, and so on, will in due course be followed and ended as the final result, by the God's kingdom, which is also heaven's kingdom. Here is the origin of the phrases we are considering, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Thus they both mean basically the yet future earthly reign of Christ. It is only when we come to the parables of the Lord Jesus that we have the revelation for the first time of a prior "mystery" form of the kingdom, to be introduced, not by His coming like the lightning, but by the sowing of the Word. Both expressions apply also to the prior "mystery" form now in existence.

That the Spirit of God intends some distinction in aspect by the different usage of the two phrases we can scarcely doubt, but I have not, at present, any conviction on the subject to offer. F. W. Grant says, "(the kingdom of heaven) is dispensationally applied, while the kingdom of God implies more its spiritual features (Romans 14: 17; Matthew 6: 33).

The question also deals with the church and its relation to the kingdom. In what respect can the church be regarded as the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God?

In the first place, consider the

persons involved. In the case of both, the kingdom and the church can and do on occasions include what is mere profession. This has been exemplified above as regards the kingdom. Regarding the church it appears in Revelation 3. Thus we cannot distinguish those included in the church from those included in the kingdom on the basis that either does or does not include mere profession. It is more appropriate to consider the persons who have real faith in Christ, and then it is apparent that the persons included in the church and in the kingdom must be identical. So long as the church is on earth, the obedience of faith is the only qualification for a real and true place in each.

When the church shall be removed to heaven, then the kingdom in outward power is set up and henceforward the persons composing the kingdom and the church will be distinct. It might be held that the members of the church, as

"the righteous shining forth in the kingdom of their Father", are still in the kingdom, but the members of the kingdom on earth are not members of the church.

If we return for a moment to the present time, although we have seen that the persons composing the church and the kingdom must be identical, this does not mean that the church and the kingdom are identical. The persons composing a family and a business may be identical, but the family and the business are not the same thing. The two entities will have different constitutions, different privileges and different responsibilities. The kingdom and the church are indeed very distinct. The kingdom consists of all that depends on the fact that here on earth we are subject to Christ as Lord. The church consists of all that springs from the fact that we are eternally one with Christ in heaven by the Holy Spirit sent down.

THE GAME OF THE KING

D. W. PATERSON

ARCHAEOLOGY, from the point of view of most Bible readers, has been used chiefly to confirm the accuracy of the Scriptures as we have them, but when study from the past throws up into better light the true meaning of certain passages, it renders an enriching service to which we do well to take heed. The purpose of this paper is to understand a little better the well-known verses in the Gospel of Mark 15: 16-20.

It seems that the ancient world was fond of games. Some of these have been found engraved in flagstones. Examples come from a very

wide distribution throughout the Roman-occupied territories, from camps, forums, basilicas, and baths. One of these games calls for our closer inspection now, the so-called Game of the King. Extra-biblical sources tell us of a Babylonian feast of Sacees which, for 5 days, was a great occasion of masquerade. Masters and slaves intermingled took in procession through the streets a king selected by lot. Every honour was lavished upon this poor man for this burlesque, but at the end of the feast he had his throat cut. This practice of the Sacees continued into the Roman world at

the pagan feast of Saturnalia, celebrated at the same time approximately as our Christmas. Holidays, amnesties, gifts, feasting, drinking, gladiatorial combat, and games of chance became the order of the day with the accompanying debauchery and cruelty. It seems that the game of the king, played with a condemned prisoner, with local variations, was well known in the east and therefore would be well known to the soldiers of Pilate's guard. It was practised with fervour, even frenzy, at times of national festival.

With this general historical background may we now look at some archaeological work done in 1938 in Jerusalem. The fortress of Antonia has several scriptural references in connection with the Apostle Paul as well as our blessed Lord. It lay in a commanding position to the north side of the temple area. The spade has now laid bare the whole site. It covers an area of 455 feet by 325 feet and consisted of a palace and other administrative buildings, storehouses, military quarters, dungeons and water cisterns. What concerns us now is the pavement (assuming the connection with the gospel is correct) called in the Hebrew Gab-batha. Its area is 178 feet by 146 feet. The flagstones are, like most Roman stones, large and striated to prevent the horses from slipping. At the east side of the pavement, in front of the stairs leading from the courtyard to the barracks, are found the carvings on the flagstones where the soldiers whiled away their leisure hours in games of various kinds.

The carvings for the game which concerns us can now be described. Dogmatism in regard to it is impossible, but when the symbolism used is found to occur elsewhere in the Roman world it may be possible to conjecture what is the truth. On

one flag is carved a diagrammatic scorpion with two pincers and a tail, the sign of the praetorian guard, also the "Star of David" and the eagle of the Roman legions. On another flag a plumed military helmet may be discerned. A closer inspection of several of the flags discloses the letter B, thought to be an abbreviation for the Greek word Basileus, meaning King. The sign PEL, palm and laurel, on another flag, is expressive of victory in games. The lines with circles and squares are to be especially noted. The line represents the line of life and ends ominously with the Executioner's sword.

What we would all like, of course, is to know the particular significance of every one of these symbols and how the game was played. The Latin writer Ovid made a treatise on games, but this has perished! Some things, however, are clear. The throw of a dice (knuckle bone in the ancient world) determined the progress of the prisoner from circle to circle. Sometimes the progress was accelerated and sometimes halted, depending on the circles and the squares reached in his journey, but whatever the rate of progress, the conclusion was always the same — the line was cut with the sword — the prisoner was brutally slain.

All this may be dreadful enough even as a cold study in history. But when we consider it in the light of the scriptural record perhaps we may get help in relation to that most precious of all studies, the sufferings of our blessed Lord. The game on this occasion was not played by a few soldiers. The Scripture that "they call together the whole band" — 400 to 600 men. For the 14th Nisan, the first Easter Good Friday, there was a very special prisoner. In truth indeed He was

a King, born King of the Jews; "another King, one Jesus". The fame of Him had spread abroad. The common people had received Him gladly. The leaders had delivered Him up for envy. His condemnation had been secured through the Roman governor by this cry "We have no King but Caesar". This prisoner, if no other, must be "set at nought".

Herod and his men had already done this. Their action it seems was not so much cruel as humiliating. But now the furnace was heated sevenfold in the hands of Pilate and his soldiers. They clothed Him with purple, plaited a crown of thorns and bound it round His head, and saluted him "Hail, King of the Jews". They smote Him on the head with a reed, spat upon Him, and bowing their knees they worshipped Him. Could it be that all these indignities are in fact the stages in this awful "game of the King" so well known in the Roman world which, in this late stage of the world's history, we have overlooked and missed?

Perhaps one further point could be mentioned, not vital, but interesting. In John 19: 13 we read, "Pilate sat down in the judgment seat." Many authorities believe

that the better rendering here is that Pilate sat not himself but the Lord Jesus in the judgment seat. That Pilate should sit himself in the judgment seat, we are told, is too commonplace for notice. But that the Roman governor should set the prisoner in the judgment seat seems better to agree with the more recent evidence given above. It was not only the men of war but also Herod who set Him at nought. Was Pilate now following the practice of his erstwhile enemy Herod, and giving a lead to his own soldiers? It may be so. In any event what truth all this carries home to our hearts, the wonderful, wonderful grace of Him who was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not her mouth"? Other lessons there are too, lessons, alas, we are slow to learn; the guilt of the guilty nation, the wickedness of the human heart and the distance at which we often follow while professing to walk in His steps.

May the Lord graciously open our eyes the more to see Him and then we shall the more be drawn after Him.

*"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life my all."*

FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Exhortations and Instructions about Prayer in the Epistles

WE know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Romans 8: 26).

Be . . . continuing instant in prayer (Romans 12: 12).

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive

together with me in your prayers to God for me (Romans 15: 30).

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel (Ephesians 6: 18, 19).

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (Philippians 4: 6).

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving: withal praying also for us (Colossians 4: 2, 3).

Pray without ceasing. . . . Brethren, pray for us (1 Thessalonians 5: 17, 25).

Finally, brethren, pray for us (2 Thessalonians 3: 1).

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. . . . I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (1 Timothy 2: 1, 2, 8).

Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4: 5).

A widow indeed . . . continueth in supplications and prayers night and day (1 Timothy 5: 5).

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4: 16).

Pray for us: for we trust we have

a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly (Hebrews 13: 18).

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driving with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord (James 1: 5-7).

Yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts (James 4: 2, 3).

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5: 13-16).

Watch unto prayer (1 Peter 4: 7).

Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments (1 John 3: 22).

This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say he shall pray for it (1 John 5: 14-16).

THREE WOMEN

HAMILTON SMITH

(The Book of Ruth — Chapter 1)

THE incidents recorded in the opening chapter of the Book of Ruth, though taking place in a time long past, and in circumstances very different to those of today, are rich with instruction, warning, and encouragement for believers of every age.

These incidents are connected with three women. First, in the story of Naomi, we see a back-sliding saint, and we are instructed in the gracious way the Lord takes to bring about restoration. In the case of Orpah we have the solemn warning of one who makes a fair profession of godliness, but in the end turns back to the world. Lastly, in the story of Ruth we are encouraged by the example of one who, not only makes a fair profession but, to use our Christian language, bears all the marks that accompany salvation.

To enter into the full significance of the stories of these three women, it is necessary to recall the character of the day in which they lived. From the first verse of the chapter we learn that these incidents took place "In the days when the judges ruled". The solemn character of these days is summed up in the closing verse of the previous Book. There we read, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Moses, when instructing the people as to their conduct after they had come into possession of the Land, definitely said, "Ye shall not do after all the things that we

do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (Deuteronomy 12: 8). Three hundred years after this warning we find the people in the Land, but, according to the records of the closing chapters of Judges, in a low moral condition marked by gross corruption and violence. This low condition is traced back to two causes. First, they had cast off the authority of God as their King; secondly, as a result, every man was doing that which was right in his own eyes. They were thus marked by *the casting off of Divine authority*, on the one hand, and *the assertion of human independence*, on the other.

It is very obvious that all the misery and confusion in the world today spring from the same causes. The throwing off of Divine authority, and the assertion of self-will, are working havoc in the political world, the social circle, and the family life. Rulers, masters, and parents, give up the fear of God; subjects, servants and children, increasingly act in self-willed independence.

The world, however, is not our direct concern. That which should give us the deepest exercise is the solemn fact that the same principles which are bringing the world to ruin, have already brought about the ruin of the Church in responsibility. Moreover, to come closer home, even amongst those who have sought to walk in separation from the corruptions of Christen-

dom, how often the same evils have led to scattering and division. We have not been true to Christ as the Head of His body — we have failed in holding the Head — the result being that the tendency is for each one to do that which is right in our own eyes.

The instant we cease to hold the Head — to draw all our needed supply of grace, wisdom, and power, from Christ the ascended Head of the body, the Church — it can be said of us, in the language of the times of the Judges, we have "no King". The inevitable result follows, that we fall back on our own resources and do that which we judge to be right in our own eyes. We may be very sincere, very religious, and very active in good works, but, if we are doing what we judge to be right in our own eyes we are acting in independency of our Risen Head. "Holding the Head" (Colossians 2: 19) is a great deal more than holding the doctrine that Christ is the Head; it is the practical recognition that all our resources are in Christ, and involves a walk in subjection to, and dependence upon Christ as our risen Head. This work would lead to spiritual nourishment being ministered to us; to our being knit together; and to spiritual increase. The first result of giving up the direct authority of the Lord, and acting in independency, is to bring a famine amongst the people of God. So we read, *"there was a famine in the land"*. The very Land that should have been, according to God's promise, a land of plenty, flowing with milk and honey, had become a land of famine. Alas! have we not to admit that again there is a famine amongst the people of God, and for the same reasons. We have failed to give Christ His place as the Head of His body — the One, as we have

seen, from Whom nourishment is ministered.

As ever, a time of famine is a time of testing. It costs us little to be identified with the people of God when outwardly everything is prosperous. But when difficulties arise and conflicts have to be faced, when weakness becomes manifest, then the reality of our faith is put to the test. Under the pressure of trial some may turn aside from God's path for His people, as in the case of Naomi; the empty profession of others is exposed, as in the case of Orpah, while, with others the very trial becomes the occasion to manifest their devotedness to the Lord, as so blessedly illustrated in the story of Ruth.

I. NAOMI

In the days, then, of Naomi such was the low condition of God's people that there was a famine in God's Land. Elimelech, her husband, lacking in the faith that looks to God in trial, turns aside from the Land of Jehovah to seek relief in the land of Moab, taking with him his wife and two sons. Thus we see a second result of there being "no king of Israel", or, as we should say of, "not holding the Head". The people of God instead of being "knit together", are "scattered abroad". In Scripture the different countries that surround Jehovah's Land are used as types of the world in different aspects. Egypt speaks of the gross world in which man seeks to gratify his lusts. Babylon of the world in which man seeks to exalt himself by a corrupt religion. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel" (Jeremiah 48: 11). Thus Moab represents the

world in its ease where one can escape the conflict entailed in fighting the good fight of faith.

Today, when those who have escaped the gross world of Egypt, and the corrupt religious world of Babylon, are faced with famine and conflict amongst the people of God, the world in the form typified by Moab becomes a sore temptation. Many a saint, since the days of Elimelech, harassed and wearied with strife and conflict, has given up God's ground for His people to seek a life of ease in some quiet circle which tries nobody's conscience and allows of everybody's will.

Thus we read of Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons, that "they came into the country of Moab", and, what is yet more solemn, we read, they "Continued there". In spite, however, of its promise of ease and quiet and rest, it proved but a place of sorrow and loss for the children of God. Moab, with its green hills and dales, looked very attractive, but Elimelech has to learn that "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14: 12). Thus it came to pass that Elimelech, who sought to escape death by famine in the Land of Jehovah, walks into the arms of death in the land of Moab. To take a false step to avoid trouble will oftentimes lead into the very trouble we seek to avoid.

Following upon the death of Elimelech, the two sons marry strange wives of the land of Moab. Ten years pass away, and then death lays its hand upon the two sons. Naomi, bereft of her husband and sons, is left a lonely woman in a strange land. Leaving the Land of God to escape the trials of a famine she has found in the land of Moab only bitterness and sorrow. Thus

we see a third result of there being "no king of Israel". It leads to decrease, rather than increase. If we cease to hold the Head, instead of "increasing with the increase of God", we shall decrease — lose that which we have (Colossians 2: 19).

At this point in the story of Naomi we pass from the solemn warnings as to the failure of a saint, to the rich instruction in the restoring grace of the Lord. Naomi had wandered from the Land of Jehovah, and come under the chastening of the Lord. If, however, the Lord chastens it is for our blessing, to bring us back to Himself, and the circle of His own people, in His own land. Thus there comes a moment in the history of Naomi when we read, "*She arose with her daughters in law that she might return from the country of Moab.*" But what led her to return? It was not the sorrows of the land of Moab, but the good news that she heard concerning the Land of Jehovah. It was not the want and misery of the far country that drove the prodigal from that land of sin; it was the realisation of the plenty in the Father's house that drew him home, for he said, "*In my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger, I will arise and go to my Father.*" So, in the history of Naomi, when she heard "that the LORD had visited His people in giving them bread . . . she went forth out of the place where she was . . . to return to the land of Judah." Our sin may harden our hearts and drive us still farther from the Lord; but the thought of His grace breaks our hearts and draws us back to Himself. It is

"the thought of Jesu's love
Lifts our poor hearts this weary
world above".

Further, we see very blessedly set forth in the story of Naomi that restoration to the Lord is rightly followed by *reception among the Lord's people*. Thus we read in verse 19, "It came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them." How is it that there is so little restoration today? May it not be that too often the people of God are so little moved about the wanderers? May the Lord give us to taste a little more of the compassion of His heart that led Him to go after a wandering sheep until He found it.

Then, as we listen to the words of Naomi we shall see every mark of a restored soul and learn some home truths as to the sorrow of backsliding. First, Naomi says, "The Almighty hath *dealt* . . . with me" (verse 20). It would seem that for ten long years she had ceased to have any dealings with the Lord, but the Lord had not ceased to deal with her. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God *dealeth* with you as sons" (Hebrews 12: 6, 7).

Secondly, she says, not only that the Lord had dealt with her, but, that He had dealt with her "*very bitterly*". If the Lord deals with us in our backslidings we shall find that "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but *grievous* : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Thirdly, Naomi says, "*I went out*" (verse 21). She exhibits the true mark of a restored soul by taking all the blame for departing from Jehovah's Land. As a matter of fact the story tells us that it was Elimelech who "went out". He took the lead; but Naomi does not attempt to shelter herself by blam-

ing her husband. She does not say the circumstances were so trying, and the pressure was so great, that I could not help turning aside. Ah no! she owns as we all must own that the secret cause of all our wanderings is not in the failure of others, or the pressure of circumstances, but in ourselves.

Fourthly she owns that "the Lord hath brought me" back. She owns that she went out but it was the Lord that brought back. Left to ourselves, as backsliders, none of us would ever come back if the Lord did not bring us back. So David can say, "*He restoreth my soul.*"

Fifthly, she does not simply say that the Lord brought me back, but "the LORD hath brought me *home* again". When He brings back it is not to some half-way house but right back into the warmth and love of the home circle. When the Shepherd picked up His wandering sheep, He layed it on His shoulders and we read, "*when He cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*" Blessed be His Name, nothing less than His home will do for His sheep.

Sixthly, nevertheless there is a solemn confession that Naomi has to make. If the Lord brought her home, she has to own that "the Lord hath brought me home again *empty*" "I went out full" she says, and the Lord brought me back, but He brought me back empty. All the days of our wanderings are days in which we make no spiritual growth, though they may, indeed, be days when we are stripped of everything that hinders spiritual progress.

Seventhly, there is one other exceedingly comforting truth for every restored soul, that shines out in

Naomi's history. We read that the time of her return was "*in the beginning of the barley harvest*". If the Lord brings us back empty, He takes care to bring us back to plenty.

Thus, in the story of Naomi there passes before us the sorrows of a backsliding saint; the gracious dealings of the Lord in restoration, and the reception of the restored saint amongst the Lord's people.

II. ORPAH

In the brief allusion to Orpah we see the sorrowful case of one who makes a fair profession and yet lacks every vital link with God and His people. It is solemn to see how far nature can go in making a fair profession, even as the Apostle Paul warned us that in these last days there will be many who have "the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof".

We see the form of godliness strikingly set forth in Orpah. First, she *identified* herself with Naomi, a true believer. We read both of Ruth and Orpah that they went "with her", and again, "they went on their way" (verse 7). It looked as if Orpah had made a clean cut with her old life, and had started for Immanuel's Land.

Then the test comes: Orpah has opportunity to return. Naomi says, "Go, return each to her mother's house." This calls forth the fact that Orpah was marked by a great deal of nice natural feeling, for we read, "They lifted up their voice and wept." Indeed, it looked as if Orpah was going to pass the test, for she appears to make a very definite decision to cast in her lot with Naomi and the people of God, for she joins with Ruth in saying, "Surely, we will return with thee unto thy people." Moreover, she

is not lacking in natural affection, for we read, "Orpah kissed her mother in law" (verses 9, 10, 14).

Nevertheless, in spite of her identification with Naomi, in spite of her tears, her fair words, and her kisses, she returns to her people, her gods, and her land, and we hear no more of Orpah. Her profession was fair; she had the form of godliness, but she lacked the power of godliness — simple faith in God.

III. RUTH

In striking contrast to Orpah we have the touching story of Ruth. Like Orpah she leaves the land of Moab; she identifies herself with Naomi. She, too, is moved to tears, and makes a definite decision. But, in contrast to Orpah she exhibits all the marks that accompany salvation. We remember that in a solemn passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle warns us that we may be "enlightened", and taste of the blessedness of heavenly things, and even partake of the outward blessings of the Christian circle in which the Holy Spirit dwells, and yet apostatise, and thus prove we have no vital link with Christ. But, speaking of those to whom he is writing, he says, "We are persuaded better things of you and things which accompany salvation." Then he presents three of these things, "Love," "Hope," and "Faith" (Hebrews 6: 9-12). Very blessedly we see that Ruth is marked by these three things.

First, in simple and beautiful "*faith*" she turns her back on her native land to travel to Jehovah's Land. She accepts the pilgrim path, for she says, "Whither thou goest, I will go." She takes the place of a stranger with no certain home, for she says, "Where thou lodgest I will lodge." She identifies herself

with the people of God as she says, "Thy people shall be my people," and expresses her confidence in God, as she adds, "Thy God" shall be "My God". Moreover she is marked by devoted love. Orpah may indeed kiss Naomi, but of Ruth we read, she "clave unto her". Further she says, "Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." Lastly she was marked by "hope", for we read, "She was stedfastly minded to go." As it were, in the light of another world, she gave up the present world.

To nature it might appear that Ruth was acting in the utmost folly. She gives up her home, her kindred, and her country, and identifies herself with a broken down old woman, to go to a Land she has never seen and a people of whom she has no personal knowledge. To reason and sight this seems madness, even as today it may appear great folly to identify oneself with the poor, and foolish, and weak things of this world, and to leave the great religious world, to share the reproach of Christ outside the camp. But "it doth not yet appear what we shall be". Only faith that looks on to the glorious end can take such a path. The start that Ruth made in company with an aged, lonely, and desolate woman was only the beginning of the story: in the end she will appear as the Bride of the mighty Boaz: and, yet more won-

derful, her name shall be for ever enshrined in the genealogy of our Lord. In the light of her after history, who will say that she made a mistake when she threw in her lot with the aged Naomi? Orpah, who chose the world and its ease, passes into oblivion; Ruth, who turned her back on the world, passes on to honour and glory.

In our day, let us remember that the path of suffering, reproach and shame that, in different measures, will be the lot of those who follow a rejected Christ may look very foolish in the eyes of the world; but faith knows that it will end in the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. So that we may say in the words of the saintly Rutherford, "There is a long chain . . . of God's ways, counsels, decrees, actions, events, judgments, mercies; and there is white and black, good and evil, crooked and straight, interwoven in this web; and the links of the chain, partly gold, partly brass, iron, and clay, and the threads of this dispensation, go along the patriarch's days . . . through the generations of the prophets, . . . persecuting emperors, and martyrdoms of the witnesses of Jesus, slain by the woman drunken with the blood of saints, till the end of the thread and last link of the chain be tied to the very day of THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB."

THE ONLYBEGOTTEN AND THE FIRSTBORN

The most exalted truth is contained in the apparent contradiction between these two titles of the Lord. If our Saviour is the Onlybegotten of the Father, how can He be also the Firstborn among many brethren? In the Mystery of God there is this double Sonship of Christ. His title the Only begotten presents His Sonship in deity and in eternity, and in the majesty and love of this relationship He is absolutely unique and for ever alone. His title the Firstborn presents His Sonship in manhood, and it is the Father's gracious purpose that in this relationship He should have many brethren.

THE VOICE OF GOD

G. A. C. BINNIE

THREE times the voice of God spoke in approval of Jesus during His earthly lifetime; three major crises were marked by the voice of God; three great cross-roads were granted divine blessing. The three events so signally distinguished are the Lord's baptism, His transfiguration and the occasion when certain Greeks wished to see Jesus at the end of His ministry. These highlights deserve closer attention in their own right, because of the importance which God attached to them; and they deserve our attention to stimulate us as we reach crisis points in our own lives.

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD (Matthew 3: 3-17)

Here, by the banks of the Jordan, was first manifested at the same time the triune God; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This in itself points out the importance of this event in the life of Jesus, and indeed in the life of the world. For thirty odd years, Jesus had been maturing as a humble carpenter in a quiet Galilean village; now He was to be revealed to the world as the Messiah, as the Son of God and as the one who would be the Saviour of the world. Before His baptism, He was a humble tradesman living in obscurity; after His baptism, the die was cast, He was to go about preaching and teaching and living as a perfect man (*cf.* Exodus 12: 5, 6) to stimulate our aspirations and to be a perfect sinless sacrifice when He died on the cross. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming he was reluctant to baptise Him — "I have need to be baptised of thee"; and John could say of his familiar cousin who was but a few months younger than he was, "After me cometh a man

which is preferred before me; for He was before me. And I knew Him not." But when John saw the Spirit descending as a dove upon Jesus, then he knew that this was the Son of God; and in fulfilling all righteousness by taking His place in the waters of Jordan in baptism, He was acknowledging that He who was the Son of God was also the Son of Man. He, who had no need of baptism, was foreshadowing the baptism which He was to be baptised with on the cross some three years later; He was foreshadowing His own glorious resurrection from the dead, in which hope we ourselves have been baptised. Well could the voice of God say, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." God's plan of redemption was under way, God had revealed Himself to man; Jesus was giving Himself as the sacrifice for sin once for all.

THE TRANSFIGURATION (Luke 9: 28-36)

This appears to mark a second great crisis point in the life of Jesus. For two or more years He had been exercising His ministry, and with what effect? Only a handful of disciples following Him through thick and thin, the fickle crowds flocking to see a magician, and behind it all, the relentless plotting of authority, the plotting which the Lord knew would result in His death and in His sacrifice for the sin of the world.

And so, on the lonely mountain top, He was presented with the glories of heaven as He was transfigured before His disciples and assumed the appearance which will be His when He shall be glorified, Moses and Elias appeared with Him, representatives, as has often been

said, of the Law and the Prophets, and representative of those who will meet the Lord through death and through the Lord's second coming. The conversation on the mount of Transfiguration was not a gentle conversation of this and that, but of His decease, or rather His exodus, "which He should accomplish at Jerusalem". This was the Lord's unswerving purpose, what He should complete when He made His way out of the world. The fact of the Lord's impending death was something which the disciples were quite unable to follow or understand, and so followed Peter's impetuous words which seemed to put Jesus on what to Peter was a very exalted plane, with Elijah and Moses; then the cloud overshadowed them, and the presence of God was signified not only by the cloud, but also by the voice which said, "This is my beloved son: hear Him." The voice of God again testified that Jesus was the Son of God, and in addition the disciples were exhorted to hear Him; but what they heard left them still questioning with one another what the rising from the dead should mean" (Mark 9: 10).

Jesus could not stay in the glory of the mountain top with Moses and Elias, without returning to complete His destined path. We can thank God that He did return to the foot of the mountain, and went on to the cross "to bring many sons into glory"; and the voice of approbation is echoed by the people of God, who know Jesus as God's well beloved Son, as they seek to hear and obey Him.

THE CORN OF WHEAT (John 12: 23-33).

Now the Lord could say, "Father save me from this hour." The time of ministry was past, only a few

more days lay ahead before the cross outside Jerusalem; the clouds about the Lord were thickening, and even the disciples realised that the end was near, although they half expected some dramatic military or political solution. Here, almost at the last hour, the Lord seemed to face a further crisis, and to go on to be the corn of wheat which should die and bear much fruit, much fruit amongst the Jews as well as the Gentiles who were even then seeking for Him. Again the voice of approval was heard, saying that God's name had been glorified, and would be glorified again. God's name was glorified in the incarnation and life of our Lord Jesus; and God's name has been more than glorified in the lifting up of Jesus so that all men could be drawn to Him. We are of that great host who have been drawn to Jesus, and we give glory to God through Him for His love and mercy.

These three high peaks in our Lord's lifetime were followed by problems and trials. We read that after His baptism "He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness and there tempted of the devil"; when He descended the mount of transfiguration, He was met by the father of the epileptic boy whom the disciples had been unable to help; and after the voice of God was heard as recorded in John 12, we know that the cross followed hard after. We can thank God that Jesus was able to overcome the devil and His temptations, that the epileptic boy was healed, and that the power of the devil and the stranglehold of death were broken on the cross.

Our own lives are filled with spiritual hills and hollows from year to year if not from week to week, and great help can come to us from those which have been dis-

cussed in the life of Jesus when the voice of God was heard.

As young Christians we are converted, we obey the Lord in baptism and we may have experiences of high Christian exultation; then the devil attacks with the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. The lust of the flesh, sexual temptations, may be more powerful in younger years, but all Christians have need to be on constant guard against the desires of our sinful natures and the pride which comes with age and achievement. If we know that great spiritual peaks will be followed by temptations, then we can face the tempter by the power given through the Word of God. Three times Jesus said to the tempter, "It is written," and it is in the Bible and its constant study that will be found our answers to the tempter.

As the Christian life goes on, we have high water marks in our careers as Christians, times of great spiritual uplift, times when we seem to be in the very presence of God

with no care in the world except to remain in the company of our Lord. And then we descend from the mountain top, often with a shock, to find that we too are powerless disciples, we cannot do the things we ought to do. The answer the disciples found to their problem with the epileptic boy was the presence and help of the Lord Jesus. With us in our difficulties and dilemmas, the solution is to be found in the presence of the Lord, asking His help and guidance — and how well He answers our prayers.

Finally as life goes on and draws to its close, how hard the Christian pathway may seem. Yet we can remember that God has glorified Jesus and that as we have trusted in Jesus, so God will glorify us in Him. As our Saviour died for us on the cross, so He lives to succour us in illness, pain and frailty, and we believe that we will be glorified in Him, when we see Him whom we have known and loved and followed since the day when He first met us.

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

2. THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

SERIOUS ERROR

Among the epistles of the kind we are to consider Galatians has a clear first claim on our attention. The cardinal importance of the truth insisted on in this letter, and the fundamental nature of the misconception which it deals with, are immediately suggested by the tone in which it is written. The strong and serious line adopted by Paul is quite exceptional; in no other place

is the manner of his writing nearly so direct and grave.

Greetings and other preliminaries are abbreviated to the minimum and noticeably less warmly expressed than in Paul's other letters. Opening commendations are entirely absent. Within the shortest possible space he gets to grips with the urgent matter which required his attention. We may be thankful that his treatment of this vital issue

was so firm-handed and clear. To have commended them at all would have beclouded the issue. Instead he shows quite plainly his sense of astonishment and disapproval at the way they had allowed themselves to be diverted from the truth. "I marvel," he writes, "that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ into another gospel: which is not another, but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (1: 6, 7).

Later verses in the epistle make it plain that the situation which gave rise to the letter was somewhat as follows. The Galatians to whom the letter was written had been converted during a visit from Paul only a short time earlier. In receiving the gospel of Christ in its purity, as he preached it, they had experienced the joy and liberty which it brought and had started on the Christian life with great vitality and promise. At that stage they had a great respect and affection for Paul as the servant of the Lord through whom this liberating message had reached and affected them. While he was with them there seemed every indication that they would continue in fruitful obedience to the truth which they had received. And yet, since his departure, they had listened to persuasive voices from other sources. They had given heed to teaching which, though plausible, destroyed the very basis of the blessings they had received, and which hampered the true Christian liberty which as believers they were entitled to experience. In accepting the guidance of these new teachers, their respect for Paul and his authority had diminished considerably.

In brief, the kind of teaching which the Galatians had been misled into receiving was this: circum-

cision, and other activities of a legal nature, of high importance to those used to the Jewish tradition (see, for example, 4: 10), were being held to be a necessary adjunct to Christian faith. Teaching of this kind caused much difficulty in the days of the early Church. This is perhaps understandable in view of the historical situation in which Christianity began and developed, and a brief survey of the setting in which the early gospel was preached may help our understanding of the origins of this misleading teaching.

ITS ORIGIN

The events on which the Christian message was based, the death and resurrection of Christ, had, of course, taken place in Jerusalem. Beginning on the day of Pentecost, with the descent and empowering of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of that message had also started there, in the face of much opposition from the Jews, but nevertheless with great vigour and effect. Soon the preaching spread further afield; though the thought that it was also intended for Gentile hearers, on the same terms as it was offered to Jews, was a new one, not easily grasped even by those who were actively in sympathy with the work. Peter learned this, against his own inclinations, in the way related in Acts 10. Face to face with a Gentile audience, in the house of Cornelius, having been brought there by God's clear directions both to himself and to Cornelius, Peter begins his message spontaneously with the words "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons". He expresses what he now sees for the first time, with much surprise and wonder as he says it. The difference between Jew and Gentile, though a long-

standing one, and rooted in a God-given tradition which had been the cherished possession of the Jew over the centuries, was to disappear in the gospel day. In the vital and basic sense there was no difference. Tradition and background may be entirely different, but both Jew and Gentile are equally without claim on the benefits which the gospel brings. Also God in His gracious intentions will make no distinctions of a merely external kind amongst those He wishes to bless. "There is no difference . . . the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10: 12). Peter felt the power of this that day, and the effects of his preaching confirmed its truth. The Jewish Christians at Jerusalem also accepted the truth which was demonstrated in this way, when the evidence was related to them. They did not do this easily, however, since it was so contrary to their prejudices; a temporary settlement of the issue is described in Acts 11, but the same issue came under discussion again, and in more vigorous fashion, as described in Acts 15. This was after Paul and Barnabas had completed their first journey, and had much to report on the way Gentiles in more distant parts had been blessed.

It is evident then that, to people of Jewish background, the change-over to the full truth and implications of Christianity was a difficult one. Those who were brought to see it did so with some reluctance, and indeed it could be lost sight of again rather easily. In Galatians 2: 11-14, for instance, Paul relates how it had been necessary to rebuke Peter openly for reverting to Jewish ways of conduct in a way which was likely to confuse the issue for others. What Peter had seen earlier, he was not bold enough to insist on at a critical moment.

While the genuine people were gradually learning this truth, there were others who were bitter and active in opposing it. "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15: 1) is a sample of their dogma, and it resulted in dissension. To men of this type their tradition and law-keeping were highly important, making them lose sight of the fact that God's grace was their only real ground of hope. They also ignored or even resented the fact that His grace was overflowing to people with no background such as their own, making no demands of any kind upon them. The remainder of Acts 15 relates how this matter was again temporarily settled in Jerusalem; the proponents of this kind of teaching were not easily silenced, however, and the rest of the book of Acts shows the same teaching re-appearing, at times in places quite remote from Jerusalem. Teachers of this kind had been busy and successful in Galatia. Though their background was entirely different, probably a pagan one, these Galatian Christians had been induced to accept the necessity of much that the law enjoined on the Jew, apparently with little difficulty. Part of the force of Paul's words to them arises from the fact that law keeping was not inbred in them in a way difficult to discard, as it was with the Jew. They had taken it on as something new and, in their minds, necessary and pleasing to God.

The full gravity of what had misled the Galatian Christians may not be immediately apparent. But, if the general principle which underlies the teaching they had accepted is singled out, the reasons why it is treated as a highly serious matter become clear. Shorn of the details of the form in which

the Galatians had adopted it, we are considering the attitude which thinks that legal observances in one form or another, will please God. In adopting such an attitude the fact that legal observances form no part of the ground of our acceptance with God may be lost sight of. But a more subtle misunderstanding is to think that, even though justification rests on Christ alone, such observances remain necessary for Christian living. Correction of *this* misunderstanding seems to have been the special need of the Galatians, though the true basis for justification is also re-emphasised to them, as they may well have become confused on this issue too. This mistaken attitude is a widespread one, not limited to the context of old rites and ancient ceremonies. It is as easy to adopt today as it was in New Testament times, and as hard to discount. It is an inborn tendency of humanity to assume such an attitude; it has its ultimate origin in the fallen human condition. To understand the teaching about this must always remain a matter of great importance.

ITS IMPLICATIONS

The position which the Galatians had been persuaded to adopt did not, on the face of it, deny the value of faith in Christ. On the contrary this was accepted as important. But, in addition, observance of the law was held to be necessary. They did not discount the work of Christ on their behalf, but believed also that law-keeping was needful. The implications of this will now be examined.

First, if it is agreed that something additional is needed, over and above faith in Christ, this carries with it a denial of the *sufficiency* of Christ as the sole ground of our

justification. Those who accept this do not place their entire confidence in Christ; and in reality it is a poor tribute to Christ if He alone is not enough for our faith. Hence, the additional of law-keeping as a partial basis for our justification, or as a basis for the subsequent life of the Christian, effectively cancels proper and entire confidence in Christ.

Secondly, this teaching implies that there is that about ourselves which is acceptable to God, or can be made so. To fix on something in self to be satisfied with, or to congratulate ourselves about, is a pleasing and easy line to follow. But the very existence of this tendency reveals the deep-seated nature of our trouble. We are essentially self-centred, away from God, sinful by nature. The desire to make "a fair show in the flesh" (Galatians 6: 12), to glory in self and its achievements, or indeed in some self-imposed discipline of observances, is natural to us. It ignores the gravity of our condition. The truth is that "the flesh" is incorrigible, that it *cannot* please God (Romans 8: 8). The list of "the works of the flesh" given in Galatians 5: 19-21 shows how shameful and inwardly wicked is our true state. Going through the motions of religious observances or legal formulae of an outward kind cannot really disguise this or alter it in any way. What "the flesh" merits is death; and for the believer it has received what it merits in the death and crucifixion of Christ (Galatians 2: 20, 5: 24). To glory in self or any of its achievements is to misconstrue the whole situation. It is also a sure means of diverting our attention from the one and only true object of boasting and wonder. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by

whom the world is crucified unto me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6: 14) is the true attitude.

The verses towards the end of chapter 2 put the issue in its clearest terms; and the final verse takes the matter to its ultimate conclusion. To think that righteousness can be gained on the principle of self-effort is to disregard the grace of God, to treat the death of Christ as ineffectual and unnecessary. Chapter 5, verse 4 makes the same point, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by law; ye are fallen from grace." This being the real implication of this teaching, we can well understand the serious treatment it is given.

THE TRUTH INSISTED ON

Having considered the implications of the false teaching which the Galatians were ready to accept, we may now consider, in outline, the way in which Paul deals with it. The teaching presented in the epistle can for this purpose be divided into three main sections, corresponding fairly closely to the three consecutive pairs of chapters which make up the whole letter.

In the first of these sections Paul relates *historical events* in which he was involved, to show that the gospel which he proclaimed had its source and authority in God. Its substance, as well as the commission to preach it, came directly from Christ. It required no other authority, human or otherwise, to confirm it. Approval was not needed in advance from the senior Christians at Jerusalem; though they supported him fully when, years later, they heard the details from him directly. His gospel was essentially the same as theirs. Jews by nature, such as Peter and Paul and others, had been driven to dis-

cover that there could be no possible ground for compelling Gentile Christians to live like Jews, that is, under the law, and they were agreed on this. "Even we," converted Jews, "have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law" (2: 16). Why then act as if one only half believed this, as Peter had done on one occasion? And why impose on Gentiles what was an impossibility to the Jews? So Paul, conscious of the God-given authority underlying his actions, spoke out boldly in order that "the truth of the gospel" (2: 5) might remain clear to the converts of his own and later days.

Near the end of this section (2: 20) is a verse of a different kind. It is in some respects the key verse in the epistle. Still referring to his own experience he now speaks of his inward reasoning and motives; he discloses the principle on which his life is now lived. It is personal to Paul, yet it is the pattern for all Christians, living of a true kind. It contrasts strongly with the principle of self-effort to gain approval from God, which, as we have seen, under-rates the seriousness of sin and undervalues the death of Christ. To Paul the death and crucifixion of Christ is indispensable, and a source of great wonder too, moving him to live along lines which he could not otherwise follow. The law did not justify him, it condemned him, and he saw that sentence carried out at the cross, and knew that it was a just one. But he also saw there the supreme manifestation of an inexpressible love, the love of the Son of God, Who gave Himself for him. The life that he now lived sprang out of this; and Christ, the Son of God, continued to dwell at the centre of that life. He was its power and object. "I live, yet not

I, but Christ liveth in me."

The section occupying the second pair of chapters (3 and 4) begins by reference to the experience which the Galatians themselves had already known. Their present attitude was in contrast to the spiritual nature of their initial experience at conversion. "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh?" (3: 3). It must clearly be on spiritual lines that the Christian life is worked out.

But this section devotes itself mostly to teaching based on an appeal to *Scripture*, which is used to show that it was God's intention all along to bless on the grounds of promise on His side, and faith on the part of the recipient. The law had its importance and its functions, but was never intended to be the means through which men could be justified. But the principle of unconditional promise, received by faith, had been made clear long before the law was introduced. "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (3: 8). The truest sense in which one can be a child of Abraham is to have a faith like his; this is open to Gentiles quite as much as to Jews, but is in danger of being missed by any who think to live under the law. What is received on the ground of faith today, through Jesus Christ, is "the promise of the Spirit" (3: 14) and this carries with it a different status and relationship with God. "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" (4: 6, 7). "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith

Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (5: 1). The distinction between sons and slaves, liberty and bondage, is illustrated in the closing part of chapter 4 by a further, rather different, appeal to Scripture. The story of Ishmael and Isaac is treated as an allegory from which the contrasting principles are drawn.

The final section (chapters 5 and 6) seems in the main to use a *moral* argument to support "the truth of the gospel" for which Paul stands. Liberty, as Paul understands it, is freedom from the restraints of the law, but there is no thought of licence in it either (see, for example, 5: 13). Paul's gospel, properly received, brings about an inward moral change which all the commandments and the restrictions of the Jewish law could not produce. "The fruit of the Spirit" (5: 22, 23) can appear in the lives of those who go all the way in responding to it. Tested by its results then, the divine source of the gospel which makes this possible is demonstrated. Their desire to be under the law had not helped to produce the true Christian qualities in the Galatians, but instead the attitudes which required the warnings of 5: 15, 5: 26, 6: 3, 6: 7, 8 were evident amongst them. The ineffectiveness of the legal principle in producing valuable and Christ-like characteristics amongst them was clear. If the desirable attributes were to appear they must follow the advice of such verses as 5: 16ff.; the Holy Spirit must have His way if Christian character is to show itself. He must be allowed to direct and lead (5: 18); they must "walk in the Spirit" (5: 25), they must "sow to the Spirit" (6: 8) if the profitable and admirable qualities were to appear in their lives.

Implicit in the teaching here is the fact, more explicitly stated elsewhere (e.g. Romans 6: 1ff.), that Paul repudiates any interpretation which would conclude that conduct and moral principles are unimportant for those who are "not under law but under grace" (Romans 6: 14). His main aim in this epistle is not to correct this kind of misinterpretation, but to deal with that false synthesis between law and grace which confuses the true principle of Christian living, and which may even lose sight of the basis of acceptance with God. It is clear nevertheless that Paul envisages as appearing in lives which are properly Christian, behaviour and attitudes consistent with God's high and holy character. His standards are never lowered or revoked; they are more than met by all that is Christ-like (see, for example, 5: 14, 23). Such will be the outcome of a proper orientation of life towards Christ and an outliving of the new spiritual power which each believer possesses, the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

ITS PRESENT RELEVANCE

Centuries have passed since the letter to the Galatians was written and received; yet it has been evident throughout our study of the letter that it contains truth which is timeless in its application and value. It may be useful to summarise some of the main points in conclusion.

First, the letter emphasises clearly that Christ and Christ alone is the sole and sufficient basis of the blessing into which Christian faith enters. Clarity on this fundamental issue is easily lost, with consequent loss of the Christian confidence and liberty. A clear and unambiguous statement of the truth on this immense issue is of immense help, and

is provided here in an authoritative and permanent form.

Secondly, there are plain warnings here about reversion to formalism, to ritualism, to legal observances and other similar procedures. Unquestionably the letter teaches that to attach great importance to activities of this kind is not consistent with a proper understanding of the true nature of Christianity. Formalism is prominent, indeed it is almost dominant, in several present-day versions of Christianity. The more obvious instances of this may be easy to identify, but it needs to be remembered that all Christians are subject to tendencies in the same direction, which often show themselves in more subtle forms. We easily allow some shibboleth or other to become the hall-mark of our Christianity. Small routines of a non-vital kind easily become exaggerated in their importance in our minds. Such things ought not to fill even part of the place which belongs exclusively to the true Lord of our lives. Not even the God-given law is to share with Him the control of our lives. Still in 1967 the Christian who makes the law his "rule of life" is defying the teaching of Galatians. The letter describes and urges the "more excellent way".

Finally, and not least in importance, lives of true Christian fruitfulness, in which the graces of Christ Himself are in some measure seen, are more than ever needed in our day. The epistle shows the way to this end. The need for having our eye upon Christ, for judging ourselves, and allowing Him to dominate our thoughts and ways, is stressed here. In this way the Spirit of God would lead us; may we have the grace and obedience to follow.

FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Exhortations and Instructions to Prayer in the Synoptic Gospels

PRAY for them that despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5: 44).

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into the closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret . . . but when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do . . . for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him (Matthew 6: 5-13).

The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest (Matthew 9: 37, 38).

Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation (Matthew 26: 41).

What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any (Mark 11: 24, 25).

And it came to pass that as He was praying . . . one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray . . . and He said . . . Which of you shall have a friend and shall go unto him at midnight and say unto him Friend, lend me three loaves . . . and he from with-

in shall answer, Trouble me not! . . . I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as much as he needeth. And I say unto you Ask and it shall be given you; Seek and ye shall find; Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. . . . If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? (Luke 11: 1-11).

And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, nor regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith (Luke 18: 1-6).

Why sleep ye? Rise and pray (Luke 22: 46).

1. PRIORITIES

NO request could be more topical than the request with which this passage opens. "Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." Not only is it topical in the time and place in which these words are being written, but it is difficult to imagine any time to come, short of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth, when the request will be any less topical than it is today. It seems to say, "a finite amount of this world's good is available, and I want a larger share for myself."

Two questions dominate the life of nations. There is the problem of the size of the national income, or the nation's wealth — an industrial and economic question: and there is the social and political question of sharing it justly. The great divide between contemporary east and west is their divergence on these points. The east, in general, has settled for some form of communism. The west in general regards this as the greatest possible danger. All the disputes about Marxism and all the strikes in every land are forms in which this grievance is constantly recurring.

A most challenging and reassuring fact for every Christian is that such a question was put to the Master and that we know His answers. "Master, said the man-in-the street, Speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." We have this cry from the heart of every have-not, be it man or nation. The Master's answer was, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" — which, being interpreted means, "Man, I am not here to settle such questions — not yet!" We must note how necessary it is

to add "not yet". The Father has committed all judgment into the hands of the Son. In the day of His power He will indeed be the judge and the supreme arbiter. It is a basic fact about the whole lapse of time up to Christ's appearing, that the time of His judgment is not yet. At His first coming God was in Christ, "not imputing their trespasses unto them". The Christian's confidence is not that these problems in industry, commerce and economics are not important, but that they will not receive a just and complete solution until Christ's kingdom comes, *and* that for the Christian, the top priority lies elsewhere.

What follows is clearly to be divided into two paragraphs. From verse 15 "He spake to the company" of which the questioner was one. From verse 22 He explicitly addressed His disciples, and we must carefully distinguish the two kinds of living, the two outlooks on the world. Both attitudes encompass the need for food, for clothing, for a treasure for the heart. On the one hand there is the life of those who give top priority to planning the abundance of their possessions and who leave God out of the calculation. On the other hand there are the disciples of Christ, who, peaceful in the knowledge of the care of their Father in heaven, give first priority to His kingdom.

From verse 15 the Lord attributes the question to covetousness, and enforces the point with the story of the rich man who was yet, in the last analysis, a fool. The essentials of the story lie in two contrasts, which underline the fact that God was not in all his thoughts. He said to himself and of himself,

"much goods"; but God said, "not rich". He said to himself and of himself, "many years"; but God said, "this night". He was in fact not right with God, and all his planning came to less than nothing. These are exactly the thoughts of the world we live in. Every conversation heard, every placard, every broadcast, drums into our minds the thinking, the planning, the values of a world like this, and therefore we need the Lord's voice to teach us the last word, the epitaph, on such living, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth."

From verse 22 the Lord addresses His disciples, and the key-phrase of the message is, "Take no thought." The meaning of this phrase in literary English is, "Do not be anxious," and in colloquial English, "Don't worry." And this is not the mere catch-phrase it is in modern speech, for we are provided with (1) facts for the heart which dispel worry (2) something better to do (3) the Lord's command which is its own enabling. It would be difficult to prove that the dangers of anxiety are greater today than ever before, but few would doubt that they are in fact greater due to the accelerated pace of modern life and the complexity of the problems which beset the world. Wider dissemination of the knowledge of these problems is not the least part of the modern dilemma.

The Bible has a good deal to say about worry, but in order to see this we have to disencumber the A.V. of some confusion in translation. Apart from Luke 12, the two best known passages are Philippians 4: 6 and 1 Peter 5: 7. Colloquially they would be translated, "Don't worry about anything," and "Rolling off all your worry on to Him." We are thus confronted with one

of the commandments of the Lord, once from the lips of the Master Himself, once through the words of Paul, and again through the mouth of Peter. None obeys this command with completeness, but we must allow its power to come upon us constantly.

The next thing to be noted is that in no case is this a mere prohibition, a negative. In each case the means are given to enable us to overcome evil with good. Peter accompanies the command with the comforting assurance, "He careth for you." Paul joins immediately the command to put in its place prayer — "but, in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Then comes the promise joined to the prayer, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

In Luke 12 a much more extended discourse deals with the facts for the heart which dispel worry. It agrees exactly, however, with Peter's antidote, and might be summarised, "God is taking care of you." The disciples are asked to consider the ravens and the lilies. The lesson to be learned is focused at a single point, that God takes care of them. We are not to imitate the ravens in their abstinence from planned labour, nor the lilies in the magnificence of their clothing. We are to take account of the fact that God feeds and clothes His creatures. Scripture in other places enforces the necessity of labour on our part, and in others yet the avoidance of magnificent raiment, but here, one thing only is taught. Even taking account of all our labour, it is God who feeds His children, and all our toiling and spinning would not equal the splen-

dour with which God clothes the lilies.

G. K. Chesterton has a striking passage on verse 28, "if then God so clothe the grass, which today is in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith?" "Even in the matter of mere literary style, if we suppose ourselves thus sufficiently detached to look at it in that light, there is a curious quality . . . of piling tower upon tower . . . making a pagoda of degrees like the seven heavens. . . . There is perhaps nothing so perfect in all language or literature as the use of these three degrees in the parable of the lilies of the field; in which He seems first to take one small flower in His hand and note its simplicity and even its impotence; then suddenly expands it in flamboyant colours into all the palaces and pavilions full of a great name in national glory; and then, by yet a third overturn, shrivels it to nothing once more with a gesture as if flinging it away . . . and if God so clothes the grass that today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven — how much more. . . ."

If verses 22 to 28 tell us what to avoid (together with the antidote — trust in God's care expressed in prayer), verses 29 to 31 tell what to do, what is the practical enterprise into which our energies are to be flung, in fearless abandon of anxiety as to earthly cares, the kingdom of God. In this context, to seek something is to toil and sow for it, and the all-embracing object of the Christian's toil is the kingdom of God. The whole tenor of Scripture leads us to read these words as the great statement of the disciple's priorities. We are obviously to take action about food and clothing and the earthly needs of this life, but seeking these things is not the disciple's first priority.

Of all the terms in which the Christian's priorities are presented, perhaps this is the most fundamental and embracing. In Matthew's terms it is "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is the Christian's first priority. Into this enterprise he is to pour the first of his prayers, the finest of his energies, and the best of his time. It is indeed worthwhile to enquire what is this kingdom which should loom so large in terms of practical life.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

IAN I. ROSS

2 Timothy

IN this last recorded letter of the Apostle Paul, preserved for us by the Holy Spirit, our attention is clearly drawn to certain realities which must be known and experienced by all who would be servants of the Lord. I should like to point out four of these important truths in this loved epistle.

CHAPTER I: THE PERSON KNOWN

Paul says in verse 12, "I know

whom I have believed." It will be obvious but must nevertheless be stated that without this knowledge we cannot in any way be the servants of the Lord. It was this personal encounter with the Risen Lord that transformed the flaming, fanatical Pharisee Saul of Tarsus into the beloved apostle, the bond-slave of Jesus Christ. This encounter resulted in the remaking of Saul and brought him into a personal

knowledge of the Lord Jesus and so gave him the first and supreme essential for an effective ministry. Without it he would never have won a single soul for Christ, preached a single Spirit-empowered sermon, established a single assembly. Nothing will ever take the place of this for those who would serve the Lord. No amount of learning, no amount of eloquence, no amount of personal magnetism, useful though these things undoubtedly are, can serve as a substitute for this personal knowledge of the Risen Lord. We may not all enter into it in quite the same way. Saul did so in a transcendent blaze of light causing him to fall to the ground. Not so with Lydia who prayed by the river in the quietness of her experience of the Lord. But both she and Paul had come to know the same living Lord and both lives were transformed.

Later in life the ageing apostle could still declare that his supreme ambition was "that I might know Him". Having come to know the Lord on the Damascus road he still desired day by day to know Him better. "Yea doubtless, I count (daily) all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

The Apostle had given up many things in life — his position, his comforts, his financial security, no doubt his own family — but these things were worthless in comparison with the surpassing worth of Christ Jesus His Lord.

CHAPTER 2 :

THE POSITION MAINTAINED

In verse 19 the apostle declares, "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." It is perhaps just at this point that so many of us have to admit failure.

We may have been given some particular work to do for the Lord, to teach the young, to instruct the young men and young women, to preach the gospel, to deliver tracts, to visit the sick or some other special call into service for the Lord. To each one comes this clarion call of the apostle, "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

In bearing the name of Christ we have a great privilege but also a great responsibility to honour that name in our lives. Our lives should be above reproach in moral conduct, in word, in manner of life. To Timothy, the apostle says, "be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

We are told that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians at Antioch. In their daily lives they showed the grace and beauty of the Saviour. Christ lived in them and through them. They were men and women who were indwelt by Christ.

The next mention of the name Christian was in Paul's defence before King Agrippa. Here the apostle bore witness to the saving and transforming power of Christ. So powerful were his words that the sinful monarch exclaimed "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Those who bear the name of Christ are to be witnesses for Christ. The third and final time we read in scripture of the name Christian is found in Peter's letter. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed." Perhaps we have not experienced much of this because our lives have been cast in pleasant places. Nevertheless it is true that those who would be faithful servants of the Lord may have to suffer in one way or another in greater or lesser degree.

Thus those who bear the name of Christ must depart from iniquity for they are indwelt by Christ; they must witness for Christ and they may have to suffer for Christ.

CHAPTER 3: THE POWER RECEIVED

In verse 15 we read, "the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." It has often been said that the pathway of success is found more readily by the man who listens than by the man who is heard. When the great servant of God, Joshua, was faced with the stupendous task of leading the children of Israel into Canaan he received very clear instructions. "This book of the law (said the Lord) shall not depart out of thy mouth but thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein. For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1: 8). Here in this verse are three very important and practical secrets for the servant of the Lord.

1. Look it up! "The book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth." We must read His Word and feed upon it. Enjoy it, for it is the only food which will sustain our spiritual life.

2. Let it in! Not only must we feed upon it, but "thou shalt meditate upon it day and night." This surely means that having read it we let it sink into our hearts and minds. It is not sufficient to read it; we must let the truth of what we read enter into us and dwell within us. It is of little value if we read that we should esteem one

another better than ourselves if we maintain within us a spirit of pride. It is of little value if we read that we should forgive one another if we spend our time criticising one another.

The word meditate in this verse means more; it also means "to bow down". We are called to bow down or submit to the authority of the Word of God. It must of necessity be the final authority in all matters relating to our faith and our conduct.

3. Live it out. "That thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein." We must be obedient to God's Word and live it out in our lives daily. We must put into practice daily what we read, so that our lives like those of the Corinthian believers may be epistles, known and read of all men."

If then we seek to do these things there is the glorious promise given to us as it was given to Joshua, "Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success."

CHAPTER 4: THE PRESENCE ENJOYED

In verse 17 the Apostle declares the faithfulness of the Lord. "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me." Paul was now approaching the great climax of his earthly life and most of his friends had left him for one reason or another. So soon he was to be taken out to the place of execution, released from the restrictions and privations of the body, into the full joy and light of the presence of His Lord.

Here in the hour of his supreme need he experienced in a wonderful and deeper way, the comfort and sustaining presence of His Lord. David could say, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . . . Thou art with me." Surely this is the experi-

ence of every true servant of the Lord, for with such He would walk day by day to give His comfort, His strength, His fellowship, His love. The two on the road to Emmaus walked and were sad until Jesus came alongside and talked to them and opened their eyes to see and to know Him. Then sadness was turned to joy, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness: leaden legs were changed into athletic legs as they sped with great haste to share their experience of the Presence of the Risen Lord with their friends.

To us again He says, "Lo, I am with you alway." May our hearts burn more within us as we journey

through life, experiencing daily His presence and enjoying His fellowship.

*"Jesus, a great desire have we
To walk life's troubled path with
Thee:*

*Come to us now, in converse stay;
And oh! walk with us day by day."*

Thus the Apostle draws the attention of the young man Timothy to these four vital realities: the Person, the Position, the Power and the Presence of the Lord Jesus. Surely he is speaking to us also, and insofar as these things are vital in our own daily experience we shall be useful and faithful servants of the Lord.

THE PATH OF LIFE

HAMILTON SMITH

(Psalm 16)

IN the New Testament both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter, speaking by the Holy Spirit, use quotations from Psalm 16, as being the language of the Lord Jesus (see Acts 2: 25-28; Hebrews 2: 13). We thus know, beyond all question, that in this beautiful Psalm we hear the voice of Jesus telling us of the life that He lived when passing through this world. It is this that makes the Psalm so precious to the believer.

How many and varied are the glories of Christ! Other Scriptures present His glory as a Divine Person — the Son of God, making God known in all His moral attributes. Here, however, Christ is viewed in His perfection as a Man, though never ceasing to be God, because He has become Man.

Furthermore, as the Son of Man, Christ is presented in different connections. We may think of Him,

with great delight, as the One who "went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil;" feeding the hungry; clothing the naked; teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God. Then we can contemplate Him doing that mighty work on the cross, and, having learnt what He has done for us in the past, we can look up and see Him "crowned with glory and honour" — the present Object for our souls as the One who is living for us and soon coming for us. Good and needful for our souls to contemplate Christ in these varied glories; but they are not the theme of this Psalm. It does not present Christ doing a work for us on the cross, nor as our Object in the glory. Neither does it speak of His outward life or perfection before men. It presents *the inner life lived by Christ under the eye of God when passing through this*

world as the perfect Man. It marks out "the path of life" through a world of death, that leads to "fulness of joy" in the presence of God.

A path leads from one place to another. It has been pointed out that there was **no path in the Garden of Eden**, and there will be no path in the Paradise of God. When we reach the rest that remaineth we shall need no path to leave that home of bliss, for we shall "go no more out". The path is through this fallen world where none can rest nor remain. The unbeliever treads a path that ends in death. But there is "the path of life" that leads to pleasures for evermore, that has been marked out by Jesus, Who, in taking this path has left a perfect example of the inner life lived before God that becomes His people. Good for us, then, to listen to the voice of Jesus and thus learn the blessedness of a life lived before God, and seek by grace, in our measure to follow in the path that He has marked out.

Firstly (verses 1, 2) we learn that this life is one of **perfect dependence upon God** as we hear the Lord say, "Preserve me, O God." As a Divine Person He could have preserved Himself, but this would have been no pattern for us. He did not preserve Himself, nor avail Himself of the aid of twelve legions of angels. He walked through this world with all its trials in entire dependence upon God, as became the position He had taken as Man. Moreover, the One on Whom He depended was One in Whom He had perfect confidence, for He can say, "In Thee do I put my trust." In human affairs we may be dependent upon one in whom we have little confidence. In God we have One on Whom we can depend by casting all our care upon Him, and can do so with perfect confi-

dence knowing that He careth for us (1 Peter 5: 7). The apostle Paul, following the Lord's example, expresses his dependence, when he says, in the midst of all the trials he had to face, the Lord "will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom", and shows his confidence in the Lord, when he adds "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work" (2 Timothy 4: 18).

Further, this life of dependence on God, and confidence in God, was marked by **subjection to God**, for the Lord can say, "Thou art my Lord." Having taken the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, "He humbled himself and became obedient" (Philippians 2: 7, 8). Coming into the world He could say, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me": going out of the world, we hear Him say, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Hebrews 10: 9; John 5: 34; Luke 22: 42). Ever seeking the Father's will, He can say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8: 29). With the perfect example of the Lord before us we may well make the desire of the apostle our prayer, when he says, may God "make you perfect in every good work to do His will working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13: 21).

Secondly (verses 3, 4), we see in the Lord Jesus, a Man whose delight was in the saints — the excellent of the earth. The benefits of His goodness — manifested in dependence, confidence and subjection — are for the saints in whom He delights. We do well to ask ourselves, as God looks down into our hearts, Who is it that He sees we delight in? We may make a fair profession before one another, and yet too often, in our hearts which God

sees, we may be "having men's persons in admiration because of advantage", and thus set a higher value on riches and social position than on spirituality and the lowly graces of the One who was "meek and lowly in heart". With the Lord, His delight is in "the excellent" — those marked by the moral excellencies of God, even though they be weak, and base, and despised in the eyes of the world (1 Corinthians 1: 26-28). Good for us to heed the word that exhorts us "Have the same respect one for another, not minding high things, but going along with the lowly" (Romans 12: 16, N.T.), and thus, like the Lord, delight in "the excellent".

Moreover, with a heart filled with fidelity to Jehovah, and delight in the saints, the Lord was wholly separate from those who were multiplying sorrows to themselves by hastening after some other object than Jehovah. Has this no warning voice for believers? We do well to remember the words with which the apostle John closes his epistle. Having reminded us that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one", he gives the warning word, "Little children keep yourselves from idols." Let us beware of allowing our hearts to be governed by any object that would come in between our souls and God.

Thirdly (verses 5, 6) in contrast to those who hasten after some worldly object for the gratification of the flesh the Lord can say, "Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." The inheritance is the lasting portion of the believer to which we are going on; the cup speaks of the experience of which we taste in passing through the circumstances of life on the way to the inheritance. The Lord, as He passed through this

world, looked on to the joy that was set before Him and thus experienced the sustaining grace of Jehovah amidst all the circumstances of life, however trying and sorrowful. He did not look for support and comfort from those around Him, but found His support in the unchanging love of the Father. Thus He was maintained, and could say as He passed through this world, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places;" and, as He looked to the end of the path, He can add, "Yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Fourthly (verse 7), in this path of life, the Lord, as the perfect Man was counselled and instructed by Jehovah. In another passage, the Lord, speaking as the Servant, can say of Jehovah, "He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" (Isaiah 1: 4, N.T.). The Lord draws a distinction between the counsel of God and the instruction. He can say, "*the LORD* hath given me counsel," but "*My reins* also instruct Me." The counsel speaks of all that God has purposed, made known in His word. To learn the counsel of God we need to have the opened ear to hear as learners, or as those who are "instructed". For the knowledge of His counsel we need "every Scripture", which we know is "given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . . that the man of God may be perfect . . . thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17). The reins speak of the secret thoughts that govern our practical lives. When these thoughts are formed by the counsel of God, and set free from all outward influences, as suggested by the quiet of the night seasons, we shall be instructed as to the path of life through this world. In Christ all was perfect. His thoughts were entirely governed

by the word of God, and free from every influence of the world around.

Fifthly (verse 8), the word of God will ever lead to God, Himself. So Christ, as a Man on earth, can say, "I have set the LORD always before Me." Good for us when the written word leads our hearts to the living Word; when we search through all the Scriptures, not simply to gain a better acquaintance with the letter, but to seek for "the things concerning Himself". Then, indeed, Christ becomes our Object. With Christ there is no failure, for He can say, "I have set the LORD always before Me." With ourselves this may be true *sometimes*: who but Christ could say "always". Yet to have Christ before us as our Object is surely the secret power for treading the path of life, and the measure of our spirituality. The result of having Christ before us is blessedly set forth in the words that follow, for Christ can say, "Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Setting the Lord *before us*, we shall find that the Lord is *with us*. He cannot fail those who make Him their object. If He is *with us*, He will maintain us, so that, however trying the circumstances, whatever the insults and opposition we may have to meet, we shall not be moved. Alas! too often a trifling circumstance, not to mention the deliberate insults of opposers, may move us to speak and act in the flesh, only to reveal how little we have the Lord before us. The apostle Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ." Having Christ as his Object, he could also say, when faced with "bonds and afflictions", that "None of these *things* move me" (Philippians 1: 21; Acts 10: 23, 24).

Sixth (verses 9, 10) with Jehovah *before Him* as His Object, and *with*

Him at His right hand, the Lord could tread the path of life with gladness in His heart, even though that path led through death and the grave. He went into death in the sure and certain hope that Jehovah would not leave Him in the grave. Having been through death He has destroyed its power for believers so that if we are called to pass through death we shall find that the One who has already been through death is with us. With the Psalmist, we shall be able to say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me."

Seventhly (verse 11), we learn that the path of life through this world of sorrow and trial, will lead to the presence of Jehovah, or, as the Christian can say, to the Father's house, there to find ourselves in the presence of Christ, to be with the One who was with us in the path, there to find "fulness of joy", and "pleasures for evermore". In the world around we see men abandoning themselves to "the pleasures of sin", which are but "for a season". The believer, who treads the path of life, may, indeed, meet with manifold trials, but they too, are only "for a season". But the "light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4: 17, 18).

This then is the path of life, as unfolded in this beautiful Psalm, and marked out by One who has trodden the path in perfection. Let us ever remember that the life of which the Psalm speaks is the *inner life* lived with God. One has said, "It is important to remember that there is an inward divine life which dwells and joys in God, having nothing to do with circumstances, though enabling us to go

through them " (J.N.D.).

To sum up the perfections of this life, as presented in this Psalm, we learn that it is,

(1) A life that is dependent upon God, confident in God, and subject to God;

(2) A life that delights in the saints and is separate from sinners;

(3) A life that has the LORD for its portion;

(4) A life that derives its instruction from the LORD;

(5) A life that has the LORD for its object;

(6) A life that death cannot touch;

(7) A life that leads to fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore in the presence of the LORD.

Such then is the blessedness of the inner life lived before God and with God, and without which the outward life before men, even though it may make a fair show in the flesh, will only be the form of godliness without the power. May it then be the desire of our hearts to follow in the path that the Lord has marked out for His own, and that thus living this inner life there may be found in us that which is well pleasing in the sight of God through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13: 21).

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

3. THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

THE NATURE OF THE LETTER

The letter to the Philippians is considered next, not because it is the most obvious choice, but because it is such a different letter from that to the Galatians. Something can be gained in the understanding of both letters by dealing with them consecutively, allowing the differences in their style and spirit to make their impression.

The letter itself reveals much about the state of the Christians to whom it was addressed. Almost everything here can be contrasted with what has been said in the previous paper about the Galatians. As Paul writes this letter he finds much to commend, and to dwell upon with thankfulness, amongst the body of Christians who will receive it. These are people who are entire-

ly in sympathy with him; they share his aims as he seeks the interests of Christ in all their variety and range. They are deeply concerned for him and for his well-being. They are very much on-target in their interests and their desires. These are active, energetic Christians, kindred in spirit to the great apostle himself. Here is a free exchange with people with whom he has much indeed in common. The mutual bonds which exist between those who genuinely enter into the Christian life, with deep and vital interest in everything which is its proper concern, appears naturally and easily on the surface of this letter. As he thinks of these Philippians, Paul is free from any great sense of restraint or anxiety about them; there is no admonition here. No barriers intervene, so that he readily writes

wonderful things about the Christian's life, his ways of thinking, his aims and objects, his confidence and his joys, his secret sources of supply; and all that he says rings true because he is himself such a real example of it.

Along with the many satisfactory features which marked the church at Philippi, some disharmony of a personal kind seems to have existed amongst its members. He appeals openly for the healing of one breach in the final chapter. Earlier passages appear to prepare the way for this, urging the need for humility and freedom from dissension. This is clearly part of the background of the epistle. The pattern of behaviour of the Philippian Christians, otherwise almost ideal, was marred by this blemish. Here was no gross sin, or major error of a doctrinal kind requiring serious and authoritative treatment. Perhaps not more than a few members of the church were at variance with one another. In a sense it was a relatively small matter. Yet Paul does not overlook it; he could not be satisfied until the matter was rectified. Paul felt keenly that any such disunity amongst the Philippians was out of character with the true Christian spirit, and could be a hindrance to their progress and testimony. He does not over-emphasize their weak point though; he handles it carefully and tactfully. His advice about it is intermingled with much which will stimulate them further along the pleasing lines they were already following. There is indirect help and prompting, too, in Paul's own attitude as he writes. Here is teaching by example, not altogether deliberately intended as such; rather it is the easy and spontaneous product of Paul's own happy spirit as he communicates freely with them.

The content of the epistle, and

the way it aims to meet the situation which existed at Philippi, will be discussed under these two broad headings. We shall outline the direct exhortations which are pressed on the recipients of the letter. Secondly, the salient features of the instruction provided by the example and attitude of the writer will be pointed out. These sections are not entirely distinct, the division being made mainly for convenience in outlining the teaching. Brief reference will be made, in a final section, to the importance of this teaching in a modern context.

ITS DIRECT EXHORTATIONS

The direct instruction and teaching of this letter is mainly concerned with the need for unity and humility. Most pointed of all is the appeal to two particular persons. Euodias and Syntyche, towards the end. He beseeches them to forget the discord which existed between them and to be "of the same mind in the Lord" (4: 2). These women seem to have been well-known as pious and devoted Christians, with a real interest in the prosperity of the Christian testimony and readiness to work to that end (see 4: 3). Active concern for the interests of Christ carries with it possibilities of tension, particularly amongst strong-minded and serious Christian people, and disagreements which arise in this way are especially regrettable. But the remedy lies "in the Lord", in the mutual recognition of His supremacy and excellence, in the demonstration of His spirit of grace and humility.

An earlier passage (1: 27 - 2: 18) seems to press the same lessons in a more detailed way. Without naming persons at this stage the Philippians are exhorted to allow more prominence to harmony and

humility in their relationships. Possibly the tendency which showed itself openly between Euodias and Syntyche lay beneath the surface rather more generally in the Philippian church, with all its alertness in Christian things. "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that . . . I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents" (1: 27, 28, R.S.V.) So this section opens. There had been much to commend in the opening of the letter, let them show more of this spirit of unity and his joy in them would be complete. "Complete my joy by being of the same mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (2: 2-4, R.S.V.). These words are direct and clear, and response to them is expected as a simple matter of love and obedience (see 2: 12-16). Attitudes which are the opposite to these may characterise the "crooked and perverse generation" still unaffected by the Christian message, but amongst true Christians the power to act in this distinctive way is not lacking. To do as these verses urge is to show a real outworking of our faith, and to provide an effective support for the gospel of Christ.

To draw out this response he reminds them of Christ, of the low place that He descended to, in selflessness and humility of mind, step by step even to the cross. This most supreme and moving example provides the greatest of all incentives towards a true Christian spirit amongst those who benefit from His great act of condescension. Along-

side this, what place can remain for self-esteem and the seeking of one's own advantage? Quite apart from the context there are, of course, wonderful statements in this passage (2: 5-11) about Christ Himself, the greatness of His person, the lowliness and the ultimate end of the path He pursued in humility and obedience, His exaltation and the acknowledgment of His rights both now and in days to come. Here, in its own right, is one of the most precious passages of the New Testament, though we must merely notice this and pass on.

That this selfless and Christlike spirit could be shown in persons of their own kind and calibre is apparent from other examples which appear later in the same chapter. The attitude of Paul himself, expressed in verses 17 and 18, provides one striking example, all the more impressive because of its spontaneity. Again, fine illustrations of the same spirit are available in Timothy and Epaphroditus. All this comes out in his references to them, in an incidental rather than an intentional way, as he speaks of his plans to send Epaphroditus to them, bringing the letter with him, and for Timothy to follow as soon as possible.

Words of direct advice of other kinds are given, here and there, elsewhere in the letter. The advice to "rejoice in the Lord" is offered repeatedly with full awareness that this is being done (3: 1; 4: 4). Again, direct instruction on the lines on which a calm and contented Christian life may be pursued is given in chapter 4. All this, however, is so much a reflection of Paul's own spirit of joy and peace that it falls more appropriately into our next sub-division. On a more serious note, urgent warnings are passed on in two places in chapter 3. They are forewarned, in strong

terms, against the kind of teachers who had influenced the Galatians (verse 2), though it does not appear that they had yet succumbed to this teaching. Later (verses 17-19), warning is given against the possibility of being absorbed with self-interested pursuits and earthbound objects. The intervening verses have much to say of Christ as the sole and excellent Object to fill the vision and to command and direct the energies of His people. Again it is Paul's example which sets the pattern which they are urged to follow (verse 17).

THE EXAMPLE OF THE WRITER

Only a small part of this particular letter consists of instruction which is deliberate and corrective in its aim. In the main the letter is a spontaneous expression of the Christian life, a demonstration of the spirit and outlook which are proper to a Christian. Paul's whole life is seen to centre on Christ, and this regulated all his attitudes. Here is Christianity as it should be, as it works out in our lives. Stimulus and correction in Christian things can be provided to some extent by precept and exhortation, but the life and spirit of Christ seen in another may achieve even more in this direction. Such a living demonstration of the truly Christian attitudes would seem specially suited to the kind of need which existed at Philippi. It will therefore be in order to refer briefly to some of the lessons of this kind found in the letter.

First, Paul's comments about his own position, his imprisonment and the prospects ahead (chapter 1), reveal a discerning and spiritual mind which bases its judgments on other criteria than the usual ones. His imprisonment has proved to be a good thing rather than a misfortune.

The gospel has been furthered, the interests of Christ are served. Paul is far from being depressed, and wishes them to see the position in that light too. He takes a completely unselfish standpoint in judging this matter; his assessment of the situation is no superficial one. Already he has indicated that he prays that they too may have increasing knowledge and judgment of this kind in their thinking (1: 9). Again, looking at his own prospects, he could well have felt that the outlook was a grim one; at best, a doubtful and perhaps distant release from prison; at worst, martyrdom. But instead, neither of the alternatives seems at all unattractive to him. If the choice were his, he would choose life rather than death, though he makes it clear that for himself personally this would be the less preferable choice. To die would be gain, it would be *far* the better alternative in fact. But to continue in this life would appear to be the greater immediate need, in Christ's interests and theirs. And so the issue seems also decided, though the decision may rest with others. Such a Christ-centred view carries with it contentment and inward joy; in such a life Christ will be magnified whatever way a difficult issue may turn.

Another part of Paul's constant prayer for them was "that ye may approve things that are excellent" (1: 10), and he also provides many an unconscious example of this in the letter. Most excellent of all to him was "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (3: 8). In this passage in chapter 3 he lays bare his own soul as he reveals how highly he prized this above all else. At one time his objectives and his values in life had been so totally different, rooted in himself, his upbringing and his

achievements. "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ", and from that moment Christ took the supreme place, filling his horizon and prompting all his thoughts and activities. Progress in that knowledge and experience was Paul's only aim and desire. The joy and satisfaction in Christ which accompanies such an experience cannot easily be concealed; it springs irrepressibly to the surface in this passage. The spirit of it is readily transmitted to others, so that its readers are helped towards a similar appreciation of Christ and a similar desire to know Him better.

The final chapter has calm words of advice and of experience from one who has learned to face any and every situation in the strength of Christ. Over-anxiety should not trouble a Christian; all problems can be referred to Him Whose presence and peace can keep our hearts. We can afford to be moderate and quietly confident with such a Companion always at hand. There are inward joys, which cannot be quenched, in the knowledge of our Lord. Instead of anxious thoughts filling our minds, we can be busy on pure and profitable lines of thinking. All this is said by one whose experience confirms it, and who has found an ample supply for every eventuality in his Lord. Christ is indeed magnified in these verses, and our will to know and to prove Him more is greatly stimulated by the example shown by their author.

ITS RELEVANCE TODAY

Obedience to the recommendations of this letter has not been a strong feature of the Christian testimony throughout the years; and no less today than at earlier times is there reason to reflect on the sadness of non-adherence to this teaching.

There has been, and is, much of the kind that the letter seeks to correct. Disunity, seeking our own things, lack of coherence and genuineness in the Christian witness, have been unhappily prominent. There are of course essential matters of principle, of doctrine and of behaviour, which it is important to maintain; and unity at all costs should not be the objective. But it is also true that small and non-vital matters have often been at the root of many situations in which lack of harmony has shown itself. Such a state of affairs can all too easily exist among Christian people who are not lacking in instruction and interest in the things of Christ. If the Philippians needed this teaching, the need is at least as great today. Comparison with these early Christians on features for which they are commended, such as spiritual energy and devotion to Christ's interests, also leaves little ground for complacency in our day. In this sense too the letter must still have a clear voice, and we shall do well to heed its message.

Yet still, as we read this epistle today, the sense of the indisputable grace and reality of the genuine Christian life makes its impression. We are made to realize that enablement for such things is still fully available in Christ. Nor can we feel that lives after this pattern have been entirely confined to the first century, or to others earlier than our own. Many an example of the selflessness, of the irrepressible joy and vigour, of the serenity and confidence of the true Christian spirit is still to be noted in our day. With our eye on our Lord, and distrusting ourselves, may our lives too give evidence of these qualities, for His honour, and in response to the clear teaching of this part of holy scripture.

CHRISTIANS are frequently called by strange names, and who would deny that sometimes these names are deserved! The world has its own peculiar appellations for those who are Christ's, and indeed the very name "Christian" may have been one of those, since clearly it was a name *given* to the early disciples and not one *taken* by them. But other characters in which believers appear in Scripture are familiar to us, viz. sheep, salt, lights, stones and perhaps others come to mind.

Less familiar and perhaps less understood is that which Paul calls the saints at Corinth (2 Corinthians 3: 2, 3). Here they are said to be a letter (or epistle) and only some patient study of the context will make clear to us what is meant. How could living men and women be said to be a letter "known and read of all men", and what circumstances called for this particular epithet? Evidently some of the apostle's critics had demanded that he should be made to prove his authority by producing credentials or letters of testimonial. They were possibly those who wished to undermine the stern reproofs contained in his first epistle to them. Taking up the challenge, Paul searches for the most powerful and convincing written testimonial to his authority. But no parchment written with ink had he in mind, nor even more permanent engravings on tablets of stone.

The very people to whom he wrote were an undeniable and obvious record of his ministry, under which they had been converted. Upon the fleshy tablets of their hearts the Spirit of the living God had written Christ, and all could know and read this in them. So

what better letter of commendation could be presented than this? A letter written with pen and ink could be forged, altered or distorted, but surely they were genuinely the greatest proof of God's power working through him. Here his critics are silenced, for either they must admit that they were not genuine, or concede the full impact of his apostolic authority.

Such then is the context of this rather enigmatic phrase, "you are an open letter about Christ" (J. B. Phillips Trans.) and since the apostle makes this general to all believers it has its application to us today. Does it challenge our hearts to know that others can read us like a letter, and, as has often been said, will do so in preference to reading the Bible? Are we really a living letter with Christ as its message for all the world to read? The effect of the Spirit's working in our hearts is to efface self and write Christ there so that "out of the abundance of the heart" our lives might bespeak Christ. Never could this have been produced by the old letter of the Law written on tablets of stone. That indeed was a letter of demand upon us and could only aggravate our bankruptcy before God, and as such it was surely the letter that killeth. Only the Spirit of the Living God can impart life and create thus a live letter, with the message of a transformed life, plainly readable by all.

The writer was once conducted to the Dead Letter Department of the G.P.O. in search of a letter from U.S.A. which appeared to have gone astray. The scene in this Department was distressing in the extreme. Everywhere were letters and parcels unable to reach their destination because wrongly or inadequately ad-

dressed or mutilated in transit. There they lay lost and undelivered however eagerly awaited by the intended recipients. Dead letters indeed, with no message for anyone; and such, one was compelled to reflect, was the condition of the unbeliever, in contrast to the Christian as a Live Letter, sure of his destination and known and read of all men, radiating Christ to the whole world.

Job craved the ability to write indelibly the message of his life. In 19: 23-25 he says, "Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever." The last expression has reference to the cuneiform or wedge-shaped lettering used by the ancients when permanent records were desired to pass on to future generations. Many of these have been found in excellent preservation by archaeologists, particularly on remains of ancient monuments. Little did Job know that his words were to be preserved forever in the Book that Gladstone called "the impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture". This man's life was a live letter and the message of it is epitomized in these verses, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Christ filling the heart is the secret of a life that can endure sorest trials and emerge triumphantly with gain that outweighs all loss. Surely Job's message was known and read of all men, and even in the world of today his name is the very synonym of patient endurance. To one and all it can be said, "You have heard of the patience of Job" (James 5: 11).

We live in a day of much Gospel

preaching, thank God, and many and varied are the means employed for its promulgation. This is surely good in the light of the example set by that greatest of all preachers, who said, "To all I have become all things, in order that at all events (or by all means) I might save some." Also, "I have made myself slave to all, that I might gain the most possible." J.N.D.'s footnote to this verse in 1 Corinthians 9 says that the Greek here means "the greatest number possible, the whole mass that he could reach by these means." Surely if our hearts are set to win the greatest number possible for Christ, we ourselves must be live letters conveying the message clearly, not only in words but in every deed and action. It has been rightly said that a sceptical and apathetic world may argue against our words, but the answer of a transformed life is beyond argument. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9: 25). Here is that which can be known and read of all men, and in the long run may be more effectual than merely novel methods of communicating the Gospel message.

May we be truly concerned as to our function in the world as "an open letter about Christ", which must be the most urgently needed message in the distressed state of the nations in this our day.

Hutton's delightful words might well be the prayer of our hearts in this context:

*"For this, O may we freely count
Whate'er we have but loss:
The dearest object of our love,
Compared with Thee, but dross.*

*"Engrave this deeply on our hearts
With an eternal pen,
That we may, in some small degree,
Return Thy love again.*

2. UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES

THE first chapter drew attention to the dominant importance of the Kingdom of God for life and work, but it is now necessary to look at the place the Kingdom occupies in the New Testament in general, and therefore its importance for doctrine, that is, for an enlightened understanding of Scripture. It is not possible to be right in understanding Scripture, unless we take proper account of a subject which figures so largely in it. The examination now to be entered on will in addition serve to underline the fact that practical issues are so frequently clinched by reference to the Kingdom of God.

The Synoptic Gospels, as distinct from the Gospel of John, present the Kingdom of God as one of their main themes. The fullest treatment is, of course, that of the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew, though there are weighty pronouncements in the other gospels which will be noted in due course.

Almost a quarter of the total bulk of the Gospel of Matthew is contributed by three great discourses. The first, generally called the Sermon on the Mount, occupies chapters five, six and seven. In this discourse the King proclaims the principles and laws of His Kingdom. The second fills chapter thirteen, in which the King sets out by parables the Mysteries of His Kingdom, that is, its history in its present form. The third is found in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five, and in it the King discloses what His disciples needed to know about the future of the Kingdom: the future for Israel in chapter twenty-four, for Christ's servants and disciples in chapter twenty-five to verse 30, and

for the Gentile nations in twenty-five, verses 31 to 46.

Thus in the Synoptic Gospels we find recorded the teaching of the Lord Jesus which encompasses the whole sweep of Kingdom truth. Does this aspect of truth fade out of sight as church truth and practice is developed? Indeed it does not, and in the Acts we must not fail to see that it still forms a staple of the instruction given by the Risen Lord and the great apostle. How precious in the recollections of the disciples must have been the forty days which they passed in fellowship with the Lord, alive after His passion by many infallible proofs. We have the first resurrection day in great detail. The appearance to the devoted women who came to the sepulchre on the grey dawn; His dealings with the travellers on the Emmaus road, causing their hearts to burn within them while He opened to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself; His appearing in the midst of His own gathered together behind closed doors for fear of the Jews and their gladness when they knew who He was; all this, and more, comes to mind as we go over the details of that first Lord's day. And so the story proceeds, and piecing together the various parts, we learn about the recovery of those out of the way, the opening of their understanding, their commissioning for the time of His absence, and the promise of power from on high, the gift and coming of the Holy Spirit. Then in Acts 1: 3 the words occur "appearing unto them by the space of forty days and speaking the things concerning the Kingdom of God."

The words plainly mean that this theme, the Kingdom of God, formed the subject of His discussions during the forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension. Was this theme an additional one to be added to the others we have considered; the interpretation of the things in all the Scriptures concerning Himself, the great commission, the gift of the Spirit, His second coming and the end of the age? I think not. It would be difficult so to read Acts 1: 3. A far more natural meaning would be that these things *composed* the "things concerning the Kingdom of God". The Kingdom of God was not an additional theme, but these themes so moving to the hearts of the disciples were themselves the things concerning the Kingdom of God. We should misconceive the Kingdom of God if we were to think of it as a compartment of truth separate from these others. In some important sense the Kingdom of God was the all-inclusive theme embracing in its sweep all these other details of instruction. Thus it is suggested that the Kingdom of God is the theme with which the Lord occupied the thoughts of His own after His resurrection.

Few would doubt that there is a special, almost symbolical, meaning to be attached to the detail of Paul's ministry in connection with Ephesus, and from this point of view the mention of Ephesus leads us to the pinnacle of New Testament truth as unfolded in the epistle bearing that name. It is customary to analyse the Acts by reference to the journeys of the apostle, the first, the second, and the third. While the first journey may well be a unit of separate significance in the mind of the Spirit, there are few things more plain than that the second and

third journeys are not so. In the later chapters of Acts it appears far more likely that in the mind of the Spirit in the structure of the narrative, the units of significance are the cities, to which the apostle addressed letters. Paul embarks on his second journey as recorded in 15: 40, and from that point the narrative divisions are events in Philippi (16: 12-40), Thessalonica (17: 1-9), Corinth (18: 1-28), overlapping with Ephesus (18: 24-19: 41 and 20: 17-38). The scope, detail, and explanation of the long section centred on Ephesus emphasise the importance attached to what took place in that city. The explanation is contained in the famed address to the Ephesian elders contained in the last passage quoted. In this discourse, leading, as has been noted, to the pinnacle of New Testament truth, the Kingdom of God is one of four themes epitomising Paul's teaching while he was labouring at the establishing of that Church. Two of the four themes cover the message by which the hearers had been first brought into blessing. These two were, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 22), and "the gospel of the grace of God" (verse 24). The remaining two themes form the message by which those brought into blessing were established and built up: "the Kingdom of God" (verse 25), and "the whole counsel of God" (verse 27). Here again, it appears most likely that the last two expressions quoted, cover the whole range of establishing truth, the Kingdom of God from the point of view of the Christian's responsibility, and the whole counsel of God from the point of view of God's immutable will and purpose. Thus, although special care may be needed to understand the expression aright,

the important place given to the Kingdom of God in Acts 20 gives the theme a lasting relevance throughout the present era.

At the close of this book Paul is found (on the same page as the Epistle to the Romans begins) at Rome spending a whole day with the chief Jews. In verses 23 and 31 the themes of the conference are stated. They are, first, testifying and teaching the Kingdom of God, and second, persuading and teaching the things concerning Jesus.

In the epistles there are important references to the Kingdom of God in Romans, 1 Corinthians (three or four), Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, but none in later epistles. This fact must be significant, whether we can understand its significance or not. These references may readily be grouped by certain concepts. The first is "the kingdom of God is . . .", and such passages describe the nature of the Kingdom (Romans 14: 17, 1 Corinthians 4: 20). The second group contains the phrase ". . . inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6: 9, 10; 15: 50, Galatians 5: 21, Ephesians 5: 5). This expression probably indicates that the context specifies the charac-

ter and behaviour of those who will and will not receive rewards in the Kingdom as it will be established in power at the Second Advent. The third phrase is ". . . unto the Kingdom of God" (Colossians 4: 11, 1 Thessalonians 2: 12), and draws attention to certain actions which will have results in the future Kingdom. There is one reference to those who will be "counted worthy of the Kingdom of God" (2 Thessalonians 1: 5).

Finally, in the Revelation (12: 10), "Now is come . . . the Kingdom of our God" is the theme celebrated in heaven. With so voluminous a stream of teaching and truth running through the New Testament, and leading to such a conclusion, how can we fail to appreciate the necessity of giving a just place to the theme of the Kingdom of God in the scheme of divine truth, in its bearing on the Christian's behaviour and responsibility, as distinct from the viewpoint of God's counsel and purpose, but always in view of the lordship of Christ. And this outlook carries with it in full measure what is required to satisfy the heart, for "the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost".

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

ROBERT DAVIES

"What is his name? What shall I say unto them?"

(Exodus 3: 13)

"What is his name and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?"

(Proverbs 30: 4)

". . . and thou shalt call his name JESUS . . ."

(Matthew 1: 21)

OF the seven definitions of the word "name" given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, three

are of present interest: (a) Word by which individual, person, animal, place or thing is spoken of, or to.

(b) Person as known, famed or spoken of. (c) Reputation — has an ill, a good name, has a name for honesty. . . . When thinking of proper names, the question arises, "Are such names connotative?" Do they describe the attributes of the person to whom they belong? In modern times the answer is most probably "No". Current fashion and family tradition, rather than insight on the parents' part, are the more important factors governing the bestowal of a Christian name. Some surnames, like Carpenter, Cooper or Fletcher are derived from trades or crafts, but they provide an unreliable guide to a person's natural abilities or acquired skills today.

Among primitive people, this was not so. Great importance was attached to a person's "true" name. They felt that a person's real being centred in his name. To know a person's "true" name and to be able to pronounce it correctly gave one power over that person. Something of this magical element was present in the religion of ancient Egypt. By knowing a god's true name, the priest could invoke his aid. This provides the background to the third chapter of Exodus. Needless to say, the God who revealed Himself in the burning bush, could not be "invoked" or "conjured" in this sense. There was no need for it. Exodus 3: 7, 8 presents God as taking the initiative: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . and I am come down to deliver. . . ." He stands in complete contrast to the gods of Egypt, on whom He is about to execute judgment. What then is the significance of Moses' questions, "What is his name? What shall I say unto them?" The name is a revelation of character and disposition. In his book

"Moses", to which I am indebted for this information and from which at least two of the following examples are drawn, Martin Buber states that where "What" is associated with the word "name" in biblical Hebrew, the question asked is "What finds expression in that name?" What Moses is really asking is "What is this God really like? What shall I tell the people? What is His disposition towards them?" It is not simply Moses identifying a sound with a person, but an intimate knowledge of His character.

When Jacob was returning from Padan-aram to the land of his kindred, and his wives and their families had passed over the ford Jabbock, he was left alone "and there wrestled a man with him. . . ." The "man" asked him "What is thy name?" (Genesis 32: 27). Did the "man" not know with whom he had been wrestling? The context makes it clear that the purpose of the question was to draw from Jacob a confession. His name means a supplanter or heel sneak. He was a supplanter by name and by nature. This confession is a prelude to blessing. He shall be no longer Jacob, but Israel, a prince of God. This change is confirmed later at Bethel, "Thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name" (Genesis 35: 10). There is a lesson for us in this. The acknowledgement before God of our true character is the only way to blessing. "They that are whole need not a physician but they that are sick."

Jeremiah 16: 21 reads, "Therefore, behold I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is the LORD." The prophet is telling the people that through judgment and through mercy they will learn

the true character of the God who has called them to be His people. Psalm 22: 22 is also of interest, "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren." In the immediate context the Psalmist is going to make known to his fellows God's character as the Great Deliverer.

I Samuel 2: 12 gives a negative example. It is recorded that the sons of Eli "knew not the LORD". From their evil conduct it is clear that this means ignorance of God's holiness and righteousness. Their conduct was no better than that of the priests who served the false gods of the surrounding nations.

The words of Agur, the son of Jakeh (Proverbs 30: 1-4) raise the same problem. Is not Agur really asking the age-old question, "Can man by searching find out God?" Can man by his own unaided effort ascertain God's nature and disposition towards him?

What then is the meaning of the Divine Name, the LORD, JEHOVAH or YAHWEH? Exodus 3: 14 reads, "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM": He is the Self-Existent One. It is a mistake, however, to interpret this in a purely abstract or theoretical way. The A.S.R.V. gives as an alternative, "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE". The important point is that Moses is going to learn by experience the disposition of the LORD towards His people. In the conflict with Pharaoh, in the events of the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea and on the wilderness journey, Moses will learn that the God who appeared to him in the burning bush is the God of Redemption, the God who delivers and sustains His people, a covenant-keeping God. The people may fail in their responsibilities, discipline may follow, but the LORD does not go back on His promise.

"And God said, Certainly I will be with thee."

"and I will be with thy mouth."
"and I will be with thy mouth and with his (Aaron's) mouth and will teach you what ye shall do."
"My presence shall go with thee."
"I will make all my goodness pass before thee and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy."

(Exodus 3: 12; 4: 12, 14; 33: 14 and 19).

God is still the God of Redemption. In the New Testament, God in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ has broken the "strong man's force", taken away his armour and spoiled his goods. He has set free the captives of the devil. "Thou art gone up on high and hast led thy captives with thee. . . . Prais'd be the Lord . . . even the God of our deliverance" (Psalm 68: 18, 19 — REVISED PSALTER).

The test for us is, do we hold this as a theory divorced from practical living, or is it a vital force? The apostle's injunction, "ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price," is clearly intended to have a practical effect. The well-known passage in Peter's first epistle, "ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ", follows a practical exhortation, "Be ye holy".

When we come to the New Testament names of the Father and the Son we have the answer to Agur's question. The name of Jesus may rightly be said to be dominant in the whole book. The second dictionary definition is relevant here, that is, "a person known or

famed". This is the Name above every name and at the name of Jesus, God has decreed that every knee shall bow (Philippians 2: 10). It is interesting to compare this passage in Philippians with Isaiah 45: 23, "I have sworn by myself . . . that unto me every knee shall bow."

JESUS is the Greek form of Joshua. It means "Jehovah is Salvation" or "Salvation of the Lord". Matthew 1: 21 leaves us in no doubt that this name is a true expression of the character of the One who bears it, "for he shall save his people from their sins". There is, no doubt, a reference here to Psalm 130: 8, "he (the Lord) shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities". What in the Psalm is attributed to Jehovah is in the Gospel attributed to Jesus. He is all that His name implies.

What does the name of Jesus mean to us? Is it a sound by which we identify an historical figure or have we proved experimentally its worth? This is the crux of the whole matter. "Jesus, the same yesterday, today and for ever"

(Hebrews 13: 8). A personal and intimate experience is here implied. In the verse preceding the one just quoted, the Hebrew Christians are asked to remember their former leaders, their faith and their way of life. These leaders, who had been instrumental in bringing this company out of Judaism into the "better things" of Christianity, had died and I believe the writer is in effect saying, "What Jesus was to these men of faith, He will be to you in your present difficulties." This is equally true today. We may be discouraged by the weakness and divisions amongst the Lord's people and we are tempted to think how much better things were a century or so ago. What the Lord Jesus was to those of a past generation, He can and will be to us. "The same . . . today and for ever."

To know the name of Jesus *in the biblical sense* is to find the answer to Agur's question. His mystery is now an open secret. "What is his name and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

4. THE FIRST CORINTHIAN LETTER

THE first Corinthian letter has a clear title to a place in this sequence of papers. Almost the whole of the letter is concerned with righting wrong attitudes and answering difficulties; though in the process much profitable and positive instruction comes to light. Some of the topics dealt with are grave ones indeed. This letter, unlike those

already considered, is lengthy and deals with a whole sequence of errors and problems. It was mostly on matters of behaviour that the Corinthians needed urgent instruction; though in chapter 15 one important matter of defective belief, regarding the resurrection, is put right in characteristically clear and profitable terms.

In dealing in a single paper with such a letter, the approach will need to be highly condensed. Some sections will be passed over in the effort to single out the major shortcomings amongst the body of Christians at Corinth, and to outline the essentials of the teaching which meets these shortcomings. It seems clear, on examination, that in writing the letter Paul adopts this line himself, dealing with major matters as of first importance. The Corinthians had raised certain queries with him, on marriage, on meats offered to idols, etc. These are answered in due course (7: 1ff.), but they are not given priority. News he had received about the state of the church at Corinth (1: 11; 5: 1) required that other things should take precedence.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE LETTER

What then is the picture of the Corinthian church gained from the letter? Briefly it is as follows. Here was a church which was gifted, busy, sizeable and enlightened. It was the product of a remarkable work of God's grace, brought about through a preaching of a kind described in chapter 2: 1-5, a preaching "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power". The city of Corinth might at first sight have seemed a most unpromising place for the sowing of the seed of Christianity. It was almost without equal for low standards and wicked behaviour; immorality was open and widespread. Yet many of these pagans had been rescued from that background, and converted to God. "And such were some of you" Paul writes, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (6: 11). God's word to Paul, as encourage-

ment to persist in his initial labours there, had been "I have much people in this city" (Acts 18: 10). The outcome of those labours confirm this. The very existence of this body of believers, surrounded by but called out from the evil in which they had once been involved, was a remarkable evidence of the power of the Christian message and the extent to which the grace of God in Christ can operate. Paul acknowledges this readily, and gives unstinted thanks to God for them and for His gifts to them in the opening section of the letter. The faithfulness of God, Who had called them unto the fellowship of His Son, was something to fall back upon, and to derive confidence from. This was especially so since as yet their behaviour fell far short of what was desirable, and serious words would be needed to set it right.

In brief, the attitudes on which the Corinthians are criticized in the letter are these. First, cliqueishness, or party-spirit, was prevalent amongst them. Secondly, though not unconnected with this, their thoughts were centred on men and their talents more than on the God Who alone was the giver of all they had received. Different leaders were followed according as their gifts were admired to a greater or less degree. Abilities possessed by some, undoubtedly God-given, were allowed to swell the self-importance of those who possessed them, and tended to carry away the beholders with admiration. Spiritual pride, in their own imagined enlightenment and ability to judge issues, had been allowed to replace that humility and carefulness which ought to issue from the true knowledge which comes from God.

Then in addition, with such a free rein to human judgments and

human valuations, much which was of an undisciplined and disorderly character was allowed, both in their separate lives and in their joint activities. There was a real need for words about control of the right kind in their assembled activities, so that profit and harmony might result. The moral implications of reception of the gospel, in their personal lives, were in some cases not understood. In others, on the pretext of enlightenment, they were ignored. Shameful sin on the part of one person, which would have shocked even the pagans outside, was unjudged in their very midst. Paul had, indeed, a serious task in writing this letter. But he also had equipment from God, and dependence upon God, to discharge it; and as a result we too have guidance on these important matters. The main issues will be dealt with in turn.

PARTY-SPIRIT AND PRETENSIONS TO WISDOM

Though no outward cleavages were apparent amongst the Corinthians, they had permitted rival factions to develop within the church. Moreover they appeared to be quite unaware of the inconsistencies of such a situation, and of its dangers. After the preliminary greetings and expressions of thanksgiving, nearly the whole of chapters 1 to 4 deals with this evil within the Corinthian assembly. The factions within the church centred around men (see 1: 11-13), and the Corinthians needed to be informed quite plainly that partisan affiliations of this kind show evidence, not of progress or wisdom of a spiritual kind, but of the lack of it. They were still mere infants in the new life in Christ; they were spiritually immature. Their actions were the product of

the fleshly nature as mere unchanged men would act (see 3: 1-3).

Paul's own name had been used as one of the party watchwords. He makes it absolutely clear, however, that he had deliberately aimed at avoiding such a possibility. He had higher and more worthy business in hand than gaining adherents for himself. "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1: 13). "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" (3: 5). So he asserts his own insignificance alongside the unique dignity of Christ, and his part as a humble servant in the great work which was God's alone. Neither the manner nor the substance of his preaching had been of the kind that would attract natural human approval. There was nothing of mere attractive display or style about it, such as would have encouraged the kind of superficial judgments that they were now prepared to make. The cross of Christ had been presented, the Spirit of God had operated through that message, and they themselves were the evidence that it had been effectual. He makes it plain that, on the true scale of values, the cross of Christ stands far above the highest that the wisdom of man can envisage or approve. Here is wisdom of a different category altogether, which puts "the wisdom of this world" in its proper place, as "foolishness with God"; even though that wisdom may discount it and despise it. That message has power, too, for those who are under its grip; "unto us who are saved it is the power of God". It gives reason to glory, not in the flesh, nor in men, but in the Lord (see 1: 29-31; 3: 21). It introduces into a realm of things hidden from natural understanding, and beyond the range of human search-

ing. This is the spiritual realm, where "the deep things of God" are known, revealed by His Spirit (2: 7-14).

Progress in this spiritual sense is what Paul would wish for the Corinthians, but their occupation with men and their admirable qualities presented a barrier to such progress. They needed to be shown that the men they admired were merely the instruments through whom God was at work. From Him alone comes the increase in what is valuable and abiding. A real work of God had certainly begun in Corinth. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Let each of them see that what was built upon that foundation would be in character with this. The day of testing would reveal its quality, or else its emptiness (3: 10ff.). The very servants of the Lord, upon whom they ventured to place their own estimates, would be judged by Him to whom they alone were responsible. The character and issues of their service would then be made manifest. To judge such matters before the time, and by their own merely human standards, was especially ill-advised and valueless (4: 1-6).

ABUSE OF FREEDOM, AND ITS CORRECTION

The subject matter in chapters 5 to 10 is of a more diverse kind, and only some of the prominent points can be considered.

The state of laxity in the church at Corinth was as bad as chapter 5 describes. Gross immorality on the part of one individual was permitted, not with any sense of shame, but almost with a feeling of pride about it. Paul rebukes them in

forthright fashion. He points out how readily evil spreads. He stresses the need and the obligation to purge it out. The lesson that a Christian assembly is responsible to judge evil could not be plainer. The particular case had to be dealt with; and the general principle is also stressed. A clear cut must be made with those who claim to be Christians but whose moral behaviour does not correspond with that claim (5: 11, 12). Each individual must be guarded about his own behaviour too, as the closing verses of chapter 6 point out. Personal purity and self-control must be maintained. The reasons for this are compelling ones; the believer's body is "the temple of the Holy Ghost"; "ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's".

The earlier part of chapter 6 deals with another subject. Something of the extent to which mutual bitterness amongst Corinthian believers could go is indicated here. Some of them were asserting their rights and settling their disputes publicly, in the courts, before unbelievers. The inconsistency and the shamefulness of this is stressed. Again the point is made that within the local body of believers there should be the ability and the spirit which can settle all matters between themselves. Their joint responsibility to act when necessary, in the spirit of discernment and peace-making, is plainly underlined here. Failing the proper resolution of problems in this way, however, a person who feels himself wronged would be well-advised not to assert his rights. Though it may cost him something, he would thus personally show the peaceable and inoffensive spirit which makes for harmony and health in a Christian gathering. If all were

doing this no disruptions and disagreements would remain, and the testimony to non-Christian neighbours would be of the kind which would really commend their faith.

Much of chapters 7 to 10 must be passed over here. One common thread which may be traced in these chapters, however, continues the subject just discussed. How far ought a Christian to go in asserting his rights? Needless to say, Paul does not allow unqualified freedom to do this, regardless of consequences. In chapter 9 he shows how he denied himself things to which he was perfectly entitled, in order that the success of other objects, closer to his heart, might not be hindered. His service to the Lord was more to Paul than insisting on all that he could legitimately allow himself. On the subject of eating meat sacrificed to idols, he seems to agree that scruples about this were unnecessary in certain circumstances; but he also insists that it would be better avoided if another believer, not so clear about this, was thereby upset (8: 9-13; 10: 23-33). Helpful attitudes, including non-insistence upon one's own rights, if that helps, are encouraged. High-handed actions which upset others are not

approved. When no problem arises, no other Christian being likely to be affected, to act openly and moderately with a clear conscience seems to be the line advised. But all must be governed by the desire not to harm, but rather to help, other believers. It must be clear that the principles outlined are also applicable in many a more modern context than the eating of idol-meat.

It is important too, that, in all such matters, the conscience of the Christian should be properly alert. It may be untroubled simply because his standards are too low. There are suggestions here that, to some of these self-opinionated Corinthians, the main criterion of right and wrong was their own readily-assumed sense of "knowledge". It was true that there was no reality behind the idols at Corinth, and the eating of idol-meat was in a sense a neutral issue (8: 4). But it was also true that evil powers were active behind the scenes at Corinth (10: 21). With such real evil around them, serious compromise could be the result of unguarded actions arising from quick and careless judgments.

(to be continued)

THE UNSOLVED RIDDLE

J. STODDART

MANY of us, perhaps in younger days, found ourselves intrigued and entertained in attempting to solve riddles, pitting our intelligence against that of our betters. Not often were the answers to these as instructive as they were amusing. It seems that we overlooked or were unaware of the fact that Scripture

itself contains not a few riddles and provides answers which abound with interest and instruction.

Already the reader acquainted with the Old Testament will have recalled Samson's riddle, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Samson alone held the solution to

this riddle posed to his wedding guests, and almost a week had passed without any guest having ventured an answer. Only the unfaithfulness of Samson's wife, who had pressed him to divulge the secret to her, enabled them to boast of knowing the solution (Judges 14).

Prophetic students will have called to mind Ezekiel's riddle of the two great eagles (chapter 17) which were respectively the King of Babylon and the King of Egypt. The prophet was told by God to propound the riddle to a rebellious house of Israel as a means of attracting their otherwise scant attention to their desperate need of His great mercy. Here we find a parallel to the Lord's own use of parabolic illustration to those who clearly had no ears for the otherwise plain teaching of truth. The understanding of these riddle-like parables was given only to those, His disciples, who asked Him to explain them (see Luke 8: 10).

Thus in the New Testament also, we discover a wealth in the seemingly enigmatic passages, which are intelligible only to those who have ears to hear. If we by-pass such passages because they are difficult, we may miss much spiritual treasure intended for faith and dependence upon The Holy Spirit. Thus wrote Willian Cowper:

*Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His Own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*

Pharisees and Sadducees in turn had posed their cunningly contrived riddles to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 22, with the less carefully concealed intention of "entangling Him in His talk" and to catch Him out in His answers. "Tell us," said the

Pharisees, "What thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" Only that wisdom of which He was the embodiment could have conceived the Saviour's reply, which at once exposed their hypocrisy and adequately solved their riddle. "Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's: and unto God the things which are God's." Little wonder we read that they marvelled at His words, and left Him and went their way.

Not to be daunted, came the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, with a riddle calculated in their minds to baffle Jesus and, if possible, make Him answer in a way that contradicted Moses in the Old Testament. This was the rather patently hypothetical case of the woman who had been wife to seven brothers in succession. "Now of the seven, whose wife shall she be in the resurrection? For they all had her." Quite unanswerable, thought they. But they had not reckoned with One Whose wisdom, not only knew every answer but clearly recognised the motives that prompted every question. Little had they expected to hear Him say, as He alone could, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. . . . God is not the God of the dead but of the living." Their sheer astonishment was complete.

Having heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees conspired to launch another attack upon Him, and this time the riddle was the characteristic question of the lawyer. "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" thinly veiling his impertinence with a flourish of courtesy. More cun-

ning than would appear, this question might be answered in a way that made the other nine commandments of little or no importance. This would justify a charge that Jesus brought God's holy law into contempt, showing the rightness of their opposition to Him. But such a snare could hardly succeed against One of whom it was written, "He will magnify the law, and make it honourable" (Isaiah 42 : 21). For a lawyer, acquainted at least with the letter of Scripture, all that was necessary here was to quote, as the Lord Jesus did, from that source. But not from the decalogue, as he may have expected, but from Deuteronomy 6: 5 and Leviticus 19: 18. "Upon these two commandments (love to God and love to one's neighbour) hang *all* the law and the prophets." What a resounding vindication of *every* commandment given by God, and not one belittled by His reply. The disquietude of the lawyer is not recorded, but can be readily imagined.

But now to the unsolved riddle forming the title of this paper. The truly routed religionists, who had posed their trivial riddles, Pharisees, Sadducees and the lawyer alike, must have shared the feelings of G. K. Chesterton's "Wise Men", who said,

*O, we have learnt to peer and pore
On tortured puzzles from our
youth.
We know all labyrinthine lore,
We are three wise men of
yore,
And we know all things but the
truth.*

They can only now await the coup d'etat that must surely come from Him whose answers they

had sought and received, but inwardly despised. The initiative was now His, and most graciously He uses it to propound His riddle to them. This was neither facetious nor intentionally puzzling. Indeed, while not appealing to their intellect, it was a challenge to their understanding of the Scriptures they professed to revere. How wise they would be if they could give the true answer. "Jesus asked them saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto Him, The son of David." All so far very correct, but now comes the riddle. "He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" Did they know the answer, or would thy be forced to condone their ignorance? A complete haitus ensues in which not one single word is attempted. "And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions." Thus a most instructive riddle remained, for them, unsolved, nor till this day can they solve that problem.

There is no unsolved riddle for the believer, possessed of the Holy Spirit Who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2: 10). To him it is plain that David in Psalm 110 is speaking of Jehovah (LORD) who said to David's Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. Since it was not true in fact at that time it must be prophetic in relation to the Messiah, who truly would come of royal David's line and therefore be his lineal son. Yet greater far than great king David would He be,

because in Psalm 2 God says of Him, "Thou art my Son." So it would be that David's son would also be David's Lord. Here is the solution to the otherwise unanswered riddle.

Even further depths are to be found in this incident when the parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels are examined, and a further quotation in Acts 2: 34. The differences of wording in these passages would indicate four ways in which Psalm 110 (and indeed all Scripture) was written, viz:

Matthew 22: 43 reads,

"David in spirit calls him Lord."

Mark 12: 36 reads,

"David himself said by the Holy Ghost."

Luke 20: 42 reads,

"David himself saith in the book of Psalms."

Acts 2: 34 reads,

"David saith himself. . . ."

"Out of the Strong . . ."

Samson was much more than a match for the lion, and rent it as one would rend a kid. In like manner all the powers of darkness gathered against the Lord Jesus Christ, for He came to expose all that was false and to establish all that was true. But, in death He gained the victory; by dying He overthrew the foe; and, just as the carcass of Samson's lion yielded meat and sweetness, so the death of Jesus yields life and nourishment for the soul, and true joy for the heart. We see the life and nourishment for the soul, and true joy for the heart. We see the reality and faithfulness of divine love displayed in that great conflict and victory, and we owe our every blessing to it.

The hand that smote the lion held the honey, and Samson shared it, the remarkable fruit of his victory, with his parents, as they walked in company with him.

The great anti-type of this should yield abundant joy to us. All blessing is held in the mighty hand which smote the power of death, and it is the delight of our Lord Jesus Christ to dispense to us of that which He holds so securely. . . . That we may feast upon the honey is the Lord's desire for us.

Firstly, Matthew 22 refers to David's own spirit in writing the Psalm. Thus it was written by CONVICTION, not under duress.

Secondly, Mark 12: 36 establishes that it was by the Holy Ghost and therefore came by INSPIRATION, not human invention.

Thirdly, Luke 20: 42 affirms that it was written in the book of Psalms, therefore set down by DICTATION, that is in the Scripture.

Fourthly, Acts 2: 34 confirms that it was David himself who said it. That is, it was his own CONFESSION, giving the glory to his Greater Son.

The significance of these differences underlines the care and beauty with which the Holy Spirit has indited Scripture, and would encourage us to apply ourselves with ever greater diligence to its study, even when the superficial reading of it presents an apparently unsolved riddle.

(Colossians 4: 9)

ONESIMUS — a faithful and beloved brother. Such is the wonderful commendation of the aged Apostle Paul for this young man.

Read again the very touching and kindly letter of the Apostle to Philemon and there find the excellent reference which he gives to Onesimus — a faithful, obedient and devoted servant.

If we were to retrace this young man's history we would have to go back to a small town in Asia Minor, near to the town of Colossae, to the residence of a prosperous citizen, Philemon by name. In this home young Onesimus was a servant or slave along no doubt with many others. His master Philemon and his wife, Apphia, differed greatly from the many other well-to-do people of the city in that they both had embraced the Christian faith through the faithful ministry of the Apostle Paul. No doubt the treatment of the slaves would, therefore, be very different from the normal treatment of menial servants. In these favoured conditions young Onesimus lived and served. Probably he heard the message of the Gospel from his master, and possibly even from the lips of the Apostle himself. But this reckless young blade wanted to be free to throw off all the restraint placed upon him, to cast off the yoke around him even though it was a godly one. Finally, pilfering his master's goods or money, he cut loose and headed for what he considered to be the safest place for a runaway slave, the Imperial City of Rome, hundreds of miles distant. How or when he reached his destination we know not, but reach it

he did. There he no doubt would mix with the underworld city. Glorious Rome was now decadent Rome, glorying now in its vice, corruption and immorality. What of Rome's underworld then into which this young man sought refuge? It beggars description — a pit of sin and filth!

But by the Grace of God, he is brought into contact with this strange man Paul, now a prisoner in that same city under the monstrous Roman Emperor, Nero. How this meeting took place we are not told, but this reckless, useless, disobedient young man was gloriously converted and his whole life completely transformed.

No longer slinking from his master, but desiring to go back to him.

No longer rebellious, but wanting to serve.

No longer disobedient, but wanting to obey.

What had happened? Onesimus had heard the voice and call of the Saviour to him and he had responded in faith and the Lord Jesus had cleansed his heart and entered into his life and caused this wonderful change. This was not reformation but rather regeneration. This was not conformation but transformation. Only Christ could do this in Onesimus as He alone can do this in us. For are we not all Christ's Onesimuses? The Grace of God has found us and brought us and lifted us out of the pit of sin, and from the miry clay, set our feet upon a rock and established our goings. He has put a new song in

our mouths, even praise unto our God!

So gladly now the Apostle writes this reference for this young man. Firstly, he was a *Faithful Servant*. Both here in Colossians and in his letter to Philemon the Apostle fixes our attention on this lovely characteristic of this young man Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother. His name Onesimus meant this very thing — faithful. But how well Philemon the old master would remember that if ever a man belied his name it was this young fellow, Onesimus. Why, he should have been called unfaithful. I have no doubt that before he descended so low as to steal from his master, he had committed many other acts of unfaithfulness. Perhaps if it had not been for the fact that his master was a Christian, he would have been sold or even worse than that. So that Philemon would have him well sized up, an unfaithful, untrustworthy servant.

But now the Apostle writes in glowing terms of this young man being faithful and trustworthy. He has been transformed by the mighty indwelling power of Christ and now he bears his name Onesimus, faithful, with great dignity. Paul had found him to be a trustworthy friend. When others were ashamed of the Apostle's bonds, when others were afraid of being associated with him in prison, this young man was ready and willing to come and go in quiet and faithful service bringing help, kindness and assistance to Paul.

So that it is with joy that the Apostle writes — he is a faithful servant. Surely this is what the Lord looks for in each one of us, faithfulness to Himself, in whatever work we are given to do, in our

homes, in our daily lives, in our Christian witness.

How good if we too, might receive commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

Paul goes on to call Onesimus an *Obedient Servant*. I am sure that one of the characteristics of this young man before he met the Lord was disobedience. But what a change has taken place. He has received Christ and in receiving Christ he has been transformed. Now this young man is fully prepared, come what may, to obey the command of the Lord to him to return to his old master, the master whom he had defrauded, cheated and disobeyed in such a despicable manner.

We must bear in mind that a runaway slave when he was caught was treated without mercy. A slave was merely a dispensable tool, the property of his master. But Onesimus was fully prepared to obey the Word of the Lord to him, no matter what the cost.

How prepared are we to obey His Word to us? The Lord Jesus said "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." The obedience into which we are called as Christians should and must touch every part of our lives.

It touches our home life. We who are Christian parents, has the Lord His place in our homes? To the young Christian, obedience in the home is enjoined as well.

It touches our social life. Do we cultivate the close friendship of those who love the Lord?

It touches our assembly life. How much the health and prosperity of our life in fellowship depends on our obedience to the Word of God!

Be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another.

Consider one another.

Pray for one another.

Love one another! This new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.

The path of obedience has always been the path of blessing in which alone the "delights of His love" are proved.

Onesimus was an obedient servant, fully prepared to obey the Word of the Lord. Paul now completes his glowing commendation, *A Devoted Servant*. Paul calls him a brother beloved. It brought young Onesimus right into the inner circle of the Apostle's love and affection along with Timothy, "my own son in the faith", and with Luke the beloved physician. How was it that this rebellious, undisciplined slave had now entered into that close and dear relationship with Paul.

I believe it was simply that Onesimus had revealed not only his great love for Paul, but also his undivided love and devotion to the Lord, who had followed him through the years from Asia Minor to the pit of sin in Rome, and had in matchless grace met him and saved him. There was now within his heart like desires after Christ along with his father in the faith. He owed much to the Apostle, but how much more he owed to the Lord.

On what or on whom is our love and devotion set? Perhaps the saddest words penned by the Apostle concern another young man called Demas. When Paul wrote to Tim-

othy from prison it was with tears in his eyes; "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." It grieved the Apostle much that this young man had turned away from him, but how much more to realise that he had also forsaken the Lord. What had happened to this young man who had started the Christian life so well, who had served Paul during his early imprisonment? Simply this, the attractions of the world around him were so great that slowly but surely he was drawn away from his love for Christ by them and into God-dishonouring pleasures. God has given us, in His providential care and love, very much in life to enjoy, but the pleasures which would draw us away from our love for the Lord must of necessity be wrong.

It was then with breaking heart that Paul wrote "Demas hath forsaken me having loved this present world."

Of Daniel it could be said "a man greatly beloved". Why? Because he purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the King's meat! He would have nothing to do with the evil practices and pleasures of the world around him to which he had access. Rather he set his love and devotion upon the Lord.

What is it that the Lord wants most of all from us? He wants our service, our talents, our time, our energy but above all else He wants our love and devotion. "Son, daughter, give me thine heart." Thus Paul gladly wrote of Onesimus that he was a faithful, obedient and devoted servant. May it also be said of us who also have been the objects of Divine Grace.

3. THE TIME IS FULFILLED

THE Kingdom of God had no existence prior to New Testament times. This fact is of such fundamental importance that it is worth while to linger over it. It begins to emerge in the earliest references in the Gospels, and to bring this out more clearly, let us begin with Mark 1: 14, 15. "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

There are here three announcements about the Kingdom of God. First, it is good news. Although it involves assuming beforehand what still remains to be demonstrated from Scripture, it is impossible not to pause at this point and reflect on the joy and gladness which comes with the certainty that God is going to reign on earth, that His will is going to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In no other way shall "all the crooked be made straight, and the rough place smooth". Only when "out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem", shall the nations "beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more". When God's Kingdom appears then His people will say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His Salvation." The best possible news regarding this earth is the gospel of God's Kingdom, even though that Kingdom must be established by the bringing down of all man's loftiness and the purging of his sin.

The second announcement about the Kingdom of God in Mark 1: 15 is, "the time is fulfilled". A definite time was coming to an end with this preaching. From the moment of His utterance in this verse, it would be necessary to go back over a certain fixed period now fulfilled. Where shall we look to find a promise which would fit these circumstances? Surely we are taken directly to Daniel 2: 44, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." We must return later to this Scripture in Daniel for a fuller examination, but for the time being we note that an earthly Kingdom of God and of heaven established in the Person of the Stone cut out without hands was promised to follow and displace the Roman Empire. The primary meaning therefore, of the phrase "the Kingdom of God" is the millennial reign of Christ. Accordingly, the third announcement is that the Kingdom of God is "at hand", and this is the principal part of the message. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God with all its glowing promise had come near.

In Daniel 7: 13, most explicitly amplified in Matthew 24: 30, the Second Coming of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God in power would be an event like lightning, visible and compelling for all the tribes of the earth. Now, although the presence of the King was evidenced by samples of the powers of the world to come (Luke 10: 11, "notwithstanding be assured of this, that the Kingdom of God has come near you"), very soon the Lord began to explain to His disciples the very different manner in which the

Kingdom at this time was to be set up. Its promised establishment by the visible splendour and power of His second coming was not a mystery. It was not something hitherto hidden and unrevealed. It was clearly described by Daniel. In both Mark and Luke we have it recorded that Jesus began to initiate His disciples by parables into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. This was a hitherto unrevealed form of the Kingdom, to precede the Millennium, and at that moment being inaugurated by the quiet going forth of the Sower, sowing the seed of the Word of God. Reflection on the sweep of Kingdom truth reviewed in the previous chapter seems to make it plain that it is this mystery form of the Kingdom of God which is the predominant, though not exclusive, subject of the New Testament references.

The truth under consideration in this chapter is that the Kingdom of God had no existence before New Testament times, and further thought must be given to this. A popular view is that since God is the King eternal, He must always have had a Kingdom. That God is eternally and in all time the Sovereign Lord and Ruler of all is not in question, but it is absolutely indisputable that the phrase "the Kingdom of God" as used throughout the New Testament does not refer to this general, universal Kingdom of God in all time. It does not refer to God's general supervision of history. It refers primarily to the millennial reign of Christ, but more often to the mystery form of that Kingdom which likewise had no existence before the Son of Man went forth as the Sower.

Abraham and Moses and David and John the Baptist were not in the Kingdom of God, but the least professor of repentance and faith is in

that Kingdom. This truth is quite categorically stated by the Lord in two passages: "There is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7: 28). "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached" (Luke 16: 16).

It is of course necessary to take prayerful and patient account of other Scriptures which have often been quoted in this connection. Perhaps the two most important are 1 Chronicles 28: 5 and Matthew 21: 43. The former refers to the throne of David and Solomon as "the throne of the kingdom of Jehovah over Israel", and this concept is indeed one of great appeal, setting in a wonderful light the true nature of David's kingdom and of God's blessing on the man after His own heart. But it is abundantly plain that the one — the throne of the kingdom of Jehovah over Israel — is at the beginning of the chain of events, while the other — the Kingdom of God over the whole earth (Daniel 2: 35) — is at the end of the chain. There is a real connection, in that it was on account of the sad infidelity of the later kings of David's line that the glory departed and earthly dominion was given by God to Nebuchadnezzar. Only when the times of the Gentiles have run their course will a Kingdom far greater than David's appear — the Kingdom of God and of heaven.

Matthew 21: 43 reads, in explanation of the parable of the wicked husbandmen, "Therefore I say unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof". This has been held to mean that Israel must have possessed the Kingdom of God before their

rejection of Christ. In view, however, of the categorical nature of the Scriptures quoted above, which state so clearly that the Kingdom of God had no existence prior to new Testament times, Matthew 21: 43 need mean no more than that the Kingdom of God was removed from being at hand, or near, for Israel.

The point we have reached in our study of the fact that only in the New Testament is the Kingdom of God set up, might well lead us to end in a meditation on the desire of God to receive fruit. In the Kingdom of God He does receive that fruit: what more moving appeal could reach us than this, to "seek first the Kingdom of God". See how the heart of God is involved, and the heart of the prophet is awakened when he sings (Isaiah 5: 1ff.), "I will sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching His vineyard". Then, after detailing the manner in which nothing in the way of care and cultivation which could be lavished upon it had been withheld, Jehovah turns Himself and addresses His people, "I looked that it should bring forth grapes". Here is the heart of God, in patient

love looking for response, for fruit to be His delight from the people of His choice: but "it brought forth wild grapes". The fruit was and is character and behaviour. The fruit He called wild grapes was oppression and injustice between brethren, self-indulgence, and pride.

Shall we not be the people bringing forth fruit for God? Shall we not seek first that Kingdom in which such fruit is found?

In olden times, as He mourned over it, He broke down the wall thereof, and the wild boar from the forest wasted it, because this was the issue of a necessary probation. It was in the Gospel days that He took away His Kingdom and gave it to a people bringing forth its fruits. Make no mistake, God has not given up His deep desire to receive fruit from His people. Rather, He has, in the Kingdom of God, taken a new way to obtain it. The appointed instrument is the good seed of the word of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit given, the fruit is seen: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.

ABRAHAM

R. THOMSON

" CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE "

THE eternal purpose of God is, that He will in the dispensation of the fulness of times, head up "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Ephesians 1: 10). To take account of the activities of the Godhead to bring this about is extremely interesting and of spiritual importance, as we shall see.

Adam presents the dominion

and headship which were given to him at his creation, although they afterwards became marred through the entrance of sin. In *Abel* we see redemption by blood; and the only means of approach to God must now be in righteousness through the substitutionary death and blood-shedding of an innocent victim. *Abel* offered of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat

thereof. *Enoch* declared the promise of translation, for he, the seventh from Adam, was taken to heaven without dying, following a very long season of unbroken communion with God. *Noah* depicts the truth of salvation, that the only means of deliverance was by entering into the ark of gopher wood, which he was commanded by God to prepare against the overflowing flood of waters upon the earth. We next have blessing in *Abraham* who brings out the importance of God's pleasure to bless on the principle of faith. Also we see God's dwelling in connection with *Moses*, who was commanded by Jehovah to build the tabernacle in the wilderness, a sanctuary for Him to dwell with His redeemed people, Israel. In *David*, the kingdom was established, and the thought confirms us in the assurance that God is working to finality in Christ, and the glorious moment will surely come when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be in all (1 Corinthians 15: 24-28).

In considering the life of *Abraham*, we see the promises of God to bless, and the importance of faith to lay hold of them. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11: 6). The first mention of *Abram* (as he then was) is given in Genesis 11: 26. "And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran." Out of the scattering of Babel, God was to bring to light that which would be to His praise and glory. Shem (of whom Christ came) must be in pre-eminence over Japheth and Ham, and Canaan was to be servant to both Shem and

Japheth. Thus we have the generation of Terah, and the central truth of the few chapters, Genesis 12-25 concerns the Lord's gracious dealings with Abram, the son of Terah. God's call to him was that he must get out of his country, his kindred and his father's house, and go into a land which the Lord would shew him. This command evidently was not immediately obeyed, for Terah took Abram, Sarai and Lot from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran, while Nahor and his family continued in Mesopotamia. Terah and his household abode in Haran to the day of his death.

We are now to consider the call of God and Abram's response to it. In the days of Noah, the word to him was, "Come thou in", and he was preserved from the judgment. Now, the command to Abram is, "Get thee out", to receive the blessing of God; for He will not bless in any association with evil, but speaks to the heart in such a way that when there is obedience, He is free to prove all He can be in the riches of His grace. This testimony of God to His servant Abram is given to us in four "I wills".

1. "I will shew thee a land."
2. "I will make of thee a great nation."
3. "I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing."
4. "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12: 2-3).

"Abram departed . . . and Lot went with him." This is a short phrase which conveyed that there would be great testings to follow. So Abram passed through the land of Canaan, not as a mighty conqueror

with the sword, but as a pilgrim and a stranger in obedience to the word of God. This delightful progress is observed by the Lord Who appeared to him to confirm His promise to give this land to him and to his seed. Here Abram erected an altar, and as a worshipper was in communion with God. He moved on, for he was a stranger in the land of promise, and pitched his tent between Bethel (House of God) and Hai (a heap of ruins). This must be the dividing line, for here also, returning to the land, he builded his second altar and called upon the name of the Lord, as a worshipper and a dependent sojourner. Each step was a test in going and journeying for he was proving the One Who had called him and promised so much.

Every step so far trodden, was a triumph of faith; but could he trust God in all circumstances which were to come upon him? A time of famine came and there was a dearth in the land where the Lord had directed the steps of His servant. Did Abram readily turn to God in his extremity and need, and seek His care and sustenance? We note that he did not do so, for probably he had not yet learned the blessedness of complete trust and surrender Godward. He turned aside to go down to Egypt, and entered into a

covenant of lies, saying that Sarai his wife was his sister, lest they should kill him. Pharaoh saw the beauty of Sarai and treated Abram well for her sake.

There may be a measure of good, and earthly prosperity, from pursuing a worldly course, for Abram became prosperous, but it brought no glory to God. However, the Lord looked upon His failing children and plagued Pharaoh and his house for Sarai, who was in a place of sore temptation. Abram too, was reprimanded by Pharaoh, and asked to leave the country with his wife. The over-ruling hand of Jehovah had been in evidence, guarding and preserving His own, and Pharaoh commanded his men concerning them, that their return to Canaan must be in peace. So Abram went up out of Egypt until he came to Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning; unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first. The deeply solemn lesson to us is that there can be no spiritual progress, or glory to God, through turning aside to paths of expediency in a time of testing. It is also wonderfully true that there is recovery by returning to the former paths, for it is recorded that there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

EARTHLY THINGS — OR HEAVENLY?

T. S. DAVISON

EARTHLY THINGS
(PHILIPPIANS 3: 18, 19)

"ENEMIES of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." These words were

not written concerning pagan idolaters at Philippi, or anywhere else, but of many professing Christians known to the Apostle Paul at the time of writing. These were not

said to be the enemies of Christ, but of the cross of Christ. In this they were typical of a popular modernism today, which denies every fundamental truth of Christianity, and in particular the significance of the Cross of Christ.

The deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless humanity, the miracles He performed, His bodily resurrection and ascension to heaven, His present session as glorified man at God's right hand, His coming again to set up His kingdom on the earth, His judgment of the living and the dead, and above all, the sacrificial character of His death at Calvary as dealing with the question of sin, have all been first questioned, then denied. Assent is given to these fundamental truths in many cases with mental reservations, which make the repetition of the creeds of Christendom a hypocritical farce. This denuding of "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) of its vital content leaves these "Christians" with a professed belief in Christ as an outstandingly good man, and a teacher of revolutionary ethics (promulgated in a wonderful sermon preached on a hillside overlooking the sea of Galilee), but whose ideas were so far in advance of His time that He died as a martyr for His opinions. The "Christian religion" is considered to be mainly founded on this "sermon on the mount", and to be primarily and mainly applicable to the earth and the affairs of this life. Any portions of the "sermon" which appear to conflict with this are conveniently ignored, or explained away.

Christianity without the cross is characteristically concerned with the earth and the conditions thereon, and is not interested in heaven. Those referred to by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3: 18, 19 are

said by him to "mind earthly things". If he had indicated "worldly things" as occupying their minds, there would have been no difficulty in associating this with the other evil features mentioned; for Scripture clearly instructs as to the moral principles permeating the world system, i.e., lust and pride, and also as to its subservience to Satan, its god and prince. But the expression "earthly things" seems almost an anti-climax following on the four solemn statements about these people who bore Christ's name, but whose walk was the cause of the Apostle's tears. What meaning can lie beneath these apparently innocuous words?

Actually, the expression is self-explanatory and the meaning clear. Earthly things are simply the things inseparable from man's life on the earth in his flesh and blood condition. In the beginning of man's history as a sinner, after Cain "went out from the presence of the Lord", his descendants soon set about the task of making the earth as comfortable a place as possible to dwell in (away from the presence of God), and in doing so established the first civilization (Genesis 4: 16-22). This was much more complex than the simplicity of the lives of Adam and Eve, Cain himself, and Abel. Many more civilizations have run their course down through the ages, and have continuously increased in complexity; and the current civilization of the twentieth century A.D. is undoubtedly the most complex of all. It is also true, however, that when the complexities are reduced to the bare essentials, it emerges that all man's activities on the earth are concerned with three things, i.e., family relationships, food, and raiment. These are basically the "earthly things" of Philippians 3: 19. Ignoring the first mentioned

factor, for the purpose of this paper, it remains that the necessity for food and raiment furnishes the underlying reason for man's daily toil during his earthly life.

This is confirmed by Scripture from the very beginning of man's history as a fallen, sinful creature. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," said the Lord God to Adam (Genesis 3: 19). "All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled," said Solomon, the preacher (Ecclesiastes 6: 7). "If any would not work, neither should he eat," said the Apostle of the Gentiles (2 Thessalonians 3: 10).

It is clearly, therefore, God's provision for man, in his fallen state, that he should work for food and raiment. The fact that throughout human history there has been the accumulation of great wealth by some, and at the same time the suffering of poverty and privation by many, is simply further evidence of the disorder introduced into the world system consequent upon man's self-will and covetousness.

The "earthly things" referred to in Philippians 3: 19 are not inherently evil things. On the contrary, they are legitimate and normal. The true Christian must, of necessity, be concerned with them as long as he (or she) is in the body. The vitally important question which arises, (and which should challenge the conscience of every believer) is — what is the attitude of the *mind* to these things?

The Lord Jesus Himself, in the days of His flesh, gave very clear instruction as to this point. When a certain man appealed to Him to intervene in a dispute between him and his brother regarding an inheritance, He declined, but took occasion to warn all concerned against covetousness, for, said He, "A man's

life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Furthermore, after exposing the folly of the rich farmer who left God completely out of his calculations, He added, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Then followed the practical application to the disciples, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on . . . for all these things do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Luke 12: 13-31).

These instructions from our Lord Himself are amply confirmed in the epistles of the New Testament, and therefore in the light of the full revelation of Christianity. After speaking of some who imagined that "gain" and "godliness" are synonymous terms, the Apostle Paul assured Timothy that "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Timothy 6: 5-8).

At the same time Paul also issued a solemn warning concerning those who "will be rich" — that is, those who make the pursuit of riches an object in itself. The tragic results he spoke of have all too often been the bitter experience of Christians throughout the ages since the words were written (1 Timothy 6: 9, 10).

Most Christians would thankfully acknowledge — particularly in those parts of the world enjoying the benefits of the so-called "affluent society" — that God in His goodness has provided them not only with food and raiment, but

with a great deal more. A smaller section may even qualify for inclusion with "those who are rich in this world", who are charged that "they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6: 17-19).

It is clear, therefore, from the consideration of these portions of the Word of God (and others which could be cited) that "earthly things", although necessary, should occupy a *relatively* subordinate place in the life of the Christian. God knows the needs of his children in this respect, and his faithfulness may be counted on to supply every need "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4: 19).

HEAVENLY THINGS (COLOSSIANS 3: 1-2)

In the sphere of nature it has been affirmed that "nature abhors a vacuum". However this may be, it is undeniable that there is no such thing as a vacuum in spiritual things. If the believer's mind is not to be set on earthly things, the alternative indicated in Scripture is, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your *mind* (N.T.) on things above, not on things on the earth."

Why should the mind be set on things above, and not on things on the earth? Because Christ is no longer on the earth, where he was crucified, but sits above, at the right hand of God; and because the Christ-

ian's life is hid with Christ in God awaiting the day of manifestation. "When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear (or, be manifested [N.T.]) with him in glory" (Colossians 3: 3). The life of the Christian is a complete mystery to the worldling, and also to the professing Christians under notice in Philippians 3: 18, 19. How often the remark has been made by such, "I don't know how you people live!" But there will be no mystery in the coming day when Christ is manifested, and His Saints are manifested with Him in glory, their life no longer "hidden".

Reverting to the passage in Philippians, the apostle reminds his readers that, in contrast to those whose minds are set on earthly things, "our conversation is in heaven; from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, (or, body of humiliation [N.T.]) that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself" (Philippians 3: 20-21). The *hope* of the Christian is therefore *heavenly*, and not earthly.

Furthermore, every true believer has been transferred from the headship of Adam, the first man, who is of the earth, earthy, to that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Second Man, out of heaven. He is therefore *heavenly in origin*.

Further, "as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." He is therefore *heavenly in character*.

Again, "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly". The believer is therefore *heavenly in destiny* (1 Corinthians 15: 47-49).

Finally, Christians are said to be "partakers of the *heavenly calling*"

(Hebrews 3: 1), in contrast to the calling of Israel, which was earthly.

These, and many other blessed truths, are some of "the things which are above", being established in Christ, the heavenly Man, sitting at the right hand of God.

CONCLUSION

When earthly things are allowed to assume a disproportionate place in the daily life of the Christian, first love for Christ is eclipsed, the indwelling Spirit of God is grieved, heavenly things are progressively displaced from the mind, there is retardation and eventual complete arrest of spiritual progress and prosperity. In short, obsession with earthly things results in complete

disaster.

The warnings of the word of God in this matter have always been relevant and timely, but surely never more so than in this age of all-pervading materialism. No Christian is exempt from the danger of being infected by the spirit of the age. The only infallible defence against that spirit is whole-hearted subjection to the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. This ministry directs the heart to Christ, and to that heavenly sphere where He is supreme, awaiting that moment He spoke of before leaving this earth, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 3).

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

4. THE FIRST CORINTHIAN LETTER

(Concluded)

TRUE CHRISTIAN UNITY, IN PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE

WE have seen in chapters 1 to 4 how attachment to wrong objects of esteem leads to factions, envyings and disunity; these are the signs of a low spiritual state, even though there may be outward activity and apparent progress. On the other hand, a proper attachment to Christ, the one true rallying-point and bond of unity for all Christians, will produce effects of a very different kind. Harmony, orderliness, and true spiritual growth will be the outcome. A later section of the letter presents teaching of this kind, and it seems advisable to consider this next. The relevant sections are parts of chapters 10 and 11, and the whole of chapters 12 to 14.

What Christians are really involved in, jointly and mutually, and whether aware of it or not, is "the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1: 9). Alike and together they benefit from the shedding of the blood of Christ. On that great basis they share much else together, of His love and of His blessings. The vital link with Himself is also the indissoluble bond of unity between them. All are members of the body of Christ. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (12: 13). This is presented as firm fact. It is what God has done. But correspon-

dence with the truth of it is also urged, and some aspects of the practical bearing of this truth will now be indicated.

First, participation in this great fellowship, or communion, is presented in chapter 10 as the ground for carefulness about other associations and activities. To partake of the Lord's table, as all Christians do in the general sense, places a moral obligation upon them. There must be no compromise with evil; great care about questionable activities is necessary. Otherwise, we provoke the Lord to jealousy, and His dealings with us will prove that we are not stronger than He is (10: 20-22). Even neutral and lawful actions are not always expedient for the Christian. Our own imagined knowledge and freedom can be a faulty guide in such matters, and we must in any case bear in mind the impact of our actions on fellow-Christians (10: 23ff.).

The subject of the Lord's supper is introduced at this stage; observance of this is an expression of the oneness of all Christians (10: 17). How wrong then to partake of it in a way which belies what it represents. Much about the meaning of the supper is clarified in chapter 11. The setting of this, however, is the unworthy manner in which the Corinthians observed it. Disunity and disorderliness at the supper are a practical denial of its meaning, and a contradiction of the spirit and intention of its Author. Earlier, the same chapter speaks of the relative status of men and women in the Christian assembly, pointing out what is suitable as a recognition of the place and honour of Christ. The Lord's supremacy and authority, and the common bond between Christians which exists in Himself, is the key to correct representation of His mind amongst Christians.

Self-importance, and a sense of the value of our own personal judgments, make for the very reverse of this.

Another important section follows in chapters 12 to 14. The main theme here (12: 1, 14: 1) is the exercise of the "spiritual gifts" with which the individual members of the church were endowed. Since these all originated, of His own sovereign action, from "one and the self-same Spirit", it was clear that His control of their use would be expected to lead to harmonious and effective results. The confusion which was characteristic of the Christian gatherings at Corinth plainly did not arise from *that* Source. This leads to a more general development of the theme of "the body of Christ". Several important features are underlined using the human body as the illustration. The body is a single entity, a perfect whole, yet made up of many parts. The mutual dependences of all the parts, the distinctness and variety of the many contributions to the whole, yet the need and importance of each of these contributions, are features which are obvious in relation to the human body; "so also is Christ" (12: 12). Here the term "Christ" includes all that is of Himself, joined to Him by the link of life and union formed by the Spirit of God. A great reality which has no place in it for imperfection is in one sense expressed by this figure. This divine concept of the body of Christ is indeed an important truth to grasp. But, in its context, and with the existing situation at Corinth as the background, several of the practical lessons are especially apposite. The point is made, for instance, that special esteem should be reserved for the less prominent members, who may well be among the more vital ones. Also

when properly functioning, the body grows and develops. The functions of the parts are all co-ordinated, with the well-being of the whole as the object. Constructive activities are proper there. What tends towards disintegration and sectarianism is quite out of character with the illustration.

The same subject is carried over into chapter 14, where the profitable conduct of their actual assembled gatherings is mainly in view. Helpful contributions should be encouraged and stressed, rather than those of a merely spectacular kind. Ability to contribute profitably should be the aim. "Prophecy" is given priority, while activities and gifts which were valued highly at Corinth come low in the order. Even prophecy (that is, speaking a message from God) must be clear and understandable and edifying, if it is to be valuable. There are suggestions that the briefer contributions are often the clearer ones. Orderliness is important. Obedience to the various instructions here, as being "the commandments of the Lord" (14: 17), is the test of real spiritual understanding of the Lord's will in such matters.

The intervening chapter provides a vital link between chapters 12 and 14. The proper exercise of gifts (chapter 14) depends on more than simply their existence (chapter 12). Chapter 13 describes what is needed. The passage is a very beautiful one, and its theme is of paramount importance. Possession of gifts is futile if they are not used in the right spirit; love is an essential prerequisite for the right exercise of any ability. Apart altogether from gifts, the attitudes and characteristics of love are of positive value in themselves, and greatly to be admired. Nothing compares with love in quality, beauty and permanent

value. All that love does is constructive, self-effacing. It thinks along profitable lines; it refrains from damaging activities and misjudged suppositions. It is in control of itself. With this underlying their contributions all would be well at Corinth. Making love their main pursuit would regulate their conduct into really desirable channels.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Chapter 15 deals with this distinct subject. It is perhaps not surprising that some of these Corinthians should doubt and even deny the possibility of bodily resurrection (15: 12). The frame of mind which has a high opinion of its own judgments will readily entertain and express such doubts.

Paul counters this in the following way. If resurrection of the body is not possible, then Christ did not rise from the dead. And if Christ did not rise, they were not Christians at all. Their faith was futile; they had believed a message which was false. The basis of the gospel was non-existent. He had preached it, and they had believed it, to no purpose. They were yet in their sins. Hope for the future was groundless. Living, working, suffering for Christ was misguided and valueless.

But in reality each of these conclusions is false, and the opposite true, since Christ is risen from the dead. There could be no doubt about it. Scripture foretold it; the evidence of the many witnesses was substantial and clear. Paul himself was one of these, and they themselves had experienced the power of the risen Christ. Furthermore, other events of a like character are to follow, guaranteed by the fact that this first event in the chain has already taken place. "Christ the

firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (15: 23). Later still will be the complete subjugation of every adversary, including, last of all, death itself. The Christian hope, and the ultimate overpowering of all that opposes God, is assured because Christ is risen.

A further discussion, full of valuable instruction, arises from the question, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" (15: 35). The first part of the question is not answerable to the satisfaction of limited human minds, but a partial answer to the rest of the question is given. Events of a character not dissimilar to the one under discussion take place repeatedly in the natural course of things. The seed is sown and the plant ultimately appears. This is so commonplace as to be accepted without question. Yet understanding of such a process is very limited. It would be foolish to deny it because of failure to understand. From the natural process of the germination of a seed lessons are drawn, by analogy, regarding the resurrection of the body of the believer. The identity in kind of the plant and the seed from which it springs, and the variety of the seeds which may be sown, are facts so clear as to need no pressing; and the conclusion is drawn that in the resurrection the distinctness of each individual will be preserved. Yet there is a difference too, of a clear kind, between the plant which grows and the "bare grain" which produced it. What is "sown in dishonour" is an earthly, natural, corruptible body; but the body "raised in glory" is heavenly, spiritual, incorruptible, bearing the image of Christ.

A few further verses (15: 51ff.) resolve problems about happenings

when that great moment arrives for which the Christian hopes. The trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised and the living changed. "We" shall be changed, as Paul puts it, the hope being so bright in his own vision. Then come words of triumph and thanksgiving to God; and, last of all, encouragement for Christians to continue in a steadfast way. Their work in the Lord's interest is well worth while and all that they hope for is certain Christ is indeed risen.

PRESENT NEED FOR THIS TEACHING

The resurrection of the body is perhaps more freely doubted in the 20th century than ever before in the Christian era, and this is quite common within the pale of the Christian profession. Also, unquestionably, in our day moral issues are counted as of less importance than they once were. Standards can be low even in Christian circles. This letter makes no concessions on either of these lines. For those who profess the name of Christ it challenges and rebukes slackness either in our moral outlook or in our basic beliefs.

There is today much of the sectarian kind, too, which makes the teaching of this letter highly relevant. What is currently called Christian cannot with any justness be compared favourably with the first-century version of it at Corinth. Incipient cleavages have long since become real ones, and these are many and widespread. The position is in general well beyond repair by individual Christians or groups of Christians who feel its sadness and its inconsistencies.

Yet the possibility of acting in the spirit of this teaching is by no means denied to us. So plainly is the Lord's mind indicated that those who seek humbly to obey the prin-

ciples set out here can surely look for help in fulfilling them, within the bounds of what is possible to them. To make everything of Christ and the vital link with Him which unites believers, and to desire to obey Him, while avoiding what would displease Him, are the first and important steps. Accompanying this is the need to refrain from recognizing dividing principles which Scripture would not support. The introduction of false terms of membership or other conditions of fellowship, which essentially define a sect, needs to be guarded against. It will be a test whether we are really prepared to act in this way; and, having begun, we shall not automatically continue on that path. The letter stresses the attitudes which will help. Amongst these are humility, low estimates of ourselves, love and forbearance. The constructive, co-operative, and helpful spirit must be fostered. It will be necessary to guard against laxity and carelessness. What is evil will need to be recognized and avoided; and at the same time watchfulness against high-handedness and pride will be required. Pride in the correctness of our position could well be the most unsuitable attitude of all. Our only true boasting as Christians is in the Lord.

It seems evident however that spiritual progress lies in the direc-

tion of obedience to this teaching. Unity and joy in the Lord, and a ready recognition in a practical way of His over-ruling and authority, will be the outcome. Those who seek to follow this path will enter, together and increasingly, into an enjoyment of the things of Christ which could be missed otherwise. Things not open to natural inquiry, but revealed and made available by the Spirit of God, will be theirs to explore. Upon the foundation already laid in their lives, gold, silver, and precious stones can in this way be built. The unity of the Spirit will be demonstrated amongst them in a practical sense. Their mutual care and love, and the profitable nature and orderliness of their joint activities will corroborate in a convincing way the truth that they hold.

What has been described may seem ideal, and little in evidence in our day. The desirability and need for it cannot, however, be in question. The instruction directed towards this end is clear. Nor can it be doubted that the power to work it out, the power of the Holy Spirit of God, is ever available to be drawn upon amongst the people of God. May we not fail on our part to use what He provides. May it be our concern to carry out the teaching of his letter and to avoid the pitfalls against which it warns us.

THE LORD OUR RESOURCE

HAMILTON SMITH

(PSALM 25)

THE Twenty-fifth Psalm describes the experiences of a believer who is opposed by enemies that are eager to triumph over him (2); who seek to entrap his feet (15), and hate

him with cruel and relentless hatred (19). He feels his desolation and is troubled in heart in the presence of the distresses by which he is surrounded (17).

In these circumstances his experiences take a three-fold form. First, he commits himself wholly to God, to be sustained and taught in the ways of God (1-7). Secondly, he comforts his soul by dwelling upon all that God is for those who fear Him (8-14). Thirdly, he spreads out before God his troubles and calls down the eye of God upon himself, his circumstances, and his enemies (15-22).

TRUST IN GOD

(Verses 1-3). The believer overcomes all his difficulties by implicit trust in the LORD. He does not, as one has said, take "the smallest step for the injury of his enemy, but he refers his case to Jehovah, and leaves it in His hands, looking for His deliverance". Committing himself to the LORD he can say, "Let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me". At times, in the presence of opposition and insults, we trust in ourselves, and our efforts, to avenge insults and crush opposers, only to find that we expose ourselves to shame and the triumph of our enemies. But, says the Psalmist, "Let none that wait on thee be ashamed".

(Verses 4, 5). Having found rest in committing himself, and his circumstances, to the LORD, he now desires to see Jehovah's ways; to be taught His *paths*, and to be led in the *truth*. Oftentimes, believers tend to be over-occupied with the evil ways of men, the crooked paths they tread, and the errors they teach. But God has His ways to guide the conduct of His people, His paths for their feet to tread, and His truth wherewith to instruct them. Our great concern should be to see His ways, to be taught His paths, and, not only to know the truth, but to be led in the truth. For such knowledge we shall

need to be continually waiting upon God as the Psalmist can say, "On Thee do I wait all the day."

(Verses 6, 7). The thought of God's ways reminds the believer of his own ways, often so contrary to God's. This leads to the confession of sins, and to the believer casting himself upon the tender mercies and loving-kindness of the LORD.

DELIGHT IN GOD

(Verse 8) Dwelling upon God's ways and paths and truth, leads the Psalmist to delight in God. He has confessed his sins, but realising that God is "good and upright", he has confidence that He will teach even a sinner His way.

(Verse 9). If then the LORD is good and upright there must be a right condition of soul to appreciate God's ways, to walk in His paths and learn His truth. It is the meek that God will guide, and "the meek will He teach His way". How often we can miss the guidance and teaching of the LORD through our vanity and self-importance; but the acknowledgement of sin, and the realisation of the goodness of God leads to a spirit of meekness which gets the guidance of the LORD, and light as to His way with a right judgement as to good and evil.

(Verse 10). Moreover, every step we take in the paths of the LORD will be marked by mercy, and according to truth, for those who obey the word — that "keep His covenant and His testimonies".

(Verse 11). Realising the mercy and truth of the LORD the soul can be thoroughly open with God. It does not seek to excuse or minimise its sins; on the contrary, it can say, "Pardon mine iniquity for it is great". The flesh would seek to excuse sin and say, "Pardon mine iniquity for it is small". Only the

knowledge that there is grace to meet all the sin, will enable us to own the greatness of our sin. It was the exceeding abundance of the grace that met Paul that enabled him to own that he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1: 14, 15).

(Verses 12-14). The acknowledgement of sin and the realisation of the goodness of God, not only leads to meekness, but to the fear of God. A God-fearing man is one who walks in the conscious sense of being in the presence of God, and who owns his responsibility to God. Such will not only have moral discernment between right and wrong, but will discern the path that God marks out for His people in the midst of the surrounding darkness and confusion. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him. He gives such to know His mind. They will see clearly that God has promised blessing for His people which will surely be fulfilled however difficult the day and however great the confusion and opposition.

Thus we learn that the condition of soul that is needed to see God's way, to be taught His paths, and to be led in His truth will be found in the one who confesses his sin (8); who is marked by meekness (9); who obeys the word (10), and who walks in the fear of the LORD (12). The flesh is in us and, unless judged and refused, will lead us to justify ourselves rather than confess our sins; will lead to self-importance and self-assertion rather than meekness; will

act in self-will rather than obey the word, and has no fear of God.

ALL UNDER THE EYE OF GOD

(Verses 15-18). From the midst of all his trials the believer looks to God and trusts in the One who is above all. He can say, "Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD". Looking up to the LORD he asks the LORD to look down upon his afflictions, the troubles of his heart, and his distressing circumstances.

(Verse 19). Further he asks the LORD to consider his enemies and their cruel hatred. He does not ask the LORD to judge them. To call down judgement upon our enemies may also call down the chastening rod upon ourselves. Far better to spread all before the LORD, and leave the LORD to act according to His perfect wisdom. In this spirit the Apostles acted. In New Testament days, when in the presence of their enemies, they did not invoke the judgment of the LORD, but simply brought their trial before the LORD. "Now Lord, behold their threatenings."

(Verses 20-22). Realising that everything in himself, his circumstances, and his enemies is under the eye of the LORD, he can quietly leave everything with the LORD, trusting in Him to keep his soul, while waiting the time when the LORD will redeem His people from all their troubles.

*Shew me Thy ways, O LORD;
Teach my Thy paths.
Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me:
For Thou art the God of my Salvation;
On Thee do I wait all the day.*

QUESTIONS

1. *Is it true or false that John's baptism was for Jews only?*
(Luke 3 mentions people, publicans and soldiers.)

A review of the passages in the prophets and in the gospels dealing with John the Baptist shows that, while Gentiles are not *explicitly* excluded, his mission was so specifically addressed to the Jews, children of Abraham, that in the absence of other evidence we should take it that his baptism was offered to Jews only. The locality where John was baptising was borderland, but this was evidently symbolic of the separation of those who accepted his baptism.

The only additional evidence is provided by the naming of the classes of those who accepted amendment of life by being baptised. These are detailed in the question, and it will appear that special examination is required in the cases of the publicans and soldiers. Only if Jews were indubitably excluded from these groups could they be taken as evidence that John's baptism was offered to non-Jews. In the case of the publicans, not only is there evidence in Josephus that under the Empire tax-gatherers were appointed from the provincials, but there is also the clear Scripture instance of Zachaeus, who was a son of Abraham.

The exact meaning of "soldiers" in Luke 3 is less clear. Roman soldiers are called in the gospels *stratiotai*, whereas these are *stratouomenoi*. It is not certain whether the "captains" of Luke 22: 52 had people under them called soldiers,

but it is highly probable that Herod had.

Thus, in the absence of clear proof in the names of these classes to the effect that John's baptism was for non-Jews, this rite remains clearly intended for the identification and separation of the remnant who feared the Lord, and will be His when He makes up His jewels.

2. *Is it true or false that "Go ye therefore and teach all nations", (Matthew 28: 19) represents the purpose of preaching today? Is it not rather to take out of the nations a people for His name?*

I suggest that Matthew 28: 19 cannot mean making all nations disciples in the totality of each nation. Both scriptures must mean making disciples of individuals out of all nations.

The question still remains whether the commission of Matthew 28: 19 refers to preaching the gospel today. In 10: 5ff. the mission at that moment is seen in verse 23 as continuous with that in operation at the coming of the Son of Man. The mission to the cities of Israel in 10: 23 is parallel with the mission to all nations of 28: 19.

Since this mission is really one with those in Mark and Luke, it does cover the present gospel period, but in distinction from them is specially worded to include the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom at the end of the age (Matthew 24: 14).

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

5. THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

FEATURES OF THE LETTER

THE letter to the Colossians is distinct in certain senses from the others in the group under consideration. It is the only letter of the group which is directed to Christians who were not Paul's converts. There seems no evidence that he had been in touch with them in any direct way. They had been blessed through the efforts of Epaphras, by whom the news of their good progress in the Christian life had also been conveyed to Paul. With characteristic largeness of spirit he expresses his great thankfulness for this, and assures them of his continual interest and readiness to pray for them. Not all the news about them had been of a satisfactory nature however. Paul had also learned of their tendency to be affected by certain unhelpful influences, and this caused him concern when he heard of it. Having a great sense of responsibility for the well-being of his fellow-Christians, whether his own converts or not, he felt impelled to write this letter. The fact that he did so, even to Christians of whom he had no first-hand knowledge, underlines for us the importance of the guidance it contains and the reality of the type of error it points out.

Secondly, though the false teaching to which the Colossians were susceptible was real and dangerous, its exact nature is not easy to specify. The errors and defections of the other churches to whom Paul

wrote are less difficult to define distinctly. As we shall see, the Colossians were liable to be side-tracked by acceptance of a scheme of teaching of a complex kind. Even to its immediate followers this teaching was possibly not well-defined in its content; a sense of mystery and vagueness may well have been part of its attraction. It appears to have involved a blend of Judaistic legalism and Greek philosophy. It included elements of asceticism and angel-worship; the sense of pride in initiation into an inner circle of wisdom and enlightenment was felt by its devotees. Plainly its adherents considered it an advance on apostolic Christianity. But Paul has to inform the Colossian Christians that any such development is no advance at all. It belittles Christ, and robs Christians of a great deal if they pursue it.

On reflection, some advantage seems to be gained from the looseness with which the Colossian heresy is indicated. Had we been able to specify in detail the whole system to which they were attracted, it would no doubt have seemed less like a snare to which Christians of our day are subject. As it is, with only a few of its distinctive features made clear in Scripture, there may be many things of a similar (if not identical) kind currently competing for the interest of Christians. Against these we can extract from these pages the warning which

we may be sure is intended. We may also reflect with satisfaction that, if the exact nature of the false teaching is not clear, there is no diffuseness about the teaching which is provided to counteract it. The positive teaching of the letter is comparatively easy to single out, though at the same time it is profound and elevating. No less a theme than the uniqueness, the supremacy and the fulness of Christ is the answer to the Colossian misapprehension.

The letter puts the positive teaching first, and warns about the dangers later. It presents what will help and preserve them, before saying what they needed preserving from. As in the other papers in this series, the approach suited to the present purpose is to see clearly first the misleading influences affecting the recipients of the letter. These are mostly to be found in chapter 2. We shall then return to the great theme of chapter 1, noticing how it suits and meets their special needs. Short sections on the practical implications (chapters 3 and 4) and the present relevance of this teaching will complete the survey of the letter.

MISLEADING TRENDS

Paul's desire and concern for the Colossians is expressed in brief in verse 23 of chapter 1. They must "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . .". It was his wish that they should be steadfast and well-grounded Christians, worthy of the One to Whom they had been attached on first receiving the gospel, and not easily led off by counter-attractions of a spurious kind. Though he saw the need for this in a special way at Colosse, it was his broad objective for all Gentile believers. The clos-

ing verses of chapter 1 say this. Always he was engaged in conflict, involving unceasing prayer and effort, with no less an aim than to "present every man perfect (or mature) in Christ Jesus". His general desire for all was that they may be filled and captivated with Christ. He knew well where the true riches and the true wisdom were centred. Only Christ could satisfy their hearts and settle their minds, and he laboured to achieve this. Then there would be no discontinuing in the faith, no turning elsewhere, as was so possible with the Colossians. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving" (2: 6, 7). That they should continue as they had begun was his urgent concern.

The avenues into which they were in danger of being diverted are detailed in chapter 2. It will be well to try to isolate the principles of the deceptive teachings to which they were vulnerable. It appears that they were particularly liable to be misled in the realm of their minds. Schemes of *thought*, of a rationally-constructed, imaginative, and progressive kind, held a strong attraction for them. To be able to enter into and assess such things brought a sense of enjoyment and exclusiveness. At the same time, systems of self-discipline, of a rigorous nature, appealed to them. They enjoyed the challenge of a test of their control of their *wills*. Here again a sense of gratification was felt in being able to submit to such schemes.

Paul deals with these tendencies in brusque fashion. Advanced thought on Christian matters, of the human and speculative kind, is to him so much emptiness and deceit. They must not fall for any of these

enticing words (2: 4). "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him . . ." (2: 8-10). Alongside the lack of substance in the teaching which might appeal to them, he places, in contrast, the One in Whom the true substance and sufficiency resides. He thinks very little, too, of deliberately assumed attitudes of self-denial and humility. These things, as ends in themselves, are easily accompanied by inward pride and self-congratulation. Intruding into unseen things, neglecting of the body, adhering to some exacting code or other, worship of angels, respect for calendars, new moons, abstentions and fastings, can all have a self-satisfying flavour about them. One may with little difficulty be "vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind" in any of these directions. The main outcome of such performances, and the reason for their appeal, is that they satisfy self. "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility"; but, in reality, they tend "to the satisfying of the flesh" (2: 23).

To counter these tendencies the truth of the believer's union with Christ is stressed. Our link with Christ is no remote and distant one. It is a *living* link, which is both immediate and firm. It exists with equal reality for every believer. For the true Christian the old self, with its carnal attitudes of mind, is dead and buried with Christ (2: 12, 20); his baptism is the outward recognition of this. To recognise it in a practical way, in his thoughts and interests as well as in his ways, is also needful. *If ye be dead with Christ*, if this is what the profession

of a Christian really involves, how is it possible to carry on as though self-interested living is still allowable? How can one be taken up with traditions and schemes of human devising, which are not after Christ? (2: 20-22, 8).

But a Christian's faith and baptism also involve a recognition that he is risen with Christ. He has been "quickened together with him" (2: 12, 13). This is the great outcome of the sovereign operation of God on our behalf, which has included the decisive and triumphant action of Christ for us. He has dealt, at the cross, with every charge and every power which was against us; and now our lives as Christians should show evidence of that vital link with the living Christ which God has formed. "*If ye then be risen with Christ*, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth. . . . For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (3: 1-3). The springs of a Christian's life are there, unseen as yet, in Christ Who is his life. From that Source he has a full supply for life and growth in ways which are suited to him as a Christian. All Christians have their proper and sole source of direction and satisfaction in Christ, and the common link with Him is also the bond of unity between themselves. There, in heaven, is Christ, "the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (2: 19). But it is important to give Him that place. Other attractive lines of interest would interpose themselves between the believer and Christ. But, to the one who accords Him the commanding place in his thoughts and affections, such things show up in their shallowness alongside what He can provide .

FULNESS IN CHRIST

After the opening greetings and preliminaries the key section of the whole letter appears right at the start, in the remainder of chapter 1 (from verse 9). Within this passage verses 15-19 form the most crucial section of all. Erroneous though attractive teachings made their bid for the interest of the Colossians. To guard them from these they needed to have their eyes opened fully to Christ. His incomparable majesty and sufficiency are here unveiled to them. His glory and supremacy are shown to be of an absolute kind. The teaching is given, not in any formal fashion, but in a way which befits the theme. As is so characteristic of Paul, his own sense of appreciation, and of the unsurpassable nature of his subject, breaks through in a convincing and living way as he writes.

Christ stands completely apart, so they are told, from all other objects which could engage their minds and hearts. No other power or being could rightly claim even a small place of esteem alongside *Him*. His being is of an entirely different order, separate and incomparable. He is "the Son of His (the Father's) love" (1: 13 R.V.), the timeless, uncreated Object of His love and pleasure. He is also "the image of the invisible God" (1: 15), displaying and representing God perfectly where otherwise He was unknown. He is "the firstborn of all creation" (1: 15), before, above, beyond and outside all things created. He is the author and cause of them all, whether seen or unseen. All other powers and beings are dependent, owing their existence, and its continuance, to Him. He is also the end for which they exist, the goal towards which all created things and events converge. He is the inner purpose, the

reason for their very being. "By him," too, "all things consist," holding together, having their principle of coherence, in Him.

In verse 18 Paul passes in thought into a different realm. Here again Christ has the first and unique place. Eternal in His being, He became man; and, through death, has passed on to His present place of eminence and glory. "He is the head of the body, the church: . . . the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." He is the origin of the being of the church, the fount of its life. In that new spiritual creation arising from His death on the cross He is the supreme One, the beginning and the end, first and pre-eminent through the triumph of His resurrection. He is foremost in everything, and from every point of view. He holds the primacy in the sphere of reconciliation as well as in that of creation. He is the keystone of God's purpose, the centre of all His will and pleasure. His work of reconciliation ranges far in its effect (1: 20, 21); present-day believers form only part of this, though His activity on their behalf is a good sample of its quality and perfection. Once at enmity with God, in thought and ways, they have been made holy and blameless, by the very standards of God Himself, through Christ's death on their behalf (1: 22, 23). This is even true of Gentiles, such as these Colossians and all their successors, who have been brought in as members of the Church, the body of Christ, jointly and on equal terms with Jewish converts.

Arising from this there follows a clear statement of the unique place of the Church within the purposed plan of God. Though this is a subject of great importance, to dwell on it more than briefly would be an

aside to our present aim. The place of the Church as the body of Christ, undisclosed in Old Testament times, but revealed after the descent of the Holy Spirit, was given especially to Paul to make known. This great truth, ever in view 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 (1: 24-29). The marvel and the wealth of this secret, now an open one, is reflected in Paul's language as he describes it. God would make known "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The bright light of this disclosure had taken place amongst the Gentiles, including themselves, who were formerly in darkness. At the heart of it was the amazing reality of Christ dwelling within them. There and then, He was at the centre of their lives; as members of His body, His life flowed within them. In this, too, was the pledge of final glory.

Paul had good reason to rejoice, then, as he did in commencing this part of the letter (1: 12-14). Transferred, by the sovereign act of God the Father, into the kingdom of One so great and unrivalled as this, he rightly breaks out in the fullest thanksgiving on their behalf. He might well be jealous, too, lest secondary interests and minor objects should cause them to undervalue *Him*. Their sense of the wonder and the value of that immediate link with Christ must not be allowed to lapse. Nor must the fulness which is available there, for their direction and well-being as members of His body, be undrawn upon.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

As in so many of Paul's letters

matters of doctrine are shown to lead to practical consequences. The practical Christian living which should issue from the teaching of this letter is presented in unambiguous and down-to-earth terms; the transition to this kind of instruction occurs around verse 5 of chapter 3, where it is plain that he now intends to deal with dependent and necessary consequences in their everyday lives.

The reasoning at this stage seems to take the following form. Since, then, you are new men in Christ, see that you live like new men. Old ways and thoughts are inconsistent with what they now are as Christians, and must therefore be discarded. Special warning seems to be directed against unguarded and impure words. Also, the spirit of cleavage and class-distinction is altogether foreign to that new creation where Christ is everything. If Christ is indeed our common and supreme Object, if His life is within us all, then even the most firmly-entrenched frontiers should melt away. Distinctions of culture, class and nationality, were indeed lost sight of in the early Christian community, in a way which demonstrated the reality underlying their faith. How wrong then to erect and sustain unreal boundaries, as for example between "enlightened" Christians and others, between advanced and ordinary Christians. Such attitudes are plainly "not after Christ" (2: 8).

The true and characteristic attitudes for Christians are very different. These are beautifully described in 3: 12-17. A conscious effort to act like this is required, though it is evident too that to centre one's life and time around Christ is the key to fulfilment. Mutual support in the Christian life is also very much in mind here. The

name of the Lord Jesus is to colour and control all that we do. In every aspect of our conduct we must readily acknowledge His authority, and be continually alert to what would honour Him.

The letter then passes to more particular situations in which Christians are found. The value of our knowledge of Christ, and the recognition of His Lordship over us, is to extend into every kind of human experience. Domestic and family matters come well within the field where the knowledge of the Lord can sweeten and bring the best out of human relations. Employees, if practising Christians, are aware that in their employment they serve a higher Master than the immediate one, and are the better employees because of this. Christian employers too will act in fairness, and gain real respect, in the knowledge that they too serve the Lord Christ.

THE MESSAGE TODAY

The trends which the letter picks out for criticism and correction have their counterparts today. They appear, in their most clear-cut form, in liberal Christian thinking of the extreme kind, of which there are notable current examples. They appear also in less drastic, well-disguised forms. Against these we must also be on our guard.

Though liberal Christianity shifts its ground with the times, its basic character does not change very perceptibly. There is unfortunately little difficulty in the mid-twentieth century, in singling out new versions of Christianity which seem to have little of Christ in them. The sincerity with which such schemes are advanced may be real, and it is no part of our duty to question it, but the criteria on which they are based are, to say the least, non-biblical

ones. Religion for secular man, Christianity reduced to terms acceptable to modern thinking, without revelation from God, without Christ, is quite at the opposite pole from biblical Christianity. If what is acceptable to unaided reason is the test, only a highly diluted Christianity will remain. This is to emasculate our faith of all its distinctive content. It is also to ignore, if not flatly to deny, the plain statement of Scripture that the natural man cannot understand the things of God. Light from heaven is needed to break into his darkness, and Christ is that light. Centred around the person and work of Christ is glorious light and fulness, sufficient for all man's needs. But without it the darkness remains.

But the same kind of attitude may also manifest itself in more subtle ways; and it is here that the warning of the letter may be most needed. In our approach to things Christian, whether doctrinal or practical, small intrusions of the merely rational spirit can easily be permitted. Our proneness to this needs to be recognised. To rely on purely human judgments as part of our guidance in the truth of God, can lead us astray. Allowing our imagination more scope than is warranted, in our interpretations of Scripture, in building up what we consider to be Christian schemes and routines, is a real risk too. Adding to the word of God is as dangerous a process as diluting it. Yet another concession to modern ways is to underplay the great truths of God which centre around Christ, because they are no longer popular in our day, though earlier generations prized them greatly. This is hardly a thoughtful reason for undervaluing so great a heritage, but it is a modern trend, and this is reason enough to some minds. Even

amongst genuine Christians the readiness to belittle what is old, apart from its value, is not unknown. If our vision of Christ is a true one, of the kind this epistle affords, the fashions of time ought not to affect our sense of the greatness of it.

Quite firmly and unequivocally we are told in this letter that Christ is the entire substance of Christianity. Christ is all, and in all. All the

treasures of wisdom and knowledge are there, and Christians are linked with Him by a living and indissoluble bond. Though we live in days when lives are commonly moulded on other principles than this, may the consciousness of our union with Himself, our incomparable Lord, rule our whole lives. May the bright light of our knowledge of Himself be the touchstone of all our ways and of all our thinking.

HOW THE LORD STIRRED UP THE PEOPLE

D. W. PATERSON

Revised notes of address on Haggai, Chapter 2

READERS will recall that consequent upon the writings of Jeremiah and the prayers of Daniel a small remnant of God's people returned from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. They were beset by many difficulties: strong enemies without and failing harvests and deep discouragement within. Ezra 4 tells us the sorry story of how the work of building the temple was made to cease. Under God, and doubtless also the exercise of godly men, the word of the Lord was brought to bear upon the situation. What was thought to be due to external pressure and circumstances was due to lack of heart amongst the people of God. Is it time for you to dwell in your own cieled houses and the Lord's house to lie waste? (Haggai 1: 4).

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and the spirit of the remnant of the people and they came and did work (verse 14). There remained, however, some very real

difficulties to face, both then and now, and the Lord's answer, through the mouth of his prophet must be of interest to us. It is not a little striking (Haggai means feast of Jehovah) that this prophetic word (2: 1) came to the people of God on the 21st day of the 7th month. This appears to be the Old Testament equivalent of the last day of the feast when Jesus stood up in the temple (John 7: 37). What should have been an occasion of the greatest joy was darkened by the gloomy clouds of disappointment and despair.

The first of the difficulties was the *smallness of the position*. In Ezra 3: 12 we read that when the foundation of the temple was laid many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, and had seen the first house (Solomon's), wept with a loud voice. The Lord remonstrated, "Is it not in your eyes as nothing" (2: 3). Some may feel this also in their local gatherings. There is ever the

danger of eulogising the "good old days". But the prophet Zechariah (4: 10) reminds us that we must not despise the day of small things. When the earth is disquieted (Proverbs 30: 21-23, and was it ever more disquieted than it is now?) the answer is found in smallness, in ants, conies, locusts and spiders (Proverbs 30: 24-28). The three revivals of the Old Testament, it is worthy of note, became progressively smaller but better — Hezekiah's, Josiah's and Ezra and Nehemiah's. Why are they better? It is because the Lord graciously says, "I am with you" (1: 13 and 2: 4). The smallness of Proverbs 30 is followed by that which speaks of Christ — the lion, the war horse, the he-goat, the king (Proverbs 30: 29-31, N.T.). Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst (Matthew 18: 20). The prophetic answer to the smallness of the position is a consideration of the *resources of God*. (1) the word (2: 5), (2) my spirit (2: 5), (3) the silver and the gold is mine (2: 8) and (4) the promise of His coming (2: 7). The river of God is ever full of water (Psalm 65: 9) "May we with this be satisfied, and glory in His name".

The second cause for discouragement, both ancient and modern, is the *slowness with which blessing comes*. The initial move for God followed the prophetic word spoken on the 1st day of the 6th month (1: 1). By the 24th day of the 9th month (2: 18) there was evidently still some evidence of shortage. For the Jews this was a blight on material prosperity. With us the flow of spiritual blessing may not come at once. Lessons on the principle of association have to be learnt (2: 10-14). The holy cannot make the unclean holy, but the unclean can make the holy unclean.

A sound apple does not make rotten apples good, but rotten apples can make a good apple rotten! Patient continuance with God is needed. Notice the emphasis in this section upon work — "Be strong" and "work". There are two words for work in Haggai. In 1: 14, the word is never used for servile work. In 2: 4 it is more general, any kind of work. Brethren, we must work. Not only Joshua and Zerubbabel but also the residue of the people are included. In 2 Timothy days there are the "others also". Even the smallest and humblest of us, at this late hour of the church's history, must do something. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which He has before prepared that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2: 10). In the pastoral epistles there are no fewer than nine references to good works. "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3: 8). Furthermore not only must we work but we must have "long patience" in waiting for the results. Hudson Taylor laboured, was it 14 years, before there was one convert in China. But presently how the trickle became a mighty stream! In Philadelphia the Lord says, "I know thy works" — not incomplete works as in Sardis, but complete works, which He can fully approve. The answer to the slowness of blessings is not to give up or to give way, but to hold fast, and stand fast, and *rely upon His promise*. "From this day will I bless you" (2: 19).

The final cause for discouragement, then, and always, is the *strength of the enemies*. In those days it was Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian (Nehemiah 2:

19). Every servant and work for God has had to campaign against opposition; not a battle only, which may soon be over, but a campaign which continues to the end. In a dark day the opposition is ever more intense. They that will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3: 12). More and more we are brought to feel the pressure, and the prophetic answer to this situation is ever the imminent *return of the Lord*. In the light of the present situation and current events, how cheering is this word! "I will shake the heavens and the earth" (2: 21), a quotation which is repeated in Hebrews 12: 26. "I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms (2: 22). We know who sits upon *that* throne — the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan. He will be cast into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20: 2, 3). The strength of the kingdom moreover is in the hands of the beast and the false prophet, who will be cast alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 19: 20). "The chariots and those that ride in them, and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother." Often in biblical history the enemies slay one another, as Jonathon proved (1 Samuel 14: 20), Gideon (Judges 7: 22), Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20: 23), Egypt (Isaiah 19: 2) and even the Lord Himself (Mark 14: 59). It would seem this is also the way in which Israel will be delivered in a future day. As to our enemies we are to "fear not" (2: 5). The scene will be cleared, but the scene will also be filled. "In that day, saith the Lord of Hosts,

will I take thee, O Zerubbabel . . . and will make thee as a signet . . ." This, though a personal communication to Zerubbabel doubtless has a greater than Zerubbabel in view.

Moreover, wherever a ring is mentioned in Scripture, a position of public dignity is in view. Pharaoh gave to Joseph his ring, Haman's ring was put on Mordecai, and the prodigal also had a ring given him. "What, know ye not that ye shall judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6: 3). The signet here not only indicates ownership but style. The new heaven and new earth will take character from Christ (everything exactly like, and according to Christ. What a scene!). In 2: 7 we learn that the desire of all nations shall come. We have to take this to be Christ. The words "shall come", however, are in the plural. Does this not tell us that not only Christ will come, but all that is Christ's and according to Christ. This is encouragement indeed. The days may be small, and the house nothing much to look at, but the latter glory of this house (the Millennial temple) will be greater even than Solomon's temple. "And in this place I will give peace," in contrast to the battle of the present day. In truth we can sing: "*With smiling face the Christian says, The best lies on before.*" Summarising therefore, may we say that the answer to *smallness* is the *resources* of God; to the *slowness* of blessing, *reliance* upon His promise; and to the *strength* of the enemies, the sure and certain and early *return* of our blessed Lord. Even so come Lord Jesus.

"A BETTER COUNTRY"

GENESIS 13 begins with Abram brought again to the position of obedience and dependence before God, and linked with his tent and altar as at the beginning. The famine was now over, and the prosperity of Abram and Lot in flocks and herds was so great that the two could not dwell together. Also, there was strife between the herdsman of the cattle of the two men; and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled in the land. As we can already see, earthly prosperity brought with it strife, covetousness and division, and no doubt the Canaanite and the Perizzite would strongly oppose any acquisition of their pasturelands.

Abram, although rich, still maintained his character as a pilgrim and a stranger, and it is good to see the features of godliness manifested in him toward Lot. The elder spoke in grace and wisdom to the younger, saying, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

Lot, given the opportunity of first choice, lifted up his eyes, but not as high as the heavens to acquaint himself with God. He saw the well-watered plains of Jordan, as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt "as thou comest to Zoar". Here too were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, soon to come under the judgment of God. As Lot saw them, they appeared to be immense-

ly attractive. Little wonder then that Lot chose this delectable portion, so likely to bring about a yet further increase in prosperity and wealth. However, these names were full of meaning, for Sodom signifies "burning", and Gomorrah, "submersion". The judgment of fire was soon to come down, and the waters of the Dead Sea would ultimately submerge these two cities, because the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. This was the choice of Lot, who saw with his natural eyes, and preferred to choose by sight rather than by faith. In a word, he left God out of all his dealings.

What a delightful contrast we see in Abram! Manifesting the features of a godly man who was prepared to give way to others, he was bidden by God to lift up his eyes and behold the whole of the land, north, south, east and west which was to be God's gift to Abram and to his seed for ever. Also, the earthly seed of Abram, was to be as the dust of the earth, though at that time not one of his children was yet born. He was exhorted to arise, and walk through the land in all its length and breadth, for, saith the Lord, "I will give it thee." These two occupations of Abram, to behold the land and to walk through the land, are indeed full of meaning for us.

Abram, a lovely type of the "heavenly man", was learning the lesson of finding every need met in God. When he tarried at Charran, God waited for him; when he went down into Egypt, He restored him and led him the right way; and in strife and separation He took care

of him. These were the intimate and wonderful dealings with God enjoyed by Abram. Lot chose Sodom, but there was no altar there, for sin and wickedness prevailed, vexing the soul of the righteous man from day to day. He was in the wrong place, and very soon would reap the result of his wilfulness and folly.

Abram, in contrast, removed his tent and dwelt in the plain of Mamre. The one who had adhered to the pilgrim path was now enjoying rich, divinely provided pastures. His

soul was enriched by God's bountiful supply, and dwelling in Hebron, he builded there an altar unto the Lord. The experience of fellowship with God, led to worship ascending to Him, Who alone can satisfy every longing and desire of the heart.

"How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house: and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Psalm 36: 7, 8).

THE SINGLE EYE

HAMILTON SMITH

(PSALM 27)

THE Twenty-seventh Psalm very blessedly presents the experiences of a believer who, amidst all his trials, looks to the Lord with entire singleness of eye and desire (verse 4).

It opens by giving the experience that finds in the Lord an unfailing resource in the presence of every form of opposition (1-3). We then learn the secret desire of the Psalmist's heart after the Lord (4), and his confidence in the Lord (5, 6). We listen to his prayer to the Lord (7-12); and finally learn how he waits to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (13, 14).

THE LORD THE RESOURCE OF THE GODLY

(Verses 1-3). In all his difficulties and trials, the godly soul finds in the Lord his unfailing resource. The Lord is his "light", his "salvation", and his "strength".

Amidst the prevailing darkness the Lord not only gives light but He is light. The Christian can say that the Lord has trodden the path and

met the contradiction of sinners, and is the perfect example of the spirit in which opposition is to be met. Moreover, the Lord can deliver, and in the end will deliver, from every enemy. In the meantime the Lord is our strength to support us through all the trials of life.

With the Lord as his resource, the believer can say, "Of whom shall I be afraid?" We may be opposed by individual enemies, or by a host of enemies, or by "war" — prolonged opposition at every step of the journey. But the heart need not fear nor the soul lose confidence, seeing we have the Lord as our light, our salvation, and our strength.

DESIRE AFTER THE LORD

(Verse 4). Behind this confidence in the Lord, there is the earnest desire after the Lord. Above all else the Psalmist desires to live in the constant sense of the presence of the Lord — to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life; to be-

hold the beauty of the Lord, and to learn of Him. In New Testament days we learn that the one thing that the Psalmist desired, is the one thing that Mary chose — to sit at the feet of the Lord and hear His Word.

CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD

(Verses 5, 6). Connected with desires after the Lord there is of necessity confidence in the Lord. If the Lord is my salvation He will hide me from all my enemies. If He is my strength, He will "keep me" in safety (N.T.) firmly established upon a rock; and, in due time, will lift up my head above all my enemies for His own glory and praise.

THE PRAYER TO THE LORD

(Verses 7-12). In the prayer we see the exercise of this godly man in the presence of the Lord. In the presence of the enemy he realises the strength of the Lord; in the presence of the Lord he is conscious of his own weakness and sin, for which he fears the anger of the Lord. Nevertheless he learns the evil of his own heart in the presence of the grace that can meet it all, for has not the Lord said to him, "Seek ye my face." Even so in the day of our Lord, Peter discovers that he is a sinful man in the presence of the One whose heart is full of grace for a man that is full of sin (Luke 5: 8).

Secondly, encouraged to seek the face of the Lord, he prays that the Lord will not hide His face — that he may be kept in the sense of the Lord's favour shining upon him. It is one thing for the Christian to know that he is accepted in the Beloved and stands in the favour of God; it is another thing to walk in the conscious sense of this favour.

Thirdly, realising that the Lord has been his help in times past, he

desires that the Lord will not leave nor forsake him in the days to come, even though he may be forsaken by the nearest on earth. Seeing that the Lord has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," the Christian can "boldly say, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13: 5, 6).

Fourthly, he desires to be taught the way of the Lord. It is not simply *a way* that he desires, but, realising that the Lord has His way for His people, through this world, he prays, "Teach me *thy way*, O Lord."

Fifthly, he realises that there are many enemies that would seek to turn him out of the Lord's way, therefore he desires, not only to be taught the way but, to be *led* in the way. He says, "Lead me in an even path, because of mine enemies" (N.T.). We need light to see the path, faith to take it, and grace to keep us in it.

Sixthly, realising his own weakness in the presence of his enemies he prays that the Lord would deliver him from the will of enemies, who without conscience witness against him falsely, and without heart breathe out cruelty.

WAITING FOR THE LORD

(Verses 13, 14). Left to himself this godly man would have fainted. What sustained him? Faith in the goodness of the Lord that would bring him into the land of the living. The Christian can say the grace that brings salvation to me on earth will bring me to the glory in heaven. All around we see the evil of man in a world of sin and death, but faith walks in the confidence that very soon we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

For this we must with quiet patience wait the Lord's own time.

Therefore, the word is, "Wait on the Lord." All that we have to face on the way can be met with "good courage", for the Lord will support us if walking in His way. He will strengthen the heart. So, whether it be for grace in the way, or the final mercy that delivers us from a world of death and brings us into

the goodness of the land of the living, let us "Wait on the Lord", with the single eye that leads us to say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, 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, and to enquire in his temple."

WHO CARES?

J. STODDART

THE answer to this question, so flippantly asked nowadays, depends upon what is meant by the word *care*. More often than not those who use the words, "Who cares?", have no thought of an answer and intend rather to affirm that nobody cares. Many today, especially those who like to be known as the modern "avant-garde", have adopted the slogan, "I couldn't care less!" But surely the banal effect of this attitude to life is not hard to discern in the world around us.

When we turn to Scripture it becomes clear that the word *care* has more than a single meaning, and the particular meaning must be derived from the context in which it is used. When Paul counselled his Philippian friends to "be careful for nothing" (4: 6) can we think for a moment that he meant that they should be careless about everything? Most certainly not; and even less did he intend to support the *laissez-faire* attitude of the moderns referred to above. In the context of this verse, to be "careful" was to be fretfully anxious about life's details, when the right and wise course was to "take it to the Lord in prayer", as

the remainder of the verse indicates.

In the touching story of Martha's service in Luke 10, she had undoubtedly a deep desire to please the Lord in what she did, but how she did it revealed in her a fretful anxiety. How tender was the reproof she received from Jesus when He observed her care-burdened efforts, as He said, "Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things, but there is need of only one" (verse 41, 42, AMP. N.T.). She had said, "Lord, dost Thou not care?" and surely the one thing needful on her part here was just this: to know that He did care with the utmost love and concern for her. If our very service for the Lord is fraught with an undue anxiety, then it may be we have to learn more perfectly that He cares.

Another example of the corrosive aspect of care, where this means fretting anxiety, is in the Lord's explanation of His parable of the sower (Matthew 13). The seed which fell among thorns represented the Word received, but choked by "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (verse 22). Alas, how many unfruitful lives owe their barrenness to business and

domestic worries which, if allowed, completely stifle soul-growth. But how utterly wrong it would be to conclude from this that carelessness is a virtue in these spheres of responsibility. We must, therefore, distinguish between the kind of care that amounts to over-anxiety, fretfulness and worry, and care which means legitimate concern and responsible attention to matters.

Listing some of the grievous experiences which crowded into his busy life, the Apostle adds in 2 Corinthians 11: 28, "besides that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches". We can well understand the heavy burden of responsibility which weighed upon him as he thought of each of the many assemblies which had been formed. Each one had special local problems and needs, and each needed his daily wise counsel, some taxed his patience and others opposed his authority. His faithfulness was tested when the enemy cunningly spread the leaven of false doctrine and sinful practice. Such then were the cares that daily befell the man who wrote to Christians to "be careful for nothing, but. . . ." Did he practice what he preached? We might ask. But the answer is clear, for this was not Paul's collapse under fretful anxiety, but his legitimate, godly care and concern for others. So little, indeed, was he concerned about his own well-being, that in 2 Corinthians 12: 15 he says — and it was no idle boast — "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." Like his Lord and Master, he would give everything he had and then give himself in his love for them. Here then is the kind of *care* which love demands, far from worry and anxiety, and yet imposing its own

burden, which only faith and prayer can sustain. This, too, is surely in the Apostle's mind, when he says that "the members of Christ's body should have the same care (godly concern) for one another" (1 Corinthians 12: 25). For this is not only the responsibility of an apostle, but that of every member of the body to every other.

But it might be thought that there is some disparity between Paul's advice to the Philippians — "Be careful for nothing" — and his command to Titus (3: 8) to "affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works". No contradiction, however, is contained or implied in these passages, for the first is to be free from corroding care and anxiety for one's own affairs, and the second is to give diligent attention to that which is for the good of others. Let us notice that in the same epistle in which he says, "Be careful for nothing" (Philippians 4: 6), he commends his friends in that, "your care for me has flourished again; wherein you were also careful but you lacked opportunity". The different meaning of the word *care* in each case is quite apparent.

When king Nebuchadnezzar threatened the three young Hebrews (Daniel 3: 14-18) with the excruciation of the fiery furnace, because of their refusal to worship the image of gold, their answer was as courteous as it was unflinching. Surely if there ever was a moment when anxious fears were justified, or when extreme care was called for in the use of words, it was here. But we read that, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are *not careful* to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God is able to deliver us out of the

fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Such uncompromising courage was the result, on the one hand, of their trust in the God whom they served, but on the other hand because they were not careful, not unduly worried or filled with anxiety by the threatened torture of the king. Some valuable lessons thus come through to us from this thrilling story, one of which underlines the fact that to be truly "careful for nothing" is not a negative attitude, but is productive of the most courageous action and true service.

It must be apparent to all that there is a strange anomaly between the modern "couldn't care less" attitude and the fact that anxiety neurosis is one of the most prevalent sicknesses of Western civilisation. Books that deal with the subject of "peace of mind" (not necessarily peace with God) are in popular demand. Doubtless the many pressures and tensions of modern living have helped to create this search for peace of mind. The threat of a possible third world war, the disruption of international relationships, economic anxieties to make little sense of boasted material prosperity; consequently cares, fears, phobias and anxieties are ever increasing. Statistics in abundance have been produced to prove this, but who has the answer to such problems?

Only the mind which is stayed upon Jehovah (Isaiah 26: 3, 4) can know that "perfect peace" which dismisses anxious care and fretful fear. "Be careful for nothing" ("don't worry over anything whatever" Phillip's Trans.) must always be accompanied by the remainder of

the exhortation, "tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4: 6, 7, Phillip's).

Can the most modern psychological or psychiatric treatment offer anything so complete or so reassuring as this? Without underrating these specialised skills, which doubtless have their value, the answer must be in the negative. The Christian, however baffled and beaten by the size of the problems he faces (some of these due to the very fact of being a Christian) knows where to refer his cares. He may not always avail himself of such knowledge, as the well-known hymn reminds us:

*"O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer."*

But to the popular question, "Who cares?" faith knows the undeniable answer — "Cast all your cares (anxieties) on Him (God), for *He cares about you*" (1 Peter 5: 7 R.S.V.). Whoever else cares not, God Himself cares about us and everything that concerns us. He charges Himself with our safe conduct through a hostile and care-bedecked world. Far from being a refuge or subterfuge from the plain path of duty in the will of God, here is that which sets both heart and mind free to serve Him with unfettered zeal and devotion.

May our too-often encumbered hearts be liberated from their cares, so that we may happily make His interests our greatest concern, and His glory our truest care.

QUESTION

Is it true or false that we should preach propitiation to the sinner and teach substitution to the saints?

We should certainly preach both propitiation and substitution to the sinner and teach both propitiation and substitution to the saints.

I do not know where and with whom the habit commenced of setting these two words against each other. One might guess that the practice arose in connection with the Calvinistic disputes as to whether the sacrifice of Christ was for all or only for the elect. Since it seems plain that in different senses both are true, the word "substitution" came into use to describe the sacrifice of Christ in its application to those who believe, and the Bible word "propitiation" was reserved for its application to the whole world.

It might be better for us to bypass the Calvinistic disputes and start from Scripture: there I think we will find that the Bible word "propitiation" presents the purpose and effect of Christ's sacrifice *toward God*, and the Bible idea of "substitution" *toward believers*.

Propitiation, as well as the original word it translates, means what is required to appease or conciliate a wronged person. Christ's death propitiated God: it gave satisfaction to God for sins: it declared His righteousness in forgiving and justifying all who believe. The four Scriptures which teach this are:

1 John 2: 2. He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

1 John 4: 10. God . . . sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Hebrews 2: 17. That He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Romans 3: 25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness. . . .

The most comprehensive of these verses is 1 John 2: 2, from which it is plain that *both* the bearing of the gospel toward the world *and* the ground for the forgiveness of "our" sins are grounded on Christ's propitiation.

When Scripture speaks of the bearing of that propitiation on those who believe and are forgiven, then it uses terms which describe a substitution: —

Isaiah 53: 5, 6. He was wounded for our transgressions. . . . The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Romans 4: 25. He was delivered for our offences.

1 Peter 2: 24. Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.

In Romans 3: 25 the word translated "propitiation" is the regular word for the mercy-seat in the tabernacle (Hebrews 9: 5). The application of the blood to the mercy-seat faithfully represents Christ's propitiation as availing to satisfy God about His people's sins. This appears to have led some to consider the two goats brought on the day of atonement (Leviticus 16), one to be sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and the other for a scapegoat. It has been said that the goat on whom the Lord's lot fell represents propitiation, and the scapegoat substitution. I very much doubt whether this view can be sustained. The scapegoat is not sacrificed at all. First it speaks of the future time when Israel will confess in the language of Isaiah 53, so that their sins and iniquities will be remembered no more (Jeremiah 31: 34). In the scapegoat, therefore, we are not shown a sacrifice, but confession of sins and their remission.

THE YOUNG CHURCH IN ACTION

IAN I. ROSS

NOTES ON THE OPENING ADDRESS AT ST. ANDREW'S 1967 (Acts 4)

I would like, with the Lord's help, to present the message of this well-known chapter to you under four headings. I trust it will be of real blessing especially to the young folk here.

THE COMPANY THEY KEPT

This is the commencement of the conference as far as the ministry is concerned and I would like to ask each one here, especially those who are here for the whole week, to ask yourself this question: "What exactly have I come here to St. Andrews for?" I suppose if I were to ask you that privately I would get many and varied answers. Some of them might even be amusing, but we will put all of that on one side for a moment. We are seriously raising this question, What have you come here for? What do you expect to receive during this week? Perhaps you you have not even thought about it. What do you hope for? What is your desire during this week? What do you hope to see? What do you hope to hear in this lovely city of St. Andrews? Here we are away from the normal routine of life, away from the normal work that we do, away from our normal duties, withdrawn. Here we are in company together. Now what do we expect? What do we hope to see during this week?

It has been the case right down through the years that men of God

have been withdrawn from the normal duties of life, the normal way of life. They had to be withdrawn from these before the Lord could give to them a wondrous vision of Himself. I believe that is the desire of the Lord for each one here, that we might have this wonderful vision of Himself. We sang, "Our hearts are full of Christ." I wonder if we really sang it sincerely. Think for a moment of Jacob. Jacob was withdrawn from the normal life and he saw that prophetic vision of the ladder reaching right up to heaven. Where was it? On the moorland of Bethel. Think of Moses. He was withdrawn from the normal routine of life. Right out in the wilderness he had that arresting vision of the Shekinah Glory in the burning bush, something he had never seen before. Take John, withdrawn, exiled to the little island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, away from Christian fellowship, and there he had a vision, of something which he had never seen in Jerusalem, nor in Galilee, and certainly not at Ephesus. He saw the Lord, the risen, glorified, transcendent Lord, and he fell at His feet as dead. John, who had walked the lanes of Galilee, who had been associated with Jesus of Nazareth, had leaned upon His bosom, here sees this glorious vision. He falls at the feet of the risen Christ as one dead and he hears that voice speaking to him,

saying, "I am he that liveth, and became dead; and, behold I am alive for evermore." And here we are, withdrawn from the normal way of life and the Lord would have each one of us to have this self-abasing vision of Himself.

The Pharisees and the scribes and the elders "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus". May it be at the end of this conference that when we go home, others can see that we have been in the presence of Jesus! These men, Peter and John, were living daily in this blessed experience of the companionship of the Lord Jesus Christ. They desired above everything else, that they might see Him, walk with Him, live with Him, day by day. What a desire they had! I wonder if our desire is that during this week we might be found in the company of Jesus. This was the company they kept. What incomparable company! We cannot have a greater desire for this week. They desired to be with Jesus.

When Jesus ordained twelve and sent them forth to preach and to heal and to teach, he ordained them first for something entirely different. The first thing mentioned here in Mark's gospel, was that they should "be with him". If there is any desire in our hearts this afternoon that we might be found in the company and the presence of Jesus, we can be sure of this, there is a far greater desire in the heart of the Saviour that we should be with Him. He desired that they should be with Him. I wonder, then, what is our desire at this present moment. Do we each desire to be found in His presence? They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Where had they been? They had been in prison. They had been in the com-

pany of some very peculiar people, but they took knowledge that they had been in the presence of Jesus. The hostile observers did not know who He was, but we have learned something of what and who He is: the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of men, the Consummator of the ages, the living Christ, the One in Whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, the sum and the total of all the Father's love. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." This is the happy experience into which the Lord Himself would lead each one of us this afternoon, during this conference. He would lead us to be daily, moment by moment, found in His blessed presence. His presence is our strength in a time of weakness, our defence in a time of temptation, our comfort in a time of sorrow and our joy in a time of rejoicing. May our prayer be this afternoon, "Lord open my eyes that I may see Thee in all Thy glory."

THE POWER THEY RECEIVED

Perhaps we have come here feeling our own inadequacy and lack of real spiritual power. Perhaps we think of the work that we seek to do for the Lord in our home towns and that there is a lack of spiritual power. Needless to say, we want to know the remedy. Many seem to believe that the answer is in re-organization. Let us re-organize, let us change things, they say. Perhaps some changes may be necessary and if so, they should be made, but re-organization in itself is not the answer. Organization, flawless timing, the projection of some human personality, are not the answer; they do not constitute spiritual power. "And when they

had prayed", we read, and what a prayer meeting that was! There is something of the true remedy in that wonderful prayer of those gathered together in Jerusalem. What a prayer meeting!

After they had prayed, we read, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This was the power they received! This is the pre-requisite for spiritual power, when men and women, and young men and young women are so taken up and occupied with Christ and seeking His glory. Then indeed we will receive that God-glorifying power. It is the Holy Spirit that quickens the soul. God will not bow to man's control. We may get the best arrangements; we may try our utmost; but what we need my brethren is the power of God the Holy Ghost. The Lord said to His disciples, and what He said still holds good today, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you".

What sort of power was this? What these twelve disciples had already achieved was indeed remarkable. They were sent forth to preach and to teach and to heal, to cleanse the lepers, to cast out the devils, to raise the dead. They were given amazing power for service. What more power could they require? What more power could they desire than the power they had received at the command of the Saviour. Yet the Lord Jesus said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." These men could go out and heal the leper and cast out devils. They came back to the Lord elated with their successes: "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us" (Luke 10: 17). Yet the Lord wanted to give them something different, something not known before. "Ye shall receive power, after that the

Holy Ghost is come upon you." They had already received wonderful power over bodies, but what they now needed, and what we all need, is a power that would purify their hearts and lives.

Just listen to John, the beloved John, as he looks out upon the inhospitable Samaritans, and he cries, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" What a spirit! They had no power inwardly, no power over their own selfish ambitions, their own evil thoughts, their own sinful ways. They had not the power that purifies. Jesus promises *that* power in the gift of the Holy Spirit. I wonder as we look back perhaps over our lives, young people, what it is that we have desired. Perhaps we want to be great preachers. It is right and good to have that desire, but I wonder if, in the presence of God we really are willing to bow before Him and seek that power that searches. He may do so this afternoon, searching our hearts, searching out the wrong motives, searching out the selfish pride, the foolish pride that is there. Are we prepared for that? Are we? Are we prepared like the Psalmist to bow in His presence with a broken and a contrite heart and to say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Are we prepared here at this conference, young folk, for that power? "Search till Thy fiery glance hath cast its holy light through all, and I by grace am brought at last, (like John of old) before Thy feet to fall."

Then, if we are prepared for this, we will be like the disciples, able to go forth and to preach the word

with power. What is God looking for, even in this company today? Make no mistake about it, God wants a pure, clean vessel and anointed lips. He wants a man, a young man, a woman, a young woman, filled with His Spirit, to speak His message through the power that they received.

THE MESSAGE THEY PREACHED

We read that they preached the word with great power. What was that message? It was not something that they had thought up by themselves. It was not some theory or idea of their own. It was not just ethical exhortation. They declared concrete facts of history. They declared that which was nothing less than the mighty acts of God. What were these mighty acts? I believe that the true foundations of their preaching were these two facts: "Christ died for our sins," and "Jesus and the resurrection."

"Christ died for our sins." This was the heart and core of the preaching when later developed in its fulness, the divine, redemptive act of Calvary. They preached that cross as a three-fold revelation. The cross revealed once and for all, in all its fulness, the wickedness and sinfulness of the human heart. Secondly, the cross revealed the attitude of God towards sin. For the day in which Christ died upon that cross, on that day once and for all, God revealed His attitude towards sin. But, paradoxically, the cross also revealed the amazing love of God towards the sinner. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." There we have the first part of their message.

Then also they preached Jesus

and the resurrection. "With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection." Here is the key-note that determined the message of these early preachers. Why the resurrection? Without the resurrection there is *no sure basis for faith*. "If Christ be not raised your faith is empty," says the apostle Paul. Without the resurrection there is *no satisfying peace of conscience*. If Christ be not risen then are ye dead in your sins. Without the resurrection there is *no satisfying power for life*. And without the resurrection there is *no serene hope for the future*.

The message preached in Bible days throbbed with this glorious truth, Christ died, but rose again, triumphant over death and the grave. By a master stroke of divine strategy, in a moment of apparent defeat and appalling disaster God turned it all to glorious victory by the resurrection. They preached the cross as revelation. They preached it as victory. They preached it as a challenge. And Jesus and the resurrection they preached because this was what gave authority and power to their gospel, Christ alive from the dead as the dominating reality of life. "With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection."

Is there any other message today? Is there a different message? The Bible knows no other. Peter proclaimed "There is none other name." The Gospel we preach is exclusive. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." And there is no other message and there is no other way today.

THE LIVES THEY LIVED

We may know the doctrine, and

our opening prayer petitioned that we may know *both* the doctrine and the practice. If all that we know is mere head knowledge, and not something that really affects us in our daily lives, I wonder what its value is. What were the lives that they lived? As for these men that were companying with the Saviour, who received this wonderful power, and who declared this message, their lives were in line with their preaching. It says that "great grace was upon them all". Contemplate the beauty: no longer in evidence the works of the flesh, but the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness — great grace was upon them all. The grace of self-sacrifice, the grace of humility, the grace of kindness, the grace of fellowship, if you like, this grace was upon them all. Not only did they witness to the Saviour by word of mouth, but their very lives witnessed for Him. This is the test, or, to be colloquial, this is the crunch. In the most provoking circumstances that we can possibly imagine, these men who companied with Jesus, showed forth the love of Christ in their lives day by day. This is the test. Murray McCheyne once said "A sermon only lasts an hour, but a life preaches all the week." Sometimes we sing, "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, all His wondrous compassion and purity."

I wonder if this is our prayer at this conference, that having been in the presence of Jesus we may show forth something of His life in

our lives.

I want to ask you that question in closing again; what do you come here for? Let us be honest about it. What do you hope to see here at St. Andrews? What are you expecting? What are you desiring above everything else? We have come here away from our work, away from our homes, from many familiar faces, and here we are together. What do we hope to see? Four men came to a mountain, and the first man, a speculator, stood at the foot and as he looked at it, said, "How much is it worth; how much money can I make of it?" The second man came and stood at the foot of the mountain and he looked. He was a mineralogist; and he said, "I wonder what minerals are contained in the depths of that mountain?" The third man came to the mountain. He was a Moses and as he looked he said, "In that mountain there is a cleft in the rock where I saw the Lord." Another man stands at the foot of the mountain and he says, "On that mountain is the place where I heard the still, small voice of God."

What do you desire to see, what do you desire to hear? May each one have a burning desire that we might see the risen, glorified, transcendent Lord as we have never seen Him before and that we might hear His voice. If we have this desire we can rest assured that the Lord will make Himself known to us each one, in His all-sufficient grace. May this be so for His Name's sake. Amen.

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

6. THE LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS

THE CHARACTER OF THE LETTERS

These letters, written soon after the founding of the church at Thessalonica, supply the encouragement and instruction needed in the special circumstances of that church. Paul's visit to Thessalonica, and the conversion of the first Christians there, are described in the early part of Acts 17. The church was established in the face of open opposition. For reasons beyond his control, Paul had to leave the vicinity in haste. The brevity of his stay is reflected in passages in the letters where he rekindles the memory of teaching he had passed on all too hurriedly. There had been little opportunity to give them as thorough a basic teaching as he would have wished.

Leaving them in this way, exposed to persecution from the start, he was naturally anxious about them. At the earliest moment he sent Timothy to see how they were faring (1 Thessalonians 3: 1ff.). Timothy brought back excellent news; in the main all was well, and Paul's restlessness and concern about them had been unnecessary. They were doing well, in a tough testing-ground for believers young in the faith. They were commendably alert in the joy of their new-found knowledge of God in Christ. The reality of what they possessed, made evident by its effect upon their lives, was known and spoken about throughout the

whole district.

Despite the highly satisfactory progress made, it is not surprising that, with so much to oppose and bewilder them, help was still needed in certain senses. Their special problems arose partly because they were so youthful and fresh in the Christian life. Teaching of a stabilising and enlightening kind was needed. Along with words of approval and comfort, the letters provide this teaching.

The *first letter* was written as soon as Paul received Timothy's report about them. Dominant here is Paul's sense of relief and pleasure when, after a period without news, he heard of their excellent start as young Christians. But it soon becomes clear that the Thessalonians were keyed-up and unsettled. They were not a little perturbed by the turn of events through which they were passing. They had been taught to expect the return of Christ, and looked forward earnestly for that great event. So eager was their anticipation that normal everyday living was not being pursued in a steady purposeful way. There are indications that some of them were workshy and idle. Also, they were uninformed about certain vital aspects of the second advent. To be alive when their Lord returned, awaiting Him with a welcome, was the hope which they cherished. It was an unforeseen possibility that some might not survive until that

moment. Some amongst the newly-converted Thessalonians had died in those recent months, perhaps in the bitterness of the persecution, as well as in the natural course of things. Those remaining were depressed by the mistaken thought that these, and others who might follow them, would somehow miss the joy and the blessing which Christ's return would bring. For their comfort, and to sustain their hope as Christians, clarification on this matter was essential. Though it only occupies a half-chapter (the close of chapter 4), the main teaching of the first letter is directed towards removing this misunderstanding.

Paul found it necessary to write the *second letter*, closely following the first, to guard them against fresh sources of confusion. Deceptive suggestions, from people who would use almost any means to disturb these Thessalonians, had to be countered. His immediate aim is to give them help towards peace of mind and quiet patience in all these testings. But there is also instruction regarding "the day of the Lord", and the events and trends leading up to it, which would not have been available otherwise. This is to be found in chapter 2. Well to the fore in this letter, as in the earlier one, is Paul's sense of gratification as he recognises their continued growth and testimony. It is clear, too, that some of the earlier misapprehensions were not entirely cleared up by the first letter. In chapter 3 of the second letter he reinforces in much stronger terms the earlier advice that their lives as Christians should not only be calm and hopeful, but also hard-working and truly sanctified.

We consider first the instruction about the coming of Christ con-

tained in the letters. In particular, the special aspects drawn attention to in chapter 4 of the first letter, and in chapter 2 of the second letter, will be outlined. A section follows on the manner of life appropriate to those who await that coming, as enjoined upon the Thessalonians. Finally, it is important to consider our own day and circumstances, and the senses in which these letters are relevant still.

INSTRUCTION ABOUT THE COMING

The future of "the dead in Christ" is the central issue of verses 13-18 of 1 Thessalonians 4. On a subject on which they had no previous information, the truth is now conveyed "by the word of the Lord"; that is, with no less authority than that of the Lord Himself as its guarantee. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Here is something as much to be believed, and as sure of accomplishment, as those other great events on which Christians rely, the death and resurrection of Christ. When our Lord openly appears, to receive and establish the kingdom of which He is the heir, He will not appear alone (see Colossians 3: 4). But here especially it is made clear that those at present "asleep in Jesus" will form part of the vast host which will accompany Him then. The confident and authoritative way in which this is affirmed is impressive. This is calculated to remove one of the main causes of depression and uncertainty amongst the Thessalonians, and to replace it by a sense of comfort and hope amidst their exacting experiences.

Some details of the way in which this will be brought about are given. Our Lord's first action will

be on behalf of His people. Christians who are alive when the great moment comes will have no advantage or priority over those of the same faith in the living Christ, who have departed from this life. Rather the reverse. The dead in Christ shall rise *first*. Then those still alive at the time, along with them, will be *caught away* (or *raptured*) "to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord". All will be with Him, in this way, before His public manifestation; they will appear with Him when at last He openly reveals Himself. Though there may be delay, the time will surely come when our Lord intervenes for His people, destroying the very power of death itself. With no exceptions every single believer will be changed to His likeness and translated into His presence. Here is the common and sure hope of all whose faith centres on Christ. No other event requires fulfilment before it may come about. We await the commanding shout from Himself which will effect it. When this is understood, the sorrows which Christians experience take on a softer character. Bereavement of Christian companions is not a hopeless nor a comfortless experience. With such a hope to sustain it, faith can find the nerve to persist however hard the paths it may tread. The Thessalonians must have received these heartening words with thankfulness and new hope; numerous others have done so since.

The teaching of 2 Thessalonians 2 is of a different kind. "We beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come" (2: 1, 2, RSV). This shows

clearly what the possibilities were. Quite unlike the teaching about the rapture, it is clearly stated in the verses which follow that certain happenings must precede the coming of "the day of the Lord". The first letter, at the end, had credited them with some awareness of this aspect of the coming of Christ. "Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night — sudden destruction cometh upon them — and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (5: 2-4). Here was plain indication that, though summary judgment was to come, at a time referred to as "the day of the Lord", it was not for them. On the contrary, the One they awaited was to deliver them from the wrath to come (see 1 Thessalonians 1: 10). They were now less clear about this; the result of misleading suggestions from those who wished them no good. Hence Paul in this second letter stresses the fact that, though their circumstances were hard, and tension was high, their troubles were in no sense comparable with those in store for the world when "the day of the Lord" comes. As Christians they were not to look for the worst, or to imagine it to have arrived: it would indeed come later, but no Christian would be asked to face that. On the contrary the time of judgment upon those who troubled them, and upon all who are disobedient to the gospel, would be a time of rest and relief for them (see 2 Thessalonians 1: 4-10). When it is understood that the events of 1 Thessalonians 4 will occur first, before God's judgments in the earth begin to take effect, it becomes clear that Christians need not fear the future. It is equally

clear that non-Christians have no cause for composure, even though that may be a common attitude (see 1 Thessalonians 5: 3), so severe and so certain are the events ahead as outlined in these verses.

In order to discount the false idea that the day of the Lord could already have arrived, the second chapter specifies signs which must precede it, together with other developments which will take place then, and only then. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped" (3, 4). Paul states here that a great and final apostasy, reaching its climax in the Antichrist, will be the sign of the proximity of the day of the Lord. The English word apostasy is merely the transliteration of the Greek word used here, translated "a falling away" in the Authorised Version. Revolt against God, yet retaining a religious character, is here envisaged. One man will ultimately come to the fore, the personification of those self-seeking and self-exalting traits which have long characterised fallen man. Here will be the final bid by man to replace and dethrone God. His end will be sudden and sure. "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (verse 8).

These developments were not in sight when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. They are perhaps more so today, but have still not materialised in any full sense. The unrestrained manifestation of evil, in its character of arrogance and opposition to God, is yet future.

But though under restraint, evil has been in active development ever since those early days (see verse 7). The restraint upon it mentioned in verses 6 and 7 has often been identified with the Holy Spirit, present here on earth so long as the true Church of God remains here. The members of that Church are elsewhere spoken of as "the salt of the earth", a simile which can be seen to be significant in the present context. Whatever the first intention of these verses, and it must be admitted that the reference to the restraining power is enigmatic in form, the Holy Spirit must be the ultimate check upon evil. In due time that restraint will be removed for a brief period. Corruption and lawlessness will be allowed to gain momentum in the earth. The character of evil will be shown in all its hideousness; it will rightly deserve and receive unsparing judgment from God.

Verses 10-12 speak in stark and solemn terms of the fate at that time of the many who have refused the truth of Christianity. Unbelief and rejection of the truth from God opens the way for easy deception from elsewhere; the adversary knows well how to present this in attractive form, and will be allowed to do so in that day. The attitudes of persistent refusal of the love of God, and of pleasure in unrighteousness, will reap their irrevocable returns. Both opportunity and possibility of repentance will have passed. God Himself will then confirm in full measure the delusion which men have themselves preferred.

For the Thessalonian believers, however, and all others of later days, a bright hope and a bright future stand out against this dark background (verses 13-17). These

dark prospects could hold no menace for them. Salvation in the fullest sense would be theirs, the completion of God's gracious work within them, already begun. Let them therefore be calm and hopeful in all their attitudes. Let them be consistent and purposeful in quiet adherence to the teaching they had received, strengthened by that sovereign and protective love which could never fail them, waiting in patience for their Lord.

READINESS FOR THE COMING

Paul's idea of readiness for the coming of Christ is made clear in those parts of the letters which urge appropriate ways of living upon the Thessalonians. The prominent sections of this kind are chapter 4 (1-12) and chapter 5 (6-22) from the first letter, and, from the second, chapter 3 (6-15). Paul makes it very clear that these are more than his own recommendations to them; here are instructions which are no less than "commandments by the Lord Jesus". This is the very will of God for them.

The contents of these passages may briefly be summarised as follows. The need for purity and quiet steadiness in their lives is pressed; their true and practical sanctification would consist in living well-balanced, orderly and peaceable Christian lives. They must certainly be alert and watchful for their Lord's return, yet also they should be sober and industrious in their habits. They must be active in well-doing, always on guard lest any of their ways should bring the general body of believers, and the confession of Christ which they made, into disrepute.

The most urgent kinds of advice needed by the immediate readers seem to be picked out and stressed

in chapter 4. The need for personal purity and holy living comes first. For the Thessalonians, called from a background of idolatry and licentiousness, this emphasis is especially understandable. For all Christians of every time and place it is hardly less important to underline this, so strong are the tendencies, within and around, to be content with less than true Christian standards. "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 4: 7, 8). In giving this great gift, God has equipped His people for living in ways which please Him; yet, by the same act, it is made plain that His standards for His people are of the highest kind.

Alongside this, one other matter is given prominence in this section. Attention is drawn to the importance of going about their ordinary pursuits in a quiet and industrious way. Brotherly love, also a highly desirable feature, was already a strong characteristic of theirs, so that they are simply encouraged to allow it to increase more and more. But the need to be self-supporting, not frittering away their time in idleness, really required pointing out. The tendency towards idle ways, shown by some of them, was no doubt made easier because of the strong spirit of mutual support amongst them. Such an attitude would also be easy to adopt in that atmosphere of heightened tension associated with the feeling of the immediacy of the return of Christ. It was right to look forward to His return with expectancy and hope; and the mutual consideration shown amongst themselves was also good. But such commendable attitudes must not be allowed to

have these adverse consequences. They must study (literally, be ambitious) to be quiet, to work with their own hands, walking honestly towards those that are without. Ways which were seen to be consistent and correct in the eyes of the outside world must be their aim.

The same tendency may be seen to underlie some of the later injunctions appearing in chapter 5 (see, for example, verses 6, 14, 22), though exhortations of a more general kind also appear there. Paul has to deal still further, and more severely, with this spirit of indolence in chapter 3 of the second epistle. The amount of space devoted to this subject in the second letter is second only to that given to instruction about the coming of the Lord. We may therefore be sure that this is no unimportant matter. Such conduct by a fraction of their number was unhealthy for the individuals concerned, unfair to the remainder, and spoilt the good impression otherwise given by the church. Acting in this disorderly fashion was (as the word in the original implies) like breaking rank, marching out of step. A firm line must be taken to bring the offenders to their senses, though it will be noted that a mild form of ostracism is suggested as the remedy, not excommunication. Paul is able to use his own example when with them as a model of diligent, selfless, and independent effort which they might well note and follow.

THE LESSONS FOR TODAY

Centuries have elapsed since our Lord promised that He would return; and, in general, two kinds of reaction to this situation are possible. One is to treat His return as

very close now, arguing that if the Thessalonian church did right to expect it how much more ought Christians to do so today? Yet sadly the alternative tendency has been the common one. Passage of time has made forgetfulness easy; and scripture itself foresees this trend. One mark of a questionable Christian is to discount Christ's promise and to slip into ways no different from the world around him (see Matthew 24: 48-51). But dullness to the bright prospect of the return of our Lord, while not deliberate, is nevertheless a real possibility with the most genuine of His people. It is high time indeed to awake out of sleep, and to think and act as those who await their Lord (see Romans 13: 11-14).

Both the helpful and the salutary aspects of our Lord's coming are needed today. The stimulus and the encouragement which it supplies are essential ingredients of Christian living; and all Christians have their distressing times when the comfort of that blessed hope is specially needed and welcome. Needless to say, these comforts and encouragements are the stronger because the realisation of that hope is so much nearer. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed," and the Christian spirit is continually quickened by the awareness that this is so.

Help in discerning the character of the times in which we live is also made available in these letters. According to the second letter, lawless and self-interested trends will increase in prominence towards the end. This prediction is not difficult to match with contemporary events; though, as has been pointed out, the passage teaches that other, worse, features must yet appear. In present days these verses can hardly fail to im-

press the reader with their importance, those attitudes which will be dealt with unsparingly by our Lord having become so much more palpable and widespread in recent times. The 20th-century situation, and the teaching of scripture, are alike at variance with the supposition that the world is growing better every day. The conflict and tension between good and evil is to continue and heighten until the final crisis comes; and the judgment of God, in the hands of Christ, will fall on all that rejects and opposes God.

Knowing these things, what manner of men ought we to be? We have seen how the letters stress some of the implications for us. Pure, consistent, and alert Christian living must be our aim. Let us not be fine-weather Christians, or Christians on the big occasion only. Let us try to avoid excitable and variable attitudes, but apply ourselves to calm and patient allegiance to our Lord, making it our aim to be honest and hard to criticize in all our ways. The other-worldliness of our interests and expectations as

Christians must not damage our efficiency and sense of application to other duties, else our ways will not agree with what is advised here. Still worse it would be to be sluggish not because of high interest in the things of Christ, but simply because we may share in the spirit prevalent in the world. As much as possible in return for a little as possible is a common objective in our day, though there are exceptions to this. To share in that spirit is not a true Christian attitude. It is important surely to stress today, as then, that an honest day's work is expected from all who take their faith seriously.

The Master Himself urged, and summarized in the most succinct terms, the spirit appropriate to those who look for His return. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord." "Blessed," we may be sure, "is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Luke 12: 35, 36; Matthew 24: 46).

TRADITION OR TRUTH?

J. STODDART

IT takes no great skill or discernment to realise that the authority of Scripture is increasingly being challenged in this our day. No surprise do we feel that this should be true of a hostile and unbelieving world without; from that source we would surely expect little else. But very great concern must be felt at the growing disregard for the Word of God by those within

the profession of Christianity. The most subtle and specious way in which this takes place is by the introduction of tradition by leaders who would not overtly deny the authority of the Word. Indeed, some of these, at least, would maintain that such tradition complements and supports Scripture itself.

Let us examine afresh the uncompromising attitude of the Lord

Jesus towards those who made such contentions. In Matthew 15: 1-20 the scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem, who, more than any, waged constant and unrelenting opposition to Jesus, had followed Him into Galilee. Their purpose as always was to "catch something out of His mouth, that they might accuse Him" (Luke 11: 54). Doubtless, the most obvious chance of success for them would be an attack upon the more vulnerable disciples, about whom they proceed to lodge their complaint to Jesus. "Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread." How quickly, we might think, this question could have been disposed of if He had simply retorted that the tradition of the elders had not even a vestige of divine authority. But for wise reasons He did not. Instead, He counters theirs by a question of His own. "Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" The import of these two questions is not always fully understood.

What were the "traditions of the elders" insisted upon by the scribes and Pharisees? They were not merely the arbitrary rulings of living religious leaders, but dearly treasured principles and precepts, held to have been committed to Moses orally by God in addition to the Law written on tables of stone. They based their belief on a misconception of Exodus 34: 27. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel." Thus they taught that Moses received both the oral law and the written Law on Mount Sinai. The oral law was transmitted from generation to generation and eventually committed to

writing in the Talmud. This purported to complement and explain the written Law, and in effect carried as much if not more authority than their Scriptures. So from this source it was that they alleged the transgression of the disciples. It was a most serious offence which they could in no wise overlook, and provided, as they thought, an excellent complaint to the Master.

But their assumption was as erroneous as their motives, and His counter-question to them exposed both relentlessly. He was evidently acquainted with the details of the tradition of the elders, and readily cites one of the glaring examples of their complete contradiction of the commandment of God. The fifth commandment was one which they professed to revere meticulously. Yet, strangely cunning as the legalist mind is, they discovered in the traditions of the elders, a means of evading the plain commandment to "honour thy father and thy mother", with its gracious promise for obedience. A man had only to say that that which he ought to render to his parents was Corban, that is given as to God or to the Temple, and he was then relieved of all responsibility to obey the commandment, and also of the punishment for disobedience. Thus neatly and conveniently the Word of God was "made of none effect" (Mark 7: 11-13) and tradition had effectively annulled the authority of Scripture. But how these "blind leaders of blind", as the Lord called them, must have cringed under the withering condemnation of their hypocrisy, which He quoted against them from Isaiah 29: 13. "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far

from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Of course, we readily identify ourselves with the Lord's teaching here and rejoice to see the scribes and Pharisees roundly rebuked by Him, but may we challenge our own hearts by asking how far we have learned the deeper lesson which He now draws from this occasion. Not only were the "traditions of the elders" invalid, but coming from the heart of man, they were the truly defiling elements and therefore external sanctification by washing of hands was quite useless. The traditions failed to recognise the utter corruption of man's condition before God, and presumed that by mere ceremonial cleansing of the outer man, righteousness could be gained. But when the unpalatable truth came from the lips of the Lord Jesus the Pharisees were offended. It cut them down to size, and where pride governs the heart the cure is painful. Strangely enough, even the disciples had hardly grasped the lesson, when they asked Jesus if He knew how He had offended the Pharisees. They thought it must be some kind of "parable" and asked Him to explain it to them! How slow can we poor mortals be in learning the nature of truth, for alas how like the disciples we are in this. And even with the indwelling Spirit, has the Lord not to say to us at times, "Are ye also yet without understanding?"

We quickly discern how many professing Christians are ensnared and enslaved by the traditions of men in this our day, but it might be profitable to apply the lesson a little nearer home. Even in circles where the Scriptures are revered, and the claim made that it is the sole guide in Divine things, are

there not to be seen indications of traditions which bid to undermine the sole authority of the Word of God? When the question is asked why we do this or that, the answer is sometimes given, "We have always done so", or perhaps, "This was firmly held and taught by so-and-so." If we do this surely this establishes the authority of tradition above the Word, otherwise the Scriptural authority would gladly be quoted.

But it may be asked, and rightly so, if Scripture itself does not support the idea of a right kind of tradition. It is true that in 2 Thessalonians 2: 15 and 3: 6 the A.V. uses the word "tradition" with regard to apostolic ministry, both written and oral. Other translations (*viz.* Amp N.T. and J.N.D.) give the word "instruction" in these instances, while the Greek word remains constant in every case. Thus if it be maintained that tradition has a rightful place in our thinking and action, it must without question be that contained in the inspired writings of the New Testament. Had there been more regard for such "tradition" or instruction how effectively the authority of men would have been rejected and true unity expressed in the fellowship of the saints. How much less importance would have been attached to the outward appearance of things and much more value set upon the state of the heart. In the story of Simon Magus in Acts 8, it was the evident condition of his heart expressed in his covetous words, that brought out Peter's strong condemnation of the man. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Yet externally this man had had much to commend him, as we read that Simon was baptised, con-

tinued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the signs and miracles which were done (verse 13).

"But to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man," said Jesus (Matthew 15: 20). It is to be noted that His statement was not made in the context of hygienic values, for here the simple rule of washing one's hands before eating or handling food could not be over-emphasised. Neglect of this could have the most dire results upon our physical well-being, according to the findings of modern hygienic science. But the moment that moral cleansing is attributed to this action, as did the Pharisees in their practice of many ceremonial washings, then the truth as to the heart of man, incorrigible in its desperate wickedness, is denied. Do we then wonder why the Lord so sternly rebuked these hypocritical men, who he said would be uprooted as not of His heavenly Father's planting? They were but "blind leaders of blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (verse 13, 14).

When Jesus Himself was invited to dine with a Pharisee in Luke 11, His host " marvelled that He had not first washed before dinner" (verse 38). Let no one imagine that what offended the Pharisee was a social indiscretion by the Master, but that He completely ignored the traditional ceremony of washing of hands. This to the host was a serious breach of the talmudic tradition, and a salutary rebuke to the self-righteousness implied in the practice of it. A study of the verses that follow show how the Lord interpreted His own action, as a denunciation of their hollow formalism, which even led them to "pass over judgment and the love of God" (verse 42). Yet such men regarded themselves as the custod-

ians of Jewish truth, which in the far distant history of their sect they may have been. But what may have been commendable in their beginnings approximately in B.C. 300 now comes out in open revolt against the grace of the Lord Jesus, "Who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The Master knew that His disciples were not Pharisees, but in Matthew 16: 6 He finds it necessary to warn them (and ourselves) to "take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Their teaching and love of tradition was something that could spread and infect others. And in another context we are reminded that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5: 6). So soon in the early church's responsible history had Phariseeism begun to rear its head, with the result that the impurity of the human heart unjudged now menaced the fellowship. In this late day, the sad spectacle of the break-up of a circle of fellowship, once owning to be guided by the Word alone, has been seen — and alas witnessed by a sneering world. Those who know this situation best have attributed the debacle to the authority invested in men, whose leadership insisted on the maintenance of traditions rather than the Word of God. How largely it has been forgotten that no man, however gifted and faithful, is an authority, and that the only authority we may acknowledge is that of the Word itself.

It is most fully acknowledged that only the Lord Himself is the Judge of every responsible situation, as can be learned from Revelation chapters 1, 2 and 3, but we may learn His mind as He assesses things

there, and be guided by His gracious authority in this our day. May we be kept so near to Him Who alone is "The Truth", that we shall resolutely, yet humbly refuse

every attempt to rule by traditions of men, and quietly bow to the authority of the Word of the Living God, "the Scripture of Truth".

CORRESPONDENCE

DR. T. Scott of 111 Bennetthorpe, Doncaster, writes as follows:

Propitiation and Substitution. (Question p. 288). While agreeing generally with your answer, I think we should keep to the simple distinction that Propitiation is "for all", Substitution "for many". Propitiation is a word misconceived and disliked by modern theologians. It is most simply explained by the Divine illustration, "a mercy-seat", where God and man can meet. (Note modern theologians substitute the Laver for the Mercy-seat. See NEB I John 2: 1. "He is the remedy for the defilement of our sins.") At the Mercy-seat God and man can meet, because the death of Christ has so glorified God that He is "justified" (shown to be righteous) in forbearing to punish instantly the sins of men from Adam to Judgment Day, in showing providential care and kindness to them meanwhile, in providing salvation for them at such cost to Himself, in initiating and maintaining the Gospel for whosoever will and much more. As an occasional Gospel preacher, I tell them something like this. Then I say, "I cannot tell you that He bore your sins, and died instead of you, because I do not know unless you tell me first that you believe on Him. If you do so, I am

authorised by the Lord to declare to you that your sins are forgiven for His Name's sake. He was your Substitute." Otherwise it is Universalism. If He is the Substitute for all, God cannot demand payment twice, and all men (perhaps Satan too) will be saved at last.

I fail to see why you should doubt that the first goat represents propitiation, and the second goat substitution. True, they are separated in time, as the Atonement and the Remission of Israel's sins will be. But they are closely identified in that the two goats were presented *together* before the Lord. You say that the scapegoat is not a sacrifice, but for material and physical reasons it could not be sacrificed if it were to carry away their sins. (Like the two birds in Leviticus 14. But the living bird was identified with the killed one by being dipped in the blood.) "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

Having the two goats as types makes it easier for us to distinguish aspects of the death of Christ.

The "one sacrifice" for us is better shown in the young bullock which Aaron offered for himself and his house. The fact that it was foreordained is shown by the fact that he brought it into the holy place (Leviticus 16: 3) before ever he put on the holy linen garments (Incarnation) (Leviticus 16: 4).

CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS AND THEIR CORRECTION

COLIN CURRY

7. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

A review of the subject matter of this sequence of papers gives rise to a few general observations, which it may be valuable to set down in conclusion.

First, we can scarcely fail to be impressed with the breadth and variety of the problems dealt with in these letters. A ruling is given here on many a difficult matter, and in a way which should settle the issue for all who will accept what Scripture says. It is clear that these epistles provide a comprehensive body of corrective teaching. All the shades and types of misunderstanding which can affect Christians are covered in principle. We have also noticed again and again the way this teaching suits present-day needs. Not only have we seen its pertinence in the general sense, but we have felt ourselves to be involved closely in requiring and needing to respond to much of it. The sharp edge of the word of God, the sword of the Spirit, touches the conscience still. But we have also sensed the healing and helpful qualities of this same God-given word, if its guidance is accepted.

Secondly it is clear that, though the misapprehensions and the problems are many and diverse, the instruction which meets the difficulties has a strong common element about it. In one way or another our faith is focussed upon Christ Himself as the answer to every misconception and wrong tendency. It is as our lives as Christians lose that focus, that the defections and the misunderstandings arise; and re-direction of faith towards Him is

always the cure and the corrective. At the most basic level of all, we may need to see again that His sufficiency alone is the adequate foundation upon which we can rely; or we may need to realise afresh the vital truth of His resurrection, without which our faith is vain, and upon which so much else depends. If clear on these fundamental matters, help in proper Christian living will not cease to be needed. A life true to the New Testament pattern has Christ Himself dwelling at its centre, as its rule and its object. The control upon our lives which our Lord can provide needs to be our continual experience. Enablement and incentive for true Christian activities and attitudes can only stem from a real and abiding knowledge of Himself. Right attitudes with fellow-Christians will flow from such an appreciation of our Lord. Small matters will not be allowed to divide us; joint concern for what concerns His interests will take precedence in our thoughts. From the common recognition of His supremacy and authority will flow the real experience of fellowship with others, of mutual profit and spiritual growth, of helpful and constructive activities and ministry amongst His people. In the awareness that His promised return may indeed be close at hand will be found the comfort and the stimulus needed to maintain our lives in hopeful confidence and in patient allegiance to our Lord.

Finally, encouragement is to be found from the thought of the foresight which provided this guidance

for generation after generation of Christian people. It is clearly intended for us, no less than for believers of earlier times. These letters certainly highlight our weaknesses to us: and it is important that we should allow them to do so. But, as we face these shortcomings, clear direction and substantial support in overcoming them is also given. The opportunity is always with us in humility to accept

and to obey this instruction, to follow the guidelines here laid down. The profit to be gained from Scripture, by its own claim, arises in part from the "correction" and the "training in righteousness" which it supplies (2 Timothy 3: 16, R.S.V.). These particular letters would seem especially helpful along these lines. May we, by accepting and obeying their teaching, prove their helpful qualities for ourselves.

ABRAHAM

R. THOMSON

A SHIELD AND AN EXCEEDING GREAT REWARD

(Genesis 14 and 15)

FROM the blessing and fellowship which Abraham enjoyed at Mamre we come now to the scene of conflict which was soon to have serious consequences for Lot. Because of the rebellion of those who served Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, for twelve years, we have four kings engaged in warfare with five kings. The battle was pitched in the vale of Siddim, full of bitumen pits, and there the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah suffered defeat. Goods and victuals were taken, and Lot who dwelt in Sodom, was captured. His self-will and self-choosing had brought this disaster upon him, and he was sadly in need of a deliverer. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Romans 6: 16).

To whom could Lot turn for deliverance? We have no record of his crying out to God for help; but we do know that God was behind the scenes and was working for the deliverance of His righteous servant

who had fared so very grievously. A fugitive from the battle came and told Abram, the Hebrew. This is the first occurrence of this term, Hebrew, in the scriptures. It means "emigrant", or a person who is sojourning in a land not yet his own. It suggests the New Testament description: "pilgrims and strangers". A pilgrim is one who is passing through to a place of promise; and a stranger is one of another country. Truly, Abram was such, as is typified by his tent and his altar. The tent declared that he had no settled place here, and the altar symbolised his sweet communion with God. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11: 10). Also, the Lord could say to the Jews "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8: 56).

Abram dwelling in Mamre, enjoying its rich pasture, was the man of resource for that present moment, and was also prepared and willing to be used by God for any service

which would be for His glory. Having heard that his brother had been taken captive, he gathered together his three hundred and eighteen servants, trained and instructed in his own house, and pursued the adversaries as far as Dan, the place of judgment. God gave Abram a glorious victory; and we see Abram in all the strength of faith, with brilliant tactics, dividing his comparatively small company, attacking the enemies by night, and finally smiting and pursuing them as far as Hobah. Victory was assured, for God was behind all the operations and Abram brought back all the goods, also his brother Lot and his goods, along with the women and the people. It was really a full and spectacular triumph, for God had assuredly been the shield and protection for Abram, the man of faith.

The hour of victory was also the moment of great testing for the victor. Would he be overcome with thoughts of self-importance? Could he resist the plaudits of the world, soon to be offered to him? Or, would God be glorified as a result of the triumph, and the servant be blessed in his own soul? This we are soon to see; for God had purposed to minister grace and blessing to the heart of His willing servant Abram. The testing came in the congratulations from the king of Sodom, who hailed him as the victor over the enemies of Sodom. They met in the valley of Shaveh (level place), the king's dale. It almost suggests that the king of Sodom recognized Abram as an equal, even offering him all the spoils of his victory.

Then came the great and mysterious Melchizedec, king of Salem, and priest of the most high God, who brought forth bread and wine to refresh him after the conflict. He

also conferred upon Abram blessings from God, the possessor of heaven and earth, thereby giving sustenance, cheer and blessing to the victor. The true service of the Melchizedec priesthood is seen to be *blessing*, not as in the case of the Aaronic priesthood, *sacrifice*. Not only did the blessing *descend* upon the servant, but it also *ascended* in thanksgiving to God, Who had delivered the enemies of Abram into his hand. How very comforting and encouraging this must have been to Abram, whose very life and practice was to be subject to God, enjoying His favour day by day! Thus we see the surpassing excellency of that which is heavenly, over that which is earthly. Furthermore, Abram gave Melchizedec tithes of all that he had. One tenth of the spoils of victory were willingly offered to him who in Hebrews 7: 17 is declared to be a beautiful type of Christ in His eternal priesthood. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

It would almost seem that the actual meeting with the king of Sodom and his offer of the spoil took place after the meeting of Abram and Melchizedec. Abram appears to base his refusal on a prior solemn vow to the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that he would not take anything, small or great, from the king of Sodom, lest he should say, "I have made Abram rich." What a noble answer, so wonderfully in keeping with one who had been feasting in heavenly pastures, and enjoying the blessing of God!

Thus we see in chapter 14 how God became Abram's shield. Lot had been delivered to return, alas, to sojourn in Sodom; and Abram proved the power of God, with the blessing bestowed for his subjection and obedience to Him. When the

tempting offer from the world was presented to him, he refused it, because he had been feasting upon the things which were heavenly and of God.

In chapter 15, to Abram the overcomer, victorious through the power of God, and receiving food for the mighty from the hand of Melchizedek, there is now opened up a wonderful sphere of promise and blessing from God. Indeed, not only is this passage of the greatest importance in the scheme of divine truth, but it is *the* determining factor in current events in the Middle East.

Having refused all the tempting offers from the king of Sodom, Abram is prepared to receive from above that which will encourage and strengthen him in the path of faith. It is "after these things" that we see the unfolding of divine covenant dealings with Abram (Genesis 15: 1) firstly in connection with his seed, and then in relation to the land of inheritance. The covenant now to be made with Abram is a great advance on that made with Noah relating to the earth (Genesis 9: 12-16) and confirmed by the bow in the cloud. The Abrahamic covenant was by sacrifice and blood (Genesis 15: 9, 10).

In these new communications through the word of Jehovah recorded in 15: 1, a change seems to be indicated. The public life of His servant had been much in evidence, in the altars erected, trials endured, and victories gained. Now, it would seem that God was to deal with Abram in a private way, showing what He could be to him in fullness and sufficiency, through faith. The word communicated is, "Fear not, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward". Had He not already been a shield to him as he rescued Lot, and overcame the war-

ring kings? Truly, He had; but what about the exceeding great reward? Here the boldness of faith shone forth as Abram addressed Adonai Jehovah, the God able to give blessing upon the earth. "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" Abram's great desire was to have a son, the fruit of his own body. This longing was fully in accord with the mind and purpose of Jehovah, for with Him Christ was ever in view.

With deep joy He brought Abram forth and asked him to look steadfastly upon the stars of heaven, which could not be numbered for multitude, and said, "So shall thy seed be." Evidently Joab knew this blessed truth when he refused to number the people at David's request (2 Samuel 24: 3). The heavenly company of the line of faith is first in view, for "God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1: 3, 4). It is noteworthy too, that it is "seed", and not "seeds", thereby declaring the pre-eminence of Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham (Matthew 1: 1). Could Abram believe this promise from God? Blessed be God, he could, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness". Abram believed what he heard from God: the principle upon which righteousness can be imputed unto the believer in Jesus. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10: 17).

After the promise of the seed thus given, Jehovah now speaks to Abram of the promise of the *land*. This He had already made known to him at his call from Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 12: 2) and now confirms it to him for his faith.

Abram, in the boldness of this blessing asks, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" The covenant-maker then gave him a detailed account relating to the proposed covenant. It was to be by sacrifice and blood, thereby securing the inheritance of the land to Israel as Abram's seed.

Abram loved covenant title, and readily accepted the word of Jehovah concerning the oath and the blood. Five things had to be taken for sacrifice: a heifer, a she-goat and a ram, all of three years old, also a turtle dove and a young pigeon. This procedure for making a covenant was according to the established pattern. Another example is seen in Jeremiah 34: 18 where it seems probable that the manner of making the covenant of Exodus 24: 5-8 is described. "The words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof." Note that in this present scene, Abram did not pass between the pieces. Fulfilment could never fail, for it depended on God alone.

Obedient to all that Jehovah had commanded him, Abram now watched over the carcasses, lest the fowls of the air should devour them. That which had been entrusted to him by God must be preserved from the attacks of the evil one, who is the prince and power of the air. So also, at the going down of the sun, a deep sleep came upon Abram, and a horror of great darkness was upon him.

The struggle to preserve the carcasses and the horror of great darkness are extremely vivid pictures of the deep exercise by which Abram was involved with God in this supremely important transaction. Not easily did Abram become the father of all the faithful and the

friend of God.

It is in these circumstances that the covenant-making God is well able to announce His covenant, and by His power and wisdom will bring it to a glorious conclusion, through Christ, the promised Seed.

God also revealed to Abram the history of his posterity over the next four hundred years. His descendants would be strangers and servants, being greatly afflicted; but deliverance would be brought to them at the appointed time, and they would come forth with great substance. This was God's answer to Abram's question, "Whereby shall I know?" It was to be communicated to him by sacrifice, by darkness, by a deep sleep, by a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, and received in exercise and faith.

Divine wisdom can be seen in the fact that Abram did not pass between the pieces. The covenant did not depend on Abram's fulfilling a part. It was unconditional, God being the only contracting party. "A mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one" (Galatians 3: 20). "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Galatians 3: 16).

After Abram's death in peace, the word concerning the nation would surely be fulfilled, but only after four hundred years of the servitude in Egypt until the deliverance through Moses.

When the sun went down, and darkness fell, there was a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp passed between the pieces. The smoking furnace perhaps suggests the nation's deep trial, as given us in Deuteronomy 4: 20, "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth

out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day." The burning lamp might denote Israel's later glory as in 1 Kings 11: 36, "That David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there."

Thus the covenant was established with Abram and the extent of the land given to his seed made known. It is obvious that the promised pos-

session is much larger than the Israel, an island in the Arab world, as we now know it. In the day when Christ shall sit upon His own throne, and rule in equity, Israel's boundaries then will be from the River of Egypt, to the great River Euphrates in Iraq. Ten nations, mentioned in the end of Genesis 15 would be dispossessed, and their lands given to Abram's seed for an everlasting possession.

"BEHOLD YOUR KING"

Echoes from St. Andrews, 1967

J. STODDART

1. HIS BIRTH

Matthew 1: 1-18; 2: 1-12

THE study of the life of the Lord Jesus, "in the days of His flesh", is rightly considered to be of paramount importance to our Christian faith. In modern times the facts recorded in the Scriptures concerning this have been openly assailed, and our only safeguard is to become better acquainted with revealed truth in order to refute the specious errors of our day.

With this in mind some five studies are before us, each in the Gospel of Matthew, focussed on the cardinal events in the earthly days of Israel's Messiah; (1) His Birth, (2) His Temptations, (3) His Transfiguration, (4) His Death and (5) His Resurrection. Perhaps it would be as well to consider these as *one* integrated study since all converge upon the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Firstly then, let us reflect upon the miracle of His virgin birth, so greatly discounted, or at best thought of by some Christians as non-essential to our faith. True, only two of the four

Gospels record this great event, but we would be quite mistaken to conclude from this that the other two writers considered the birth of Jesus to be without significance. Indeed, very valid reasons underlie their omission, but these lie outside the scope of our present study.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke each give an inspired account of the birth of the Saviour of men, each differing significantly from the other in the circumstantial details observed, and yet convincingly complementary to each other in the fact that Jesus, the Son of God was born of a virgin mother, Mary, and conceived miraculously by the Holy Ghost. How significant it is that the first page of our New Testament opens with this amazing record of what must in many ways be the greatest event in history, nothing less than the Almighty Creator breaking out of Eternity into this world of time and space: God Who is a Spirit becoming manifest in flesh: He Who ever dwelt in the

bosom of the Father nestling in the bosom of a frail human mother. Every subsequent event in Redemption's plan hung dependently on the accomplishment of this miracle, this great mystery of the Incarnation.

In the modern process of "demythologising" the Bible, the story of the Virgin Birth has been explained away (being both "unscientific and unnecessary") as the exuberant naïvety of Jewish folk-lore built around the essential facts of the occasion. Yet the serious student of Scripture is impressed with the claim of Matthew 1: 22, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet (Isaiah 7: 14) saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Thus, far from being one of the doubtful trappings of tradition, the fact of the unique conception by a virgin and consequent miraculous birth of Jesus was the most significant proof that God was fulfilling His promise of the Messiah made seven centuries before.

Take away the record of the Virgin Birth of Christ and you take away the one great sign given by God Himself that Emmanuel had come here amongst men. Thus a blow is struck at the very roots of Christian revelation and we are left without assurance that God has really kept His word. It would follow that if Isaiah 7: 14 has not been fulfilled, if no actual conception by the Holy Ghost in the virgin's womb, then Jesus was only an ordinary man, born in sin and therefore Himself needing salvation. Every subsequent subject in our present study would be worthless for these reasons. First, the *Temp-tations* of Jesus could not have been victorious if he were born as

other men, all of whom had fallen under them. His *Transfiguration* would have been mythical for it could not have been said by the Father from Heaven, "This is My Beloved Son, hear Him." His vicarious *Death* would have been impossible, since He was to "offer Himself, through the Eternal Spirit, without spot to God", which could be said of no son of Adam's race. His *Resurrection* could not therefore have taken place, since this would be the mighty proof that Redemption was accomplished, which was an impossibility to any mere man.

Such considerations surely underline the importance of the true Scriptural account of our Saviour's birth, while we humbly acknowledge the profound mystery inseparable from it. At this juncture it may be well to ponder the human aspect (for want of a better word) of this great event. For long generations no king of David's royal line had sat upon the throne of Israel and Gentile domination of Immanuel's land had placed Herod, the Idumean, as king over the Jews. In that humble birth in a stable in Bethlehem was there at last a challenge to this intolerable situation? The first seventeen verses of our New Testament assure us that there certainly was. For here is the *Biblos Geneseos*, the genealogy of Jesus Christ, as the lineal descendant of both David and Abraham, born in the time, manner and place predicted centuries before in the Old Testament. It has been noted, however, that while this genealogy conforms to the conventions customary in Jewish legal registers, the clear marks of inspired accuracy are conspicuous. Thus, while for all others in the line it says father begat son, verse 16 says, "And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called

Christ." So while with strict legality Joseph was His father, He was truly Mary's child, the long-promised "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3: 15).

It needed the appearances of an angel in a dream to console Joseph and assure him that the pregnancy of his espoused wife, so unaccountable to him and requiring a sorrowful separation by such a righteous man as he, was God's unique way of bringing into the world One Who would "save His people from their sins." Hence His Name was to be called JESUS. This is the conjunction of two Hebrew words Jah (a name of God) and Isoua (Saviour or Deliverer). It corresponds to the Old Testament name of Joshua, but there with the simpler connotation of a man raised up by God to be a deliverer from their enemies. Only in the New Testament does the name assume its full significance of God Himself as Saviour from His people's sins. In obeying the angel's word to "take unto himself Mary his wife", that is, not to put her away, Joseph cast the legal protection of his own name around her, and made her firstborn son his heir. So here in **very** truth was the living heir to the throne of David, and heir to the promises made to Abraham.

It would take more space than this paper permits to consider at length the difference between the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. Noteworthy, however, as a key to this, is the wording of Luke 3: 23, "Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." Here again we see the superb care with which the Spirit indites the Scripture, showing that Jesus was publicly acknowledged as Joseph's son, while in fact He was the son of Mary. From this point, as has been said, the

stream flows backward, to trace His ancestry back to Adam, through Nathan and David. The reasonable conclusion is that here we have the genealogy of Mary His mother, not given to prove His title to David's throne as in Matthew, but as truly Son of Man, of Adam. Thus its position in Luke 3 is significant as a prelude to the temptations of the Second Man by Man's inveterate enemy, Satan. As Joseph was not the actual son of Heli as stated here, it must be taken that he was Heli's *son-in-law*, and that Heli therefore was the father of Mary. To call a son-in-law "a son" was evidently consistent with the conventional form of Jewish registers. Another profitable observation would be Luke's record that the angel Gabriel is sent to Nazareth to *salute Mary* with the announcement of the coming great event. No record here, as in Matthew of the angel who appeared to Joseph in a dream, so right in its place there where the title to the throne was involved, and Joseph addressed as, "thou son of David."

Some remarks may now be recalled regarding the apparent lack of reference to the Virgin Birth in the preaching of the apostles in Acts and in the doctrinal epistles. Does this in some way weaken its importance? Surely not, if we remember the many statements made there which either imply or depend upon His unique birth for their understanding. At Athens Paul "preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17: 18), His Person and His work. Would it be unlikely that he should say how that Name was given at His birth and the manner of that birth? Also when Peter said (Acts 4: 12) "there is none other Name under heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved," surely that Name

would stand forever connected with the circumstances under which it was "given", both before and at His birth. We are told in Galatians 4: 4 that "God sent forth His Son, *born of a woman*, born under the law to redeem. . . ." This as we have already noted could only be true if that birth was in the manner predicted in Isaiah 7. It may be well to remember in this context that generally the epistles were written *before* the publication of the Gospels and the Acts. Until then much depended upon the oral dissemination of the facts concerning the Person and work of the Lord Jesus.

The question arises as to whether the Scriptures read or other passages clearly indicate the pre-existence of the Son of God before incarnation. Firstly, verse 23 of Matthew 1 citing the angel's words says, "They shall call His Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Not only does this establish His deity but that from the pre-existing form of God, He would assume the form of Man. One of the clearest answers to this question is given in Micah 5: 2, "Out of thee (Bethlehem Ephratah) shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; Whose goings forth have been from old, from Everlasting." Thus the Babe of Bethlehem is none other than the Eternal God. To this may be added John's Gospel chapter 1: 1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." To the Jews Jesus said, "I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me" (John 8: 42).

We must now briefly consider the story of the Magi in Matthew chapter 2. It will be necessary here to dispose of some firmly rooted mis-

conceptions created by popular Christmas carols, Christmas cards and artists' impressions of the so-called Nativity scene. Alas, how much average theology is dependent upon these fantastic sources! The A.V. reading of v. 1 "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem," has been more correctly translated, "Now Jesus *having been* born in Bethlehem of Judaea . . ." (J. N. D. Trans.). This allows for a period of up to two years after the birth of Jesus before the wise men appeared. This may be gathered from verse 16 which tells us how Herod in his wrath "sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time he had diligently enquired of the wise men." He therefore believed that the child Jesus could now be up to two years of age.

Scripture certainly does not say that the Magi were three in number or that they were kings, as so often popularly imagined and represented. They said they "had seen *His* star in the East and had come to worship Him." But evidently they had lost sight of the star in the uncharted wastes of the desert, and at length arrived, not at Bethlehem but at Jerusalem where the star was not. Being astrologers these men may have come from Babylon or Persia and thus followed the star for months before losing its kindly guidance. It was not, be it noted, from *the stars* that they gained their direction, but from one star, *His* star. We know not what measure of revelation the wise men possessed, but we recall that Daniel who in his day was thrown into the company of such men, proclaimed that "there is a God in heaven that

revealeth secrets", in making known the king's dream and its meaning to him. Could they have possessed some fragment of O.T. Scripture such as Numbers 24: 17 where Balaam said, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall arise out of Israel"? Secular history records that throughout the East in those days there was a general expectancy of the birth of a great king and that in some unintelligent way it was connected with Jerusalem.

Arriving at Jerusalem the wise men might have expected great jubilation, and a ready, joyful answer to their enquiry, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" But on the contrary we read, "When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." No knowledge with Herod, but on interrogating all the chief priests and scribes (verse 4) they seemed to be quite well-informed and informative on the subject, for to Herod's query, "Where should Christ be born?" at once they answered, as if proud to show their learning, "In Bethlehem of Judaea," supporting their reply by the well-known quotation from Micah 5: 2. But, like many today, their knowledge of Scripture bore no relevance to the happenings of their day. Little did they suspect that this astonishing promise had actually come to pass. Herod, however, would take no chances and with this new light in mind he directed the Magi to proceed to Bethlehem, "Go and search diligently for the young child (not a babe, notice); and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also." How cunningly he contrived to use these godly men, and even their Scriptures, to carry out his own nefarious intentions.

Once more the wise men resume their quest, and on the beam again, presently the star, which they saw in the East appeared for their guidance, going before them "till it came and stood over where the young child was." What exceeding joy filled their hearts to see that star, *His* star, again and to be confirmed in their minds that their journey had not been in vain. Soon it seems they arrived at the house (not the stable, notice) over which the star stood. "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him (not Mary!). And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh." The imaginative pictures we have so often seen, depicting this scene in the stable, with the infant Jesus on His mother's knee, and three gaudily-clad and crowned kings presenting their gifts, accompanied by angels and animals, would seem to bear little resemblance to the Divinely-inspired account here given. Perhaps the idea of three persons was derived from the three kinds of gifts they brought, but is there anything to compel such a conclusion? But the character of the gifts suggests some intelligence as to Who this Young Child really was. Gold was surely the appropriate gift for One Who was "born King of the Jews", frankincense for Him Whose life would yield such sweet savour to God, and myrrh, used in those days in connection with the burial of the dead, for that Death in which all love was centred.

The fact and circumstances of the birth of the Lord Jesus cannot be separated from the purpose of His coming into the world. Herod's subtle attempt to slay Him failed, for the wise men obedient to God's

warning in a dream, did not return to their tryst with him at Jerusalem, but took a different way home. But from His cradle in the manger there could be no turning back from that path of suffering which would end at His Cross of shame. His lowly birth but predicated His ultimate rejection and humiliation at the hands of those He came to save. Yet when "His own received Him not", there

were those, the wise men from the Gentiles among them, who worshipped and gladly rendered their tributes to Him. "No room," is still the real attitude of the world to the Son of God, but may He make our hearts, as His dwelling place, more and more appreciative of that grace that once brought Him down to earth to be our Saviour.

SEEK YE FIRST

J. S. BLACKBURN

4. "THE GOD OF HEAVEN SHALL SET UP A KINGDOM"

IT has already been remarked that the expressions "the Kingdom of God" and "the Kingdom of Heaven" find their origin in the Prophecy of Daniel. The leading passage has already been noted, Daniel 2: 44, and closer study must now be given to this verse in its context, and also to the parallel in Daniel 7: 18 and 27.

Daniel 2 forms part of the section in which God's revelations are not given to His people in the person of the prophet directly, but in a vision to the first Gentile king himself, Nebuchadnezzar, which is then interpreted by Daniel with wisdom imparted by God. It is thus to be expected that the view presented will be an external view of the course and succession of Gentile powers, rather than their character in the eyes of God, or their relations with His people Israel. The dream of Daniel 2 is part of God's discipline of Nebuchadnezzar, not involving the exercise of the prophet's spirit as do the later visions given to himself.

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar's image and its interpretation may be

seen as "the story of the kingdoms", for in the interpretation in verses 37 to 45 the word and idea "kingdom" is dominant. Nebuchadnezzar was seen to be a "king of kings", and with the kingdom given him was added "power and strength and glory". His kingdom was over other kings, and the whole earth as inhabited by men, beasts and fowls. Also, in his "kingdom" was included his Babylonian successors, and likewise for the second, third and fourth kingdoms.

Thus verse 39 speaks also of kingdoms, the second and the third, inferior to the first, yet ruling the whole earth. The fourth kingdom occupies verses 40 to 43, subduing all things, breaking in pieces and bruising, yet divided and adulterated in the end.

It will readily be observed that it is the word "kingdom" which dominates the passage, occurring six times in these few verses. We must try to grasp its bearing. It is not general or abstract in meaning. It signifies the actual historical rule of one person, with his hierarchy of servants and ministers as administra-

tors over the whole habitable earth. It is a kingdom given by God, and in terms of the boldness of these children of God who withstood the king's decree, and the lesson subsequently enforced by the king's sentence to madness, such kingdoms are concrete expressions of the fact that the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men, and disposes as He wills.

It is also most important to notice that according to Bible history, and prophecy prior to the book of Daniel, that in Jerusalem was "the throne of the kingdom of Jehovah over Israel" (1 Chronicles 28: 5). When Nebuchadnezzar became Jehovah's servant (Ezekiel 29: 20 and 30: 24-26) it was to take away that throne, which from that moment ceased altogether from the earth, and in its place God gave to Nebuchadnezzar the splendid golden kingdom here described. Thus began the times of the Gentiles. Let us not fail to notice also the contrast between the throne of David and Solomon over *Israel*, and the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors of the second, third, and fourth kingdoms, over *the whole earth*.

The *denouement* is seen in vision and interpretation in 2: 34, 35 and 44, 45. "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which

shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Here then is the Bible specification for the basic meaning of one of its most characteristic concepts: this is the KINGDOM OF GOD: this is the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Before proceeding to the parallel vision given to Daniel himself, and recorded in chapter 7, it will be well to pause here in chapter 2 and gather up some further important detail about the Kingdom of God. First, the Person in whom the Kingdom of God will be set up is without question identifiable; "the Stone cut out without hands". The instrument and its effect present a magnificent picture of Christ the King. In how many several settings is He called the Stone!

From the Mighty God of Jacob is promised "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel" (Genesis 49: 24). "The Stone which the builders refused is become the Headstone of the corner" (Psalm 118: 22). "He shall be for . . . a Stone of stumbling and for a Rock of offence to both the houses of Israel" (Isaiah 8: 14). "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious corner Stone, a sure foundation" (Isaiah 28: 16). Each of these passages, except the first, is quoted in the New Testament and the meaning is unquestionably Christ. In one epistle they are assembled, and a wealth of treasure made available for the Christian's heart. Here it is (1 Peter 2: 4-8), as set out so illuminatingly in RV.

"Unto whom coming, a living Stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices,

acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in Scripture,

Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner Stone, elect, precious: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame.

For you therefore which believe is the preciousness: but for such as disbelieve,

The Stone which the builders rejected,

The same was made the head of the corner;

and,

A Stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offence."

The Person in whom the Kingdom of God is to be set up is therefore Christ, but we also have this confirmed by a shaft of light unique to this one out of the many Scriptures which name Christ the Stone; "cut out without hands". The concept of representing a person's origin and parentage by his being cut out as a stone appears also in Isaiah 51: 1 and 2: "look unto the rock whence ye are hewn . . . look unto Abraham your father and unto Sarah that bare you." In the light of this comment in Isaiah, there can be little doubt that "cut out without hands" is, in the language of Old Testament poetry, an indication that the Person in whom the Kingdom of God will be centred is a Person of no ordinary human lineage. Alongside so many other prophetic strains, we have here another indication that God's King will be of an origin outside this world and indeed owing nothing at all to the will of man. We must, then, put this word, "cut out without hands", alongside the name Immanuel, God with us, and "the Man that is Jehovah's fellow" (Zechariah 13: 7), and respond, like Thomas bowing low at His feet,

"My Lord and my God". Thus is surely to be fulfilled the divine decree, "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. . . . I shall give thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (Psalm 2: 7, 8); and "Let all the angels of God worship Him".

This King, who is also our Saviour, is celebrated in His beauty and glory and majesty as King over all the earth by many another song of prophet and psalmist. The King "asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it Him, even length of days for ever and ever" (Psalm 21: 4). "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end."

Next, this short passage sets in the clearest light the manner of the termination of these temporary kingdoms, and the substitution of the Kingdom of God which is not temporary: it shall never be destroyed nor left to other people, though it will be merged into the timeless rule of God. The Stone cut out without hands falls with violence on the fourth kingdom only, but the result is the utter destruction of the whole structure of Gentile rule over the earth. Daniel is thus explaining that though universal rule passes from the gold king to the silver king, and so on to the mixture of iron and clay, "those kings" continue to exist. When, however, the Kingdom of God is set up by this violent blow on the fourth kingdom, *all* the kings, the whole image, the whole structure of Gentile rule will be destroyed at once.

The prime characteristic of this picture is the sudden shattering of all previous rule and the substitution of a Kingdom in one sense the fifth member of a series, but in a more important sense a Kingdom entirely new. Perhaps the critical element here is best drawn out by reference to other O.T. prophecies of the works of the Messiah. In nature a distant perspective minimises or even eliminates the apparent distance between objects seen afar. Two mountains may be ten miles apart — found indeed to be ten weary miles of “moor and fen, crag and torrent” if the traveller has to pass on foot from one to the other. But seen in the perspective of a distance of fifty miles, they may well appear to be equidistant. So it is with Old Testament prophecy. To this day the Jews, reading the Old Covenant with a veil on their hearts fail to distinguish the two comings of the Messiah. His coming was to be like “the waters of Shiloah which flow softly” (Isaiah 8: 6), and also a tempest of destruction. When He comes, “He shall not cry, not lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench (Isaiah 42: 2, 3), but also He shall dash the nations in pieces like a potter’s vessel (Psalm 2: 9). In the very terms of this passage in Daniel, at His coming He would be both a Stone on whom many would fall in repentance and faith, and a Stone falling on men and grinding them to powder (Matthew 21: 44).

There can be no question at all concerning which of these two manners of His coming is the one described by Daniel as the one establishing the Kingdom of God. In each of the couplets set out in the preceding paragraph, it is the second. His coming for this purpose is to be a

sudden crashing destruction. To anticipate for a moment the imagery of Daniel chapter 7, as interpreted in Matthew 24: 27, this coming, and this inauguration of the Kingdom will be like the lightning. There is nothing quiet, unseen, progressive, or gentle about it. After the first utter destruction, however, there is afterwards something progressive implied in the words, “the Stone . . . became a mountain, and filled the whole earth.”

The *Time* when the Kingdom of God will come is specified (so far as this single passage is concerned), in the words, “in the days of those kings” and that it is on the feet of the image, part of iron and part of clay, that the Stone fell. It is when the fourth kingdom has reached (in time) its final form that the destruction occurs. The period of unmixed iron (including the division into two parts), has passed completely. The period of feet (including ten toes, though not here mentioned), when the iron is mixed with clay, is also complete when the Kingdom of God will come. This part of our study, relating to the *time* of fulfilment, must be dealt with in a little more detail when we come to consider briefly chapter 7, but suffice to note at this point that there is the point of the vision to which reference is made when Jesus began to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and said, “The time is fulfilled”.

At this point also, it is necessary to consider the question, Is it possible that in the intention of the Spirit of God this prophecy, the fifth kingdom, the kingdom of the Stone cut out without hands, can be fulfilled in the results of the preaching of the past 1,900 years, and in the existing church of Christ? The position taken in these pages is that even

without regard to the vast mass of other parts of Scripture bearing on the subject, this is not really a debatable question. It is absolutely out of the question to take it so. Augustine suggested an interpretation of the 1,000 years reign of Christ and binding of Satan in Revelation 20: 1-6 which did away with the idea of a yet future earthly reign of Christ distinct from the church period. He wrote this as a tentative suggestion for reasons which anyone can read in the "City of God". Calvin followed his master on this point, and by way of the fugitives from the Marian persecutions (including John Knox) and their sojourn with Calvin, this view has never lost its hold in Britain and U.S.A. They are perpetuated in the traditional page headings often printed with the Authorized Version, and the Apostles' Creed is worded so as to leave room for them. The purpose of these pages is not to combat this view, but even so far as Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's image is concerned, the nature of the "kingdoms" forming the subject from beginning to end, and the manner of establishment of the fifth kingdom, alone precludes completely the notion that the fifth kingdom is the church of Christ.

Daniel's own vision of the kingdoms recorded in chapter 7, together with the interpretation furnished by "one of them that stood by", provide significant extensions and confirmation of what has been gleaned about the kingdom of God from Nebuchadnezzar's vision. Although covering roughly the same ground and, like chapter 2 occurring in the portion of Daniel written in Chaldee, the differences are significant. The visions of chapter 7 and after, were given to Daniel personally and have a good deal to say about the saints and God's people.

The kingdom's of this later vision are seen by Daniel as wild and savage beasts, existing before, but held in check until the moment comes when each is allowed to take the kingdom and divide the earth. The beam of interest is overwhelmingly concentrated on the fourth beast and its successor, the Kingdom of the Son of Man and of the saints. We have the same kingdoms as in the image-vision, but the fourth kingdom and the Kingdom of God occupy the visions from 7: 7 to the end with the brief interlude of verse 17. What do we learn from this chapter about the Kingdom of God?

First, there is introduced for the first time a vision of God sitting on His throne and surrounded and served by myriad angelic beings. The ultimate disposal of the kingdom is in His hand. He is seen as an old, old man (the Ancient of days) surrounded by all the means required for the instant execution of His will. In Nebuchadnezzar's image and its interpretation, the God of Heaven starts the course of Gentile dominion by giving unprecedented worldwide authority to Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel's vision the Ancient of days terminates the course of Gentile dominion: "the beast was slain and his body destroyed and given to the burning flame" (verse 11).

In chapter 7: 13, 14 the Kingdom called in chapter 2 God's Kingdom and heaven's Kingdom is given to the Son of Man, and it is on these subjects, the last kingdom as a ten-headed monster and the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, that we reach the point where the New Testament both takes up the story and interprets the detail in an absolutely unmistakable manner.

In the later chapters of the Revelation, the last great world-power

before the coming of Christ is pictured as a ten-horned beast. He appears first in Revelation 13: 1, and several times in that chapter, and the next. In chapter 17 the scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns is a principal actor in the scene. Eventually, now referred to simply as "the Beast", he assembles the kings and armies of the earth to fight against Christ: and so he comes to his end, "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone".

Few would doubt that the ten-horned beast of Daniel 7 and the Revelation are one and the same. Are they not both the final form of world power to be destroyed by Christ? Are there any signs in Revelation to identify this power? There are: chapter 17: 9, "the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth"; also chapter 17: 18, "the woman thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth". In the reign of Vespasian, when these words were written (as stated in 17: 10) there could not be the faintest doubt that these two descriptions — the seven hills and the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth — signify Rome.

On this particular point therefore, the light cast back on to Daniel 2 proves that the feet of the image on which the Stone fell is the Roman Empire, and this explains why in Mark 1: 14, 15, it could be said "*the time is fulfilled*".

The next additional light is in Daniel 7: 13, "and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven". If Augustine was right, and it was at His first coming that Christ bound Satan and His saints reigned on thrones with Christ 1,000 years, then the Stone

falling on the image and the Kingdom taken by the Son of man must have been at His first coming. Did Christ come at first with the clouds? The birth at Bethlehem was carolled by angels and revealed to shepherds, but there was no room for Him in the inn. There are in fact six or seven references in the New Testament to Christ's coming "with the clouds", and none could possibly doubt that they describe His *second* coming. The best known is, of course, Matthew 24: 30, in a setting named as that of the prophet Daniel (verse 15), "They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Thus, we have this additional light from Daniel 7: 13 to confirm that the establishment of the Kingdom of God is to take place at the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, in Daniel 7 there is added the fact that **when** Christ comes to reign, His saints shall reign with Him. "Judgment was given to the saints of the Most High: and the time came that the saints possessed the Kingdom" (Daniel 7: 22). "And the Kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the Kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (verse 27).

Without any attempt at a detailed exposition of the prophecy of Daniel, but confining attention to the few verses which are the root of all later Scriptures concerning the Kingdom of God, we shall see that every detail is of importance in searching the Scriptures of the New Testament in order to find, embrace, and practise all that will assist us in seeking first the Kingdom of God.