

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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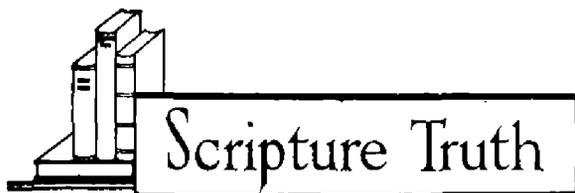
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(incorporating *Words of Help*)

JANUARY, 1983

LOOKING FOR THE SAVIOUR

A NEW YEAR POEM

Evidently the believers of the 1830s who sang these fine verses had no regrets about the passing years. Have we?

*Fly ye seasons, fly still faster!
Let the glorious day come on
When we shall behold our Master
Seated on His heav'nly throne;
When the Saviour
Shall descend to claim His own.*

*What is earth, with all its treasures
To the joy the Gospel brings?
Well may we resign its pleasures:
Jesus brings us better things;
All His people
Draw from heaven's eternal springs.*

*Fly ye seasons, fly still faster,
Swiftly bring the glorious day!
Jesus come, our Lord and Master,
Come for us without delay!
Take Thy people,
Take, oh, take them hence away!*

from HYMNS FOR THE POOR OF THE FLOCK (ed. GVW), 1838

WAIT FOR IT

JOHN BARNES

But there is another side to the beautiful sentiments of the poem overleaf, and it occurs in three parables of Matthew 24 and 25. How are we occupied while "the bridegroom tarryes"? If we are not occupied in the Lord's service, what are we doing? No life is a vacuum; if not filled with heavenly things, it will be filled with earthly.

God will not delay to bring His purpose to a conclusion, but we should also recognise that He will not be provoked into haste. He has His own ways of acting, ways which are past finding out; He has His own times and seasons, and these are also kept from us, reserved in His own authority. The full text (Habakkuk 2:3) from which the heading of this paper is taken, reads, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry". The fulfilment of the vision has its precise time, and though there may have been an apparent delay, the fulfilment is certain and will not be delayed. The enigma of delay is enfolded in the two expressions underlined in the text above; "though it tarry", and, "it will not tarry". God will do what He has set out to do, but he will do it in His own way and in His own time. No consideration will induce Him to act precipitately, yet nothing will postpone the accomplishment of His design. What is certain is that we seldom understand what He is doing, but He who knows the end from the beginning sees the whole scheme clearly.

When God sent His beloved Son into the world that we might live through Him, it was at His appointed time. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son . . ." (Galatians 4:4). The Lord's death was no more haphazard than His birth: "In due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). It has been remarked that the Jewish leaders did not wish the Lord to be killed on the feast day, but there was the inescapable truth that the "passover must be killed". Try as they might, they could not avoid that critical date, for it was God's appointed time. This in no way absolves them of their responsibility and culpability. Though He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, He was, nonetheless, taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain.

When the Lord Jesus returns in His glory, it will, once again, be in the times and seasons which the Father has in His own power (see Acts 1:7). The apostle Paul makes a reference to this in 1 Timothy 6:14, 15: ". . . the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate . . .". No power in the universe can interrupt or delay these arrangements, nor will any consideration advance them. The position of the saints is to be aware of these things, and to wait in patience. "Then do we with patience wait for it." Uncertainty breeds impatience, but if we have knowledge and understanding of what God is doing, we can await the outcome in patience. There are, certainly, some texts which would lead us to think

of the Lord's return as being very near, and in all probability, this was the expectation of the early church. There are, however, other scriptures which seem to indicate that there would be some delay in that return.

In Matthew 24, 25, there are three consecutive parables in which such a delay is envisaged. In each case breakdown is shown to occur and this appears to take a form different in each instance.

Oppression: Matthew 24:45-51

The Lord Jesus suggests a situation in which the master of a large establishment has set his servant over his household to manage affairs for him during his absence, and to care for his dependants. The Lord points out how pleased the master would be if, on his return, he should find that his instructions were being carried out. There would be blessing for the servant who had attended to his master's affairs and promotion would be ensured. The Lord then goes on to suppose another case in which unspecified circumstances occasion some delay in the master's return (v. 48). The responsible servant says in his heart, "my Lord delayeth his coming". It is most striking that he says it in his *heart*, surely denoting an absence of affection for his master. The steward then turns on his master's servants, and assuming an unwarranted authority over them, he begins to oppress them instead of caring for them, and to pursue a course of self-indulgence and self-will. This is a sad picture, but is true to the facts, and is what actually happened during what we call, "the dark ages". As this period of the Lord's absence became prolonged and true affection for Him waned, a powerful sacerdotal system was established, markedly distinguished from what was arrogantly termed "the laity"; and centuries of ignorance and oppression ensued, which brought the church into disrepute and even disgrace in the world. Pride, coupled with looseness and wild excesses marked the priestly caste, while ignorance and discouragement stifled the laity. The period of waiting brought to light the absence of true love for the Lord (with a number of heart-warming exceptions), and revealed the true condition of the mass of professing Christians.

We should not lightly pass over the matter of our own times. There is more light today than in the dark ages, but can we truly say that the hope of the Saviour's return is a living reality in our hearts, or is it a doctrine which we really believe but which affects our outlook and behaviour very little? The fact that we have more light increases our obligation to answer to it faithfully. The more definite is our knowledge of the Lord's return, the more intelligently and the more patiently ought we to wait for it.

Depression: Matthew 25:1-13

In this well known parable of the virgins, the thought of some delay in the Lord's return is to be seen once again. "The bridegroom tarried" (v. 5). As in the other cases, no reason is given to account for the delay; it is simply stated in the details of the story.

It is perfectly natural that this should cause some exercise in the

hearts of those who have thought seriously of these matters. Evidently, the apostle Peter gave the matter some thought, and in his second epistle he gives us a reason for the seemingly abnormal extension of the period. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The apostle writes, "some men", not, "all"; there are those who see things from God's angle. Others would count the delay as "slackness", and attribute to the Lord the human defect of lack of interest or concern. This view demonstrates their failure to understand His heart and His motives. The apostle Peter shews that it is not lack of care which occasions the delay, but greatness of care.

It is in the abundance of His mercy to man that God has extended His day of grace. During this long period (and we have to confess that nineteen hundred years is a long time) the professing church sank into apathy and depression. The effect of lost hope is depression and often despair. Peter urges us to be "mindful" (3:2) and to be "not ignorant" (v. 8). The truth is made known to us for our present blessing, and if we allow it to have its due effect on our hearts, hope will be kept bright and alive. Although the days of waiting may seem protracted, if we are affected by the truth of the reason for His tarrying, our affections will reach out to those who do not know Him and who have no hope at all, and we shall take on something of His compassions and longsuffering.

We are bound to recognise that, according to the parable, true believers "slumbered and slept" along with the professing body. Slumbering and sleeping suggests a gradual lapse from watchfulness into unconsciousness, and this was the case for many centuries in the church. There were periodic awakenings. We value the Reformation, and remember with affection the bright revival of truth and hope during the nineteenth century, but who would be so bold as to claim that hope burns as brightly in the assemblies today? If we translate the truth of Habakkuk 2:3 into New Testament terms, and think of it as, "wait for Him" perhaps the personal nature of it will itself lift our hearts and revitalise our hope. It is affection for Him that kindles response in the bride, and she is then in harmony with the Spirit. "The Spirit and the bride say, come". True love going out to the Lord will make the saints long for His return, and true sympathy with His thoughts will enable them to understand why He tarries. The midnight call centres, not so much in an event as in a Person. "Behold the *bridegroom* cometh, go ye out to meet Him."

Suppression: Matthew 25:14-30

In the third of these parables, the Lord Jesus tells us of a man who went on business to a distant land, and left his servants to trade on his behalf until he came home. Taking into account that their abilities were varied, he left them different sums of money with which to trade, ranging from five talents for the most able to one talent for the least. Those who received the larger amounts put the capital to work and made profits for their absent master, but the man who had received

the one talent adopted a policy of suppression. He dug a hole in the ground and there hid his master's money, thus trying to put his obligations out of sight. The money was his lord's, so he had clear responsibilities which he declined to meet. Digging in the earth may suggest that he looked to his own earthly interests rather than to the affairs of his master, and looked to his own property and not to the promotion of his master's interests. If we are not occupied in the service of the Lord, what are we doing? No life, however empty it appears to be, is a complete vacuum; everyone has interests, even if they are entirely earthly. This unhappy man, whom the Lord brings before us for our learning, influenced by a want of true concern for his master's interests, filled in the "long time" (Matthew 25:19) of his absence with his own affairs.

In the prophecy of Habakkuk, the saints are told about the vision, and are advised to "wait for it", even though the time for its fulfilment should appear to be delayed indefinitely. In Hebrews 10:37, where we have a plain reference to this text, we are pointed to the Person of the Lord, the One who loves us. "He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry". He will come when the moment, which the Father has reserved in His own authority, has arrived. The apostle concludes with a most challenging message; "Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him". The verb, "draw back", is given a number of possible meanings in the lexicons, one of which is, "to suppress". There seems to be a suggestive link with the parable we are considering. This spirit is the opposite of faith, which is the principle which endures.

The last verse of Hebrews 10 takes us into more bracing air. "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition: but of them that believe to the saving of the soul". The Lord's intention in the writing of Habakkuk's vision was that those who read may run (Habakkuk 2:2). It was calculated to promote energy and continuance in the path of faith, and it is interesting that in Hebrews 11, which follows immediately on this citation from Habakkuk, we enter the great record of men of faith who energetically continued. The modern believer, who has a true affection for the Lord, will be expecting His coming again. Should the delay be long, patience will occupy the remaining period in true devotedness to the Lord, the Bridegroom; true service for the saints, His household; and true employment of the "talents" which He has committed to our trust.

Since the actual date of the Lord's return is withheld from our knowledge, we are bound to expect it imminently. Paul reminded the Roman saints long ago: "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. For us today, we cannot but think of the Lord as "even at the door". A visitor who commended an old gardener on the perfect condition of the grounds he maintained, was astonished to be told that the master of the establishment lived abroad and had not visited the place for a good number of years. "Yet," the visitor remarked to the old man, "you preserve the grounds as though you expected him tomorrow." The old man quietly replied, "No sir; as though he were coming today." Though his master tarried, he waited for him daily.

May the Lord grant us a similar liveliness of hope and patience in labour, while we wait.

CHRIST GLORIFIED

GORDON SPRATT

“Now is the Son of man glorified.” One of the central doctrines of our faith is locked up in this little phrase. We urge our readers to study this article.

One of the words most often used by Christians is the word “glory”. And yet it is one of the most difficult words to define. It is used in so many ways that we must agree that it has to be understood in its context rather than standing alone with a single, all-satisfying meaning. But at best most of us would have to put it into the category of “better felt than told”!

If that is true of the noun “glory”, it is also true of the verb, “to glorify”. In chapters 13 to 17 of John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of Himself as being glorified at least five times. The references are:

John 13:31-32
16:14
17:1
17:5
17:10

All these scriptures have very different meanings, and it is proposed in this and, if the Lord permits, subsequent articles, to discuss each in its place. The object in doing so must be not only a better understanding of the truth of Scripture, but that the Lord Jesus may be glorified in our hearts.

In John 13:31 Jesus says: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” Already, in the previous chapter, He has used similar words, and it is clear that He is speaking of His death. As to history, He is about to be betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, scourged, derided, crucified: we shall need some deeper, more spiritual insight than is offered by the external circumstances if we are to understand this amazing expression. Other considerations apart, who else could speak of his death as though it were past, his greatest work, still future, as though it were already accomplished?

Let us begin with the title, Son of man. It is this title which distinguishes the passage we are considering from the other references in John 16 and 17. What can we say about it? It is a title used only of the Lord Jesus, and with perhaps the single exception of the dying Stephen in Acts 7, it is used by the Lord Jesus about Himself, but not by others about Him. But the uniqueness of the title must not becloud its meaning, for it conveys ideas which, apart from man’s abject failure, should have been fulfilled in Adam. For it refers to Christ as the Head of the human race, the representative Man in whom all God’s thoughts regarding man are fully set forth. And so we must see that

where the first man has failed utterly to represent God according to the divine standard ("Let us make man in our image, after our likeness") the Second Man has fulfilled every divine thought. Where Adam, and every descendant of Adam, has sinned and come short of the glory of God, the Lord Jesus in His perfect Manhood has glorified God in every particular.

This was of course true throughout His incarnate life. As a boy, subject to his parents, yet about His Father's business, He fully glorified God. In all those thirty obscure years in Nazareth, to all outward appearances the carpenter's son, He was the One in whom the Father found His delight. In the wilderness, facing Satan's first great onslaught, He met every temptation in perfect reliance on God's Word. At Sychar He said: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work". And so through the whole of His life, where every other man had fallen short, Jesus was perfect at every point.

But there is a more precise focus to the statement, "Now is the Son of man glorified". As we have already seen, in John 12:23 Jesus says, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified" — a clear reference to His death. It is at the point when Judas has gone out to do his foul work, and events are moving with dreadful swiftness through Gethsemane and Gabbatha to Golgotha, that Jesus as Man comes to His supreme test.

Let us consider the issues that faced Him there. The hymnwriter says:

*Oh, what a load was Thine to bear
Alone in that dark hour,
Our sins in all their terror there,
God's wrath and Satan's power!*

Who could take up the dreadful question of sin on the behalf of God? None but He who knew no sin could be made sin for us. Who could bear our sins in His own body on the tree? None but He who could offer Himself, without blemish, as the true sin-offering. Who could, in presence of divine wrath unmingled, measure up to the claims of God's righteousness? Only He of whom alone it could truly be said, "Thou has loved righteousness and hated iniquity". Who could face the power of Satan in his own domain? Only the One who could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me".

What a contrast! On the one hand, man's darkest hour as the Holy and the True is taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain. On the other hand, the hour in which the Son of man, perfect in every moral attribute, is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. What remarkable insight was it that caused the Roman centurion, hardened to the horrors of crucifixion yet sensing something extraordinary in the cry of triumph that came from the lips of the dying Jesus, to exclaim, "Truly this man was the Son of God"? And yet he could not have seen, even dimly, the divinely-ordained and eternal consequences which must flow from that amazing scene. Paul has a deeper perception as he says:

And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself — by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight.

(Colossians 1:20-22)

Man, dishonoured in the disobedience of Eden, is glorified in the perfect obedience of Gethsemane. Abject in Adam's failure at the beginning, despite his primeval strength and splendour; glorious in the victory of Jesus at the end, despite the weakness, the woe, the shame, the suffering of the cross. And God is glorified in Him: every intent of God secured for His eternal praise and pleasure in the Person and work of His beloved Son.

John 13:32 adds another thought: "If God be glorified in him, God also shall glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him." The hour had indeed come when the Son of man should be glorified in death, but another hour had also come. Our chapter begins: "When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world to the Father. . . ." Of course it was His own place — He was the One who "was come from God and went to God". But there is a new dimension, for an entirely new glory for the Son of man is in view, into which He enters as man. God shall glorify Him in Himself: other men are glorified in the positions they hold, in the titles they are given, in the possessions they acquire, but here is something more than all these. The Son of man is glorified in God.

We shall try in vain to understand fully what is meant. No place high enough can be found to do full honour to Him who is God over all, blessed for ever. No title can be created that will add lustre to the renown of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords. If the Son of man is to be glorified, He must be glorified in God. Such a glory must be peculiar to One who is Himself divine, and yet it is as the Son of man that He is so glorified.

The context shows that the glory is in answer to His work in Manhood, and especially at the cross, but it is not His future public glory, for the verse goes on: "and shall straightway glorify him". There is a public glory for which He waits, according to such scriptures as 1 Peter 4:13, and in which, as Colossians 3:4 tells us, we shall appear with Him. But there is no waiting here. The Son of man, unique in His Person and in His moral perfection, is glorified immediately and alone.

Before we leave the subject we must again remind ourselves of the context. Here, where man in Adam has failed completely to measure up to that glory for which he was created, another Man has answered perfectly to every thought of God. More even than that, He has in a special way been glorified in his death. Most marvellous paradox:

*By weakness and defeat,
He won the meed and crown.*

We must preserve always in our minds the uniqueness of the One of whom we are thinking. He only, perfectly man, man in perfection, yet divine in His incorruptible nature, could bear the title, Son of man. And yet, because of what He has achieved, there is glory for all those who are His. If the captain of our salvation is made perfect through sufferings, it is in order that many sons should be brought to glory. He is to be the firstborn among many brethren, conformed to His image, not for their glory but for His. But glorified nevertheless, for "whom he did predestinate, them also he called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified". (Romans 8:30).

BIBLE STUDY —

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA _____ J. S. BLACKBURN

5. A SOLEMN PAUSE — CHAPTER 4

With this article we resume an expository series whose last instalment appeared in September 1981.

In these chapters we find a solemn pause devoted to taking stock, in five important lessons, of the position in which the people of Israel now found themselves. We consider the first two of these in this article: the two memorial monuments (4:1-9, 14-24) and the magnifying of Joshua in the sight of Israel (4:14). The other three will be considered in the next article.

The memorial stones

The greater part of the narrative of these verses is occupied with the cairn formed from twelve stones lifted "out of the midst of Jordan", out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, bearing the ark of the covenant. One verse only (4:9) testifies to the erection of a second cairn consisting of twelve different stones set up "in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark stood". The purpose of these monuments is quite specific. The memorial was intended for the children of the future. The exact detail to be impressed on them is very clear also; it was "that the waters of Jordan were cut off" (v. 7), and that "the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan" (v. 23).

The memorial aspect of all that has been considered in the previous chapter is vividly presented in Ephesians 2:7; "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus". Our thought is naturally drawn by the parallel expression in Ephesians 1:19. The apostle is praying, and comes to the words, "that ye may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places". Here are two expressions to remember, to warm

the heart, to cheer the spirit, to calm the soul, to arm for the battle:

— the exceeding greatness of his power

— the exceeding riches of his grace.

The twelve stones so briefly mentioned, set up and submerged in the midst of Jordan speak of something left behind as part of God's victory, at the threshold of amazing period of victories in Canaan. Certainly what Israel left behind at the entrance to Canaan was the evil heart of unbelief which came out specially when they refused to go forward from Kadesh-Barnea. Before, during the wilderness journey, an endless succession of unbelief, murmuring, disobedience and rejection of God's promise. After, in Canaan, an overall picture of sustained victory. Perhaps these stones correspond to leaving behind the old man, like a rejected garment, according to Ephesians 4:20-24. This casting off refuses place to the devil. This effective rejection accompanies the saints' realisation of their being raised and seated in heavenly places with Christ — exceeding great power of God indeed.

The cairn erected in Gilgal, with its individual stones taken out of Jordan, most assuredly corresponds to individual saints seated in the heavenlies. Grace takes account, not only of the place from which the saints have been taken, but pre-eminently of the limitless range of blessing — the breadth, length, depth and height — God had in view in taking them up. Let us pause and take account of this fact, that true riches, real wealth are to be found in Ephesian truth regarding God, Christ and the saints — the true Canaan. Oh may the vision of such wealth, in the glory that excelleth, outshine everything of earth and the world, even as the sun outshines the stars!

An extremely suggestive phrase occurs separately with reference to both sets of twelve memorial stones: "the place where". Regarding the stones taken out of the river, 4:3, we read "Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of *the place where* the priests' feet stood firm". Dealing with the stones to be set up in the middle and submerged in the river (4:9) it says "Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in *the place where* the feet of the priests . . . stood". Certainly to myself this immediately brings to mind, "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see *the place where* the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6). We shall never, never see with understanding and truly enlightened eyes the transcendent fulness of Christ at God's right hand, unless ever and again there flows over our spirits in remembrance the death with all its terrors where Jesus once stood in His great love, on our behalf. Is it not to this end that perfect wisdom and love has ordained the Lord's Supper?

Joshua magnified

The Lord had promised Joshua that in the events of this day He would increase the stature of Joshua in the eyes of all Israel. The fulfilment of this promise is given in 4:14: "on that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life". So far as effective command over the people is concerned Joshua was given the stature of Moses (Moses remains unique, of course, in his nearness to God). It is obvious that

a major element in the days of victory which lay ahead for Israel was the leadership of Joshua; and the quality which takes this leadership out of the realm of mere human abilities, is that it consisted in Joshua's mediation in giving the word of the Lord for every occasion. The effect of this on Israel's enemies is wonderfully seen in Balaam's prophecy concerning the wandering nomads whose tents lay before Balak: "Jehovah is with him, and the shout of a king is among them".

In taking up the comparison between the crossings of the Red Sea and of Jordan under Moses and Joshua respectively, there are differences appropriate to each. But the essential feature was that Joshua committed himself beforehand in the ears of all the people to the word of the Lord. The instant the first Israelite feet touched the waters of Jordan, then Jehovah would intervene with a mighty miracle directed to the guarantee that *the living God* was among them, and therefore He would drive before Israel the terrifying Canaanites with giants and walled cities. This was precisely what Joshua and Caleb had maintained against the other spies: "If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us".

No Old Testament worthy has a claim stronger than Joshua's to be recognised as representing Christ. That the names, Joshua and Jesus are identical is seen in Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8. In the latter case especially such use of the name Jesus is very natural and fitting. The writer had the Septuagint in front of him, the Greek Old Testament, and was in the middle of a series of exact quotations from it. What more natural than to continue his quotations by using the Septuagint name for Israel's leader in Canaan? And so Joshua is before us very expressly as representing Christ Himself.

The apostle Paul has often moved our hearts deeply by his word in the face of death by martyrdom: "my earnest expectation and hope . . . that . . . Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death". From such a man, by the same Holy Spirit, we have in Ephesians 1 words directed to magnifying our Joshua in the eyes of all the saints. He does this by fixing our gaze on Christ where He is now, at God's own right hand. Let us take that long look! I mean long, not in the number of the words used, but in the time we allow ourselves at this moment to make good use of the eyes mentioned in v. 18: eyes of our heart, eyes enlightened by God.

It is a familiar experience, if not often described, that, on moving from surroundings brilliantly illuminated into dim light, one experiences a fleeting instant of blindness. In some diseases of the eye this period of blindness is lengthened. This thing is a parable. We pass our days of normal awareness in the brilliant light of earthly things. More than the fleeting moment required for reading these words is required if we are to receive a deep and lasting impression of the greatness of that glorious Man who is in a world whose brightness is too often dimmed by the light of earthly things, if He is truly to be magnified in our eyes, as we see Him in heaven's light. It is a question to be asked: has *meditation* any place at all in our lives? Without it our eyes will not penetrate the veil of time and sense. Let us heed the word: let us set our mind on things above by taking

time for meditation: for it is there we find Christ sitting at the right hand of God.

The splendid position given to the raised and ascended Christ is the theme when the words occur, "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Are we about to be told that principalities and powers are the powerful enemies of the saints? Are there great names of "wisdom, love and power" borne by men and angels? Christ is far above them all. With the Greeks, the expression "all things" was a technical term for the universe, and there was perpetual speculation about its nature and destiny. The universe is under His feet: and He fills it.

That Christ fills all things has been likened to the sun filling the solar system with its warmth and light. Another illustration preserves the idea of a Man and His world. One of the greatest names named in the world of the New Testament is that of Augustus (cp Luke 2:1). This great man was the architect of the Roman Empire, which gave the majesty of the Roman peace to the world in a system which endured for half a millennium. Many emperors were of course evil men but in his own day there was no corner of the inhabited earth which did not enjoy in good measure the fruits of the wisdom, mercy and power of Augustus. So, lifting the illustration out of its connection with sinful man, when the glories of Christ fill the universe, there will be no corner of it where His wisdom, love and power in all their divine perfection, will not be a living reality: and this is the glorious Person with whom the saints are united in His body which is the church.

THREE DOUBLE TITLES OF THE LORD JESUS

R. A. CREETH

An exposition of well known titles of Christ which bring great reassurance to the heart of the believer.

Apostle and High Priest

This double title occurs in Hebrews 3:1. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus" (New Translation).

As the *Apostle* He is God's Representative, the Sent One, who came from God into this world to make God known and to undertake God's work. As the *High Priest* He has gone back to God that He might carry on His people's cause in the presence of God, where He ever lives to make intercession for them.

It would seem that in this twofold office of our blessed Lord, we have a summing up of what has been presented in the first two chapters. In chapter 1 Christ is presented as Son of God, and He comes from God to man on earth. In chapter 2 He is presented as Son of man, and He goes from man to God in heaven.

It has often been observed that there is no mention of any other apostle in this epistle. This is because Christ eclipses all other apostles,

and it is the Holy Spirit's design in Hebrews to present Christ as *the* Apostle. God, who had previously spoken by prophets in many parts and in many ways, has now sent His Apostle into the world: He "has spoken unto us in His Son". What an ambassadorship was this if no angel could be entrusted with it, but only One who is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His person and the established Heir of all things! (chapter 1:1-3).

Thus in chapter 1 His deity is emphasised, the eternal glory of the One who came from God into this world as the Sent One, God's Ambassador or Apostle, while in chapter 2 His manhood and priesthood are brought before us. "Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like to His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (verse 17, New Trans. of J.N.D.). Thus He has made atonement for our sins by the sacrifice of Himself, and has now taken His place in the very presence of God to continue His service for His own. "For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." What a comfort this should be to us in our pilgrimage down here! Let us quote from chapter 4. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

We can look upon Moses and Aaron as typifying this twofold office of our Lord. Moses represents His apostleship, while Aaron represents His priesthood. Moses was God's messenger, His apostle, sent from His presence as revealed in the burning bush, back into Egypt with God's commission to effect the deliverance of His people. Aaron was the priest whose office was to maintain the people in relationship with God. But these are only types, and we are bidden to fix our gaze upon the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus, who indeed is faithful to Him that appointed Him, faithful as Apostle here on earth and as High Priest now in heaven. As pilgrims passing through this world with its trials from day to day, travelling on to the rest that remaineth for the people of God, let us occupy ourselves with the beauties of His person and the perfection of His work.

The Author and Finisher of Faith

This double title is found in Hebrews 12:2. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith."

First we are bidden to cast aside whatever would hinder us in running on with endurance in the path of faith, whether that hindrance be a sin or merely a weight. Jesus Himself is brought before us as the great Exemplar: He is the beginner and finisher of faith. He ran the whole course from beginning to end without a single faltering step, and having endured the cross, despising the shame, He is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. This is the One we are to have our

eyes upon — “looking stedfastly on Jesus, the Leader and Completer of faith” (New Trans. of J.N.D.).

The word “*Author*” or “*Leader*” is the same as “*Captain of our salvation*” in chapter 2. It is also translated “*Prince of life*” in Acts 3:15, and as “*Prince*” in Acts 5:31 where its connection with “*Saviour*” forms another double title. He is the source of power for His people, and as the great File Leader He is leading them on and He gives them power to follow.

He is also the *Perfecter* (another translation of “*Finisher*”) of the path of faith, the One who has brought it to full completion. He has run the whole course and finished it with joy. He has gone on high, the great Forerunner of His people, and as surely as He is there within the veil we shall finish our course too. Meanwhile, in order to obtain power and energy for the race we must stedfastly fix our gaze upon Him.

This blessed One had a joy set before Him. What was this joy? Was it not first of all the joy of pleasing His Father in the full accomplishment of His will? (See John 8:29, 4:34, 5:30, etc.) In the perfection of His manhood He could say in Psalm 16, “In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”. He was going back to be for ever in the Father’s presence, but He would not be there alone. He would have companions to share His joy, for as the great Captain of salvation He was going to bring many sons to glory. What encouragement there is for us to run the race that lies before us, looking stedfastly on Jesus, the Leader and Completer of faith!

The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls

The third double title is found in 1 Peter 2:25. “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

We are reminded of Isaiah 53:6. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way.” Such was the natural condition of Jew and Gentile alike, for the Jews were as far gone in wilful departure from God as the Gentiles. But God has graciously intervened: “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” As the prophet says in verse 5, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”

The apostle Peter surely had this passage in Isaiah in mind when he wrote concerning the Lord Jesus, “who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed”. The word “stripes” refers literally to the weals left by the lash, which many a slave knew full well. A touching allusion this to the sufferings endured by the Lord Jesus for the healing of His own. “For ye were going astray as sheep, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (New Trans. of J.N.D.).

What precious thoughts are treasured up in the title “*Shepherd*”! He is the Good Shepherd who has laid down His life for the sheep;

He knows His sheep, and gives them eternal life (John 10). He is the Great Shepherd, risen from the dead and caring for His saints in the pilgrim pathway (Hebrews 13:20). He is the Chief Shepherd who will present to the faithful under-shepherds a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:4). Remember that we are among the many sons that He is leading to glory, and as we journey on we can confidently and joyfully sing with the hymn-writer:

*Thus led by Thee, Thy tender shepherd care
Will keep, and guard, and guide us safely there.*

The word "Bishop" is better rendered "Overseer", as in Acts 20:28. It conveys the thought of superintendence and ruling, and suggests one who is concerned with the welfare of those in His care. What a Shepherd and Overseer is Jesus! The sheep were the Father's gift to Him, and He proved His love to them by laying down His life for them on the cross. Now in heavenly glory He is alive again to tend and watch over our souls in His everlasting love.

CORRESPONDENCE

SCRIPTURE UNION NOTES AND OTHER MATTERS

Mr Smart's letter, published in September (Vol. 47, p. 272) has in turn elicited the following reply:

The following remarks seem to me to be needed to supplement the letter from Mr Alan Smart in your September issue. That letter can give the impression that Spirit-guided personal bible reading will be so open and flexible that an element of orderliness in it will not necessarily be prominent; and that any study or ministry centred on the Word of God is the better (and more "spiritual") if it wanders around under the freedom of the Spirit. In reality there seems far more in the N.T. to counter this idea than to support it. Often in Scripture the evidence of the Spirit fully in charge is that the activity proceeds "decently and in order". Think of Stephen, shortly to be martyred, full of the Holy Ghost, producing something which is second to none as a perceptive and orderly review of much of O.T. history. In a sense it was "off the cuff", but it had nothing whatever of a disorderly or haphazard character: and its weight and impact in the testimony was of the highest kind, though it cost him his life. Look at Luke, setting about writing to Theophilus. After reading his opening verses can anyone doubt that his approach was consciously disciplined and methodical? All that follows confirms that there is thought and care about every line. Is that Gospel any less of the Spirit of God because Luke put his renewed mind into the job in hand? Indeed, can any part of Holy Scripture be faulted on grounds of lack of thoughtfulness in the message? Moved by the Holy Ghost men wrote. It was a divine product, through and through, but the channels were men (men of

faith, of course); *men*, not tools.

The secondary stages, of *drawing upon* and *passing on* the Word of God, are also totally dependent on the Spirit of God — quite as much as its initial production. Is our entry into these areas, however, somehow to be divorced from our own thought-processes, even though it is entirely accepted that the natural man understands not the things of God? The *renewing* of the mind, under the Spirit of God, is surely very different from non-use of the mind. One of the basic tests of the control of the Spirit of God is that the *understanding* (of the spokesman and the listener) is well-involved in what is going on.

Now a word on the written ministry of the early brethren. Undoubtedly the Spirit of God can provide help and profit to readers in various ways. He may use a broad cursive treatment of bible themes and passages. He can work through a much more patchy style of written or spoken ministry. Many written works confirm these facts. But also, *detailed* verse-by-verse following through a passage is surely not too regimented a way of getting to grips with it under the Spirit. To say that there is some loss or risk in following an order which is the biblical order, looking closely and in detail at the verses (even the *words*), comes close to slighting the Word of God and the Spirit who ordered it so. To refer to one or two only of brethren writings, Mr Darby's "Synopsis" in itself belies the notion that orderly progress through the Scriptures is undesirable (though of course it is not a detailed handling of the text). Mr Kelly's careful *expositions* (as distinct from Notes on Lectures) are outstandingly weighty in the true spiritual sense. Let any reader give careful attention to his Exposition of the Gospel of John, for instance, and this point must be agreed. Here is profound and profitable exploration of Scripture, yet still leaving the awareness that there are exhaustless depths yet untapped. Such ministry gains rather than loses from its system and orderliness, which is no more nor less than that of Scripture itself. Here is real living contact with the Word of God. Let no one think that such a method veers towards "dead legalism". We cannot despise such a model for dealing with the Scriptures in a worthy way. Though we may follow it at a distance, this pattern is surely no false guide for any who would receive the teaching of God's Word, or seek to convey it to others in a small way.

Not having seen S.U. Notes for some time, I do not express a judgement on their value. Like any other written material on the Scriptures, they will require discernment in their use. But I see no reason why they should be vetoed as possible help in steady bible reading under the Spirit of God. Random approach to the Word of God has no special virtue, and undisciplined study can easily tend towards little study at all. The claim to a special enlightenment that would not touch such aids has little to commend it in its own right. It can be no more than *pseudo-spirituality* (not the least of our dangerous tendencies today).

This letter may be thought to be one-sided, and I am conscious that it *is* so. I have put it in this form to redress the balance somewhat.

COLIN CURRY



Scripture Truth

(incorporating *Words of Help*)

MARCH, 1983

ELDERS, OVERSEERS, BISHOPS ————— FRANK WALLACE

1. WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW THEY ARE CHOSEN

Why haven't we bishops? Haven't we elders? Many people still seem to be very confused about these questions. Perhaps for this reason this form of service among the people of God is being neglected in many places. Are any readers exercised to take up this work?

Teaching about humility was an important part of the Lord's earthly ministry. Nowhere was it more prominent than in His last words to his disciples before He suffered. In the midst of those who were contending about who was to be the greatest He was "as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27). In the full consciousness of His glory as coming from God and going to God He "laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself . . . and began to wash the disciples' feet" (John 13:1-5). These were the men who were going to represent Him on earth after His return to glory. The care of the people of God would be in their hands. Great authority — apostolic authority — would rest on their shoulders. But the Lord well knew the frailty of the human heart. He knew the corruption of fallen nature and the tendency of man always to exalt himself at the expense of others. Who could teach them humility better than Himself? Had they not observed what power to attract lay in the glorious humility of Christ? How that the children flocked to Him — the adulteress, the needy, the helpless, all finding in Him a ready answer of blessing, kindness, forgiveness and cheer? And would not these be the things that came into their minds as He told them the significance of the footwashing? "If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye ought to wash one another's feet."

We readily criticise the disciples' attitude, but if we look in our own hearts we see the seeds of the same hateful attitude there — the desire to be pre-eminent. But Scripture is plain: "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" . . . "That in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Matthew 23:8; Colossians 1:18).

Part, at least, of the responsibilities laid upon the apostles devolves upon us. Only part, for the office of apostle itself and the particular authority of apostleship have long disappeared. However the responsibility for the *care* of the people of God remains — that part of the responsibility denoted by the three words that form the title.

of our article. I wish to examine the teaching of Scripture about this type of service. But before questions about the form it takes and its practicalities come the matter of the spirit of it, and the attitude in which it is done. Without humility nothing else matters. And the example that was placed before the apostle is there for us too.

Persons bearing the title “bishop”, “elder” (not to mention “minister” and “deacon” — words which space will preclude our going into) are all around us, and anyone would be pardoned for asking, “Why haven’t we bishops? Haven’t we elders?” Over the centuries these words have gathered anything but humble associations; our business however is not with what other people have, or haven’t got. What we have or haven’t got is not our standard. Our standard must be, “What does the Bible say about these forms of service? What does it say about bishops, overseers or elders?”

Elder and overseer the same person

The first thing that Scripture makes clear is that these words speak of forms of service rendered by one and the same person — not by different persons taking different positions in a hierarchy. Where does Scripture show this?

In Acts 20:17 we read of Paul calling to him “the *elders* of the church” in Ephesus. Further down in the same chapter Paul says to these same “elders”, “Take heed . . . to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*” (v. 28).

Now in Philippians 1:1 we find “bishops” among those addressed. But the word in the original for “bishop” is exactly that used in Acts 20:28 for “overseer”. “Bishop” and “overseer” are therefore exactly the same thing.

In Titus 1:5 Paul instructs Titus to “ordain elders”. But among the personal qualifications for this service that Titus is to bear in mind we find that “a *bishop* must be blameless” (v. 7).

Lastly, what does Peter say? He too urges the *elders* to take the *oversight* of the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-2). Scripture is unanimous in its testimony that eldership and oversight are united in the same person, and overseers and bishops are identical.

We might note further that Scripture does not imply that solitary elders were ever found in any New Testament assembly. We always read of them in the plural. The indications in Scripture are that many of the early companies of believers were quite small ones. Think of, say, six elders in an assembly of one hundred people. Six bishops per one hundred people! This is the kind of relation Scripture presents. Not one *above* many, but always working together, helping forward the things of the Lord.

What elders and overseers do

What do these words mean?

The term “elder” occurs frequently in the Old Testament to describe those who had authority among the people of God (e.g. Exodus 19:7; Numbers 11:16, 24-25); men whose maturity gave them discernment to guide and help the people of God to obey His will, not

arbitrarily, but as themselves subject to the Law of God; men who could also impose discipline upon those who disobeyed (e.g. Deuteronomy 25:7-10; cp. Ruth 4:2ff). The successors of these Old Testament elders had by New Testament times degenerated into the opponents of the Son of God (e.g. Matthew 16:21, 26:57). But there was a need for the same form of service among those who received Christ, and who took their place with Him outside the nation — a service connected with “authority”, “direction”, “leadership”.

“Elder” describes the characteristics of the person who does the work; “oversight” describes the work he does.

In itself the word for elder is connected — obviously — with age. Sometimes, this is all that it implies (e.g. 1 Peter 5:5). But among the people of God it indicates *maturity*. Paul says distinctly, “Not a novice” (1 Timothy 3:6). An elder is not *just* one of advanced age, but one whose experience in the things of God has fitted him to handle them aright and for the benefit of the people of God.

“Oversight” explains itself. An overseer “looks over” the people of God to find out what they need. The shepherd who goes to the field to “look over” his sheep is not calculating how he might impress them. He is anxiously running his eye over them to find out what they need — some sheep might be injured, or not there; there may be a new lamb; danger may have developed nearby. Moreover, if the shepherd does not know what he is doing, his flock may suffer serious damage.

Just so, an “overseer” in the assembly has the care of the flock at heart, and its needs. And he has to know what he is about in a spiritual sense, if he really is to care for them.

Over the years there has been much declension among the people of God. Much of it would have been avoided, had there been brethren of mature spiritual calibre, who had the wellbeing of the flock of God at heart — men who had had the spiritual influence and stature necessary to deal with the problems that arose. What a crying need there is amongst the various companies of the saints for this type of mature, godly, exercised person, who really cares for the flock of God! The door is wide open for individuals to take up this service.

How they are selected

How did brethren in the early church find themselves charged with this form of service? Scripture indicates three elements in their selection.

Firstly, apostolic appointment. In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas “ordained elders in every city”. Elsewhere we find Paul, on a specific occasion, instructing Titus, on his behalf so to speak, to do the same (Titus 1:5).

Secondly, appointment by the Holy Spirit. It was the *Holy Ghost* who had made the elders in Ephesus “overseers, to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28).

Thirdly, personal exercise. 1 Timothy 3:1 speaks of the *desire*, or *aspiration* of the individual himself.

How do these three elements in the “selection” of elders and overseers apply to our day? The apostles are long dead and we live at the end of the days of the church of God on earth. Does their authority

survive? Is there any central body of believers today to whom we can turn for the selecting and empowering of elders? In spite of great claims to the contrary we find nothing in Scripture to suggest that such a "succession" of apostolic authority was ever even contemplated. The apostles' *doctrine* we have, and a "succession" in the custodianship of it (2 Timothy 2:2); the apostles' *fellowship* we still have, for this involves the Lord's ministry. But the office and authority, as such, of the apostles have gone, and gone for ever. Is it not presumption for any individual or group of believers to arrogate to himself or to itself the right to do this "ordaining" which at the start was confined to the apostles? Where does Scripture sanction "election" or "voting" as a substitute? How could such presumption be justified before God?

The other elements however remain. The Holy Spirit abides with us forever. Personal exercise will be necessary as long as we are left on earth. The Spirit's choice and the person's exercise will co-ordinate to produce a moral condition and power that will carry an influence to be recognised by the assembly. Their authority will be *moral* and *spiritual*, not *official*.

Maybe, many of us who are older have wasted our time to such an extent that there is no longer opportunity for us to attain to the spiritual maturity required for this form of service. Let us examine our hearts. But let the word reach the young. If the Lord does not come, the maintenance of the testimony to the great truths of Christianity rests on their shoulders. Don't let them be given up! Don't let us abandon things that were procured, and also recovered, for us at great cost! For this it requires that *young* believers be concerned to be men and women of spiritual maturity, *exercised* (an old-fashioned, but a powerful word) to apply themselves diligently to the things of the Lord, not merely to accumulate head knowledge, but to practise the truth in their lives. This is a crying necessity. In time to come, if the Lord tarry, fresh young people will come to the meetings. If the young of the present generation don't know the truth, they will be of no use to anyone. If they don't practise the truth, they can be of no spiritual influence for good. On the shoulders of our young brothers and sisters rests a very heavy burden. The sooner they apply themselves to equipping themselves to bear it, the better. *Personal exercise for this service of which we speak is all-important at this present time.* Leave it to the Holy Spirit to place you where your service and influence will be of most use. He knows.

BIBLE STUDY — THE BOOK OF JOSHUA ————— J. S. BLACKBURN

6. A SOLEMN PAUSE — CHAPTER 5

Circumcision, the old corn of the land, the Man with the drawn sword: what lessons have these evocative phrases for us? In this article that question is answered from the teaching of the epistles.

In my article in the last issue two events of the “solemn pause” that followed the Israelites’ passage of the Jordan were studied — the two sets of memorial stones and the magnifying of Joshua. Three other events preceded the besieging of Jericho. They are recorded in the fifth chapter and we turn to them now.

Circumcision reinstated

The first institution of circumcision, given to Abraham as the seal of the covenant, is found in Genesis 17. In Gilgal, “the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time’ ” (5:2). This second institution had for its purpose to “roll away the reproach of Egypt from off” them (v. 9), and an immediate preparation for the battles ahead.

A careful perusal of verses 4 to 9 brings out a preoccupation with Egypt. The “reproach of Egypt” consisted in the fact that it was the men who came out of Egypt who rebelled against God at Kadesh in refusing to proceed with the possession of Canaan. Gilgal signalled the fact that these had been “consumed” (verse 6). It was a silent but urgent stimulus to courage for the battle. In us believers it is the flesh explicitly which is “not subject to the law of God nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). If we take note of how God has dealt with the flesh we shall see in a moment the application of Gilgal to ourselves.

If we consider afresh the position of Israel at Gilgal, then it is easy to see that the remembrance of those men who had been consumed in the forty years’ wandering would be salutary not only as regards the actual “consuming”, but also against Israel’s confidence in themselves. This is exactly where the true meaning of circumcision brings the Christian. “We are the circumcision, which . . . have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). This is the point at which we must look more carefully at the New Testament teaching about the application in Christianity of the “type” of circumcision.

First, in Romans 2:28, 29, we learn that the ultimate circumcision is in the heart and spirit, not in the body. In other words, God had in mind from the beginning the meaning and application of circumcision to the Christian. Next, we learn from Colossians 2:10-11. The real circumcision is reckoned to the Christian from the moment of faith, when he is united to Christ in glory (v. 10). The circumcision with which the Christian is circumcised is exactly defined: “putting off the body of . . . the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”. In the context His circumcision can only mean His death. In no sense has the

Christian living on this earth put off the body of flesh and blood; therefore "the body" in the text can only mean its totality. The "putting off" is constantly renewed by the Christian, as is typified in this reinstitution and in the return to Gilgal after each victory. But finally we revert to the connotation of circumcision in Philippians 3:3. "We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh" (New Trans of J.N.D.).

"No confidence in flesh" is tremendously strengthened by turning back to Joshua 5:2. "Make thee *sharp knives* and circumcise". If swords are to be victorious in battle against Canaanites, sharp knives must be made and turned on self. How much that is so slack and spineless about the Christianity of today is due to lack in, or total absence of, work with the sharp knives? Is this application to be found in scripture? Explicitly and abundantly! "If thy right hand be a snare to thee, cut it off" (Matthew 5:30). The Saviour's words speak not of the physical body, of course, but of the mind and spirit; still one's flesh shudders in the contemplation of the picture conjured up by them. They urge upon us what we ought to be doing. "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "Put to death, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, vile passions, wrath, anger, malice" (Colossians 3:5, 8; New Trans). It was said to me long ago, alas, often forgotten, "Most people find all the excuses for themselves, and are strict with others. Be as tolerant as you can with the faults of others; be tough with yourself."

The corn of the land

In preparation for battles, the indispensability of assuring food supplies was asserted by Napoleon in the famous, if ambiguous sentence, "An army marches on its stomach". The needs of the wilderness wanderings had been supplied by the miracle of the manna. It comes as something of a shock to realise that, unmentioned, the manna had continued all along the King's highway, past the plains of Moab, and into the land of Canaan as far as Gilgal. And it was so with the corn of the land. They both slipped into the silence of familiar routine. This is, of course, only one aspect of the maintenance of food supplies. Other aspects of the history forbid the allowance of the contempt bred by familiarity, but unless the assuring of the Christian's spiritual food becomes a thing of fixed habit, the fight will not be sustained, and we shall not be found, "having done all", standing (Ephesians 6:13).

The type of the manna is most emphatically interpreted by the Lord Jesus in John's Gospel chapter 6. Five times it is repeated that He was Himself, in His own Person, the true bread "which cometh down from Heaven" (John 6:33, 38, 42, 51, 58); and this in the context of vv. 31, 32. "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert . . . bread from heaven." The manna is the Lord Jesus Himself, as food for the soul, as the One come down from heaven to be food and life for His people in the desert. The corn of the land is, in the light of this word of the

Lord Jesus, not difficult to interpret. It is the Lord Jesus Himself in glory, in that heaven to which He belongs, where is His eternal home, and this to be His people's food to give strength for the battles of their holy war.

It would appear that, of the solemn pause we are considering in this chapter, three successive days are found in these verses (5:10-12). Israel kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month (v. 10): they ate the corn of the land of Canaan on the fifteenth (v. 11): and the manna ceased on the sixteenth (v. 12).

There can be no question about the application of the Passover and Unleavened Bread to the Christian life. It is clearly explained and powerfully applied in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and 8: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth". Regarding the character and behaviour which prepared for the fight, let us notice the parallels between the passage just quoted and Ephesians chapter four: "truth" is urged upon us in vv. 15, 21 and 24: and the casting off of "malice" in v. 31.

In the narrative of the first Passover in Egypt and in the regulations for the Feasts of Jehovah, eating of the slain lamb and of unleavened bread are most closely joined together. A person who started to eat the passover committed himself to eating unleavened bread. Thus the Christian who gets the blessing from the blood of God's Lamb, is committed for life to the kind of living of 1 Corinthians 5:8.

Coming now to verse 11, and the "corn of the land", Israel's eating it corresponds to the Christian's feeding, mind, heart and spirit, on the Lord Jesus; but now it is in a special character and position. It is Christ in heaven. He came down from heaven, and is now in heaven. It is His own place, to which He belongs. This is a most important distinction in faith and in practice. That is only real Christianity which centres on Christ in heaven. J. B. Stoney said: "A person will often say, 'I stick only to Christ' without any thought going beyond His earthly life, and not centering on Christ in heaven". For our struggle in the heavenlies as described in Ephesians chapter six, we need to feed on Christ in heaven. What wealth of teaching is available to us concerning Christ now in heaven! This is not the place or time to expound the truths: we can only give a lead as to what they are and where they are to be found.

A very special case is that of the epistle to the Hebrews, deeply founded in the books of the law available to Joshua. The moment when the High Priest enters into the holiest with the blood of sacrifice is pin-pointed to be the theme of the epistle: Christ entered into the very presence of God, and seated at the right hand of God is the source from which all the blessings of that epistle flow. Most particularly pertinent to our theme in Joshua, of course, is the present position, grace and activity of Christ at God's right hand as Lord and Head. To direct our attention to such a Person, and in such a position is a main

purpose of the types in Joshua. These thoughts lead very naturally to the final paragraph of our theme.

The Captain of the LORD's host

In the first three of these lessons the attention of Joshua and the host of Israel was directed to remembering the lessons of the *past*. In the fourth, *present* action still recalled the contrasts with the past. In this fifth paragraph Joshua is bidden to attend to the *future* wars.

One thing further is needed before actual warfare commences and it seems to be Joshua himself who needs it, for it was given to him alone to see it, and we have no record of its being passed on to the people. Is it implied that Joshua was alone, surveying the city in secret, and perhaps dismayed before the immensity of the enterprise about to begin? He became aware of something unusual, looked around, and there stood a man, naked sword in hand!

We are soon aware that this is a theophany — an appearance of God. Sice God is known in Christ, we might say that it is an appearance of Christ. Other theophanies had gone before, and others were to follow. The two theophanies in earlier books are the three men who appeared to Abram (Genesis 18) and the burning bush (Exodus 3:2). Regarding the former, there is a striking difference between the character of the men who appeared to Abram and that of Him who appeared to Joshua. To Abram the pilgrim there came peaceful travellers, accepting the courtesies due to travellers, and communing with him about his future. Now, to Joshua, Jehovah appears, not as a peaceful traveller, but as a warrior, ready for immediate fighting. This is the first part of the lesson: Jehovah is a warrior.

The second part of the lesson is in the answer to Joshua's question, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" The answer refuses the question, as much as to say, "Adversaries are nothing, non-existent, if you learn the lesson that this war is My war, and you are My army". The word translated "host" sometimes means "Heavenly bodies" and sometimes "angels". The context here is plainly in favour of "army". "As captain of the host of the LORD am I now come". Joshua was Israel's leader, appointed by Jehovah, and already magnified in the people's eyes. But Joshua was that invincible leader required by the promises only inasmuch as in complete obedience to Jehovah he faithfully mediated Jehovah's word and power. The real captain is Jehovah.

At this point a simple reading in Ephesians 6:12 will serve to confirm vividly where the New Testament counterpart of the conquest of Canaan is to be found. Note particularly the strong implication that the apostle Paul has in mind some *other* struggle, but then against human foes, which nevertheless forms an instructive parallel to the struggle he now describes:

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers . . . against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places" (cp. AV margin). In terms of the conflict for the spiritual blessings in heavenly places no doubt it is Christ in glory as Head who, through the believer's union with Him, is the supplier of

all that is needed for every aspect of life (Ephesians 1:22 and 4:8). But can there be any real doubt that the “Captain of the Lord’s host” in Joshua 5 is a clear pointer to Ephesians 6:10 — “Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might”?

We now turn for a moment to consider the theophany of the burning bush, and to compare it with that of the Captain of the Lord’s host. Whereas it is the contrasts that are instructive when comparing the latter with the theophany to Abram, this time it is the parallels. Some of these can be seen in the Table.

JOSHUA 5		EXODUS 3, etc.	
5:13	looked and behold	3: 2	looked and behold
5:14	the host of the LORD	7: 4	mine armies [hosts]
		12:41	the hosts of the LORD
5:14	am I now come	3: 8	I am come down
5:15	Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou stand- est is holy	3: 5	Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground
5: 6	the land which the LORD sware unto their fathers . . . that floweth with milk and honey	3: 8	to bring them unto a land flowing with milk and honey
5:12	they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year	3: 8	to bring them . . . unto the place of the Canaanites

We have previously had occasion to compare the meaning of the Red Sea passage with the crossing of the Jordan and to see them coalesce to form one whole view of the putting into effect of God’s purpose, taking up Israel in Egypt and placing them in Canaan. Perhaps the two appearances of Jehovah, in the burning bush and as Captain of the Lord’s host — as compared in the Table — coalesce in a similar way, tending to present redemption from Egypt and establishment in Canaan as two sides of one event. The great lesson repeated and received with such solemnity is that no victory is possible that does not fully square with God’s holiness.

By this time we would expect Joshua and Ephesians each to illuminate the message of the other. It is certainly so in this case. The section of Ephesians giving general exhortations, as distinct from special relationships, runs from 4:17 to 5:21. In the early portion of this section, we have a reference to the warfare of chapter 6, in that it pinpoints the kind of behaviour which gives victory to the devil; “let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26, 27). Close by, in this same portion, we find holiness put in as the behaviour which tends to victory; “having put on the new man, which according to God is created in truthful righteousness and holiness” (4:24), and “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (4:30 New Trans of J.N.D.). In the fighting which so soon ensued, the *only* defeat suffered by Israel in pitched battle was after Achan had sinned in the accursed thing. Let the last terse words of the chapter remain with us: “And Joshua did so”.

THE LORD'S COMING IN 1 CORINTHIANS — JOHN BARNES

To Paul, the hope of the Lord's coming governed everything, including assembly life: this article shows how. The previous article in this occasional series appeared in March 1982.

The truth of the Lord's return had a considerable place in the apostle Paul's thoughts as he wrote this letter to the saints in Corinth. He relates matters to it about six times, and in some detail.

Riches: chapter 1:4-8

The period which would elapse between the descent of the Holy Spirit and the Lord's return was not to be one of spiritual penury for the saints but one of wealth. While the Lord was here on earth the disciples enjoyed the riches of His presence and character, and they also had His wonderful teaching to benefit them. In John 14 He refers to His near departure, and in order to show them that this would not impoverish them He tells them that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who would indwell them, to empower them and to guide their minds in the truth. Moreover, the Spirit was in no way inferior to Himself, but a divine Person equally with Himself and He would bring them enrichment.

In the epistle to the Ephesians we learn that when the Lord Jesus ascended up on high, He gave gifts unto men. When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, He brought those gifts with Him to enrich the believers on earth with the wealth centred in their exalted Head. The time of the gracious Spirit's service continues, for the Lord said of Him, "He shall abide with you forever". The reference to the Lord's return here in verse 7 seems to indicate that the spiritual enrichment of the saints will be maintained until the Lord returns: "Ye come behind in no gift waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". The period of the Lord's physical absence, far from being marked by deprivation, would be entirely spanned by the endowing power and presence of the Holy Spirit. All that is needed for the maintenance of the testimony, the edification of the assembly and the spiritual health of believers is richly provided.

The verb "waiting" which is used here "expresses actual expectation" (J.N.D.). It seems that the brethren lived in actual anticipation of that happy event, not as a vague or remote hope, but as an imminent event. My own feeling is that the apostle uses this fact to press upon them the need for true response. The aspect of the Lord's coming referred to here is that of His revelation and would focus attention on the appearing rather than on the rapture, and so would emphasise the responsibility of the saints. However, the thought seems to be that the period now running its course with that unveiling in view is one which furnishes the saints with great benefits. The history of the church confirms this. There were long dark times when the flame of faithfulness burned low, but it was never wholly extinguished, and when there was a revival of response to the Lord great spiritual blessing was enjoyed.

Even in our frigid days the Holy Spirit continues His faithful work, enriching the brethren with the precious benefits He is empowered to bestow. The faithfulness of God guarantees the upkeep of this till that day. Knowledge of God is given, and ability to communicate it to others is preserved, to confirm the testimony and to ensure its continuity from one generation of believers to the next, until He comes. All is maintained in divine power. Grace is given (v. 4); the saints are enriched (v. 5); they come behind in no gift (v. 7). What God has in view is that the features which will be manifested in the day of the Lord's revelation should be developed now in us as we journey through a wholly hostile environment. Growth, progress, freedom and joy are normally restricted, or even impossible in extreme opposition. However, the Holy Spirit has power to provide for the saints that normal atmosphere in which the development of these features can proceed unhindered by outside influences. So, to be in the good of this we must be fully in the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, in a practical way.

Responsibility: chapter 3:10-15

In this chapter Paul writes about building. There is a sense in which the Lord Himself builds, and no man has a hand in the work. We could think of Matthew 16 in this connection. There the Lord Himself builds, and no power in the universe can prevail against the structure which He rears. In this chapter the responsibility of the believer is clear, and the possibility of error arises. The apostle Paul was a wise master builder, and he saw to it that the foundation was truly laid, but the question was, How would others work who were to succeed him? There may be bad workmanship or, as is mainly emphasised, unsuitable materials may be built into the structure. Paul again brings in the day of Christ as the touchstone of the situation. The day will declare the value or otherwise of the building material. Those who build on this foundation are under obligation to bring matter which is in keeping with the foundation — that is, material of eternal value. Where stuff of lesser value or of a different kind is brought into the building it will not stand the test of that day and will be burnt up. The Christian worker who may use such combustible matter will not himself be lost, but will suffer loss of reward because he has failed to build responsibility.

The certainty of everything being examined in that searching light should cause us much exercise as we work in our localities. What are we bringing to the work? Is it the excellencies of Christ or it is the destructible features of the man whom God has set aside? The one will survive any test; the other will be destroyed. Our responsibility is to promote that which is of eternal value.

Reward: chapter 4:1-5

In this chapter as in chapter 3 the question of responsibility is much in evidence. Those who have received a stewardship have a duty to carry it out loyally. God is faithful — this is one of the grand, foundation truths of this letter. God is faithful, so His stewards are to be faithful

also. The faithfulness of God who has called us into the fellowship of His Son will ensure that everything required for the preservation of that fellowship will be provided throughout its duration. So each generation of believers has an obligation to answer to that faithfulness by corresponding fidelity in service. Those who have been given special work to do for the Lord have been equipped for it and are answerable to the Lord for how it is done. Where a stewardship has been carried out in fidelity there will be praise from God for the worker. Indeed it has been noticed that the last clause of verse 5 is beautifully gracious, and suggests that each steward will receive commendation. Where there is faithfulness it is a reflection of God's own character. Thus He takes pleasure in that which corresponds to Himself, the fruit of the Spirit's work in the believer.

Fidelity is expected in the steward; this is a matter between the servant and his Lord and will be resolved at His coming (v. 5). Things at present unknown to all others will then be brought to light. This is a solemn thought. Many of us have failed and this will come to light. There is also another side to this. Many quite obscure believers have gone on quietly in some small corner unacclaimed, sometimes even despised by other Christians, faithfully working for the Lord. This will not go unnoticed. What men ignore, God will not pass by. What was done for Him will be acknowledged in that day. It is not the big splash that is noticed, but faithfulness to a commitment which is estimated by the Lord Himself. The crowd can have no idea of this, the servant himself is unable to reach an estimate, the Lord knows it all. Hidden things — purpose, motive — all are open to Him who reads our hearts, and surely we are in for some surprises!

The stewards of verse 1 are official servants, of whom Paul would be an example. Most would believe that he fulfilled his stewardship with a fidelity perhaps unequalled in the church's history, but he is careful to point out that he was not prepared to assess even his own faithfulness. "I judge not mine own self". He was, rather, content to leave the matter with the Lord. "He that judgeth me is God". He will come to His own wholly righteous conclusion. Where reward is merited it will be given; where there was unfaithfulness, there will be loss of reward.

Rebuke: chapter 5

There were serious problems at Corinth. No one could read a letter like this without being aware that things had gone wrong. One of the outstanding evils was their tolerance of open immorality among them. The sorrowing apostle speaks of this in unambiguous terms here. Instead of being proud of their gifts and parading them to their own satisfaction, they ought to have been prostrate before the Lord in shame and grief that such evil should exist in a Christian assembly. Paul speaks of this with the Lord's return in mind — "that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:5). His point seems to be, How does this look in the light of that day? "That day" will be one of glory and display, but everything contrary to it will have been swept away. This brother's conduct was not only a lapse, but a

persistent walk in open evil which was depraved even in shameless Corinth (cp. 5:1). How, then, would it appear in the light of Christ's glory? This seems to be the line of Paul's reasoning here, and he urges the brethren to clear themselves of this dishonour: not that the erring brother should be lost to them, but that he should be saved in that day (5:5).

We learn from the second letter that the outcome of their tardy, but vigorous, discipline was indeed fruitful. But here he rebukes them for their laxity in dealing with the leaven which was working among them. The question must be raised, Why were they so unwilling to deal with this evil? The answer surely is that they lacked the spiritual power needed for such action because they were more concerned for their own day of glory than for Christ's day. Paul rebukes them — "Your glorying is not good". If they had been concerned with Christ's day, the assembly would have been spared this disaster. They were reigning as kings when they ought to have been in the dust before the Lord. James advises us, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up".

Remembrance: chapter 11:17-34

This chapter opens with the commendation, "I praise you, brethren", but by the time we reach v. 17, Paul has to say, "I praise you not". The saints were not coming together for profit or edification, but on the contrary their meetings fostered divisions and strife. Even the sacred gatherings to break bread suffered serious damage. Indeed it seems that when they met to break bread, it was not properly speaking the Lord's supper they celebrated, though they may have had the outward order correctly arranged.

Here again Paul brings the coming of the Lord to bear on the subject. The entire period of the Lord's absence was to be marked by the remembrance of Himself, and has His death as the point it looks back to, and His coming again as the point it looks on to. If the saints truly love the Lord, their remembrance of Him will do at least two things. It will make them conscious of His presence with them spiritually, even though He is not there physically to be handled as was the case in John 20. It will also fire their desire to see Him and to be with Him in the place of glory where He now sits. If this were always so, what a difference it would make to times when the saints gather to remember Him! His physical absence has not deprived us of His true presence for He promised, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them". But he also promised, "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also". These two promises, held in faith and love, would make all the difference to our gatherings to break bread: His presence and His coming. "Till He come" is a precious thought. As we recall Him to mind in the supper, we look back to see Him bearing the great burden of sin at Calvary, but as we think of Him, knowing Him to be risen and exalted, we can look on with glad anticipation to His coming, to take us to be with Himself, where He is, that we may see His glory and be in conditions suited to those scenes of splendour.

Reaping: chapter 15

Meanwhile, "here in the body pent", we move on our way. Many dear saints are with the Lord. Many of us alive now may also pass that way, but even death will not sever our hope from the Lord and His return. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death, for resurrection will release the sleeping saints from its custody. We could not in any case enter those courts in these bodies. When the Lord Jesus returns to claim His own, not only will the dead in Christ require to be changed, but the living saints will also be changed. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall *all* be changed". At the Lord's coming a mighty harvest will be reaped, the fruit of His work (15:23). Myriads of saints will rise to meet the Lord in the air; some raised from the dead and the living having been changed. The new conditions into which we shall be translated require such a transformation. This chapter makes it most clear that the saints will not be raised to the condition in which they were at the time of their death. They will be raised in conformity with the Lord's present condition of glory. There will be great and wonderful changes. These bodies, made for life on earth, would be unsuitable for the life of glory; so the raised saints will be given those bodies, suited for heaven, like the Lord's own body of glory. The change which takes place in the living saints will be equivalent no doubt to the resurrection change in those who have fallen asleep.

So throughout this important epistle the truth of the Lord's coming is kept before the mind, and the whole life of the assembly is seen to be influenced by it in a very marked way. The importance of the coming of the Lord has been played down somewhat of recent years, but the brethren should beware of any attempt to minimise this truth in any way. Those who ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" cannot be His lovers. Those who do love Him and are in the current of the Holy Spirit's thought will surely cry, in unison with Him, "Come, Lord Jesus".

FELLOW WORKERS WITH PAUL ————— T. D. SPICER

10. SILAS

Silas is a lesson in humility: himself a prophet, he was content with the relatively obscure place of a "fellow worker" with Paul. The last article in this occasional series appeared in January 1982.

The apostle Paul owed much to the fellowship, encouragement and loving service of his many companions, but it would appear that many of them owed their maturity in the Christian faith to the time which they were able to spend in his company and the lessons they learnt as they travelled and worked with him. There were some among them who sat and wrote at his dictation the letters which he sent far and wide to encourage those whom he had won for the Lord from the superstitious practices of paganism. The letter-writers had an additional

privilege, for the apostle would doubtless share with them the news he received from distant assemblies and then discuss the themes of his letters before the actual process of dictation began.

Not all Paul's fellow workers were immature in the Christian faith when they met him; and among his acquaintances there were certainly those who were used by God to enlarge his understanding and appreciation of the Gospel, and to encourage him in Christian ministry. In our study of Barnabas we saw one who recognised the potential of this man from Tarsus and drew him into the fray for souls alongside him; and it mattered not to Barnabas that before long the leadership would pass from him to his friend, for he was a large-hearted and self-effacing individual. There were others, too, who were mature men of God when they met Paul and one of them, Silas, is selected for this study.

As we turn to the Scriptures, we find that the Roman form of his name — Silvanus — is invariably used by Paul in his epistles, although Luke in his account in Acts always wrote of Silas. Of his early history and conversion we know nothing, but it would seem that he was a Hellenistic Jew who, like Paul, had acquired Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37), although by what means we cannot tell.

The council of Jerusalem

We first meet Silas when he was appointed with Judas, surnamed Barsabas, to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch with the decree of the "council" of Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). Both men were eminent members of the early church and were well qualified to speak fully concerning the will of God and to show to the believers in Antioch the implications of the "council" on various points of Christian doctrine and practice. The appellation given to them both by Luke is, "chief men among the brethren".

There had been difficulty and dissent in Antioch occasioned by some Jewish Christians who had gone there from Jerusalem, saying that Gentile converts should also become proselytes of Judaism. Paul and Barnabas had resisted these men and had sought a ruling on the question from the apostles who were in Jerusalem. What is more, they had gone in person to present the case. Following a lengthy discussion, of which we have little in the Acts account, the "council" under the chairmanship of James the brother of the Lord, set out in detail its decision, sending Silas and Judas to Antioch as their personal representatives to confirm the written message. So we find Silas with authority as a delegate of the assembly in Jerusalem.

Paul's second missionary journey

After this Silas appears to have remained in Antioch while Judas returned to Jerusalem; and it is here that he finds himself co-opted by the apostle Paul as a companion for his second missionary journey, following the difference of opinion which the apostle had with Barnabas over John Mark. It was a particularly appropriate choice in view of the journey Paul proposed to make through Syria and Cilicia to visit Gentile Christians, the very task for which he had been

commissioned by the assembly at Jerusalem.

So the little party set out and passing through Syria, Cilicia, Phrygia and Galatia arrived at Troas where the call to cross over into Macedonia was so vividly received. They sailed to Samothrace and eventually came to Philippi where they witnessed the startling events which culminated in the conversion of the city gaoler. The story is well known; but let us remember that suffering the flogging, the discomfort of the stocks and the gloom of that inner dungeon alongside the apostle was Silas. A true companion, even in adversity.

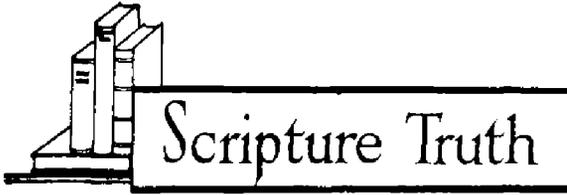
Outreach in Corinth

Silas accompanied the apostle Paul to Thessalonica and following the riot there was sent by him to Berea where he remained with Timothy when Paul left for Athens. Later, they rejoined the apostle in Corinth where they formed a team and engaged in some considerable evangelistic enterprise in the city and the surrounding neighbourhood. In his second letter to the assembly at Corinth Paul alludes to this time of outreach and writes, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus" (2 Corinthians 1:19). The two letters to the church at Thessalonica were written at this time while Paul and Silas were in Corinth and Paul includes Silas in the opening greetings (1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1). We then lose sight of our subject until he reappears in the first letter of Peter.

The testimony of Peter

Peter's reference to Silas is brief. "By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly . . ." (1 Peter 5:12); and he expresses his confidence in one whom his readers knew well as a companion of Paul. Moreover, Peter was concerned to inform his readers that in his considered opinion Silas was a true and faithful brother in the Lord. Did Peter's mind go back to that memorable "council" in Jerusalem in which he played such a notable part? We cannot tell, but we find him warmly commending to his readers one who had so signally distinguished himself at that time because of his standing and acceptance among all the gatherings.

"A faithful brother" is Peter's warm expression of approbation. A "brother in the Lord" is sufficient commendation in itself; but when the individual is a "faithful" brother how much more is conveyed by the use of that adjective. In a world which is marked out by much infidelity — in public life, in commerce and industry, or in the home — what a need there is for those whose lives, like that of Silas, can bear such a testimony.



(incorporating *Words of Help*)

MAY, 1983

MAKING A BROTHER STUMBLE ——— ALLAN RETALLICK

“How easily we may be the cause of another’s making a shipwreck of the faith! When we condemn a young believer for turning aside, might it not be wiser to examine ourselves to see if we have not been in any measure responsible for this?” These and other searching lessons are drawn from the story of the two prophets in 1 Kings 13.

In 1 Kings 13 we read a strange and solemn story. Jeroboam had established his idolatrous temples at Dan and Beth-el, and, although he had appointed priests to serve at these centres, we find him in this chapter offering incense at the altar in Beth-el. We read in verse 11 that there was an old prophet living there, but perhaps he was not in the right spiritual condition for God to speak through him. We are not told in fact that he registered any protest against the false worship that had been set up in the very place where once God had revealed Himself to their ancestor Jacob. At any rate a man of God from the neighbouring kingdom of Judah was sent to cry against this altar. It is not often that an inanimate object is addressed in this way in Scripture: “O altar, altar! thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee”.

Perhaps we find a parallel in Jeremiah’s words: “O earth, earth, earth, hear the words of the Lord”; or Ezekiel, when he said: “Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God”. Of course, in these instances, as when the Lord reproached Jerusalem and the other favoured cities where He had laboured, the word is really to the inhabitants of the earth, the worshippers on the mountains and the people that had refused our Lord’s words. So here, Jeroboam recognised that the words addressed to the altar were really a rebuke to himself.

On this occasion God gave a sign to Jeroboam that the prophesy would be fulfilled. The altar would be rent and the ashes poured out. This did happen, but not before the idolatrous king had lifted up his hand to apprehend the man of God. Immediately that hand was dried up, so that he was unable to draw it back again.

We often find that God gives signs when a new era begins, so that men are not left in ignorance of God’s will and purpose. We find this

for instance at the time of Israel's departure from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land. Similarly the years of the Lord's ministry and the times of the apostles were characterised by notable signs and wonders. God had spoken to Jeroboam through His servant Abijah, but Jeroboam had not heeded. Now He gives him another warning, and confirms it with an unmistakable sign of divine authority.

The first reaction of the ungodly man to God's messenger is usually open hostility and persecution. We find this in the book of the Acts. Jeroboam however was frightened when the power of God smote him physically and he immediately changed his attitude, relying upon the mercy of God to restore him in answer to the prayer of the man of God. This is a typical inconsistency of human nature. Men gladly avail themselves of God's mercies while not willing to be obedient to His word. The man of God did pray however, and the king's hand was restored.

When the enemy does not succeed by open opposition, he often turns to patronage and flattery. We find this in the book of Nehemiah, where we read that the enemies of God's people were grieved that a man was come to seek their welfare and attempted by ridicule and open opposition to stop the work of rebuilding the wall; but when this failed, they said, "Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages". Nehemiah was not deceived by the apparent desire for co-operation. Jeroboam, too, seeing that his attempt to arrest the man of God was frustrated, now turned to a more subtle manner of making his ministry ineffective. The scriptures tell us that we are not ignorant of Satan's devices, and yet God's people are constantly being compromised by the patronage of the world, and their testimony is rendered ineffective as was that of Lot in Sodom.

"Come with me," says Jeroboam, "and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward." What reward from the prince of this world can compare with that laid up in heaven for the believer that seeks to walk with His Lord through this world as He walked, a stranger and a pilgrim? This man of God from Judah however had already been warned before he set out, and he faithfully rejected the king's offer of hospitality. "If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread or drink water in this place". This was the language of Abram when he had rescued Lot from his plight. The king of Sodom had said: "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself", but Abram was not deceived. "I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and . . . I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." No wonder God's message to him was: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." To the believer, who possesses all things in Christ, the world's rewards do not count for much.

So the man of God, thus far obedient to the word of God, went back by another way. It would have been happy if the story had ended there, but God does not hide from us the weaknesses and failures of the men chosen to serve Him. What an encouragement this is to those who realise all too well their own inadequacy! It appears from verse 14

of our chapter that the man of God, fatigued, perhaps, by the long journey and the experiences at Beth-el, decided to rest for a while before going back to his own land. Here we see another ruse of the enemy. "This is not your rest", we are warned. The disciples in the garden of Gethsemane were overcome with sleep, and were unable to pray, as they had been bidden, that they might not enter into temptation. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion." The conflict goes on, and we need to watch and pray and to be clad in the whole armour of God if we are to stand in the evil day.

What shall we say about the old prophet living in Beth-el? His sons came and told him all that the man of God had said and done. What moved him to saddle his ass and seek him out? It may have been a genuine desire for fellowship, or to show godly hospitality, but one fears that he may also have been jealous because God had passed him by and used a possibly younger man from somewhere else to bring His message. Eli had also had this experience, when the Lord entrusted to the young Samuel a message that the older man was not in a state to receive. In his case, however, we see a becoming humility when he says, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good". It may be a humbling experience for an older brother, especially if he is out of touch with the Lord, to find God using a younger servant to make His will known, but it is well when the message is received in a spirit of humility, and obeyed accordingly.

This old prophet, unlike Eli, not only insisted on overriding the convictions of the man from Judah, but even claimed that an angel had spoken to him, reversing God's previous explicit command. His words, "I am a prophet as thou art," suggest a spiritual pride that is an abomination to God. Indeed, his words remind us of the first recorded words of the enemy: "Yea, hath God said?" If the man of God from Judah had considered, he would have realised that the word once spoken to him could not be changed. God cannot lie, and He cannot go back on His word. As the apostle says to the Galatians, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received let him be accursed". It is well for young Christians to test all that they hear by the Word of God, as did the Bereans of old. On the other hand older Christians should be most careful not to discourage the babes in Christ or turn them aside by teaching that is contrary to the Word of God.

While they were eating together, the true word of God came to the old prophet, and this time there was no mistake as to its authenticity. "Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord . . . thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." He says not a word of his own sin in turning the other from his path of obedience. He delivers the solemn message and reminds the man of God of the commandment given to him by God Himself. There must be many souls today on a wrong path because they were led astray by false teachers but, while these leaders are certainly heaping up judgment for themselves, those that are so led are responsible to walk in obedience to the word that they have from God Himself. The pursuit of a wrong path will inevitably bring its disastrous reward.

The word spoken by the old prophet came to pass. The lion killed the disobedient man of God as he went his way, but was restrained from devouring the carcase or attacking the ass. When the old prophet heard what had happened there was still no word of remorse or repentance for his own part in the sad sequence of events. He merely said: "It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord; therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the Lord which He spake unto him." It was all very well to bring the carcase back and bury the man of God in his own grave, with lamentations of "Alas, my brother!" He might well wish to be buried in the same grave; he might well acknowledge that the word spoken by that man of God would surely come to pass. Had he no thought that he was responsible for this man's violent death and for the disobedience of which he speaks so readily? It would be well for older Christians to learn a lesson from this sad history. How easily we may be the cause of another's making shipwreck of the faith! When we condemn a young brother or sister for turning aside, might it not be wiser to examine ourselves to see if we have not been, in some measure, responsible for this? Surely, too, we may all learn a lesson from the other man, not to let any rob us of what we have learned of Christ; to hold fast that which we have, that no man take our crown.

The sad conclusion of this chapter shows us that the solemn warning delivered by the man from Judah, and confirmed by such striking signs, was yet unheeded. "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way", so that nothing could prevent God's judgment falling upon him and his house, "to destroy it from off the face of the earth". How solemn it is to receive a special message from God, and to give no heed! It is well to be reminded of the verse in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day" (Hebrews 3:12, 13).

THREE SONGS R. A. CREETH

Creation, incarnation and redemption each call forth their own song. Heavenly beings form the chorus in the first two cases, but redemption can only be fully celebrated by men who have experienced it.

1. The Song of Creation

In Job 38:7 we read, "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." This is beautiful poetic language, the very words of the Creator God Himself, describing the rejoicing in the heavens that accompanied the bringing in of the first creation. Surely the heavens declared the glory of God, and the firmament showed forth His handiwork (Psalm 19:1). The angels, the heavenly intelligences, the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places", gave utterance to their exultant joy as the marvellous panorama of the

Creator's handiwork opened out before them.

The context of the chapter shows that God was replying to Job's vain questionings and lamentations. Job dared to question God's ways and express his own thoughts about his Creator. Job had to learn that he was but a poor, frail, sinful creature, and he must take his true place in the dust before the Almighty who giveth not account of any of His matters" (chapter 33:13), and of whom the apostle declared, "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

Job had been questioning the dealings of God. Now the tables are turned, and God says to him in effect, "I am going to question you, and answer me like a man if you can. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding." Job could not reply. "Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?" He did not know. "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; when *the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*" Job was overwhelmed and had no answers to these questions. He was learning his total ignorance and failty in the light of the majesty and power of the Almighty.

What a marvellous scene it must have been when stage by stage the universe was established and brought into view! Well might the angels burst forth into praise as the Creator's perfect handiwork was displayed before their wondering gaze!

2. The Song of Bethlehem

In Luke 2 the angels again share in the joy brought to the earth. It was an angel who came with the wondrous message to the shepherds, "Fear not, I bring you good tidings of great joy; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men" (New Trans. of JND).

The angels burst into praise to celebrate the great purposes of God. First, they ascribe glory to God in the highest, in the very dwelling place of God. God incarnate was present on earth, and in Him the foundation of God's eternal glory would be laid, for in the Babe of Bethlehem all the counsels of God were centred, and by Him they would be perfectly fulfilled. So later as Messiah He would be acclaimed: "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38).

The second part of the angelic ascription of praise was "peace on earth". Much of the earth at that time was under the yoke of the Roman Empire, and strife among the nations was much in evidence, but the heavenly host anticipated peace for the warring earth, for they see in that lowly Babe "The Mighty God, the Father of eternity, the Prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6, New Trans. of JND).

Thirdly, the angels express God's "good pleasure in men". What greater proof could there be of God's good pleasure than this, that His own Son had become a man? It proved that God had set His love upon

men, and taken them up for blessing. The angels did not enter into detail, but they sang of these great outlines of God's purposes. They knew that this lowly Babe was the Lord from heaven, they saw God's glory established, they foretold peace for this troubled earth, and they rejoiced that God's complacency rested upon men, now that His Son had become a man. The earth was to them the theatre in which God's glory and grace would be displayed, and this led to their threefold ascription of praise.

3. The New Song of Redemption

In Revelation 5 the apostle John is given a prophetic vision of the universal adoration which will be rendered to the name of God and of the Lamb. Invested as He is with all knowledge, wisdom and power, the Lamb alone is accounted worthy to set in motion the final accomplishment of all God's purposes concerning this world, all judgment having been committed unto Him, and having authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of man (see John 5, 22-27). When, therefore, He had taken the seven-sealed book, "the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, having each a harp and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals; because Thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed to God, by Thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests; and they shall reign over the earth" (verses 8-10, New Trans. of JND).

The song of the elders, typifying the risen saints, is a "new song", not because redemption itself was a new thing, but because it was now fully and finally accomplished, and its glorious effects were seen in heaven: the redemption of the body by resurrection had actually taken place, and the saints are seen glorified in heaven. The Lamb is about to commence what He alone could undertake — the redemption by power of the earth. The song celebrates the completion of all God's purposes.

These risen saints are viewed in the character of priests and kings. As priests they have in their hands the incense-prayers of the needy and persecuted saints on earth; as kings they are about to reign with Christ over the earth. This vision brings us, therefore, to the eve of the millennial kingdom.

It is interesting to notice that the chorus of praise begun by the elders (verse 9) is taken up by the angels (verses 11-12) and finally by all creation (verses 13-14). But there is a great difference between the worship of the angels and that of the elders. The angels praise His obedience unto death, and acknowledge that as the slain Lamb He is entitled to receive glory and blessing, but they say nothing about redemption, for they have not proved, as we have, the cleansing virtue of the blood. The elders, on the other hand, see the great central feature of the cross to be the redeeming work there accomplished, and so they acclaim the worthiness of the Lamb because they have themselves experienced the eternal value of Christ's redemption.

How blessed that we too even now can anticipate this universal chorus of praise!

2. THE MOTIVE, MANNER AND PRECONDITIONS FOR THE WORK

This article concludes a very important subject. The first part, in the last issue, defined the work and those who do it. This part emphasises the spirit in which it should be done.

There is a great need for the kind of service we sought to describe in the last article. But there are dangers. Service easily degenerates into position. Give a man a position and he quickly begins to think well of himself. He's a bit above the rest. People begin to ask his advice, and to want him to do things. And so his service grows in his mind, and he begins to expect to be treated accordingly. This is just how the division between the "clergy" and "laity" emerged, as the record of history tells us. Humility is first diluted, and then turns into arrogance. I do not deny that many humble men of God bear the title "bishop", or "elder", and seek to fulfil it according to the mind of Christ in the knowledge that they have. Still, the way in which they conceive their "office" *cannot but* foster this danger.

Amongst the apostles it was different. Let us, by way of contrast, consider 1 Peter 5:1. "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder . . ." Is this the prince of the apostles speaking, the rock on whom the church was founded, the first pope? Peter was taking the place of one among many. How well he had appropriated the Lord's personal ministry towards him! Once he had said, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I" (Mark 14:29). Once he had thought "I'm the man". Experience and the Lord's intercession for him had taught him better.

In the process of learning what he was in himself, Peter had learned also the character of the service to which he was called. He had been "a witness of the sufferings of Christ", and was also "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed" (v. 1). After the Lord had announced the foundation of the church upon His own Person, in Matthew 16, but before the experience of the transfiguration in chapter 17, He laid down the principles of discipleship — suffering, sacrifice, reproach. Peter had seen it exemplified in the Lord Himself. There was none better than he to tell his "fellow elders" what their service would entail — not adulation, not pre-eminence, but suffering. But Peter had seen the transfiguration also. He knew the glory to which the path of true service led.

Having delineated the character of their service in the sufferings and the glory of Christ, he can now proceed. "Feed the flock of God . . ." (v. 2). *Feed!* In Acts 20:28 Paul actually said, "Shepherd", and in Titus 1:9 he laid down that the elders were to "exhort with sound doctrine". What important tasks! There is more to feeding a flock than throwing down the fodder and leaving it at that. The thought embraces all the care that, as we have seen, a shepherd shows towards his sheep. Its scope may be gathered from what the negligent

“Shepherds of Israel” failed to do of old: “Ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. . . . My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search and seek after them” (Ezekiel 34:3-6).

But let us apply this to ourselves. How is the “flock of God” to be fed today? We certainly don’t do it by criticising, by fault-finding. Nor by imposing a tyranny upon the people of God — which says, “My word must be obeyed at all costs”. Scripture teaches us the motive and the means: *love* — for the people of God and love for the name of Christ. Are the brethren dear to us *because* they are dear to God — the flock “which he hath purchased with the blood of His own [Son]” (Acts 20:28)? Is *our* work that of helping, of binding together, or of scattering and destroying the flock? These are serious questions.

Peter continues, “Not by constraint, but willingly”. What a poor thing it is, to enter some form of Christian service because, “It has to be done. Nobody else is going to do it. I suppose I’ll *have* to do it.” There is not much value in this type of service, in the sight of heaven.

“Not for filthy lucre.” What a terrible thing it is to serve the people of God for financial gain!

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage.” “My Lord Bishop?” Does this clause of Scripture not destroy such an idea? It’s not what we get *out* of this service that counts, but what we put *into* it. Elders are greatly responsible before the Lord to put in as much love, care, and godly influence as they are able to supply. “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (v. 4).

The passages continue, “Likewise ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder”. The Scripture is plain as to what the duty of the young is towards those who are concerned about their spiritual progress. Let them not seek to evade it. But perhaps if we who are older were ourselves more governed by the truth, and had ourselves more spiritual power and influence, it would be easier for the young to submit themselves to our advice and admonitions. A great deal of responsibility in this matter rests also on those who are older.

What are the qualifications?

If we examine 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 we find statements of the qualifications for this form of service. They fall into three very important divisions. Firstly, the character of the individual himself. Secondly, his behaviour in the home. Thirdly, his behaviour in the circle of the saints. Extremely high standards are demanded of those who take up this service in all three respects. And I say this very humbly: that the measure in which we fail individually, in our homes, or among the people of God is the measure in which the testimony of God will be adversely affected. The measure in which we answer to the truth of God individually, in our homes and in the assembly is the measure in which the assembly is going to prosper.

It is obvious that the form of service we have been considering falls squarely on the shoulders of the brothers. The attitude of the sisters is critical however to its success or failure. Their prayers are vital to this work. And a wife can do a very great deal, either to encourage her husband, or, sadly, to enfeeble his service. Wives, encourage your husbands to be exercised to take up this form of service among the people of God and help them all you can in prayer and influence that things of God might be strengthened in these last days.

CHRIST GLORIFIED GORDON SPRATT

2. HE SHALL GLORIFY ME

The opening out of Christ's glory to the believer by the Spirit will only convince him the more of what passes comprehension. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father". The first article in this series appeared in January.

John 13, verse 31, which formed the subject of our last study, is connected with Jesus glorified as Son of man: glorified in the perfection of His manhood in contrast with the failure of every descendant of Adam, and glorified more particularly in His death. John 16:14 is also concerned with His glory, but from an entirely different point of view.

Superficially the statement made is easy to understand. "When the Spirit of truth is come . . . he shall glorify me." No Christian doubts that any appreciation we have of the glory of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. But to leave the matter in those few words is to turn over a gem in the jewel-case of Scripture without appreciating fully its perfection. Let us hold it up to the light and enjoy some of the many facets of its richness and beauty.

In chapters 14 to 16 of John's Gospel, Jesus makes a number of statements about the work of the Holy Spirit. Every one is worthy of study. He will abide with us for ever (chapter 14, verse 16). He will indwell the believer (14:17). He will teach all things and bring the sayings of Jesus to remembrance (14:26). He will testify of Christ (15:26). He will reprove the world (16:8). He will guide into all truth (16:13). He will show things to come (16:13). And then, surely the culminating statement, in chapter 16:14, "He shall glorify me".

The great work of the Holy Spirit, implicit in His every activity, is to glorify Christ. Whether it is to communicate truth, or to reproduce the features of Christ in the believer, or to testify to the world which has refused Him, all must centre in the One who is the focus of God's purpose and pleasure.

This is a vast subject, far beyond the scope of a short article, but the general statement of John 16:14, "He shall glorify me", is explained by the words, "For he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you", and that must be the basis of our consideration.

We should remember the setting. The words of Jesus were addressed, not to a company of Spirit-taught believers accustomed to thinking according to spiritual perspectives, but to a little band of disciples, uniquely privileged in their personal relationship with Jesus and illuminated by flashes of divinely-communicated perception, but otherwise simple men, torn between their deeply implanted traditions and the impact of a Personality and a doctrine that were soon to overturn the world.

The scene on the Mount of Transfiguration is significant. We are inclined to be smugly critical of Peter as he says: "Let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah". Should we not rather remember the profound esteem in which Moses and Elijah were held by the Jews, and see in Peter's proposal the best tribute his natural mind could pay to the One who had been transfigured before them. And what of the voice from the cloud? — "Such a voice from the excellent glory". How much did Peter understand at that time, and how much did his deeper and fuller understanding depend upon the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

There were of course the miracles. There was that marvellous ministry that led Peter to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life". And there was that spotless life, so different from any other, that must have been both a mystery and a delight to His disciples.

But there was another side. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" asks Nathanael. There was the humble natural parentage of Jesus; there was the carpenter's shop; the thirty years of obscurity in despised Galilee. And then, as Jesus emerged into the public eye, it was not as a man of wealth and earthly power, but as One who "for our sakes became poor". The One who could have laid a Creator's claim to the cattle upon a thousand hills said rather, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head". And finally there was the shame and ignominy of Calvary, and the collapse for the moment of the hopes that the disciples had associated with Jesus; even those hopes — "We hoped that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel" — which fell so far short of the amazing truth.

Of course, the mighty and indisputable fact of the Resurrection changed all that, but it was the coming of the Spirit that brought about the real transformation, bringing for those early disciples the person and work of the Lord Jesus into its true perspective. It must have been rather like the experience of one who focuses a scene through the lens of a camera. At first all is blurred and indistinct, however carefully the camera is trained upon the subject. A turn of the wrist, and everything is brought suddenly into clarity and life and colour. No one reading the second chapter of the Acts can fail to be impressed with the confidence and certainty of Peter's address, culminating in the words, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ".

Let us return to our text: "He shall glorify me; for he shall receive

of mine, and shall show it unto you.” The next verse goes on to say: “All things that the Father hath are mine”. What a claim for the presumed son of a Galilean carpenter, so soon to be betrayed to His enemies and put to a criminal’s death! It goes even beyond the testimony of John the Baptist: “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things to be in his hand.” It is a statement of His deity, suited to One who “thought it not robbery to be equal with God”. It has ever been the tendency of man to depreciate the person of Jesus, to emphasise His humanity at the expense of His deity. It has always been the work of the Holy Spirit to glorify the One who “is over all, God blessed forever”.

And here let us sound a warning. The moment we set out to penetrate the mystery of the Godhead with a view to reaching a satisfactory intellectual comprehension of that mystery, we are in very grave danger. For we shall inevitably fall short of the understanding which we are seeking, and our knowledge of God will be limited rather than enhanced as a consequence. Our worship will become analytical, from the head rather than the heart, and lacking that sense of reverent wonder which must ever control the creature in presence of his Creator. And in our relationships with fellow-believers we shall find ourselves in the barren world of theological dispute, in which only disagreement and division can flourish.

Scripture states that “the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God”. And Jesus says in the chapter that we are considering that “he will guide you into all truth”. But that does not mean that we can look upon our Christian faith like some educational syllabus, to be covered and then written off as completed. How easily can we take a beautiful flower and strip it of one lovely petal after another until only the bare stalk remains. The action of the Holy Spirit is more like the microscope through which unsuspected and ever deeper wonders are revealed to the eye, or the telescope which reaches out ever further beyond human sight into the illimitable.

Jesus says, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30), but if we try to reconcile that fact with the statement in John 16:28: “My Father is greater than I”, we shall soon find that we are beyond human logic. For to see that the same divine and eternal Person, who was and is ever one in Godhead with the Father, has taken a place of subjection in lowly manhood in order that the purpose of the Godhead might be fulfilled, and yet that God was manifest in flesh for in Him all the fulness of Godhead dwelt bodily, all this is not a matter for cold analysis, but for wondering adoration.

“All things that the Father hath are mine.” We must not wonder that Jesus can lay claim to the physical universe, for its creation is attributed to the Son. But there is more in our subject than the material creation, for the disciples’ horizons were to be enlarged in the possession of the Spirit into a spiritual universe.

Even in human terms we can look beyond the purely material. It may be true that a son has title to everything that his father possesses, but his relationship with his father is based not upon possessions, but on the sharing of more precious things. His father’s lineage, his

renown, his plans and purposes, his home and family, not least his love: all these things and others distinguish the relationship of a son with his father.

John's view of the glory of the Lord Jesus is not associated only with power and majesty. In that sense his perception of the scene on the holy mountain went beyond Peter's. "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father" — it was a glory of relationship beyond the reach of all but the Son.

And yet it is that glory that gives its distinctiveness to our Christian experience. For John also says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him". If God is to be declared and known in the fulness of His love, it could only be by way of One who could say, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". But that declaration once made, and received through the power of the Holy Spirit, there is a place of unmerited favour opened up to the believer. Not only access to the holiest by the blood of Jesus, but a place in the Father's love. Paul says, in Romans 8:15, "We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father".

Such undeserved favour for creatures like ourselves can but enhance the glory of the One who has made it possible. It can never detract from His uniqueness. Jesus says repeatedly, "My Father"; in His message through Mary in John 20 He says, "Your Father". He never says, "Our Father". Many sons will be brought to glory, but only the Son, incomparable in His divine personality and glory, can say, "All things that the Father hath are mine".

DISCIPLES, SATISFACTORY AND UNSATISFACTORY

COLIN CURRY

Often we have to form judgments about the states of soul of other people, and often we jump to over-hasty conclusions. This article teaches us to learn from the Lord's example in this as in every other matter.

In this paper we look at three sections of the narrative in the Gospel of John. The passages are John 2:23-25; 6:66-71; and 19:38-42. In each of these the true situation was masked by the outward appearance, and our Lord knew the truth of the matter before events brought it out into the open. We shall find a good mixture of warnings and encouragements in considering these verses. There will be profit too from observing the manner in which His judgments were made.

Superficial disciples

The persons described at the end of John 2 turned back from following Christ after some time. Verse 66 of chapter 6 tells what became of them. The picture looked pleasing at first; these individuals are described as believers of a sort, and the word "disciples" is also used of them. Yet events showed how shallow their faith had been. They

were among the masses that followed Jesus, wondering at the miracles, impressed by the impact that He made. Our Lord discerned the nature of this kind of allegiance to Him. "He knew what was in man". Our fallen human nature, though capable of the worst, can also be attracted and stirred in ways that look more promising. Christ can be popular, His teaching respected, the undeniable impact He has made in history agreed. The general consensus that Christianity is a force to be reckoned with, that there is indeed something to take notice of here, and to subscribe to, finds a ready acceptance with many. Habitual church attendance, regular and seemingly zealous support for meetings, can be thought of as a symptom of faith. There is a pattern of Christianity which is accepted as right, and followed in practice too. It can be done mechanically, or for social reasons; or it may be followed assiduously and with much piety. In making these comments we do not look askance at these attitudes: indeed, many of these things are admirable. Yet we shall mislead ourselves if they become central in our Christianity. From the very start, despite the favourable outward appearance, our Lord was completely aware of the unsatisfactory reaction to Him shown by these people. The basic link with Him was missing. When the reality of their bond with Him was tested, these superficial followers would melt away. He did not commit Himself to them: they were not really committed to Him in any vital sense.

The opening of chapter 3 reinforces these points. Nicodemus's enquiry was a respectful and well intentioned one. He had been impressed by the miracles. He conceded that Christ was a teacher come from God, from whom he was willing to learn. His approach had a commendable humility about it, unusual in a Pharisee. Yet it assumed a common platform on which they could speak together. He too was a leader in his own field, respected by many. To his own mind he was in the same area as the Lord Jesus, able to discuss and receive teaching from God. Our Lord will not meet him on these assumptions. He says in effect that Nicodemus has not made a start in the vital sense. "Ye must be born again", is His word. Otherwise, a man cannot see the kingdom of God. We shall meet Nicodemus again in our final passage, plainly having crossed that great Rubicon at that stage. Meanwhile, let us keep awake to the fact that peripheral things of outward Christianity can engage and satisfy us while we may draw little, or perhaps nothing, from Him who is the true Fountain-head of Christian life.

A sure disciple

One can sense the sorrow of the Lord Jesus as those once-enthusiastic followers deserted Him. The question to the twelve "Will ye also go away?" reflects His distress at the departure of the many. He had spoken of the need for reality in true discipleship. It was possible to begin thoughtlessly, taking up the stance of a disciple, and fail to complete the operation (Luke 14:28f). Counting the cost was needed first. True discipleship involves denial of self, and a spending of oneself for His Name's sake. Hard sayings from Himself, which search and test us deeply, have to be faced and accepted. Close and profound

experiences with Him, with a total exposure of ourselves, lie at the basis of continuance with Him. But such experience with our Lord is not only thoroughgoing and deep, but it is an incredibly rich experience too. A truly loyal disciple clings to his Lord because it is absolutely vital to him to do so; the Lord Jesus is followed because to be without Him is unthinkable. He is the answer to all our personal needs and weaknesses, and to our deepest desires too. To know Him is more than compensation for any other loss. To be in touch closely with Him is to hear the words of life, and, hearing these words, to have crossed the great divide between death and eternal life.

So, in response to that question from the Lord Jesus, Simon Peter made his own position clear. His words were spontaneous and outright. To him, Christ was indispensable and irreplaceable. "We believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God". It was said heartily and with conviction. It was a confession born of close experience with his Lord, and close attachment to Him. On occasions, those earlier experiences had thoroughly humbled and searched him (see, for example, Luke 5:4-9). Yet the effect had been that he was now bound to the Lord in a vital and living way. What a total contrast there is between this kind of appreciation of Christ and the routine and shallow acknowledgements of a mere formal adherence to Him!

Peter's confession was bold and right, springing from his deep attachment to his Lord. No other thoughts obtruded into this single eyed view of his Master. But Peter still had his weaknesses, and was to learn them in deep ways. Three times He would deny his Lord. Another sure statement, just before those denials, was as wrong as the present one is right. "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matthew 26:35). How thoroughly that self-confidence was exposed as valueless; and how well our Lord discerned that weakness before it displayed itself. True disciples need to know how weak they are. Their capabilities for failure are real; their actual failures can be serious and greatly to their shame. Yet confidence in Christ is never wrong, and is vastly distinct from self-confidence. In spite of Peter's disloyalty the Lord knew that at heart Peter loved Him. He had prayed for him, that his faith would not fail; and so it proved. Peter gained from this experience, though it was a sad one. The bond between the believer and Christ is one which, basically, Christ Himself has formed and will sustain. Only let our eye remain steadily on Him, and we shall be very sure of His unique worthiness of our loyalty. We too, in our manner and in our witness, will show that ring of confidence which marked Peter as, on this occasion, he made his convictions about his Lord clear.

But there was a sense in which Peter was mistaken even in that confident confession of John 6:69. He felt he could speak for them all, and yet one of the twelve was a very different person from the rest. With Judas Iscariot, falsity and treachery were close at hand, unknown to the others in that small band of followers. Only the Lord could see that terrible and basic distinction, so well obscured by outward appearances. Judas was, of course, unique in the evil he perpetrated; and it is unfair to use him as an example of unbelievers in general. But

the comments from our Lord at the close of this chapter do strikingly reinforce the point that He knows the true position with any individual, and that even apostles-to-be could assume too much and totally miss the mark in their judgments. Let us not be excessively dogmatic about others, either in over-approval or in harshness. Let us speak out for ourselves in these matters, after the fashion of Peter here, if indeed we know the Lord Jesus in that way.

A secret disciple

Finally, what a contribution to the honour of the Lord Jesus was made by Joseph of Arimathea: and how completely out of the blue it came! No one suspected that a loyal soul existed in that rank of society. He had kept it secret, fearing to show his colours publicly. Yet, how well he showed up at the most critical time of all. Even the loyal ones defected then, shocked by the adverse turn of events, and unable to stay true to their Master. But, exactly at that time, Joseph and Nicodemus came forward, declaring their loyalty, taking their stand with the Crucified One. Faithful, respectful persons handled that body, performing a notable service for Him, honouring Him deeply after great dishonour had been done. A malefactor's death was followed by a rich man's burial! The prophetic passage had foretold it. Though reproached and despised for doing it, Joseph and Nicodemus took a firm stance at last. Drawn and moved by the deep scenes of the sufferings and death of their Lord, they could no longer maintain their secrecy. Secret disciples came out as open disciples, and were far more true to their inward faith in doing so. How wonderful too that a person so recently hiding his light could fill a gap, could boldly approach Pilate, and could perform a service for the Lord that must be done. For our Lord's honour a careful and respectful burial was His due; and it was done, entirely suitably, by a Joseph and a Nicodemus when disciples (known as such) were no longer in sight.

How surprising at times are the ways the Lord takes, and how contrary to expectations. When Elijah could see no other faithful persons than himself, there were seven thousand known to God. When for the moment hope in Christ had faded with Peter and James and John, Joseph and Nicodemus showed a marvellous courage and devotion. Jesus did not commit Himself to mere shallow adherents, but His very body, mutilated by His enemies, was safely and entirely in the hands of devoted persons like these, so recently silent about their loyalty to Him.

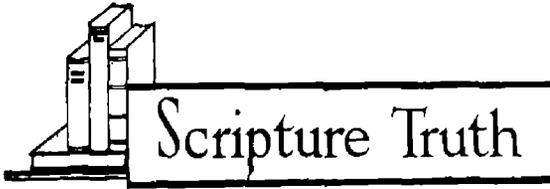
Closing remarks

Our passages have afforded some instances of the undoubted fact that "The Lord knows those that are His". It is good to know this when, as for us in present days, the true situation is often difficult to diagnose. It is surely important to recognise our fallibility in these distinctions, alongside His perfect discernment of them. Nevertheless, that quotation (2 Timothy 2:18) is coupled with another which expects some careful discernments from us too. "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity". We are firmly instructed to

stand clear from what dishonours Him. The context is particularly concerned with false teaching on basic matters, and those who engage in it. Personal purity is also pressed, and purity in manner of approach to these issues. Our judgments need to begin with ourselves; they must be righteous assessments, carefully and meekly made. We can be tolerant beyond what is right in our judgments; we can be unjustly severe too. Humility and self-examination become those who pronounce on others.

Let us then take note of our Lord's handling of these cases. He always acts on knowledge of the facts; and certainly never on hearsay or questionable assumptions, as we are prone to do. We can be thankful that He is so true, and yet so understanding, in His discernment of the thoughts and intents of the heart. He can see the emptiness of a formal discipleship, and will not call it differently from what it is, a dead and unsatisfactory adherence to Him. He does not commit Himself to such persons. Yet He looks at their departure with distress and regret. But He can see the reality of response to Himself, though there may be shortcomings, and even serious lapses. He can commit Himself to a Peter, to the extent of praying for him in his weakness, with an eye to entrusting him with a great charge later. He can promote and sustain a bold faith, deriving from a good and proper appreciation of Himself. He is still there when faith has its weak and shameful times too. He knows all things, and knows that we love Him, if we have responded at all to His immense love for us. He can commit Himself to a Joseph of Arimathea, with no past history of devotion to Him, stirring such a person into shouldering an important service for Himself.

Though we are obliged to make assessments of other persons at times, let us always act cautiously, aware of our limitations and weaknesses in this area. Let us aim in these circumstances to reflect a little of our Lord's manner, never looking only on the surface of things, fair and utterly true to the realities of the situation, perceptive and graciously kind with weaknesses, patient yet active in recovering people, strongly encouraging and supporting them in living experiences with Himself.



(incorporating *Words of Help*)

JULY, 1983

FOUR VIEWS OF TRUTH _____ JOHN BARNES

ROMANS 8:1-4

God is at work for us, in us, and through us, and He explains to us exactly what He is doing. Each of these aspects of "truth" must be grasped if the gospel is to have power in our lives. All readers are urged to attend to this instructive article.

The epistle to the Romans is an exposition of the "gospel of God" (1:1), and we can hardly find a better short summary of its teaching (other than chapters 9-11) than the first four verses of chapter eight. These four verses do more than just summarise, however. They indicate four different relationships in which we stand to the "truth".

Firstly, the gospel tells of how *God* views *all* who are "in Christ Jesus", whether they feel it or not. I have labelled this "truth in essence", and we find this view of the matter in verse one. But, secondly, the effects of God's view *of me* should be felt *in me*; I have labelled this "truth in experience", and it is found in verse two. Experience does not interpret itself, however, and so lest we go wrong God has taught us how to interpret it by explaining to us the grounds upon which He is dealing with us. This is the subject of verse three and might be called "truth in exposition". Lastly, what has been learned in fact and experience by divine teaching should be clearly visible in our behaviour. This is "truth in exercise" and is the subject of verse four.

Truth in essence

In the Authorised Version the first verse of chapter eight contains twenty-three words. Modern editions of the original show that in Greek the verse has only eight words. This big difference is accounted for above all by two facts. Firstly the final clause — "who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit" — should be left out. It can be seen in verse four, where it properly belongs.

Secondly, there are no verbs used in the sentence. The opening words are italicised in the Authorised Version to indicate that they have been added by the translators to complete the sense in English; they do not appear in the original. Nor does the verb "are" appear, also italicised in the A.V.

So, stripped to its essentials, the verse reads something like this: "Therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus".

Verbs limit and define in a number of ways by the use of tense, mood, voice, person and number changes. The complete absence from this verse of these limiting grammatical forms gives it a peculiar breadth of meaning. Those in Christ Jesus, irrespective of the period they live in, without reference to race or class, without considering even their response or progress as Christians, are seen to be exempt from condemnation from whatever source.

The first word of the verse is the word translated "not". Some believe it reasonable to translate "not even", which gives a yet stronger negative idea. Evidently, when the Greek wished to emphasise a thought, he introduced it early in the sentence. This "not", coming as it does at the very beginning of the verse, underlines the blessed truth that not any condemnation can be thought of as applying to a person in the situation described in the verse. This truth is further strengthened by the adverb "now". Many sincere believers who have not had the benefit of clear teaching, look forward hesitantly to such a happy condition at some vague, distant future date. The wonderful truth of this verse is that "no condemnation" applies at this very moment to all who are in Christ Jesus. There is no need for any true believer to wait in uncertainty to discover if, at last, he is to be free from condemnation. The simplest Christian may rest in the assurance that no condemnation rests upon him *now*. If not now, then certainly not at a later time. Condemnation is the application of a righteous judgement based on the truth of the case in question. Since we know that such a judgement on us would be perfectly just, we do well to marvel at the grace which has spared us such a terrible fate.

The word "therefore", conveys the idea of consequence and so directs our thoughts to matter already alluded to. When we allow our minds to run over the facts advanced earlier in the epistle, we are conscious of the operation of an amazing grace. Man is seen to be a total ruin; whether he is considered as an ignorant savage, an educated philosopher or a deeply religious person, there is no difference, for all have sinned. The notion that anyone in any of these groups could be justified at all raises the deeply important question, "Whom, then, does God justify?" That all have sinned is undoubted; that some are justified is also unquestionable. Who are the justified ones? The astounding answer is that "God justifies the *ungodly*" (Romans 4:5). Since all have been proved to be ungodly, it is equally clear that the blessing of justification is available for all but all do not enjoy it, because it requires the operation of faith to enable a man to enter into its blessedness. Many have entered into this by simple faith in Christ and so stand in Him beyond the reach of condemnation. So we can look back to a work done on behalf of the ungodly on the ground of which God, in complete righteousness, can justify them. The epistle shows this work to be the Lord's work, wrought out in His death at Calvary, on the ground of which God clears the guilty who come to Him by faith. They are, therefore, no longer seen as standing on their own merit, or as in themselves, where impeachment would certainly find them. They are now in Christ Jesus where it cannot reach them. It cannot touch them because it cannot touch Him in whom they hide.

The preposition "in" is understood to mean, not only being inside something, but being there permanently.

The security such a position offers is unshakeable. When we consider who this Person is in whom we are secure, and ourselves as safe in Him in the union and fellowship such a position gives, we may well "joy in God". The love of that great heart took up our desperate case and brought us to Himself in righteous grace. In this verse, the pronoun "them" is before our minds. It is those who are in Christ Jesus to whom this security applies, and it applies without distinction to them all.

Truth in experience

In the verse just considered Paul writes of "them that are in Christ Jesus". In verse 2 he writes, not about "them" but, about "me". He well knows that he is included in the truth of verse 1, and that this is true of every Christian, but when the actual experience of something is the question, a man can only speak of himself. There is no way of gaining experience but by having the experience itself, and this verse brings forward the experimental side of the truth. There is, as we have thought, a great breadth to verse 1, but the truth of verse 2, while free to all who participate in the blessing of verse 1 seems nevertheless to be limited to those actually in the good of it. Otherwise Paul could have continued to write of "them". He writes instead as a man would write of his own experience. The experience of another could be reported but would have to be written in the third person.

Another interesting feature appears here. Verses 2, 3 and 4 each present two distinctly contrasting matters. Verse 2 contrasts the law of the Spirit of life with the law of sin and death; verse 3 contrasts what the law could not do with what God has done through the work of His own Son; while verse 4 contrasts the walk after the flesh with the walk in the Spirit. Verse 1 was different; it insisted only on the freedom from condemnation of those who are in Christ Jesus.

So, verse 2 sets before us two wholly contrasting principles. The law of the Spirit of life is in the sphere of life and the law of sin is in the sphere of death. The law of the Spirit of life is centred in Christ Jesus, while the contrasting principle has sin as its propulsive power. Paul had experienced the working of this principle but he now speaks of a new principle which had brought him into a wholly new experience which liberated him from the bondage under which he formerly laboured. There is no doubt that the experience which Paul enjoyed can be ours, but the limiting pronoun, "me", seems clearly to mark this out as a personal experience. If we wish to put our own name in the verse, we may do so, if what was true of Paul is true of us.

It is important however to see that the truth of verse 2 cannot be divorced from that of verse 1. The critical truth of verse 1 is that the uncondemnable person is in this happy state because he is in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life which the apostle refers to in verse 2 is in no way detached from, or independent of, that truth. The words, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus", make that clear. The total absence of condemnation to one in Christ Jesus may lead into

the enjoyment of liberty in the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus.

If a principle is at work, it is bound to have certain consequences. Where these results are modified it must be because some subsidiary influence is at work also. Nevertheless, there are some things which are clear cut and in this verse we see such a case. Where the sin principle is at work the result is death: where the Spirit of life is at work the result is life and liberty. If we are living on the one line or on the other, the outcome will be the one or the other. Our experience in the Christian life is going to be decided by what law or principle governs our lives.

Truth in exposition

A most happy feature of Christianity is that God has not only brought us into amazing blessing, but He has also given us much teaching on how He has done it and what He has in view. He may easily have blessed us richly and yet left us largely ignorant of how He did things. We can actually see this in the Old Testament in certain cases. Israel, though wonderfully enriched, were given an insight only into the Lord's acts, while to Moses a much greater privilege was granted; Jehovah made known to him His ways (Psalm 103:7, cf. Psalm 95:10). We are ignorant of a great deal, no doubt, but our God has found pleasure in unfolding truth to our hearts, not simply that we may know it, but that we may be in tune with Him, and that our affections may respond to His grace. In this verse God gives us an unfolding of truth of a most valuable kind. He had introduced the law in a former age, and for a long period this was applied to His people Israel, providing convincing evidence that man in the flesh was incapable of improvement. Paul sums up the situation in this text in a remarkable way. He speaks of "the impossible of the law". The law, though in itself perfect, was unable to promote moral improvement along the lines of the flesh, because the flesh cannot be improved. It is important to remember that there is no inherent defect in the law: the defect lay in the material to which the law was applied as a rule of life.

In this verse God describes to us what He did in order to accomplish what was an impossibility for the law; and He did it in infinite grace. He did not say, "This has proved a failure; I will withdraw the law". This would not have been possible, nor would it have solved the difficulty, for the flesh would still be there in its sin and rebellion. What He did was to send His own Son in flesh-of-sin's likeness, and for sin; and so "sin in the flesh" was condemned and brought to an end before Him, thus freeing Him to draw near in grace to those who had offended him. God has taken pains to explain this to us to show that no other way was possible. This is surely emphasised by the statement that it was His "own Son" whom He sent; no less. He sent Him, not in sinful flesh, but in its likeness. Had someone come in sinful flesh he would have been unable to help fallen man, for he would be in the same predicament. But the manhood had to be the real thing, and the Lord Jesus took that on in every sense apart from the sin principle that dominated the race of men. In that sinless manhood He was "made sin" at the cross, so concluding, as before God, the history of sinful flesh. Everyone who trusts Him may be in the full

good of this wonderful privilege, and in the clear knowledge of it. So the blessed contrast is made plain, that what the law could not find itself able to do, God has done in what He accomplished by sending His own Son.

Truth in exercise

The final verse of the four provides an excellent summary of the practical working out of the truth of the epistle. If the truth is known and understood, there is bound to be some measure of response in the believer's life — the "intelligent service" of chapter 12:1. The apostle uses the pronoun "us" in this verse, so graciously linking the Christian company together as those in whom this response is being worked out, qualified by the last clause — "who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit". The righteous requirement of the law, which man is incapable of providing by nature, is fulfilled in the believer who walks, not governed by the flesh, but under the control of the Holy Spirit who indwells and empowers him. The word "requirement" is in the singular. It does not therefore refer to obedience to the tenets and details of the law, but concentrates the whole of the righteous requirement of the law into one thing. It is the law of love. Love is the fulfilling of the law. There is thus no difference between John and Paul; the new commandment is the law of love.

It could not be said, exactly, that this is true of each of us. It is true of a Christian if he is subject to the entire control of the Holy Spirit. Every provision has been made to make this a practical reality for each of us to be in the good of. It is practical because it takes us beyond the doctrinal explanation into the sphere where what is taught is received and worked out in the details of everyday life. In engineering, students are taught how gases behave in engines; how by expansion they are used to move the working parts of engines; how the power produced is exerted to turn the wheels and so on. This is not taught simply that these facts may be known. They are learned so that they may be applied to actual mechanical conditions encountered in the everyday life of the factory and workshop, and to enable the engineer to make, get working or keep working, the machinery of his trade. Romans 12 to 16 show us how the truth of chapters 1 to 8 may be worked out today.

In closing may we think for a moment of the verb "to walk". In this verse it is the verb from which our English word "peripatetic" is derived. It would appear, basically to mean, "to walk about". It may therefore be suggestive of how we conduct ourselves as we walk about and fulfil our varied obligations in life. The final chapters of Romans refer to a number of situations in which we may find ourselves. How should we act in these various situations and relationships referred to? There are our relationships with other Christians, with those who govern our country, our contacts with men in general, and our private lives. The wonderful truth of chapters 1 to 8 is not to be so much theory in our minds, to be enjoyed in an abstract way, but is intended to mark our daily behaviour as we "go about" our affairs in the home, at work and in the market place. We probably find ourselves disinclined

to apply this to *every* department of our lives, but verse 4 does not leave room for any exceptions.

In reply to the question, "Do you think we need to ask for more of the Spirit?" someone once said, "No, I do not; I do not need more of the Spirit; the Spirit needs more of me". If our lives were under His control we should walk in the Spirit and the law of love would be fully effective in us.

FROM THE CROSS

*Lord, let us hear Thy voice of love and glory,
In seven words of peerless grace and power.
Teach us again Thy love's amazing story
Worked out by Thee in Calv'ry's dreadful hour.*

*Nailed there by wicked hands, Thy supplication:
"Father forgive, they know not what they do",
Tells out the grace that won for us salvation
When death and judgment only were our due.*

*To Mary — "See thy son!" To John — "Thy mother!"
No need escapes the compass of Thy love.
O Friend, that sticketh closer than a brother,
That love shall keep us to our rest above.*

*There, in his ears death's solemn summons sounding,
Hangs the vile thief, his long account to pay;
To feeblest faith the answer comes astounding:
"Thy place with Me, in Paradise — today!"*

*"My God, My God, why hast Thou Me forsaken?"
The darkness gave no answer to Thy plea:
Yet in our hearts responsive praises waken:
All, all our blessings flow from Calvary.*

*"I thirst." The vinegar of wanton malice —
Last callous cruelty of guilty men —
Answers the voice that uttered Sychar's promise:
"Who asks of Me shall never thirst again."*

*Thy spirit to Thy Father's hands commended:
"Finished the work Thou gavest Me to do";
The vict'ry's won, The path of sorrow ended —
Perfect devotion all that pathway through.*

*Yes, "It is finished!" Loud Thy proclamation:
Triumphant cry from God's triumphant Son!
Oh, what a peal to ring through all creation —
Redemption's story only just begun!*

Written in Kampala, Uganda, on a Sunday morning,
20th June, 1982.
R. Gordon Spratt.

11 TYCHICUS

Once again Mr Spicer puts flesh and bones on a shadowy New Testament figure: the "letter-carrier" is found to be a "beloved brother", a "faithful minister" and a "fellow servant" with the apostle.

Wanted — a travelling companion for a long and dangerous journey. Applicants should be and prepared to

What should those qualifications and requirements include — honesty, sympathy, good humour, fortitude, sobriety, resourcefulness, faithfulness? If the journey were to be a missionary enterprise then, in addition, we should surely look for one who trusted the Saviour, was holy in living, acquainted with the scriptures, frequently in prayer and who anticipated the return of Christ in His glory. In short, he would be a holy man of God. Such an individual was Tychicus.

The references to Tychicus in the scriptures are few, but from what we may deduce from them he was well-qualified to be a companion of the apostle Paul and a fellow-worker for Christ. He was a native of Asia Minor and had accompanied the apostle on the visit to Jerusalem which had concluded with his arrest (Acts 20:4). Whether Tychicus was later able to travel with Paul and his escort to Rome we cannot tell, although Aristarchus, another travelling companion to Jerusalem, was obviously able to do so (Acts 27:2).

The letter-carrier

However, the next mention of Tychicus is as the letter-carrier who took the apostle's letters to infant churches. The letters to Colossae and Ephesus were entrusted to Tychicus (Colossians 4:7; Ephesians 6:21, 22), who was to be accompanied on his journey to Asia Minor by Onesimus the runaway slave whom Paul was restoring to his master. Obviously it was Paul's intention that these friends of his should be duly welcomed, and he leaves them to convey all personal news which he has not had opportunity to put into writing.

It would appear that these two letters of Paul were intended for circulation among the various churches, as we can see from Colossians 4:16. The Colossian letter was evidently written especially for the assembly at Colossae, while that for Ephesus has a more general tone, setting out the relationship between Christ and the church; yet they are complementary to each other and have been called "twin" epistles. Nothing could be more natural than that they should be interchanged between the churches, especially when we realise that Colossae was only about 100 miles inland from Ephesus.

In his commendation of Tychicus to the Colossians, Paul describes him as a "beloved brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord" (Colossians 4:7). He goes on to say that he is sending him so that you may know "my state" and that he may "comfort your hearts". This does not mean that Tychicus was making his long

journey for the sole purpose of carrying messages to Colossae. We know that he was able to visit other assemblies and his errand to Colossae was probably one among others, although he was going there at Paul's special request. A better translation of verse 8 reads, "that you may learn about my affairs". The Colossians were anxious about Paul and perhaps about their own worker, Epaphras. From Tychicus they would get news which would in some measure put their minds at rest.

How typical this is of Paul's pastoral care — his "care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28)! He knew that at any time the Emperor Nero might have him executed and yet, despite the limitations of his imprisonment, he was more concerned about the well-being of the church of Christ than his own peril. The visit of Tychicus would, he prayed, encourage them. What consolation it would be for them to learn that Paul was triumphant in spite of his chains! His readers lived daily under the threat of persecution and had he weakened in his hour of trial their faith would have been seriously undermined.

Other references to Tychicus show that he gained the apostle's highest confidence and kept it to the end. In his last letter written to Timothy, Paul mentions Tychicus with almost his dying breath — "and Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus" (2 Timothy 4:12). Paul was writing during his second imprisonment at Rome and this reference, together with an earlier one from the letter to Titus (chapter 3:12) tells us that Paul considered him trustworthy enough to be put in charge of important work at Crete and Ephesus.

We began this article by referring to character and we must give due consideration to those qualifications which mark out Tychicus as a holy man of God.

A beloved brother

Paul called him first of all "beloved brother". On the authority of the Lord's own teaching all believers address each other as "brethren" — "for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matthew 23:8). There are brethren of whom we must admit that, because of our imperfect knowledge and understanding of them, they are not necessarily "beloved brethren", even though the expression may be used out of courtesy. Paul, however, is not merely being courteous. He and Tychicus have been long enough in each other's company, and from his personal knowledge and experience of him Paul can write in all sincerity and say, "beloved brother". It is an expression of his love for him. Brotherly love, of course, can be strong among believers and it is the rule of Christ, "I command you, that ye love one another" (John 15:17).

A faithful minister

Next, Paul says he is a "faithful minister". This would imply that a minister was more in the rôle of personal assistant to the apostle; he would be one who ran errands and, bearing in mind the nature of his imprisonment, Tychicus probably made arrangements for the hospitality of Paul's various visitors (Acts 28:30). Yet, it is also likely

that he was gifted in the presentation of the gospel and able to dispense that most beautiful treasure of all, gospel grace. How we ought to rejoice if, in any way, we can minister the insearchable riches of Christ to those around.

Yet Paul emphasises not only the work, but the workman; for Tychicus is a "faithful" minister. "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). This faithfulness is to be demonstrated in that we seek the glory of God and not our own. "If any man speak, let him speak . . . that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11). Then, again, faithful ministers are those who endeavour to the best of their ability to promote the spiritual well-being of others. "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:33).

A fellow-servant

Finally, Paul writes that Tychicus is a "fellow-servant" and by doing so declares that he is of equal status with himself. What a loving, gracious gesture this is on the part of the apostle, and how beautifully he reflects his Lord who has made us all joint heirs with Himself and workers together with Him (Romans 8:17). There is no pride of place here, only an indirect acknowledgement of the truth that we "are one body in Christ", and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:5). Paul had his gifts and ministry and Tychicus his; in fellowship together they sought to render reasonable service to God by presenting themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to Him (Romans 12:1).

Tychicus knew that he was not called into such fellowship to live a life of ease and pleasure, but to prosecute with all diligence the charge given to him, that of being an ambassador for Christ.

THE MEN THAT SIGH ————— **ALLAN RETALLICK**

The gospel brings joy, but also "sighing" at the emptiness and hypocrisy of much that passes for Christianity at the present time. Are we of that class of persons, "poor and of a contrite spirit and trembling at God's word" — whom He can bless and use?

In the eighth and ninth chapters of his prophecies Ezekiel describes a vision which snatched him up in spirit from the place of his captivity (Ezekiel 1:1, cp. 2 Kings 4:14) and showed him three things about those who were still left in Jerusalem. Firstly, the secret corruption of those concerned with official religious observance there, despite the desperate plight of the city. Secondly the irrevocable judgment of God upon it. Chapter eight concludes with a people whose loud cry God will not hear; chapter nine commences with the voice of God Himself, loudly sounding in the prophet's ears and issuing the executive commands of judgment. But there is a third part of the

vision in chapter nine: here and there among the hypocrites were people of a different class — “men that sigh” — and them God marked out for mercy.

Ezekiel's task was not easy. At the outset God had told him: “Thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech. . . . Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me” (Ezekiel 3:5-7). Perhaps we may see a parallel today, when we hear of many turning to the Lord in foreign lands, where they have never heard the good news of salvation before, while in these favoured western lands the message of grace is despised, while heathen cults flourish. The words of William Kelly, nearly a century ago, are as true today as when first written: “Of the new school of critics generally, we may say without exaggeration, what was said of others more openly profane in science, that their principle consists in believing everything but the truth, and exactly in proportion to want of evidence” (*An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah*, page 77).

In chapter 8 we read of Ezekiel's vision of the temple, where the glory of God still dwelt. The outward worship may have gone on as always, but the vision exposed the innermost thoughts of the leaders of the people: “every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about” (verse 10). In this idolatry not only the poor and unlearned took part, but the ancients of the house of Israel, who, in the vision, were turning their backs on the temple in order to worship the gods of the nations round about them, saying in their blindness and folly: “The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth”.

The faithful Lord, conducting the prophet into the labyrinth of the religious, yet idolatrous, heart of man, time and again drew his attention to what was going on: “Son of man, seest thou what they do?” (8:6). “Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here” (8:9). “Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?” (8:12). It was not true that the Lord “saw them not”. Today, too, He sees not only what goes on outwardly in so-called Christian service, but He still looks upon the heart, and seeks those that are whole hearted and obedient to His word. This, then, is the background to the chapter now before us.

It was characteristic of the Lord Jesus that He did not strive nor cry, neither was His voice heard in the streets. That is why exceptions to this are the more striking. At the grave of Lazarus, for example, He cried with a loud voice: “Lazarus, come forth”. On the last day of the feast in John 7, we read that “Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink”. In Ezekiel 9, too, the Lord cried in the prophet's ears with a loud voice. The day had come when the iniquity of the nation was to be judged. At His command six men came from the way of the higher gate, each with a weapon in his hand, and one man among them, clothed with linen, had a writer's inkhorn by his side. To this man the command was give to “go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and

set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (9:4). As ever, when judgement is pending, the God who delights in mercy makes provision for those that listen to His voice when all others are heedless. It was so in the days of Noah, when that righteous man was bidden to build an ark for the saving of his household. It was so in Sodom, when the angels came to deliver "just Lot". It will be so before the "great and terrible day of the Lord", when thousands will be preserved through that terrible time of trouble, as we read in Revelation 7.

[In this case the Lord was looking for those that were concerned about the state of things in the place that had been so highly favoured, the city that God had chosen to place His name there. Several times in this book we read of a remnant, a few faithful ones who were concerned with God's interests in the midst of a nation that said: "The Lord seeth not". We must not think that the prophet was indifferent to the state of his nation. Ezekiel, like his contemporary Jeremiah, was a man of intense feeling. Even when the unfaithful leader, Pelatiah, fell dead at his feet when he pronounced God's judgment against the people, Ezekiel fell upon his face, and "cried with a loud voice", pleading, "Ah Lord God! wilt Thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" (Ezekiel 11:13), as Zechariah later did. We cannot fail to be touched, moreover, with the way in which he describes the death of his wife in chapter 24. Entrusted as he was with a message of judgment, he still loved his nation, like the apostle Paul, who reminds us that they are still "beloved for the fathers' sakes". When called upon to preach the gospel to guilty sinners, or to plead with individuals, do we show the spirit of our Lord, who was moved with compassion for those that would not come to Him, that they might have life?

The man clothed in linen completed his task, and reported the matter, after which the armed messengers of death would carry out theirs, and once again the prophet falls upon his face to plead for the nation: "Ah Lord God! wilt Thou destroy all the residue of Israel in Thy pouring out of Thy fury upon Jerusalem?" God's answer is solemn. The iniquity of Jerusalem was too great, and there was no sign of repentance on the part of this favoured city. Judgment must begin, as ever, at the house of God. The executors of God's judgment "began at the ancient men which were before the house — "My sanctuary" as He Himself describes it. The glory was shortly to depart from the temple, as we read in the following chapters, but here it was still hovering over the threshold, as if in a last appeal to the guilty nation.

We are not told how many faithful ones the six men found, but we know that there were some like Jeremiah who had God's interests at heart. Has this anything to say to us who live in such favoured lands where there is liberty to preach the Word, where we have the Bible in our own tongue, as well as the valued writings of faithful men of God at our disposal? It is so easy for us to be taken over by the indifference that we meet with on all sides. It is easy to take for granted the lukewarmness and self-seeking that is characteristic of this age of luxury. The Lord is looking for a faithful few who are genuinely concerned about these things, and sigh and cry to God for mercy upon

His people. We remember how Daniel, when reading in Jeremiah's prophecy that the days of deliverance were at hand, betook himself to prayer and fasting, confessing his sins and those of his people. If our concern for the state of things has a similar effect, it will not be in vain. In the last chapter of Isaiah we read what sort of men the Lord seeks "at such a time as this": "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). We read of our Lord's sighing when confronted with a man that could not hear His voice or confess His name. "Ephphatha — be opened!" was His response. May our ears thus be ready to hear and our hearts to obey His voice, our lips to sing His praise, our feet to walk in His ways!

WHAT IS MAN? _____ COLIN CURRY

The question posed in Psalm 8 has been asked many times; by studying it, in the light of the New Testament, we get the divine answer to the question.

Considered in isolation this psalm has its own attraction. Here the psalmist, under the Spirit of God, voices his thoughts about the place of man in the sight of God. As the background to his meditation the material of Genesis 1 is clearly in his mind. It seems fair to say that Adam and his race are primarily in his thoughts. The psalm shows a spirit of awe and true adoration, a real awareness of the greatness and excellence of Jehovah. The composer is deeply affected, so that the reader is also carried along in a similar spirit, as he joins the psalmist in his meditation. The opening refrain, repeated at the close, so full of response and praise, stamps the psalm with a style and quality its own.

But the psalm is considerably enriched by the New Testament allusions to it. There is more in David's words than perhaps he understood. The New Testament quotations show that we must go beyond Adam to Christ to perceive the deeper significance of the psalm. The second Man, the Lord from heaven, who often took the title "the Son of man", must surpass and eclipse Adam in our minds if we are guided by the inspired New Testament comments. How plainly Hebrews 2:5-9 underlines this! 1 Corinthians 15:27, though briefer, says the same. In addition, the Lord Jesus Himself quoted verse 2 to His detractors (Matthew 21:16), confirming that He must occupy our thinking for a proper understanding of the psalm.

We begin with the consideration which was first in the psalmist's mind, and which we should certainly share with him; the thought that man is *small*. Then we pass to a truth that he knew too, which surprised and delighted him, that man is *significant* despite his smallness. We shall conclude with something he saw and marvelled at in his own way, that man is *supreme*. With Christ central in our vision, and with the New Testament and the Holy Spirit to point it out, we can see it better today. His supremacy, in its most comprehensive sense, will be openly visible soon.

Man is small

No doubt David as a shepherd-boy had special opportunities to consider the heavens, and the sense of the splendour of God's creation would remain with him later. The naked eye view on a clear starlit night is indeed a magnificent spectacle, today as it was then. If people are too sophisticated or insensitive to be affected by it, this reflects no credit on them. Modern observational methods have added much to the ordinary visual information. The astronomical scale of things, the numbers and the distances, are enormous. Yet over-involvement with the technical details can swamp the sense of awe and amazement which is the true reaction to a simple consideration of the works of God's hands. Often God is left out of the picture altogether; but the person who sees the heavens as *God's* heavens, displaying His power, skill and artistry, has a true insight into the meaning of the universe. He sees a vast demonstration of the glory and wisdom of God there, and can never treat such a matter as commonplace.

The effect on the psalmist was to see himself dwarfed by creation, and almost nothing at all alongside the God of creation. Man and God are at utterly opposite extremes, both in scale and in kind. God, Maker and Controller of everything, in charge of the whole universe in His omnipotence, fashioning and displaying it in such vastness, and with such quality in its detail. Man, on the other hand, a tiny being, confined to a small locality, feeble in his powers to effect anything, an infinitesimal onlooker in this great scheme of things which is God's field of activity. "What is man, that *Thou* art mindful of *him*?" The overwhelming disparity between God and man impels him to ask that question. Man seems like a nonentity. The idea that God in His immensity should take notice of humankind seems unlikely in the extreme. Yet, amazingly, this is not at all the full answer to that question of his. *Man is significant, God is mindful of him*, as we shall see in the next section.

But first let us learn well the lesson that we are small beings indeed. Extreme humility suits us, especially in the presence of God. Though small, God has made us recipients of a tremendous revelation of Himself even in creation. He has put us in the position of those that can admire Him, with deep respect and wonderment. This in itself is no small dignity placed upon man, no small opportunity granted to us. But the fuller revelation of Himself in the Scriptures (Old and New), and especially in Christ, surely prompts a still deeper sense of awe and joyful astonishment from its recipients. Greater things than even the splendour of God in creation are placed within the grasp of puny persons like ourselves! The grandeur of God far surpasses our best estimates of it; but also, not a shred of self-importance on our side is fitting in the presence of God.

Man is significant

God is not only the Maker of all, but He is also the Carer for the small parts of His creation, including diminutive human beings like the psalmist and ourselves. "Thou art mindful of him". The thought is almost unbelievable, but true. "Thou visitest him"! The most

tremendous truth of all, true in Christian days in a way beyond David's expectation. How greatly this adds to the high thoughts of God already presented in the psalm! God is too great to ignore any detail in His creation; His thorough care and concern for humankind is one of the most marvellous marks of His greatness. All the nations, the millions of the human race, are no more than "the small dust of the balance" to Him, and yet He sees and knows every individual (Isaiah 40:15). David, in another psalm says, "Thou understandest my thought afar off, . . . Thou art acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139).

More than this, God's interest in man is a special interest. It goes beyond that general detailed concern He has for all parts of His handiwork. The psalm says it plainly. But the fact that man can think of God (indeed speak to God, ask questions of Him, praise Him), after the manner of this psalm, marks the distinctiveness of mankind. This awareness of God gives the lie to the notion that the existence of man is an accident, the outcome of chaotic developments. Thoughtful man, the product of blind disorder, is a nonsense. But man is a spiritual being, conscious of God, with a sense of moral responsibility before Him too. At the very least these things are latent in men, though they are on the surface here. That man is a special creation of God is the teaching of Scripture; and it is in accord with reality too.

Indeed the psalm goes beyond the idea of the distinctiveness of man, to underline what was clear at the beginning of the Bible. Man is the crown of creation, the objective of it all. Man, small in size, is not small in the thoughts of God. Man is the key, the climax, the end in view from the start. How plainly Genesis 1 says it, and this psalm repeats it. From eternity, God's delights were with the sons of *men*.

But that is by no means all. The story of God's creation is not a story of pure good undisturbed by other things. "The enemy and the avenger" appear in the background here, though God has His means of defeating and silencing them. Man innocent, at the apex of creation in the thought of God, soon gave place to man fallen, the dupe of the adversary. He became a sinful being, and all mankind is involved. There is something sadly special about that, too. Humankind has become the arena where the tremendous tension between good and evil has been on display, and will ultimately be resolved openly. It is the battleground where that great issue has been raised, and has been settled too in a sense, though all will recognise it yet. The disclosure of the moral basis of everything is associated with the story of mankind. God has declared Himself in deeper ways, in a wider field than that of creation, the field where eternal values and judgements are manifested, where redemption has been effected.

The question "What is man?", then, has a dark answer. Man is God's disobedient creature; he has dishonoured God, failing to trust Him. He is a defeated being; he has failed the test, succumbing to the devil. Man is a captive, in the grip of stronger forces than he can deal with. He is weak, incapable of extricating himself from his plight. Furthermore, having been deceived, he has proceeded further on the downward line. Man's regular features now are self-seeking, self-

esteem, possessiveness, pride and arrogance; he goes his own way, sinking further into corrupt living; he is unable to meet even his own ideals. He may be cultured, he may be highly capable in his own fields of interest, but he readily adopts a self-opinionated air. He can be knowledgeable, but is content in his own things, and limited in his horizons. He is often at odds with his fellow-men, easily taking a superior posture. Basically he is a rebel, with a bias against God, shunning the light, hiding from God, unresponsive to God's goodness, well-enmeshed in the devil's net. Death and corruption are at the end of his life-span, and judgment beyond; though he does not care to face these issues. The truth about man is tragic; and it is our story too, though unending thanks are due for grace that lifts us out from such a desperate plight.

But to the same question, "What is man?" there is another answer, and a glorious one. We have thought of Adam, and the sombre train of consequences from his act of disobedience. But, without belittling the damage introduced by Adam's sin, that grim story is outbalanced by another, the story of the obedience of "one man, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:15). Sin has certainly abounded in this earth, and does abound; but grace overtops it. The one act of Calvary shines in all its perfection, to the glory of God, and with a tremendous range of far different consequences.

So, Christ is the true (and much the best) answer to the question, "What is man?". What a range of glories surrounds the Person who is "the Man Christ Jesus"! Here is Man of a different order from Adam, yet truly Man, partaker of flesh and blood, though also God manifest in the flesh. Through His death the devil has been defeated, and his captives liberated. His was a total and flawless obedience, even to the death of the cross. There that pure and holy life was laid down; there the extreme sacrifice was made; and there the glory of redemption shines. Though heaven and earth will pass away, *this* will remain undimmed, its glory is the light of eternity. The heavens declare the glory of God, but another glory shines "above the heavens", and it centres on that Man who honoured God, the Man whom God delights to honour.

In Christ we see Man as the overcomer, the One utterly faithful to God; the sinless, spotless, holy Man; the One marked by marvellous attitudes of condescension, humility, purity, selflessness, love and grace; the One who conquered by submission to abuse and hatred, but above all by submission to the will of God. Here is the One who is rightly entitled "the Son of Man"; an expression carrying the meaning *true* man, or *very* man, Man as he really is, to the satisfaction of God.

Man is supreme

From considerations such as these, it is only a step further to believe that such a Man is worthy of supreme honour. First, let us focus on a few features of Hebrews 2, which provides most of our guidance in understanding Psalm 8 today, and then return to the psalm for a final comment. The writer of Hebrews answers the question in the psalm by seeing Christ there directly. He looks at the lowly place taken by the

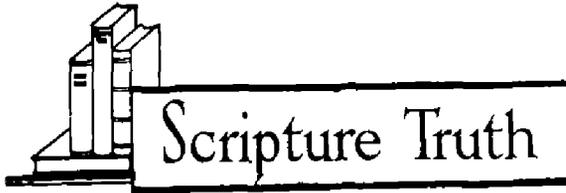
Lord Jesus, and sees beyond it the high esteem which must inevitably follow. He sees it already accorded to Him partially, but soon to happen in the broadest sense. Not yet are all things visibly under His dominion, but already He is crowned with glory and honour. Faith is entirely in agreement with the matchless distinction already given Him by God, and faith eagerly awaits the time of His widest supremacy too. What astonishing grace it is that includes us amongst the "many brethren" He has associated with Himself, the "many sons" destined for glory. We owe it all to Him, who undertook our cause, who through death disarmed the foe, and claimed us for His own.

The words used about the sufferings of our Lord are full of meaning. "He tasted death" reminds us of His sensitivity to that darkest of all experiences; we may never know more than a little about that. Let us ever pay due respect to that aspect of His sufferings. He was "made perfect" through sufferings; also a striking phrase. We must never doubt that He was always spotless and perfect. But, also, we cannot question that His perfection was still more evident in His sufferings. The fire of testing brought out the quality of the Offering; and, even before the time of His death, pressures of various kinds revealed the calibre of the Man who endured them. The line of the hymn is clearly true: "He knows what sorest trials mean, for He has felt the same". His abilities as Succourer and present Saviour of His people, were, in a sense, acquired in those dark times. Of course at the cross He carried a tremendous burden alone; a burden we could never share.

Both the psalm and the inspired comments on it have exceptionally bright features too. "Crowned with glory and honour", the New Testament simply lifts it out of the Psalm, repeats it, applying it to Jesus, once the lowly Nazarene. It is His present place: there has been no delay, God has already enthroned Him. The dominion and the majesty are His already. All things are under His feet, and clearly there are no exceptions to that, so the N.T. writer adds. But soon it will be patent for all to see. The New Testament explores the breadth of the Lordship of Christ in a more comprehensive way than the psalm, with its limited perspective, could ever do.

Let us note, then, those phrases in the opening of the psalm: God's glory is "above the heavens"; the place of the Lord Jesus is supreme and permanent beyond all created things. He has ascended "far above all heavens", according to one New Testament statement of it. But also, a Name excellent "in all the earth" is envisaged in this opening verse, and again at the close. The Son of Man is His Name of universal supremacy, but how pleasing it is to know that the whole earth, though a narrow realm in relation to the universe, will know the excellence of the despised Man of sorrows in a particularly immediate way.

Meanwhile, there is a chorus of praise which we can join already. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings His praise flows readily, though some would rebuke such enthusiasm and call it naïve. Happily, He will vindicate us, and rebuke the critics and the adversaries. No faith in Him can be too childlike in its open confidence, and time will show that such responses to Him have not been misguided.



(incorporating *Words of Help*)

SEPTEMBER 1983

BIBLE STUDY — THE BOOK OF JOSHUA—J. S. BLACKBURN

7 THE WALLS OF JERICHO — Chapter 6

This article continues a series whose last instalment appeared in March of this year. The walls which protected one of Satan's strongholds in the land of promise, and the apparently powerless, but obedient, procedure which caused their collapse, have direct lessons for the believer who seeks "to make his position his possession".

The most striking sentences in chapter six are: "and the walls of the city shall fall down flat" (verse 8), "the walls fell down flat" (verse 20).

Did anyone recall the report of the first spies from the wilderness which so frightened Israel? "The cities are walled and very great", "The cities are very great and walled up to heaven" (Numbers 13:28 and Deuteronomy 1:28). Our first study will consider the means employed to bring about this decisive victory. What were the weapons of Israel's warfare? They were trumpets, shouting, faith and obedience.

The nature of the trumpets warrants careful study. The kind of trumpet found in Joshua 6, at Sinai, for the year of "jubilee", and frequently as a battle call or alarm, is the "shophar". The word "jobel" is translated in AV either "jubilee" or "ram's horn", but better, means "a loud noise" or "shouting". It is connected with alarm, rejoicing or terror. The context decides which. Lastly there is the "chatsotserah"*, a trumpet which in Numbers 10 was made of silver, and was used for movement commands, for alarm or with singing. The emphasis here is on a clear sound, and hence on a clear command. This characteristic is in sharp contrast with the loud noise or "jobel".

The characteristic of usage in Joshua 6 is that "shophar" and "jobel" come together five times (vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 13) the phrase being translated in AV "trumpets of ram's horns", but more accurately "trumpets of loud noise". The only other case in which these two words come together is at Sinai (Exodus 19) and this passage determines the meaning in context:

*See T. Tyson, *Scripture Truth*, Vol. 47, No. 4, pp. 49-53.

Exodus 19:16: “there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled”.

19:19: “And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake and God answered him by a voice . . . let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD lest he break through upon them”.

The trumpets in Joshua then are by context “trumpets of loud noise”, noise of terror witnessing the presence of Jehovah in destruction. Jericho was rather less than one hundred and fifty yards across, and therefore such trumpet blasts would be heard across the city, reaching every corner.

It was in fact the shout which brought down the walls. Six days the host encircled the city once each day, and for those days Joshua said, “Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice . . . until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout” (v. 10). And so they did: “when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city”. Trumpet and shout come together again in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first”. Also the number seven is central in the account of the trumpet’s sounding in the Revelation 8:2 to 11:15. All this prepares us for the understanding that here in our chapter we have what symbolises in some sense the destruction of the world and the entrance of the people of God into blessing. The shout witnessed Israel’s certainty of victory.

In Hebrews 11:30 we learn that it was “by faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days”. Just as in the previous verses of Hebrews 11 we can see the faith of Moses and separately the faith of the people at the departure from Egypt and the keeping of the Passover, so here we can see both the faith of Joshua in commanding the people and the faith of the people in acting as they did. Faith is manifested by action. When people do what God says, then faith must be in action.

And so the great central weapon is the panoply of Israel in this first, but decisive encounter with the armies and kings of Canaan is obedience to the word of God. The fact that these weapons would be foolishness in the eyes of the watchers from the walls of Jericho was not a factor in determining events.

A review of the history of Israel in scripture reveals that from the wilderness journey to the final extinction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the constant theme of the prophets is God’s judgement coming because of disobedience. They always failed to maintain what God commanded, and always did the things He forbade. The Book of Joshua is unique in this respect — a very striking history of unbroken obedience. After the serious lapse of one man here at Jericho, there is unbroken obedience, and — marvellous witness to God’s power and faithfulness to His word and promise — unbroken victory. The defeat

at Ai, and the moral defeat by the “wiles” of the enemy at Gibeon are searching lessons in their place. Oh for ears today to hearken to the message of this unique example of obedience and its power!

It is time we returned to consider the great teaching of this book for the Christian — the Christian’s warfare in heavenly places. What, in this application, corresponds to this celebrated event, “the walls fell down flat”?

This wall was a defensive structure for the king of Jericho and his armed forces. It aimed to prevent the destruction of the accursed race, and thus to hinder Israel from possessing its possessions. Very precise light is available at this point in 2 Corinthians 10:4,5. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”. One hears surprisingly little attention paid to this very striking passage. In it we have “weapons” and “warfare” — “strongholds” and “high things lifted up” (walls, in other words). The result of victory is “obedience”, and all is in the realm of thought and spirit — “imaginations” or reasonings, and “every thought”. Paul had not been able to occupy the Corinthian saints with the mystery, the precious things available to the believer in heavenly places, because an enormous thought barrier existed in them. In the realm of spirit and thought, they were carnal. There loomed large in the thought and spirit “the wisdom of the world”, “envying and strife”, all things hostile to the destruction of the accursed thing, and to the knowledge of God. Some of our most cherished thoughts and reasonings could enter into the material forming “the wall”.

And so the king of Jericho and all his forces are locked up and protected from destruction by this wall. The last we read of the king of Jericho is v. 2; “I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour”. Allusion has been made to the destruction of the world, and this thought that the destruction of the world is in some sense symbolised here is supported by two references in Ephesians. In 2:2 the theme is the past life for the Ephesian believers; they “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”. Also 6:12 with explicit reference to the Christian’s warfare in heavenly places; “we wrestle not against flesh and blood [as Israel did], but against (spiritual authorities), against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [heavenly] places”. Looking over the enemies of Israel throughout her history, the king of Egypt represents the world in keeping Israel under slavery in Egypt. The kings of the Amorites and Canaanites aimed to keep Israel out of the land of promise. Later, the king of Babylon removed them from their land of promise because of disobedience. Thus we have here in Jericho and its king one aspect of the many-sided opposition of the world animated in the spiritual realm by Satan. The Christian meets this opposition directly in his own spirit, if his aim is to *stand* in possession of the

the experiences of knowledge and understanding (Ephesians 1:17,18) of the indwelling of Christ and the comprehension of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge (ibid. 16:21). A first exercise awakened by these thoughts from scripture is to question our hearts whether we are over on Christ's side of things in spirit. Or are our exercises confined to achieving serenity in daily cares or success in the service of God, both basically self-centred? These latter experiences are of very great importance in the eyes of the Lord, but He wants us active and exercised and praying to be in line with the purpose of God's grace for us.

Our thoughts on the victory in heavenly places must have two sides: first, the once-for-all victory of Christ for us, and second, the saints' victory in the conflict of Ephesians 6. We have just spoken of the latter, and, thanks be to God, the Word is clear as to the former. In the same section of Ephesians as that just quoted we must pinpoint that stage in the victory of Christ to which our previous meditations on the Book of Joshua have brought us, that is, the ascension of Christ (S.T. No. 11, p. 170). We cannot be confirmed too strongly in this, as in all other aspects of Christ's victory. The ascension in this connection comes before us in Ephesians 1:20-30 and 4:8-10. We have all along laid great stress on "the exceeding greatness of his power" in the ascended Christ at God's right hand, and on "the exceeding riches of his grace" (1:19 and 2:7). Let us now reflect a little on 4:8. It is when ascended upon high, having gotten the victory, that He dispenses the fruits of His victory for the equipment of the saints for their work of service; and this equipment includes all they need, for all the time they need it, to make them overcomers in the war.

In the movements of the armed men, the priests and the people, their actions, extending to the trumpet blasts and the shout, carried out in minute obedience to the Lord's commands, mediated the power of God for the entrance of His people into possession of Canaan. The essential of these movements was the bearing and display of the ark, mentioned nine times in the chapter. J. G. Bellett has a striking passage (*The Son of God*, p. 7): "A mere journey from Egypt to Canaan would not have constituted true pilgrimage. Many a one had travelled that road without being a stranger and pilgrim with God. . . . A merely toilsome, self-denying life, even though endued with that moral courage which becomes God's strangers on earth, will not do. In order to make that journey the journey of God's Israel, the *ark* must be in their company, borne by a people ransomed by blood out of Egypt, and tending, in their faith of a promise, to Canaan. . . . And what ark is in the midst of the saints now for safe and holy and honourable conduct through this desert world, if not the name of the Son of God? What mystery is committed to our stewardship and testimony, if not that? 'He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed'. The wall of partition is to be raised by the saints between them and Christ's dishonour." This people, moving round Jericho, possessed the emblem of Jehovah's presence with them: every

detail of their action centred around this fact. The church consists of a people amongst whom is known in faith the precious mystery of the Person of the Son of God, "the eternal Son of the eternal Father", now ascended up on high, and seated at God's right hand. The trumpets and the shout represent witness to this, made effective in the detail of the obedience.

What exactly is the nature of the obedience portrayed here? I think we get more than a hint on this in "the whole armour of God" (Ephesians 6:13). Having read so far through the Ephesian Epistle, we might have conditioned our thought to expect that the putting on of the armour would consist in some tremendous transaction in the purely spiritual realm. Not so: the armour consists in truth, righteousness, peace, salvation, the word of God and prayer. I think, therefore, that it is obedience in the whole detail of life in the world, the family and the church which releases the victory power in this purely spiritual realm. Women with heads covered in church, in obedience whether they understand or not, are a sight which has effects among these same spiritual powers.

It has just been remarked that in the struggle of Ephesians 6:12 the spiritual energy put out by hostile powers in the spiritual realm acts directly on the believer's spirit. We are here learning that it is in lives in which is enshrined in the inward sense the confessed knowledge of the Son of God, seated at God's right hand, lives lived in the outward sense in obedience to God's word in every detail of life, that the power of Christ's victory over principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15) is released. "Now unto him [the Father] that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, to him be glory in the church through Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20,21).

It remains to look at vv. 17-19. These verses present types of most serious and urgent practical questions. In Vol. 47, No. 9, p. 138 (last 3 lines) and p. 139 we looked in a preliminary way at the fearful action in 6:21 and 24: "and they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. . . . And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein; only the silver and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD". In that place our conclusion was that our faith, like Abraham's, can only come to rest in "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?".

Now we must look more closely at this aspect of the inspired narrative. First, notice the adjective in the phrases, "the accursed thing", "the city shall be accursed" (three times in v. 17 and v. 18), and also the verb in v. 21. These are forms from the same root which means "to set apart for God". The action applies to "the city and everything in it". But this setting apart was carried out in two ways. The persons were to be put to the sword and then all perishable things burned with fire. The imperishable things were to be put into the treasury of the Lord's house (the tabernacle). It is clear therefore that the reason for this fearful sentence, carried out throughout this conquest, was that the detestable practices which filled the Canaanite

religion required that everything Canaanite must be removed from human circulation. Perishables were to cease to exist by being burned; imperishable things were, so to speak, to revert to the original control of the Creator.

There can be little doubt where we shall find the analogous ban in the Christian's warfare in heavenly places. We take up the thread from S.T. Vol. 48, p. 25, which brought us to Ephesians in the section 4:17 to 5:21. More precisely now, we find in 5:3-7 what unmistakably corresponds to the detestable practices associated with Canaanite religion. It is in the parallel passage in Colossians 3:5-7 that we encounter exactly the parallel of the ban in Joshua 6:17-19: "mortify", kill, put to death: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them". Let the mature Christian note, as well as the young disciple, that none ever gets beyond the solemn warnings and commands of these passages.

The reason for these appalling measures is found in v. 18. If they were disobedient in this respect, then the people of Israel, and the camp itself would become also devoted to destruction. The story of Achan in the next chapter follows so sadly from this verse.

CHRIST GLORIFIED _____ GORDON SPRATT

PART THREE

How Christ glorified the Father on the earth by finishing the work the Father gave Him to do — is a truth with whose broad outline we are familiar. How He continues to glorify Him from heaven by giving eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him, is the grand subject of this article.

GLORIFY THY SON, THAT THY SON ALSO MAY GLORIFY THEE:

To read chapter 17 of John's Gospel is a privilege: to hear the Son of God in sustained communion with His Father must lead us to the threshold of a sphere of pure glory beyond human experience. And yet as we read, possessed surely by the spirit of worship, there is much to be learned in this most holy of all chapters.

In verse 1 Jesus says: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee." We may well ask: what is this glory, and how may it be distinguished from other references to the glorification of Christ in this chapter and others?

The key to its significance must surely lie in the words, "that thy Son also may glorify thee". It is not only that the Lord Jesus knew, as we read in John 13:1, that the hour was come that He should depart out of this world to the Father. No one could doubt the rightness of Jesus, His work on earth completed, resuming the place that is ever rightly His, but that is not precisely the force of the verse that we are

considering.

Put in the simplest terms, what Jesus is saying is that, having glorified God on the earth and completed the work for which He was sent, He will now continue to glorify the Father from a new position in glory. Not a new position in the sense that He had not occupied it before, but because, having become Man in order to fulfil the Father's will, He is to remain a Man forever, and it is as Man that He is to take that place of glory.

As so often when speaking of the mysteries of divine revelation, we must guard against anything that might seem to belittle the unique and eternal personality of the Son. It is but a proof of the limitations of our human minds that we find difficulty in understanding that One who is eternally God can enter into Manhood and remain in that condition forever.

Perhaps to pursue this a little further we ought to consider the general character of the gospel by John. It is so full of elevated thoughts of God, expressed in the relationship between the Father and the Son, that it is easy to assume that John deals with the "heavenly" side of the truth. But a closer study reveals that the focus of this Gospel is not heaven but earth. The general subject is the manifestation of God in His Son, but as Man here upon earth. The key to the first chapter, and perhaps to the whole book, lies in the words: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us". Here, in the perfection of His Manhood, the Son has glorified the Father. Here God has been declared by the only One who could make that declaration. Here where Israel has failed utterly to render fruit to God, He is the true Vine. Here He has made good His own words: "He that has seen me has seen the Father". And He presents Himself in John's Gospel in figures which belong essentially to the earth scene. He is the Antitype of the sacrificial lamb and of the brazen serpent. He is the Bread of Life that came down from heaven. He is the Good Shepherd. Though His death must ever be in view as the end of His pathway here, all else meaningless apart from it, yet the emphasis is not, in John's Gospel, on His death but on His Person and upon what was manifested in Him here in His Manhood. Hence the fact that He uses the words, "It is finished" even before His death as to fact is accomplished.

To return to the theme of the new position that Jesus was to take, it was, as we have seen, not simply a resumption of His eternal place in glory, but to be understood in a sense as an extension of what was true of Him on earth. He had undertaken here the work of glorifying the Father, taking a subject place in order to do so. Now, that work completed as to what could be accomplished on earth, He is to take an exalted place, not simply in resurrection, which is not the subject here, but in glory. Yet He is to continue from that place of glory His work of glorifying the Father. "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand" — how perfectly that divine charge was sustained in His lowly path down here, how perfectly the task completed. But let us note that, though His position has changed, His activity in glorifying the Father still has its focus, at least for the present time,

down here upon earth. Our scripture continues: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him".

And here we come to a great and vital truth: that the Lord Jesus is the Giver of eternal life, and that in doing so He glorifies the Father. Let us examine what this means. We saw in an earlier article that Jesus, in His perfect Manhood, had personally glorified God where every other man had failed. Verse 4 of the chapter we are now considering confirms this: "I have glorified thee on the earth". But something more is in view. The first Adam, as head of an earthly race, failed utterly to glorify God: the last Adam stands as the Head of a heavenly race in which God is to be eternally glorified. The first Adam could communicate only a life defiled by sin — he "begot a son in his own likeness" (Genesis 5:3). The last Adam, given power over all flesh, communicates eternal life to those given to him by the Father. He is a life-giving spirit. The first man was of the earth, earthy, and so with the whole of Adam's race. The second Man is the Lord out of heaven, heavenly in His own attributes, but more even than that, bringing into view a heavenly family of which we read in 1 Corinthians 15, "As is the heavenly, such are they also who are heavenly".

When Jesus was here in Manhood, an entirely new order of life was set forth in Him, new, that is, in the sense that it had never before been manifested in this world. Of course in many observable ways He partook of the characteristics and circumstances of the first man — He shared fully in the limitations and experiences of the human race, even at length to death itself. Yet there was in Him, though few were privileged to see it, a different order of life, referred to by John in his first epistle as "that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us. It is one of the marvels of divine wisdom that God has purposed that that life, set forth so perfectly in the Son of God, should be communicated to a whole family of persons who, as to their history, are no more than poor sinners saved by grace.

But how is it to be communicated? Two things clearly are necessary. Firstly, the termination judicially in death of the first man; in other words the work of redemption. Secondly the sending out as a life-giving principle of the Holy Spirit. And both of these necessitate the taking by the Son of that new position which is the subject of our consideration.

Of course we may reason that the work of redemption centres on the death and resurrection of Christ, and if we are thinking only of man's responsibility that is true. But if we are thinking of eternal life we must go further to see the full fruits of the work of the Cross. We must see the One who in His lowly Manhood, and supremely in His death, glorified God down here, for ever separated from every connection with man after the flesh and entered into a sphere wholly compatible with that eternal life which was perfectly delineated in Him. Paul says (2 Corinthians 5:16) "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more". If we have been quickened together with the Christ, it is in order that we might be raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places

(Ephesians 2:6,7). Eternal life, in other words, must link us in new creation with a glorified Man in heaven.

And yet we do not wait until we get to heaven to receive it. A direct result of the Lord Jesus leaving this world and going to the Father is the sending of the Holy Spirit, and it is in the indwelling power of that life-giving Spirit that we have the present experience of eternal life. Romans 8:11 makes it abundantly clear: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you".

John describes eternal life in these words: "That they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent". It is not mere immortality; it is above all, relationship. Relationship with the only true God known as Father, and relationship with Jesus Christ not now as humbled here but glorified as our living Head in heaven. Paul fills it out in Romans 8: "We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs — heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ — if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together".

This is, of course, our side of the matter, and very wonderful too. But we must go back to the words of John 17:1 — "That thy Son also may glorify thee". How is the Father glorified? As a general question it must involve the whole purpose and will of God, laid as to its accomplishment upon His beloved Son. What glory must ever accrue to the Father because of the perfection of what the Son has undertaken! But perhaps, in the context of John 17:1, we may see a closer and more intimate meaning. We read in Hebrews 2 that God, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, is bringing many sons unto glory. What a triumph for God that out of all the conflicts of time, out of all the long story of Satan's challenge and man's failure, He will at length bring about a scene entirely suited to His own pleasure. And not only a universe purged of sin and indwelt by righteousness, but a scene where God is surrounded by countless myriads of those whom He has brought into the closest possible relationship to Himself. Many sons brought to glory — what a family, and at the centre of it the One who was loved by the Father before the foundation of the world, now the Firstborn among many brethren.

And in the meantime the Father is glorified in those who, abiding in the One who is the true Vine, drawing their life from their vital connection with Him, bear fruit to God. "In this is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

One final thought. We can set no term to the words that we have been considering. There was never a moment in His Manhood when Jesus did not glorify His Father. And He has become a Man forever, and will ever glorify the Father. Of course it is true, and must be reverently and worshipfully maintained, that He never ceases to be God, yet in the passage in 1 Corinthians 15 which begins with the words: "Then cometh the end", Paul concludes: "Then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."

PSALM 45: TOUCHING THE KING ————— **JOHN BARNES**

A clause by clause meditation opens out this sweetest of psalms. Readers will want to study this article closely until they are sure that every phrase of the psalm has parted with some of its meaning to them.

Quite a few psalms have no title and many have titles with one, two or three elements. This psalm has an unusually full heading containing five elements.

(i) "To the Chief Musician." While this was probably intended for the leading temple musician, for the Christian there is only one to whom the title applies; our Lord Jesus Christ. "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee." He declares the Father's name to His brethren and leads them into the Father's presence that they may worship Him (Hebrews 2:12, cited from Psalm 22:22).

(ii) "Upon Shoshannim." The word is understood to mean "lilies". In what way it is to be applied is harder to understand. Some think of it as the name of the tune which the Psalm was set to; some the shape of the instruments the music was played on; to some it means, "alternate strains". One thing is clear. In the Scriptures, lilies are spoken of in relation to their beauty. "Behold the lilies of the field . . . Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." The bridegroom, in the Song of Songs, referring to the beauty of his bride speaks of her as "A lily among thorns", contrasting her excellence with the ugliness of the thorns. There can be no question about the beauty of this lyric, or of the glorious Person who is its theme.

(iii) "For the sons of Korah." Pure grace is to be seen here. Numbers 16 (especially verse 30) seems to suggest that Moses, considered, maybe, as representing the law, demanded the death of Korah and all that were his. Divine grace overruled this and we read later (20:11), "Notwithstanding, the children of Korah died not". Grace saved the sons from the terrible fate of their father and his associates in evil, that they may be preserved for the service of the Lord. We find their name in several Psalm headings.

(iv) "Maschil". This word is thought to mean "instruction". The service of these men was to be intelligent. Our God is not looking for mechanical men or for robots. We may recall that in Romans 12 Paul speaks of the intelligent service He desires in believers today. It is our glad response to His love which gives Him pleasure.

(v) "A song of loves". According to the scholars the word love is feminine plural. There seems to be the suggestion of a responsive company, understanding the grace which has reached them, happily appreciative of it, and uniting in the glad service of praise. The feminine idea may introduce the thought of subjection. If so, this would be the opposite of the spirit of rebellion and self-assertion which marked Korah and his company.

The writer begins by saying that it is his heart which is engaged in this holy exercise, not his mind alone. True worship is not academic; it is affectionate. We all know how sometimes a gathering of the saints

has been "set on fire" by some simple, stumbling words addressed to the Lord from a heart appreciative of His love. The writer of this Psalm speaks of his own exercises. "My heart . . . I speak . . . I have made . . . my tongue". There is nothing second-hand here, nothing of the proxy. He speaks what he feels; he gives expression to the living movements of his own heart to the great Object of his affections. One of our hymns speaks of "praise issuing forth in life". This is what we have here.

A movement like this is bound to be spontaneous. It does not wait on others to be stirred up; the stirring up takes place inside and its effect is known by expression. Inditing means "bubbling up". It may perhaps be likened to the water in a geyser under the enormous pressures built up inside; the water cannot refrain from bursting out. So he says, "I speak". He is bound to tell out in some way what he feels so deeply.

"What I have made" may, at first, give an impression of artificiality; as though he sat down and composed the ode in a literary way. But the word means, "My occupation". This is what engaged his affections at all times. What a man thinks about all the time, business or pleasure or whatever else, he is bound to speak about. This writer's occupation, and that which captured his whole interest, is what he writes about. So it is not only the bursting out of pent-up feelings, it is also the fruit of prolonged and unremitting meditation on this theme.

He then tells us what the theme is; it is the King. Here was a man who had seen the King in His beauty, had felt the grace that had touched him, had known the love and care lavished upon him, and this he would speak of and sing of, so that others might share his own thoughts of the King. We shall see some of the details of this beauty and grace in subsequent verses. For us, our Lord may be also the absorbing theme of our song, the great Object of our adoring worship, our love and devotedness. How richly we have been blessed in Him! How ready ought our worship to be!

The Psalmist does not sit back and let others carry on with this response. He writes, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer". He does it himself. However poor we may feel our language to be, this should be our desire; to tell the Lord for ourselves how much He means to us and what we think of Him. This readiness of utterance would not only suggest loving willingness to adore but also intelligent expression, the fruit of exercise. The differing grades of offerings possible to the Israelites under the Levitical system are suggestive of varied levels of understanding and appreciation. This offers the possibility of growth in intelligence. The idea of the ready writer may suggest the maturity of the exercised believer and this does not come automatically. The Lord would certainly desire our growth into this maturity. A human father would not expect his little boy of four to speak to him in adult terms, but he would be pained if his son of twenty addressed him in baby language.

We may on the other hand think of the Ready Writer as the Holy Spirit taking up the subject believer as a vehicle of expression. "His word was in my tongue" seems to bear such a suggestion.

“Thou art fairer than the children of men.” The King brings into Manhood His own wonderful beauty. No one today knows what the Lord looked like. It is remarkable that no record has been given us of His physical appearance. The Holy Spirit engages our hearts with His moral features. For us, in any case, His beauty must be moral, for we have not seen Him. “Whom having not seen, ye love.” To us, He surpasses all others infinitely.

“Grace is poured into Thy lips.” Not only was there grace in the words He spoke; it was there in infinitude. The verb “poured” conveys this idea of abundance. Men wondered at the gracious words which fell from His lips. “Thy faith hath saved thee”; “Go in peace”; “Neither do I condemn thee”. What boundless grace we can see in Him to all and sundry.

“Therefore (the first of three therefore in the Psalm) God hath blessed Thee for ever”. The Lord is what He is essentially, but His beauty shone so brightly in Manhood in this squalid world that God was pleased to bless Him forever. This is the Manhood which God delights in. The first order of man had to come under His judgment: “The end of all flesh is come before Me”. Of this Man God has said, “His name shall endure for ever”.

In v. 3 He goes out to battle with the enemies of God. He goes out alone. Up to this point He has no rival; now He has no helper. But in future days when He goes out to do battle He will tread the winepress alone. Some of the expressions here would seem to emphasise this idea. “Thy sword . . . Thy right hand . . . Thine arrows.”

“Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh.” The warrior girds on His weapons as He prepares for the conflict. The thigh is a symbol of strength, the thigh muscle being the largest muscle in the body. So here we have an expression of great power. The writer goes on to say, “O most mighty”, so acknowledging the exalted status of the King he writes about. The most Mighty is, indeed, the Almighty; woe to those who oppose Him. His kingdom is referred to later and it is with the establishment of His reign in view that this campaign against enemies is necessary. However powerful they may be, and they do have great power, He is greater, the most Mighty of them all.

“Ride prosperously.” In His victorious career He will trample every foe under His feet, and what He undertakes to do He will carry through to a successful conclusion. This is true of every activity He undertakes; He finishes things.

“Because of truth and meekness and righteousness.” In the tremendous battle against evil forces, every principle of righteousness and truth is fully maintained. In the exercise of His military power all right is upheld. Military commanders often flout the right in order to win the fight. Not so with the Lord. All is held in perfect balance. It is remarkable that meekness is spoken of in this connection, an ideal far removed from the minds of most commanders of military forces. The blessed One who told out God’s attributes while in lowly Manhood here will continue to maintain them in the dignity of exalted power.

“Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things”. As He looks for no help from others, so He needs no instruction from them. His own

powerful hand wields the sword with competence and the effects on His enemies are devastating. It is a source of wonderment to our hearts that the very hand which is exercised on our behalf for our salvation is the one which so effectively overcomes the enemy. In His own power He knows what to do against the foe as well as for His own. We can learn something of these "terrible things" in the book of the Revelation.

"Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies." We saw the sword in verse 3; here we read of arrows. A sword is used in close, hand to hand battle, while arrows were the artillery of ancient warfare and were directed at enemies at greater range. The enemies of the Lord work in both ways; through opposing forces outside the circle of God's people or through enemies within. Whether these apostates or the more distant opposers, all are crushed in mighty power. Israel's apostates will be punished as well as the invading armies from the north, and other attackers. Whoever they may be the King's arrows pierce the heart; the very springs of these movements are destroyed and the peoples fall under the mighty Warrior.

The enemies out of the way the scene is clear for the establishment of the kingdom. "Thy throne O God is for ever and ever." It is founded on what He is in Himself. Though He is truly Man He is also God; what is set up in His power will endure. The sceptre of His kingdom is not one which simply crushes all opposition, it is a sceptre of righteousness. It will surely destroy every opposing element but will maintain all that which is according to God. The King loves righteousness and hates lawlessness. He does not put down some evil and tolerate some in parts of His administration, a principle so common in many lands today; He loves things that are right and maintains this in every part of His kingdom.

"Therefore God hath anointed Thee." This is the second "therefore". God has chosen Him for this exalted place because He is morally perfectly suited to it. "Anointed" is suggestive of the action of the Holy Spirit Himself. David was a type of this. The Lord had not chosen any of his brothers ("the Lord hath not chosen these") but he had chosen David, and as soon as he was brought in from the sheep, Samuel anointed him in the midst of his brethren. So far as we are concerned we appreciate the anointing of our Lord, so that what was a pleasure to Him is one to us also. "His joys our deepest joys afford." God thus clearly signifies His own approval of the One who served Him so faithfully.

"All Thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia." These are shrubs whose leaves or bark were pounded into aromatic powders much used in burials. They may lead us to think of the fragrance of the Lord's death. Normally death does not suggest fragrance; rather the reverse as John 11:39 would indicate. The Lord's death however, produced only an odour of a sweet smell. There was no corrupting element there. Though He bore our sins, though He was made sin, in His death He was victorious over all and nothing corrupting touched Him there. His death rose to the Father as the sweet odour of the true Burnt Offering.

“Out of the ivory palaces.” Ivory is procured from the slaughter of elephants and when this beautiful and valuable product is thought of in as large a sense as this verse suggests, a very considerable number of beasts must have been slain. However, the emphasis is not on death itself but on beauty out of death. There was not only fragrance from the death of the Lord but beauty also. We have a sense of this as we remember Him at the supper. Although we may be deeply conscious of His sufferings and sometimes of the horrid aspects of His death by crucifixion, we dwell more on the blessed effects of His death, what has accrued to God as a consequence and what has been established for the blessing of the saints. Here we have only beauty and stability. The palace suggests the tranquility of His reign.

The next clause is thought to be better translated “stringed instruments”; so the whole expression would read, “Out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made Thee glad”. Music is produced from strings by means of tension. The strings are stretched taut. Indeed, to reach what musicians call “concert pitch” they are subjected to slightly more strain than normal. This thought would, therefore, be somewhat in line with previous ideas. Here we have beauty of sound, harmony through strain and stress. What pressures the Lord Jesus was subjected to! The song began then and has gone on growing sweeter and louder till ultimately heaven’s vaults will re-echo to the refrain issuing from unnumbered throats, “Unto Him who loves us”.

“Kings’ daughters are among Thine honourable women.” Normally accustomed to being served, these princesses are privileged to serve this exalted King. Perhaps this may refer to nations around who come into the glad service of the King.

“The queen stands at His right hand.” The queen is His consort and companion. In a Jewish setting this would be the nation itself. She stands while He sits enthroned. It is at His right hand the queen is to be found, the right hand being symbolic of power, action and dignity. If we could be permitted to transfer the thought to the New Testament setting the queen would be the church, but I expect we would be more correct to think of her sitting.

“The queen stands arrayed in gold of Ophir.” We are told here not only of the substance but also of its source. The occurrence of gold in the bowels of the earth is associated with its great heat and enormous pressures. Its mining is attended by difficulty and danger. Its extraction from the mined ore is accomplished by the goldsmith by the application of great heat in the crucible and by the removal of impurities till the precious metal remains, cleansed of defiling elements. What wonders have been wrought in order that the saints should be arrayed in that which is pleasurable to God and acceptable in His presence! She stands there, fitted to be there and conscious of acceptability.

“Hearken . . . consider . . . incline thine ear . . . forget.” She forgets her origin, not in pride of because of any defect in humility, but simply in the consciousness of the work that has fitted her to be there. She is taught in this way and there is moral progress in the verse.

She is now to be wholly for the King. When Rebecca was asked "Wilt thou go with this man?" there was to be no delay, no clinging to her father's house, her earnest reply was, "I will go".

"So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty." This is moral loveliness. Love to Him is beautiful to Him. There is nothing in the universe more beautiful than love. It is what He is in His blessed nature. What He finds attractive in the saints is the hidden man of the heart. Isaac loved Rebecca and she became wholly for him.

"He is thy Lord, worship thou Him." Yet there is no undue familiarity. It is unhappy where this is seen or heard in the circles of the saints. Can we ever forget the greatness of the Person who has taken us to His heart? The bride never presumes. Despite her nearness she remains a worshipper. Indeed, I am sure of this: the nearer we are to the Lord Jesus the more worshipful we shall be.

"The daughter of Tyre." Others are there to observe, to admire, to contribute or to serve, but the nearness to the King enjoyed by His consort is hers alone.

"The king's daughter." She is not only the King's consort; she is also royal by birth. Perhaps we could think of affinity of nature here, by grace indeed. The bride is a company of redeemed ones, born by the Holy Spirit into the divine family, and so they have community of nature with the Lord.

"She is glorious within." This has been understood in at least two ways. She is what she is morally. Her outward beauty is a true reflection of what she is inwardly. This is not always the case in the world. Beauty according to God is not what man can see but what He can see and take delight in. There is another thought for which there is some evidence it is believed. She is beautiful within the royal apartments. This would underline her suitability to be there. She does not introduce a foreign note to those holy places but is thoroughly in keeping with that environment.

"Her clothing is of wrought gold." This takes the thought of gold a step further. Cloth is composed of a great number of strands of yarn, woven together to form the fabric. This cloth is of woven gold, an infinitely precious garment, every strand woven in with consummate care, the warp and the woof complementing one another in glorious presentation.

She is presented to the King "in raiment of needlework". Needlework is possibly what we would call embroidery; an adornment, additional to the cloth itself. Sometimes embroidery is done on cloth which is, of itself, of little value; the needlework is what makes the finished piece valuable. Here, the cloth itself is of infinite preciousness but has this added refinement. Needlework is an additional feature of beauty, done with skill and loving care.

She has companions, virgins. Some have said that the idea of the virgin in the Hebrew tongue suggests "unconquered". This would suggest that there are those who have not submitted to the world system but remain true to the Lord. In the Old Testament immorality is frequently attributed to Israel because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord, particularly in their idolatry. The book of Hosea makes this

point clear. The bride is purely for her husband; this is a corporate thought. The virgins are faithful ones, this is the individual thought. These companions are morally suitable to be in attendance on the bride. If we think of this in principle as applied to later times, John the Baptist was certainly a suitable person to be a friend of the Bridegroom. He was surely one of the virgin companions of the King. These maids are similar attendants of the queen.

There is gladness in the palace. The Father's house is a habitation of unending joy. It has often been remarked that in the Lord's parable in Luke 15, they began to be merry. This joy goes on.

There is no looking back to the fathers but on to the children. The outlook is not black with despair, wicked ambitions, failure, blighted hopes. The history of the fathers, while lightened by faithful men was, in general, littered with unfaithfulness, disobedience and apostasy. There is no looking back to that. Grace will restore the children, as in the case of Korah's children. Looking on to a new dispensation they are to be princes in all the earth. "All the earth;" not confined to the narrow territory of Israel's former occupation. Israel, under her King, will enjoy great enlargement.

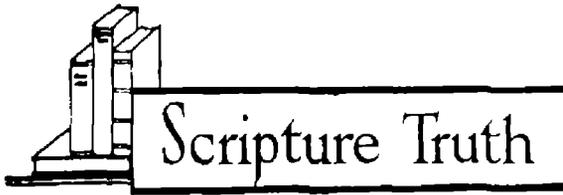
The King's name will be remembered for ever. To know Him is to remember Him; to remember Him is to worship Him. O worship the King!

THE BANQUETING HOUSE

Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Art thou, my soul, at this time in the full enjoyment of [this fellowship]? Pause over the inquiry. Sometimes, for the want of this search of soul, deadness, or at least leanness, creeps in. Say then, my soul, how art thou dealing with thy God; and how is thy God dealing with thee? When were his latest manifestations? When did he take thee into his banqueting house, or when didst thou sit under his shadow? Hast thou very lately heard his voice saying, 'Fear not, I am thy salvation'? The discovery of these things are amongst the sweetest exercises which flow from the indwelling Spirit. . . . When hadst thou communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ? . . . How is thine acquaintance there advancing? How art thou growing in grace and in the knowledge of thy Lord and Saviour?

. . . Precious Jesus! Do thou keep the flame of love alive; manifest to my soul the certainty and reality of my union with thee, thou sweet Saviour, by causing this blessed communion to be constant and full of divine communications. Let thy Spirit call forth in me the exercise of the graces he has planted, and do thou come forth in refreshing manifestations of love so that . . . while thou art graciously saying, 'Seek ye my face', my heart may say unto thee, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek' . . . If, dearest Jesus, thou wilt mercifully keep this fellowship alive in my soul, how will my poor soul be living upon thee and with thee, and how shall I be exchanging with thee all my leanness, poverty, wretchedness and weakness for thy fulness, righteousness and strength? Come then, Lord Jesus, and until the day break and the shadows flee away, 'turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bether'.

ROBERT HAWKER, *The Poor Man's Morning Portion* [1821]



(incorporating *Words of Help*)

NOVEMBER, 1983

Aspects of New Testament Teaching

A STUDY COURSE

J. S. BLACKBURN and COLIN CURRY

Over the next five issues we intend, God willing, to publish a study course which will require the active participation of readers to a far greater extent than our normal articles do. The subjects of study are summarised in the Table of Contents immediately below; the origins, aims and methods of the course are outlined in the Introduction following that table. Lastly as an appetiser we have printed the first short section of the course.

THE CONTENTS OF THE COURSE

(a) Introduction

(b) Part I: The Church in New Testament Teaching

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Appendix I 'Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, Pentecostalism'

(c) Part II: Guidance for the End of the Church Period

Section A. Times of declension: biblical teaching about a remnant

Section B. New Testament instruction and resources for our times

Appendix II Recovery of NT church truth, and obedience to it attempted, in the nineteenth century

(d) Part III: The Revelation of the Father; Worship

Section A. The Father

Section B. Worship

INTRODUCTION

In this introduction we indicate the form and aims of this study course and the circumstances in which it was originally devised. Some other points which need to be explicit from the outset are also included.

The course that follows is really a scheme of directed reading and it falls into three distinct Parts or 'modules'. Considerable cross linkages exist between the subjects studied in each of the Parts; nevertheless these subjects will best be covered by taking the Parts one at a time. Each Part of the course contains guidance on how to approach it and on what to read for it. There are of course valuable books of a sizeable kind on all aspects of the course to which the reader might be referred. So far as possible however reading matter of a shorter nature has been recommended, as befits a first introduction to these themes. And the scriptures themselves have the first priority as the basic material to be studied. All the books recommended can be obtained from the Central Bible Hammond Trust at the address on the cover of this magazine.

Your attention is particularly drawn to the remarks on a right approach which appear near the beginning of Part I [Preliminaries, paragraph (c), especially the final sentences — see p. 84 below]. These remarks plainly apply to the entire course.

Why focus on the particular aspects of New Testament revelation taken up in this course? The answer is that these matters, while clearly on the New Testament pages, are commonly ignored in the broad Christian field today, yet they are as important for us to understand, to value and to obey in practice as any other part of the Word of God. Obedience to the Word of God on church matters has been felt as an obligation by 'brethren' for at least a century-and-a-half, but lack of clarity as to our scriptural basis is now common and lack of purpose to stand in obedience to scripture inevitably accompanies this. The aim of this course is to provide at least a minimum of scriptural instruction which may rectify this, so that the Lord may enable us to be true to Him, desiring to fulfil His will in these areas no less than in others.

This Bible Course has arisen in the first place as guided instruction for intending missionaries: but it is now felt that all who wish to honour the Lord, whether in their home area, or as directed by Him to service elsewhere, could well profit by undertaking it. It will be evident that the course presupposes a serious student, prepared to spend both himself and his time in response to his Lord.

Perhaps the first thing to stress is the excellence of much of this truth, which requires our appreciation and response. This study touches some of the most glorious of all revealed truths. *Christ and His church*, a unique part of the eternal plan of God, to be realised in its fulness when He presents (and receives) to Himself 'A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing', the product of His own love and sacrifice for her. The marvellous display of divine wisdom and glory

in bringing such a thing to pass, the kind and character of the divine love which is so openly on the face of the New Testament, displayed in all its quality at the Cross. The love that belongs to the eternal realm; timeless, fadeless love, the Father's love for the Son, and the Son's love for the Father; the atmosphere of heaven, and the welcome there, opened up by One Who (in word and deed) declared *the Father's Name*. The realm where 'the true worship' proceeds, the Object of it, and the Substance that fills the hearts of those engaged in it. Is it not strange that these great matters do not always stir our spirits as they should, that familiarity can dull our awareness of them, that they can be overlooked by some who read the New Testament? These are not matters of doctrine only: the life that is uninformed and unmoved by the knowledge of God enshrined in these teachings is to that extent impoverished in its reflection of the true Christian character.

Part of our study is concerned with *the early church*. This too is a highly attractive part of the Biblical subject-matter. The model the early church supplies, the sources of its power, the unity and effectiveness of its conduct and testimony, provide lessons we must humbly and assiduously seek to learn.

But while much can be learnt from the record of the early church, we *must* see clearly that our situation is very different from that in which the early church functioned. The account of the early church can certainly be of help to us if we are also ready to heed other Scriptural instruction specially suited to the end-times of the Christian era. The outward church situation has departed greatly from what was at the beginning, and it is part of our duty to recognise this. This is not a matter of observation only, but of expectation too; and in fairness to Scripture we must see it there. It envisages no general return to the beginning, neither does it press that kind of attempt at all. Rather, it gives special guidance for conduct in the presence of large-scale departure in Christianity, when the true outward order has been lost. It is important to see that this is *not* an afterthought, when things have gone wrong, but was foreseen and catered for (by laying down appropriate instruction) from the start. What simple and obedient believers can do today is to obey the Word of God for our day, standing clear from what is untrue to God, relying on the same direction and power as were known at Pentecost (the ascended Christ, and the Holy Spirit given), sharing in some of the zeal of those days, without expecting all the special features of the early church to reproduce themselves.

Instruction for a difficult day has less appeal than high truth that stirs the heart. But the Word of God in all its aspects should be our guide. Part II of this study is devoted to instruction for *the end-days of the Christian era*. *Separation* from what displeases and misrepresents God, and *pursuit* with others of what honours the Lord, are prominent

requirements laid down for us there. Clearly Part II material should not precede Part I, but it is well to start on Part I bearing in mind the points which these closing introductory paragraphs have made. In Part III we pass from themes connected with the church to that most central of all NT matters — the revelation of *the Father* and the nature of the *worship* suited to that revelation.

The formulation of this course has been largely in the hands of one of its authors, but the need for it and the general break-up of its contents were first suggested by its senior author. One or two specific sections are also his direct handiwork. It will be seen to lean heavily on scriptural matters close to his heart as evidenced by written and spoken ministry over many years. Both of us are firmly persuaded that the Holy Spirit guides in serious and disciplined study of the scriptures and that the Lord is honoured thereby. It is our prayer therefore that these pages will receive more than mere interest, that some may approach them with application and discover the gains of really learning from the Word of God for themselves.

PART I: THE CHURCH IN NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

Preliminaries

(a) *Division of Material.* The subject matter falls into three sections:

- A. The whole church — its place in scripture
- B. Local aspects — the 'local assembly'
- C. Common deviations from biblical church order

Appendix I: 'Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, Pentecostalism'

Section A is to be found below; the remaining sections will be printed, DV, in January.

(b) *Reading.* Whole sections from the New Testament for close study are specified in sections A and B.

As a handbook to Part I, *The Church*, by Samuel Ridout, is suggested. This is brief, direct and (in the main) succinct, and has good coverage (though it is uneven in the weight it gives to various matters). We do not follow Ridout closely in the scheme below, but refer to his book at points throughout it. Nevertheless the whole book should be read carefully. A longer book is *The Church of the Living God* by R. K. Campbell. Most comprehensive is *Lectures on the Church of God* by William Kelly.

(c) *Approach.* First, thorough reading and meditation on the recommended New Testament passages are vital. They form the basis of the whole study. Then, follow through the outline of material point by point, seeking scriptural support for each statement. Usually the

support will be found in the specified NT passages though occasionally it will be found outside the main passages. Ridout mentions most of the matters somewhere in his book, with scripture references. A prayerful approach to this study is needed. Keep in mind that the aim is not merely to be informed, but to be *moved* with the greatness and importance of this truth, and thus to 'walk worthy' of our calling.

Section A: Broad aspects of the Church

New Testament references: Ephesians.

Read also: Ridout, chapters 1 and 2.

1. The *term* 'church': open to misunderstanding — 'assembly' is perhaps a better word.
2. The church a *new thing* in New Testament days: a secret now revealed — the topstone of NT truth — the outcome of eternal purpose — of heavenly origin — the special object of the love of Christ.
3. The church *period*: Pentecost to the Rapture — the church's inception — its destiny — pictures and foreshadowings appear in the OT but these are only recognisable in the light of the NT.
4. The *growth* of the church: its basis ('on this rock', Matthew 16) — added to by the Lord — through the gospel — the vital nature of the Spirit's work in the church — in its formation, its unity, its growth and activities — the Spirit indwelling each and the whole is the power for constructive activity and growth — gifts to the (whole) church — foundation gifts, continuing gifts — evangelism contributes to the growth of the church — pastoring, teaching, ministry all play an important part too.
5. The *unity* of the whole church: one body, one Spirit, one hope — recognising one Lord, and one Name, only — united to Him, the Head — all earlier distinctions and disparities between members have gone — the church as body, flock, house and dwelling place, temple, bride.
6. The *marks* of the church: affection for Christ — response to His love — subjection to Him — walking worthy of the calling — showing the heavenly character — mutual love, esteem and subjection — the display and evidence of God's exceeding grace and wisdom — awaiting Christ's Coming with a strong desire.

Written work on Section A. Following most of these study sections, some writing is encouraged. This will be found helpful as a means of

consolidating and clarifying the subject matter.

Write about two thousand words of your own, based on Ephesians, on 'The role of the church according to scripture, and its proper effect on the person who has a good glimpse of it'. [On the second part of this theme, it may help if Paul's own zeal and earnestness — as he feels the grandeur of this great subject entrusted to him — is noticed. In addition, of course, the epistle has direct teaching on how it should affect us all].

Any person who would welcome comments on their written work should send it to Dr. Colin Curry, 71 Riverside Park, Otley, Yorkshire LS21 2RW.

Fellow Workers with Paul

T. D. SPICER

12. TIMOTHY

Many a believer has warmed to the shy, diffident character of Timothy. His personal qualities were not accepted as an excuse for backwardness in serving God however, and none of the 'fellow workers' was as close to Paul as he. A challenge never to use our shyness as an excuse for Christian laziness!

Of all the apostle Paul's fellow-workers none is of more interest than Timothy whom he describes as his 'beloved son, and faithful in the Lord' (1 Corinthians 4:17). There is no doubt that Paul loved Timothy and highly esteemed this young friend. Their relationship was an enduring one and Paul always knew that he could count on Timothy, for he was the kind of person who, in spite of his youth, his natural reserve and timidity, and his frequent ailments was willing to leave his home to accompany the apostle on hazardous itineraries, to be sent on difficult errands and to remain faithful in all things.

His training

Timothy was an inhabitant of Lystra in Asia Minor and the result of a mixed marriage, having a pagan Greek father and a devout Jewish mother, Eunice. From the days of his childhood, Timothy had been taught in the writings of the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:15). This early training should not be overlooked. It was biblical instruction. For our part, we are richer than he was since we also possess the New

Testament and this increases our responsibility and the weight we should attach to the whole Bible as a means of instruction.

We should notice, however, not only the method but the spiritual principle which was at work. In the book of the Acts the faith of Eunice is specifically mentioned and we see from what the apostle writes in 2 Timothy 1:5 that it was the driving force in both her life and her mother's — 'when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith . . . which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice. . . .' Here is instruction for those with Christian homes concerning the upbringing of children, and there is encouragement in the results which may confidently be expected from such training.

Moving forward with Timothy's career we are able to note something else before we reach the point where the first mention of him occurs in the Acts' history. Paul had been in Lystra prior to the time when this young disciple joined him as a travelling companion. In 1 Timothy 1:2 the apostle writes of him as his 'own son in the faith', which would seem to imply that he was used towards his conversion. On the occasion of this second visit to Lystra, Eunice is described as already being a believer. These circumstances lead to the conclusion that Timothy was probably converted on the occasion of the apostle's first visit. Confirmation of this would seem to come from the passage in the second epistle to Timothy where we read that he had known and followed the 'persecutions' and 'afflictions' which had come to Paul at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (2 Timothy 3:11). These sufferings had occurred on the apostle's first visit and the geographical order in which the names are given is precisely the same as that in which he experienced these trials.

This leads to the thought that sufferings and ill treatment were incurred by one who was obviously loved and respected, and these made a deep and lasting impression on a young mind. So we can see in this early acquaintance of Paul and Timothy the foundations of a warm attachment and allegiance of the one to the other.

His appointment

When the time came that Barnabas was no longer Paul's companion and Silas was co-opted to take his place, we are introduced to Timothy's association with the apostle in the work of the Gospel. We have now passed into the period of the second missionary journey and this point in the history is carefully marked by Luke, the historian; in it we find helpful instruction regarding the duty of those in positions of responsibility concerning the qualifications of Christian workers.

This passage (Acts 15:36-16:3) should be set alongside sentences in the two letters to Timothy. In these letters Paul urges the memory of his mother and grandmother to stimulate Timothy to consistency and progress in the work of the Lord, and exhorts him to 'stir up the gift of

God' which had been given to him (2 Timothy 1:6). Evidence is also supplied as to his personal character at this time for we read that he was 'well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium' (Acts 16:2). A further reason for Paul's choice of Timothy is found in the words which follow, 'him would Paul have to go forth with him'. The apostle seems to have discovered at the very beginning, to quote the phrase which he used afterwards of his friend, that he was 'like-minded' with him (Philippians 2:20).

Another point regarding his fitness for missionary work should also be noted. This was a crisis period in the history of the church with regard to the relation between Judaism and Christianity. It is unnecessary today to elaborate in order to show that in such a choice of a fellow-worker for future labours there was a particular sensitivity in selecting one whose mother was a Jewess while 'his father was a Greek' (Acts 16:1).

His work in Macedonia

Now we find Timothy taking part in the whole itinerary and becoming one of the founders of the assemblies at Philippi and Thessalonica. His name is not mentioned by Luke in connection with either place, but we have the apostle's own testimony of his faithfulness at the former city, 'ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel' (Philippians 2:22). He was not imprisoned there with Paul and Silas and this may have been on account of his comparative youth. We can trace his status by the order of the three names in the epistles written shortly afterwards to Thessalonica and we should notice that these epistles imply that he was well known in that city (1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1).

When the party moved on to Berea we find Timothy brought into the discussion on the scriptures with which he had been so familiar since his childhood; and it is stated that he and Silas were left behind in Macedonia with instructions to rejoin the apostle and we learn that they eventually did so in Corinth (Acts 17:14-15 and 18:5).

Paul had no companion with him in Athens, but we discover how much he was encouraged and strengthened by the presence of his friends when they met up with him. The epistles to Thessalonica, written after the arrival of Timothy, show the high estimate which Paul had formed of him. In allusion to the mission with which he had been charged, he describes him as his 'brother, and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ' (1 Thessalonians 3:2). We should also notice the confidence implied in the mission itself. Serious troubles had occurred in Thessalonica and this young disciple was sent to 'establish' them and to 'comfort' them concerning their faith so that they should not be moved by these afflictions' (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3).

We are unable to determine what Timothy did in the interval

between the residence at Corinth and the beginning of the third missionary journey. He and Silas were together with the apostle at Corinth and there is every reason to believe that they travelled with him to the 'feast at Jerusalem', touching at Ephesus on the way (Acts 18:21). We cannot now trace Silas in company with Paul on the subsequent journey, but Timothy is with him still. While the apostle remains at Ephesus, Timothy crosses over on an errand into Macedonia at his request and this time his name is associated with that of Erastus (Acts 19:22). In this we see the same obedience and devotion on the part of Timothy, and the same confidence on the part of Paul.

His work in Corinth

Of Timothy's commission at this time we have no precise details; but if he was commissioned to endeavour to assuage the party spirit and to correct abuses at Corinth, exceptional qualities of character were implied and the terms in which he is spoken of in the first epistle to the Corinthians deserve our attention. Paul writes, 'I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church' (1 Corinthians 4:17).

Nothing can be more expressive of a deep affection and confidential trust; and we may deduce that if Timothy knew so well what the apostle taught, 'every where in every church' then he had been with him in many places, although we do not always find mention of his name. Later in the same letter we read, 'If Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do' (1 Corinthians 16:10).

These two friends had now been associated together in the work of the Lord for a long time during which many new circumstances must have arisen severely testing Timothy's character; the confidence, however, of the apostle had not diminished, but rather increased. The relationship remained the same as it had always been, and if the expression 'without fear' implies a shy, retiring disposition then it helps us to appreciate better the affection and concern which the apostle had for his friend.

It would not appear that Timothy was with Paul on the journey which ultimately took him to Rome, but during the apostle's first imprisonment there they were certainly in close contact once again for in the opening greetings of the letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, all written from Rome, the two names are once again linked together. So we find an unbroken, close relationship which withstood the test of time and change of circumstance.

His character

In the Philippian letter there is a passage concerning Timothy which

gives us much information concerning the character of this servant of Christ and companion to the apostle. It is found in chapter 2, verses 19-23 where Paul contrasts him with others as being completely 'likeminded' as himself and as one who would take an honest and genuine interest in the welfare of the Philippians. Paul also asserts that Timothy has always served him well as distinct from those who 'seek their own' things.

There remain two letters written to Timothy personally, the first of which reached him in Ephesus and is full of practical advice concerning assembly matters and the preservation of a life of holiness. Again the great trust which the apostle rested in Timothy is evident; for he is to refute false teaching, set in order assembly practices and, above all, to be an example to all 'in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity' (1 Timothy 4:12). Later another letter arrived in which Paul, again writing from imprisonment in Rome and facing death, urges his friend to come to him before winter (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). 'The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus . . . bring . . . and the books, but especially the parchments' (2 Timothy 4:13). Our curiosity is aroused and we would like to know what these were, but nothing more is said about them and we are left with our imagination.

Whether these two friends ever met one another again for their mutual help and encouragement we cannot say, there is nothing in the record. That Timothy made every endeavour to set out for Rome with the cloak and the books we may be sure. It would certainly be entirely consonant with what we have come to understand of the character and devotion of this fellow-worker of the apostle Paul.

Peace, Hope, Love

ALLAN RETALLICK

'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5:1).

A meditation on three key words in Romans 5:1-5.

When the risen Lord appeared to the disciples, as recorded in John 20, He said twice to them: 'Peace be unto you'. On the first occasion He showed them His hands and His side. Peace was theirs in virtue of His finished work. The next time He added the words: 'As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you'. This was, we may say, His own peace,

which He had already promised to them before the cross, when in the upper room He could prepare their hearts for that which lay before them. We remember that Thomas was not present on that first day of the week, but a week later the Lord appeared again, when Thomas was present, and again spoke peace to them all, including one who would not believe unless he saw — typical, no doubt, of the nation of Israel who will turn to Him when they behold Him coming in power and glory. Future peace for Israel, as for the whole world, is founded upon the work of our blessed Lord. Of this we are reminded at the end of Romans 4, which speaks of His being 'delivered for our offences, and . . . raised again for our justification'. This chapter follows immediately with 'therefore'.

In Leviticus 14 the cleansed leper had to bring two birds, alive and clean, to the priest. One was killed over running water, the other dipped with the cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop in the blood of the dead bird and let loose into the open field. The blood of the dead bird was applied to the leper, but the living bird was out of sight — a picture of the One that is 'gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God' (1 Peter 3:22). The cleansed leper could eventually go back into the camp from which his leprosy had excluded him, and no one could deny his right to participate in the worship and fellowship of God's earthly people. So we, in virtue of the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord, have 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. In Ephesians 2 we read that the former Gentile sinners were now made nigh by the blood of Christ, 'for He is our peace'. In the next verse we read that He made peace, reconciling both Jew and Gentile to God by His death on the cross, and again in verse 17 that He 'came and preached peace' to those far off [the Gentiles] as well as to those that were nigh [the Jews]. Not only is the question of our sins and our sinful nature dealt with by this finished work, but we also have access into the very presence of a holy God, no longer with fear and trembling, but as beloved children. Then too we can revel in 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding' (Philippians 4:7), which garrisons our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. There is no blessing outside of Christ, but in Christ is every blessing.

This brings us to the next subject of this chapter: 'We . . . rejoice in *hope* of the glory of God'. The enemy of souls has succeeded in robbing many of our words of their original significance. When people say that they hope to do this or that, there is always an element of doubt in the matter, but hope in the Bible is certainty, an anchor, 'sure and stedfast' — as Hebrews expresses it. Even the word 'expect', once more meaningful, has not the same certainty of meaning as formerly. What do we hope for, what do we expect? The glory of God. The eighth chapter develops the subject in some detail. The apostle there points out that what we possess can never be a subject of hope, but that which

we know we shall possess with the certainty of faith in the promise of God. 'If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it' (Romans 8:25). The apostle speaks of 'the glory which shall be revealed'. The Holy Spirit has already prepared our hearts by revealing much of the future, but our limited earthly capacities cannot comprehend the glorious revelation of God's beloved Son — and we shall share that glory, in answer to the prayer of our blessed Lord in John 17. To the whole universe will be displayed the glory of the One who was despised and rejected of men, the Man of sorrows, who shall there be displayed with all His own — the fruit of the travail of His soul. This is called in another place 'the blessed hope'. It is also a refining hope. John tells us that 'every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure'. Unlike the unfaithful servant in Luke 12, who says: 'My lord delayeth his coming', and eats and drinks, gets drunk and beats his fellow-servants, the true disciple echoes the words of Peter: 'Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless' (2 Peter 3:14). 'We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. May we be preserved from losing our hope. When David lost sight of the promise of God that he would one day be king, he went down to Philistia, and sank lower and lower, until even his own men were ready to stone him. It was then that he 'strengthened himself in the Lord his God', and the spirit of hope enabled him to recover all that he had lost. The Psalmist asks: 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God' (Psalm 42:5).

While we wait for that glorious moment when we shall see our Lord, we pass through many experiences, as the next verses remind us: tribulations of one kind and another. We need patience — endurance — as we are reminded so many times in the New Testament. This chapter teaches us that these very circumstances through which we pass are used for blessing. We see progress here: 'Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.' So eventually even the tribulations through which we pass are used, in the wisdom of God, to kindle hope in our hearts — an eager waiting for the fulfilment of the Lord's promise: 'Surely I come quickly'.

Finally this hope is realised in the believer by means of the third quality mentioned in our chapter — *love*. 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.' It is the Spirit's delight to glorify Christ, and to engage the believer with Him. John, the disciple who was so conscious of the Lord's love to him, points out that 'we love Him, because He first loved us'. It could not be otherwise, but the more we are aware of His love to us, the more our own love to Him is deepened, although we

may often have to confess like Peter, conscious of our own feeble affection: 'Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee'. The apostle goes on to speak of the activity of God's love: 'God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. Can we ever forget that evidence of divine love for the undeserving? In chapter 8 we are reminded that He 'spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all'. Who can measure love like this? That chapter concludes with the precious words: 'I am persuaded that neither death, nor life . . . nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'. May we then, as Jude exhorts us, keep ourselves in the love of God, holding the truth *in love*, showing brotherly love one to another, and showing our love to our Lord by keeping His commandments.

Four Pilgrims

JOHN BARNES

Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Isaac all lived as seeing the Invisible. But as the circumstances of each differed, so this faith worked out in slightly different ways in each case.

In the book of Genesis, four of the patriarchs whose lives are touched on are thought of as walking with or before God. They are Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Isaac. There would seem to be a slightly different emphasis in each case which it may be of profit to consider.

Anticipation of rapture

Enoch walked with God with the light of rapture shining in his heart. The effect of hope is that it detaches one from undue occupation with present circumstances and attaches one more firmly to the object hoped for. There is not the least doubt that Enoch knew that he would be raptured into the presence of the Lord. We are told in Romans 10 that, 'faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God'. The word 'hearing' can be rendered 'report'. Faith is not some kind of superior or religious optimism which, despite gloomy surroundings, cheerfully 'looks on the bright side'. In fact, faith depends on and acts on the word of God and so is not a leap in the dark but a step in the light of a communication from God. In Hebrews II we read: '*By faith* Enoch was translated that he should not see death'. So it is certain that for a number of years, perhaps for as long as three hundred, Enoch walked with God with that anticipation burning brightly in his heart. He knew that he would not die in the manner of the generations around

him whose depressing history was punctuated by the solemn climax, 'And he died'. His hope was in the God of hope, the living God, and of life with Him to continue without passing through death at all.

Assurance of salvation

Without referring to the relative dispensational aspects of the history of Enoch and Noah it is nonetheless clear that in their walk with God, each was governed by a somewhat different concept. Enoch knew that judgement was coming, but the hope of being translated buoyed him up to look for that happy transfer before judgement descended on a guilty world. In his prophecy, recorded by Jude, he speaks of the Lord coming with ten thousands of His saints: they would come *with Him*. Noah also knew that judgement was to come. Like Enoch, he was in touch with the Lord who told him of what He planned to do and instructed him to prepare an ark for the *saving* of his house. Noah and his family would not be saved before the judgement fell but would be divinely protected through it and would emerge in safety on the other side to have part in a new order cleansed of the generation which had brought such shame and dishonour into the world. Noah walked with God in the faith of this salvation. For those long years, perhaps more than a hundred, he laboured at the building of the ark, this very work testifying to his profound belief in the truth of God's communications to him. The earth would be overflowed with water and man and beast destroyed except those in the safety of the ark. In the dark century through which his great work proceeded slowly to its completion, Noah walked with God in the light of salvation from universal disaster, a salvation rooted in the promise God had given him.

Apprehension of the heavenly city

Following a communication from the Lord, Abraham had abandoned a wealthy earthly city, Ur of the Chaldees, in order to migrate into a land which the Lord would show him. Modern excavations have revealed that Ur was no rural village but a city of complex structure. Those who have studied its remains believe it to have been a centre of an advanced society and a thriving community. In response to the Lord's call Abraham and his wife left Ur and journeyed to Canaan. He did not however receive a city there nor indeed any place of permanent residence. He eventually acquired a plot of land, but even then by purchase and that for a burial ground in which to lay the precious remains of his beloved wife and fellow-servant of the Lord, Sarah. In this plot he was eventually to be laid also. Had he then given up the comforts and civilisation of Ur for nothing? Not for nothing. His posterity would yet inherit the land in which he walked as a stranger, but Abraham himself looked on beyond that and above it to a greater and more enduring inheritance. He looked for a city which has stable and

eternal foundations, whose Architect and Artificer is God. In the faith of that he walked before God, willingly accepting strangership in the land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who accepted in their own generation the pilgrim character which marked their great forebear. As his feet trod the rocky miles of Canaan's uplands, the vision of the city of God shone before his soul and encouraged him to go on. He knew that his feet would yet tread the golden streets and the hope of it lifted him above his circumstances, often trying, into communion with his God, the mighty Planner of that great city who is also its Builder.

Appreciation of the heavenly calling

Isaac succeeded his father in the path of strangership and is the fourth of that distinguished company who walked with God. Though in some respects he does not catch the eye as a man of very marked character such as his father Abraham, there are typical features in his life of great interest. For example he never left the land. Born in Canaan, he lived wholly there and died there. If Canaan is taken to be typical of the heavenlies, as many understand it to be, this is an interesting consideration. Isaac did not immigrate into the land as did Abraham; he did not go to seek his wife abroad as Jacob did at a later date. Isaac's wife was sent for and brought to him in the land. He did not go down into Egypt as both Abraham and Jacob did, but he remained within the confines of the land at all times. His purpose to do so and to live entirely in the land and on its resources is emphasised by the fact that he reopened the wells which Abraham had dug and which the Philistines had filled in. He also sowed 'in that land' (Genesis 26). He would seem to have arrived at an understanding that this was indeed the land of promise and, in the exercise of his soul, he determined to obtain its fruits and benefits. In response to his faith, the Lord 'blessed him' (Genesis 26:12).

If we think of this transposed into Ephesian terms our minds would immediately run to that grand statement, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing', and in the faith of our souls we can be enabled to walk its invigorating heights and enjoy communion with the Father and the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Each of the features we have considered in the lives of those saints of old may contain certain elements of application to ourselves in present-day conditions. However the first and fourth would appear to be of special interest to us. The heavenly calling of the assembly and the hope of the rapture are two precious truths for long lost sight of, but which were particularly illuminated to faith in the great spiritual recovery of the last century. They must surely be of great importance to the brethren today.

Conflict and Rest

O Glorious, changeless One! to trace
The sweet restorings of Thy grace
Is simply to proclaim Thee good,
Amidst each dark vicissitude.

Full oft, alas! with humbling smart
I've felt *how dreadful* was this heart,
Have known 'twas sin, and only sin,
And prayed for utter change within.

Such prayer, alas! though surely heard,
Was quite unanswered — not a word:
For self within was still as vile,
The heart abhorrent all the while.

How dear to me Thy changeless grace,
The smile of Thine unclouded face!
As Thou hast said, "Not changed in thee,
But judged, yea, crucified in me!"

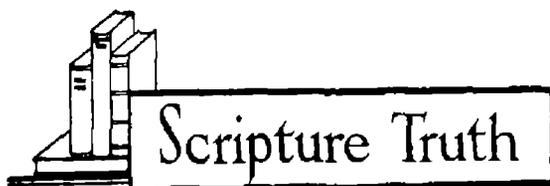
'Twas thus I saw upon the cross
That death had purged my *hellish dross*;
Not death in me, the death was Thine,
The full discharge from sin is mine.

Thus, too, I know my Saviour-God,
I'm free to tread the heavenly road:
Free now to dwell within the veil
Where sin and self no more assail.

In "heavenly places" there is fight:
Inside the veil there is no night!
As once of old where Aaron stood
No ills of earth could e'er intrude.

'Tis thus, dear Lord, I would abide,
Close sheltered, dwelling at Thy side;
As branch with vine, to live from Thee,
Thy life, alone, to live in me.

Thus may my soul be "dead to sin",
No other death have I within;
Thus may I yield my powers to God,
As one who's sanctified through blood.



(Incorporating *Words of Help*)

JANUARY, 1984

Christ Glorified

GORDON SPRATT

PART FOUR

The fourth of five studies of the places in John 13-17 where the Lord speaks of His glorification, and reaching perhaps the apex of the subject matter of the series.

“And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” John 17:5.

In the first verse of John, chapter 17, Jesus makes the request: “Father . . . glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee”. The glory spoken of is in contrast with the place He took in incarnation, a positional glory from which He is to exercise the power given to Him over all flesh. The glorifying of the Father, and the immeasurable blessing of those to whom the Son gives eternal life, are in view in His taking this place.

But it is not the only glory referred to in this chapter of glories. In verse 22 we read: “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them” — a glory given to Jesus as Man, and in turn communicated to those who are His. Surely this is the glory of sonship, a relationship proper to the one who is the Son, but reaching out to others through Him. “That we might receive sonship”, says Paul in Galatians 4 (JND Trans.). And this is John’s great presentation of unity. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:12, presents the unity of the Body of Christ. John here presents the unity of the divine Family: “That they may be one, even as we are one”.

A few verses later we have the words, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”. What is this glory? A glory given to Jesus and evidently unique to Him, but to be seen by His own. Surely it is the glory of the Son, taking full account of that relationship as it existed before the world was, and yet given to him in His Manhood too, in order that it might be displayed to those who are eternally to be in His company.

In one way or another the glories that we have noticed are connected with what we may, to some degree, understand or experience. But what are we to say when we read verse 5 of our chapter? "And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

It is not a glory to be seen by us; it is not a glory to be shared by us; it does not belong to the time scene; it is not connected with position or activity. It is a glory of relationship, a relationship divine and eternal, forever outside the comprehension of even the most favoured of creatures.

What has occurred in time, we may enquire into, and for the most part understand. What lies in future eternity, whilst entirely beyond our natural understanding, has nevertheless been declared to us in a spiritual revelation which gives it relevance and meaning. Not only so, but we shall enter into the enjoyment of it when the many sons are brought to glory. But what existed before God ever set out on His great creatorial programme, is another matter altogether. How impossible it is to conceive of God's illimitable existence before, apart from, and independent of any material substance. Even the words that we use to express our most spiritual thoughts are borrowed from the material world in which we exist. It can be no shame for creatures like us to take our humble place with Paul to own the supremacy of Him "who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honour and power everlasting".

And yet that which most exposes the boundaries of our finite vision, the most declares the glories of Him whose Person is beyond all human understanding. What a remarkable paradox that we should see in this verse 5, which relates so clearly to the divine and eternal glory of the Lord Jesus, an expression of the perfection of His Manhood. For we might well enquire why He should ask to receive a glory to which He had a perfect and eternal right. It can only be that, having become Man, His every act and utterance is in perfect consistency with that nature.

But there is more than perfect Manhood here: there is a relationship which only the Son can claim. And yet it is not specifically the relationship that is claimed, but the glory that belongs to it. The relationship was never broken, save perhaps in those dreadful hours on the Cross. The only begotten Son *is* in the bosom of the Father, characteristically so without respect to time or circumstance, and it is that abiding relationship which gives its distinctiveness to the way in which God has declared Himself. But, if the relationship remained, the glory that was proper to that relationship was laid aside when Jesus "made himself of no reputation". He who was rich, for our sakes became poor. He who dwelt in unapproachable light had not where to lay His head. And now, the work on earth completed, He claims again the glory: "the glory which I had

with thee before the world was”.

What can we say about that glory? Its great distinctiveness must be that it lies outside every glory that is connected with the created universe. There is a seventeenth century cartoon in which there are three drawings. The first shows the crown and robes of France, with the title “Le Roi”. The next shows a pretty insignificant specimen of humanity clad only in undergarments; it bears the title “Louis”. The third puts the first and second drawings together and, under the title “Le Roi Louis”, shows Louis XIV in all his royal splendour. It is a cruel comment on the nature of human glory.

Even when we think of the glory of God as it has been revealed, there is the need for a Mediator. For though we read in 2 Corinthians 4 that, “the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone in our hearts”, yet the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ. All that we shall ever know of the glory of God shines out in the Person of His Son.

But the glory that we are considering lies before and beyond the great activities of God in creation or in revelation. Beyond also the limitations of our vocabulary. Uncreated, intrinsic, ineffable, unexpressed, inexpressible, all these are words which declare the striving of our minds after understanding, and yet which fall always short of the incomprehensible truth. Outside the boundaries of intelligent human enquiry is a glory, in the recognition of which mere man can only take a creature's place in wonder and worship.

But the Son, unique in His divine and eternal being, though forever Man in a condition entered into in grace, lays claim to that glory, not because of what He has done or will do, nor even because of His moral excellence, but because of whom He is. How easily we can take pride in our tiny spiritual insights, how readily oppose our frail understanding to that of others in bleak theological debate. When we think of the greatness and glory of the Son, we must say with Job: “Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not”. For we are as little children paddling on the edge of a mighty ocean. The aged Paul, charged long ago with the revelation of the Mystery, privileged to be caught up to the third heaven, there to hear unspeakable things, able to declare at Ephesus all the counsel of God, nevertheless reaches a point where he exclaims: “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever, Amen”. It is a suitable place to conclude our meditation.

Aspects of New Testament Teaching

A STUDY COURSE

J. S. BLACKBURN and COLIN CURRY

This is the second instalment of a course of guided Bible study originally designed for people who wish to be seriously committed to serving God. An overview of the entire course was given in the November, 1983 issue, which also included the opening section of the Part of the course now being studied. It was about 'Broad aspects of the Church'.

PART I: THE CHURCH IN NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

Section B: Local aspects — 'the local assembly'

New Testament references. Please read:

Acts of the Apostles: the early church; the gospel proclaimed in a widening field, leading to the establishing and building of assemblies.

I Corinthians (particularly chapters 10-14): importance of the Lordship of Christ; behaviour 'in assembly'; 'decently and in order'.

I Timothy: on local order more generally.

Read also: Samuel Ridout, *The Church*, remainder of the book.*

As you read the scriptures, try to check what you find against the following outline:

1. The *nature* of a local assembly: a part and 'sample' of the whole church of God on earth, not an independent entity disconnected from the whole — it obeys the same Lord, is directed and supplied by the same Head in heaven — is empowered and led by the same Spirit — is taught and guided by the same Word of God. Principles are the same everywhere.
2. The early church in Jerusalem — its prominent marks form a *pattern* to maintain: unity — steadfast obedience to the apostles' teaching and fellowship — breaking of bread — prayers — mutual care and support — backing up those who preached the Word — a recognition of the Holy Spirit amongst them — awareness of the guarded and holy

* Chapters 1-2 were the 'set reading' in the last instalment. The book can be had from the publishers of this magazine.

behaviour consistent with His presence — proving the joy, and the enablement to serve the Lord which His presence provided.

3. *Gatherings* of the local assembly are in view in 1 Corinthians 10-14. Note the repeated phrase, 'when ye come together'. Various kinds of activities in meetings can be distinguished:

Breaking of bread: central, and quite vital, to keep the flame of proper response to our Lord burning brightly — the obligations and constraints that accompany a partaking of 'the Lord's supper' — also, flowing from the meditation on His love and death, *worship* should surely follow: response to the Father and the Son by the Spirit can, and surely should, happen in local gatherings.

Prayer: knowing and expressing our dependence is vital, for assemblies as well as individuals — outward-looking prayer is also important — 1 Timothy 2:1 gives prayer the first priority in a well-ordered local church.

Edification: mutual upbuilding in the local assembly gatherings — each is to fill his own part — variety of contributions but one harmonious activity, under the Holy Spirit — gifts of the One Spirit — Spirit led ministry — the use and the curbs on the use of these gifts — love to motivate all and to show itself thereby — the clear, profitable, constructive and loving contributions carry the hallmark of the Spirit.

4. *General order* and responsibilities in the local assembly: various points can be found in several places in the epistles — e.g. assembly backing and support for servants of the Lord, for brethren elsewhere, finances and practical matters, chores, liberality in personal and assembly giving.

1 Timothy particularly speaks about 'behaviour in the house of God', to be worked out in the local context at Ephesus, under Timothy's guidance — godly behaviour on the part of the individual (Timothy, in the first instance) is to support and commend the authoritative instruction about good, orderly and godly conduct in the whole local assembly. Instruction about personal godliness (chapter 4) falls within a sequence of guidelines about many issues in a local situation: prayer, suitable decorum for men, women, older people, younger, widows, servants, rich people in the local church. Special dangers are noticed: discontent, lack of purity and energy, empty occupations, misleading teachings and influences. The truth is to be distinguished from error, to be valued and obeyed.

5. *Local responsibilities* need to be felt, and shouldered, by suitable persons — such persons are to be respected and honoured and their guidance accepted — qualifications for 'bishops' (i.e. overseers), elders, 'deacons' (servants assisting in various ways) are mostly

relating to their moral and spiritual qualities, their reliability and co-operativeness — the exercise of these services is still needful, though official status in these areas is no longer justifiable from scripture — church government is not a heavy handed imposition of rules (decided perhaps by a higher 'body') but a gracious action by those that are channels of the Lord's will, in accord with the Word of God.

6. *Church discipline*: involves steering believers into right channels of behavior — and obedience to those guidelines too (basically, scriptural guidelines) — thus believers in a local area can be 'in rank', in common and in agreement with other assemblies elsewhere. Serious disciplinary action is required in some situations — evil and wicked behaviour demands it — active propagation of false teaching, especially on fundamental matters, cannot be tolerated — liaison with what dishonours the Lord or undermines faith or is a corrupt version of Christianity must be avoided — judgement in these areas is a delicate matter, requiring grace, fairness and the hope of recovery of persons involved. Extreme disciplinary actions are actions of the whole assembly, conscious of the Lord's presence and control and of the need for humility amongst those who look for the Spirit's guidance on such issues. [Ridout has a whole chapter on discipline; perhaps more on this than on other things. There is also a full chapter on Ministry which is informative and helpful.]

Written work on Section B. Make your own summary of principal points to be noted under the heading 'The New Testament pattern of the local church'. Two thousand words will perhaps be about right. Anyone interested in 'feedback' on what they have written should send it to Dr. Colin Curry, 71 Riverside Park, Otley, Yorks LS21 2RW, who will be pleased to supply (constructive!) comments.

Section C: Common deviations from biblical church order

On this subject a thorough and orderly study would be a major project: perhaps not a highly profitable one. Church procedures which are not scripture-based are common. Some run counter to scripture, and others are extra-scriptural (in the sense of going far beyond its guidance in these matters). As a brief venture into this area the following topics should be given consideration, setting them alongside biblical teaching. A helpful procedure in itself would be to read through Ridout picking out sentences and paragraphs where he contrasts common practices with the New Testament pattern.

The national Church — the 'Church' as a body with political influence — the 'Church' as teacher — ecclesiasticism and hierarchies in the church — outward show and formalism in church services — priests

and laity — Old Testament forms copied in the New Testament situation — litanies, creeds, articles and prayer books — parochialism (i.e. dividing the country into 'parishes') — congregationalism — general synods — general assemblies — the 'world church' idea — rule by human decree from above — apostolic succession — ordination — one man ministry — pseudo-spirituality and spiritual elitism.

No written work is asked on this Section, but Appendix I should be consulted. This is a brief but nevertheless factual statement which highlights some of the main lines of deviation, within which most of the separate topics listed above fall.

APPENDIX I EPISCOPACY, PRESBYTERIANISM, PENTECOSTALISM

The meetings began because J. N. Darby was led to realise that Christendom contained nothing at all of the 'biblical church order'. The denominations are *en masse* disobedient to God's revealed Word in the matter of such order (see especially 1 Corinthians 14:37). (It is most important to understand that the statements made so categorically above relate only to Church Order. At the individual level we honour greatly the love and devoted discipleship seen so very widely, from the great leaders like Luther or Hudson Taylor to the brother or sister we rub shoulders with 'by the way'.) Christendom then, is a mass of undiluted 'deviation'. 'Deviation' is not some rare thing encountered occasionally, but the general rule throughout the Christian profession. (See the section of this Bible Study on Separation; in II B.) The worker in Christ's vineyard needs to be aware of the nature of these deviations for his guidance in his contacts with other workers in the field.

Of unique importance since it is the oldest and most globally widespread today, is the deviation we will consider under the name 'episcopacy'. As this name indicates, it means the system of Church organisation which centres on *bishops*, together with the complex system of doctrine enshrined in it. Episcopacy is most completely seen in the Roman Catholic Church, but historical primacy belongs to the Orthodox Eastern Church. Episcopacy is very fully seen in the Church of England, and the Anglican Communion in all parts of the world. The Methodist Church in U.S.A. was originally episcopal, the Methodist Episcopal Church of America. The deviations in organisation and doctrine seen in episcopacy are so wide and deep that a few hints only can be given. First, although episcopacy has an air of truth to Scripture in that the N.T. does speak of bishops, the likeness ends with the word: the bishops of the N.T. and of modern episcopacy have no other points of resemblance. See 1 Peter 5:2,3. There was a plurality of bishops in the N.T. churches; in episcopacy one bishop exercises all church authority in a diocese. Next episcopacy is a worldly system. The bishops of Rome claim authority over secular governments. The Church of England is a branch of the state with the sovereign at its head. The utterly unworldly character of the true church is seen everywhere in the N.T. In doctrine, beside adherence to the Creeds on the positive side, there is mortal error on the way of salvation, which is by the sacraments of the Church. Though there are unquestionably true children of God in the Catholic Church, a hand stretched out from it is stained with the blood of the martyrs past and future, and this is a terrible deviation from the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Consider next the deviations, also in organisation and doctrine, grouped under the name *presbyterian*. (Let us take it that the closely related word 'reformed' applies rather to doctrine as distinct from organisation.) Although Luther was the first reformer, the 'reformed faith' and the presbyterian system spring uniquely from Calvin. The word

presbyterianism signifies the Church system centring on elders, and this, as in episcopacy, gives an air of conformity to Scripture not borne out by closer examination. It is said that the church system of presbyterianism is seen most complete in the Church of Scotland, but the system is strong in all protestant countries. Moreover, since the Marian refugees from persecution in England fled to sit at Calvin's feet in Geneva, the 'reformed faith' has never lost its hold on Anglican evangelicals. Also, the sections not bearing the name presbyterian, but arising in England in the 17th century, and immediately exported to the new lands in America, depended for doctrine very heavily on Calvin. Calvinism is strong in Holland and in Switzerland, and is represented in France. The deviations inherent in Calvin's system ought to be studied with great care, but only a few hints can be given here. Calvin's was a worldly system: he and his church ruled Geneva mercilessly; and it is established in Scotland. One only has to read the *Institutes* (and everyone should glance at them), to see that Calvin, after saying loudly that Scripture is the only authority, and starting from a few Scriptures, proceeds to erect a system in simple disobedience to Scripture. His ministers do not exist there at all; his elders are not the Bible elders, because of the existence of the minister; his hierarchy of governing councils is pure expediency, while being ostensibly based on Acts 15. In doctrine, Calvin confessed the fundamentals, including the Trinity, the Person of Christ, and justification by faith; but his doctrinal system is characterised by such gravely anti-scriptural teachings as to be fatal to fellowship. These include: the church is one from the beginning of Scripture, denying the distinct call and destiny of the church relative to Israel; there is to be no earthly reign of Christ (the millennium); the law of Moses is the rule of life for the Christian.

One further system of deviations from Scripture must find a place in this survey; the communities to which the words *Pentecostal* and *Charismatic* apply. These also have an even greater air of adhesion to Scripture, since the Holy Spirit was indeed given at Pentecost, an event of supreme importance; and the Greek word 'charisma' finds an important place in the N.T. Characteristic of this system — a complex exhibiting many variations — is the idea that a full gospel should lead to the manifestation of the miraculous gifts which unquestionably were experienced in the N.T. church. 'Brethren' encountered this system in full force at their beginning in the activities of Edward Irving. They rejected it on grounds which are clearly on record, purely Scriptural, and within a short time that particular manifestation collapsed through the admission of the most prominent witnesses that they had invented the experiences on which their movement depended. Deviations are often a matter of wrong emphasis. In the N.T. passages where charismata appear — especially 1 Corinthians 11 to 14 — the emphasis is on edification. This is to be the principal test to identify the real activity of the Holy Spirit in the gathered church. By that test, tongues is allocated a low place in the scale of values at the end of chapter 12. That Scripture seems to conclude that if that gift is not possessed, it is not to be sought; rather, seek something better. This seeking tongues is exactly what charismatic devotees do; where the gift is absent, they seek, and watch, and wait and pray, until a gift is manifested. This is flat disobedience to 1 Corinthians 12:31. It is notorious that those who are delivered from the system witness that edification through understanding takes a very inferior place. Indeed the great heart of the N.T. revelation: the place of the Church in the counsel of the Father and in the love of Christ; the revelation and declaration of the Father; intelligent worship in spirit and in the Spirit, receive very little attention. Another clear deviation, this time of such a nature as to make the whole system a gigantic delusion, relates to tongues. The tongues miraculously given at Pentecost were real languages, the mother tongues of the foreigners listening (Acts 2:6,11). There is absolutely no reason to believe that the tongues spoken later in Acts and at Corinth were not also real languages. This is not true of the contemporary tongues movement, and is not claimed. This fact renders spurious the whole movement.

A very important point remains to be made. The practices and teachings noted above are deviations in the sense that they are not found in Scripture. But with all these systems there is deviation in the sense that the positive wonders of divine truth relating to the

church are left unknown. Their practices in various degrees and ways displace the unhampered action of the Holy Spirit by substituting human arrangements. God is displaced by man. A moment's reflection shows that it is not surprising that the first 'brethren' called it 'the sin against the Holy Ghost'. But let us reflect on the wonderful blessings to be found in obedience to the Word of God; it is better than sacrifice: in cleaving to the divine order in meetings; to count positively on the Holy Spirit, left untrammelled to take of Christ's things and show them to us, to lead us into all the truth. There is also the personal action of the Lord Jesus in the assembly: declaring the Father's name: leading His brethren's praise rising to the Father.

The Holy One of Israel

ALLAN RETALLICK

Isaiah speaks more often of God as the 'Holy One' than any other biblical writer. His employment of this Name is a reminder of the unchanging claims of God, but also of His ceaseless mercy towards His people: He remains, 'the Holy One of Israel'.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm, it was in order that they should be for Him a nation of priests, a holy nation. Their history throughout the ages, as we know, was quite inconsistent with their unique, privileged position. No sooner had they heard the voice of God commanding them to have no other gods before Him, than they begged Aaron to make them 'gods, who will go before us' — a golden calf. Much later in their history He had to say of them: "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2: 13).

After the kingdom was divided, on the death of King Solomon, the northern kingdom had a succession of idolatrous kings, beginning with Jeroboam, who set up *two* golden calves, and thus 'made Israel to sin', as we are constantly reminded afterwards. Under these monarchs the peoples' morals sank to a very low level, until the Assyrians took them away into captivity. Not that God ever left Himself without witness: Elijah and Elisha, as well as other prophets, were raised up to remind them that they were still God's peculiar people, but these voices were not heeded.

Judah, warned time and again, and favoured by having several faithful kings, followed the example of its northern neighbour. Even godly kings like Jehoshaphat allied themselves with the ungodly kings of Israel, and even the temple worship was but a mere form. It is noticeable that the prophet Isaiah — whose period of service extended from the end of the godly but disobedient king Uzziah's reign until, probably, the end of Hezekiah's — used more than any other the expression 'The Holy One

of Israel'. It is true, we find this expression three times in the Psalms (71:22, 78:41 and 89:18), but, apart from Jeremiah and Ezekiel (the former twice and the latter but once), Isaiah is the only prophet to use this divine title. In the first chapter of his prophecy he tells them that they have 'provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger' by their vain oblations. The temple was still standing, and the priests stood as always to carry out their service, but there was no heart in it, because they failed to recognise the 'Holy One of Israel' who deigned to dwell among them. 'Holiness becometh thine house', said the psalmist; and holiness becomes those that claim to be God's people. His words to them at the beginning of their national history had been, 'Be ye holy: for I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 20:7). Now He has to say to them, 'When ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood' (Isaiah 1:15). As He had reminded them earlier, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider' (verse 3).

Who then is this 'Holy One of Israel'? First I would remark that the very title is a striking evidence of God's grace and forbearance with His wayward people. Just as, centuries before, He had deigned to say, 'I am the God of Jacob', the scheming, bargaining forefather of the nation, so now He is not ashamed to couple His holy name with that of the people that He had made His own. We have to read the whole book through to see how this was possible, for we know, in the light of complete revelation, that it was only because of the suffering Messiah of chapters 49 and 53 that God could become the 'Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus'.

First, then, we see that this 'Holy One' is the Creator. In Isaiah 43:15, for example, He says, 'I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King'. Other references are 17:7, 41:20, 45:11. If upon no other ground, surely Israel owed allegiance to the One that had taken up their impoverished forefather, 'a Syrian ready to perish', and made of him a great and populous nation. Not only was He the 'Creator of the ends of the earth', but He had a special interest in this nation that He had taken up to be His praise and glory in the earth. How sad to see that they were so unimpressed by this appeal that they 'despised the word of the Holy One of Israel' (5:24). This is emphasised by the text that we read in verse 19 of that same chapter. 'Let Him make speed, and hasten His work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!' What folly to challenge their Creator in this way! 'Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!' warns Amos (5:18). He goes on to say, 'the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light' for the unbeliever. How many take the 'Lord's prayer' on their lips week by week, without thinking how unprepared they are for that kingdom for which they pray. There are many references to 'that day' in Isaiah's writings, and he describes it as a 'day of visitation' (10:3), a 'day of

vengeance' (61:2, 63:4) and even 'the day of His fierce anger' (13:13). 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10:31). We must also remember that 'the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain' (Exodus 20:7). In these days of increasing profanity, the believer should beware of falling into the sin that characterised Israel and Judah of old.

Then we are told, again and again, that this 'Holy One of Israel' is the Redeemer. In chapter 41:14 we have one of the many 'fear nots' of the Bible. 'Fear thou not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel'. This theme is taken up so many times in this latter part of Isaiah that 'time would fail' to mention them all. Israel's history as a nation began with the death of the Passover lamb and the sprinkled blood that distinguished the houses of the Israelites from the Egyptian houses, where 'there was not a house where there was not one dead'. From that hour they were a redeemed people, and God would not let them forget this. Since all these things were written for our learning, it is well for us, as believers in the Lord Jesus, to remember that we are not our own: we are bought with a price. 'Oh, that we never might forget what Christ has suffered for our sake!' In Isaiah 48:17 their Redeemer appeals to them: 'Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go'. They should have known that the way that He chose for them would have been the best, and yet He has to plead with them in the next verse: 'O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea'. What prosperity might have been theirs if only they had listened! In chapter 30:15 we find the name coupled with another divine title that is used over thirty times by Isaiah: 'The Lord Jehovah'. This verse is so often quoted that most of us know the first part of the promise by heart: 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' How gracious of the Holy One of Israel! but He adds, 'and ye would not'. Do the words of our blessed Lord fall upon deaf ears? Does He have to say to us, as to His earthly people, 'How oft would I . . . but ye would not'?

On the occasion of the Assyrian invasion and siege of Jerusalem, as recorded in 2 Kings 18 and Isaiah 36, we find that the godly king Hezekiah laid the boastful letter of the Assyrian general before the Lord, and Isaiah was entrusted with God's answer to the king's prayer. The message contained a solemn warning to the infidel leader. He was reminded that, in reproaching the Jews, he was lifting up his hand against God Himself. In Isaiah 37:23 He asks: 'Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.' Zechariah was given the message to the rebellious nations that preyed upon the despised

people of God, that to touch them was to touch the apple of His eye. This still stands, and nations are warned against oppressing the Jews or dividing their land — His land. The enemy would return by the way that he came, said God to Hezekiah, 'for I will defend this city to save it for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake' (Isaiah 37:35). If His earthly people were so precious, how precious must be those that form part of His heavenly bride!

Isaiah was given a message of hope for the despised and unfaithful people. God has still a future for them. In chapter 55, verse 5, He says, 'Nations that knew thee not shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee.' The time would come, as we read in chapter 60:14, that this city, that in chapter 1 has earned the name of Sodom, should be called the city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Their sun would no more go down, 'for the Lord be thine everlasting light' (verse 20), and 'thy people also shall be all righteous'. The God whose name had been dragged down into the dust by their unfaithfulness, would finally be glorified in the very place where, centuries before, He had declared that His eyes and His heart would be perpetually (1 Kings 9:3). We know that even Solomon and his successors failed to give glory to the Holy One of Israel, but when He comes, whose right it is to reign, once more Jerusalem will be the joy of the whole earth. In this connection it may be interesting to see Ezekiel's reference to this divine name. In chapters 38 and 39 he describes the still future battle and judgments of the guilty nations, and then the Lord says, 'So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel' (39:7).

While these references to an Old Testament name of the God of Israel may be interesting, has it any bearing on us in this day of grace? We do know that the things that happened to Israel of old 'are written for our admonition'. When we read Peter's words, 'As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation', we must surely read on to remind our hearts that we are redeemed with 'the precious blood of Christ'. In the next chapter, too, he reminds his readers that they are 'an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light'. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification' (1 Thessalonians 4:3). But perhaps even more striking are the words spoken by the glorified Lord to the assembly at Philadelphia: 'These things saith He that is holy, He that is true' (Revelation 3:7). Not only when we gather to the name of this Holy One, conscious of His presence in the midst of His own, but day by day, in the midst of our ordinary tasks and duties, we need to be reminded that we are indwelt by the *Holy Spirit*, the Spirit of truth, who delights to engage our hearts with this blessed Person, so that Christ may truly be formed in us. May we

respond to the plea of the apostle Paul to the Romans: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, *holy* acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service' (Romans 12:1).

The Present Purpose of God

J. T. MAWSON and H. D. R. JAMESON

Scripture Truth first appeared seventy-five years ago this month. It was a monthly magazine, of larger format than at present, and contained about thirty-two pages! To judge by the title its editors selected for it and the subject matter of many articles, attacks on the truthfulness of the scriptures, perhaps particularly those mounted within Christendom by 'higher criticism', were bewildering many believers at the time: the editors were clearly concerned to deal with a pressing contemporary problem. Confession of the authority and perfection of holy scripture remains a basic aim of the magazine today. Further evidence about the exercises that initiated it comes in an article contributed that year by both editors jointly (vol. 1, pp 161-2). It is worth reprinting as a timely statement of things that remain programmatic for Scripture Truth.

There are two things that ought to have a governing place in the hearts of all God's people on earth, two things that should have this place because they are the direct outcome of the sufferings and death of Jesus, and not merely the outcome, but the very cause of those sufferings, for they form the great purpose of God that lay behind that mystery of sorrow and woe. These two things are, on the one hand the Gospel of the glory of Christ going out to every creature under heaven (2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:23), and on the other hand the gathering together in one of the children of God that were scattered abroad (John 11:52).

The Gospel in its magnificent universality, and the binding together in an indivisible unity of all who believe it: this is the intent of eternal love; for this the Son of God suffered and died; and to make this an accomplished fact the Holy Ghost has come down to earth. No Spirit-energised man could be satisfied, or rest from his labours, as long as any of Adam's race are ignorant of the glad proclamation; and no man who is intelligent as to the mind and purpose of God will be contented that sinners should know their sins forgiven merely; he will earnestly desire that the truth of God's unity may become a practical thing in the hearts and faith of all who believe.

The supreme efforts of Satan are directed against these two things.

He will hinder the Gospel from reaching men if he can; or if he fails in this, he will mar the testimony and power of the second; hence we are called upon to do battle with him. For this we need to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"; and to put on the whole armour of God, that we 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 world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6: 10-12).

Now the chief part of this conflict is waged by prayer. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication" (Ephesians 6: 18), and the object of the conflict in prayer is twofold: first "for all saints", and second that God's ambassadors might boldly declare the mystery of the Gospel (verse 9).

The disciples did not readily grasp the meaning of the Lord's coming to earth: they "trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel". "ISRAEL" stood out in large capitals before their eyes, so that even the glory of Christ took a secondary place; therefore He had to 'open their understanding', so that they might grasp the drift of all prophecy, and live henceforward in the glory of the truth that "thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24: 46,47).

There are many in the direct succession of this early blindness: the vision of the soul is limited or warped by some narrow circle of interest, and the Gospel among all nations has become of little importance. Many excuses are made for this lukewarm condition, and it is even boldly declared by some that the time for the Gospel to every creature is either past, or has still to come.

We need to be carried to where those disciples stood, that our understanding may be fully opened to God's great and gracious purpose. There in the midst of them was the Lord, with the fresh wounds in hand and side and foot; He was there to tell them that He had suffered, not because men hated Him, but because God loved them, and would have all to know this blessed fact. Thus was the prophetic word confirmed by the Son of God in resurrection, after all the suffering was accomplished.

What enlargement of soul this gives! how it lifts out of all petty and narrow notions, and fills the soul with the glory of God's character! and what surpassing glory it gives to that Cross of shame! for by it the door of repentance has been thrown open to all mankind; and thus the moment a sinner turns to God, from no matter what clime or nation, he discovers that God is a pardoning God.

To be God's ambassadors carrying forth the glad tidings of repentance and remission, beseeching men to be reconciled, is an unspeakable privilege; to be associated in any way with this mission is a

favour that the chief of the angels might covet; but it is reserved for those of the sons of men whose souls have been brought under the sway of that love which is without limit or end.

But the crown of the Gospel is the gathering "together in one" of the "children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:52). The Gospel turns our eye outward to a mighty circle, including all nations, a circle of which a shameful cross stands as the centre; and we see the love of a Saviour-God streaming out from that wonderful centre to the utmost limits of that great circle. But this gathering "together in one" which is effected in "the mystery of the gospel" shews us every individual unto whose heart that light has shone, whether he be Greek or Jew, "Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free" (Colossians 3:12), linked up in an indissoluble bond to the risen and exalted Christ: He has become not merely the gathering centre but the Head, and they are the members of His body on earth. It is by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost that this is accomplished, and in spite of all the efforts of the devil to scatter and divide, this unbreakable unity remains under the eye of God, and the truth of it will ever be a precious treasure, guarded by a purposeful faith in the hearts of all who walk in the Spirit, and answered to practically by the endeavour in all lowliness, meekness, long-suffering and love, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

To be indifferent to this, in which is made known "the manifold wisdom of God", is to shew ourselves to be but babes in Christ, and not merely babes but dwarfs, stunted, having settled down to something short of God's purpose for us, and as a consequence growth has been arrested; and to concentrate our thoughts upon any narrower circle, and so become sectarian in spirit, is to give evidence of carnality. The contrast to this stunted, dwarfish, and carnal condition that can only feed upon milk and not meat (Hebrews 5:12,13), is set before us in Ephesians 4, where we read of the divine intent for which gifts are given from Christ on high: "for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

These two great things formed the ministry of Paul the apostle (Colossians 1:23-27); for the furtherance of them he was prepared to die a thousand deaths; and they will govern every heart that loves the Lord, and is set for His glory undaunted by all the scattering and dividing that "the wolf" has effected, until the day of glorious consummation when Christ shall present the Church "to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

Better Clothing

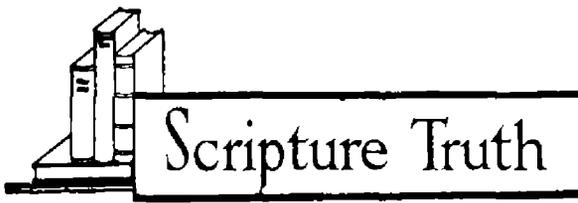
From a letter written in February, 1800, during the French Wars.

I want to know how my old friend goes on this cold inclement season which doth so severely try those whose clay tabernacles are gone into years. . . . My soul is sick of this world and sick of a body of sin and death, but faith maintains her hold and hope expects what faith has in view; and patience must wait till the vision speaks, till the veil rends and the boundless scene opens to view. Then shall mortality with all her grievous train and miserable attendants be banished from the glorified soul. . . . 'He shall change our vile bodies and fashion them like unto his glorious body'.

. . . God hath granted us that faith which is the substance of these things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. He has given us the Comforter which is the earnest of the inheritance and our meetness for it. He hath imputed [His own] righteousness to us, which is our title to it: 'Whom God justifies, them he also glorifies'. How must the soul feel itself when unclothed of this cumbersome clog! . . . Then shall the tree of life, the river of pleasure, the throne of glory, the angelic millions, and the spirits of just men made perfect appear as they really are; and we shall see face to face and know as we also are known, and be no more clogged with corruption, no more interrupted in our devotions. No more shall the sweet countenance of our God be hid. . . .

But after all this soaring aloft . . . I am still in this body of sin and death, attended daily with a diligent devil; oft repining, fretting and grieving at the deplorable weather, at the unparalleled distress of the poor, at the sight of the artificial famine and at the intolerable insensibility and cruelty of the unbearable oppressors. . . . But we must leave them in the hands of that God who said, 'The covetous and him who loveth violence, his soul hateth'. Our days however can be but short, our glass is almost out; and blessed for ever be that God who hath not put us off with a portion in this life, who hath not given us meat for our lust nor sent leanness into our souls. . . . In the furnace of affliction he manifests his choice of us and from all our dross and tin he will purge us and make us more precious than the gold of Ophir. And when the work is done . . . when faith and patience are fully tried, when the appointed race is run and the appointed warfare completed, we shall return with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads. . . .

WILLIAM HUNTINGTON, S.S.



(Incorporating *Words of Help*)

MARCH, 1984

Each One's Responsibility

JOHN BARNES

NUMBERS 1-2

There was order in the camp of Israel, but it was not the dead uniformity of puppetry. When each individual recognised his responsibility toward God as regards himself, his household, his tribe and the tabernacle, the glory of God was visibly manifested in the spontaneous order of the camp. If there is a lot of energy today, there is also a lot of disorder, so this article teaches a valuable lesson.

The book of Numbers is the great travel book of the Old Testament. Expressions such as, "set forward", "journeys", "removed", and so on occur frequently throughout the book. There are many records of travel both in Scripture and in secular literature, but no migration was quite like Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan. It took forty years to complete, carried the people through terrain of unbelievable harshness, involved an entire nation of possibly two or three million people, just liberated from a long and humiliating servitude, and included all their personal luggage and livestock. Yet this national exodus was no panic-stricken scramble. We read that they went up "harnessed" out of Egypt (Exodus 13:18). The word "harnessed" is said to mean, "in ranks of five", and indicates an orderly march, such as a disciplined army would make; and indeed we can see that word "armies" used in reference to them. Later, towards the end of their desert travel, Balaam "saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes". He referred to their orderliness in the poetic language of his parable; "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters" (Numbers 24:5, 6). The original order was still to be seen after all those tedious years of desert wandering. The plan and disposition established at the beginning

were not permitted to lapse. In the chapters we are considering, each man seems to have been responsible to contribute towards the maintenance of this order in four ways.

His personal responsibility

“Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard” 2:2. Throughout the nation, each man was held responsible to maintain the testimony and to do so within the ordered arrangements set up by the Lord. Whatever disorder may from time to time be introduced by any rebellious individual or group, each man’s obligation to abide by the established order remained unchanged. Sometimes, when conditions among the saints become cold, a spirit of slackness tends to prevail, and if there is widespread laxity some feel that it is too much to expect them to maintain high standards. People dislike being thought of as old-fashioned or stuffy. It is however worth noting here that of the four obligations we are looking at, that of the individual believer is placed first. After all, individuals necessarily form the basis of companies, however large the groups may be. An army, composed of a number of battalions and army corps may be traced down through its companies and platoons to the individual soldiers, each of whom has personal obligations which demand faithful maintenance. The security of the entire cause depends on this. The nation of Israel was a conglomerate of a large number of individuals, and the Lord begins by pointing out each one’s personal accountability. Perhaps this is a good point at which to remember that every one of *us* shall give an account of himself to the Lord.

The idea of a standard or ensign seems to be that there is a rallying point set up. “Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of truth” Psalm 60:4. The root words suggest something which is conspicuous, is raised as a beacon, and can be observed from a distance. There may also be included the thought of victories won. At the close of the great battle with Amalek, Moses built an altar to the Lord and called it Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord our Banner. The people were victorious in their fight with this powerful and experienced foe and they triumphed through the power of the Lord. The victory was the Lord’s, but they enjoyed the good of it, so they set up this altar on that occasion. The standards of famous British regiments are rich with the records of great victories, an unfailing inspiration to the modern successors of the old heroes of Blenheim and Malplaquet. The regimental standard was, in old times, a conspicuous rallying centre.

If we think of these Old Testament things as establishing certain principles, we may be permitted to apply them to ourselves today. Each of us has his responsibility to the Lord and in the testimony. Though we are members of the body and do not ignore our links with all other

members, we have our personal accountability to the Lord, who made us His own at such cost to Himself. So we take up our obligations "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours", but we have our individual commitments to fulfil, whatever may be the general condition of things around us.

Household responsibility

In chapter 2, v. 2, we read, "With the ensign of his father's house". There seems to be a household suggestion in this clause. God is a great Lover of households, and the household structure is basic to the human family, but is seriously imperilled today. The term household, or house, is of frequent occurrence in the Bible. In the epistle to the Ephesians, the saints are called the "household of God", possibly emphasising their privilege; while in Galatians they are called the "household of faith", with emphasis, possibly, rather on their responsibility. When God takes up solitary individuals, it is His joy to set them in families, or, to use Mr Darby's lovely expression, "in a home". So, throughout the scriptures, the idea of the household is prominent. God commended Abraham for maintaining order in his household (Genesis 18:19). The context of this commendation is most striking, for it is there we learn of Lot's total loss of household control, and the infinitely sorrowful results. Households where the Lord is honoured, where, as at Bethany, He is welcomed and loved, are little gleams of light in the world and provide help for those who grope in the dense darkness around. Each Israelite's personal obligation was coupled with a need for household loyalty. The household thought will be found to run through the epistles, and is not absent even from those which reach the greatest heights of Christian teaching. Indeed, the Ephesian epistle, accepted as being one of the greatest Christian documents, includes teaching for every member of the house. The believer's duties in the household are insisted on and it is shewn that he has obligations and is to carry them out. The testimony is to be maintained by the household as well as by the individual.

Tribal responsibility

"On the east side . . . shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch" 2:3. It can be seen that similar instructions, relating to the other tribes, are given in order throughout the chapter. Each Israelite had his local obligations to the tribe of which he was privileged to be a member. In Israel there was no such thing as a freelance, a concept which is becoming more and more popular today. No one could go just where he pleased or do his own thing. Each tribe had its assigned location in the camp, by divine appointment, and none could challenge this order. No person, who perhaps had disagreed with some of his neighbours, had the right to say; "I do not wish to camp any more with the men of Naphtali; I rather fancy pitching with the Danites for a

while". If he was of Naphtali, it was with the Naphtalites he must abide. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, who were sitting somewhat loosely to their obligations, says to them, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" 1 Corinthians 7:20. A verse or two further on he advises, "Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (v. 24). Obligations imposed by the Lord cannot be shrugged off; they are to be borne, and even though some of them may be irksome, there is blessing in them if borne "with God". God has put the saints into certain situations, and in them we are to recognise our plain duties and shoulder our burdens. Mordecai pressed this truth upon Esther, "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?". Such was indeed the case!

Maybe the meeting we are in does not fulfil our idea of what a local meeting should be. We would prefer to be in a large assembly, rich with opportunity, bustling with energy and enthusiasm, rather than, maybe, in a small meeting where there is not much going on. But if the Lord has put us in some small corner, it is clear that we are to be there and to be loyal to the local ensign. The blessing of the Lord will be with us in the carrying out of our local obligations. There seems to be some failure, in general, in the maintenance of this principle today. In chapter 10 of his prophecy, Isaiah considers a wholly disastrous situation. "They shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth." When this takes place, the ensign falls to the ground and there is no rallying centre for those who look for leadership or succour. What a responsibility is upon us to maintain things in faithfulness in our local situations; that God may be *seen* to be in us of a truth. It is a comfort to remember that, even when we fail completely, God does not fail. Isaiah reminds us that the Spirit of God Himself will maintain a rallying point (Isaiah 59:19).

Tabernacle responsibility

"Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: as they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards" (2:17).

A logical extension of this outline would be to suggest a national obligation as a fourth stage, but what Numbers 2 indicates is a relationship towards the tent of meeting. Two ideas are brought forward here, both in connection with the tent of meeting, that is journeying, and pitching camp. The tent of meeting assumes a central importance in this. When I was a little lad I used to love looking at some of my father's books which were illustrated. One of these contained drawings of the tabernacle, its furniture, and of Israel's camp. What impressed me then and has remained with me to this day is how the cloudy pillar dominated the encampment. The cloud rested on the tent. As they moved about the camp or sat in their tents, the Israelites would, mainly, not be able to see the tabernacle, but the cloud would be visible at all

times, even at the camp's extremities. At night the cloudy pillar became a pillar of fire; this would be most striking, and it would illuminate the entire area, and would be easily seen by all. When the cloud moved, the camp was to move; when it remained at rest, the people rested. The whole nation was grouped in an orderly way around the tent of meeting. With the exception of the priest and Levites, who had special places close to the tent, the tribes were grouped around the tabernacle in four groups each composed of three tribes. When on the march, the order of procedure was similarly influenced by the tabernacle. It could be said that the Lord was there and that the people found their centre in Him. Their thoughts, at all times, should have been governed by the fact that the Holy Lord dwelt among them, the cloudy pillar being the visible symbol of His presence. The individual Israelite's loyalty to the congregation was thus submerged in his responsibility to the Lord who was among them. When a man was true to the Lord, he would fulfil his duties to the nation. When Paul entreated the Philippians to "think the same thing", he was urging them that such a spirit should mark them. Some Christians raise difficulties about this and say, "Surely it is impossible for us all to think the same thing. We are bound to have differences of opinion and even of interpretation. Besides, we could not be puppets and remain individuals". However, if we were subject to the Lord, a real unity would be maintained without destroying our individuality and without the dead uniformity of puppetry. There were twelve tribes grouped around the tabernacle. These tribes were not exactly alike; they had their tribal characteristics and features. A reading of Genesis 49 would confirm this suggestion. Yet each was in its ordered place in relation to the cloud. It was the same with the persons who composed each tribe. If a handful of iron filings is thrown at random on a sheet of paper under which a magnet is concealed, the filings, influenced by the forces radiating from the magnet, will be formed into orderly patterns around the poles of the magnet. These iron fragments may be of varying sizes and shapes, but they will take their place in relation to the magnet, and in relation to one because the magnet attracts them all to itself, and holds each one in relation to itself and so in relation to all the other fragments of iron. If there were no magnet, the filings would fall on the paper as an indiscriminate heap, and many would be scattered here and there. The presence of the magnet with its mysterious power, forms them into a symmetrical arrangement, and holds them in a magnetic oneness and in the same sphere of influence. In the holy city in Revelation 21, there is an illuminating connection of thought. There, the tabernacle of God is with men. Then, in the description of the city we see that the gates bear the names of the tribes, three facing each way, as in the camp. The central feature of the city is the Lamb. He is the Lamp of it and radiates the glory of God.

In our case, today, it is as individually drawn to the Lord Jesus, we are held in true relation to each other, and can fulfil our obligations individually, in our households, in our local meetings, and even in a more universal way.

Aspects of New Testament Teaching

A STUDY COURSE

J. S. BLACKBURN and COLIN CURRY

This is the third instalment out of five of a course of guided Bible study. Part I, which appeared in the November and January issues of the magazine, was entitled "The Church in New Testament Teaching". You are encouraged to take the written assignments seriously; they are the best means of grasping the subject matter of the course.

PART II: GUIDANCE FOR THE END OF THE CHURCH PERIOD

Preliminaries

- (a) *Division of Material.* Again, the study will be taken in sections:
- A. The current church situation; faithfulness, and a measure of recovery, in times of declension; the biblical idea of "a remnant".
 - B. New Testament instruction, and resources, for our times.
- Appendix II. Recovery of N.T. church truth, and obedience to it attempted, in the 19th century (abridgement of some addresses by J. S. Blackburn).
- (b) *Reading.* In each section, specific passages are suggested, some for broad reading, others for detailed study.
- On Section A *Rebuilding Zion*, by F. B. Hole, is recommended. Pick out the post-exilic books. Articles on Ezra and Nehemiah (in *Scripture Truth*, Volume 47, pages 145 and 273) should also be read.
- On Section B 2 Timothy in *Paul's Epistles Volume 2*, by F. B. Hole, is a helpful outline, though rather on the slender side. *Assembly*

Principles, by the same writer, is useful. *An Exposition of the Two Epistles to Timothy*, by Wm Kelly, has about 150 pages on 2 Timothy, written in a clear and well streamlined way. Certainly among the best, though just a little longer than an ideal book for the purpose. A keen student will not hesitate to go for it.

- (c) *Approach*. The same approaches as in Part I are advised. Note how prominently the Word of God, and the importance of respect for it are pressed in the post-exilic books, *and* in the N.T. books concerned with adverse trends in the progress of 'Christianity'. Let us show that respect, by a prayerful and obediently-minded approach to it.

Section A. Times of declension; Bible teaching about a remnant

Bible passages for study:

Broadly: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah.

Closely: *Malachi*.

Other reading: see Preliminaries (b), above.

1. *A recurrent pattern* in Bible history is: Failure on the human side arises, *after* great movements initiated by God. Survey 1 and 2 Kings rapidly — see the bright start, the decline, the dark finish — this is history in the mood of confession, explaining why the Exile came about, humbly admitting that God had ample cause to judge Israel — but note the bright spots too (Hezekiah, Josiah) — trace some of the features of revival there — note how the Captivity was the end of the monarchy and statehood of Israel (in those days) — but *not* the end of God's intentions for her. Even in those days a small fraction of His earthly people, a remnant, returned (when allowed) to the old ground, the old centre, the old standards, in Jerusalem. By broad reading in the post-exilic books (using *Rebuilding Zion* too) pick out basic features underlying that recovery — and the priorities in the minds and the actions of that remnant — also, list the obstacles they faced and overcame — the deterrents, adversaries (without and within), the sources of their weakness — the separate place that they took in obedience — and *where* the support for their action really came from — the humble frame of mind, the dependent spirit, needed for the furtherance of God's work — the prayers of confession voiced by Ezra and Nehemiah (and Daniel and others earlier) should be noticed — Israel's ultimate full restoration will come that way too.
2. *A similar pattern* appears in church history, anticipated in the New

Testament — Revelation 2 and 3 outlines this — the seeds of departure at first, gross deterioration later — but *some* please the Lord — inward declension first, then compromise, corruption, lifelessness, lukewarmness and self-satisfaction at the end; see these features in five of the seven churches addressed — is this a fair picture generally (and of our own tendencies too)? Consider closely the features of the other two churches, approved by the Lord. Consider how a mixture of Laodicean and Philadelphian attitudes can be seen broadly in the Christian scene today (sadly not in equal proportions) — and is possible too within any one individual — Malachi is addressed to the earthly people of God at a late day (before the church began to be formed), but notice how closely the general attitude depicted there might be called Laodicean, while a minority attitude agrees closely with what is commended in Philadelphia. The rest of this Section involves a closer look at these two extremes, exposed as the LORD sees them in the prophecy of Malachi.

3. *Malachi* — the last word to the O.T. people of God — possibly sixty or more years after Haggai and Zechariah's messages to them — recovery had lapsed into formalism and insincerity — the opposite of Ezra and Nehemiah's spirit (of humility and confession) is now being shown by the masses (including the priests and leaders) — no wrong admitted — disputing and resenting God's assessment of them — correction, even from God, unwelcome — yet "the form of godliness" carried on in an empty way. The book follows a dialogue form — God speaks, exposing the nature of their conduct — they argue back, admit nothing, are self-satisfied, and blind to the shame of their ways. Follow the stages of this dialogue step by step through the book — try to identify the points on which God rebukes them, the ways in which their low thoughts of God are revealed in their conduct — notice too the love, patience, persuasiveness of His approaches to them still — do you think Christendom has trends within it which God would judge, to which it is blind? — would it be well to judge ourselves, too in this matter?

How readily declension starts up again! This, notice, is the picture of the one-time godly remnant a few decades after their return from Babylon in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah — but there *is* a remnant still (chapter 3:16ff.) — and a recognition of them on God's part — and a promise for them too — as well as a promise on the wider scale when all offensive things have been judged, and the Sun of Righteousness arises.

Consider how plainly the characteristics of *this* remnant (a remnant within a remnant, it has been called) stand out so separately from the ways of those around them.

Written work arising from Section A.

Write the results of your own thinking on the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3). Concentrate mostly on the moral decline clear in the sequence, and especially on the attitudes pleasing to the Lord, amidst much that displeases Him, near the close of the series. Any who would like comments on what they have written should send it to Dr. C. Curry, 71 Riverside Park, Otley, Yorks LS21 2AW.

Section B. New Testament Instruction, and Resources, for our Times

Bible passage for close study: 2 Timothy.

Other reading: see Preliminaries (b), above.

1. *Several writers*, in the short closing N.T. epistles, agree that false trends in the Christian scene were appearing, and would gather momentum later — a real need for alertness to these developments is thus a definite part of N.T. teaching — pick out quickly the adverse features foreseen in 2 Peter, Jude, John's epistles — 2 Timothy belongs to this group too — but, being more concerned with abandonment of Pauline teaching, and church truth and practice, is our main concern here.
2. *The background* in which the guidance of 2 Timothy is to be obeyed — many turning away — the ministry from God of which Paul had been the chosen channel, largely under-rated and left alone — *strong adverse currents in the professedly Christian scene* — Christianity in *form*, but lacking in power — self-pleasing, deceptive, downhill trends prevalent — the leaders (false leaders) and the led (easily led) — the general picture “waxing worse and worse”. Find all these things in the epistle.
3. *Men of God* are needed to stand firm and loyal, true to the Lord amidst so much that is untrue. They need courage (chapter 1), dedication and wholeheartedness (chapter 2, early part), purity (chapter 2, later), steadfastness (chapter 3), and an insistence on the truth and consistency with it to the end (chapter 4). Find the places where these qualities are pressed.
4. *The Sources* from which strength for such faithfulness can be drawn are clear too — “the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1), flowing down from His place of ascension and glory, was certainly the motivation of Paul's career for Christ — and would be so for

Timothy too, and all other successors in the loyal path — also, “the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (1:14), all-important in enabling us to value and preserve the truth we are charged to maintain — then again, “the Holy Scriptures”, properly approached (2:15), and well assimilated, thoroughly able to equip the man of God for all situation — use your assets, Paul says to Timothy, and through him the message comes down to the present. *How*, in a practical sense, can we let these supplies fortify us today?

5. *A charge committed*, to be shouldered responsibly, is pressed on Timothy — it is to be *received* and *passed on* down the line (1:13, 14; 2:2) — we too are in this succession, receivers of “the good deposit”, the treasures of the completed revelation of God, responsible to hold them highly and hold them fast — responsible too to transmit them — this injects a certain urgency into this study.
6. *Separation* from unsuitable things, teachings and attitudes, false liaisons dishonouring to the Lord, is an important side of faithfulness to Him in the times envisaged here. Look carefully at chapter 2, verses 14 to the end, using Wm. Kelly for a thorough study. Note the words *shun*, *depart from*, *purge out from*, *flee*, *avoid*, (and *turn away*, in 3:5). Clear of these involvements, there are positive things to be doing, guiding and reminding others, rightly and straightforwardly handling ‘the word of truth’, aiming to be suitable to the Master, pursuing the morally upright course with ‘the pure in heart’, patiently aiming to help and instruct others, even awkwardly minded persons.

Return to the place of separation in obedience to God was an important part of those partial recoveries in O.T. days, as has been noticed in Section A — failure in this choked their progress, and was the starting-point of a further wave of declension — consider how assimilation of Israel into the surrounding nations, in their day, would have submerged the revelation of God which they carried — consider also how worldliness amongst Christians, and falling into pseudo-Christian practice, dilutes and vitiates all that Christians really stand for — i.e. try to get some feeling for the importance of separation from undesirable linkages as a feature of true Christian conduct. Note that there is nothing hard or haughty, nor anything of self-conscious sanctity, about the spirit enjoined on Timothy here.

7. *A further aspect* of separation needs to be considered. Using 2 Timothy chapters 2 and 3, and looking also at Matthew 13:24-30, 35-43, Hebrews 13:10-13, Revelation 18:4 in its context, see how true to Scripture is the ensuing (largely factual) summary of the

broad 'Christian' field today. Note also the separate path for the believer as guided by the Word.

A significant fraction of the world now assumes the Christian name. Within this great 'Christian bloc' disparities in belief and practice are many, and unscriptural ways are common. Many have no true faith. In the different components of Christendom there are undoubtedly many *individuals* who are close to the Lord, pure in heart and devotion to Him, and some with exemplary zeal for the Gospel. But these are a minority in relation to the whole. The sum-total of all that uses the name of Christ is a vast and strange set-up having many elements within it, and will fall under His judgment soon. Within the denominations of Christendom, many separate patterns of conduct exist. Some are even proud of the 'variety' in the Christian scene: others feel the urge to sink differences, and *vital* matters are felt to be expendable for the sake of unity. True N.T. Christianity is *entirely unlike* this great conglomeration of views and practices — true unity is 'of the Spirit', and is based on truth and the *word of God*. A believer subject to the Word cannot extract himself from the total Christian profession, and should be greatly saddened by the disobedience which abounds there, sharing fully in the shame of it. But he is not obliged to be associated practically with this vast set-up which, in the broad, has the form but denies the *power* of godliness; nor with any branch of it which is based on a pattern not indicated by the word of God, i.e. a so-called Christian denomination. Indeed he *is* obliged personally to steer clear of such connections, to *turn away* from what is a distortion of God's order. He needs to *purge himself out*, primarily from false teaching and teachers, but also to stand apart from ways and structures not in line with *Scriptural guidance*, which *dishonour the Lord*. This line, if taken, will not be followed in isolation; others will be found, of the same mind and obedience. But also, there will be no unkindness nor sternness of spirit towards persons who are truly the Lord's, wherever they may be.

Appendix II (addresses 3 and 4) covers a little of the history of movements from God in the 19th century, when obedience to the Scriptures we have considered was attempted again, after a long lapse. See the next paper.

Written work on Part II, Section B: Write a precis of Wm Kelly's exposition of 2 Timothy, reducing its bulk to well under one-tenth of the original.

Note: The dictionary definition of '*precis*' is 'summary', 'abstract'; a good precis should be fair to the original, in coverage and in emphasis, picking out essentials from more disposable material.

Israel's Three Songs

R. A. CREETH

How often does praise rise spontaneously to our lips? This article offers some observations on this matter, from the history and future of Israel.

There are three occasions when the children of Israel are said to raise their voices in song. The first was at the Red Sea, the second towards the end of their wilderness journey, and the third, prophetically, when established in the kingdom.

The song of redemption

It was a mighty deliverance which Jehovah achieved for His people Israel when they walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea, the waters being a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left. "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians" (see Exodus 14:29-31). This is the first mention of "salvation" in the scriptures, and implies the complete triumph of God in redemption. Now having witnessed that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, the people lift up their voices in a triumphal song of praise. Led by Moses they say, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea" (Exodus 15).

This is the first mention of singing in Scripture. There is no record of singing until redemption has been brought in: it is a term reserved for the redeemed of the Lord. Now that the children of Israel have been redeemed by blood and by power they raise their voices in a triumphal service of song, proclaiming the great victory of Jehovah, the total destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts and their own complete deliverance. It was not merely a song of salvation: it was a grand celebration of the glory of God in the overthrow of all His enemies who had risen up against Him.

This first song of redemption contains the principles of praise for all generations. It is prophetic in character, looking on to the fulfilment of God's purposes for the blessing of His people in the millennial kingdom. The song begins with the people's deep sense of the grace and power that has delivered them. "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him." Their faith apprehended God's ultimate purpose to dwell among His people.

In the enjoyment of their new-found salvation in Jehovah they look on to the fulfilment of fullest blessing, as they sing, "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth thy people whom thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation" (verse 13). It is beautiful to see that faith takes a leap over all the difficulties of the way, and comes to the triumphant conclusion, "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place. O Lord, which thou hast made to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established" (verse 17). And the Song, begun with grace, ends with glory: "Jehovah shall reign for ever and ever".

The song of the springing well

It is sad to reflect how soon Israel's song of praise gave place to murmuring and discontent when they encountered the difficulties of the wilderness. We do not read of songs arising in the desert, but as Israel's journeyings drew near to a close they came to the place of "the well whereof the Lord spoke unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, *Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it*" (Numbers 21:16-17). After forty years of wandering and murmuring they are again led out in song. They gaze upon the water springing from the well dug by the princes and nobles with their staves, according to the direction of Moses the lawgiver, and their hearts are lifted up in joyful strains of praise. How pleasing must this response have been to the heart of Jehovah after all the murmuring that characterised the wilderness journey!

Let me quote the comments of another. "This is a remarkable passage coming in at such a moment and in such a connection. The murmurings are hushed — the people are nearing the borders of the promised land — the effects of the serpents' bites have passed away, and now, without any rod, without any smiting, the people are supplied with refreshment. What though the Amorites, Moabites and Ammonites are about them; what though the power of Sihon stands in the way; God can open a well for His people and give them a song in spite of all. Oh! what a God is our God! How blessed it is to trace His actings and ways with His people in all these wilderness scenes!" (C.H.M.).

The springing well is a striking type of the Holy Ghost in the believer, the well of living water springing up unto everlasting life. The Spirit of God within us would lead out our hearts in songs of praise and worship. It is when filled with the Spirit that we can speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:18-19).

It is interesting to notice that the marginal rendering of Numbers 21:17 is "*Ascend, O well; answer to it*". The Holy Spirit came to us from an ascended Christ, and, as water finds its level, so would the Spirit of God lead our hearts to Christ Himself in glory. May we answer to His

leading, and be characterised as a praising and worshipping people!

The new song in the coming kingdom

Apart from the songs of different leaders such as Deborah or David, there is no record of singing on the part of the people when established in the land of Canaan. But there is a third song which the people are invited to sing in the days of the millennial kingdom. Psalm 149 opens with "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the congregation of saints". It is new, to be raised by the redeemed nation of Israel, telling of the gladness which Zion's children have in their anointed King. "Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King" (verse 2). The meek and lowly Messiah whom their fathers rejected and crucified will be acknowledged as the maker of His new-created people. Zion's new-born sons will raise a new song of redemption-praise, and it will be said in that day, "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).

How much greater and sweeter is our privilege as those redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, for has He not already put a new song in our mouth, even praise unto our God? (Psalm 40:3). And even now we can join in that new song that will fill all creation in the coming day of glory (see Revelation 5).

Paul's Gospel

On parts of Philipians, i.-iii.

At the time of the Reformation man did not get beyond justification by faith. They did not know Paul's gospel, which was the glory of the Christ of God shining down into the heart, even of the persecutor, and filling his whole being with its blessed power. This was the root of his walk; his walk was in the power of that light and life — the gospel as tasted and enjoyed by Paul from heaven. I never get thoughts of this in my own soul without becoming very deeply impressed with my shortcomings on the one hand, and the immense privileges flowing from out of it on the other. Paul, writing from his cell, guarded perhaps by soldiers, could say, "To me to live is Christ!" Sorrow in his heart he had for the bad conditions of things. Still he could say, I have "earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with

all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified, whether it be by life or by death" (v. 20).

Let us see what characterised his state. That Christ should be magnified, he knew not how; by sufferings, or by patience, or by being sent back to work for Him. The desire is one, that Christ should be magnified; that spite of every circumstance against him, yet that Christ should be magnified in his body. I know no two things so sweet. All that is in Christ, mine; in heaven, His; yet in that cell, in that poor body, He should be magnified. In Saul of Tarsus there was no room for Christ; in Paul the prisoner the Lord magnified His grace, and that immediately, that very night. What lay at the root of this desire that Christ should be magnified? Ah! that, "to me to live is Christ! All my motives, Christ; all my energy, Christ; all my end, Christ!" Aye, all his springs in Christ flowing into his soul! And in a body, too, that man could bolt in and leave in prison. Oh! could you jot down, in any little interval of business or daily work, "To me to live is Christ"? Knowing, in your counting-house, in your homes, Christ as the spring, the motive, energy? Doing all your duties to Christ because He put you there, and all is to be done to Him? Oh! who is thus Pauline — knocking about the world, chained to a soldier, or shut up in a dungeon, and all for Christ, the risen, the ascended Christ; and as He is up there for me, so am I down here for Him?

Let us look at the root. Christ so full in Himself — He is the fulness of each. The grand characteristic of Christ was, when here, subjection unto death. The disciple has the same eternal life, and must know the dying daily to get the fulness of blessing. Christ died out of the world. Israel would have had Christ, if He would have let His glory out, and taken things into His own hands. The Christian's pathway in the divine life is to obey; to obey in subjection to God. Christ would have nothing except from God's hands. Is it God working in you? God works to will: He chains us up to desire and to will; and he will enable us to do. Whence can I draw water to turn the wheels of that mill? In Christ up there at His right hand. Paul saw that Christ up there, and his heart turned to delight in Him. Can we see the person of Christ up there, and not know desire after Him? I am wishing to show you this Christ working in you to will. Is there a backwardness to give up anything for Him? What! for Christ? Not to get Christ, but because you have that Christ, and because He has looked down to take your heart, and do you think anything great to sacrifice for Him when He gives you fellowship with Himself? Oh! could you make a cold calculation as to the worth of that Christ beyond all joy of earth? Am I willing for Christ? Am I acting for Christ?

Two things are brought home to my heart — that Christ has won a place, that all should be at His feet — and He has begun at my heart. Ah! God lets the beauty of His Son shine into your soul, and I claim

that your heart be subject to it. I am sure, if the eye has not been anointed to see what Christ has won, we shall not own Him as Lord.

Oh, nothing can stop the fulness of blessing flowing out from that Christ who has passed through death and come out on the other side! In chapter iii, we get the Lord as a living person, and the eye rests on Him as He is now, and as He is to be when He comes forth. I am united to Him in the place where He is, and as dead here my life is hid with Him in God. I look to Him up there, and know His thoughts, not according to what we are here, but as in Christ according to the Father's thoughts of us, who has committed us to Him, and has given us to have a portion with Him; to be like Him, to be as those with whom He is to be the first-born among many brethren. How far are you and I realising this? Have you part in that life? You have a portion in that Son; are your springs in that Son? Are you waiting for that Son? There is nothing in this epistle but a living Christ, and our union with Him up there; and our fellowship with Him down here in subjection and obedience.

G. V. WIGRAM

Ambassadors for Christ

Suggested by John 20:21

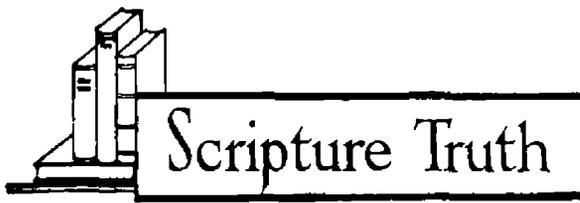
*We are come from a far country,
From a land beyond the sun;
We are come from that great glory
Round our God's eternal throne:
Thence we come, and thither go;
Here no resting-place we know.*

*Far within the depth of glory
In the Father's house above,
We have learnt His wondrous secret,
We have learnt His heart of love:
We have seen and we have shared
That bright joy He hath prepared.*

*There, amidst the joy eternal
Is the Man who went above,
Bearing marks of all the hatred
Of the world He sought in love.
He has sent us here to tell
Of His love unchangeable.*

*From the dark and troubled waters
Many a pearl to Him we bear;
Golden sheaves we bring with singing,
Fulness of His joy we share;
And our pilgrim journey o'er,
Praise with Him for evermore.*

from a poem by FRANCES BEVAN



(Incorporating *Words of Help*)

MAY, 1984

SCRIPTURE TRUTH: OBSERVATIONS FROM A NEW EDITOR

COLIN CURRY

This issue indicates new arrangements for the editing of *Scripture Truth*. As the person newly entering into these responsibilities, I feel it appropriate at this juncture to make some remarks which would be less suitable during the magazine's normal running. Some of these observations *must* be made; the others I judge to be good for the general well-being of *Scripture Truth*, in the sense of its profitability and value to those it is intended to help.

First, it is entirely right to give as full recognition as we can to the retiring editor's substantial services to the Lord and to his readers, over many years, and in a widespread way. These have carried the stamp of unsparing devotion, with full and faithful application to the task in hand. To say that the quality of the product of his efforts has been substantial is really an understatement. Perhaps it is not uncommon to take for granted all that is done behind the scenes; but readers will be stirred by this reminder, I trust, to recognise the weight of what he has done and to join truly with me in saying how much we have gained from it. Characteristically, he does not retire purely for easement's sake, but because he has so many other commitments (all in the Lord's interests), and something has to go to find room for these. I feel sure we may still look forward to further papers from him (DV), as he may find possible. I shall still value his wise counsel from time to time. The Lord will ultimately assess, and assess well we may be sure, all his work for *Scripture Truth*.

The work of younger persons also needs proper recognition. Theo Balderston had also felt the weight upon his shoulders recently, and those who know him know how thoroughly he performs all that falls upon him. Heavy and necessary involvement in his daily activities, full-hearted and energetic commitment to a thriving local assembly and the testimony of the Lord, and a young family whose claims upon him are entirely right for him to recognise before the Lord; all this amounts to much more than most individuals carry. He has agreed, we may

thankfully say, to remain available (DV) in a consultative capacity, and to be prepared to take over again, if necessary at short notice, the demanding work of putting the magazine together, issue by issue, and seeing the material properly through to publication. It is hoped that he will be spared a lot of this kind of work in the immediate future. Again, these labours are not thought about greatly by the recipients of the magazine. The fact that it has appeared in such good shape in recent years, however, bears its own testimony to his careful and meticulous approach to these tasks. Thanks are due to him from all of us, at this stage. We can still look forward to his activity as a contributor (DV) and must indeed already know the value of items from him in the past. Certainly it ought to be said that his enthusiasm and deep interest in this kind of work are unabated.

I have referred above only to my immediate predecessors; but since 1978 *Scripture Truth* has incorporated *Words of Help*, which until then was published separately. Editors of that magazine were Ernest Pettman and, at the time of amalgamation, Edmund Chamberlain. Though I cannot speak first-hand about these brothers, many are able to recall their worth and sterling work for the Lord. This also needs to be recognised here.

Next, what does a new editor feel about the task he seeks to fulfil? This is a time, surely, for seeking the confidence and enlisting the support of others; a time for laying bare some of his inward thoughts.

A new editor, then, is conscious of *dependence* in many directions. First and foremost on *the Lord*, into whose service in these areas he is entering; also upon the Holy Spirit whose guidance and leading in such a service is essential. We must never lose sight of these basic enablements for right fulfilment of such undertakings. But other things are also necessary. *Co-operation* from all who are involved is important, and I make a strong plea for this. As I see it, producing a magazine, right through to the stage where readers are actually reading, is *one whole co-operative effort*. Editors, writers, readers, all have their part in this. It is pointless to produce a magazine without *readers* in prospect, preferably avid readers always looking for more. Also, editing is not a single-handed function; material to edit is necessary, *authors* of suitable material are essential. Then, editing is not a very simple matter in itself. It is more than putting together items, judgments are needed about suitability and balance, very detailed care is needed over the process of passing from the written stage to the printed page. I should like to think that we are all prayerfully in this *together* (with some zeal), readers, writers, and editors. I now address some words to readers and potential writers in turn, and then (thinking aloud) to myself as a starter in this editing commitment. While I must be clear and direct, I feel strongly the need to speak in love, and to clothe my words (particularly to others) with grace.

Scripture Truth should stay close to the Word of God, and the ideal approach to it (in an editor's mind) would not be greatly different from a proper approach to the Word of God. The latter is the sole and basic authority, of course — and everything should be checked by *that* — but how does Scripture picture a good approach to itself? What is the Scriptural norm for *readers*? “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word” (1 Peter 2:2), tells us what our desire should be, a total and urgent desire, such as a new-born babe has for milk. Such an appetite should not flag as spiritual growth takes place. Would that the content of *Scripture Truth* might be so close to Scripture that these desires may be common amongst its readers too! It falls to writers and editors to make their material close to Scripture, and to take the utmost care about its attractiveness and reasonable ease of reading; but they also have some entitlement to expect readers to *try* to imbibe what is said. A new-born babe does not need persuasion to *try* to feed, and as the process gets going it becomes a joy and a satisfaction, even though some effort is involved. Contrast this with the picture drawn by the Lord in Matthew 11:16ff; the attitude of children, sitting in the marketplace, grumpy and never satisfied — the *childish* rather than the babe's attitude (to Himself basically, and to spiritual things). This is the attitude that looks for spoon-feeding beyond its age, and is rarely happy with what is administered. We delude ourselves if we imagine we are not open to such moods; and an editor is by no means immune from things he points out as unsuitable in real Christian readers. Let us be as those who have a taste and zeal for the Word of God, and grow thereby, especially in the awareness of the preciousness of the Lord Jesus.

What shall I say to *writers*? I have been in that bracket for some time now, and hope to continue, but I would not advise solely on the basis of my own experience. But I have to say that I know well the labours and the time involved, the energy and the persistence required, the carefulness of expression continually needed. But I also know well the rewarding nature of the task, not mainly in the approval (or otherwise) it meets, but in the degree in which the Lord helps, and is pleased by what is done. Let me say too that I had never quite expected, before I began writing, the value to my own soul of doing such a thing. To present some Scriptural matter with readers in mind, calls for help from the Lord beyond the point of really grasping it for oneself. It must be put in terms which are sharp and clear, and devoid of diffuseness. This really consolidates that spiritual matter within one's very being, and draws one closer to the Lord. The gain to oneself of venturing into this service is not the prime reason for doing it, of course; but I do say that any experience of mine in this area has led to the discovery that this is one of its by-products. I have also appreciated enormously the fellowship of all with a common interest in this activity.

These things are said to encourage writers. I feel there are more

persons about than have yet come to light. I hope earnestly that all current writers will continue. I pray that others will feel the urge, perhaps even the responsibility, to do it. The Lord's interests will thus be served. I cannot say that I will look entirely uncritically at what will be offered for publication, but I wish (and will endeavour) to be gracious and supportive in the reception of what you offer. No one, I imagine, will take the attitude (common in the days of Malachi) that 'anything will do' for the Lord. We shall have to be careful about content, about standards and quality, about grammar, and general presentation. Slapdash ways are quite remote from spiritual ways. I assume everybody knows this. It is not said to deter anybody. The Lord's honour requires carefulness about the way we do things; but His claims on us require that we *should* serve Him, *and* as well as we are able.

Finally, words for *editors*. Words for myself, exposing a little of my feelings in approaching this work. Put simply, an editor must attend to the whole, and attend to the details. I have said enough already by the way about close attention to details. But, what about the whole of what comes into print? Each issue must have some rounded character on its own. A whole series of issues, a Volume, must have diversity, but also some real unity. It must match up to what it is supposed to be, that is, *Scripture Truth*. Still more must a whole sequence of volumes fairly represent the whole of Scripture. My part in this will be limited in time, short or a little beyond that. The Lord may come, *is* coming soon; and no believer will regret that termination of all his earthly services. But I must admit that to think of the breadth of content of Scripture, in all its quality and excellence, and to think of reflecting this (piecemeal and as a whole) in our pages, daunts me somewhat. Any sense of competence for this, of attainment already reached, vanishes. Like Paul we must ask "Who is sufficient for these things?" Along with him, and still more so, we must know ourselves to be "less than the least". But I take heart from the same Source as Paul knew. There *is* a sufficiency. "Our sufficiency is of God"; "*My* grace is sufficient for *thee*" — a wonderful person-to-person assurance from the Lord Jesus Himself. I find it so anyway. I trust no reader will get the impression that these are pious statements, said for the moment. The Lord knows that what I have said is genuine. I very much need your prayers that I may be kept in the frame of heart and of mind which has the lowest of thoughts of myself but the highest of Himself.

Coming back for a moment to Scripture, and the absolute wealth and variety of its contents, we shall have to guard against one-sidedness, and bias, in what finds its way into *Scripture Truth*. To take only one example: it would be totally wrong to leave out all reference to the state of things in the professing Church, the distress we should share, the humiliation, and the repentance that becomes us, in facing *our* part in the decline and decadence which we see around us so much

more readily than we see it in ourselves. But there is a view above these things, to Christ and all that stands glorious and untouchable, upon *Him*. We shall need to be in spirit with Jeremiah, in Lamentations too, at times. But only at times. Isaiah too was quite as sensitive to the gloom and gross things around, but in company with him we may move over into that area where he breaks out in soaring exuberant response. There the great sovereign God who *wills to do great things, and does* them, takes his full attention. We must not live always in the gloom, we must get well above the clouds, to the excellent glory that shines in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. But we must visit other areas too, though (staying in Scripture) Christ will always be the key and the great helper to our understanding. We must see ourselves as very much on earth, walking in love, walking in truth, walking worthily, walking circumspectly, following in His steps, showing His life and character. We shall desperately need instruction in all this. There is prophetic truth, gospel truth, church truth. Teaching, exposure of ourselves, correction, training in righteousness, all is there in Scripture. Its sharp edge needs to be felt by ourselves; it must be taken, and used, and wielded as a sword. Does anyone wonder if I am daunted? I have not managed to be fair to it even in my topics mentioned above. There is so much more! But I am *entranced* by it too, rather as the writer of Psalm 119 was. We can go ahead in dependence on the Lord.

While I have spoken about it openly, I hope it will not be felt that I have made a mountain of my part ahead, nor invited a spotlight to fall on me. *You*, readers and writers, are the main participants. Any service to the Lord is done for *Him*. At the end, the only proper summary, if it can be said truthfully, is "We have done what was our duty to do", and no merit accrues from it.

Like Peter, walking on the water, I make a start. It *is* venture, only made because circumstances indicate that He calls me to it. Like Peter, I would never start if Christ were not *there*. Talking about Scripture is totally worthless if Christ is not seen, both *in* the Scriptures, and always at hand to open our eyes to see Him there. I cannot imagine writers and readers with an interest in Scripture divorced from Christ. *He* makes it all worthwhile. I cannot pretend nor expect that I will do it all faultlessly. Like Peter, too, I may flag and flounder, losing sight of Him: this is more than possible. But still He will be *there*. His strong arm will undertake for me; just as He can cope with *any* situation.

Aspects of New Testament Teaching

A STUDY COURSE

J. S. BLACKBURN and COLIN CURRY

Appendix II

This Appendix completes Part II of this Study Course, which we hope to complete in one further issue. It is an abridgement of four addresses (by J. S. Blackburn, in Leeds, May 1976), under the heading "Hold fast that which thou hast" (Revelation 3:11).

1. A Restoration and a recovery: Revelation 3:7-13

Chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation contain letters directed to seven churches existent at the time. But these letters also pick out successive conditions which have arisen in the church. The sequence leaves out the *events* but draws attention to the *conditions* at successive stages. The letter to Pergamos (two letters earlier than the present one), spoke of the condition of spurious "marriage" of the church with the world. Just before the present passage the letter to Sardis indicated considerable light and recovery of truth (at the Reformation), but a certain incompleteness (3:2) in what was recovered, and a deadness of response in course of time.

The church at Philadelphia receives great approval from the Lord. We should not *claim*, but *aim* to be like this. (Proud claims, and unawareness of weaknesses, can easily show in our manner, and the Lord is revolted by this; see the ensuing verses.) To the humble, Philadelphian, spirit a door of opportunity is open. Entry into special things, not uncovered at the Reformation, is possible. In days of declension in the church (and elsewhere) there *is* something to hold on to. "Hold fast that which thou hast" is the urgent message. 2 Timothy is an epistle specially relevant to this situation (see 2 Timothy 1:13-15). It was a day of landslide departure; all in Asia (converts of Paul) had turned away. Timothy must hold fast (i.e. *take possession of*, an active thing) the precious deposit handed on to him. He must keep it, in the sense of *guarding* it. He must *commit* it to others, so that its transmission down the line of later generations may be ensured. He must *continue* in the things he has learned (see chapter 2:2; 3:11). Essentially it is the Pauline teaching and practice which has to be

valued and guarded in this way. Colossians 1:25 speaks of Paul as entrusted with the *completion* of the word of God — putting the topstone on the whole biblical revelation. *These* are the truths that have been uncovered again in recent centuries, and this is the sense in which the recovery at the Reformation (though a marvellous break-out from the earlier darkness) was incomplete.

The O.T. books of Ezra and Nehemiah particularly illustrate the thought of a recovery. There were millions of Jews in Alexandria alone at that time, but only tens of thousands returned to Jerusalem, starting the rebuilding in that day (beginning with the altar). There were *two* marks about those who returned. First, the sense of the all-importance of the Word of God, and their readiness to follow it wherever it led them. Secondly their *separation*, in the manner there enjoined, from the nations and the false influences and practices surrounding them. Declension again set in: Malachi had to rebuke them for robbing God of His due. Do *we* rob God of the response, the proper offerings due to Him, in the realm of our spirits? Even in Malachi's day there were a few who *did* care, and a great promise of blessing for them (see 3:16f).

2. The treasure

What is this treasure that has to be taken possession of, guarded, continued in, and committed to others? Consider Ephesians 3. We have noted the emphasis on Paul's teaching in 2 Timothy (1:13; 2:2; 3:10,14). Ephesians 3 speaks of what was specially committed to Paul. Verse 5 speaks of something hidden until it was revealed to Paul. Verse 14 shows that another special truth is also now clear, peculiar to Christianity; namely that God is revealed as *Father* (see also Ephesians 2:18). Notice how the O.T. names for God are almost completely dropped in the N.T. — they are outshone by the fuller revelation, much as the stars vanish in daytime. The last secret of the nature of God, now revealed, is the relationship of love, and the quality of love, that subsists there. John's writings enlarge on this; "the true God" is John's term. The word *true* in John's writings means *genuine* and *final*; it means the substance and the reality, as distinct from shadow and incompleteness. So, at the very heart of the Christian faith is (a) the revelation of the Father, and (b) the unique place of the Church in the love of Christ and the counsels of God. This is the treasure, and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in this.

The terms of this secret (now revealed) appear in verse 6. Gentiles and Jews, as believers, are made one, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and have access to the Father (joint heirs, a joint body, joint partakers of the promise).

Our practice as Christians is affected by this. We worship *the Father*, in *spirit*. The use of the Psalms is not suitable in Christian worship, for instance; they are not addressed to the Father. (They

have their importance, of course; in instruction in godliness, in foreshadowing of Christ.) The character of worship is determined by the day in which we live. The object of worship is the Father, known in the Son; it takes place in the spiritual realm (see John 4:21-24).

Amongst Evangelicals there are many things to be pleased about, and to support in principle and in prayer; *but* these essential things tend to be bypassed. Symptoms of the confusion are as follows. The distinct calling and destiny of the Church are not clearly seen; the thought of a common people of God in O.T. and N.T. is prevalent. Ordination and a one-man ministry is quite absent from the N.T.; it is something modelled on the O.T. pattern and ministry — this is not recognised. The opportunity is not given for the Holy Spirit to take charge; not for all believers to function as priests. The law as a rule of life is adopted; this is an O.T. concept: the N.T. principle is that Christ rules the life; walking in the Spirit is the Christian way.

Another great misunderstanding, consequent upon the obliteration of the distinction between the Christian faith and the O.T. light, is the idea that all the promises are fulfilled in the church, and that there is no future for Israel (even though the O.T. words to that effect are so very plain.)

The treasure is not possessed if we do not value these things, if we do not see these distinctions, if we do not act in accordance with them.

3. The Reformation completed: Colossians 1:23b-28; Revelation 3:1-3, 7,8

Note the two ministries of Paul in verses 23 and 25 of Colossians 1.

It is not possible to make clear what the brethren movement is all about without pointing out *differences*. Where this is necessary it is done sparingly and reluctantly.

We now ask the question: How has this recovery of essential truths come about? A review of several stages in history must be given.

(i) *Early* in the Christian era: Basic truths regarding the Person of Christ (His full deity, His full and perfect manhood), and the Trinity: these vital matters were asserted and contended for, at cost, by those who defended them. Let us not under-rate those who defined these things, finding them in the Scriptures: and let us hold them too as the profound and vital matters that they are;

(ii) *From the 5th to the 16th centuries; the dark ages*: a period when the church was not a lowly body, with the spirit of Christ, but a body of ruling splendour in the world — quite the opposite of the biblical church in fact. Also, the Bible was locked up and not accessible. Gross darkness prevailed. Distorted, limited ideas of the truth, if not total ignorance of it, was the norm.

(iii) *The Reformers*: God raised up men to uncover truth; *iron* men, facing bitter opposition, whose consciences were captive to the Word

(Luther, and others). Perhaps it is not surprising that the recovery was incomplete. We owe a tremendous debt to these men — and especially to the Bible translators (Tyndale, in this country). They set the Word of God free (printing, on a large scale, helped too). Liberated like this, it proved its own power. It was recognised that authority (in faith and practice) lay, not with the priest or pope, but with the Word of God. The great foundation truths, justification by faith and the like, were uncovered. Men lived and died for that faith.

But “the treasure” was not uncovered, and did not form part of the truth on which the Reformed Churches were founded. English Evangelical Christianity never broke from the spell of Calvin, who recognised one family only of the people of God. The distinct nature of the Church (in the N.T. alone) was not seen in this teaching at all. All the O.T. promises were spiritualised and applied to the Church. A favourite way of denigrating the O.T., saying in effect that it does not mean what it says, is to call a plain reading of it “literalism”.

(iv) The recovery of truth was not complete in Sardis, but a door was opened in Philadelphia. In the early 19th century, several individuals, reading the Scriptures for themselves, felt a deep disquiet about the general church situation and their involvement in it, and separately made the move of withdrawing. At the same time, the crowning truths of the N.T. were being rediscovered. Prominent, though not alone in this action (and in the uncovering again of what we have termed “the treasure”) was J. N. Darby. Having separated from false allegiances, these individuals became aware of each other, and began to gather “to the Name of the Lord” and in simple obedience to the N.T. pattern. The ministry of J. N. Darby centred principally on Christ in two special characters — the Bridegroom of *the Church*, and the Revealer of *the Father*; obedience to the Word of God was extended into the area of Church matters in those days, after a long lapse. Some have thought of J. N. Darby as the last Reformer, completing the Reformation principle of return to the teaching of the Word, and of similar stature to the earlier Reformers. Scripture says: Remember those (in the past) who have been your guides (Hebrews 13:7). It would be a great loss to belittle this guidance.

4. Re-digging the wells: Genesis 26:12-25, 32,33

(i) First, the history covered above is continued. By the end of J. N. Darby’s life (in the 1880s) hundreds of assemblies had been established, over the world, holding and valuing these truths. The treasure was realised in the context of assemblies according to the N.T. pattern. There have been extreme positions taken by some amongst these, which need to be avoided; but there is no reason why those who are in the middle should not be all one — they all share the treasure. It is necessary to reckon with the fact of the unity of all the children of God.

The early brethren assemblies were set up to receive every child of God, so long as they are properly commended, and not to be refused on Scriptural grounds. Care is needed in this area. To receive people as teachers needs special guards upon it — Scripture directs us not to allow teaching which is suspect. Above all “the treasure” is sensed at the breaking of bread, where its preciousness and quality is manifest; where the love of Christ for His church, and access to the Father are appreciated. Shortcomings (especially today) are the lack of pastoral work and devotion to the gospel; here is one reason for the weakness in our response to these things. *Preserving* the assemblies (feeding and caring for the flock), and *adding* to them is part of the process of guarding the treasure. But the heart of all Christian activity should lie in *the upward spring* to the Father. What stimulates worship is the sight of the Lamb (see Revelation 5 etc.). Psalm 22 is a good example too; dwelling on the sufferings leads to praise (universal praise in due course). Activity not arising from *this* spring is questionable.

(ii) The unspoken question in our minds at the beginning of these Addresses was: Do the “meetings” have something distinctive about them, and is it worthwhile continuing to be involved with them? The answers appear to be: Yes, the meetings possess something distinctive (the treasure, as described earlier). Yes, they are worth going on with. We need to possess, guard, transmit, and continue with these things. It is a test of our spirituality whether we do so. To continue is to obey the Word of God.

(iii) Finally, consider the story of the re-digging of the wells in Genesis 26. Here we have a different figure of speech. Wells opened up in the days of Isaac’s father had been stopped up with earth by the Philistines. What a meaningful phrase this is! It is useless to say nothing is happening in the meetings when we won’t read or look at anything of this kind. We need to re-dig the wells for ourselves. It is incumbent upon every generation as it comes. Wells are the life of the people in the East; so with us, our life depends on these supplies. Philistines are natural men in the things of God. The things of *earth* clog our spiritual life. Of course we *are* to deal with affairs of this life, the things of earth; but they can get out of place, and are not the primary matters. The only place to draw on the wells, is as separate from the Philistines. “Room” to enjoy the wells must be found; we must stand apart, and give our hearts and minds to these things.

Christ Glorified

GORDON SPRATT

PART FIVE

The last of a series which has helped us to consider some of the highest excellences centred in the Person of our Lord.

“And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them”
— John 17:10

If verse 5 of John 17 — “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” — takes our minds completely outside the realm of human experience, we are presented with an entirely different concept when we come to verse 10. And yet, in its way, it also makes searching demands upon our understanding. For we must assent, even whilst failing of full understanding, to the proposition of verse 5, but what are we to think of the statement, “I am glorified in them”? Superficially Jesus is saying that His disciples, whether we limit the idea to those specifically present at that time, or whether we extend it to include those “who shall believe through their word”, are to glorify Him. Peter the denier, Thomas the doubter, the ambitious sons of Zebedee, not to speak of feeble, failing creatures like ourselves. How is it that such are to bring glory to Him who is glorious beyond human thought?

Of course we are the work of His hands, and reflect His creatorial power and wisdom. For that we have human parallels: the Mona Lisa must add lustre to the name of Leonardo, the Messiah to that of Handel, St Paul’s Cathedral to Sir Christopher Wren. But what are we naturally? Vessels marred in the hand of the Potter, mis-shapen crocks fit only for the Potter’s bin. Nothing of man by nature can give glory to Christ, for have not all sinned and come short of the glory of God? So we must look further than the act of creation, great and incomprehensible as that is, to find some answer to our question.

We do not begin with the glory of the Lord Jesus in accomplishing the work of redemption, great and necessary though that work has been, for that is hardly the point of view in John 17. Rather do we hear the Lord Jesus referring to His own as the Father’s gift to Him, and He Himself as the One who gives them eternal life. What a glory to add to that already His in creation, that He should bestow eternal life upon those given to Him by the Father!

But in order that it might be so, His own death and resurrection were necessary, and every sinner saved by grace is a trophy of that

great victory over death and the grave. There is a day soon coming when the extent of that victory will be displayed. It is described in 1 Corinthians 15 in these words: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive; but every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." When a Roman general returned in triumph from some campaign he would parade through the streets of Rome with his prisoners following him in chains, every member of that sad retinue adding to the renown of the conqueror. How much greater the glory to the Lord Jesus when His great triumph resounds through the universe. Everyone in that innumerable company will bring glory to His Name. But not as poor, degraded prisoners; rather as those who have been made to share the character of the One who has died to set them free. He is the "first fruits", but the whole harvest has the same character as the first fruits, and so it will be. Jesus Himself uses a similar metaphor in John 12:24: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

But we may well pause at this point and enquire whether all this lies in the future. For does not our scripture say: "I *am* glorified in them". It is perhaps timely to remind ourselves that in John's writings the present tense is not always used to designate present time as distinct from past or future. Often it is used to describe what is *characteristic*, without respect to time at all. And we may surely believe that Christ is glorified in every believer: in every one who is delivered from the fear of death and the power of sin; in every changed life that bears the imprint of the presence of the Spirit of God; in every service rendered in the Name and for the sake of the Lord Jesus; in every tiny reflection of Him that shines in testimony in a world that has cast Him out as worthless.

It was, of course, especially so in the early days of the church. Who can read the early chapters of the Acts without wondering at that immense explosion of power which set up a spiritual shock wave that was to run through the whole inhabited earth? What did the lame man at the Temple gate think of those two Galilean fishermen who went up to the Temple to pray? Peter's words, "Look on us", must have aroused some expectation — a few pence perhaps, for they can hardly have seemed to be wealthy. But they had greater wealth by far than silver and gold, and from those memorable words, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk", came not only blessing to a poor beggar, but glory to the One in whose Name he was healed. "Look on us," said Peter, but it was not for their glory, but in order that Christ should be glorified in them.

And so through history — in the energy of Paul, in the courage of the martyrs, in the steadfastness of Luther, in the zeal of the Wesleys, in the compassions of the great reformers, even today in the sufferings

of faithful witnesses in Communist prisons — over all, and despite many a sad failure, can be written the words of Jesus: “I am glorified in them”.

And if this be true now, how much more so when He comes again, “to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe”! For all our weakness and unfaithfulness and failure will be forever gone, and even these mortal bodies will be made like His glorious body. Paul reminds the Colossians that “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory”.

But what a challenge to every one of us while we are still in the time of Christ's absence! Are we seeking our own glory, concerned for our own reputation, serving our own ends? Or can we say with Paul: “So now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death”? It is not only in the great things of our experience that we glorify Him. It is not given to everyone to serve as a Paul or suffer as a Peter. But in all the small things of our lives — in the faltering witness at work, the tiny kindnesses to our neighbours, the sacrifices made for Christ, so paltry in retrospect and yet so real at the time — in all these, and much besides, our daily prayer should be that “Christ shall be magnified”.

But we can look beyond this present time of witness to an absent Lord, beyond even that quickly-coming day of public vindication and glory. For many sons are being brought to glory, and we can dimly anticipate that eternal scene in which God's beloved Son is eternally glorified in those who have been given to Him by the Father. Predestinated, called, justified, glorified, but above all, “conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren”.

We are so prone to see things from our point of view, and in particular to be occupied with the grace of God in meeting our individual need. Let us not belittle that, for we do not go many verses into those majestic epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians before we come to the same words: “In whom we have redemption through his blood.” But there is a greater purpose and a grander perspective than the meeting of the sinner's need, however much the one may be included in the other. For God has patterned everything for His pleasure after the Person of His Son, and when all is gathered in for His eternal praise and glory, all our individual blessing, great and marvellous as it is, must surely be lost in that experience envisaged by the hymnwriter:

*Nor we alone, Thy loved ones all, complete
In glory round Thee there with joy shall meet,
All like Thee, for Thy glory like Thee, Lord,
Object supreme of all, by all adored.*

Two or Three

JOHN BARNES

MATTHEW 18:20

*Do we excuse the poverty of our meetings by our fewness?
The word of scripture is, 'None shall appear before me empty'.*

In His remarks as recorded in Matthew 18, the Lord Jesus speaks of companies of the saints as small as two or three persons. Considering the number of the brethren in the upper room in Acts 1 as about one hundred and twenty, the others scattered in the land, with them making a total of about five hundred (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:6) and the addition to their numbers on the day of Pentecost alone as three thousand, two or three seems an absurdly tiny company. It is reasonable to suppose that the Lord had in His mind the dark days of the assembly's history, when the lamp of truth and faith would burn low all over the world, and perhaps our own days also, when decay and dispersal would drastically reduce numbers in many local gatherings. What I have on my heart to think about is, what do these two or three bring with them when, in the favour of the Lord, they are privileged to meet together unto Him? In the instructions concerning the feasts of the Lord there is a striking little word, "none shall appear before me empty" (see Exodus 23:15 and Deuteronomy 16:16). As the people came to the feasts, each worshipper was to bring a suitable and proportionate offering. "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee" (Deuteronomy 16:17). The Lord had richly blessed the people. He promised Moses concerning the exodus of the nation from bondage in Egypt, "When ye go, ye shall not go empty" (Exodus 3:21). The people went out from slavery, not completely impoverished, as might have been the case, but greatly enriched, and the Lord's blessing continued with them in spite of their failures. Once they were settled in the land, as they went up to the various annual feasts, their gifts would vary considerably, ranging from perhaps a pigeon in the case of someone poor to a large beast in the case of a wealthier person, but every participant in the celebrations, rich or poor, was to bring a contribution.

We understand this to represent for us today our appreciation of Christ, which will vary from person to person as we have benefitted by enrichment from Him. Each day's communion and each occasion of our gathering with the saints ought to enhance our riches, and consequently room is left for enlargement of our gifts. The idea of

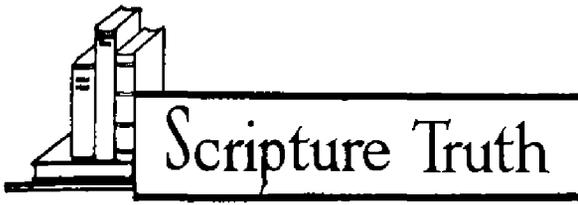
anyone appearing before God devoid of appreciation is not considered. For us today, the expression, "none shall appear before me empty", can mean nothing else. Such a readiness to offer cannot be cheaply bought, we may be sure, and there is an element of sacrifice in this, very clearly. A fleeting moment or two, distractedly snatched at random from a life otherwise devoted to our own business, or to the world and its affairs, will not be sufficient to provide adequately so that our hands will be filled as we appear before the Lord in the feast. When David's two mighty men appeared before him to fulfil the yearning of his heart, they had laid their lives on the altar that he might have the pleasure of a draught of cold water from Bethlehem's well. How David valued that devotedness! It was not so much the water which he valued so greatly — in fact, as we know, he poured it out before the Lord. It was the devoted affection which was expended in obtaining it that moved him so deeply. It had cost those men something to bring David that pleasure, and their exploit was remembered by the king with deep gratitude.

In the history of Saul, a little incident of great interest is recorded. After Saul and his servant had been entertained by Samuel and Saul had been anointed, the seer gave him certain instructions. Among them was the information we read of in 1 Samuel 10:3; "There shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine." We know that Bethel means the house of God, and these three men were on their way there to appear before God, but their hands were not empty. This was not a large company of worshippers. In Psalm 42, the writer remembers an occasion when he was one of a festive multitude on their way to the house of God; but this little group was a 'Matthew 18-size' band of only three men, yet each of them had his hands filled. One man carried three kids, one three loaves and one a bottle of wine; all different things. Brought into the context of our times, perhaps it could be said that each man brought with him some appreciation of Christ, and as worshippers of God, their hands were filled with that which was precious to Him and which had become of value to them. When the priests, under the law, were consecrated for divine service, their hands were filled. Indeed, this is the meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated "to consecrate"*. No priest could enter the holy presence of the Lord empty handed. The priest's very standing there depended on the value of the offering, and we are reminded that the priest must have "somewhat to offer". So these men brought different offerings, but the range of their gifts was considerable. The three kids, the loaves and the wine could be thought of as

* See Cruden's Complete Concordance under entry, "Hand", or Morrish's Bible Dictionary under, "Consecration".

representing our appreciation of Christ as our Sacrifice, Christ as our sustainment and Christ as our satisfaction. We could think of the blood offerings as pictured in the three kids, while the loaves may suggest the range of meal offerings and the bottle of wine the drink offerings. What the three carried was a typical representation of the whole range of the worship of God, through Christ, in which all that He is and has accomplished is brought to God and presented before Him in the believers' hands in adoring worship.

It seems superfluous to remark that no one need appear quite empty, since there is so much that we could bring. It is natural that we should be conscious of the smallness of what we have to offer, but if we can offer only a small bird, let us not fail to bring it. The Lord did not despise the widow's two mites: they were, indeed, small; but they were all that she had and she offered them, such as they were, for the service of the Lord. We may not, individually, be able to bring any significant gift, but if each brings his little, the cumulative value may amount to something. Even in big meetings, the exercise to bring something needs to be maintained, while the importance of this in small gatherings could not be exaggerated. Let us see to it that by diligence and at whatever personal cost, we have somewhat to offer when we come to the feast. How sad if we who are privileged to be "filled unto all the fulness of God", should be so drained of appreciation of Christ, that we appear before Him empty.



(Incorporating *Words of Help*)

JULY, 1984

The Last Words

GORDON KELL

This is an outline of an address given at Bradford on 14.1.84. Icy conditions curtailed attendance at the address; but its substance made it worthy of much wider attention. Hence this version, which arises from notes taken during the address. Omissions of substance are, I think, few. I have endeavoured to keep some constraint on elaboration of what was said; though readers will agree that it is hard to remain unmoved and fair to the speaker on such themes. The temper of the address, from the heart, and appealing deeply to the heart, will, I hope, come over.

Scriptures read: Luke 23:33-43, 46; John 19:25-30; Matthew 27: 45, 46.

The last words recorded in Scripture, spoken by men of God, are all worthy of our attention. John, Peter and Paul spoke words close to the end of their lives which, while different in kind, are words which have importance attaching to the stage in life when they were uttered. Still more is this true of the closing words of the Lord Jesus. This address focusses on the seven words from the Cross. These words are unique, and make a deep impression on us. What seems to be their order in time will be followed. Of course, unlike any words of others, words afterwards (i.e. beyond His death) find their place too in Scripture. Words in resurrection, on the very day, and during the ensuing days, words just before His departure into heaven, and beyond it too, are found in the Acts, and in the Revelation. *All* His words are to be treasured, whether before His death or since. But here we concentrate on His words from the Cross — words of a very special kind indeed.

(1) "*Father, forgive them . . .*": These *first* words follow closely on the actual action of crucifying Him. In Luke's Gospel, too, what are apparently the *last* words of all are found, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit". Note, He speaks first to His Father, and again also

at the last. The very last hours of a life always in touch and in communion with His Father, still have this hall-mark on them. *That link* shines out unimpaired from the beginning to the end of those hours of deep suffering. He, the eternal Son of God, was (and *is* ever) intimately close to His Father in the unearthly, deathless realms. But also He, on earth now, the incarnate Son, very Man as well as very God, was always impeccably true to God His Father in absolute purity, holiness and faithfulness. Never did He show *those* characteristics, and that deep devotion, more than in these dark hours.

But also "Father, *forgive . . .*"; what a pair of words to couple together in such a prayer! Deep love and obedience to His Father, who sent Him; but also, deep desire and prayer for men regardless of their cruelty, their hardness, their animosity. Retaliation, hatred for hatred, were totally foreign to His mind. Only love for them, prayer for them, concern for them, filled His heart. This first word — does it not stir us profoundly?

(2) "*Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*": There seems no reason to doubt that both thieves began by railing on Him. The change that came with one of them took place despite a whole life behind him of wrongdoing, adjudged by all to be of the grossest kind. Such a life had stamped a coarseness, a brazen, offensive manner on him. But God worked within that hard heart. The bearing of Jesus no doubt had this effect. Fear of God, repentance, confession, appeal to the Lord Jesus, came only just in time. Did Jesus fail to meet that faith, because the moment was so dark for *Him*? No, indeed! When did He ever disappoint faith? But does familiarity with the incident blunt its impact on *us*?

The mass rejection by His own people, the hard cruelty of the soldiers, the unpitying scoffing from those closely around, were only met by silence from Him for what seems quite a time; but suddenly His voice is heard again. "*Today*", He says, far outstripping what the malefactor had asked, ". . . *with Me, in paradise*". Let us be sensitive enough to be touched by this. Silence, relieved only by assuring the faith of such a man as this! The Lord Jesus breaks His silence by relieving another, by meeting utter need, giving to such a man utter peace and assurance. Always He gives in that fashion when faith rests wholly upon Him.

(3) "*Woman, behold thy son . . .*": Here again, the Lord Jesus shows His care for others; and also the undiminished authority of His word is evident. This desire to relieve others is as strong as it had been at many an earlier time, even though thoughts of His own burden might have predominated. It was not so with Him. From the deep need of a gross sinner, the picture now shifts to another kind of need — the need of His grief-stricken mother, the problem of caring for her, supporting her. No one else gave thought to this, not John, nor any

other. He knew her plight, and the deep pangs of her sorrow, at that moment. He planned relief for her, gave directions for it, from the Cross! He took action, effective action; His word was enough. John cared for her from that very hour. The sensitivities of our Lord are alert and alive to situations on the natural plane too — griefs, hurts, and testings of the acute human kind are all well-known to Him. Moreover He (the Man of sorrows Himself) is able to cope with these problems too. Surely there is something exquisitely special about this word of His, also spoken from the Cross. What a model spirit for us, too, is shown by these first three words. We must follow Him too, though afar off, in these ways; ways of non-retaliation, of prayer in answer to abuse, of love for all (even the worst), of recognising fully the human and natural ties.

(4) "*My God, My God . . . why . . . forsaken . . . ?*": It is distressing enough to see the Lord Jesus abandoned by the masses, unpitied by almost all, actively spurned by many. He showed His care for others, for *individuals* as we have seen, for *all* in His desire for their forgiveness. What manner of love is this! Caring for them, yes — but in return abandoned by them on the whole. What a picture! But, abandoned by *God* too! As that cry was uttered, the full and awful weight of God's wrath, of His holiness, His righteous unsparing dealing with sin, was put upon Him. The One Man ever able so say "*My God*" from total faithfulness to Him, bereft and unsupported by His God. Who could venture to comment on this? The only One with a right to ask a question of God, does so — and the question is "Why?" In Himself there was no reason for it at all. But the holiness of God was the reason. The Psalm answers that very question (Psalm 22:3). Sin, and God's absolute abhorrence of it; and the deserts of sin, too, as God assesses it and as He fully felt it, were the reason for that darkest of all experiences. Hearer, reader, He entered into *that*, God laid *that* load on Him there. Only thankfulness to Him, only mute worship, feeling it deeply and freshly, is our proper comment. We can only gaze at it. It is no surprise to see that this is the fourth of the seven sayings — the central one. Here is the lowest point of all, the pivot around which the whole crucifixion story turns.

(5) "*I thirst*": The end is nearing now. The extremest of physical suffering He also endured. He was spared nothing. The awful pangs of thirst, He knew. To crave for a little relief cannot surely be called weakness; certainly it was the last detail needed to fulfil "all that was written" before, concerning those scenes. As we read it in the Psalm it was the last awful gesture from human beings before He died. Vinegar, to quench thirst! But it was written, and so it came about. Little did those soldiers know what they were doing — fulfilling Scripture! But *He* knew; and, because "all things were now accomplished", the basis was fully there for the strong note of confidence in the great cry that

followed.

(6) "*It is finished!*" — not a weak cry, a loud cry, an impressive cry, a victorious cry; a *shout* of victory, of accomplishment. There were those that marvelled that He so cried out (see, for example, Mark 15:39). It came very close to the end, so that it can be linked with the end (as in John 19:30), but was not quite His final word. Soon there would be some who marvelled that He was dead already; it came sooner than they expected. He did not expire in weakness: He spoke loudly, triumphantly, and He then bowed His head and "delivered up His spirit" (John 19:30, J. N. Darby). His final words of all say the same. He *committed* His spirit to His Father. *HE* was the great Doer of this mighty work now finished, the Completer of all that the Father gave Him to do. He laid down that precious life. They had schemed and acted to put Him to death, and their total wrong in so acting is not diminished. But no man took His life from Him. He had said "I lay it down of Myself", and so it was. There is no other to compare with Him, in the magnificence of His Person and Work, in the all-conquering character of His love. Let us extract high thoughts of *Himself* from this marvellous shout of victory from the Cross.

(7) "*Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit*": Luke 23:46, read carefully, indicates that these words were said, perhaps more quietly, *after* His loud cry already considered; though clearly they were in close succession to it. There seems to be a wonderful peace about these final words, when at last the storm was over, all the abuses had spent themselves, the deeps of unfathomable sufferings had been known, and all was fully endured and done. *Peace*, at the cross! What an unexpected place to find it. He had spoken of "*My peace*", the peace of closeness to His Father and of doing His will, and here it is, at the Cross itself. He had spoken of the gift of peace, *His peace*, to those who would know the Father in the special way possible beyond His death. Here is the way it became open to us. The Way to the Father is *Himself*, no man comes any other way: and we have been thinking of the opening up of that Way, in Himself, and in His going to the Father by way of the Cross.

But let us think of this last word again, in all its simplicity. Quietly He hands over His spirit, in confidence in His Father, and in utter peace. Not to the world, not to the Jew, not to His own, were these words addressed; but to His Father: His spirit yielded up; His spirit, His very life, committed to His Father's care. It is, like all these other words, unique; but it is very wonderful too to see a reflection of this, exhibited in all spontaneity, in a mere disciple — in Stephen, not long after this, after animosity and abuse; showing very much a contact with heaven, much on the lines of the first and last of these words of his Lord from the Cross.

Finally, we must not sink into the habit of thought that treats these

words as wonderful indeed, yet belonging only to long ago. The brief period when He knew these experiences, when these sayings were voiced from the depths of His heart, is long gone. But the memory of it is indelible and unfading, through all eternity. The Man of Calvary stands! HE remains, the Same, alive for evermore. He is *our* Lord, and we are linked, in life and in hope, with Him. These things we have been considering are *His* qualities, part indeed of His glory, and of His infinite grace and love, things that never change. Let us count them as part of His preciousness to *us*, into which we have a strong urge to go forward in still deeper appreciation.

Aristarchus

FRANK WALLACE

Here, Mr Wallace picks out the virtue of self-control, one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, finding that it is indicated by the name of this fellow-worker with the apostle, and in his manner in the few places where Scripture mentions him. Our need to demonstrate this Christian characteristic is also made plain.

The name Aristarchus is said to mean "the best ruler". However, there is no suggestion that he ruled in any secular capacity or amongst the people of God. Perhaps Proverbs 16:32 is a better comment on the meaning of his name. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city". On the contrary, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is as a city broken down without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). To have control over one's spirit is power. To lack self-control is to render oneself defenceless. For believers, self-control can and should be exercised, in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23, J.N.D. Trans.). Many a competent ruler in secular affairs has been unable to rule his spirit, and we suggest that Aristarchus was true to his name and expressed this excellent form of rule in his life as a believer in Christ Jesus.

What kind of man was Aristarchus? There are limited references to him. Luke mentions him three times; Paul twice (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). From these we can get some idea of this upright Christian.

Acts 27 mentions that he was a Macedonian of Thessalonica. In all probability, then, he was one of those converts who turned to God from

idolatry, serving now the living and true God, and waiting for His Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10). As one of the Thessalonian assembly he would know something of the bitter persecution that followed the apostle Paul's teaching there. Persecution reveals what is unstable and unreal (Matthew 13:20, 21); but it also brings into expression the pure gold of faithfulness (1 Peter 1:6, 7), and so it was with Aristarchus. Affluence in material things can promote deadness of spirit and the lack of spiritual desires. When decisiveness is called for, involving sacrifice for Christ, the pull of material things can be strong and result in unfaithfulness to Christ. Scriptural examples are numerous; Lot's wife, Israel, Orpah, Demas, and the Laodicean assembly, for instance. Thank God we have faithful examples too; Abraham, Moses, Ruth, the widow with her two mites, Paul, are some. We believe Aristarchus was a man of firm resolve and faith, not easily side-tracked from what he loved and sought to follow.

Acts 19 shows him in the thick of danger and persecution. Feeling ran high at Ephesus as the outcome of Paul's teaching. The financial gains of the silversmiths, who made replicas of the temple of Diana, were suffering because Paul's ministry exposed the emptiness of idolatry, and glorified the one true God. This interference with their profits aroused their anger. The Lord Jesus knew something about this (John 2:13-16). Aristarchus, a companion of Paul, along with Gaius, was seized by the mob and rushed into the theatre. The intention was to secure some conviction against them and silence the hated teaching. Aristarchus had forsaken idolatry in Thessalonica; now he faced it as an enemy in Ephesus. Those attempting to regain law and order were obliged to render testimony to Aristarchus and his companions. They were not violent men. They had not plundered temples, nor spoken offensively about the goddess Diana. There was nothing criminal nor subversive about their actions. The uproar was unnecessary. Eventually the crowd was dismissed, and these brothers released from danger. Aristarchus had shown a spirit under control, the control of the Holy Spirit. His example is a reminder to us that the Christian message of the grace, mercy, and love of God is not to be nullified by irresponsible behaviour on our part. There is more power in preaching the glad tidings in a manner showing *this* evidence of the power of the Spirit than in a strong approach (even a too strongly worded approach), akin to the violent destruction of idols and temples. A strong line taken against those who oppose the truth only produces irritation and retaliation, and has no effect on the conscience. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 10:4, wrote that our weapons are not carnal. Not the worldly principles of evil men, but spiritual weapons are powerful through God to break down Satan's strongholds.

A clear sign of Aristarchus's loyalty to the Lord comes in Acts 27, where we find him accompanying the apostle on the journey to Rome.

He did not easily give up. The chapter gives vivid details of the harrowing experiences of those aboard that unhappy ship. The total loss of the ship, without any loss of life, is graphically described. Amid the danger and the confusion Paul stands out like a light in the darkness. Through his direction and coolness all their lives were saved. Aristarchus, viewing all this, would benefit from it, we may be sure. He might have thought "this Paul seems always to be in trouble, and his followers are involved in his troubles also". If he so reflected, it did not cause him to "opt out". He continued, so that in Colossians 4:10 Paul still commends him, calling him his fellow-captive. In Thessalonica after conversion; in Ephesus; on board ship; and in prison in Rome — over many years Aristarchus was a faithful follower of the Lord, as directed by Paul. He was a man of sterling worth.

As a Christian, Aristarchus was always found in the best of company. In Acts 20:4, his companions listed are Sopater, Secundus, Gaius, Timotheus, Tychicus, Trophimus. Not much is known about Secundus, Gaius and Trophimus. But we have some information about the others. Sopater was a believer from Berea, where a commendably thorough searching of the Scriptures is noted (Acts 17:11), where they sought to verify Paul's teaching from the Word of God — an important principle to be followed in relation to all teaching. Timothy is described by Paul in 1 Timothy 6:11 as "a man of God", serving the Lord as Paul did. Tychicus is often mentioned by Paul as available for sending on the Lord's concerns among His people (Colossians 4:7,8). We can be sure that these brothers were towers of strength to each other, and would share much of mutual blessing and encouragement. Philemon 24 mentions Mark, Luke, and Demas as companions of Aristarchus. Later Demas left Paul, drawn away by love of the world: Mark and Luke however were devoted servants of Christ, writing their Gospels concerning Him, under the Spirit of God. If at this stage the seeds of Demas's defection were at all evident, Aristarchus was not affected. His resolute, controlled spirit, was more likely to follow the restored Mark and the beloved physician Luke. Thus we need to keep our eyes on those who go on well for the Lord, and seek their company. Note that Aristarchus is never mentioned alongside worldly people. Devotion to the Lord and His interests involves choosing our company carefully. With such companions Aristarchus would grow spiritually himself, and be enabled to contribute to the fellowship in a constructive way. Let us covet the company of those who are more devoted than ourselves. "He that walketh with wise men becometh wise; but a companion of the foolish will be depraved (or, shall smart for it)", (Proverbs 13:20 J.N.D.).

But it is as a *worker*, as well as a companion, that Paul describes Aristarchus, in Philemon 24, a fellow-worker for the kingdom of God in Colossians 4:10, 11, and a consolation to him personally. We are not told the specific details of his work, but fellow-worker with Paul

indicates readiness to serve the Lord in various ways, all directed towards the extension of God's interests on earth. That he was a comfort to Paul shows another side of this remarkable brother. Courageous in danger and constant in difficulty, yet this tender feature of care and concern seems to be indicated too. The word translated comfort, or consolation, is interesting. An authority says that it means soothing or solace, and another form of the word signifies medicines which allay irritation. Though Paul was a special servant of Christ, he was a man like ourselves, subject to many worries and pressures (see 2 Corinthians 1:8; 4:8, 9; 7:5, 6). Companions like Aristarchus would be a help and blessing to him, used of the Lord to encourage him in continuing in His service.

We have tried to keep within the bounds of Scripture in aiming to discover what kind of man Aristarchus was. Scripture is wiser than we are, and we are thankful for its evidence about this faithful and devoted believer. Fellow-traveller, fellow-worker, fellow-captive with Paul, companion and worker with other valued servants of Christ, we are in no doubt of his spiritual worth and stature. Paul stands alone among them in his unique position as a chosen vessel, and others have their unique calling. Aristarchus, though perhaps a lesser light than some, shines in his own capacity, filling his own part among the illustrious company living and working alongside the apostle. His is a worthy example to follow. He does not appear in Scripture for nothing. We might well be stirred to better things in these days of luke-warmness and indecisiveness, by his example of courage, constancy, and care.

Many readers will know of Mr Wallace's serious accident, and all will surely share in a deep concern for him, and his dear wife, at this present stage. We can be thankful to the Lord for his survival, and also some evidence of improvement now. Let us all seek the Lord's help and comfort for them in a special way; and let us pray that, by the time this issue appears (DV), the early stages of the long recovery process will have been covered.

Re-reading Mr Wallace's article in proof, I felt forcibly how suitable a person he is to press upon us the importance of self-control.

Aspects of New Testament Teaching

A STUDY COURSE

J. S. BLACKBURN and COLIN CURRY

This fifth and final instalment completes our course of guided Bible study. The whole of Part III is covered here. We shall continue to welcome and comment on written work on all parts of the course as people may forward it. The second part of the written work on Part III Section B (in this issue) would help us to assess the value of such a course.

PART III: THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER: WORSHIP

Preliminaries

(a) *Division of Material*

A. The Father.

B. Worship.

(b) *Reading.* Bible passages for close perusal are suggested later. John's Gospel, as a whole, should be read extensively, so that the whole of its content should be in mind.

Two books, each of about the right length and weight, are recommended. These are "Show us the Father", and "The True Worship", both by J. S. Blackburn.

(c) *Approach.* These themes are, as it were, one area only of N.T. truth and practice; but they are very close to the core of the New Testament revelation, and of response to it. To quote from Appendix II "the *heart* of all Christian activity should lie in *the upward spring* to the Father". These are not matters for formal study alone; let us follow them in a properly responsive way.

Section A. The Father

For close study: *John, chapters 13 to 17* — private words, in the hearing of His disciples, on the eve of the crucifixion. Also, other selected parts of John's Gospel, as picked out and commented on in "Show us the Father".

1. *The Name*, "the Father" — note how frequently it appears, in John's writings, and in these passages especially (23 times in chapter 14 alone) — O.T. Names for God (Jehovah, etc.) almost disappear in the N.T. — the fuller revelation of God outshines the

earlier ones — though it does not cancel or contradict them — think about John 1:18 as a kind of headline to John's Gospel — notice carefully the words in prayer (voiced by the Son to the Father, in chapter 17) — the work now finished on earth involved the declaration of the Father's Name, and He prays that *that* knowledge and experience may guard and fortify His disciples in times ahead. Note that in Scripture a Name is not merely a label, it expresses something of the innermost being of its bearer.

2. "*The Son*", too, must fill our thoughts, if a proper awareness of the Father is to be gained. Find support for the following from general reading in the Gospel: "My Father", as used by our Lord, signifies an entirely special and unique relationship between Himself "the Son" and the Father — a ceaseless mutual bond of love, of supreme and unearthly character — still in incarnation the closeness of that bond was thoroughly enjoyed and maintained — in a sense there were new features in it, the Son being totally at one with the Father in *action* now, in obedience to His commandment, delighting in His will, demonstrating His love to the uttermost; the Father finding fresh delight in Him, in His perfections, His utter faithfulness, His flawless but costly shouldering of the work given Him to do. Some of the most weighty sayings from our Lord (about Himself, His oneness with the Father, and His mission here) come when He is under attack by the Jewish leaders, and in the face of more general disbelief. Pick out these places, and note well His words. A passage worth close study is John 5:17-47, where something of the greatness of the Person of the Son is stressed. One commentator (Ryle) says "To me it seems one of the deepest things in the Bible". The chapter "The Father Working" in J.S.B. refers to some of these verses. Two quotes from Wm. Kelly (*Exposition of the Gospel of John*: strongly recommended for further reading) seem worthwhile: "Jesus, the Son, had fellowship, unbroken and perfect, with His Father" (on verse 17); and (on verse 18) "they were not mistaken in *this* inference at least. . . . He did not deny but confess, that God was His own Father in a sense that was true of none but Himself. This is the truth; and the truth of all truths most due to God, and the turning point of all blessing to man."
3. *Seeing* the Father, *knowing* the Father, *coming to* the Father, is open to us, in experience, *since* the Son has revealed Him. The unique and ineffable Name of God, "the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost", embodies reality about God which is eternal and timeless — but its *disclosure* has been in the arena of creation and time — it is presented to faith today — unbelief rejected His words about His Father, but those close to Him would

shortly know the wealth of these great disclosures — *after* the words in chapters 13-17 were spoken — see how He refers forward to the day that was nearing, the day of the Spirit's coming — when the power for appreciation of His revelation of the Father, and for responding to it, would be theirs. Read carefully through chapter 17, see how wonderfully it shows the intimacy of love, and of concern for the fulfilment of the intentions of love, between the Father and the Son — see also how the objective in mind for today, prayed for by our Lord, is that *we* should enter into the *value* of all the Name "Father" embodies, as He, the Son has made Him known — of course the longer-term prospects foreseen in the same prayer are, thankfully, not in doubt; and certainly not less wonderful to consider. Follow these points in the chapter. Finally, try to sense the joy of the message transmitted through Mary Magdalene, mentioned in 20:17b — joy to *Him* to send such a message, joy to *us* too surely, to believe it — My Father *and* your Father, now possible to speak of as firm truth, on the other side of His death, with the Father's love fully and effectually displayed.

Written work on Section A

Chapter 14 is a pivotal chapter in this continuing discourse. It seems to cover Christianity in its *essential features*, the beginning and the end of Christianity on earth, the key truths of Christianity, special features of the Christian day, the inward power of Christian living. Make a digest of the chapter, focussing on these aspects (under 1000 words).

Section B Worship

Central passage for study: *John 4:19-24*; other related passages are Ephesians 2:18, Hebrews 10:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4,5. Some feeling for the O.T. system of sacrifice and approach to God will be useful as background. So, some general reading is advised, in *Hebrews*, and (say, as a sample), the early parts of *Leviticus* (the burnt offering, and the law of the burnt offering).

Additional reading: "The True Worship"; read it all, treat it as a handbook.

1. *The term* Worship; often used wrongly, covering far more activities than real worship — worship is *not* equivalent to "attending a church", "hearing a sermon", "participation in a form of service", "observing some rite", "preaching the gospel" — Biblical teaching about worship *must* be singled out for consideration — in John 4:23, the word "true" implies that there are other kinds of worship (some correct in their day) — but *now* the Father seeks *true* worshippers, engaged in the *true* worship. To follow the true way, as found in Scripture, is important — the Father sent the Son in quest of true worshippers — so surely this requires our attention.

2. *True Worship* is distinguished from the O.T. service of God, as the substance surpasses the shadow. Access to the Father is now open and free — spiritual sacrifices replace material sacrifices — *all* believers can act in a priestly way, etc. Using the handbook to this section, make as full a list as possible of *differences* between worship as a N.T. activity, and the pattern of it (with its shortcomings) in O.T. time.
3. *True Worshippers* have a different *status* before God than was possible in earlier times — in what ways is it different? True worshippers are distinct from formal worshippers in *attitude* too — gather up the features of a person's *manner* (if engaged in the true worship) mentioned here and there in the handbook — the word worship implies awe, respect, adoration, a bowing down before transcendent excellence — yet also a response too, *full* of the Object of worship, a *giving* of what is due, with some spontaneity because it is drawn out by that Object — consider how apposite is our Lord's description of this: a well of water, *springing up* within the believer, a feature of the life that he possesses — consider too what *causes* we have for such responses, by the Spirit, in the revelation of the Father by the Son.
4. *God alone* is to be worshipped (in the full sense of the term) — everywhere Scripture insists on this — God, *as Father*, is particularly the Object of Christian worship, since that is how Christians know Him — but the Father is only known in the Son; approach to the Father is not separable from occupation with Christ — access to the Father is *through Him* — worship directed towards the Father *and* the Son is in keeping with the Christian revelation — make a search for passages where *Christ* is worshipped — and note how, every time, this is seen to be rightly due to Him — in the Revelation, note how "God and the Lamb" are often together as the sole Object of response and praise, and how fervent and right those responses plainly are — assure yourself too that there is a passage that says *all* will honour the Son even as they honour the Father.
5. *The Content* of worship needs consideration — think over 1 Peter 2:4, 5 — also consider what those offerings detailed in Leviticus really foreshadowed — sacrifices "acceptable to God" are surely concerned with one Subject only, the perfections of Christ, the excellences of His Person and His work — "spiritual" sacrifices are appreciations going on in the realm of our spirits, which take shape as offerings to God the Father — expressions of a sense in the heart of some feature of the worthiness of Christ — notice the variety of offerings in the O.T. picture — think how exhaustless is the range

of subject-matter, when the virtues of Christ and His sacrifice fill our thoughts — how even the smallest aspect of this great Theme should stir some response — how God is pleased to dwell amidst the united responses of His people (see Psalm 22:3). (Follow up these matters in “Spiritual Sacrifices”, in the handbook.)

6. *The Key place* occupied by our Lord in the whole activity of worship, according to the N.T., is very plain. He is the Revealer of God, in the fullest sense — *in* Him we see the Father — *in* Him we know the God Whom we worship — only *through* Him we enter into the area where God is worshipped, and have the life which lives there, and is at home there — we belong there because of our links *with* Him, formed and forged through His death and resurrection — not only has He brought (and revealed) God the Father to us, but He brings *us* to God in association with Himself — He conducts us into *His* realm — in the greatness of His Person (God *and* Man, the Word become flesh) He acts on behalf of both — the One Mediator between God and man. His functions on *our* side in the activity of worship are important to recognise — laying the foundation on which it is possible — acting *with us*, while worship is proceeding, indeed leading and controlling what is going on — our “great high priest”, and also the “minister of the sanctuary”, where the service of God takes place.

From the Hebrews epistle pick out some of the ways in which He represents and leads His people in response to God. (Read thoroughly the chapters “The Priesthood of Christ” and “The priesthood of believers” at this stage).

7. *The place of the Holy Spirit* in worship is important — (read the chapter “*In spirit and by the Spirit*”) — see how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in this great experience of our access and worship, in verses like Ephesians 2:18 — and note the oneness of the activity described in that verse. Genuine worship is a matter of response in the *spirits* of Christians, i.e. in that part of our make-up where awareness of God basically occurs — this rules out much, of a splendid and aesthetically-appealing kind, as being just in the wrong area for “true worship” — also worship takes place “in truth”, i.e. it is directed to God as truly revealed, it is not a matter involving imagination or speculation.

But worship is also “*by the Spirit*” — without the indwelling Holy Spirit we should have no illumination within our spirits, no ability to appreciate all that stands revealed in Christ, no right thoughts of Christ, no filling to overflowing with His greatness and glory, no real response to God the Father of the kind that He seeks; — Philippians 3:3 is important in the way it couples two other

features with worshipping God by the Spirit, joy and exultation in Christ Jesus, and no confidence in the flesh — the Spirit, not the flesh, has freedom in “true worship” — set forms for worship can hardly be consistent with a free movement of the Spirit — but orderliness of another kind is the product of the Spirit’s control — clearly, too, where the Spirit is grieved He cannot be free to promote worship.

8. *The practicalities* of Worship need some consideration. In “The True Worship”, chapters 8 and 9 are relevant (and also the Prologue and Epilogue). Individual worship is clearly possible and right, but worship in Scripture is more usually seen as a joint activity in which many individuals participate, together and in harmony — e.g. a company of priests functioning as a unity (a “priesthood”) — an activity which the Lord “in the midst of the assembly” controls and leads — note also that worship cannot be fabricated by self-effort — it is *stirred* into action by absorption with its Theme — the sight of the slain Lamb moves the hosts of heaven, with the redeemed to the fore; — a true partaking of “the Lord’s Supper” can hardly fail to turn to worship — 1 Corinthians 10:16 virtually links the act of partaking of the Lord’s Supper with responsive blessing and praise *rising up* from the participants — in common with other assembly gatherings (see Part I) there are certain norms which would mark a Spirit-led order for such a gathering — hymn-singing on such occasions is Scriptural, but choice and singing of hymns needs to be under the Spirit of God too. The handbook has good guidance on this subject.

Written work following Section B; and at the close of the Course

Write a *precis* of “The True Worship” of no more than one tenth of the length of the book.

Write a frank statement, outlining your own personal reactions to the themes covered in the whole of this course. Include especially what you feel to be the problems of being practically faithful to Scripture in these parts of its teaching. Say something, too, of you can, about the worthwhileness of the attempt, and your own personal feelings of commitment to it (no more than 1000 words).

Absalom and Mephibosheth

The following notes were taken at an address by P. H. Hirst at a conference in Ripon in 1968, and are reproduced without change. Questions which seem to be implicit in them appear at the end.

Absalom illustrates wrong turning-points in a person's relations with God: a person like many of ourselves, who grew up in a home where God was known and honoured; yet took a wrong line. Similar dangers exist today.

(i) *2 Samuel 13:23ff.* Faced with a moral issue of some sort, does one *make the rules oneself, or, stick to the rules of God?* Taking one's own line results in separation from God, and from one's family too (if Christian). With Absalom there was no thought of repentance; no humility, no reconciliation.

(ii) *2 Samuel 14: latter half.* Though an uneasy truce is effected (with the family), yet — physical things about him are the most prominent — a ruthless attitude is still adopted — he still lacks perception of his own wrong — there is a mock return to fringe connections with the work of God — his defiance is as strong as ever. A positive life is now beginning to develop, on quite unspiritual principles, on anti-God lines, with self at the centre.

(iii) *2 Samuel 15.* The final stage before disaster is reached.

He *challenges* the very foundations of his father's kingdom; he *questions* his father's goodness. Concern for worldly things is now so dominant that he rebels against all his father stands for. Having no real spiritual root he is taking things by storm as far as his own life is concerned. This leads to complete and absolute spiritual disaster.

Summary: By the nature of the case the life a man builds on his own engulfs him and is his own downfall. The story of Absalom shows clearly how the moral way in which a man should live is *tied in* with his spiritual progress.

Mephibosheth; this story (in *2 Samuel 9*) is in complete contrast. He had no good background; there was nothing helpful to him, nothing attractive in him. Lamed in a fall, he depicts one who is injured spiritually. He had none of the traits, nor the assets, that got in Absalom's way. There were no separate lines *he* wanted to follow.

With no grounds for favour he receives a call, and responds to it in humility. There is nothing sham about *this* humility. He *entered* the family; *was given* an inheritance.

Summary: Our true spiritual bankruptcy must be recognised; there

must be a readiness to accept what God will give. This principle goes through life; we have nothing to sow but humility.

David is seen *at his worst* (almost) with Absalom (in the early stages anyway); but *at his best* with Mephibosheth.

Absalom's story was part of the consequences of David's own sin. We see David inactive, paralysed, with his hands tied by the situation he had brought upon himself. But Absalom's rebellion was ultimately quashed: as David gradually in humility takes action, it leads to victory *out of* that situation. He was concerned with the will of God throughout; he never reacted violently (for example, with Shimei); he left the outcome to God. Gradually we see him confident about victory, and concerned only about what would happen to Absalom.

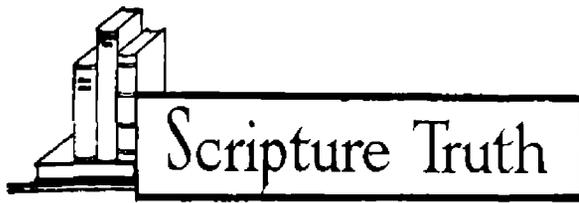
With Mephibosheth it was different. David was never more powerful and free-acting than when showing outwardly-directed acts of selflessness, as with Mephibosheth.

Concluding questions

Are we to be like David *weak*, or David *strong*?

Are we to give a poor lead to those who look to us for example in our style of life, unguarded in our attitudes, compromised by self-interest untrue to our faith in God? Or are we to be conscious of our serious tendencies, repentant fully about our lapses, and in more constant humility finding help to represent and honour the God on whom our faith is centred?

Can we allow ourselves to be warned by the example of Absalom? The influence of others may be helpful or less helpful. But we have only ourselves to blame if, taken up with our own concerns we drift away, and in the end disastrously far away from the Lord. Or should we not rather show continually the spirit of Mephibosheth; entirely dependent on "the kindness of God" shown to him by David; a humble person indeed, through all his days; yet deeply appreciative of the lavish grace shown to him, and strongly true to his benefactor too in times when the usurper had his day, and his loyalty was tested?



(Incorporating *Words of Help*)

SEPTEMBER, 1984

The Fields of the Wood

JOHN BARNES

1 Samuel 7:1,2 tells how the ark of the covenant remained for many years in obscurity, neglected by the people of God. But Psalm 132 reflects something of the joy with which it was brought into the foreground again. Later, when David restored it to Zion, that too was a high point in the revival of Israel. It is strange indeed if the very Centre of Christianity, Christ Himself, is in obscurity; out of sight behind much else that goes on in what seems to be Christian. This paper shows that He must be right in the foreground, in the supreme place, if our life and vitality as the people of God is to be genuine.

Psalm 132:6,7. Four words which appear in these two verses form a sequence of thought of great interest. They are the words *heard, found, go, and worship.*

1. *Heard.* The ark of the covenant had been captured by Israel's enemies, and the wife of Phineas the priest, shattered by the terrible series of disasters culminating in the seizure of the ark, and dying in childbirth, uttered the fateful word, "Ichabod", the glory is departed. The ark was the central piece of furniture in the tabernacle and without it, in spite of its many other interests and beauties, the tent was an empty shell. It was concerning this holy vessel that the Lord said to Moses; "There will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel" Exodus 25:22. If the ark were missing from its central place, the entire system was evacuated of its significance. It had been carried into battle without divine authority, captured by the Philistines and taken by them, as booty of war, victoriously into Philistia. But it took with it its own solemn influence, judging not only the people, but their false gods, and they soon wished to be rid of this dangerous hostage. So the ark

was returned by them and arrived in Beth-Shemesh, and, subsequent upon some irreverent treatment by the local people, it was carried to Kirjath-Jearim. In that town it was housed by Abinadab who set his son Elieazar apart from other duties to look after the holy vessel. It remained twenty years in that household, perhaps even considerably longer, and the household prospered by its presence among them, and by their devotedness to its care.

In general, during that period, the ark was neglected by the nation. In fact, we read in 1 Chronicles 13 that during the reign of Saul the ark was not enquired at. So it seems that for a long period the ark was neglected and ignored, but in one corner of the land, a faithful remnant preserved it and gave it sanctuary. It is not surprising, therefore, that the name, "Ephratah" which means fruitfulness, should be applied to that company. The Lord richly blessed the faithful household in which His glory was valued. Verse 6 of the psalm suggests that people began to talk about it and news of this blessing and fruitfulness became known. "We heard of it at Ephratah". The blessing was rightly attributed to the presence of the ark and the Holy Spirit stirred up the hearts of faithful men, and a revival of interest and concern was brought about by hearing. Faith comes by hearing and it is fed by hearing the truth of God. The news of this blessing at Ephratah promoted a desire in other faithful hearts to have a share in this joy. The absence of the holy vessel from its true place began to be felt by men of faith who said, "Let us bring back the ark of God to us" 1 Chronicles 13:3.

2. *Found.* The ark is a beautiful type of Christ as we know well. What we have been considering is sad indeed. Its counterpart in our own day suggests that the blessed Person of the Lord is not valued and that He cannot be found at the centre of much that claims to be the worship of God. Very possibly, during all those barren years, much of the tabernacle system functioned as usual. The priests and levites would be there and offerings would be made, but without the ark in the holiest it was empty of its true meaning. The ceremonies of the great day of atonement could not be carried out without the ark. Where the ark was treasured there was fruitfulness; where it was absent, there was sterility. Even if other things were not possible at Ephratah, the ark was there, cherished and honoured, so there was abundant blessing. Where the Lord Jesus has a place of honour among His saints, though in weakness, there will be fruit for Him and blessing for them. "We found it" seems to suggest that hearing promoted an exercise to be in touch with the ark. The searchers found it in the fields of the wood. Woods are tangled and not easy to pass through and visibility is restricted. Things are not easy to locate in such conditions and a search would not be a simple task. Apart from the occasional accidental finding of a lost article, finding

demands careful search. True spiritual exercise is a costly matter. The phrase 'the fields of the wood' is believed by some to relate to the groves which had been planted in honour of Baal. These had probably grown and spread, and now formed dense forests. In the midst of all that God-dishonouring environment there was this little sanctuary of devoted souls caring for God's ark, and it was to be found there safe, and honoured. Fields in woods are made by clearing away trees and undergrowth and by planting crops. Are there havens like this today where, in the midst of widespread declension and even open apostasy, the Lord Jesus is known, loved and honoured, and where the saints can find food and nourishment? Thank God there are. The fields of the wood still provide little havens where God's dear Son is central to everything and His people are fed.

It would be a blessing to be in a field of fruitfulness in the wood of almost universal departure. That 'wood' has devoured "more than the sword". The little Ephratahs where Christ is cherished as God's anointed are of immense interest to Him and His blessing may be relied upon.

3. *Let us go* (v. 7, New Tr.). Energetic movement must accompany this exercise of heart. A true understanding of the importance of Christ, known as the centre of what God is doing, would promote decision of heart to be associated with that centre. This often brings distress and reproach. If the ark is to be housed and cherished, considerable adjustments may have to be made. Abinadab consecrated one of his sons to this service and part of his house would be set aside to accommodate the ark. These things, which otherwise would have been gain to him, he counted loss for the excellency of the presence of the ark in his house. The true gain to him and his family was very great, but in order to have the gain he must make the sacrifice. Paul suffered the loss of all that would have been of profit to him in order to win Christ. In the Philippian epistle where this idea is strongly presented there is a suggestion of a great output of energy; "I follow after . . . reaching forth . . . I press toward the mark." Here is a believer who is going somewhere and is doing so energetically. He had heard, he had searched out, and he was on his way. His great wish was to carry the brethren with him. "Brethren, be followers together of me" (3:17).

4. *"Let us worship at His footstool."* v. 6, New Tr. Nothing can draw men after Christ in this way but His own personal greatness and attractions. The writer of this psalm, his heart moved by a sense of the treasure he had been enabled to find, responds by saying, Let us worship at His footstool. In his letter to his beloved Philippians, the apostle writes of the exaltation of the One who came in incommensurable lowliness to Calvary. When we enter those tabernacles of wonder where every detail speaks out glory, we find the Ark at the centre of

all. For years the levitical system was carried on without it, but every true heart missed it and yearned for it. Now, the desire to have it back in its place had been accomplished. In the actual history of this restoration serious mistakes were made, but the desire was right and God's blessing was over all. The lesson was learned that God's service must be carried out in His way, and once this was attended to, the matter advanced happily to its conclusion. The ark was once more in its place in the affections of the people and central to the Lord's service. There was music and dancing; the people were nourished and the Lord was honoured. So the writer concludes in v. 7: "Let us worship at His footstool." A due sense of the Lord's greatness and of his own nothingness filled his heart and promoted a true offering of worship in the sanctuary. This leads on to the thought of God's rest, which, though its actual fulfilment may still be some way off, can be enjoyed in anticipation by the loving heart.

In John chapter 1, there is a happy reflection of these precious things. John the Baptist spoke of the true Ark; "Behold the Lamb of God". Two of his disciples 'heard' his testimony, sought the Lord Jesus and found Him. The Lord said to them, "Whom seek ye" and in their testimony given later, they affirmed, "We have found the Messiah". That they worshipped at His feet cannot be doubted. But this chapter, so full of glory, gives us another picture, just as on a bright evening we may have the pleasure of a double rainbow. Nathaniel is brought before us. He had been hearing what Moses said in the law and what the prophets had written about Christ. Very likely he and the other disciples who were of Bethsaida had done this search together, because the fact that they were of the same fishing community is noted. Philip says, "We have found Him". This information stirred up Nathaniel's heart and he got up to go with Philip in response to his loving invitation, "Come and see". The happy result was that he, too, became a worshippinger at the Lord's footstool. "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Israel."

The psalm leads our minds on to the rest of God. "Here will I dwell; for I have desired it." In John 1 the Lord takes the hearts of His lovers on to the day of His public manifestation, the day of greater things, when He shall dwell with His people in conditions of divine rest, and the angels of God shall happily perform their service upon the Son of Man.

Sand

ALLAN RETALLICK

Few people perhaps would have considered sand as a possibility for a helpful meditation! But this paper does make some valuable points on scriptures relating to that subject.

What does the word 'sand' conjure up in your mind? Does it make you think of happy seaside holidays as a child, digging in the sand or rolling through the sand-dunes? Or does it remind you, by way of egg-timer and hour-glass, of the brevity of human life and the passing of the day of grace? Sand is mentioned several times in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, in fact, but in the book of the prophet Jeremiah we discover a remarkable way in which the Creator illustrated His power and wisdom, and at the same time demonstrated the principle, elsewhere recorded in the Bible, of choosing the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

"Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at My presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" (Jeremiah 5:22).

Along the coast we have seen many buildings of reinforced concrete tumbled over and broken up by the power of the sea. Cliffs are eroded, and rocks worn down with the mighty waves, and yet we read in this text that God placed the *sand* for a bound to the sea, and to this day the divine decree stands: the sea cannot pass that barrier. As the Lord reminded Job, He "shut up the sea with doors", and said to it: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:8,11).

Yet what is so weak and insignificant as sand? A single grain of sand is hardly to be measured or weighed, and a handful of sand will trickle through our fingers almost unnoticed. To build on a foundation of sand, as the parable reminds us, is to court disaster, for sand shifts and moves, being blown in all directions by the wind. How remarkable then that God chooses this yielding, weak substance to frustrate the onslaughts of the mighty sea! In fact, it is the very yieldingness of the sand that makes it an ideal substance for this purpose. Stone and concrete resist the waves, but are finally battered to pieces because they do not give, while wooden breakwaters, which are more resilient, often last for decades. Sand, too, moves with the waves, and finally returns to its position on the shore, and absorbs the fury of the sea.

The sea is often used in Scripture as a picture of the nations in their unrest and lawlessness. God's promise to Abraham, on the other hand, was that his descendants would be as the *sand* of the seashore — innumerable. This was fulfilled in the days of King Solomon, as we read in 1 Kings 4:20. But perhaps this was not the only interpretation of this simile. In Genesis 10 we read the history of Noah's descendants, and the commencement of nations on the earth. This chapter is the key to the later history recorded in the Bible. But in Genesis 12 we read of Abraham's call. Out of the nations God chose one man to be the father of a nation that would always be apart, separated from the others, to be the object of God's purposes of grace and glory in this world. Moreover, it was to be a nation that should make God known to other peoples. We know how Israel failed in its divine task, and how God had to remove first the ten tribes, and later Judah, from the land that they had polluted by forgetting their unique position. It is true that a remnant was permitted to return and set up a reduced testimony, with the rebuilt temple as its centre, but even then, as a nation, they had lost sight of their character as 'sand', a bulwark against the moral evil of the surrounding nations, as we read in the book of Malachi.

Psalm 76 sets forth the true character of this favoured nation as God intended it to be: "In Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion" (Psalm 76:1,2). When Solomon dedicated the temple that was to be "a house of prayer for all nations", he prayed for the stranger that would hear of God's great name, and His strong hand and stretched out arm, and come and pray toward that house. Instead of maintaining this testimony, even in Solomon's life, the people of Israel turned to the idols of the heathen nations round about them. Solomon himself, in spite of his God-given wisdom, set a bad example in this way, following the gods of his strange wives. It is interesting to see the description of the wisdom, understanding and largeness of heart of the young king: "even as the sand that is on the sea shore" (1 Kings 4:29).

Just as Israel was placed in the midst of the nations to be a testimony for God, so today the Church of Christ is called to be a light in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation. In Paul's epistles we read clearly how the Lord's interests are to be maintained in the Church. Not only when we gather to the name of the Lord, where specially it must be seen that the Holy Spirit is free to lead and direct all that is said and done for the glory of the Church's Head, but also in the individual life of the believer, living and working in the midst of a society where divine principles are flouted and ridiculed, we have a responsibility to maintain this character. On the one hand we have to show yieldingness towards all, and the meekness that characterised

the Saviour, but on the other hand we must not allow the enemy to rob us of our sense of values, or yield to the inroads of modern, Satanic influences.

God placed the sand on the seashore to keep the might of the sea at bay. Today the believer is not called to conduct protest marches or seek positions of influence in worldly systems, but in all humility to "follow that which is good". Our homes should be seen by all as places where God's authority is recognised, where the children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and the husband and wife live in a relationship that is a true picture of Christ and His assembly. Even when the children of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt, God could say of them: "I will put a division between My people and thy (Pharaoh's) people" (Exodus 8:23). Today, too, He is not ashamed to be called our God, and it is He that has made us different from the unbelievers round about us. Moses had to remind the children of Israel that God had not called them because they were better, or more numerous, than the other nations; but simply because He loved them, and kept the oath sworn to Abraham. Believers today need to be reminded that they were once "children of wrath, even as others", but now they are accepted in Christ Jesus, the Father's delight. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise: and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:26,27). One solitary grain of sand cannot stop the sea from inundating the land, but the total mass can. This emphasises the need for fellowship. We need each to abide in Christ, and as we remain close to Him, so we remain close to each other. Let us then put on the whole armour of God, "above all, taking the shield of faith", since this it is that will overcome. "We are not of them that draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:39).

Continuation of 'Effective Service' from p. 176:

experimentally what it meant to be overthrown by God. When, in the belly of the fish, all God's billows and waves passed over him, the agony of it must have burnt into his soul in a way never to be effaced. When therefore this man preaches an overthrow, there is a power, a pungency, a heaven-born velocity about his words, that is otherwise unknown.

Brethren in Christ, it were better for us to master well one lesson in the school of God than to acquaint ourselves with much in a superficial way.

Ruth

COLIN CURRY

All persons who read the word of God have a liking for the book of Ruth. It seems like a gem set against a very dark background. This paper thinks only of the personal qualities Ruth showed, and the progress she made, as the successive chapters indicate it.

The book of Ruth is set in a surrounding Scriptural context describing civil war and internal strife, and almost unmentionable abominations amongst the people of God. Men are doing what is right in their own eyes: chaos and shame, and almost total dishonour to God, are the outcome. It is a tremendous relief to turn the page to this book with its quiet and attractive story, so different in character, yet set in those same harsh times.

One can look at the book in different ways. It is *history* — a true story, attractively told. Behind the events, one learns about the providence of God; it underlines the grace of God, and His sovereign disposal of events, affecting individuals, affecting His people. Secondly, it has *prophetic* meaning, it prefigures the ultimate return of God's earthly people, received and dealt with in kindness and grace, though in the position of no more than Gentiles, objects of pure mercy. Third, we can find more direct lessons for ourselves, looking at Ruth's admirable features, finding instruction profitable to observe and follow. This is our approach here.

Ruth's *decisiveness* in chapter 1 is clearly the first point, and the high *distinction* to which she came (chapter 4) the final one. In between, the progress and the *discoveries* she made form a fair heading for chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes her *drawing near*, in a meek and delicate way, to Boaz, the other principal person in the story. This humble personal approach is the turning-point in the whole book, with lessons for us of a critical kind too.

Decisive Faith

At the start the picture is very grim. It is a story of departure, famine, and death. Three deaths in fact; Naomi's husband and her two sons, far away in Moab. Three widows remain, in destitution, poverty, emptiness, hopelessness. They are left without support, with no encouragement, no prospect. There is bitterness with Naomi, but something more positive with Ruth — a loyalty to her mother-in-law, and to her God. She had everything to learn yet, everything to discover, but she shows firmness, decisiveness, deep commitment,

faith in the true God. There were arguments in favour of her going back; Naomi presses these. There was the example of Orpah — but she was determined, despite all the persuasions to the contrary, to cling to Naomi in faith in God. At that critical moment she voices one of the finest declarations of loyalty and faith in the O.T. (1:16). Not only does she decide, but she is decisive in her commitment. Naomi sees that she is steadfastly minded, and desists in seeking to influence her.

It will be fair to ask ourselves a few questions arising from this example shown by Ruth. Whatever others may do, turning away from decisive commitment to God, counselling moderation in our zeal for the Lord, am *I* (the writer, and each reader) set firmly in the right direction as Ruth was? Generalising a little, this decisiveness, this devoted commitment to God, *does* it mark the people of God broadly today? Are most of the younger people amongst the children of God showing this attitude prominently? Are the majority of older believers like this? Ruth, the stranger, the newcomer, much the junior person, shows the bold faith: but Naomi, the older hand, has no example nor encouragement for her. Are there salutary lessons in this, too?

How easily the scale is tipped in the direction of *departure*: the tendency to discontinue, to fade out — what an ever-present thing this is with us! Boredom, inertia, familiarity with what is going on in assembly gatherings; readiness to find fault, quickness on discontented critical lines; non-co-operation; how easily these attitudes come to the fore! Where *is* this zeal, this decisiveness, this positive loyalty, bending oneself in faithful adherence to God's will in our lives (together, and each for himself) — *where is it?* Let each of us face and answer fairly that question. Could it be that because material things fill our attention we fail to get into focus what should be the central loyalty of our lives — loyalty to God and to Christ?

Discovering the Provision of God

There is a gleam of hope at the end of chapter 1. They arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. But the door of hope begins to open wider in chapter 2. Ruth is here feeling her way forward, following the path of simple devotion and duty to her mother-in-law. She makes use of an opportunity (provided basically by God; see Deuteronomy 24:19) open to the poor and the stranger — the opportunity to glean the left-overs at harvest time, and so find something on which to survive. She finds the way open for her in a larger sense than she expected; it was being opened for her in fact. Her return with Naomi had been noticed, and her loyalty to her mother-in-law had made its impression. Many in Bethlehem had admired the purity and excellence of her attachment to Naomi and the God of Israel. Boaz's question "Whose damsel is this?" is answered

readily, and he too had heard all about it. She is noticed and encouraged, and the gleaning task made easier for her as she goes on (a hard task nevertheless). She makes progress, and gathers more as she proceeds. He had a hand in this, though indirectly to a large extent.

Thus, she discovers that there is sustenance for them, available and provided, so that her portion gathered is surprisingly large. But she is discovering more. Unexpected kindness and consideration for her is being shown. She has success in gleaning, but she is becoming aware of 'the Lord of the harvest' too. She learns his kindness and care for herself and Naomi; she is taken aback somewhat by his goodness — she is able to speak face-to-face with him. Though it is quite undeserved, as she recognises, she is allowed to join the mealtime circle, receiving something from his own hand, hearing his words of counsel and kindness. To a person of Ruth's background, these are discoveries indeed! She is seeing the lovingkindness of Jehovah reflected in His subjects. Unknown to herself she herself is also already showing some of that sort of kindness (born of faith in Him) in her devotion to Naomi and her family. Is it not really amazing that, alongside the atrocities going on in Israel in these times of the Judges, there should be these high-quality characteristics shown by some? The tribal borders were aflame with strife, but there were these pockets of tranquillity where men and women were still true to their God.

The lessons of this chapter seem plain. Having begun with decisive commitment to God, from our very hearts, what discoveries are ahead for us too! To enter into a realm where *He* is honoured, where *His* fulness and favour are known, brings a person into a field where need is met, where satisfaction is found, and progress is made. We find that His care and interest encourages and leads us on, that people around are helpful, being conscious of His favour to themselves, and reflecting His character in their grace and helpfulness. *Above all*, this is an area where one great Person dominates — we begin to be in touch with Him, face-to-face in direct personal interchange, a privilege which should never fail to amaze us. May we share Ruth's spirit as we wonder at our Lord's personal and gracious interest in us.

Of course it is also true that the Scriptures form part of the field in which those who are decidedly for the Lord may glean. We can be busily gathering our store there, finding food for our souls and for others, but also (most important of all) discovering Christ there.

Drawing near

In Chapter 3 we reach the crux of the story. This approach to Boaz, made by Ruth, was done in meticulous obedience to Naomi's guidance.

There are two relevant passages in the Law on which it was based; Leviticus 25:25, and Deuteronomy 25:5-10. These define possibilities open to a brother, or a close relative, when a man's *inheritance* was forfeited because of poverty and debt; and also the obligations to a *widow* resting on a kinsman of her husband, on the death of her husband. The procedures of chapter 3 (and chapter 4 too) may seem complex and strange, but perhaps the main point for us to grasp is that chapter 3 does *not* describe a brazen and over-bold move: on the contrary, Ruth's move was made in all meekness and purity, following up a claim encouraged and provided for in the Law. *God* had catered for just such a situation as theirs. One can see, in chapter 2, how the prospect lifted (for Naomi) when she found that the man who had shown kindness to Ruth was indeed this Kinsman to them both.

"The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" well describes Ruth in all parts of the story, and not least in this action. The integrity and delicate nature of this approach is clear. But perhaps we need to see the initiative that it involved too. It was a venture on the part of the two widows, in dependence on God. Ruth *did* venture forward to do it, with a courage born of her faith in God, and also from her sense of Boaz's goodness, his kindheartedness, his reliability.

The conversation with Boaz here is at a different level from that in chapter 2. There, *he* approached her, and she marvelled that he did this, showing such unexpected consideration. It was all out in the open field, the harvest was proceeding, others were around. But here, *she* made the move, awakening him, claiming from him the fulfilment of the kinsman's duties. The private and personal nature of this interchange, the one-to-one aspect of it, her confidence in him (backed by reliance on Jehovah), the integrity of her manner, together with his appreciation of her honourableness and grace; these are the prominent features here. He on his part unhesitatingly accepts her confidence in him, and commits himself to undertake for her in the fullest sense. She can leave the matter with *him* now, though there may be problems ahead. He proves himself as good as his word, by acting immediately, next morning, in an entirely thorough way. Meanwhile, he loads her with still more corn and sends her back to Naomi.

The questions for us arising out of this chapter are perhaps these: Is *our* faith not only discovering things about our Lord as we move and work in the area where He is recognised, learning a little of His interest in us, but does it also venture further into close proximity to Him? Do we confide in Him enough to draw near to Him, though always with a humble spirit? Is ours a *receptive* faith only, taking, and gaining much from the things we discover He provides; but is it also a *pursuant* faith, anxious to enter into a personal close knowledge of Himself? Do we know about moving forward into deepening com-

munion with Him? What kind of a bond exists between ourselves and our Lord in our private experience? What initiative is there with us in approaching our Lord, desiring to know Him better, and to respond to Himself in all His goodness? We cannot overestimate His willingness to welcome us into that experience, nor His reliability in supporting us in these desires. The next section will include a few brief words on the Kinship between Boaz and Naomi's family which made possible this claim on him.

Distinction and Dignity Conferred

In what follows in chapter 4, Boaz acts alone. The straightforwardness and openness of what he does is clear. First the willingness and competence of another redeemer, nearer of kin, who proves to be no redeemer at all, has to be tested. A prominent line in the whole biblical teaching enforces the truth that Christ is the *sole* Redeemer. He alone is able to cope with the plight of those who carry the liabilities of sin, and know the distresses of distance from God. The possibility of another redeemer *can* be raised as a *supposition*, but proves to be void of hope. Moses, and the Law (faultless in itself), can be trusted (see John 5:45), but such a trust is groundless. Its real effect is to expose, and to condemn. It has no more hope for those who boast in it than it has for those totally remote from God (a Ruth, from Moab, for instance). There is no hope at all of establishing right relations with God, and knowing His favour, *that* way. Christ is absolutely unique in His great ability to meet the case of those who are destitute and hopeless (apart from law, or under it). "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4,5). *He* has broken the bondage which the law imposed, and lifted its yoke. He has brought new life for those who sorely needed these Kinsman-services, and set them up in the highest favour. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14, 15). Note in these Scriptures the phrases 'born of a woman', 'partaking in flesh and blood', which tie up so closely with this thought of kinship, necessary for the act of redemption to be done, and stamping such a quality on the bond which the Lord Jesus sees between ourselves and Him.

How thorough, and how competent, Boaz shows himself to be in the action he undertakes here. Only *he* is willing, and able, and in complete control here. How this makes us think of the unerring ability of *our* great Boaz to deal with our plight and state! The needs of the

two widows are more than met. The action, and the transaction, is done in an open and fully legal way. All is *settled, affirmed, and witnessed*; the matter cannot be revoked nor changed. None can question the status into which Ruth comes, nor the closeness of the link with him that is established. How marvellous to recall that our Lord has made our bond with Him firm, and sure, in a totally righteous way; He has *underwritten* it in death; He has sealed it with His blood!

So, the bitterness and destitution of chapter 1 is lost and forgotten in the joy and plenitude of all that the lovingkindness of God has achieved, as it has been demonstrated by the one who has reflected it. The union brings honour and satisfaction to Boaz, willing to befriend the outcast, showing the very grace and reliability of God in such an act. The union is fruitful too; Ruth's son is the grandfather of David the king. The issues of decisiveness for our Lord, and venturing toward Him, are all of a joyous and blessed kind.

Our status in grace has indeed been firmly established. The plenitude and blessing of it is a rich experience to know. To our Lord alone the honour is due. How magnificent has been the display of "the kindness and love of God our Saviour" to those He has reached out to bless in Christ. In the ages to come we are to be the evidence of the exceeding riches of God's grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

Yet one more comment seems also needed in view of the points about Ruth that we have noticed. God's initiative in grace lies at the root of all our blessing; but faith on our part, awakened by Himself, has to do with our progress forward into these experiences. Those who, in faith in God, are on the honourable line get the honours at the end. Ruth's career, from her decisiveness at the outset, to her distinction at the end, illustrates this fact too. Those who honour God, God honours.

[Some well-chosen and heartwarming words on the Kinsman's obligations appear in *The Patriarchs*, by J. G. Bellett (pages 317ff, 349f, 356, 370f particularly). Readers would certainly gain by following up this matter there.]

Form, Fashion, Likeness

These words, in Philippians 2:5-8, when used in normal English, are often equivalent and interchangeable. The Greek words, however, are distinct; and importance is attached to the selection of each where it is used. Readers who have access to W. E. Vine's 'Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words' will find the comments there on these words enlightening. To reproduce this material could give an over-scholarly impression to some. Instead, we quote below a short extract from 'Biblical Foundations' by B. B. Warfield. This highlights the teaching embodied in these distinctions in clear and attractive English. We cannot afford to ignore distinctions of this kind, anywhere in Scripture, and especially where they deepen our responses to our Lord.

Permission to make these quotations is acknowledged.

Warfield's comments, in an article entitled 'The Person of Christ', are as follows:—

"The language in which our Lord's intrinsic Deity is expressed is probably as strong as any that could be devised. . . . When our Lord is said to be in 'the form of God' . . . He is declared, in the most express manner possible, to be all that God is, to possess the whole fulness of attributes which make God God. Paul chooses this manner of expressing himself instinctively, because, in adducing our Lord as our example of self-abnegation, his mind is naturally resting, not on the bare fact that He is God, but on the richness and fulness of His being as God. He was all this, yet He did not look on His own things but on those of others."

"Our Lord 'being', 'existing', 'subsisting' in the form of God — as it is variously rendered — . . . contains no intimation . . . of the cessation of (this); . . . it is cast in a tense (a participle) which in no way suggests that the mode of subsistence intimated came to an end in the action described in the succeeding verb. The whole of what our Lord is described as doing in vs. 6-8, . . . He is described as doing despite His 'subsistence in the form of God' . . . It is this underlying implication which determines the whole choice of the language in which our Lord's earthly life is described. It is because it is kept in mind that He still was 'in the form of God', that He is said to have been made, not man, but 'in the likeness of man', to have been found, not man, but 'in fashion as a man'; and the wonder of His servanthood and obedience, the mark of servanthood, is thought of as so great. Though He was truly man, He was much more than a man;

and Paul would not have his readers imagine that He had become merely man. In other words, Paul does not teach that our Lord was once God but had become instead man; he teaches that though He was God, He had become also man. . . .”

“The term ‘form’ (in the phrase ‘the form of a servant’) bears the same full meaning as in . . . its occurrence in the phrase ‘the form of God’. It implies the specific quality, the whole body of characteristics, by which a servant is made what we know as a servant. Our Lord assumed, then, according to Paul, not the mere state or condition or outward appearance of a servant, but the reality. He became an actual ‘servant’ in the world. . . . (Paul) brings out forcibly, for the enhancement of his appeal to our Lord’s example, . . . (the contrast) between what our Lord is by nature and what He was willing to become, not looking on His own things but also on the things of others. This contrast is no doubt embodied in the simple opposition of God and man; it is much more pungently expressed in the qualificative terms, ‘form of God’ and ‘form of a servant’. The Lord of the world became a servant in the world: He whose right it was to rule took obedience as His life-characteristic. . . . The further clause — ‘being made in the likeness of men’ — does not throw doubt on the reality of the human nature that was assumed, in contradiction to the emphasis on its reality in the phrase ‘the form of a servant’. It, along with the succeeding clause — ‘and being found in fashion as a man’ — owes its peculiar form . . . to the vividness of the apostle’s consciousness, that he is speaking of One who, though really man, possessing all that makes a man a man, is yet, at the same time, infinitely more than a man, no less than God Himself, in possession of all that makes God God.”

[A further article by Warfield, in the same volume, makes it clear that while Paul uses language and chooses terms here, knowing what he is doing, yet the Holy Spirit is the ultimate power framing the teaching, and God Himself the Originator of all this careful instruction about our Lord. That article, on the Inspiration of Scripture, and indeed all that appears in this book, can be strongly commended.]

Effective Service

F. B. HOLE

This article is reprinted from the very first volume of Scripture Truth (1909). Its general relevance today must be agreed; as also its direct message to each reader must surely be felt.

Christians are always affected, more or less, by the prevailing spirit of the world which surrounds them. In the days of primitive Christianity this was illustrated by the Corinthians, who, dwelling in a city noted for its luxury and license, soon had these evils springing up in their midst (see 1 Corinthians 4:8; 5:1). One of the most striking features of the (present) day is its general shallowness, and lack of that force and serious purpose which deep conviction gives; and nowhere are these sad features more painfully pronounced, than in the bosom of the Church of God.

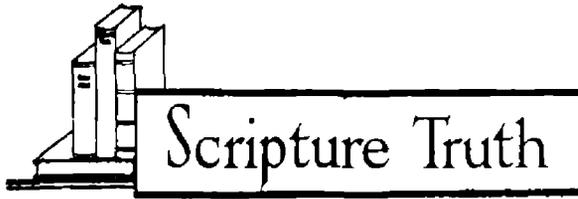
Brethren, we shall not fail in our pathway of testimony on earth because of lack of knowledge, but rather because, though knowing much, we are not utterly possessed by it, and hence feel so little. We resemble some broad but shallow lake, rather than a well of small circumference, but deep. *It is the man of depth and feeling who is effective in the Service of God.*

As an illustration of a man who powerfully affected his fellows, take Ezra. Failure and trespass began to appear in the shattered remnant of Israel that returned from Babylon, and the old sin of intercourse with the people of the land threatened again to ruin them. It was an emergency indeed. Ezra called together no committee; he laid no elaborate plans for reforming this abuse; he just *felt* things before God, and as they affected God. He so felt things that he rent his clothes, plucked off his hair, and sat down astonished, until, realising the full extent of things, he fell on his knees, and commenced a memorable prayer of confession, by saying "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God" (Ezra 9:3-6).

Then as Ezra was himself moved, others were moved with him (v. 4). Indeed, as the work of God in repentance and confession deepened in him, so the power of God radiated forth through him, until "there assembled unto him out of Israel, a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore" (10:1). In result there was a national cleansing from their false associations, and the plague was stayed.

What a contrast between the noisy and ineffective machinery of man's making, and the quiet ease and grace of a heaven-sent movement. But that movement works through a man who feels things with God. Jonah illustrates another phase of the same thing. He was one of the most effective preachers of antiquity. Though addressing a people of great wickedness, and carrying a message of judgment — always an unpopular one — yet his simple words produced astonishing results. To a man, the Ninevites sought the face of God, and turned from their evil way (Jonah 3:5-9).

Why such extraordinary power with the message? Was it not because the man who cried "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown", came up to his mission, fresh from an overthrow himself? Jonah learnt



Incorporating *Words of Help*

NOVEMBER, 1984

Hallmarks of a New Testament Church

TOM TYSON

The main points and substance of an address given in Otley are reproduced here. While the N.T. does not envisage a general broad return to Pentecostal days, the model the early church presents, the sources of its power, the unity and effectiveness of its conduct and testimony, remains for us to take notice of. The features underlined here may well help us if we can accept the rebuke that a comparison with many of our assemblies of today invites.

Scripture: Acts 2:41-47.

For a brief period, following the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the entire church of God, newly formed, was localised in Jerusalem. Soon, with the outward spread of the Gospel, there came to be believers elsewhere, and local churches (or local assemblies) in various places were established. *All* believers in Christ everywhere comprised the *one* church of God on earth. The passage in Acts 2 can be used to press those characteristics which are proper to *any* local church; though this church happens to be the first local assembly of all. As we proceed we must ask ourselves how far *our* local assembly matches this pattern.

(1) *Who made up that church?* Verse 41 says that those involved were "those that gladly received" the message concerning Christ; while verse 47 states that individuals were added to the church by the Lord. So, still in 1984, *only* those of this kind, the product of the work of the Lord, receivers by the Holy Spirit of the word of the gospel concerning Him, can be thought of as belonging to a local church which is Scripture-based.

(2) It was a *growing church*. It grew rapidly, yet also steadily. Daily additions took place, not only when 'special efforts' were being made. It was not a stagnant church, but a living energetic church. Increase took place, not only in a numerical sense; but 'continuing steadfastly' was also a feature. It was rooted well in, into Christ, and the teaching concerning Himself. Basically, additions and increase must be attributed to *the Lord*. *His* work is going on, *His* support is being drawn on, in such a church.

(3) *A studying church*; a church relying on instruction and teaching. The apostles' teaching underlay the steadfast continuance of its life. They were 'getting down to it', in earnestness about what God would have in mind for them. Though serious application to Scriptural teaching is not popular today, it is still true that living aright flows out of teaching; seeking to learn, and obedience to instruction were the key to the vitality of this model church. Does this characterise *my* local assembly? Does it characterise *me*?

(4) *Real fellowship was known in this church*. This was also a steady feature, fellowship based on the apostles' teaching. They *shared together* in a common lot, a common possession. Their fellowship involved a *common purpose*, being actively involved in it, pooling their resources to this end. In *our* assembly life are we all aiming the same way? Do we pull together in the Lord's interests, or are we pulling apart? Do we divide up, or are we *all* responsible and involved in *all* that is going on? Verse 46 shows that their fellowship did not stay within the walls of their place of meeting — there was even a social side of their activity; they really knew and were close to one another, opening their homes and their hearts, so that their unity was not formal, but *real*, being open with each other as persons.

(5) This was a *worshipping church*. "Breaking of bread" was a central regular experience, being a priority in its life. The special opportunity for response and obedience to the Lord Jesus was highly valued. He Himself, and the constant reminder of His love for them, was the mainspring of the responsive love and praise arising as they gathered to His Name. There is no suggestion that they would willingly miss any opportunity for this. Is it a 'must' with us?

(6) *A praying church*, also — where they did not merely meet 'to say prayers', but where the spirit of prayer marked them. They *relied* on this as an essential part of doing God's will for them; making living contact with God through prayer. 'They', in verse 42 is defined for us in verse 41, and again in 44. *All* that believed and were baptised, and added to the church, met for prayer. Is it so in our assembly, or is it left to the few? Adding to the church seems to be closely linked with the whole assembly praying.

(7) It was a *united church*. Locally, we can present a shining testimony that we are united around Christ, and in our purpose for Him. Verse 44 points out that the believers were *together*. This was not just

physical, but indicates a real 'togetherness'. Verse 46, they met *with one accord*, a description often given to this early church. Again, to verse 47, a footnote in the Darby version says "Probably we should read 'the Lord added *together* daily . . .'" in this verse.

(8) *A caring church*. Disparities between persons were not prominent in their thinking about one and another; except insofar as active moves to even out those disparities were common amongst them. 'Loving one another' was seen in practical reality — it was *not* just a nice motto. Each individual, and all individuals, forming our local assemblies, need to know each one of the others with real mutual interest, concern and support. 'We *ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren' does not appear to be optional. It will have its costly side. It needs our deliberate application. Do we use our private things for the Lord, thinking of them as not ours but *His*? In many situations using them for the Lord will involve thought and care for our brethren.

(9) *Fear* marked this church. 'Fear came on every soul' (v. 43). This means, not that people were frightened, but there was a real reverential respect for God, as being amongst them. Let us remember that the Holy Spirit is with us, amongst us indeed, and He is the *Holy* Spirit. How much reverential fear is there in our local assembly? Are we casual about our attendance at the meetings, and when we are there? Coming into the presence of God, if we understand it as that, will make us guarded against excitable ways, and also against slack and disorderly ways. Things will be done 'decently and in order'. Let us think with care about *how* we act, *as* we arrive, *as* we leave, indeed *before* we leave.

(10) *Things were happening* at that church. Wonders and signs were seen in those early days; when 'the signs of an apostle' were evident. But other signs were also strongly evident, and these we might expect still to be seen. It was clearly an attractive place to attend, it was not a labour to go. One's own attitude helps, of course. If we are not there willingly, with positive co-operation, the weariness will be contributed to by ourselves. *This* church, at any rate, was one where no artificial atmosphere prevailed, but truly it was a gathering where God was honoured.

(11) *A happy church*. Those that *gladly* received the word formed it. It started on a happy note! What joyful happenings conversions are! They even ate their food with gladness. All of them were glad-hearted people — people thankful for all their blessings from the Lord.

This is a grumbling world, but inward joy should mark the whole of a believer's life, and especially his life as linked with other believers. Again, they are described as constantly *praising God*. They were reproached at times, but the urge to lift up their glad hearts to God was irrepressible. Outwardly it made an impression difficult to ignore, too. A favourable reaction from all, was unavoidable by those who

witnessed such living church-vitality. They did not, by any means, court favour — but nevertheless were respected by all.

(We hope to publish in a later paper the gist of a second address entitled *Power in the N.T. church.*)

Bible Study — Joshua

J. S. BLACKBURN

7. THE VALLEY OF ACHOR: CHAPTER 7:1 to 8:29

Here, Mr Blackburn continues his sequence on Joshua, the last item of which appeared in September 1983. Like the editor, readers will find this paper searching and humbling. Self-exposure under the Word of God is one of the prime ways in which it helps us.

The events described in these two chapters are uniquely important for the understanding of the narrative and its application to the Christian. The reason for this statement is simple. The defeat at Ai was the only defeat on the field of battle suffered by the forces of Israel in all the campaigns of the book of Joshua. Moreover, the statement acquires special emphasis from a consideration of casualties. The thirty-six Israelites 'smitten' by the men of Ai were the only casualties suffered by Israel in all these campaigns. Not a single death in battle is recorded. What could be achieved at the level of victory in battles on the single and simple basis of obedience in strategy and tactics is without limit: and for the people of God in every dispensation, from beginning to end of the Book of God, no lesson is more important than this — "to obey is better than sacrifice".

v. 1 As the narrative passes from chapter six to the opening of chapter seven, all seemed set fair for the progress and success of the enterprise to take possession of the land of Canaan. The opening verse of the new chapter abundantly justifies the huge capitals with which the English Versions generally emphasise the first word. With the tremendous BUT, the verse stands alone in any analysis of the chapter. "But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan . . . took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel." The action was Achan's; and perhaps the genealogy suggests influences lying behind the action; but the consequences lay upon the whole of the people. The verse reveals

the one thing of real consequence in any situation — the state of affairs as seen under the eye of God, before a single move is made in that action. Could Israel have been aware of this? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they could. If they had enquired of the Lord, He would have revealed it.

Since we have in this verse the principles underlying defeat, very careful study is appropriate so that we may learn its lessons for ourselves. It fixes attention on sin in the heart and life of believers, and therefore in the church: on its effect, discovery, and the urgency of immediate action to deal with it according to God. It would not be possible to command the attention of readers with an exhaustive treatment of the matter, but I beseech the reader to read the following passages with the closest attention: Matthew 15:19; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3,5; Colossians 3:5,6; 1 Corinthians 5:11,13; Matthew 5:27-30 (especially v. 30). We must try, as tersely as possible, to draw out the implications of Joshua 7 for the Christian's warfare in heavenly places.

(1) The flesh is present in the believer, and in the wisdom and love of God will continue with us during our earthly life. In the cross and the Spirit are the means of victory, and there is no condemnation attached to the presence of the flesh in the believer. It is at the precise point where lusts after the *gratification* of the flesh manifest themselves that action — immediate, vigorous, ruthless — is demanded.

(2) In the church epistles there are three lists of sins, and attached to them the sternest rejection. Two, typical because they are found in all such lists, are fornication and covetousness, which is idolatry. I shall try to show, by examination of the context of each, that they qualify explicitly for acceptance as the sins pictured in "the accursed thing" of our chapter.

(a) Ephesians 5:3-6. Compare v. 6 with v. 1 of our chapter in Joshua: "because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" and "the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel". Notice also Joshua 1:6 "for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land". In later chapters the word 'inheritance' is especially characteristic of this book.

(b) Colossians 3:5. "Mortify (put to death) therefore your members which are upon the earth", and the verse goes on to identify "your members" with the sins listed. This verse and this action is most vividly illustrated in Matthew 5:30 "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee . . .".

(c) 1 Corinthians 5:11,13. The same sins are listed here, and in the context of 1 Corinthians, demand excommunication, no less. This demonstrates as nothing else could the need for total exclusion of these offences. Nevertheless I cannot believe that excommunication is the lesson of Achan in Israel for us. The former is exclusion with a view to restoration of the individual. The latter is total destruction of the

'members' responsible for the sin, and in each case must be worked out in and by each for himself. This is true in spite of the fact that the whole company is involved. To this we now turn.

(d) In this first verse of our chapter, a notable point to observe is that the guilt and the anger of Jehovah, rests on all Israel. This we see in church epistles in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 5:6, indicating that in case (c) above, the whole assembly is involved. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump".

Galatians 5:9, the same words, in this case connected with errors of doctrine. There is an interesting echo of our chapter in Galatians 1:7 and 5:12, if we recall that Achan and Achor mean 'trouble'. "I would that they were even cut off which trouble you."

Vv. 2-5. All unaware of Achan's sin and of the disaster entailed by it, Joshua made his dispositions for assault on the next city, a small one. Here also there was a large 'but'. Joshua himself was at fault at this stage. He did not enquire of Jehovah. He went forward on the crest of the wave of appearances straight into disaster. And this disaster had its causes entirely in Israel itself — Achan. His fault was sin. Joshua's fault was lack of wisdom and of dependence.

Joshua was, at his level for that day, cautious. The reconnaissance party he sent out reported the facts — "they are but few", and a judgment, "let not all the people go up". And so, out of the hundreds of thousands available and eventually required, Joshua, at their word, sent about three thousand men, "and they fled before the men of Ai" (v. 4). What was worse, there were casualties.

Vv. 6-9. At last Joshua and the elders are on their faces before Jehovah to enquire of Him. Their despair is recorded in vv. 7-9. The parabolic nature of the history requires a vivid realisation of their predicament. Israel was completely surrounded by an alien and hostile population. They were entirely shut up to only two alternatives — victory or annihilation. There was no help and retreat was impossible.

There is a most important lesson here arising from the application of all this to the Christian's warfare in heavenly places. The stark dilemma which faced Israel scarcely exists for him. In the case of Israel, deliverance from Egypt, the experience of Jehovah's provision during the forty years in the wilderness, and the fight for Canaan, were gone through separately. There was no choice at this stage, no possibility of avoiding conflict in Canaan by going back to the wilderness. All this is because the loving wisdom of our God has given to the Christian the records of these phases of Israel's experiences standing in the Word. They stand there *not for Israel*, but for the Christian so that we may, for our guidance in the path of life, study each as a separate existence. But, in what corresponds to them in the Christian's experience, they represent things that should go on side by side simultaneously. And here is the crux of the matter. It is possible for the Christian to settle

down and enjoy the world; it is, in a sense open to the Christian to be satisfied with the experiences of God in the pilgrimage, and so avoid the conflicts of Canaan. Let us make no mistake, the Christian experiences which correspond to “the manna and the springing well”, and the pillar of cloud and fire, are very, very wonderful. But to opt for the wilderness and thus draw back from Canaan is to forfeit communion with God in “the things that He hath prepared for them that love Him” — things so rare and precious that eye hath not seen them, nor ear heard, neither have they entered into the heart of man — things centred on Christ in glory, and to know the love which passeth knowledge. It is possible for the Christian, unlike Israel, to choose, or to slip carelessly into this option, and very many Christians do so. Do you?

At this point let us search our hearts. Am I avoiding the conflict of Ephesians chapter six altogether by setting my sights on easier things? Or by the disobedience which permits the Christian to love the world? Are we making full use of the wisdom of God in giving us these things in separate tableaux so as to help us to be clear-cut in our commitment to realising deliverance from Egypt, divine supplies for the wilderness, *and* also victory and rest in the land of promise?

Vv. 10-15. I think it was Spurgeon who entitled a sermon on v. 10 “Unseasonable Prayer”. It was indeed so; “Get thee up; wherefore liest thou upon thy face?” It was not a time for prayer, but for action. Israel had sinned. Jehovah’s reply seems to indicate that Joshua ought to have known the true state of affairs, by enquiring of Jehovah before the assault on Ai. So the truth would have emerged before the defeat and loss. The action required was to detect and root out the accursed thing. In the language of Ephesians 4:27 they had “given place to the devil”. Sinful behaviour on our part can and will, in our spiritual warfare, give place for the devil.

Vv. 16-21. A substantial part of the sections we are now considering (vv. 13-18), deals with the searching process by which the accursed thing was revealed. By this we are led to a more pressing attention to the ‘searching’ of Psalm 139:1,23,24. This attitude of David must not be thought of as spiritually morbid or diseased. It existed alongside the most intense joy in God. Perhaps we should say rather that such joy in God as David displays — and we covet — could only exist alongside the willingness, nay, the desire, to be searched by God. So, as we read these verses, their lesson will not be lost if David’s prayer is put frequently upon our lips, and in our hearts; “Search me, O God, and know me: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”.

We now come to the heart of this part of the history in Achan’s confession. Joshua’s fault lay in not enquiring of Jehovah, and the discipline was *defeat*. Achan’s fault was in the accursed thing, and the punishment was *death*. Achan represents something in the Christian,

and not a Christian in person. There is that in me which responds to the attractions of the detestable evils of Ephesians 5:5. It is this man who must be brought under death, the death of Christ.

In our narrative, the first step into disaster was "I saw" (v. 21). Here is a glimpse of the moment when Achan discovered that the accursed thing can assume an immensely attractive and seductive appeal, while being unmistakably Canaanite and coming under the ban. The sultry gleam of the gold and silver and the brilliant colours of the garment of Shinar overcame Achan's separation to Jehovah's ban, led him to desire, and finally to action — "I took".

What is detestable in the eyes of Jehovah and fatal to His worship, can be 'goodly' (attractive) in the eyes of the flesh. Among the things that Achan 'saw' was 'a goodly garment of Shinar'. This latter was the name of the country in which Babylon was to develop, and to become a fatal snare to Israel. The 'goodly' aspect of what came out of Mesopotamia is vividly portrayed in the prophets (read Jeremiah 10:9 and Ezekiel 23:5,6). We have already spoken about that which is put to death in ourselves. Here we learn of its attractive aspect in the eyes of the flesh.

Achan's actions and thoughts he gives in strict detail. "I saw — I coveted — I took". The last step is worthy of note — "I hid". In several of those feelings which would make up for the Christian "the accursed thing", there is something distinctly inward, hidden in the heart, nursed and meditated there, so that they are not allowed to appear on the surface. Two such evils are covetousness (Ephesians 5:3) and malice (*Ibid.* 4:31). The suggestion of feeding mentally on such things is clear in 1 Peter 2:1, as also the need to deal with them conclusively.

Vv. 24-26. There follows a solemn account of events in the valley of Achor. The name of this location occurs in other Scriptures — notably Hosea 2:15. It appears that the names of both Achan and Achor refer to the *trouble* which came on Israel because of Achan's sin. It is wonderful to read in Hosea "I will give her . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope". These words are to enable Israel to see beyond the 'trouble' spoken of by Hosea, to the final blessing, when she shall be restored. If we ask, concerning this sad chapter, what light and stimulus does it provide for us, it is that self-judgment must have a just and sensitive place in our lives. This is surely a lesson supremely applicable and worthwhile for the days in which we live. The assurance is given so long afterwards by Hosea that the process of self-judgment portrayed in the valley of Achor is the sure door of hope for the future. And this is true to our narrative, for from this moment there were no more military defeats, no more battle casualties, but unbroken victory.

8:1-9. These verses are occupied with the victorious assault on Ai. The critical point is poignantly described in v. 20 "And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city

ascended to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way”.

Here the word of Jehovah entered into the realm of explicit tactics, as was so often the case with David long afterwards, and it was obeyed. There was assurance and promise, but then the explicit clarity required, “lay thee an ambush”. Many alternatives would present themselves: to repeat the tactics of Jericho? a frontal assault again? a patient siege? a parley? an ambush? It is difficult to avoid the belief that if we were willing to listen, and above all, committed to simple obedience, the Lord would give certain communication of His mind as to action in the Christian warfare: prayer, ministry, visits, forgiving some individual brother or sister, using some detail of the armour.

Since the final plan was simply obedience to Jehovah’s command, it succeeded; and through the stern trial of the valley of Achor, the only defeat Israel suffered in the field was changed to victory. Thus we have seen in Jericho the principles underlying victory, and in Ai the great warning of the principles of defeat, and at the same time the way the valley of Achor is the door of hope. These are immense lessons for the Christian’s warfare in heavenly places.

The Resurrection and its tremendous results

R. A. CREETH

The resurrection of Christ is at the basis of much of the teaching we receive. Less often, however, is it treated as the central theme of an article. This Mr Creeth does in the ensuing paper; which shows it to be a grand and heartening theme indeed.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was the great theme of apostolic testimony. From Pentecost onwards the apostles emphasised the glorious fact that the One whom men crucified was risen and exalted to God’s right hand, and it was said of Paul that he preached “Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18). In setting forth the Gospel which he preached the apostle declares, “Christ died for our sins . . . He was buried . . . He was raised the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus was being assailed and denied in Paul’s day, and truly it is an essential part of our faith that we need to hold tenaciously in this present day when there is so much indifference as to the glory of the Person of our adorable Lord.

Let us seek to summarise some of the blessed results of the resurrection. First of all, it is *God's vindication of His beloved Son*. The very One who smote the Sin-bearer has put forth His power to raise Him from among the dead, and has exalted Him to His own right hand in heaven. Peter stresses this in the first gospel address ever preached: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: *whom God hath raised up*" (Acts 2:22-24). And later he adds, "*This Jesus hath God raised up*, whereof we all are witnesses" (verse 32). See also Acts 3:14-15 and 4:10. Such was Peter's testimony to the Jews, and later in the first presentation of the Gospel to a company of Gentiles he declares, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: . . . whom they slew and hanged on a tree: *Him God raised up the third day*, and showed Him openly" (Acts 10:38-40). Again, Paul proclaims the same truth in the synagogue at Antioch, "When they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. *But God raised Him from the dead*" (Acts 13:29-30). These scriptures show plainly that God has fully vindicated the despised and rejected Nazarene in raising him from among the dead and seating Him at His own right hand.

Christ's resurrection is also the witness of *God's acceptance of His atoning sacrifice*, and hence the assurance of the believer's eternal blessing. The scriptures already quoted from the Acts show that God has raised up the One who suffered the judgment of our sins upon the cross and has exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour. What assurance this gives us that our sins have been righteously atoned for and put away for ever! Paul says in Romans 4:25, "He was delivered up for our offences, and was *raised again for our justification*". As one writer puts it, "Having borne our sins and passed into the realm of death, Jesus our Lord was brought forth from it. His resurrection is said definitely to be on account of our justification. It is the public testimony that His atonement was effective. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the demonstration that God is righteous in imputing righteousness to those who believe, Jesus having been given up for our offences" (W.J.H.).

As those thus justified by God Himself, what effect should the resurrection of the Lord Jesus have upon our walk and ways? We should bear in mind that God sees us as *identified with Christ in His death and resurrection*. Christ having died for us, God accepts His death as ours, and we are thus viewed as having closed our connection with the first Adam and all the ruin and guilt under which we lay. Colossians 2:11-12 makes this clear. When we believe in Christ we have all the value of His death made true of us. And having been identified with Christ in His death, we are moreover associated with Him in His resurrection. "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein *ye were also*

raised with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." This lays the basis for the exhortations of chapter 3.

"If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above, where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth; for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3, J.N.D. Translation). Our death with Christ is our deliverance from the old order of things: our resurrection with Christ is our entrance into the new and heavenly order. All that I was as a child of Adam I am cut out of: All that Christ is, I am before God. What a salutary effect such a truth should have upon our walk as believers in this world! May we take it to heart more deeply that our Lord Jesus Christ has given Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father! (Galatians 1:4). Let us take care that we do not get so mixed up with the world that we lose sight of the divine purpose that we should walk in separation from it.

Another blessed result of the Lord's resurrection is that it *has secured for us a heavenly inheritance*. Peter writes in his first epistle, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." God brought His people Israel into the earthly inheritance of Canaan, but they soon corrupted it and defiled it by their sin. Moreover it faded before their eyes when they were carried away captive into Babylon. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have a living hope and an unfading inheritance which cannot be marred by sin. It is reserved in heaven for us, and meanwhile we are kept for the inheritance by the mighty power of God. Earth thus loses its attraction for the believer; his eyes are now turned upward to heaven, for all his portion is there where Christ is.

Another grand result of Christ's resurrection is that *His present position as Head of the body, the Church, depends upon it*. We read in Ephesians 1:20-23, God "raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, . . . and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be *the Head over all things to the church, which is His body*, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (see also Colossians 1:18). Union with Christ was an impossibility before His death and resurrection, but now in inseparable union with Him as His body, the church shares His place of lordship over all. What a privilege indeed is ours, not only to have life in Him, but to be intimately and eternally associated with Him, the risen, glorified Man! "The church

is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." As another remarks, "It is the complement, or that which fills up Christ, looked at as man risen from the dead. As Son of God He, of course, requires nothing to complete His glory; but as man He does. He would no more be complete in His resurrection-glory without the Church than Adam would have been without Eve" (W.K.).

We come now to the glorious fact that the resurrection of Christ is *the pledge of our own resurrection* at His coming. In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle exposes the folly of those who teach that there is no resurrection from the dead, and he comes to this conclusion, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most to be pitied". Then he adds triumphantly, "But now *is* Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: *Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming*" (verses 20-23). An Israelite would understand the figure. As the harvest time drew near he would go out into his cornfield, select the first ripening sheaf and present it to the Lord at the Tabernacle gate or in the Temple. He would do this in the certainty of the approaching harvest, and later the ripened grain of the field would be seen to resemble the first fruits in every respect. So it will be at the coming of the Lord: the raised saints transformed into bodies of glory will be like their risen and glorified Lord, Himself the firstfruits of that great harvest of all the redeemed. Then "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Finally, the resurrection of Christ bears witness to Him as the *divinely appointed Judge of this world*. On Mars Hill Paul announced that God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that *He hath raised Him from the dead*" (Acts 17:30-31). Our Lord Himself has told us that all judgment has been committed unto Him, in order that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father (John 5:22-23). Peter testified before Cornelius and his friends that God raised Him up the third day, and ordained Him to be the Judge of living and dead (Acts 10:40,42). But such is God's grace and longsuffering towards a guilty and judgment-doomed world that Peter could immediately add, "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." How blessed that we know Him now as our Lord and Redeemer, who will soon come to receive us to Himself and to bring us into the many mansions of the Father's house! How solemn that those who reject Him as Saviour will have to meet Him as Judge!

Plain Speaking

COLIN CURRY

A meditation mostly concerned with the regulations for a Hebrew servant in Exodus 21.

How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. (John 10:24)

If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master . . . shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever. (Exodus 21:5,6)

On the question raised in the verse in John 10, the evidence was already clear. But the questioners lacked the will to accept it. They believed not, because they were not of His sheep. The simplicity and open trust that hears Him and follows Him was not theirs. His own sheep — how wonderfully He expresses His ownership of them! — are not hesitant. They hear His voice, and are attracted by it, finding it clear and straightforward, removing all doubt. What clear firm words, for instance, about the security of His sheep, immediately follow! But the whole picture presented by the Lord Jesus in all His movements here, the pattern of all His vital words and actions in grace and in power, says only one thing, and says it *plainly*. It is this, that He *is* what He claims to be. His word, far from being ambiguous, comes over with authority; His love surpasses all other loves. Clearly He is to be trusted and followed wholly. Once he described Himself as “Altogether that which I also say to you” (John 8:25, New Trans.). To confirm it, He has only to be taken at His word.

The plain speaking of our Lord, in the utter devotion and service of His love, is beautifully illustrated in the passage in Exodus 21. This little picture gains in its impact when its placing within the chapters is noted. In the previous chapter the ten commandments are set out. The essence of the law, given in such an awe-inspiring way at Sinai, is there. Here are God’s standards for men; no less than this will satisfy His holiness. This too is what man, oblivious of his weakness, committed himself to do. The level set was high indeed, far above anything that fallen man was capable of. Moreover this was a minimum of behaviour acceptable to God: much of the content of Matthew 5-7 allows this point to be made. In its essence, the law from Sinai asked a man to love God with all his heart and mind and strength — and to love his neighbour too. It set the divine standard, but, apart from promoting a proper and

total respect for God, its only effect was to expose human weakness. It was disobeyed forthwith — the prime requirement of all was grossly violated. Though the law asked for love, Godward and manward, it could not stimulate it. There was nothing from which it could spring. To be under the law was to be continually obliged to seek to maintain an impossible level. The spirit of a man truly under the law must inevitably be a spirit of servitude and bondage, under pressure to meet demands always too heavy to answer. The misery and servility of that condition is obvious.

But, see this little picture in chapter 21! A picture of *love* serving willingly and freely — a spirit of service quite unlike the servitude of law-keeping. A habit of mind, a kind of devotion, which performs the set term (the six years) of service — *does* what is required readily, in love, and wants to go on perpetually, serving far beyond what is asked. Not *minimal* love, this — such as the law required — but love *that exceeds*, serving in love for ever! What a picture! Alongside the decalogue, how sharply this stands out as different. It shows that something far beyond the law was already in mind — though it was needful that the law should expose human sin and strengthlessness first. The Spirit of Christ, meeting higher criteria than ever the law envisaged, fulfilling them in *love*, willingly and at cost, is pictured for us here. The Spirit of Christ is the sole power in *us* too to walk in His steps, walking not after the flesh but after the Spirit, walking in love, and in the Spirit, and so pleasing God.

Our Lord “being (subsisting without discontinuity) in the form of God” also “took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:6,7). He was no less really a servant than He was really God. He ‘took obedience as His life-characteristic’ (see *Scripture Truth* Vol. 48, p. 175). Think for a while of the plainness, the crystal clarity, of our Lord’s speaking in pure and undying love to all He has undertaken to serve in this way. Service to the One who sent Him, under whose will He delighted to be; a real servant, truly Man, unwavering and flawlessly obedient, wherever that will would direct Him: an obedience such as took Him on to severe testing and suffering, even to the death of the cross. Serving God to the utmost, carrying everything there in faithfulness to God, in the deepest moments of all. Completing too that service which was His alone to shoulder, to the extreme pleasure of God, whose service in this respect He had undertaken and finished. But also serving still above, the exalted Man, God’s right-hand man indeed, God’s appointee, God’s fit man able to act as His executor, serving well and serving for ever — with devoted love activating all His continuing services. How plainly, at the cross particularly, He has said “I love my master” — and how plainly right it is that the love that He Himself embodies should be entrusted with *everything* in His continuing and wholly-reliable devotion to God.

Has He not also made it absolutely plain that His wife and His children are the objects of His love; a love which ever has this strong and special quality? Love that saw that bride-to-be in advance; love that valued her so specially that He sold all that He had to purchase her — the one unique object of His choice, the “one pearl of great price” which meant more to Him than all else. “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25-27). How plainly such Scriptures indicate a love of a different order, a different dimension of love, than all other loves; though it is also set up as the model for believing husbands. The measure of this love is the gift He gave to claim the church; it was nothing less than *Himself*! But claiming her in that way was only the start. After His complete self-sacrifice for her, His service in love to her continues. The service of sanctifying, cleansing her, shaping and preparing her, goes on: it is His present work of love for her. The presentation day is ever in His mind, the day when He will receive her to Himself — glorious, spotless, wrinkle-free, beautiful in eternal freshness — for His love and satisfaction for ever!

Then, bearing in mind verses like “Behold I and the children whom God hath given me” (Hebrews 2:13) we may think of all the *individuals* who together form the one company for which He died. Surely the Lord’s love for His own is a love demonstrated to each of them, and not less plainly to be understood and enjoyed by every single one of them. “My master, my wife, and my children” indicates special love for each, including each child. Each one of “His own sheep” separately recognises His voice, though together they form the one flock. He serves God still in uniting and leading the praises of those now linked and associated with Him, but they are a united band of individuals — indeed they are “*many brethren*”, “*many sons*” being brought home to glory. He has spoken of His love *plainly* and *overwhelmingly* to each one of us, and His service of love continues still. He Himself is the bond of our unison in responsive love and gratitude to Himself and to God.

“Whosoever will be great amongst you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief amongst you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Matthew 20:26-28

Life, life of love pour'd out fragrant and holy!
 Life, 'mid rude thorns of earth, stainless and sweet!
 Life, whence God's face of love, glorious but lowly,
 Shines forth to bow us, Lord, low at Thy feet!

Grief, grief of love that drew hate's every arrow!
 Grief that Thy suff'ring heart only could meet!
 Grief, whence Thy face of love, shining in sorrow,
 Draws us, adoring, Lord, low at Thy feet!

Death, death of stricken love, wrath's sea exploring!
 Death, Life's mysterious death — deep meeting deep!
 Death, whence Thy bursting heart fills ours — outpouring
 All, all in worship, Lord, low at Thy feet!

F. ALLABEN

(Quoted from *The Lord is Near* calendar)

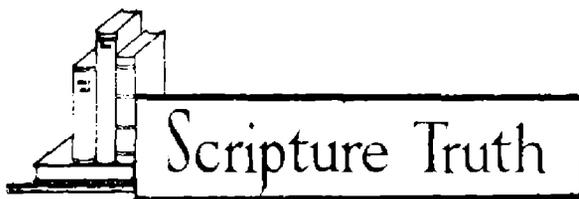
A short extract

(taken from Wm. Kelly's 'Exposition of 2 Timothy')

Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner; but suffer hardship with the gospel, according to the power of God. (2 Timothy 1:8)

"It is a grievous blank where a servant of God has only the gospel before his soul, (and) lacks heart for the glory of Christ as Head of the church. . . . It is wrong to be absorbed even with the gospel, so as to abnegate our part in these high and heavenly privileges and consequent duties, so near to Christ and inseparable from God's counsels and Christ's love."

"But there is an opposite error . . . at least as dangerous and even more dishonouring to Christ because it is more pretentious and seductive — the danger of occupying the mind and life with the truth of the church and its wondrous associations to the deprecation of the gospel, and the despising of those who faithfully addict themselves to this work. The apostle to whom we are indebted more than any other inspired instrument for the revelation of the church not less strenuously insists on the all-importance of the gospel. Christ is most actively and supremely concerned with *both*, and so should be His servants, though one might not be a teacher on the one hand nor an evangelist on the other."



ACKNOWLEDGE HIM

Ancient words, from *Proverbs 3:6* — first expressed by one possessing outstanding wisdom from God — underlie these verses written by a much-respected brother now at home with the Lord.

When joy fills all thy path of youth,
Acknowledge Him Who gives thee breath;
So shall He guide thee in His Truth
To have the life that lives thro' death.

When this or that must be thy choice,
Acknowledge Him Whose choice is best;
So shall you in His way rejoice,
Still in His perfect will to rest.

When dangers, trials, testings press,
Upon life's stormy unknown way,
Acknowledge Him Who by His cross
Will lead thee to Eternal Day.

Though sorrows come, and tears must flow,
Acknowledge Him Whose grace divine
Gives strength sufficient: you shall know
The Man-of-Sorrows' hand in thine.

As years speed on, and youth has gone,
Still take thy joys and cares to Him:
Till at Life's end you'll pass it on —
"In all thy ways acknowledge Him".

So all thro' life acknowledge Him,
That all thy paths directed be,
Till in His presence thou shalt hear
Thy well-known Lord, acknowledge thee.

A. E. ALLAN

Power in the New Testament church

TOM TYSON

This address, the second of a pair given at Otley, extended the theme of the early church to other parts of the book of Acts. This and the earlier paper, based on these addresses, confront us with urgent things today when the real power of the Holy Spirit in our gatherings is hardly so prominent a feature.

The first address, on Acts 2:41-47, looked at something rather special — the church at the very start. The Holy Spirit, newly descended from the Lord above, acted in power *in* the members forming the church. But the *continuance* of the manifestation of that power, for a whole range of needed attitudes and activities in the expanding church, is seen throughout the whole book of Acts. Some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit empowered believers will be picked out from various chapters. It will be best to refer to the Scriptures as we require them.

(1) *Power in prayer, in the N.T. church.* See Acts 4:23-31, Acts 12:5-16.

Arising out of threats and persecution, there was no doubt about the power that united them in prayer, and confirmed their prayer too.

(a) They spoke with *boldness*, with one accord. The whole company had *one voice* (singular). They prayed as one man! Their prayer went up to God, who alone was at the centre of their thoughts: they spoke to God, *about* God (primarily). It was prayer that put God first. Their prayer was *based on the knowledge of God*.

(b) Their prayer was *based on Scripture* too. They quoted Scripture. They prayed along the lines of the purpose of God. They recalled that “whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done” *had* been done; and they expected it still to be done. So, they asked for what would honour God, and bring about His will. They saw that what was required was not *relief* for them, but *boldness* to witness. God shook the place with His Amen; the Holy Ghost confirmed it all! Their prayer got a quick answer! They asked for boldness, and they *got* it, and *showed* it!

(c) For an *individual*, too, they prayed with this kind of unison. For Peter, in prison in chapter 12, “prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him”. Addressing their prayer to God, persisting with it, they found that such prayer was answered. They were still at it when he knocked at the door! The sequel shows that they were men

like ourselves — surprised when the answer came! Many of these early individuals in the Acts were ordinary persons. Their unity, their diligent concern, their continuance in prayer, even for a single person, were all of the Holy Spirit.

(2) *Power for discipline, in the N.T. church.* See Acts 5:1-11.

Here the Holy Spirit, working in the company of believers, took action in a different way. The story of Ananias and Sapphira, quite near the beginning, makes less pleasant reading, but its lessons are necessary none-the-less. The need for discipline may still arise, and only the Holy Spirit empowers for action of this kind. Satan changed his tactics; from rank opposition, he switched to an attempt to undermine the work of God. This matter must not be glossed over. The power in the early church, and the united testimony of the believers, would have been seriously impaired had this matter not been exposed. The Holy Spirit provided the discernment that discipline was required: He also supplied the guidance for proper dealing with the defection, so that the testimony to the Lord Jesus should not be besmirched, and the power lost. In result, great fear came upon all; not fright but solemnity was deeply felt — the solemnity of the fear of God. Nobody joined the believing company unless they really meant it. The next verse does however say that still there were additions, but not for spurious reasons. With the Spirit of God amongst them that deep respect for God, and what suited Him, was there too. There was powerful discipline in the N.T. church. No doubt it was partly because apostles were there; but careful discipline, according to the Spirit, is still important when it is called for.

(3) *Power in witness, in the N.T. church.* See Acts 8:4-8, 26-36; 11:19-26; Acts 28: 13-15, 23-25.

There was a personal witness carried by all who believed; they moved around, going "everywhere" preaching the word. It is said that fishermen dislike starfish because they attack fish; and, furthermore, the way to destroy them is *not* to chop them up. Every little piece becomes a complete starfish in time. Believers, scattered and split up, multiplied and grew. So the power of the Holy Ghost was evident. Then there were specially gifted persons, gifts to the church. Philip the evangelist was one such. When the Holy Spirit has freedom, things happen! A whole city, Samaria, felt the power of the word of God. There was great joy in that city! But soon, as guided by the Lord, Philip turned his back on all that work, and met a lone person in the desert, reading the Old Testament, though needing help with it. Through this stranger from Ethiopia it seems that black Africa, another *country*, was one of the early places to know the effects and power of the Gospel. The detailed way in which the Holy Spirit guided Philip in approaching this man in the desert, may be noted. The preaching in Samaria,

meanwhile, spread as far as Antioch. Preaching began first in the synagogue, but soon a church in Antioch was set up, and became a base for still wider evangelism. How far it had spread is evident from Acts 28. In less than one lifetime (Paul's) Christians were already in Italy. He and his companions found brethren at Puteoli, on their way north in Italy, after the voyage and the shipwreck. To the Appii forum and 'The three taverns' brethren came out from Rome to greet them, having walked the forty miles to that spot. What a meeting that must have been! Paul thanked God and took courage! The spread of the Gospel had been going on under the Holy Spirit's power, during the long period of his confinement in Roman hands, in Caesarea, and afterwards. And still it was to go far further!

(4) *Power to deal with practical problems.* See Acts 6:1-7; 11:27-30; 13:2-4.

Practical problems of various kinds arose, the Holy Spirit being much to the fore in enabling them to be met. In Acts 6, some dissension arose, because of a feeling of grievance. The sense of unfairness was felt by those in the church who had been Grecian Jews and those converted from a strictly Jewish background. These could almost be termed racial troubles; and the dissension would have spoilt the united testimony if allowed to develop. But it was dealt with promptly and wisely under the Holy Spirit. Men full of the Holy Spirit were chosen, mostly from the aggrieved section, who sorted it out, and settled the matter properly. Even business matters, if to be effected aright, require the Holy Spirit's guidance and enablement. The promptness and effectiveness of the action taken here may show how such matters ought to be handled in a local assembly.

The verses in Acts 11 show the Holy Spirit working in another way. Agabus, gifted as a prophet, by the Holy Spirit forewarned of a great famine soon to arise; and by the Holy Spirit in the church at Antioch action was decided upon to forestall some of its effects. Every man, amongst the disciples there at Antioch, "according to his ability" made his contribution (much in the way that Paul pressed on the Corinthians). They *determined* to do something for the relief of the brethren in Judea, *which also they did*. Again notice this feature of *action* in practical matters, under the Holy Spirit. Under the Holy Spirit too they completed their intention, by using persons they could trust to convey the gift to Jerusalem. Practical common sense marked this action too.

In Acts 13:1,2 Saul and Barnabas are seen along with other gifted persons in the assembly at Antioch, but not until then outstanding among the others. But at this point we see them called by the Holy Spirit to move further afield, and to start upon new service for the Lord, the work of preaching and establishing assemblies elsewhere. In the local assembly, we see power to identify gift, and to support it too,

given by the Holy Spirit. With Barnabas and Saul, we note the power of the Holy Spirit choosing them, and fitting them, and sending them out on their new work. Sent forth by the Holy Spirit they went to Cyprus, and far further later. The church's involvement is also plain, under the Spirit. Do *we* support people? Do we discern and encourage abilities and services for which the Holy Spirit has fitted individuals? When persons are directed really to work for the Lord, do we wait on the sidelines and let it happen, giving perhaps some tardy support at a late stage? How easy it is to be semi-dormant regarding possibilities, and the exercises of persons not too remote from us! The will to be involved, both in action and in strong backing of movements of the Holy Spirit amongst us, comes itself from the Holy Spirit.

(5) *Power in teaching and in worship.* See Acts 13:1; 15:28,29; 18:24-27; 20:11,12,27,28.

Returning to Acts 13:1, the individuals mentioned there are interesting: Barnabas, who had sold his fields in support of the well-being of the early church, and who had nurtured Saul in his newly-converted stages. There is quite a possibility that Simeon was the Cyrenian who carried the cross for Jesus. Manaen was brought up with the wicked Herod — but how wonderful to see him now, a believer, and a teacher in the church, along with these others. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit which enabled them for this local service at Antioch — fitting them all as He sees best.

After long consideration the letter mentioned in 15:28 was despatched to the Gentile churches. At that discussion in Jerusalem an important *doctrinal* question was settled by the Holy Ghost. The context shows how serious was this discussion, with proper dependence on the Lord. Very properly Scripture was used as the reference-point, and was the basis underlying the conclusions arrived at, and the formulation of the letter. The real power guiding their careful and humble conclusion was the power of the Holy Spirit. Here is guidance for us too, should a proper resolution of a matter of teaching and truth be needed. Note that in this letter they were able to distinguish between what was critically important, and what was much less so — again something much needed today!

Acts 18:24 shows a capable, gifted man — Apollos — needing help. Instead of criticising him, that beloved though unobtrusive pair Aquila and Priscilla gave him just exactly the help he needed. They took him home, and expounded the way of God more perfectly. Apollos was still at the O.T. level of understanding — he knew only the baptism of John. After receiving enlightenment, by the Holy Spirit (through Aquila and Priscilla), he was better equipped to do the work of the Lord, and became a specially gifted servant in those early days. But let us remember that in a private way much is done which the Lord uses to further

His ends.

In Acts 20 we find Paul moving finally (as it proved) out of areas where he had travelled, leaving behind brethren and assemblies in places where the Holy Spirit had been at work, mostly through his own labours. Sadness at his departure is seen in the record, in some of these farewell scenes. Yet a sense of fortitude is there too. Apostles may do their work and have passed on. Yet where *God* has been at work, and the Holy Spirit remains among believers, support and help for them is available, and will be needed. At Troas, as at the outset among the first believers, breaking of bread is a continuing practice. Response to the love of Christ, and the outflow of praise and worship is one of the continuing things, under the Holy Spirit. It can be sustained only in His power. At Ephesus, or more precisely at a point not far distant, where elders from Ephesus journeyed to see him as he passed that way, Paul reminded them that the power of the Holy Spirit was to be their enablement in teaching and feeding the flock of God, for whose welfare He (the Holy Spirit) had fitted them to share responsibility. There would be things to beware of, guarding that flock from misleading influences, wrong and grievous attitudes and persons springing up amongst themselves. It is a sobering farewell from the apostle, not less needed today. But there is encouragement in it too! *God*, and *the word* of His grace, with all its ability to guide and guard believers, and to help in the undertaking of any charge which God puts upon our shoulders — these are our resources which *remain* while the Church remains on earth. The N.T. church situation has passed, but the power seen in the N.T. Church is still present, and available in all the ways this address has sought to outline.

'The true light now shines'

J. N. SHEPHERD

The bright glory of Christ breaks in as faith looks up to see it there today; but His glory will dawn in a broader, open, fashion in 'the day' to which the article refers in its later stages. Dr Shepherd's warm style is stamped upon these pages.

Years ago, when on a journey from the canton of Vaud in Switzerland to Paris, it was my privilege to witness from the train corridor the marvellous sight of sunrise over the Savoy Alps, and the sense of wonder at the majestic grandeur of it has lived with me for more than fifty years. It may have been allowed of God so that those precious Scriptures which speak of the soon-coming superb view of a Sunrise

beyond compare might frequently be brought to mind.

The very concept of light and day found origin in God Himself, for indeed "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all". It was His desire that creation when He made it should be bathed in light which came from Him, and which in His gracious plan was essential to maintain life in it. That this is so in natural things is evident to us all, but how surpassingly wonderful it is to be let into the secret of the spiritual answer to that picture; for the *true* light is a spiritual reality, coming into the world in the Person of God's blessed Son, whereas all that is natural is soon to pass — "the things that are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal".

When we listen with adoring hearts to the Lord Jesus speaking to His Father of "the glory which I had with thee before the world was", it is ours to remember that the One who then spoke on earth was the outshining of His glory before there was a world; the light shone when there was no one to see it; shining in Him upon whom rested all that God purposed to bring into being. What joy must have filled the Father's heart as it centred on Him to whom the words apply "the Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way before his works of old, I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was".

There is something specially wonderful too about the fact that, *although* the creation of God included man, on earth, and man soon chose moral darkness and distance from God, yet it is *here* that "the dayspring from on high has visited *us*"; and so long as He was in the world He was "the light of the world". What shone out there continues to shine.

"In Him was life and the life was the light of men": and as the apostles could say "the life was manifested and we have seen it". In the main it went on shining in the darkness, unappreciated and not understood by men, but was still ever the joy of the Father's heart. In the physical sense light dispels darkness but, though it is almost inconceivable, yet it is a real fact that the light of Christ shone, and shines, yet darkness remains. Perhaps we ought to recall the words "how great was that darkness". With some, by the sovereign work of God, that light has broken in, and such can sing —

"The light of love has shone in Thee,
And in that love our souls are free".

It was *day* when He was here, though when His betrayal and rejection was imminent, the sad comment is made (on Judas's departure from the upper room) "it was night". To walk in the day, to see the light, kept a man from stumbling, so long as the Lord Jesus was the object of his gaze. None who believed on Him abode in darkness. What a day it must have been in the life of Andrew and the other disciple of John when they found themselves invited to "Come and see" where

He dwelt; and what changes have occurred in the lives of men and women, over the centuries since His ascension, as the present glory of the Lord Jesus has filled their spiritual consciousness! So much has the light of His glory affected them in their character, their behaviour, their hopes, their joys, their satisfactions, that God's precious word describes them as "children of the day". No longer does distance from God mark their lives, as in all the world around them; but they have learned what it is to be accepted in God's beloved One, and none can be nearer than this. Although the Lord Jesus is still absent from this world they live in another world, in all the light of the day where He is.

Indeed surely the very meaning of John 3:18-21 is that judgment is related to the action people take with regard to that light. "The true light now shineth" since the Lord Jesus has been here, and it still shines from heaven, and individuals either are attracted to it, or they turn away from it, loving darkness rather than light. For those drawn by the light the Holy Spirit makes it real in their hearts. The Lord Jesus is the answer to all the emptiness and longings there — as indeed He is with every genuine heart. However long they may have been in enmity against Him, all is reversed; and as with Saul of Tarsus "a light from heaven" has touched their deepest being, surpassing all natural light — indeed "above the brightness of the sun" at midday.

That this process goes on with all who really believe and come to own the Lord Jesus as their Lord, is evident from 2 Corinthians 4:6. All God's glory is shining now in the face of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit God has shined into our hearts — the same God as commanded light to shine in creation's day — to make it known to us. How matchless the grace which could ever have conceived of acting in this wondrous way. The closing verses of 2 Corinthians 3 speak of an increasing appreciation of "the glory of the Lord" through the Spirit, and a process of transformation too, going on within the person so occupied. Often the process is slow, impeded by ourselves. There is a most beautiful picture in Genesis 32. After a lifetime of deceit and scheming, in which God had never left him, Jacob came to a point when "there wrestled a man with him until *the breaking of the day*", and the struggle was over. Jacob was found clinging at last to God alone. Then come those wonderful words which say "as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh". Peniel means 'the face of God'.

Soon the glorious "Sun of righteousness" will arise and put an end to this world's night — a night which seems endless at times. The gloom, the hopelessness, the violence and the curse are all to be banished in the glory of the coming day! It is said of Israel that "the Lord shall arise upon thee and His glory shall be seen upon thee", and "the Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising". The sun is only a picture of the Source of light in the day of

Christ, for it is said again "The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for thy brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory".

That coming day will be a day without an evening: "the sun shall no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light and the days of thy mourning shall be ended". We rightly think of the history of Israel as a long story of sadness, arising from their departure from God to go after other gods; rejection of their Messiah, and inevitable judgment and tragedy has followed. But all of that will be past, with full repentance and recovery. But the brightness and glory of that day will not be confined to Israel. "They shall fear thee as long as the sun and the moon endure throughout all generations" and again, "His Name shall endure for ever: His Name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed". This is the great end-point of David's prayers (close of Psalm 72); but the whole earth will be filled with the Lord's glory, so that, with Israel, we can say "Amen and Amen".

To present-day believers it is a tremendous thing to be looking on towards that wonderful moment when the Lord Jesus will actually take up that universal dominion for which He is so infinitely worthy. He will have no rival. There will be no other Name, no other authority in the universe but His own. He will indeed possess that field, in which the treasure — ever special to Himself — is hidden, according to Matthew 13:44. There is a special joy for Him related to this. It is the real fulfilment of the often misunderstood words of John 1:29; and the price of it is indicated in the description of the Lord Jesus as "the Lamb of God, the taker-away of the world's sin". As those who in marvellous grace are associated with Him, we have come, along with the apostle, to "love His appearing". There is a very special delight in it, which can never be removed by our own more private joy.

"Praise the Lamb" the chorus waking,
 All in heaven together throng;
 Loud and far each tongue partaking
 Rolls around the endless song.

Grateful incense this ascending
 Ever to the Father's throne;
 Every knee to Jesus bending
 All the mind in heaven is one.

If we today have in some small measure been let into the secret of the Father's view of Calvary, it may be that we too have seen and been able to share a little of that full joy of the Father's heart, when "at the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth". For the earth too, there is something

unique ahead in that thrilling time of Christ's supremacy. Of the third day, in John 2, indicating the millennial day perhaps, it was said "Thou hast kept the good wine until now". Then we too shall be, as Peter and others delighted to have been, "eyewitnesses of His majesty". The mount of transfiguration — "the holy mount" — could witness His face shining as the sun, and His raiment white as the light: and there the Father's voice was heard, out of the cloud, saying "This is my beloved Son: hear Him". All through the long centuries of His absence there have been, thank God, millions of His sheep, hearers of His voice of surpassing love and beauty. That voice will be heard then, heard alone throughout the whole creation of God, and "the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day".

"And in that day" — how many times repeated in Isaiah's prophecy are these words! — "there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the people: to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious".

Here and now, before the more widespread responses to Him are seen, there is a special delight already known to faith, as we join in as He leads the praises of His own, saying "Behold I and the children which God hath given me". That, of course, will be part of the eternal response, but the Psalm (22) refers to this as an intimate circle of response to the Cross, which will widen out to the seed of Jacob, and indeed "all the ends of the world and all kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee".

Then also, from God, out of heaven itself, will descend that glorious city "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband": and thus we reach the day of glory. Light and blessing will stream out from the new Jerusalem, for "the city has no need of the sun neither of the moon to shine in it, and the Lamb is the light thereof". Decked by Himself, in unbounded and unending grace, with glories He has so matchlessly acquired here and has used for ever to adorn the bride of His heart, she too will shine in that reflected glory before the universe for ever. Into that city the glory and honour of the nations and their kings will be brought, for His praise continually.

"The day is at hand". What practical result should the view of future light and glory have in all our lives? "Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for an helmet the hope of salvation". "Wherefore comfort yourselves together and edify one another even as also ye do" (1 Thessalonians 5). "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; . . . put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" (Romans 13:12-14). "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:1-3).

Headship and Lordship

NORMAN GRIFFITHS

A meditation on 1 Corinthians 11:2-34

Author's preliminary note: A careful reading of this great chapter is advised. The apostle Paul's first letter to Corinth in the first century A.D. is also directed to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Clearly then it is intended for us in our day.

Frequently in the Pauline epistles questions concerning behaviour in the assembly, or dealing with disorders and errors, are made the occasion for setting forth great doctrinal truths, the reception of which would give the answer to these problems. So it is here.

Verse 1 really belongs to chapter 10, being its closing verse. Chapter 11 is then seen to be in two clearly marked sections — the first, verses 2-16, introduced by the phrase "I praise you" and the second, verses 17-34, by the phrase "I praise you not".

The first section deals with the question of the woman having a covering on her head when praying or prophesying, and is answered by the great truth of *headship*. In verse 3 there are three headships, firstly the head of every man is Christ, then the head of the woman is the man, and thirdly the head of Christ is God.

The second section deals with the problem of the disorderly conduct taking place when the Christians came together for the celebration of the Lord's supper, the breaking of bread. This would be set right by the recognition of the *Lordship* of Christ. Eight times in these verses the Lord is referred to — it is the Lord's supper, it was from the Lord in glory that Paul received the truth concerning its institution, it was the Lord who was betrayed, etc.

Thus the great truths of His Headship and Lordship are prominent in this chapter.

In v. 3 the first headship is that of Christ. He is the head of every man. The thought of headship is illustrated by the human body where every member is directed, guided, controlled by the head. When everything is in order and each member accepts the guidance and control of the head the whole body functions perfectly and harmoniously. So, man is to accept direction and guidance from Christ, woman to accept this from man, as Christ accepts it from God.

The Headship of Christ

The headship of Christ is connected with His unique manhood. The

divine Son in the eternal unity of the Godhead became man, true man, and retains manhood eternally, yet He remains God over all blessed for ever. This inscrutable mystery is a basic article of our faith — and is to be contended for earnestly in these days when the deity of our Lord is attacked and denied by many.

Clearly, that Christ is the head of every man is not recognised by the majority; but it will be manifested in the coming day, when in the administration of the fulness of times God will head up all things in Christ. Things in heaven and things in earth will take character and direction from Him, according to Ephesians 1:10.

We may view the headship of Christ in three ways, (a) Administratively, (b) Organically, (c) Racially.

(a) *Administratively.* Christ as Head over all from whom all will receive guidance and direction. A picture of this is shadowed forth in Adam who is said to be a figure of Christ in Romans 5:14. Adam was given dominion over all the living creatures: they were to be subject to him (Genesis 1:28) and brought to him they were to be named by him — suggesting that he was competent to assess and appoint their function in the creation (Genesis 2:19,20). In Psalm 18:43 Messiah is seen as delivered from the strivings of the people, i.e. unbelieving Israel, and made head of the heathen, the Gentile nations — people previously strangers brought into blessing.

Christ as head is again referred to in Psalm 118:22, the stone refused by the builders is to be the head of the corner. That this refers to Christ is made clear when our Lord Himself applies it to the beloved son in the parable in Luke 20:17. The headstone or cornerstone is the stone which sets and controls the shape of the building. This figure is used by Paul in Ephesians 2:20,21, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord".

Ephesians 1:10, already referred to, clearly presents the idea of administration in connection with the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The figure of a stone is used for that kingdom in the prophecy of Daniel 2:34,35, in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream — viz. the stone cut out without hands which fills the whole earth. The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea, when Christ is head over all things.

(b) *Organically.* Christ as head of the body, the church, Colossians 1:18. If administratively we think of the universal kingdom, and Christ the head of all things, organically we take a more restricted view in relation to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all, Ephesians 1:22,23. Again Adam is seen as the figure of Christ and Eve as a figure of the church. This is clear from the quotation of

Genesis 2:23,24 in Ephesians 5:30-32. From Him who is the head, by this living, vital, organic union, the body receives the ministry needed for its nourishment and increase, Colossians 2:19.

(c) *Racially.* Christ is the head of a new race of men. In Romans 5:12-21 we have two racial heads, Adam and Christ — what are called federal heads, i.e. all those who come under their respective heads partake of all that pertains to the head. By nature we all come under the headship of Adam, we belong to the fallen race; for it was after the fall, his sin and disobedience and consequent separation from God, that he begat sons and daughters. Though in the beginning he was made after the image and likeness of God, when fallen and away from God he begat sons and daughters after his own image and likeness: Genesis 5:1-3. Christ, by His death on the cross, has brought to an end for God the old Adamic race, typified in the O.T. by the ark in the midst of the deluge when the end of all flesh came before God (Genesis 6:13); and risen from the dead He is become the head of a new race — new creation according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. Those under the headship of Adam derive from their head sin, death, judgment and condemnation, but every believer in Christ derives from his head righteousness and justification, eternal life and grace abounding.

Three headships

The glorious truth of the headship of Christ is to shed its light on the second headship of verse 3 — the head of the woman is the man. In the Greek the word for *man* is *ANER*, which means specifically the male as distinct from the female. It is never used in the general sense for mankind, where the common word *ANTHROPOS* is used. The man is distinguished from the woman, and it is the man who is placed in the position of head to the woman. Verses 8,9 indicate that this is God's order from the beginning. Just as Christ as head of every man is not recognised by the majority of men today, so also today God's order that headship is vested in man is set aside and women in many spheres seek the position of headship.

Taking the three pairs of statements in this verse in parallel, this relationship of man to woman corresponds with the headship of Christ to every man. Because the man in this second relationship represents Christ — the image and glory of God (Hebrews 1:3) — he must not cover his head. This would be to veil and slight Christ's glory. Also in this second headship, the subject position of the woman corresponds with the subject position of the man in the first relationship, under Christ as his head. Therefore she must have a cover on her head signifying that the glory of man must be veiled. Thus in praying (speaking* to God, see footnote) or prophesying (speaking* forth words)

*Note: The unambiguous words of chapter 14, verses 34 and 37, must also be obeyed. Ed.

from Him) the man has his head uncovered, but the woman has a cover on her head, in keeping with God's order. In nature this is indicated by the fact that the man has short hair and the woman has been given long hair (verses 14, 15). It is clear that in verse 4 a cap or cover is intended; the word used is translated literally "something down over". In verses 5, 6 another word is used meaning a veil or covering. It seems significant that the word for a covering in verse 15 is a different word again, as if to guard against the argument that a woman does not need to have a covering on her head as she is already covered by her hair. If this were so, then logically man should not have been given any hair at all since his head is to be uncovered when praying or prophesying. It appears that often times Christians decide on a certain course of action which seems to them desirable or expedient and then manipulate scripture to support it, instead of being guided by the Word of God.

In verse 10 we learn that the woman wearing a covering on her head is to be noticed by the angels, who seem to have a great interest in what takes place on earth. They are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14); salvation which the prophets of old foretold, which things the angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:12). They saw God manifest in the flesh, were at hand at the birth of Christ, His agony in the garden, His burial and resurrection. In the church, that living unity formed of such diverse elements of Jew and Gentile, they learn the manifold, all-varied wisdom of God. Thus the woman having a covering on her head, the sign of being under authority, in the subject place, is for the angels to know this great truth of the headship of Christ.

In the epistle to the Colossians where the glory of Christ as Head is so prominent, the expression of the truth of headship is to find practical conformity in the lives of Christians in the relationships of husbands and wives, fathers and children, masters and servants (Colossians 2 & 3); in the circles of marriage, family, and business, there are those who lead and those who have the subject place.

The third headship of verse 3 is "the head of Christ is God". Surely this is wonderful indeed, and considering it should dispel all thought of resistance to this teaching, requiring as it does submission from all, male or female, each in the properly obedient way. In becoming man Christ took the subject place, willingly and perfectly, and what a model this presents to us all! Surely this is of great encouragement and comfort to the woman who accepts the subject place into which God has placed her — as she contemplates the One who left us an example that we should follow in His steps. See Him in the gospels, the perfect man spending whole nights in prayer. In John 11, sent for by Martha and Mary because His friend Lazarus was ill, waiting for two days first, as it were waiting for direction from His head, God. The prophet Isaiah so beautifully presents Him, saying in chapter 50:4, He wakeneth

morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned, and in Hebrews 5:8 He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

The Lordship of Christ

The thoughts at the close of the above section impress us again as we consider the well-known wonderful passage in Philippians 2:6-11. The mighty stoop which the Lord Jesus made, when from the glory of Godhead He humbled Himself to the subject place, even that of a bond-slave, and became obedient unto death and that the death of the cross, is presented as our example: we are exhorted to let this mind, this disposition, be in us.

Consequent upon His humiliation, He is raised up to the pinnacle of glory, being made Head of every man, Head over all things: He is, and will be universally acclaimed Lord of all.

Christ is Head over all; He is Lord over all. The second of these great matters now comes to the fore, in the remainder of our chapter, as the apostle speaks of the disorderly conduct at Corinth when the saints met for the breaking of bread, to celebrate the Lord's supper.

Again the thought of His Lordship is connected with His humanity. At His birth the angels declared that there had been born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. This great fact of His Lordship was central to the apostles' preaching right from the beginning. On the day of Pentecost, the very first preaching from Peter declared that Jesus, the same Jesus, who had been crucified, was raised from the dead and God had made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). Then in the first preaching to the Gentiles Peter declared that Jesus Christ is Lord of all (Acts 10:36).

In Paul's letter to the Romans (14:9) it is stated that Christ both died and lived again in order to be Lord of both dead and living. In Romans 10:9 confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord, together with believing in the heart that God raised Him from the dead, brings salvation. By grace are we saved by faith, the gift of God, and while God alone reads our hearts, men are to be made aware that we own Jesus as our Lord, and by this open confession with the mouth practical everyday salvation is experienced.

The two ordinances of Christianity, baptism and the breaking of bread, both recognise the Lordship of Christ. In baptism the believer is committed to Him as Lord. At Samaria and Ephesus in Acts 8:16 and 19:5 the believers were baptised to the name of the Lord Jesus.

At Corinth there was great disorder when they gathered together to break bread, so much so that the apostle will not recognise it as the Lord's supper. They had turned it into an occasion for pleasing themselves; making it a time for feasting, in which some were not given anything and others were drunken. It was disgraceful behaviour and

Paul combats it by reminding them of the Lordship of Christ. How could the name of *the Lord* be associated with such conduct?

He tells them, v. 23, that it was *the Lord* who gave to him the details of the institution of the supper, which was on the very night that He, *the Lord*, was betrayed. In celebrating it in the way He ordered it they would be showing or announcing *the Lord's death* till He come, verse 26. In verse 27 it is the cup of *the Lord* and the elements of bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of *the Lord*; also again in verse 29 — *the Lord's body*.

The discipline which came upon the assembly at Corinth was the action of *the Lord* as stated in verse 32. The disorder would be set right by acknowledging in their practice the Lordship of Christ, involving obedience to His word. In John 14:15 "If ye love Me keep My commandments"; love for Him will result in obedience, and also in verse 21 the one who keeps My commandments is the one who loves Me — obedience is the proof of love. He is *Lord* to be owned and obeyed.

Just as His Headship is not recognised by the majority, so too in our day though there is much profession of belonging to Jesus there is but little acknowledgement of Him as Lord.

In Christ as Head all fulness resides. Holding the Head, clinging to Him and drawing from Him, we receive guidance and direction subject to His control. In Christ as Lord He has supreme authority over us to be obeyed and to do His will. The acknowledgement of the Headship and Lordship of Christ would affect our deportment in Christian testimony and witness, and our response to the Lord's request in the breaking of bread in remembrance of Him — and indeed in all the details of life till He comes.

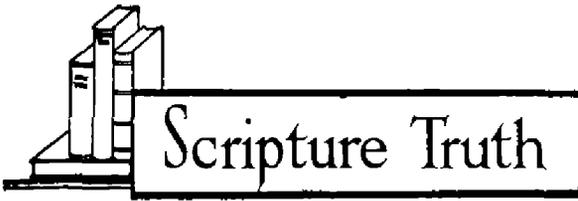
1 Corinthians 14:19

— The contrast between many wearying words and brief clear words — What gripping and profound things can be said in brief compass! Consider the following examples (each of five words):

"Behold the Lamb of God"! (John 1:36).

"This is My Beloved Son"! (common to Matthew 3:17 and 17:5).

"My Lord and my God"! (John 20:28).



Incorporating *Words of Help*

MARCH, 1985

"Give attention to reading" (1 Timothy 4:13).

This issue will test readers somewhat! Willingness to persist with rather longer articles is not always strong — but some themes *are* worthy of that kind of attention, and can even prove thoroughly engrossing.

A recent correspondent commented: "Reading is a declining ability today, even amongst Christians". With the material in the following papers to consider, and with minds to use in this way, may we not shelve these weighty issues. Rather, let us attend to them with our whole hearts, and find ourselves deeply stirred in loyalty to our Lord as the outcome. **Ed.**

Samuel

GORDON KELL

The substance of an address given at St. Andrews in July 1982. Passages in the early chapters of 1 Samuel were referred to.

About a year ago (in the summer of 1981) there were riots in some of the cities of Britain, which left a trail of ruin behind them. I well remember passing through one area in Manchester, and the total devastation which came over that place was disturbing and distressing to see. Where there had been activity, life and energy, all was wreckage; and there was virtually nothing left. Do we feel like that sometimes as we look around our Christian circles and find ourselves deeply discouraged? How *little* is left, where once meeting life was full of vitality! To compare the latest 'list of meetings' with an earlier one is disheartening in itself. The life of Samuel began at a point comparable with this in the history of God's earthly people; but the full story of Samuel has much in it to lift our hearts, and encourage us indeed, in times of this kind. It is a story that even appeals to children, yet has lessons for mature and older Christians, and indeed speaks to us *all* today. It is up-to-date, here and now, — and as we consider it again

may we find it speaks directly to us, awakening our faith, and stirring our loyalty to the God of Samuel.

Samuel was a man truly in touch with God in a close way. God worked *in* him, and *through* him, mostly through his relationships with other people. To cover his story in an orderly way we may think of:

(i) His link with his mother, *Hanna*, and her influence on him. Through her he learned the deep meaning of *faith*, *real prayer*, and also *praise*.

(ii) His relations with *Eli*; not a good example to him; nevertheless he grew up alongside him in Shiloh, where God's voice could still be heard, and where Eli ministered. Here we see him as a *listener* and a *learner*, *growing* before God — the key to so much else in the life of a man prepared to serve God in his day.

(iii) His relations with the whole of *Israel*. After his preparation period there followed a long lifetime of *service*, and *suffering* in the discharge of that service.

(iv) His relations with *Saul*, requiring both *faithfulness* and *forbearance*; in view of Israel's unwise insistence on their own way in choosing Saul as king, and the affront to God entailed in this.

(v) Finally, his link with *David* — a beautiful relationship, an old man with a youth, where Samuel in *obedience*, *overcomes*; and passes off the scene with a high vision of what God still will do, despite the perversity and weakness of His people.

Samuel and Hanna

Hanna, his mother, was the great woman behind the life of Samuel. Her faith in God carried her through suffering and deep experience, and was enlarged in that way. The sorrow of childlessness, and the suffering it entailed, were used by God to broaden her horizons, and to deepen her knowledge of Himself. We are told that "the LORD shut up her womb", and consequently she was despised and belittled, and felt the hurt deeply. Her husband loved her, and it seems they were well-off materially (the offerings they were able to give indicate this), but *nothing* could compensate for the inward emptiness which pressed hard upon her. It led to her pouring out her soul before the LORD, in broken-heartedness and affliction — crying out those words 'Remember me' to Him in her distress, and sealing it with a promise in the urgency of her faith. That prayer *was* answered, though Eli badly misinterpreted it at first, and soon the child Samuel was born. Faith cries out to God, from barrenness and emptiness, and finds that He hears and honours that appeal. Is not this a powerful picture of what *we* should be before God? Do we become distressed when our condition is as weak as God must see it, and our aspirations before Him are so undervalued and despised by others? God *can* come in and meet our need, moving in His own way when all is inert and dead. God saw a spiritual desert in the whole

of Israel at that time — there was *nothing* there for Him. But He broke into that deadness through the stirrings of faith within a godly woman, under deep pressure of soul, who prayed for a child, promised to give him back to the LORD, meant it, and then followed it up by doing what she had undertaken. Her faith was answered — the child was born — but it was tested further too. It proved its quality in the sacrifice she then made. At an early age Samuel left his parents. He was taken to Shiloh, and given to the LORD, as Hanna had said. God *desires* our prayers, but looks for our full commitment to Him too. We need to give our everything to Him. It was a turning-point (for the better) in Israel in that day. So it can be for us; what is needed is not pulpit-Christians, not conference-Christians, but people who pray urgently to God in deep humility, who commit their all to Him, and who *mean what they say*, as Hanna did. Note how this marked all Samuel's life too. It began with his mother!

Note also the song of praise voiced by Hanna in chapter 2:1-10. Is it not clear that Hanna had no resentment in giving her child to the LORD. Her heart was fully in it, so great was her awareness of the LORD, and His marvellous intervention for her and for His people.

So began Samuel's life. Hanna's influence upon him continued; as that yearly visit to Shiloh took place, we can be sure that such a mother did far more for him than Eli was able to do. A mother who prays, and cares, and supports, can be an amazing good in a child's life; as can others who can help a young person. But such links, especially the close links between parents and children, carry a strong responsibility with them too.

Samuel and Eli

Eli was a weaker person by far. His feebleness is clear in the record. He was a person with a position, but without the power which should have marked one in that place. His influence over his two sons, the successors to the priesthood, amounted to nothing at all. Those sons of his were worthless and corrupt. What a place for the child Samuel, a mere toddler at that stage, to find himself! Literally no-one encouraged that young child; there was none to help — no good guides, no exemplary behaviour from anyone. But *God* supported that child in his isolation — he *grew* where nothing was helpful. This is a repeated theme in chapters 2 and 3. Samuel, as a child, is found ministering to the LORD, before the LORD, growing, in favour both with the LORD and also with men. At a certain point, God *spoke* to him. Still a child, Samuel did not know what had happened. Eli, unaware too, could not help him — but, insensitive though he was, was *made* to realise that *something from God was afoot*. It was a moment that revolutionised Samuel's tiny life. God chooses the weak things to confound the mighty, to display His power. The Cross is the supreme example of this; but

how often God has worked in unexpected, surprising ways, taking up quite unremarkable people, 'the weak things of this world', as His means. A small child, simple and unpretentious, was to become His channel for passing on the word of the LORD in all Israel in that period. But the attitude and prayer "Speak LORD; for thy servant heareth" must be Samuel's response to the voice of the LORD. Do not these chapters (2 and 3) show how *listening* and *learning* go together, and how closely *both* are associated with *growth*, as one who would serve the Lord is prepared, and shaped under the Lord for such a service. The child listened to what God said, and that habit continued. As Samuel grew to a more mature stage, in 3:21, we read "the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel by the word of the LORD"; and thus, soon, "the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (4:1).

So we see God working where all seemed weak. Samuel, in the shadows, learning from God, where none could see what was going on, like Moses at the backside of the desert, like David with his father's sheep, being fitted for what was to come in the privacy of their inward personal life with God. How much we need to take this lesson to ourselves, with our tendency to put undue emphasis on activism in our Christian lives. All God's men learn quietly, one might say slowly, alone with God. Listening, learning, growing, underlie a life which has power in it for God. We are warned about novices, quickly in the limelight, in the pastoral epistles. Let us not essay into service for God without the experience which comes from learning in His presence first. Let our listening be given primarily to what *God* says, not to what others say, nor even to what books say, unless we find these sources concur with what God will say to us from His word.

Samuel and Israel

So far the preparatory stages of Samuel's long life for God have occupied us. From chapter 4 it becomes plain that, while at his birth things were low and barren in Israel, he was really being prepared during those years in the shadows for a still more serious crisis in Israel. We read soon of the Israelites embroiled in a battle with the Philistines which they could never win. Hophni and Phineas, Eli's sons, are found where they should never have been, in the thick of the battle, using the ark of God as a kind of talisman, in the hope of success against the enemy. It all fails miserably; the sons of Eli are slain, and the ark of God is captured by the Philistines. Eli, too, has a fatal fall on hearing the shocking news. Phineas's wife, also hearing, dies in childbirth; she names her son *Ichabod*, which means "the glory is departed", a name which trenchantly summed up the whole disastrous picture in Israel at that point. They had been doing no more than holding on to something that *once* was great — holding on to something outward — an empty shell. The elders in Israel, with Hophni and Phineas, believed that the

shell *was* the power, and the folly of that false trust was seen in the outcome.

Do *we*, let us ask ourselves, think that doing things by habit (however correctly) is good enough? Following a pattern which, under God, our predecessors took, is of no value unless their exercise is ours. It is surely fair to ask this question. *Why* is the power of godliness not clearly in evidence, when the form of it is adhered to? Are *we* prepared to let this picture from the very word of God search us now? Outward trimmings, routines, traditions, whatever their pedigree, are without power in themselves.

The story of the ark in the hands of the Philistines, though of interest, can be passed over. The Philistines were glad to part with it, and it found its way ultimately to Kirjath-Jearim, where it remained in some obscurity for a considerable time. But the trouble with the Philistines remained until Samuel took action in all this shameful state of affairs. 1 Samuel 7:3-13 shows how he acted. See his words, calling for a return to the LORD, in verse 3, and then particularly notice verse 5, and again verse 9. "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you". Here is the man of God in action, *praying*. He had learnt it from his mother! She, and he now, resorted to this — to prayer — in desperate times. But then see Samuel resort to sacrifice, giving a burnt offering wholly to the LORD, backing up his cry to the LORD in that way. The LORD heard that cry, and the Philistines were defeated without Israel lifting up arms against them. The forward look to Christ in the total perfection of His work is the high point amid all the desperate failure and weakness; and the renewed sight of it in faith is the antidote to apathy, and shallowness, and dishonouring ways amongst the people of God. From this point incursions from the Philistines discontinued, during the whole period of Samuel's steady service in Israel. In a living way, *Christ* must be central in our personal and family lives, and in our assembly life too, if we are to be lifted out of all the deadness and weakness which so dishonours God.

After the Philistine opposition abated, Samuel's ministry over the years is briefly related in 7:15-17. A respected man of God, a weighty influence in Israel, moving around the principal centres. God moved through him in a systematic way. God *does* use orderliness in our lives; spiritual ways are *not* random ways. But always Samuel returned to Ramah, where his own house was, where he built an altar to the LORD. The meaning of Ramah, 'a high place', suggests that it was from the high experience of communion with God that Samuel ventured out on his round of activity; and to which he returned after each phase of his service. Though generally respected, standing firmly for the LORD, he was not always entirely accepted by the people — especially when their own preferences were prominent. Samuel's prophetic service entailed suffering, since in representing God he took a stand for God's will for

them. Like Moses he “suffered affliction with the people of God”, partly by being with them at the time of their general low state, but also by being with them, right in amongst them indeed, having to bear with their self-will and perversity. The servant of God may not be popular at times, he may meet with cool reactions; he may even be ignored. Samuel knew about this often; especially when he took sides with God over their desire for a king. Samuel had his weaknesses too; appointing his own sons as rulers seems to have been a mistake. They were poor persons alongside Samuel himself, and not at all men of his own calibre.

Samuel and Saul

When the Israelites pressed their request for a king like the surrounding nations, Samuel felt the dishonour to God, and the wilfulness of their request. His disappointment in them must have been deep. He prays to the LORD, as always was his way in a crisis. All his guidance had, as it were, been put aside and dismissed. God Himself knew the lack of loyalty shown in their desire — saying to Samuel “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me”. But he is told to grant them what they asked, though rebuking them for it. As the Psalm says (describing another situation) “He (God) gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Psalm 106:15). Saul’s impressive outward qualities misled the people; the true Saul was an unreliable and, at times, disobedient person. Here again the full story is of interest; but fixing attention on Samuel’s relations with Saul it is clear that the new situation required patience from Samuel, and he was able to show it too. Samuel had to speak out in faithfulness at times, unpopular though it was, but also that *faithfulness* was mingled with *forbearance*, especially with the weakness of the people. We see him as an old man now, to whom few listened any longer, not without a burdened spirit in his old age; but praying still, and praying most over the tragic character of Saul. The story of Saul runs on for a long period further, but there comes a time when Saul is rejected by God, and it is determined to replace him. This time it will be *God’s* own choice — David, a man after God’s own heart. Samuel has a fading part in the remainder of Saul’s story, but is very much involved in God’s choice of the new king, though long before his accession. But in his relations with Saul, Samuel represented the LORD in an admirable way, faithful and outspoken when necessary, yet bearing with much quietly and patiently.

Samuel and David

After Saul had proved his unworthiness and unsuitability, Samuel is found mourning for Saul, and never to see him again at that stage (15:34, 35). God, seeing ahead, has His eye on a future king, and Samuel is told to go to the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite, prepared to anoint him. Samuel, uncharacteristically, is afraid — saying “Saul will

kill me" (chapter 16). Though old and fearful, he had to learn obedience again. Arriving at the house of Jesse, looking upon the sons of Jesse, he seems as one who had lost his vision, being impressed by the outward appearance of these men; having to learn afresh that "man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart". Samuel, who had been so grieved at the selection of Saul, by Israel, is found adopting the same standards as they. But Samuel had his sights re-set again, his vision returned, when David was brought, and the LORD said "Arise, anoint him, for *this* is he!" Seeing that youth, ruddy, of a beautiful countenance, goodly to look to, how Samuel's heart must have been stirred and revived! How his heart must have gone back, to Shiloh, to his early days as a child, as he saw the boy David, and thought of what God could still do in Israel. Suddenly he regains his vision, remembering the faith of his mother, praying for a Saviour in Israel, asking in effect that the LORD would bring revival through her child. He thinks again of God, using the small, the weak, to do His will. He sees the outlook under God, through this shepherd-boy, whom he anoints as God's king. He got it right again! His confidence in God, and in the prospects for His errant people, revives at the sight of David. There are hints in the ensuing chapters that, as the tension with Saul increased, David was found often at Ramah with Samuel (see, especially 19:18, 19). Though Samuel is in the background now, we can sense the strength of this relationship, between these men of God: one of them whose career for God was well-spent, and the other in its early stages. This glimpse of Samuel and David together at the end reminds us of Paul and Timothy, as Paul wrote his last letter. An older believer, who had not lost his faith in God, with no thought of *God* failing in *any* sense, confident that God would continue through Timothy, and others, and strongly supporting his younger colleague in that kind of confidence in God.

The story of Samuel begins with a child who at first was no more than a hope in his mother's heart, and develops to a man who served God at a time when there was nothing to be seen, except disheartening things, and finishes with renewed confidence in God, who knows what He is doing. All things are well in hand when in God's hands, and prospects are good and recovery assured when the *true* David, the Man after God's own heart, fills the picture.

The Virgin Birth: its Place in Christian Belief

COLIN CURRY

The sad reminder came to us in 1984 that in the field known as 'Christian' there are those who under-rate the supernatural in true Christianity. To the distress of many, even in Anglican circles, high office can accompany an open disowning of the foundational truths of real New Testament Christianity. One such truth is the Virgin Birth of Christ. This paper seeks to point out the key nature of this matter. It asks — what depends on the veracity of the statements of Scripture on this subject? Do other things stand or fall on this Biblical fact?

Introduction

A paper in *Scripture Truth* in 1968 (Vol. 43, pp. 4-9) contained the following sentences: "The character and quality of Christianity is such as to leave every reason for doubt about scepticism itself. People may claim to reject the miraculous, but in a sense they have a bigger miracle still on their hands. The difficulty of giving for the life of Jesus and its consequences any explanation which is not harder than the Christian one is *very great indeed*. Sceptical people believe the harder thing."

This fact is well recognised by all whose faith gives them even an inkling of the grand beauty of the whole Christian story (as expressed in the N.T.). Those who are in touch with the life and atmosphere of Christian experience, centring as it does on the living Christ, will take a lot of persuading that such things are unreal! The unbeliever is in a weak position: indeed there is an element of irrationality in what is called "rationalism" — a blindness to the very things it handles, an insubjection to them, coupled with an uncritical faith in the prowess of the human mind, trusting to its own insights and abilities, boasting about 'progress' in understanding while (according to the Bible) groping in a darkness of its own preferring.

An attempted defence of true Christianity as the Bible presents it would inevitably be weak and inadequate. It is perfectly capable, in its own positive right, of sustaining its own defence to the confounding of its detractors. Rather than embarking on *that* course this paper takes for granted an attachment to Christ on the part of readers, and an acceptance of the Bible records. It seeks only to draw attention to a proper attitude to the Virgin Birth, and to stress its vital place and

importance in true Christian belief.

Well authenticated

It is well to point out that the Virgin Birth of Christ is as plainly stated in Scripture, and requires the same sort of acceptance, as any clear Biblical statement. Are we humbly prepared to accept what Scripture says? The fact, clearly presented in the opening parts of Matthew and of Luke, its plain prophetic prediction in Isaiah 7, and other indications of it elsewhere, *should* be quite sufficient to settle the matter for anyone claiming a high respect for the Word of God. There is of course additional evidence of tremendous weight brought to this fact by all the splendid features of the glory of the Person who came here in this way, as Scripture also presents them. But it does not really need this additional evidence for its establishment — the plain straightforward statements are surely sufficient.

The private nature of the manner of the birth of our Lord is, however, clear. Though outside the course of nature, it was not publicly known on any large scale. It seems totally wrong (and indeed highminded) to think that Joseph and Mary were unable to distinguish between what was ordinary and what was extraordinary in this context. Scripture gives them much more credit than that, with its reference to Joseph's hesitation and the way it was calmed, and to Mary's faith, yet also to the matters that she "pondered in her heart" from that time. The honest and true nature of the account outfaces all attempts to explain it away. But, unlike the resurrection, which is expressly put forward as one of the challenging Christian facts, the Virgin Birth is not looked upon as having evidential importance. The public miracles, like the raising of Lazarus, all openly contributed their quota to the glory of Christ, and to the folly of unbelief — but not so the Virgin Birth. No less miraculous, its importance is of another kind; it tells us how it behoved our Lord to enter the human scene, He who came into it from above, and what He *must* be if He was to become our Lord and our Redeemer, and the perfect answer to God's thoughts and desires centred in Man.

Other births spoken of in Scripture, can be considered miraculous — those of Isaac, Samuel, Samson, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Saul of Tarsus, for instance. But the relevant Scriptures show that our Lord's birth *must be sharply distinguished from every other birth*. Unless our thoughts run counter to what is plainly said, we are accepting here the truly miraculous birth of Jesus from a virgin mother, without intervention of man — something absolutely distinct in character. While the Virgin Birth is a mystery, well beyond our grasp, and surpassingly wonderful indeed, these are its essential facts — together with Gabriel's words about the Holy Spirit's action in that birth, the power that would overshadow and enable Mary, and the pure holiness of the One who

would be born. None of those other births have anything at all to compare with this. In the birth of Jesus we are considering the advent of One who did not owe His coming to earthly causes. "The Word became flesh" indeed; born into humanity He certainly was — faultless, holy, humanity — but born *of* our race (the fallen, Adamic, race) never! We have yet to consider the importance of these Scriptural facts. These great statements require from us a spirit of adoration; but their *unambiguous* nature is also clear.

Part of a wider theme

The Virgin Birth of Christ — profound as it is — is *one* part of a still more comprehensive and wonderful story. We shall see later that it is a vital part of that story. We have seen that, accepting the authority of Scripture, its factual reality is not to be questioned. But we now consider the whole grand picture into which it fits.

After that birth, the life that followed was, as all must agree, highly exceptional. That is an understatement — it was *entirely unique*. Can anyone reading the Gospels fairly find a flaw in *that* life? "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" was His challenge to His critics, and still there can be none to take up that challenge. Sinlessness, holiness, purity, perfect upholding of God's high standards, faithfulness and obedience to the will of God (at whatever cost) — *this* is the constant pattern of that holy life. No other human life is at all like this. Unbelievable kindness and compassion for others, men, women, and children, of whatever class or condition, forbearance under provocation, patience, endurance — such as never was, before or since. *Love*, far beyond natural human love at its best, unearthly love, the love of God, demonstrated in Him whose name was Jesus, yet also Emmanuel 'God with us'. Where can we stop in dwelling on the beauties and graces of that pure and perfect life? Could it possibly be that such a life had an ordinary beginning?

The end stages too, towards which His life was constantly moving, are entirely unique to the Lord Jesus alone. *His* death, and His approach to death, are things quite apart from all other deaths. Death with all other men is "the wages of sin", and cannot be evaded. But why should a sinless person die? In a sense it was avoidable — legions of angels, He said Himself, could have been called in — but devotion to His Father above was paramount with Him. So it was a willing death, involving obedience to the limit, doing the will of God, displaying the love of God in such a magnificent way, yet in the deepest and darkest suffering.

Few who read the closing pages of the four Gospels can read that story unmoved. That holy man, the Son of Man, passing into and through those dark scenes, manifested there all the excellences of His moral glory. Is there not something of deliberate blindness in failing to see this? Can we wonder that it was all properly valued, by His God

and Father above, and duly honoured in His resurrection and ascension shortly afterwards? The real marvel is, *not* that God's Holy One should see no corruption, coming alive (bodily) from the very grave, *but* that He should lay down that holy life in such a death. We leave aside, for the moment, the deepest of all aspects of the Cross: but are content at this stage to underline the *qualities* of that Sufferer. Again we say — *nothing* compares with this in all the annals of history. Bearing abuse and agony, the object of heartless cruelty, injustice and coarseness — yet quietly carrying it all, thinking not of Himself but of them, concerned for them, praying for them. Still to the end He was the embodiment of the purest and fullest love, of patience, longsuffering, of heavenly grace. No pressure to which He was subjected, no trial or test, diverted Him from this perfect display of grace. All the preciousness of the suffering Saviour came out in His intense and various sufferings. *Nothing at all like this surrounds the death of any other.*

The resurrection too is a theme in itself. It took the adversaries by surprise, and needed dishonest tactics, and not very successful ones, to counter it. The situation has not changed; the plain evidence can be refused, but preference for disbelief underlies resistance to it. But to those who look at the story as a whole, it is the fitting climax to the marvellous period of His days on earth, and along with His ascension completes that story. It is wonderful from start to finish! Again, could such a course on earth, leading to such an end, have had an entirely ordinary beginning?

But clearly we leave aside much of the Biblical content if we confine our attention to the record of Christ on earth. This great period belongs to a much wider context in time; and it has its eternal context too. Prior to Bethlehem the long story that mounts towards the day of His arrival on earth, the promises of His advent, the types and shadows, the earlier partial revelations of God, all were to find their culmination and realisation in *Him* — how truly the story of Christ is the climax of that whole picture! Further back, outside history and created things, how the Bible insists on His eternal being, the Son of the Father, co-partaker of the love that belongs to eternity, alone able to reveal the Father, when the stage in time for that revelation should arrive. We cannot stress too highly that, while Man according to God's purpose was born of the virgin, and that perfect human path had its *start* in Bethlehem, yet the Incarnation involved the Coming down from above of One who belonged to the *eternal*, heavenly, realms. He was seen as a man, yet was indeed more than a man. The Son of man (very man indeed), but the Son of God (very God) also. He came on behalf of God; sent, yet in total agreement with His Sender — to reveal God as Father, and to do the work which was given Him to do.

Again, the whole Christian theme does not terminate with the ascension. Indeed, there is a sense in which true Christianity belongs to

post-ascension times. Founded upon the great basis of His glorious Person, and the absolute perfection of His life and death, sealed by His resurrection — that same One is now the exalted Man, and all the glory of God is centred in Him, shining in His face. The Spirit has come, the witness of His glory — the indweller of all who by repentance and faith are truly linked with Him, and who look up and catch an increasing vision of that supreme glory. Links with Himself — of life and sustenance deriving from Him — of recognised authority, control, and direction — have been forged and cannot be broken. Attachment to Him, in responsive love, and desire to fulfil His will, are a proper reflection of His great love to us, yet also are felt as a matter of commitment and responsibility. All this is known, and yet could be better known, by those who know the Man Christ Jesus living for us, representing us, interceding and acting for us, in the presence of God. He is the Head of the body, His church, the object of His special love, with such a wonderful destiny with Him. The common life which derives from Him is shared by every member of that body. This link with Him is our bond with one another — it is our principle of unity. And so we could go on to touch on some of the blessings and obligations of the Christian bond, the Christian's link with the ascended Christ, the Christian status and place "in Christ". Could *any* of this have existed, had not Christ as man been from the start the Holy One, born of the virgin; He who was quite apart from every taint of sin, free completely from the weaknesses, and the bent towards sin and unfaithfulness, associated with every one of Adam's progeny? The question answers itself.

Nor must we forget that the Father "hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man". Apart from the bright future of those belonging to Christ, other things rest on His competent shoulders to fulfil for God. A day is ahead in which God will judge the world in righteousness by that Man, His chosen man, His truly reliable man! "Can we find such a man as *this* is?" is surely an apt quotation here. Joseph was seen to be the right man, the only man, to cope with all those problems ahead. How much more our Lord (the true and proven servant of God) is the right One to judge and execute everything for God, and to sort it all out (though complex, and beyond all other human control it certainly is) to the honour and pleasure of God. The once-rejected Man of Calvary will do it!

The most critical matter

We have left what is absolutely central to the whole discussion to the end. The vital point is this: deny and remove the truth of the Virgin Birth, then along with it the redemptive work of Christ loses its value, and that death of His (so important as the display and glorification of God) is invalidated. The whole of the grand Christian scheme, as we

have outlined it, collapses. Is it not plain that no man, himself enmeshed in the fatal entail of Adam's sin, himself sinful by nature, and showing it in his deeds, is in any sense fitted to meet the human problem — to lift his fellows out of their dire plight? *None* of the fallen race, says Psalm 49, "can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him". But, contrasting with this, the affirmation in 1 Timothy 2:5, 6 is strong — "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, *the man Christ Jesus*; who gave himself a ransom for all . . .". One great person has done it, by giving Himself! The word 'ransom' there is more than the usual word for ransom — a special word, signifying *counter-ransom*. It invites us to see, in one scale of the balance, all the mass and mess of human sin and its awful dishonour to God — and in the other, the infinitude of the Offering made by the Man Christ Jesus, outbalancing it totally. Such is the worth of that glorious, sinless Person.

It was important that Satan should be defeated in the human realm, where his challenge to God had been raised. God set *man* supreme in His creation, the climax of it all. Duped by Satan he fell, disobeying and dishonouring God. Temporarily it seemed like success. But "the seed of the woman" (not the seed of the man, a very early intimation of the Virgin Birth) was always in God's view. The challenge would be met, the serpent's head bruised, by One who suffered in that action too — and God would be entirely vindicated through that obedient One. "By man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:21); but it was the second man, a different order of man, who did it. It was spoken about as soon as Adam failed — God would bring forward His obedient Man, His victorious Man. That Man derived nothing from Adam, but, born of the virgin, took that God-honouring course, even to "the death of the cross".

Crucifixion was, and still is, the most awful death that human beings could inflict upon their fellow men. Still more the Cross of Christ stands out in all its horror. The hurt, the physical suffering, the agony and the shame were borne by Him in all their acuteness. The coarseness, the evil, of wicked men, were displayed there in all their forms. The blackness of the sinful human heart came fully into the open. Beyond that, the abhorrent thing that *sin* is — as God sees it, judging it unsparingly, abhorring it absolutely, is seen at the Cross, in all its deeper experience for the Lord Jesus alone. His death as Substitute for sinners, as Sin-bearer, as Redeemer of all who will accept Him as such, *this* is the primary transaction enacted at the Cross. Crucifixions there were, but no other death has these deeper sufferings underlying it. Lest we should speak too glibly about this, Psalm 22 says the most guarded (and yet the most moving) words about our Lord's feelings when He, the Holy One, carried that awful load. Eternal thanks and praise are due to Him for this! But, with even a small sense of this, what shall we say to those who lightly dismiss as fiction His holy and separate Person

as Scripture speaks about it? He was indeed man amongst men, man acting for men, but also *sinless* Man, suffering and dying on behalf of *sinful* men.

Rightly we think of ourselves as beneficiaries from the death of our Lord, and feel deeply (and should show) our gratitude to Him. It is our admittance to rich blessing too. But let us also remember that *God* was dishonoured by human sin, in all its extent and gross results. One of the principal features of the Cross is the way in which the Lord Jesus there “restored that which he took not away”. Can anyone look at the Cross and say that God is not *holy* and *just*? His abhorrence of sin, borne and felt in all its awfulness by the Saviour, is seen, for all time and beyond it, there. Can anyone dispute or belittle the *love* of God, shown in all its immeasurable splendour, by Him who came to suffer *that* death, showing the measure of the love of God in *that* way? Is the *mercy* of God in any doubt; or His pure *grace*, or His willing *disposition* to save men, or His *lovingkindness* and *longsuffering*, perfectly epitomised in that One who “endured the Cross”? The reality of all these attributes of God, and there are others, is strongly asserted, in that glorious action. There the Son of Man was glorified (John 13:31). All *His* *perfections* as a devoted Man were displayed in a flawless, glorious way. But also, *God* was glorified in Him. At the cross, the harmony and consistency of all the facets of the character of God are fully seen, shining out in all their glory. Underlying all these features God’s nature, holy love, was fully manifested to His glory.

What more can we say? The glory of God was seen in part in O.T. times. The heavens still declare the glory of God. In various stages, and in various ways, He partially revealed Himself. All the moral issues, all the standards which are God’s standards, have come to the fore in the story of mankind — in the sad failure of all men to meet them, but now also in the perfect matching and meeting of those high standards in Christ. *One Man* has totally vindicated God, the Cross was the critical point of this great action to the glory of God. All the moral issues are clear, the devil’s challenge to God *has* been answered. Sin and evil have yet to run their course, but the same One who suffered at Calvary will grapple with that, when the time is right. But already, the adverse forces are defeated at their very root.

Finally, is it not right to think that those who easily abandon the Virgin Birth as one of their vital tenets hardly know what they do? Undermining thus the many things we have outlined, what else is left that can be called Christian? For ourselves, how important it is to cling, as intelligently as we can, to this vital truth, and *all* the vital truth associated with it.

The Love of the Father

(Reprinted from Scripture Truth 1936 — author unknown)

“Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

1 John 2:15

This Scripture speaks of “the love of the Father”. We have the two sides, on the one hand “the things of the world”, and on the other “the love of the Father”. There is a father and son, and they may be estranged by a very wide breach. Whatever the son or the father does they are still father and son: nothing can alter that relationship. But when you speak of “the love of the Father” does it not suggest the enjoyment of the relationship, something of the intimacy of the love of the Father? — and it is that, and that alone, I am persuaded, which is going to be our safeguard from the world and its delusions.

I believe that if the love of the Father has laid hold upon our hearts we shall be brought into His Presence to realise something of the Father’s thoughts concerning His Son, and it is only there we shall learn the Son’s thoughts concerning the Father, and it is that which will, amid trials, make our hearts overflow with joy. Think of the Lord Himself in Matthew 11, where He speaks of those cities wherein He had performed most of His miracles. What was the result? We do not want you, they said, and dismissed Him from their presence. One would have thought that, humanly speaking, that was the very time when the blessed Lord would have been cast down and disappointed; but what does He say? He withdraws into the Father’s presence, and we read, *“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes.”* He was willingly subject to His Father’s will. He rested His head upon the Father’s bosom and said, *“Even so, Father, so it seemed good in Thy sight”*. It was that which gave Him peace and joy.

He then speaks of Himself in verse 27: *“All things are delivered unto Me of My Father and no man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son”*, and if the verse had stopped there we could have understood it, but He adds, *“And he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him”*.

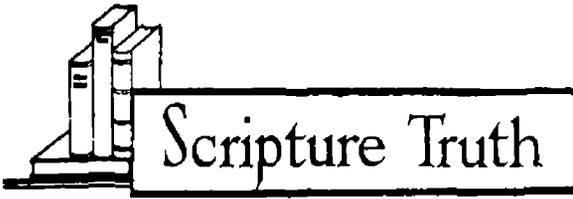
The Father’s heart has been revealed to the full, but we must take in that revelation. How can we do that? *“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,”* said the Lord, and *“I am the Way”* and *“Come unto Me”*. That is how you are going to learn more of the Father’s love. *“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will*

give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me". A Christian yoked up with the world is a sight that might well make angels weep. We need to examine our hearts to see whether there is not with us, in some measure, the unequal yoke. How the unequal yoke chafes! If you are a child of God and have links on with the world, in your heart there is the chafing and the heartache. "Take My yoke upon you . . . for My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

WHY SATAN DEFEATS HIMSELF

Readers who appreciate the ministry of J. G. Bellett will hardly need help in recognising him as the source of this brief extract.

Satan had understood Job. He knew the working of that corrupt nature which his own lie had formed in the garden of Eden. He had said "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast Thou made a hedge about him? . . . Touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face. . . . Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." And serious and terrible is the thought, beloved, that he knows us so thoroughly and understands the springs of thoughts and will within us. But though he thus understood Job, he did not understand God. The counsels of grace are above him. And by reason of this, he has been always, in the history of this world, defeating himself, while thinking that he was getting advantage over us; for he has to meet God in the very thing he does, and the purposes he plans against us. When he interfered with Adam in the garden, he encountered God to his confusion, and the promise to Adam announced his own doom. When he provoked David to number the people, Ornan's threshing floor was disclosed, and the spot where mercy rejoiced against judgment becomes the place of the temple. When he sifted the apostles as wheat, he was answered by the prayer of Jesus, and, instead of faith failing, brethren were strengthened. And, above all, when he touched Jesus on the cross, the very death he inflicted was his own perfect and accomplished ruin. So, in every trouble which he brings on any of us, he finds, sooner or later, that he has met the mighty God, and not the feeble saint.



Incorporating *Words of Help*

MAY, 1985

The Rainbow and the Throne

JOHN BARNES

"There was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

Revelation 4:3

This meditation, with the physical rainbow in mind, brings out some unexpected points for our interest and help.

The rainbow is first mentioned in Genesis 9 as a sign given by God in confirmation of His covenant with the earth. What He has to say about it is wonderful in its grace. When the bow appears in the cloud, He will look on it and remember the everlasting covenant between Himself and earth's inhabitants. When we look at the rainbow and remember the covenant, it is infinitely precious to recall that God, too, is looking at it, He from His side and we from ours. I wish to make some simple remarks on the rainbow as it appears in Revelation 4.

1. The Contour of it

The rainbow, as we see it from earth, appears as an arch extending from one point of the surface of the earth to another, feasting our eyes with a half-circle of radiant colours. Is there, then, another half to complete the circle? There surely is. If you look at the first verse of this chapter you will notice that John had been called up from the prison island of Patmos into heaven, where a door had been opened to give him access. "Come up hither." What John was to be shown required that elevation to that standpoint. When high above the earth, on a mountain or in an aircraft, it is sometimes possible, from that higher altitude, to see a rainbow as a complete circle, and it is this contour which John was privileged to observe. The bow was not an arch but a complete ring, round about the throne. Viewed from the earth in its half-circle form it may suggest that as we are confronted by the enigma of God's dealings with man, we find ourselves unable to understand

how the two ends meet. How to reconcile the fact of God's inflexible righteousness with the fact of His infinite mercy is a problem which has exercised the minds of millions of believers. I believe that it cannot be solved while an earth-bound view dominates our thinking. To understand this, and other "twin truths" of revelation, we need to get up into the heavenly scene and see things from God's viewpoint. His mercy and His righteousness meet in His throne. They do not need to be reconciled but are in perfect harmony there. There, the rainbow circle can be seen in its completeness. On earth we are in a region of unpaired ends, but there are no loose ends in the presence of the Lord. He is the God of peace; not only does He give peace but He is, in Himself, at peace. Peace could not properly be said to exist or be established if there were problems still unsolved. In the work of the Lord Jesus, all the demands of God's throne have been met, yet all the grace of His heart has been fully expressed. The rainbow round about the throne is the symbol which unfolds the contour of God's attitude towards us, showing us that "He can save, yet righteous be".

2. The Colour of it

The rainbow which we see from earth is multicoloured and the colours are always in the same order, unless there is a double bow, in which case the second arch displays the colours in reverse order; one of God's marvels in what we call nature. In our text the rainbow seen by John was of one colour only; green. The normal rainbow hues, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, show the colour green at the centre of the spectrum. Green is the fresh colour of living vegetation, so perhaps we could think of this pleasing colour as a symbol of what is vital, living and fresh. The world and its system is a dead sphere stamped by staleness and decay. Those who have studied its literature carefully have concluded that there are fewer than thirty dramatic situations possible in literature and that all fiction comes within this framework. This is astounding when we consider the vast number of novels, short stories, radio and television productions and theatre plays. They all offer the same old, dated stuff, done up in new dresses, covered with glitter and sequins to conceal the underlying, unutterable drabness of it all; but it is just the ancient vacuous stuff which men have been straining for centuries to repaint and to present in freshness. What surrounds the throne is not, however, some dessicated, antique dust, refurbished to titillate men's jaded minds; it is the fresh, infinite range of vital, living realities which radiate everywhere in a vast field of force. We look out on man's world around us and what meets our eye is a waterless waste, devoid of refreshment and incapable of supporting life. We look, on the other hand, at the throne of God and there we see the centre of life for the universe. There is no substitute for this; there is no other source of life. The rainbow encircles the throne.

It is *in sight* like unto an emerald. Maybe this suggests that we should look at it more frequently and more studiously. Speaking for myself, I feel how little time we spend in the presence of God simply contemplating what He is as He has made Himself known to us, what He has done, and all that is centred in Him. The thought of *looking* is brought forward strongly early in this chapter. John says, "I *looked*" v.1. The angel who spoke to John and called him up to heaven said, "I will *show* thee things which must be hereafter". John goes on to describe the throne and he tells us that the One who occupied it was "to *look* on like a jasper and a sardine stone". Then, as we have noticed, the rainbow was "in *sight* like unto an emerald". Here are marvels to be looked at. Someone may ask, "But how can these poor eyes of mine look on all this glory?" Well, the colour green is, of all colours, the easiest on the human eye, we are told. No one fears to look on greenness. In countries where long dry seasons recur each year making the aspect sere and barren, the new rains at the beginning of the wet season bring with them a refreshing greenness which is a joy to all. There is a freshness everywhere, a richness, a promise of food and shade and shelter. The precious benefits of this, centre in the throne of God in a moral sense as well as physically, and we should, I am sure, spend more time looking at the throne and at the living One who sits on it.

3. The Composition of it

"Like unto an emerald". Had this been the only reference to a precious stone in the context we may have been inclined to think of the colour alone, but two other stones are mentioned, so it may be in order to think of the stone itself and its qualities. One feature of earth's greenness is that it sometimes does not endure long. A period of drought, the accidental breaking of a stem or even the leaf's normal term of existence, may soon bring discoloration and decay. Not so with the throne's rainbow greenness. The brilliant colour of the emerald has more enduring qualities. It is unaffected by changes in the environment, so here we may see a hint of permanence. What we are thinking about, all the precious features which centre in and flow out from the throne of the eternal God for the blessing of His creatures, do so unaffected by changes in surroundings and uninterrupted by opposition. There is opposition. Even in this wonderful book we can read of the final, awesome destiny of God's arch-enemy, the Devil. At this point he is still actively engaged in his fierce campaign of hatred of God and the saints. But the throne remains unmoved by all this malevolence. God's throne is the centre of control in the universe, and its vitality, its freshness, its life, and its promise are all unaffected by the forces which oppose it. This thought should be a greatly stabilising factor in our hearts as we live our daily lives in such a world as this.

There can be no doubt that there is much in the rainbow which we do not understand. Beyond the red which those with normal vision can see, there is a range of colour outside the compass of our sight which scientists call "infra-red"; at the other end lies another range called "ultra-violet". Into these areas our sight cannot probe. Indeed it is said that at the far ultra-violet end of the spectrum there are rays which are dangerous to man, and further beyond the mysterious x-rays are located. But what we *can* see, and what is pictured in this verse, is so vast and attractive that it can engage our hearts and minds in hours of contemplation. Drinking in something of its fulness and glory, it may have some small reflection in our lives here below.

Lois and Eunice

GORDON SPRATT

The substance of an address given at Swansea, 30th July, 1984. It is appropriate that a paper on Lois and Eunice, and another on Paul and Timothy, should appear in sequence. The present paper refers to Scriptural teaching on family and home matters — important matters indeed, though not often discussed in our pages.

Only two verses of Scripture, Acts 16:1 and 2 Timothy 1:5, refer directly to Lois and Eunice, and we might well wonder what we can learn from this scant material. But the fact that they were respectively the grandmother and mother of Timothy opens up a wider field of reference and gives them a special significance. For it was to Timothy that the Apostle Paul committed his ministry in order that he, in his turn, should commit it to "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also". So the truth has come down to us, not through any supposed apostolic succession, but through faithful teaching of what was given at first to the apostles and recorded under the authority of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures.

And when we recognise that, apart from Paul himself, these two women, Lois and Eunice, appear to have been the greatest influence upon the life and character of Timothy, they must assume an importance out of proportion to the brevity of the references we have just quoted. Not only so, but underlying those brief references there are at least four subjects which are of vital importance in Christian experience today. When we remember Paul's warning, in his second letter to Timothy, about "the last days", we need not be surprised to find that these subjects are not only of interest to us, but that they are

under attack in a world in which it is becoming ever more difficult to pursue a life of simple godliness. These subjects are:

1. The Christian Family

Few will deny that the institution of the family is under threat in the world at large. Broken marriages, sexual deviations, the pressure of careers, the domination of the television set, and the modern scourges of drug abuse and alcoholism, are among many factors that perplex and dismay the world's sociologists, and Christians cannot claim total immunity from these things. How important it is, therefore, to find guidance in the word of God, and to help one another practically in these matters of Christian life and witness.

Let us begin with the ordinance of *Marriage*. It is right that we should use the word "ordinance", because the idea is gaining ground in society generally that marriage is merely a social custom that is becoming irrelevant to the needs of modern living, and may be modified or abandoned at will. The first reference to marriage in the Bible is in Genesis 2, and the last in Revelation 21, and the Scriptures are full of confirmation that marriage is an institution divinely ordained not only in Christianity but in creation.

It seems reasonable to suppose that Eunice had some problems in her marriage. Scripture does not tell us why, as a devout Jewess, she should marry a Greek. Nor does it tell us at what point she was converted to Christianity, and whether her husband ever became a Christian. But enough is said to hint at the fact that many marriages must have gone through times of great stress in those early days of Christianity. The practical guidance given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 remains highly relevant today, but it gives an insight too into the times in which he was writing.

Every Christian must deplore the increasing rate of divorce in our society, and the casual way in which it is regarded. It is not surprising that many young people enter into marriage irresponsibly and with little idea of permanence. But even more sad is the prevailing tendency to disregard marriage altogether. The words "boy-friend" and "girl-friend" have acquired new and sinister meanings. The time is easily foreseeable when the last stronghold of marriage in the Western world may be among committed Christians. We must surely accept the challenge implicit in this. But we may also enquire what resources there are in Christian marriage which make it possible to endure as a stable, joyful and useful relationship in spite of all the contrary influences which surround it. We can consider a few of them.

Firstly, a Christian married couple have a *shared power*. From one standpoint they are natural persons sharing a natural relationship. But each, as a Christian born of the Spirit, has a power that is capable of transforming lives. And that power is available not only in their

individual lives but in the life that they share together before God. The fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22), should be as evident in marriage as in every other area of life.

Secondly, a feature of every true Christian marriage is *shared prayer*. The daily needs of the home, the responsibility for a growing family, a common interest in the Lord's work, both local and general, these and many other aspects of life bring a Christian couple constantly into the presence of God for strength, guidance and encouragement. And that must be a unifying experience. It is difficult for a husband and wife to remain long at loggerheads with one another, or to pursue what is displeasing to God, if they are to come together to the throne of grace.

Thirdly, a Christian marriage has, or should have, a *shared purpose*. So often we see marriages in which there seems little more than the pursuit of day-to-day enjoyment, and often enough there is little unity of purpose or outlook between man and wife. Christian marriage ought to stand in sharp contrast to this, for there ought always to be purpose in Christian living, and if there is a real understanding of the statement in Genesis 2:24 that "they shall be one flesh", then there should be a sharing of every commitment within the marriage bond. There is great joy possible in a married couple sharing in the work of the Lord, but even in the practical details of life — the handling of money, the opening of correspondence, and so on — there is the opportunity for the expression of a happy unity, or on the other hand the danger of self-interest and distrust. A study of the relationship between Aquila and Priscilla would be a lasting blessing to every young Christian couple setting out in marriage together.

Fourthly, one of the greatest possessions of a Christian man and wife is a *shared prospect*. Natural marriage terminates in death, as does every other natural experience. Even in our Christian marriages we have to recognise that the things we enjoy together naturally belong to our earthly experience, and will be left behind. But every shared spiritual experience, every joy shared in the Lord, everything done in His Name, is treasure in heaven. So Peter speaks of husbands and wives as "heirs together of the grace of life". The natural relationship may terminate, but the spiritual one will endure.

Now let us turn to another aspect of the Christian family — the *Christian home*. Home is the place where family relationships are worked out. It is the place where we relax, where we are not under observation as we are at other times and in other places. What we do at home probably says more about us as Christians than anything that we say or do in public. On the one hand, our homes can be happy places of service for the Lord — even in everyday things, like the lady who had the notice over the kitchen sink: "Divine service performed here

three times daily". Or they can be places of weakness and self-indulgence.

Consider the matter of *hospitality*. Are our homes places of Christian fellowship and witness, or are we "go-to-meeting" Christians? And if we are hospitable by disposition, are we only concerned with what is congenial to ourselves? Or is our hospitality something that is used in service for the Lord? The word translated "hospitality" in the New Testament means literally, "love of strangers", and our homes can be places of effective witness.

Another subject that Scripture connects with the home is that of *discipline*. When Paul tells Timothy that bishops and deacons should "rule their children and their own houses well", it is in the context of our behaviour in the house of God. It raises particularly the question of subjection, first of all subjection to the Lord, but also the question of subjection of wives to husbands and children to parents. It is worth emphasising that subjection — so often a contentious subject — is not a matter of personal superiority or otherwise, but of divine order. Even of the Lord Jesus, God incarnate in His person, we read that He went down to Nazareth with His parents, and was subject to them. Subjection to the Lord in our homes must bring into question what we allow there. Are we allowing the corrupting influences of this world to invade our homes, or are we concerned to be pleasing to the Lord?

But hospitality and discipline will be cold qualities if we do not have *love*. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Lois and Eunice are remembered for their "unfeigned faith". But in Paul's epistles to Timothy, faith and love are linked together no less than eight times, and we can imagine that Timothy had grown up in a home where discipline and love were nicely balanced. And so Timothy had learned to love the Lord's people: Paul says of him in Philippians 2:20 (J.N.D. translation), "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on".

2. The Place of Women

The activities of Lois and Eunice, as far as the Scripture record goes, seem to have been concentrated in the home and family. Such a role for women is being questioned in the world today. "Feminism" is one of the most topical of subjects, but what matters to a Christian woman is not the current trend in the world but the authority of the word of God. Scriptures such as Titus 2:4-5 are very explicit.

Of course we must not be dogmatic, and sympathetic understanding must be given to women living in a difficult and changing world. In particular the position of single women needs to be understood. But as a general principle the word of God is clear that the place of a married woman is in the home and family. It is clear also that the woman's place in the Church is to be in silence, and we may well believe that these principles of the house of God taught by Paul had already been

exemplified in Timothy's mother and grandmother.

So what activities are open to a Christian woman? There are so many that it may be more a question of whether some of the activities particularly appropriate to women are being neglected. So many of us can pay tribute to the early Christian care and instruction of godly mothers, that the modern preoccupation with careers and material prosperity must give rise to concern. There can surely be no service more rewarding and more dignified than to bring up a family for God. And this can spill over and involve unmarried women as well in the activities of the Sunday School and Bible Class. Small wonder that we deplore the loss of so many young people if the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" are lost in the rush and bustle of modern living.

We have referred to hospitality: it can be arduous for a housewife, and the hard work not always appreciated as it should be, but it is nevertheless a joyful service for those who give themselves to it, and "some have entertained angels unawares".

Outside the home there is still much to be done. Women's meetings are an opportunity for testimony in a relaxed atmosphere, "gossiping the gospel". Visiting, a service so easily neglected, can and indeed should be shared by both men and women; and the deacon service which supports in a practical way the activities of a local assembly can produce a present-day Phoebe, of whom it is recorded that "she is a servant of the church which is at Cenchreae".

Some of the finest hymns have been written by women, and this and other forms of writing are open to Christian women with appropriate gifts. And for older women there is a responsibility, set out very clearly in Titus 2:3-5, to teach their young sisters. Perhaps most important of all, every woman irrespective of age, experience or ability can share in the prayer-support so essential to every Christian activity. In short no woman need feel that she lacks the opportunity to serve the Lord and His people in an appropriate and dignified way.

3. The Written Word of God

This third important subject is also connected with Lois and Eunice. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:15, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures . . .". The word translated "child" in the Authorised Version is in fact used elsewhere for a newly-born baby, and even for a child in the womb. It would seem then that Timothy had been introduced to the Scriptures — of course the Old Testament in his case — at an early age, and had grown up familiar with the written word of God.

We hear a good deal about the Bible today — the appearance of new translations in modern English and the wide distribution of the Scriptures in almost every known language, but familiarity with the Word, despite its availability, is a sadly declining thing in the 20th century. Even sadder is the growing tendency, even among professing

Christians, to question the truth and authority of the Bible. How important, therefore, that Christians should maintain its vital importance: its divine inspiration and inerrancy, its salvation-bringing message, its cleansing power, its doctrinal consistency, its practical instruction, above all its revelation of God in the person of His Son. And how important that young Christians should learn the Scriptures while their minds are both receptive and retentive, and that they should take them as the source of truth and the practical authority in their lives.

4. Living by Faith

Paul remembers the "unfeigned faith" of Lois and Eunice. It must have been the ruling principle of their lives, and reminds us of Paul's quotation from Habbakuk: "The just shall live by faith". Faith is, of course, a principle of *life* in the sense that our initial salvation depends upon it: "By grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). But it is also a principle of *living*, for Paul says, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God".

It is a wonderfully practical thing to live by faith: to look to God for everything, to trust Him when every other resource fails, to learn that He can do better for us than ever we can do for ourselves. It is in complete contrast to the world we live in, where the emphasis is on material possessions rather than spiritual values, on insurance rather than assurance. The life of faith in this practical sense is understood only by those who practice it.

But faith is more than just an answer to the problems of life. Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed". Faith is "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It gives entrance to an invisible world of spiritual relationship and experience that only the Christian knows. It links us with Jesus, who is "the author and finisher of our faith", and who "dwells in our hearts by faith". It brings us, as a present reality, into the divine family, for we "are all the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ". And it assures us of a prospect beyond this world altogether, for does not Peter speak of us as those "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time".

So we come back to Lois and Eunice. Their faith was "unfeigned"; not a mere profession, or a thin religious veneer, but a living reality which was the hallmark of their Christianity. And Timothy had inherited it: he had been "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:6). And it has come down to us as a precious part of our Christian inheritance through that succession of faithful men, of whom Timothy was the first.

Paul and Timothy

COR BRUINS

The closing address given at Swansea at the 1984 Conference. Older persons must not overlook the direct implications this paper has for them, any more than younger ones. May all of us see clearly its relevance to our own personal attitudes.

It has been said that one of the most beautiful comradeships in history is that between Paul and Timothy. We see from it the importance, indeed the necessity, of the close bond that ought to be between an older believer and one younger than himself. We see no “generation gap” between Paul and Timothy, but a happy spirit of mutual trust, united in the same concerns, knit together in unison about the same high aims. On the one hand the *responsibility* discharged by the elder partner, passing on teaching and encouragement by word and by example; on the other, the *response* of the younger man — the submission to guidance, the respect shown, being convinced himself of the teaching, having seen it in the life of his senior friend and ally. If the Lord should give *us* a few more years of service for Him, before He comes, what urgency there is that we (who may be younger persons) should take over the torch handed on, convinced that this pleases the Lord, strong in His grace, and in loyalty to Him.

We shall look at Paul's keen interest in persons, his passion (amounting to deep strong desire) for souls, his ability to appreciate in another believer what was there, and to encourage it. There will be lessons too from Timothy's response, in love and devotion to the older man, seen in their active service together, sharing the same experiences; also from Timothy's separate missions as a delegate of the apostle. Everywhere we shall note the respect, concern, and affection, strongly and mutually held between them. Finally we shall think of Paul's special desire for the companionship of Timothy at the close of his life.

Paul's concern for persons is plain. Think of his tender handling of the young man Eutychus (Acts 20:6-12). Think of Titus also; and of the young Timothy — it has been estimated that he was aged 15-20, and Paul perhaps 33-36, when they first met (perhaps at Lystra on Paul's first visit there, in Acts 14). A modern example would be the late W. Sewell, serving the Lord for long years in the Caribbean, who took a great interest in boys, helping them, praying for and with them, writing to them, taking time to be involved with them — a service used of the Lord to the great blessing of many. Paul saw the potential in every redeemed soul — he could see what God could do with individuals — he

served the Lord with an eye to the future, he had in mind preparation of younger persons to take over the helm. He did not underestimate the suitability of individuals, under the Lord, for His service — while pressing the need for experience to equip some individuals for certain tasks (e.g. the limitation “not a novice” in 1 Timothy 3:6). But he saw what was there, needing to be encouraged, with wisdom from the Lord. We can recall that the Lord Jesus, choosing the twelve, selected *young men*. We should perhaps remember that the movement of God in the early decades of last century began with (mostly) *young men* acting under the Holy Spirit (Mr Darby was about 26).

Of course Paul did not spoil, or hamper, a young man whom he sought to encourage. Talking down to them, treating them as children, was not his manner.

Then *Paul's passion for souls* is also clear, in general and in detail. A man of (say) 35 caring for a youth of about 16! Think of that! The Lord Jesus had affection for the *small*, even the children. He *loved* that young ruler, whose riches distracted him from the disciple's course. Is not Paul's *affection* for Timothy strongly evident in those final letters? Paul was not there at the start of Timothy's story, he was only a link in a chain. Lois and Eunice helped him greatly, but his faith in Christ Jesus came to firm decisiveness under Paul — so that he can refer to him as “my own son in the faith”. It may be that, at Lystra, Timothy had seen Paul's apparently lifeless body getting up from the ground — and quickly passing, not to rest and recover, but going back to comfort the saints! Early, Timothy saw in Paul what loyalty to the Lord could entail, and where zeal in that direction could lead.

A point calling for attention is Paul's strong sense of *aftercare* for those newly brought to the Lord, or at an early stage in Christian progress. Think over Galatians 4:19 “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you”. Are *we* interested in the spiritual growth of others in that matter? — at all? How has youth been dealt with in the assemblies over the past 50 years? What a serious question *that* is! Note how closely Paul was interested in Timothy. On the second missionary journey, back in Lystra, Paul finds Timothy (now perhaps 22 years of age), active now in the local assembly and in the vicinity. One must be a believer *at home* first, and in one's home locality. In a sense it is the most difficult place. Not a train journey, a boat journey, a plane flight, venturing far afield, makes a man a servant of the Lord. A first requirement is a *disposition to be serviceable*, wherever it is needed, without drawing the focus upon oneself. Do we desire to be of use to the Lord? Is it your desire? Well, *that disposition of Timothy was noted — God gifted him in certain ways* — the local brethren knew his usefulness, and could commend him. Paul was told about him. Can the local brethren where we are discern that *we* are soberly and humbly seeking to please the Lord? On the

basis of the good local report on Timothy, and the Holy Ghost indicating that the move was right, Paul took Timothy with him to the work. The speaker cannot speak too highly of godly Egyptian brethren years ago who heartily supported him, and guided him, when at 25 years of age he moved out to serve the Lord away from the area where he was. They never suggested he was too young, but showed confidence in him from the start. To Paul, Timothy was never “little Timothy” — he showed nothing in the slightest degree patronising towards him.

On Timothy's part we see *submission* to Paul's direction, to circumcision, to painful things, to sacrifice, giving up much for Christ. Counting (mentally) but also suffering (i.e. bearing) “the loss of all things”, as Paul put it in Philippians 3. Are we Christians prepared to be considered different, because we *are* different? Are we willing for that? — for “bearing His reproach”? It applies not only for special servants of the Lord. “Be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God”, wrote Paul to Timothy much later. It must not be done from bravado, seeking the limelight — but in the opposite spirit to that. The words “according to the power of God” put a lowly self-effacing stamp on one's own part in it.

Serving the Lord with others requires *adaptability* — this appears remarkably in Timothy's way with Paul. As apprentice with Paul, over a long period, how relevant is Amos's question “Can two walk together except they are agreed?”. It *has* to be so — how this partnership had the stamp of agreement on it! We have said they were closely knit together — it might be said they were of one heart and one soul. Timothy showed *willingness to learn*. Is there an independent streak in us, not liking to be told or taught anything? Must we always maintain “the chip on our shoulder”? At whatever stage we are, we *must* learn that we are not indispensable. Sometimes, perhaps often, we should bow to another view! When a young man in a certain place I was deputed to scrub floors, a senior and godly person, looked up to by everyone there, amazed me by joining me in the scrubbing! Young or old, we could do with less high thoughts about our own status.

See what Paul, on the other hand, thinks about Timothy! In 1 Thessalonians, an early letter, “Timothy, our brother” (3:2), “minister and fello-labourer”. Paul said it, and meant it — it was said truthfully, not to flatter him but to encourage him. Are we afraid to give responsibility to a young man, to young men, who are earnestly wanting in all reality to please the Lord — who desire, not to be seen, but that Christ may be seen? “Timothy my work-fellow” (Romans 16:21): they were opposite types, certainly, but they complemented each other — they needed each other. They had different personalities but not different ways — they were truly at one. “Timothy works . . . as I . . .” (1 Corinthians 16:10), “faithful, teaches as I teach” (1 Corinthians 4:17). “Thou, O man of God” (1 Timothy 6:11) — certainly this is not belittling

him! "A good minister of Jesus Christ", "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:3). Certainly he was one who could carry out orders, with total reliability.

Think now of Timothy as *Paul's delegate*. First, the *mutual respect* between them. Sent, for instance, to Thessalonica: the joyful first epistle tells how Paul *must* find out about them, so Timothy went. Are you a person who can be sent? A person who can bring back a fair report on any matter? He had the apostle's authority behind him, of which he was convinced. It was not an authority *imposed* on him — persons who bear authority in Christian things have it because of their own moral weight. In these areas, the greatest is the one who serves — *that* is the seat of authority in a believer's influence on others. [This does not discount the undoubted fact that an apostle had a special gift from Christ.] Timothy was happy to submit to the weight of Paul's influence. *Mutual confidence* was shared between them. In six of his epistles, Paul associated Timothy with himself in the salutation, such close allies in the work were they. As close friends, perhaps they had difficult relations on some occasions. Real closeness between individuals often involves understanding, and forgiveness is needed at times. Open apologies, when called for, mark persons of true worth before the Lord.

Their *mutual concern* for the assemblies *must* be noticed. Think of the high tribute to Timothy in Philippians 2:20 "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own . . . things. . . ." Both had a natural care for the saints; Timothy as a son with a father. It was not long after the start before Timothy had grown in wisdom and tact enough to be sent off on delicate missions on his own. While it might be fair to say that Timothy was not a leader, yet he was a very effective person, highly valued indeed by Paul, and much approved by the Master he really served.

Finally think of the *mutual affection* between Paul and Timothy. Note how Paul always appreciated devoted persons and those clearly attached to him in the Lord. Onesiphorus was one such, who searched him out very diligently, not at all ashamed of his chain. Perhaps there is a hint that other brethren, of whom there were numbers in Rome, were somewhat lax in that kind of concern for Paul. Paul is certainly sure of Timothy's close feeling for him in that final phase in prison. He remembers his tears — maybe it was when Paul was taken away that final time. He calls him "my dearly beloved son", the affection more on the surface, and the need for encouragement and support the greater, when the second letter was sent. A heart full of love was behind the hard sayings of this epistle (1:6,7 for example). In 2 Timothy 4:1 urgency is the note — time may be short — be *at* it, he says (v. 2); not purely youthful energy is needed, but dedication, in the presence of much indifference. When many are shallow and disloyal, the easiest thing is to give up, or to take some more agreeable alternative line.

Work at evangelism, using to the full what the Lord has given us for Him, with some robustness, is still the call today. Staying on where the Lord would have him was right for Paul, and for his henchman — and not less right today, if obedience and faithfulness to Him is our priority.

This prayer in verse form was quoted in midstream during the address on Paul and Timothy.

From prayer that asks that I may be
 Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee,
 From fearing, when I should aspire
 From faltering, when I should climb higher,
 From silken self, O Captain!, free
 Thy soldier who would follow Thee.

From subtle love of softening things,
 From easy choices, weakenings —
 Not *thus* are spirits fortified,
 Not *this* way went the Crucified.
 From all that dims Thy Calvary,
 O Lamb of God, deliver me.

Give me the love that leads the way,
 The faith that *nothing* can dismay,
 The hope no disappointments tire,
 The passion that will burn like fire;
 Let me not sink to be a clod. —
 Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.

FRAGMENTS

Features of unfeigned love (Romans 12:9-18, New Translation).

Let love be unfeigned; abhorring evil; cleaving to good: as to brotherly love, kindly affectioned towards one another: as to honour, each taking the lead in showing it to the other: as to diligent zealousness, not slothful; in spirit fervent; serving the Lord. As regards hope, rejoicing: as regards tribulation, enduring: as regards prayer, persevering: distributing to the necessities of the saints; given to hospitality. Bless them that persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with those that rejoice, weep with those that weep. Have the same respect one for another, not minding high things, but going along with the lowly: be not wise in your own eyes: recompensing to no one evil for evil: providing things honest before all men: if possible, as far as depends on you, living in peace with all men.

The whole body . . . works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love. Ephesians 4:16 (New Translation)

As I finished speaking at a little country gathering on the Essequibo Coast of Guyana, an interesting sight on the floor gripped my attention. An army of ants seemed to be scurrying about in disarray. But closer examination revealed that they only seemed to be confused. In reality, they were in the last stages of preparation to move a large, dead beetle. And move it they did! By the time we sang four verses of our closing hymn, they had moved it about two feet!

We can learn a lot from ants. But the special lesson that God taught me that night through these marvellous little creatures was that of unity. What a single ant could not accomplish, a group of ants could — and did. And what a single believer cannot accomplish, a group of believers can.

By himself a believer can display Christ's lordship over an individual, but not His headship over His Church. Alone he can worship the Father in spirit and in truth, but alone he cannot experience the special presence of the Lord in the midst of two or three gathered to His name. The solo Christian can certainly serve the Lord, but he cannot know the meaning of that little expression "fellow-labourers" until he has learned to work together with other Christians.

As I think of those ants, I wonder how many "spiritual beetles" lie unmoved on the floor of the Christian testimony. United action in the power of the Holy Spirit could move them, but it is often lacking. Thank God for the faithful and valiant efforts of individuals, but let's pray for wisdom and willingness to work together rather than at cross-purposes. Beetles *can* be moved.—G. W. Steidl (from 'The Lord is Near' Calendar)

BOOK REVIEW

EXPOSITORY SERMONS ON 2 PETER by *D. M. Lloyd-Jones.* *The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1983 (263 pp.) £6.95.*

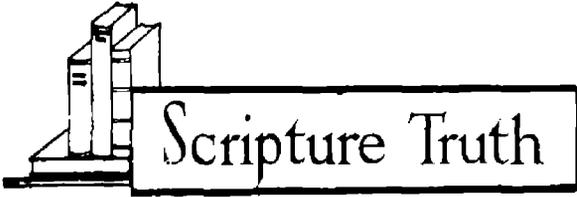
These sermons preached in 1946-7 are among the earliest in this form delivered by Dr Lloyd-Jones, but have been published in book form only since his death.

The book covers the Epistle in a thorough way, which will be found helpful by anyone prepared to pay heed in detail to the Word of God. Moreover it will be found satisfying, and indeed moving, since it allows the basic text to speak for itself, and is usually quite fair to it. It is bold and outright in its treatment of the gravity of the human scene, and the folly of a shallow diagnosis of it. It is insistent in underlining the sole foundation for faith and hope, centring in Christ. It stresses the importance of true Christian *life* and growth in individuals. It presses strongly the unique value of the Scriptures for our guidance, and the need for unquestioning obedience to that guidance.

The very last chapter of the book enhanced my (already considerable) appreciation of the whole in a remarkable way. Its emphasis on *Christ*, as the commanding focus of the believer's life, more than compensated for the few weaknesses (as I began to feel them to be) of the penultimate chapters. The primary focus on Christ seemed less prominent in those chapters on "growing in grace". This is not intended to underrate good things said in those places.

On the *sureness* of the Lord's return, and on the proper winding-up of all things, to the glory of God, Dr. Lloyd-Jones is *very* clear. Chapter 3 of this epistle, if one stays within that chapter, is of course *not* the place to venture into by-paths on the many-sided Scriptural teaching about the Second Coming. But with occasional parts of his other sermons in mind, one detects even here a certain unwillingness to touch that theme in other than broad terms. No doubt, current popular ways in which "dispensationalists" can present the teaching of Scripture are not entirely attractive; and he and others find this off-putting. But the way to deal with such matters is surely to face cautiously all the aspects of Scripture on the Second Coming, and not to leave them under a cloud of woolliness. Generally, woolliness is far from characteristic of Dr. Lloyd-Jones's manner of exposition.

The price is rather high, but is a small sum compared with what is often spent on quite trivial things. If read with discernment (as all books should be), we can gain much from the Lord Himself through the perusal of this book.



Incorporating *Words of Help*

JULY, 1985

Remember Me (1)

J. H. BOSLEY MENZIES

"Think on me when it is well with thee" (Genesis 40:14). These remarks, centring upon the remembrance of the Lord Jesus, will stir our hearts. After his introductory words, the writer breaks up his comments into three sections. The whole article has required two papers — the introduction and section 1 here, followed by sections 2 and 3 in the next issue.

INTRODUCTION

A central feature of the life of a Christian is meeting with other Christians and, in partaking of bread and wine, remembering the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. The details recorded in the Gospels make plain that the last meal which He shared with His disciples was a precious memory for them and was of great importance to the Lord Himself. Paul's comments and instructions in the first letter to the Corinthians also make clear that the early church regarded the Lord's request that they should remember Him as applicable to subsequent generations of Christians as well as to those first few disciples.

The act of breaking bread and drinking wine is not in itself an act of worship, but it would surely be impossible to remember the death of the Lord without expressions of worship and praise and adoration accompanying the act. Indeed many Christians would want to say that it is precisely at those times when they do meet to remember the Lord that they are most freely able to offer sacrifices of praise — the fruit of their lips, giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15).

Sadly it is evident that at Corinth extraneous activities were being allowed to mar the gathering together of the Lord's people to remember Him. Through the ages since those days various rituals and accretions have at times obscured the meaning of the breaking of bread and drinking of the cup of wine in remembrance of the Lord. It is not the aim of this paper to be a polemic against the practices of others,

but simply to look at three themes which are clearly developed in Scripture.

First, we shall look at the reason for the Lord's request: "This do in remembrance of Me". *Second*, we shall reflect upon the promise of His presence: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them". *Third*, we shall consider the significance of the substance — the bread and wine.

Helpful passages of Scripture to read are: Luke 22:7-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17; 11:23-29. Undoubtedly, too, the words of many excellent hymns in *Spiritual Songs* will suggest themselves to readers. Here, some perhaps less familiar lines of hymns have been quoted. One has to stop somewhere, though many many more suggested themselves.

1. The Reason for the Request

As Luke records the words of Jesus to His disciples at that last meal which they shared, before He suffered the cruel death on the cross, we are able to perceive in some measure the emotions which the Lord felt. The A.V. presents chapter 22:15 thus: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer". The N.I.V. renders it: "I have eagerly desired to eat this passover with you". The original Greek suggests that the meaning is "with great desire I have greatly desired . . .".

There is entailed in this statement a considerable longing on the part of the Lord that He should be able to spend time with His chosen ones in seclusion and in communion. Together they were to eat the passover supper and to remember the great deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. God had intervened in the sad affairs of His people when they had been oppressed and afflicted. He had enabled them to escape the judgement of death which came upon their Egyptian overlords. A lamb without spot or blemish had been taken by each household and together the family had sheltered under the protection of the blood of that lamb, in accordance with God's word. Now, some 1500 years later, in Jerusalem, the disciples and their Lord were gathered together to eat the memorial meal. As the Lord spoke to the disciples of His great longing to share this occasion with them, he added: "before I suffer". He makes clear that what lies ahead is to be bleak and cheerless — until He accomplishes what He sets out to do. Now, however, He enjoys a time of communion or fellowship with His own, and shows them that He will give His body and His blood for them. It is in this context that He asks: "Do this in remembrance of Me".

The memorial feast of the passover was ending and the Lamb of God foreshadowed in it was now to act to take away the sin of the world. A new memorial was to be instituted; as God had most surely acted in history redeeming from slavery His people, so now He was acting in history to redeem men from the slavery of sin. The breaking of bread and drinking of wine thus commemorates an actual moment in

history when God intervened in the sad and sordid affairs of man.

It is significant however, that the Lord does not simply say: "Always remember this night", or other such words. We do, of course, bring to mind the night when the Lord Jesus was betrayed, we do remember with gratitude that it was on a specific occasion that He suffered and bled and died — and within a specific time rose again. For the miracle of the eternal God acting in the history of man, here in the world, is crucial to the eternal prospects of those for whom He acted. However, the whole tenor of the occasion is charged with the great desire, the affection, of the Lord who says "in remembrance of Me". In the request is embedded a depth of love and longing which is not easy to understand; but though we may not comprehend it, when sensitive to it we are impelled to obey.

Marvellous is the story of the compassionate love of God, who sent His only begotten Son; marvellous too is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who, though He was rich, became poor for us. Not only does He exercise grace and compassion, however, the Lord also expresses a love which demands a response.

Jesus told the woman at the well at Sychar that the Father was seeking worshippers. Because of this desire of God Himself that He should be the centre of the affections and worship of His creatures, He sent His Son to die to create anew those who would honour Him and love to draw near to Him. It is now to those redeemed worshippers that the Son says: "Remember Me". Well might we occupy our thoughts with the blameless perfection of the Son of God. It is because of His fully satisfying the righteous requirements of the law of God, whilst here in this world as a man, that we can have access to God through Him. His perfection was important to God — and greatly pleasing to Him too. His obedience was matchless and His offering of Himself as a sacrifice for our sin was absolutely acceptable to God. Thus was He able to be our sin-bearer.

His person, then, is uniquely important to our blessing. Strange that we should revel in the blessings yet forget the Blessor. One can't help thinking of Joseph, who brought cheer to the heart of Pharaoh's butler. "Think of me", or "Remember me", he said, "when it shall be well with thee". Yet, it is recorded, the butler did not remember Joseph but forgot him (Genesis 40:14, 23). It is salutary, too, to reflect that of ten lepers cleansed by Jesus, only one returned to thank Him (Luke 17). Isaac Watts wrote, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands . . .". The Lord expresses here a love which must have an answer.

Can we grasp then for a moment the stupendous fact that it is the deeply-felt desire of the Lord that we should remember Him? Often we must have wondered whatever could we do which would bring pleasure to the One who brought us so much blessing. The fact is plainly recorded in Scripture that we can give Him pleasure by remembering Him.

We gather together to His name to remember Him. Certainly we remember the events which took place that night — the darkest night of human history, and yet the night which brought about the brightest hope man could have. Certainly we remember the benefits that we enjoy as a result of God's most miraculous work in the world which He created. More importantly, we remember the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enter into something of the knowledge of what God delighted in, but we enter more into the ambience of purest love. We cannot fill our minds with impressions of the Son of God without our hearts reminding us that it is the Son of God who loved me. . . . Nor can we realise His love without responding as John: "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The reason for the request, "Remember Me", is that He loves us so much, He eagerly desires us. The response which we can make, and which indeed we must, is to do just that: to make Him the focal point of our thought and attention. "If you love me", the Lord told His disciples, "you will keep my commandments". If we love Him, we should remember Him, as He asked.

The Holy Spirit in Ephesians

JOHN FLETT

An address given in the 'Catford Lectures' series. The printed word falls far short of the spoken word, in style and energy, but the substance is nevertheless important and stimulating.

Ephesians has been called "The book of *the land*". The spiritual possessions which the believer is encouraged to appreciate in Ephesians, answer to the material territory of "the land flowing with milk and honey" entered into by God's earthly people, Israel, as described in the book of Joshua. If we were to go to the land of Israel today, there would be much of interest no doubt, but we could not call it *our own land*. *Our* inheritance, our spiritual blessings, are "in heavenly places, in Christ" (1:3). Christ is in "the heavenlies", and we believers belong there too. Let us get into *our* land! Deuteronomy 8:7-10 describes the earthly Canaan in wonderful terms — "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates: of oil olive, and honey . . . thou shalt not lack any thing in it. . . . When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which He hath given thee." I feel it is my part, today, to

touch a little on those fountains, brooks, and springs to be found in *our land*. I want to help you to think of the Holy Spirit of God as the Source of all the fulness and freshness of the spiritual land which is ours to enjoy, but which needs purposefulness on our side to move in to appreciate it. There are seven points about the Holy Spirit in Ephesians — one in each chapter, and two in the last.

1. Sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13)

“After that ye believed”, this is said to have happened. *Believing* is where we start. Believers *are* sealed with the Holy Spirit. All the land *was given* to the people of God in that earlier day; but also every place trodden by the soles of their feet was given. They had it all by title and by promise, they experienced what they actually took possession of. Believers in Christ, redeemed by His blood, *are* sealed by the Holy Spirit, and need to take possession of this great truth. There are those who ask “Have you received the second blessing?” The Scriptural answer is that as believers we have more than just the second one — we have *every spiritual blessing in Christ!* *Ye were* sealed it says — not you must be, not you have to be, but you have been. It came not in any extra step forward, not by attending meetings, but in receiving Christ. One living Person, trusted in faith, brings every blessing in Himself.

A seal suggests *security*, and *ownership*. It is something firm, that cannot be reversed. Believers have His mark of certification, His stamp of ownership, the Holy Spirit Himself, upon them. How do I know that I am a Christian? How do I know that the Holy Spirit indwells me? Surely I must not let feelings, and doubts, shake my confidence, when the Word of God Himself says that as a believer I am one of Christ’s very own, sealed with the Holy Spirit.

If one could imagine the disciples of Jesus, say Peter and James and John, asking God the Father to send His Son, when He was already with them, that would be rather like some believers today, praying for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. From Pentecost onwards not a single example can be quoted of true believers in Christ needing to ask for the Holy Spirit — yet *many* statements say plainly that, believing in Christ, He has already been given to us. As an example, take Romans 5:5; “. . . the Holy Ghost which *is given unto us*”. Other statements, among many, equally firmly said, are in Romans 8:15, 1 Corinthians 2:12, Galatians 3:2, 3 and 4:6. Believers *have* received Him. Let us stick to what the Scriptures say.

2. Access by the Spirit (2:18)

What a wonderful verse this is! It mentions the whole Trinity — but also you and I, believing friends, are included in it too! *We* have access by one Spirit to the Father. The one Holy Spirit, indwelling, unites us — making us able to draw near to the Father, and to do so *together*. Jew

and Gentile are in mind in the context, but *you* and *I* through Christ have this high privilege. The way to the Father, through Christ, is open to us. David did not consciously approach the Father; the Father was not then revealed. But it is a sobering fact that David could be in touch with Jehovah (knowing God in that way) in such a *close* way, as to shame us in our limited use of the privilege and high experience of knowing the Father today. Through *Him* (i.e. through Christ) this possibility exists for us. We know the Father in the Son, who is the very basis and means of our approach to the Father.

It should be noted that, after the start of Acts, all the N.T. writers refer to God in this way. The closest term — Father — and the closest experience, belong to Christians in our day. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is known, and can be responded to. Following the Gospels, Peter, John, Paul, and the rest of N.T. writers, are unanimous on this. Here are some of the riches of “our land”, of our Christian possessions. Do we know it? Do we go in for it?

3. Strengthened by the Spirit (3:16)

“I bow my knees to the Father . . .”. Here is Paul using the access just referred to, in prayer. How do *you* pray, hearer? Paul’s attitude in prayer showed how serious and respectful it was. Prayer should be urgent, sensing the holiness of the presence entered — yet confident, being based on the open-ness of access won for us by Christ and through His blood.

But what does he pray for here? It is that they may be “strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man”. Young believer, did you know you had an inner man? These are days when there is much concentration on the outer man — on his physical well-being and satisfaction — but do we think at all about the inner man? Paul certainly did, and prayed seriously about the *inner* health of these Ephesians. Was he concerned about their greater ability to preach, to carry a good testimony, to serve the Lord? That might be part of the result, but was not at all the principal object of his prayer. In asking for the inward strength that the Holy Spirit would give them, the end in view was “that Christ might dwell in your hearts . . .”. Christ was in their hearts already, but it was urgent that He might occupy a larger and dominant place there. Here is the key to everything else. The One who fills God’s heart should be at home in our hearts, filling those hearts to overflowing. Do we realise that it needs to be so, more than it *is* perhaps? Do we pray for it for ourselves? Are we concerned about others progressing in heart-appreciation of our Lord? Surely it ought to be our prime desire for our fellow-Christians, and for ourselves. This prayer is recorded so that we may see what high-level prayer is; that we may see what is *first* in importance for the well-being of believers. The Holy Spirit is the power for keeping our hearts on-target, free from

distraction, centred only on Christ, and increasing in awareness of all His love and greatness.

4. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God (4:30)

Of our seven points, this one falls right in the middle. That clearly is right. If the positive, forward moving benefit of the indwelling Spirit is to be found, we must not be grieving Him. “Ye *are* sealed” by that Spirit — the verse says it again; but how serious and necessary it is to be told that we *can* grieve Him. The surrounding verses tell of much that *does* grieve Him. Let none of us think that we do not need to be told this. Let us heed the warning, thinking of the hurt to the Lord Jesus when we dishonour Him like this. What a sad task falls on the Holy Spirit of God when He has to act to pull us up, to rebuke us — action so different from His true mission, to speak to us of Christ, and to enlarge our affections and loyalty to Him.

We must seriously think about the practical implications of our Christian profession. These later chapters are concerned to press a walk worthy of our high and heavenly calling (4:1). Corrupt communications proceeding out of the mouth; bitterness, wrath, anger, felt inwardly and alas appearing outwardly — what awful things, yet not uncommon things, for believers to indulge in! The tongue is a dangerous member indeed; there can easily be wrong and unjust thoughts about our brethren — freely expressed sometimes. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Remember that the devil is busy accusing the brethren; let us have a horror of assisting him in any way.

5. Filled with the Spirit (5:18)

Like the previous verse, taken from chapter 4, this is a straightforward instruction, expecting our obedience. In the early post-Pentecost days this, it seems, was a ‘normal’ experience. Time and again we read about persons being filled with the Spirit. While it is still true that He indwells believers, not always is He allowed His full place. Yet it is right that He *should* do so.

Note, Paul does not tell them to pray to be filled. The onus for this rests, not on God, but on us. If other things displace Him, and are allowed to choke up His action and power, this is of *our* doing. The Genesis story (in the days of Abraham and Isaac, chapter 26) of the wells choked up with earth, is still an important one. Those wells needed to be re-dug, and cleared of earth, so that the water may be freely available. Our hearts can so easily be filled with the things of earth. The whole bent of this age is to bring us down to earth! A brother in Scotland long ago used to say “you can have as much of the Spirit as you make room for in your life”, and how true that is. What is needed is not asking for the Spirit, not praying to be filled, but finding room, indeed making room for Him. What kind of an overflow will-

take place from hearts filled in this way? Spiritual songs, melody in the heart, directed to the Lord! Simple joy in Him, expressed freely in words (there is no mention of tongues here), from persons wholly occupied with the Lord Jesus, will accompany the free movement of the Spirit in the hearts of His own.

6. The sword of the Spirit (6: 17)

Anyone wanting to go forward in appreciating the spiritual land, open to him in the power of the Spirit, will find there are many influences to deter him. A warfare is on! The attacks are Satanic. Some are direct, others are subtle. Our strength is only in the Lord, but *He* equips us with armour to meet the attacks and wiles of the devil. Almost the last item in the armour available is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”. It is not *our* sword, though we sometimes refer to our Bibles in that way. The Holy Spirit is the source of it, and the power for right usage of it, whether on the defensive or on the attack. We need skill in its use; we need to let it discern and shape the thoughts and intentions of our own hearts first. Peter, with a sword, was an unskilful user of it — he was more at home with nets! He lashed about with that sword — it was a poor shot! In the Lord’s hands the damage done was repairable. We need training, not primarily college training, but training in private with the Lord, alone with the Word of God. What do we know about *that*? Then we shall not make wild sweeps with texts of Scripture, but find the skill to use the Word wisely, graciously, and in a way that even the devil will have difficulty in rebutting.

7. Praying in the Spirit (6: 18)

Our Lord was of course the supreme and perfect Model of right use of the Word of God. The adversaries were nonplussed; the devil himself was made to retreat. But also, what an Example of prayer He was! Praying always, covering a wide ground; and praying for single persons too — both are found in these verses also; how important for us to be practically in line with Him. This is quite as important as anything else, if we are to stand in the conflict. *Praying in the Spirit*. Note that it does not say praying *for* the Spirit, nor praying *to* the Spirit — but praying *in* the Spirit. The meaning is praying in the power of the Spirit. All saints, not a limited circle, need our prayers. It is easy to go through the motions; but the sense of the whole body of Christ, linked with Him by the Spirit, must surely be more than formal. We need to be fully involved in real love and concern for fellow-believers. It is touching also to see that the apostle, so ready to impart the precious truth, and to press practical agreement with it, also needs prayer for himself — so that his urgent business to disseminate the Christian truth might continue boldly. Let us seek to reflect the same attitude, and to support strongly today those who do so under the Holy Spirit.

Another Comforter

C. OSWALD GUNN-RUSSELL

Our beloved brother, now with the Lord, left behind certain notes and draft papers, which he had in mind for publication. This is one such, left in the charge of his son-in-law Bosley Menzies, who has put it into this form. Those who knew Oswald will recognise his straightforward style here — and will appreciate this reminder of his ministry.

While he had been with His disciples, the Lord Jesus had been their helper; the Holy Spirit would be another Helper, just as He had been.

The Greek word used in John 14:16 brings with it the idea of another of the same kind. A comforter suggests one called in to help; a helper, counsellor, adviser — one present and able to render service. It reminds us of the fact that He is able to save to the uttermost, Hebrews 7:25. In a court of law an advocate or counsel for defence pleads another's cause. In this context the idea extends to a succourer, supporter and consoler. It corresponds to the name "Menahem" given by the Hebrews to the Messiah which is reflected in Luke 2:25 "the consolation of Israel", and in Isaiah 40:1, where the cry is heard: "Comfort ye my people".

It is indeed lovely to think of John looking back and remembering the Lord Jesus when He was with His disciples. Matthew, Mark and Luke were written first. Matthew tells of the One who would save His people from their sins; Mark tells of the One who gave Himself a ransom for many; Luke tells of the One who is a Saviour, Christ the Lord — a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people, Israel. But John wrote his gospel some 30 years later, about 90 AD when, an old man, he reflected upon the Lord Jesus as the One who came to reveal the Father. Led to write of Him as the Word become flesh, he could add: "We beheld His glory, the glory of an only begotten with the Father".

So John sets out to show how the Son has made known the Father; and later that another Person of the Godhead was to be sent, One who can help us fully to know the Father and the Son.

The Lord is seen in John's gospel seeking the true worshippers. As He says Himself, in chapter 4, "the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him". As we read we find the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, doing just that. He is seen dealing with individuals in John — revealing Himself to them and thus making them worshippers.

The emphasis from chapter 10 changes from the individual to the

company. He brings them together. So we find in chapter 10, “one flock”; in chapter 12, “a family”; in chapter 13, “His own ones”, and “My disciples”; in chapter 15, “My friends”; finally, in chapter 20, He could say: “Go to my brethren and say unto them — I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”

This is how He had been helping them, when with them as a Comforter (or Helper) — leading them on in the knowledge of Himself, and then of the Father, with the object of drawing them near as worshippers, to enjoy fellowship with God, — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now He is going to leave them.

The Pharisees were plotting to kill him. The disciples realised it. Jesus spoke of the betrayer in the midst. The Devil’s power was evident. The Lord did say: “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53), but in the midst of it all he thought of His own. He comforted them by telling them:—

1. If He was going to leave them, He would come again and receive them unto Himself.
2. If He was going away, He would pray the Father and He would give them another Comforter who would not leave them, but would be with them for ever and who would continue to help them, as Jesus had done when on earth, bringing them into the knowledge of the Father’s things, caring for them all the way home to the Father’s house.

Jesus Himself was to leave them; but in 1 John 2, He is spoken of as the Advocate — or Comforter, for it is the same word — with the Father. So we have not lost Him as our Helper. We now have a Helper in Heaven, and another on earth.

John 14:12-20. We need to realise the background to the passages where the Lord speaks of another Comforter. There was a pervading atmosphere of enmity, a sense of the power of evil. The disciples were bewildered with doubts and fears; their Master was going to be taken from them and crucified.

It was a scene where none else could stand. The Lord alone was in control. The disciples had learnt to depend upon Him, especially when the opposition grew, and they could not trust themselves (see 13:21-22).

But He thinks of His own.

Firstly, He tells them of the Father’s House, and that He Himself will come again and take them to be with Himself — so they have a certain and personal hope (14:1-3).

Secondly, He assures them that if He leaves them, the Holy Spirit will come, Who will not leave them, but will abide with them for ever. God does not want us to wait till we get to heaven to get to know Him.

The Father's love is shown in this. The Son requests, the Father gives, another Comforter.

The Comforter was to remain with them for ever, guiding all the way home — to be with them even as Jesus had been with them here on earth (as in verse 25 — being present, or abiding with you). He is the Spirit of Truth, and is called so in each of the following chapters (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). We read, in Deuteronomy chapter 32, of the God of Truth, which would speak of God as the origin of Truth. Then the Lord Jesus says: "I am the Truth". He it was who demonstrated the Truth. The Spirit of God is the one who makes the Truth known to us and in us.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit at times came upon men for various reasons temporarily, but He could not remain with, or abide on sinful man until redemption was accomplished. Only on the Lord, the perfect man, could He abide. So while Jesus was here, the Spirit had been with them. After the ascension of the Lord, He would be in them. Again He says: "I will not leave you orphans — or fatherless — I will come to you". This is linked with the expression: "in that day, ye shall know . . ." (v. 20). It refers not to the day yet to come, or to heaven, but to the Spirit's day, the present dispensation.

John 14:25, 26. While He was with them the Lord had said much to His disciples, but they did not really take it in. They needed help. However, He would not leave them so. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would come — sent by the Father. He is called the "Promise of the Father". (See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33, 39; Ephesians 1:13; Luke 11:13.)

It was very much the Father's desire to give and send the Spirit, so that He could remind them of His Son, and all that He had spoken to them, and to teach them all things about Him. So they wrote the Gospels by the Spirit.

When he was with Jesus, John learnt a little; but years later, John could look back by the Spirit, and realise that the One he had known was indeed, as He had said, the Sent One of the Father. "He shall bring all things to your remembrance" — this refers to the power by which the Gospels were to be written — ". . . whatsoever I have spoken unto you," — referring, perhaps, to all that He had told them of the Father.

John 15:20, 21, 25-27. Again there is the terrible background — indicative of the hatred of the world for the Father and the Son. The disciples felt it. They were to be persecuted even as He was. How would they stand up to it? Notice the "buts" which occur in these passages which reveal God's provision for our needs. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send from the Father, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me."

Thus the disciples would not be left alone. The Spirit of Truth Himself would bear witness concerning Jesus; and they, too, would bear witness, because they had been with Him from the beginning. That is to say, they had been with Jesus through all the time of His public life here; they had heard His words and had seen His works, and all the signs which He showed when He manifested His glory. Together with John, all the disciples could say: "We beheld His glory, the glory of an only begotten with a Father", and could bear witness, with the Spirit's help, to who He is. We can see the Spirit's testimony in the book of Acts, in which the disciples took part.

[See Acts 2:36; 3:11-15; 4:11; 5:30-33; 6:10; 7. Note also, Acts 1:3, 21, 22; 5:32; etc.]

John 16:1-11. Again the encouraging words of the Lord Jesus are set against the background of gloom and melancholy. Now He says: "I go to Him that sent me; and none of you asks me: Whither goest Thou?"

He was going to the Father and none of them realised what He meant, or asked; but they were sad at His going away, feeling that they would be left alone to face all the opposition and hatred. They did not grasp what He was saying, or surely they would have asked more about it — His going to the Father — and shown some interest. "I tell you," said Jesus, "the truth is, it is better for you that I go away; for if I do not go, the Comforter will certainly not come, but if I go away, I will send Him to you."

The two great benefits which would result from this were that the Spirit would "reprove the world", and would "guide you into all the truth".

John 16:12-16, 23. Fully aware of the effect of their gloom upon their receptive powers, the Lord knows their frailty, and tells his disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of (or better, from) Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak."

We see effected the guidance of the Holy Spirit, into all truth, in the book of Acts. After the Spirit came, the disciples were led not only into the knowledge of the truth, but into all the practice of it, according to all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

In the East, we are told, if a man were asked the way to a place, he would not just point out the road, but would say, "I am the way", and set off to lead the traveller to his destination. So the Lord said: "I am the way". The Spirit does likewise in the Acts.

Of course, the Epistles fill out the truth. Over the vast area from Jerusalem to Illyricum, west of Macedonia, a stretch of more than a thousand miles as the crow flies, Paul had fulfilled or completed the

Gospel of Christ by the power of the Spirit of God. Said Paul, "I am made a minister . . . to fulfil the word of God". The Greek indicates "to fulfil or complete" (Colossians 1:25). So in this ministry of Paul's we see the perfection of the Spirit's work "guiding into all the truth".

The other two important aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit are also evident in the writing of the New Testament. Firstly, "He shall", said the Lord, "show you things to come"; that promise is brought to fruition in the Epistles and in the Revelation. Secondly, "He shall glorify Me". How highly is the Lord Jesus spoken of, by those who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote of Him, the incomparable One. As we read we can see the work of the Holy Spirit, taking the things of Christ and showing, or reporting back to us; delivering to us the things which the Lord Jesus called, "Mine" (He shall receive of Mine). What a deep supply of wealth is here!

The Comforter is come.

God, the Spirit, is here to help us. May the Lord give us grace to explore, and make our own, these blessed things, here and now in the Spirit's day.

"Who is a rock, save our God?"

R. A. CREETH

The rock-like character of God summarised in our title (Psalm 18:31), appears frequently in the O.T. This paper picks out some of the ways in which the O.T. uses the figure of a Rock to convey high thoughts of Himself.

There are two Hebrew words used for "rock" in the Old Testament. One is "sela" — an elevation of strength; it suggests what is immovable, and is used symbolically for Jehovah as the Rock of His people, as in Psalm 18:2. The other is "tsur" — a rock, generally sharp and precipitous, a place of shelter and security, as in Psalms 61:2; 89:26; 94:22.

With these two meanings in mind let us consider some of the scriptures which relate to God as the Rock.

First of all He is *a sure foundation* for the believer. David says in Psalm 40, "He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and *set my feet upon a rock*, and established my goings". What a mighty deliverance was wrought for us when we were rescued from the pit, lifted up from the miry clay of sin, and our feet established upon

the Rock of ages! What a sure and steadfast foundation for our souls to rest upon, and the New Testament reminds us that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Speaking prophetically in Psalm 69:2 the Lord Jesus says, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow Me". Psalm 40:1-2 may be taken as God's answer to the cries of Messiah in His sufferings at the hands of wicked men. The wicked are in slippery places (Psalm 73:18), as Peter found among the enemies of Christ in the high priest's palace. His feet had well nigh slipped, but mercifully the Lord held him up (Psalms 73:2; 94:18). How much we need God's preserving care and His constraining hand over all our goings, even though He has set our feet upon the Rock! And in the realisation of our great deliverance we can sing that new song, which He has put into our mouth, even praise unto our God (Psalm 40:3).

Another thought suggested by the rock is that it is a place of *supply*, God's *sure provision* for His people in their wilderness journey. In Psalm 78 we read, "He clave rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the depths, abundantly" (verse 15, J.N.D. version). This refers to the smiting of the rock in Exodus 17. In spite of the peoples' chiding and their rebellious spirit God abundantly satisfied their great need by bringing water out of the smitten rock, typical of the streams of blessing flowing forth from the cross of Christ.

Verse 16 of Psalm 78 goes on to say, "He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers". This may refer to Numbers 20 when after 40 years wandering in the wilderness Moses smote the rock, instead of speaking to it as God had instructed him. He thus marred the type, and failed to glorify God. "There can be no repetition of the death of Christ; and hence Moses was wrong in smiting the rock twice with *his rod* — wrong in smiting it at all. He was commanded to take "*the rod*" — Aaron's rod — the priestly rod, and speak to the rock. The atoning work is done, and now our Great High Priest has passed into the heavens, there to appear in the presence of God for us, and the streams of spiritual refreshment flow to us on the ground of accomplished redemption, and in connection with Christ's priestly ministry of which Aaron's budding rod is the exquisite figure" (C.H.M.). As believers we just need to ask, and God delights to give. Such is the all-sufficiency of the priesthood of Christ.

The rock is also used to present to us *a refreshing shade*. The scripture that comes to mind is Isaiah 32:2, "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as *the shadow of a great rock* in a weary land". In bleak and barren areas of the world one can understand how a weary traveller would welcome the shade which a great and high rock would

provide from the intense heat of a cloudless sky, or the shelter it would provide from storm or tempest.

We are living in testing and trying times, and even true believers often become burdened and overwrought with the cares and anxieties of this present life. In such circumstances where can relief and solace be found? Only in the Lord Jesus who says to us as He said to His wearied disciples when on earth, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile" (Mark 6:31). And again His gracious invitation still holds good: "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

Now let us consider the thought of a *rock refuge* or a *place of sanctuary*. Frequently in the psalms God is spoken of in this way. "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust" (Psalm 18:2). "Be Thou my strong rock, for a house of defence to save me. For Thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for Thy name's sake lead me and guide me" (Psalm 31:2-3).

The conies or rock badgers illustrate this principle: they are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks (Proverbs 30:26). And in the Song of Songs the bridegroom says to the bride, "My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the precipice, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (chapter 2:14, J.N.D.). The bride had taken the place of security from all foes and dangers.

Moses was hidden in a cleft of the rock while God passed by (Exodus 33). Moses desired to be shown God's glory, but God had to say to him, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see Me, and live." So Moses was placed in a cleft of the rock, and covered with God's hand while He passed by; and when God took away His hand Moses saw only his back parts, but God's face could not be seen.

Moses was highly favoured to have this privilege, yet the humblest believer in this dispensation has the greater privilege of beholding all the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Through the efficacy of the work of Christ, God can now bring the redeemed sinner into His immediate presence without a cloud between. "We all, looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18, J.N.D.). Let us cherish this immense privilege of nearness and intimacy, that our occupation with the Lord in glory may have its moral and transforming effect upon our lives.

We have referred to the rock as a place of sanctuary, but this might imply a refuge to which we flee only in time of trouble and find shelter from all our foes. But in Psalm 71:3 we read, "Be Thou *my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort*". Or as the margin has

it, "Be Thou to me for a *rock of habitation*". This is more than an occasional refuge or resort: it is a place where we can dwell. The conies are defenceless creatures, and are wise enough to know it, so they make their home in the rock. The Lord expects us to be as wise as the conies and to *abide* in the Rock. In John 15 the Lord Jesus appeals to His disciples to *abide in Him*, and we need constantly to be reminded this is our only place of safety and blessing. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1, 2). And how precious is the promise of Deuteronomy 33:27, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms".

"In heavenly love abiding,
 No change my heart shall fear;
 And safe is such confiding,
 For nothing changes here;
 The storm may roar without me,
 My heart may low be laid,
 But God is round about me,
 And can I be dismayed?"

RESPECT AND EAGERNESS FOR THE WRITTEN WORD

"O how I love Thy law! it is my meditation all the day."

"Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them."
 (Psalm 119:97, 129)

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul:

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart:

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever:

The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

*More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold:
 sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."*

*"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be
 acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."*
 (Psalm 19:7-10, 14)

The Pure in Heart

COLIN CURRY

1. Psalm 73

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (verse 25).

It is intended to add, in a second brief paper, a short extension on the expression "the pure in heart" (end of verse 1) as used in the N.T. The phrase occurs notably in the beatitudes, and also in 2 Timothy 2:22. This Psalm helps in understanding the phrase, and also encourages the exhibition of this feature in ourselves and the recognition of it in others.

The following short paragraph appeared among final comments in a paper on Psalm 139 (*Scripture Truth*, 46, 170). We repeat it, since it applies again in a special way to this Psalm (though it has general relevance in all the Psalms).

"Here is an outstanding example of the *spirit* of a man acting in an open and true way. That consciousness of God which lies latent within a human being, is something distinct and unique to humankind. The spiritual side of man, that special endowment from God which he possesses, sets a gulf between himself and the animal creation. Unhappily, man's spiritual faculty is often choked and muted, and his activities confined to the sub-human plane. But when God breaks in, searching and activating a man's conscience, and he faces God with all the awe and wonder that is due to Him, a new dimension of experience is entered upon. Especially when faith awakens, and God's great goodness is discovered and relied on, a man begins to be a true man. He can break out in responses to God; he can commit all his ways to God's control and guidance, with the aim and the desire that all about him may be acceptable to Him. Let us note how well this Psalm demon-

strates these realities.”

Psalm 73 is another outstanding example. Here Asaph, rather than David (see 1 Chronicles 6:31-39; 16:5; 2 Chronicles 29:30), shows his deep appreciation of God's goodness. In the closing parts of the Psalm, he overflows with awareness of all that he possesses in knowing God. Verse 25, quoted above, is the climax of a passage which, though brief, has a high place among the recorded instances of man's responses to God.

But he had not always been like this. Earlier in the Psalm, Asaph describes a former mood of his when grievance dominated him, and envy and dissatisfaction almost engulfed him. About this he is now thoroughly ashamed, and also transparently open and honest, and glad indeed that he had made such a great move-over from his earlier unhappy outlook. The Psalm is really the record of that great transition, from the *foolish* and *brutish* angle on life (v. 22) (unaware of God, like the beasts that perish) to the deep desire for God, the humility, the joy and satisfaction in God, of the truly godly man.

We must look at both sides of the picture. The disconsolate state of mind that is easily shaped by worldly targets and attitudes, hurt (yet also envious) at the prosperity of the wicked, grieving over unrighted wrong, yet far from unmixed in its own judgments of things; the blight and emptiness of soul that any kind of envy brings. We shall need to recognise that blindness to these proclivities in *ourselves* is extremely easy. Asaph certainly teaches us about sensitivity to our weaknesses, and the advisability of open-ness about them. On the other side of the story, the contented mind, the desires and quiet confidence of the man of God, resting in his God, appear later in the Psalm. How patent it is that *this* frame of mind *honours* God, and is of such benefit to the person concerned; and how this is emphasised by contrast with the turmoil of mind, and incipient affront to God, embodied in his earlier attitude! Guidance, too, in practical and sustained living in those areas where the heart is satisfied, rather than in spiritual poverty and decline, is surely found here, and needs to be followed.

The Downward Slope

Verse 1 is like a headline to the Psalm, providing an 'abstract' of what had been learnt in the experiences related in the remaining verses. The goodness of God towards His people, the subjects of His grace and purpose, is a firm reality. But *distortion* of our appreciation of His goodness easily takes place, and distraction from a pure vision of Himself can arise all too readily, as fretfulness and self-interested discontent about our lot in life spoil that vision. Like the Psalmist, we shall be wise to be in the spirit of confession about these tendencies which we show, and seek to be steered back to that "purity of heart", that "seeing God" — the undistorted, uncluttered view, which is reliant,

restful, and satisfied in Him. God is good, unquestionably, to all His people; but what a blessing it is to appreciate it (not as theory only, but in experience), and how closely "purity of heart" is linked with a direct and personal knowledge of Himself.

But, on the way to a fuller realisation of the truth of verse 1, Asaph personally had passed through a crisis of faith, which the ensuing verses relate. Verses 2 and 3 (and again 22) are statements, *after* he had emerged from the experience, of his low state of mind seen in hindsight. At the time he allowed himself the thoughts expressed from verse 4 onwards he was unaware of the precariousness of that frame of mind. These confessions are remarkably frank. He might have affected a purely disinterested zeal for justice, but he says quite openly that envy lay at the root of his thinking. His words about the arrogance of the wicked are no doubt accurate: there seems a hard correctness about his descriptions of their worldly success, their smooth passage through life, the wealth and plenitude in which they wallow, flouting heaven and earth in their overbearing attitudes. But verses 13, 14 expose the bias that prompted his unhappiness about them. To decide that (in view of *their* apparent well-being) *his* godliness and earnestness had been a waste of time, showed what a dismally self-centred state he had lapsed into. But perhaps this was his lowest point; since he is soon shocked by the shamefulness of such thoughts into heart-searching before God, leading him to repentance, to an outspoken rebuke to himself (in the strong terms of verse 22). But also, on the more positive side, true understanding dawned, along with a total change of values, and a sense of what is true wealth, at the stage when he entered "the sanctuary of God" (verse 17).

Perhaps we also are often near the slippery slope, and our foothold almost gone, when we are least aware of it. It is easy to see that the "worldlings" are in slippery places, and "their end" is solemn indeed; but the downhill slide into poverty of soul which can come from setting our hearts on other objects than God and Christ is a serious danger to a believer too, and none have any cause to feel immune from it. The godly person, in particular, will not cover up his times of leanness of soul in the past, as if they did not exist. Rather, he will be alert to the things that damage his spiritual prosperity, and seek to be constantly (with the Lord's help) on the right side of this great transition, spoken about with such genuine reality in this Psalm.

The Turning-Point, and Beyond

The great change in Asaph's standpoint, and the new discernment that came with it, is pinpointed in verse 17. *Until* he went into the sanctuary of God the cloud hung over him; *from* that moment his outlook was transformed. But self-judgment before God, and real stirring of conscience, had led up to this 'moment of truth' (as verses 15, 16 indi-

cate). The offensive nature of the kind of thinking expressed in 13, 14 came home to him. His moral sense was no longer dormant, but *awakening* to the meaning of such thoughts. Continuing along that line meant desertion and disloyalty to the faithful amongst the people of God: more than that, to allow God to be displaced by these other desires, these other problems, was a grave dishonour to *Him* (22). That way, he was courting serious spiritual damage and loss, and he draws back not a moment too soon. It is well to be reminded that self-searching accompanies a real drawing near to God. Appreciation of the wealth of the experience of knowing God cannot be lightweight in its moral sensitivity, nor in its humility. The very term, "the sanctuary of God", covers the holiness of God Who is known there.

Understanding came with this humble approach into the sanctuary of God's presence, and this undivided occupation with his God. The *end* of the ungodly, at present flourishing in this world, alters his view of them: how unenviable they now seem! Their prosperity is the prelude to an awful fall. It deceives them, like things encountered in a dream, but they will awake to a reality which will entail unparalleled loss. His own "moment of truth" was great spiritual blessing to him. He now assessed things as they really were, rather than as they *seemed* to be: such was the insight that came from closeness to God. Furthermore, the true wealth was already in his possession, and all other wealth transient and false. He had awakened to things in the light of eternity. But the ungodly faced a far different "moment of truth"; they were to awake to disaster.

"Nevertheless" (23), in spite of the low ebb in his experience (described so humbly and candidly), what follows in this and later verses is happily true, and he knows it. Beyond the shifting sands of his own thoughts he now stands on a rock! "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever". It is a bond which overrides death (which the word *fail*, earlier in the verse, 26, seems to envisage). But how marvellous are the direct words, in verses 23, 24, 25, personally and intimately spoken with his God. The distance, and the problems, have now passed away; and the joy and the confidence of being "with Thee" fills his expressions. He is more than satisfied with his present lot.

He has a deep assurance of what God is doing for him. "I am continually with Thee" expresses the firmness and real value to himself of that link. Its long time-span seems underlined by the sequence: *held* by the right hand by God, *guided* with His counsel (for as long as it is needed), and afterwards *received* to glory. God is committed to him, and he rejoices in it. The crowning joy of passing into God's presence in the most immediate sense lies certainly at the end; but how he delights in what God *is* to him at the present stage (additionally to what He is doing for Him). "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation" states in N.T. terms this kind

of response to God (Romans 5:11). Grasping the firmness of His purpose for us is one thing, and a thing very valuable indeed (Romans 8:29, 30 with its sequence *foreknown, pre-desinated, called, justified, glorified*, is perhaps a fuller, N.T., version of acts surpassing those of verses 23, 24, but suggested in miniature there). But the God Who acts in this way exceeds even His own actions as an Object to captivate the heart's responses. Thus the supreme confession from the heart which comes in verse 25, seems to crown all these appreciative words.

We, who read these great passages in the fuller light of N.T. truth and blessing, have greater things (Christ, in all His excellences) to meet our heart's desires to the full. But, this being so, we may be in a situation of greater risk too — the risk of declining from them, losing the joy of them, adhering to the letter of them in a somewhat empty way. Better than Asaph could, we know that the blood of Jesus provides freedom of access into the holiest, and conscience can be at rest though God's standards are of the highest. Unlike Asaph, we can receive and live out the teaching of the Roman epistle; reckoning, because it is true, that we believers, who have died with Christ, are dead indeed unto sin and *alive unto God* through Jesus Christ our Lord; so that our freedom is in another realm than that where sin and its lusts operate. We may know the basic N.T. teachings well; we may know that *life in Christ*, life summed-up and centred in Him, is *our* kind of life — our *new* life as Christians. The light that Asaph possessed seems more like twilight in comparison with the full blaze of N.T. revelation and teaching. But are we as *responsive* to the knowledge of God available to us as Asaph was? It is a searching question; since, after his recovery, the quality of his appreciation of his God is high indeed. Certainly the apostle exhibited the same kind of spirit in the Philippian letter as, entranced by "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord", all other objects faded, and all other gains were counted as dross and dung. The Philippian letter is said (no doubt correctly) to demonstrate "normal Christianity"; but, how *common* is it?

The pure in heart

The last verse of the Psalm takes our minds back to the first. To those to whom sovereign grace has been shown, God is truly good. Open, unclouded appreciation of Himself is however closely allied with "a clean (undivided) heart"; something that comes when faith is centred on God Himself. The undistracted intake of the excellences and the goodness of God both promotes faith *and* focuses it more sharply and more simply on its one commanding Object. Thus the thoughts and the desires are purified, and a man's objectives in life are in accordance with the Person at the heart of his faith. This is especially true when God *as known in Christ*, fills the vision of the soul. The beginnings of declension are *inward*: outwardly all may seem well, indeed commend-

able in many ways. "Thou hast left thy first love" was said to high-level Christians, possessors of truth of a special kind. Yet the Lord discerned this lack, and counted it serious, calling urgently for repentance (Revelation 2:4). The decline that starts at such a vital point-of-departure can go a long way downhill, as chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation show. The Psalmist had known the misery of drifting away from his one true and only Good; return to the experience (and the Presence) within "the sanctuary of God" produced deep thankfulness for recovery from his waywardness, even though he had moved away in thought only. It also brought great restoration of joy, real delight in God, and close communion with Him.

So, the general statement of verse 1 ultimately becomes the personal statement of verse 28. God is good, certainly; but also, "It is good for *me* to draw near to God". How well he knows it! He is a clear example, now, of the pure and undivided heart.

My Bonds in Christ (Philippians 1:13)

JOHN BARNES

We can react in various ways to frustrating situations, and to seeming set-backs in our pathway as believers. Here we see Paul's way of meeting adverse experiences, surmounting them, turning them to spiritual gain by finding strength in Christ for every test.

The apostle Paul uses the words "my bonds" in v. 13, v. 14 and again in v. 16; three times in four verses. In Acts 26, in his defence before Agrippa, he said in reference to his chain, "Except these bonds", but here he speaks of them in a more personal way, even with some affection, not as "these bonds", but as "my bonds". He seems to wear them, not as a galling restriction which hampers his movements, but as a badge of office which established his credentials as God's ambassador in Rome. We cannot ignore that it was because his bonds were "in Christ" that they elevated the character of his bondage. The Jews had sought his execution and possibly they consoled themselves in their failure to achieve this by the thought of his confinement. At least, so long as he remained shut up his activities would be curtailed if not ended. How wrong they were! Paul's imprisonment, in the providence of God, had brought this tireless worker to the throbbing heart of the empire and to the precincts of the imperial palace. There Paul carried

on his service, witnessing to his guards, conversing with his visitors, explaining the nature of the ministry which the Lord Jesus had given *him and seeking, in prayer and by his letters, to encourage the saints to go on in the Lord.*

Christians who become ailing or old and frail, and so find their work cut off or at least reduced, may do well to consider the case of Paul and to think of the curtailment of their liberty in this personal way, as "my bonds". Many have known rich blessing in their hearts and new doors for service have opened up for them in spite of restrictions. Joseph's brothers thought that they were well rid of the young visionary, but his restriction as a household slave in Potiphar's villa was used by him in the service of his God. The more severe confinement of the prison house did not stifle the devoted service of this extraordinary young Hebrew. His usefulness provided opportunities of service which made known the greatness of God in the house of his captors, and ultimately opened a door for him into the palace of Pharaoh. What his brothers had intended to be for his destruction proved to be for his exaltation and, indeed, for their own salvation and the world's.

Many servants of Christ have experienced something akin to this, though rarely so spectacularly. The prison cell of John Bunyan did restrict the preaching activities of this servant of Christ, but it released his energies in service in a new direction, one he may not previously have thought about. His pen became his means of making the Lord known and our gain has been his books which have been translated into many languages, some say second only to the Bible.

Paul's bonds in Christ gave us the prison epistles which crown his ministry. Had circumstances developed differently, in the wisdom of the Lord, no doubt some other way would have been planned to provide the assembly with this essential teaching, but these letters would not, in that case, have been prison epistles, and this fact gives them a unique atmosphere and value. Ephesians was written in imprisonment. Paul mentions his bonds three times in that letter. This stimulating document to the Philippians was also written in confinement, and a number of references to this fact may be seen. It seems to me that these facts give such letters an even greater impact than would otherwise have been the case. "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice" strikes the mind more forcibly as from prison and privation than it would if it had come from the luxury of a palace.

John's great book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, was in a way a prison epistle. He tells us in simple, unadorned language; "I was in the isle that is called Patmos". The apostle was not there on a Mediterranean holiday but was exiled for "the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ". What a way to wear a chain! Some have supposed that John laboured on the grim island in the quarries. Tough prisoners would be confined there and would do hard labour in rigorous con-

ditions. There would be robbers, murderers and terrorists and some think that gentle John was numbered among such transgressors and shared the same conditions as they. But he does not give us any impression of privation but rather of privilege; it was for the testimony of Jesus Christ that he was there, and from his confinement in that ancient 'Alcatraz' emerged the wonderful Apocalypse, that marvellous book which has enlightened the minds of myriads and has cheered the hearts of countless generations of tried saints who have pondered on its mighty themes. "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death." What a message to cheer the oppressed and the imprisoned; a message from the bare island of Patmos, indeed, but also from the other side of the tomb!

Scripture tells us of others who served effectively in spite of restrictions. Jeremiah experienced the mire of the dungeon; Ezekiel suffered banishment to the distant banks of the Chebar; Daniel knew exile in Babylon and the traumatic lion's den. But what ministry emerged from such struggles and sufferings. Some have said that Paul could have done more if left at liberty to take the gospel to the world's market places and his ministry to the assemblies; but without the imprisonments we should not have had the prison epistles. Without their imprisonments would we have the books of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ephesians, as they are? These saints learned to look upon their restrictions in a new way. Ezekiel says, "As I was among the captives by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God". John writes; "I am your companion in tribulation . . . I was in the isle that is called Patmos . . . I heard a great voice saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. . . ." Daniel tells us; "As I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel (not his beloved Jordan) . . . behold, a certain man . . . I saw this great vision." Jeremiah writes; "Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison . . . the word of the Lord came unto me." It could be that these servants of God needed to pass through these experiences and that they learned to look on their duration in a new way. Perhaps each of them could say of his chain what Paul said of his; "my bonds". This impression could only be deepened as their writings are considered.

Some older brother or sister who reads these remarks may wonder why the Lord has seen fit to curtail useful service in His vineyard. Instead of thinking it simply to be "my illness" or "my old age"; would it help to think of it as "my old age in Christ", or "my arthritis in Christ"? We all have known frail and ageing saints whose Christian spirit was an inspiration to others and whose service in prayer was a power in the Lord's interests.

"My bonds in Christ!" Paul wore those chains as a Lord Mayor may wear his chain of office. To Paul, his bonds were his ambassadorial

distinction, worn with dignity and with gratitude. They had brought him to Rome, through great dangers and privations on the way. Men had lain in wait to assassinate him; there was the shipwreck; soldiers of his guard wanted to put him to death with the other prisoners and there was the incident of the serpent. But wherever he was and whatever were the circumstances he sought to be helpful. He gave wise advice at the Fair Havens, during the storm and again during the shipwreck; he brought cheer to the suffering ship's company; once ashore he was foremost in promoting the comfort of all and was not too proud to gather sticks for the fire. He healed the sick and would, at all times, be speaking of the Lord, making known the gospel, telling whose he was and whom he served. Now, at the very hub of the great empire whose delegates went to every part of the known world, sat Paul, brought there in the bonds of his Lord to be His representative; confined, yet free to carry on his ministry, and to spread, as opportunity arose, the great message which the Lord had committed to him. Soldiers, sent to distant parts of the empire, government officials, traders, would carry the news of this prisoner who was in chains, not for crimes he had committed, but because he preached the news of a crucified Man who rose again, was seated at God's right hand, and was to return in glory to establish a universal kingdom that shall never be defeated.

Many of us, including the writer of this simple paper, approach a time when we shall know curtailment on movement. Some of us are already there. May we be helped, as we think of this great servant of Christ, to make his outlook our own and to consider our limitations, not as irritating shackles, but as stepping stones to further service for our glorious Lord.

Aquila and Priscilla

GORDON SPRATT

"Heirs together of the grace of life"

(1 Peter 3:7)

Following the paper on Lois and Eunice in the May issue, this paper finds instruction from the partnership between Aquila and Priscilla as Scripture refers to it. The author hopes to add a later paper on Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses.

If we were looking in the New Testament for a sample evangelist, we should probably content ourselves with Philip, since he is the only person so described. If we were looking for a sample of a Christian

married couple we should be rather similarly placed, for if we exclude Joseph and Mary for rather obvious reasons, and Ananias and Sapphira as a less than satisfactory couple, we are left with only one married pair in the New Testament where both partners are mentioned by name.

But why should we be looking to the Scriptures for help about this essentially natural relationship? Our Victorian spiritual ancestors had little to say about it in their writings, and it is rarely the subject of ministry today, save as a natural parallel to the spiritual truth concerning Christ and the Church. The reason must surely be that Christian marriage is one of the most vital of those institutions which are under threat in the unstable world that we live in today.

In the western world marriage has become an optional extra in many man-woman relationships, and related to this unhappy fact is the erosion of sexual morality and the breakdown of family relationships which are such obvious features of the society in which we live. One can almost envisage a time when Christian marriage could be the only remaining form of stable, contractual, monogamous relationship.

And it is under attack: we hear reports of Satanists praying and fasting for the breakdown of Christian marriages, a proof if one were needed that it is an institution worth attacking. Sadly, even in Christian circles, the underlying principle of marriage — that what God has joined together, let not man put asunder — is by no means as tenaciously held as once it was.

This article can make no pretence to be a guide to successful marriage. If the writer has any qualification at all to write on the subject, it is only a profound thankfulness for nearly forty years of happiest marriage, coupled with a real concern for what young Christian couples may face in the future. But perhaps a brief look in the Scriptures at our sample married couple may help to establish some of the practical features upon which a happy and useful marriage is built.

Our sample couple are, of course, Aquila and Priscilla, and it is perhaps worth beginning by noticing that it is as a married couple rather than as a family that they are presented in the Bible. No indication is given of whether they had children or not, and maybe the very absence of that information serves to emphasise that a family is the product of a marriage. No better basis can be imagined for a happy, God-fearing, fruitful family than the stable foundation of a happy, God-fearing, fruitful marriage.

So what are we to learn from the record of Aquila and Priscilla? They have left behind no particular doctrine, though they were well enough instructed in the apostles' doctrine as to be able to help others, and particularly Apollos. No special gift is connected with them, except perhaps what 1 Corinthians 12:28 calls "helps". But they have provided us with some object lessons in the practical things that make Christian marriage what it ought to be.

They are mentioned six times in the New Testament. Each time they are mentioned together, never apart. What a lesson in the *unity* that should mark every marriage! "They two shall be one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31) was for them a practical reality. No separate careers, bank accounts, hobbies, holidays, if we may borrow from our modern terminology. The point is underlined in Romans 16:4 where in the original Greek the word "necks" is singular — literally, "They risked their own neck".

Of the six references we have mentioned, three are in Acts 18 — verses 1-3, 18, and 24-26. The other three are in Romans 16:3-4, 1 Corinthians 16:19 and 2 Timothy 4:19. Three times Aquila is named first and three times Priscilla is named first — surely not an early example of feminism, but an expression of that unity of outlook and activity in which neither dominated the other.

Theirs was essentially a *practical* partnership. It has been truly observed that in any society — and Christians are not immune from the charge — there are those who will work, and those who will let them! Aquila and Priscilla were undeniably in the former category. Does Paul need a lodging? Not only is he welcomed into their house, but they work together at their craft of tent-making. Does the gifted Apollos come to Ephesus with his incomplete grasp of Christian truth? One can almost hear the mutterings and the danger of disagreement and division. But it is Aquila and Priscilla who graciously take him to themselves and teach him the doctrines that he lacked. And what a debt the brethren in Achaia owed to them when Apollos went on to teach the Word in Corinth.

Later, when they are back in Rome, Paul sends his greetings (Romans 16:3) not only to Priscilla and Aquila but to the church in their house. We do not know why the Roman believers met in one of their homes, but we can well understand that it was the home of Aquila and Priscilla that was used. Clearly they were available always for whatever service was needed.

This readiness to take on whatever the occasion demanded is reflected in what we know of their movements. When we first hear of them they have just arrived in Corinth from Rome, the Emperor Claudius having banned all Jews from his capital city. Less than two years later we find them moving on with Paul to Ephesus (Acts 18:18) — no question of settling down in their new house in Corinth, just a readiness to move as the will of the Lord directed them. Within five years they are back again in Rome, but even then it was not to settle down, for when Paul writes from Rome his final letter to Timothy at Ephesus, he is again sending greetings to his old friends, Priscilla and Aquila.

Nor were they fair-weather Christians. Life was not easy for them, but many another married couple can confirm that it is not the easy

circumstances that forge the links of durability and affection in a marriage, but the hard times and the shared trials. And in “risking their own neck” for Paul, whatever suffering or sacrifice lay behind that statement, they had placed all the Gentile churches in their debt. Who knows what we, who have inherited Paul's distinctive service to the Church, owe to this devoted couple?

What kind of people were they? Austere? Severe? Demanding? that is not the impression the Scripture references leave with the reader. Rather do we imagine them as gracious, friendly, understanding. It is worth noticing that whenever Paul writes of Priscilla he does not use her full name, but the familiar diminutive, “Prisca”. Some translations have rather spoilt the effect by reinstating the full name, but it is a little touch which says a lot about the attractiveness of our sample married couple. They present a fine example for young people starting out in Christian marriage, and indeed a high standard of happy service for all who are married.

Remember Me (2)

J. H. BOSLEY MENZIES

The article commenced in the July issue is completed here.

2. The Promise of His Presence

We remember a person. He is not dead, but is risen. Once He died for sin but now He is alive never to die. In this, of course, the risen Lord differs from any hero whom man may elevate or commemorate.

Had the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus led only to the tomb, we might well have remembered a good and upright man whose life ended in tragedy and despair. But that is far from the case. We remember the anguish and torment through which our Lord passed; we call to mind, and stand amazed that He should be willing to bear our sin, but we remember a living and victorious Saviour. Our blessing would not have been possible had it been possible for death to hold Him. Peter clears this point in his first Gospel address: he tells of “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” and speaks of Jesus, “taken and by wicked hands . . . crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts 2:22-24).

How clearly now we can appreciate the promise of the Lord Himself, “Wherever two or three gather in my name, there am I in the midst of them”. Prior to Pentecost, the fearful disciples who had

gathered together with the doors bolted for fear of the Jews, were overjoyed to receive a visit from the risen Saviour. Thomas, absent from the group, missed the visit and doubted; but he too saw the print of the nails in the hands of the living Jesus. His response was swift: "My Lord and my God".

As we gather in His name, His promise still stands. God has put the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, and as we join together to worship Him, to remember Him, and to partake of the bread and wine as He asked, He is there. He is not really the guest so much as the convener of the feast. He is in a full and marvellous sense our host, for He has invited us, and is there with us. How else could our worship be led out? The Father has sought worshippers who would worship in spirit and in truth. Only as led by the Spirit of God can we worship Him. Especially important is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, around whom we meet, for it is Himself whom we meet. Spurgeon wrote:—

*Amidst us our Beloved stands,
And bids us view His pierced hands,
Points to His wounded feet and side,
Blest emblems of the crucified.*

This cannot perhaps be analysed adequately in intellectual terms. It is undoubtedly a mystery — a miracle of divine presence in the company of men: the Trinity is engaged with us as we meet and offer our worship. We cannot fathom it, but it is a reality which is experienced and known by His own. We know that the Lord is with us and delights to lead our praises to the Father. He delights to be amongst His own for, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us; "He is not ashamed to call (us) brethren, saying 'I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee'."

He is there at the heart of the worshipping community. Thomas was impelled to utter, "My Lord and my God". The two disciples at Emmaus found their hearts burning within them. Worship flows from contact with the living Lord Jesus. The power of His love is so strong that we must fall before Him in worship and allow Him to unfold His Father's love to us; to lead us in our praises, for we have gone beyond mere intellectual appreciation and have moved into the realm of spiritual perception which makes His presence palpable to us. It was with eager desire that He wanted to spend with His disciples those last few hours before He suffered. It is with eager desire that He wants to be amidst His own now, beyond that dreadful suffering. He promises to be there and so He is. It matters not now where we meet to remember Him. Miraculously, simultaneously, throughout the world, He is present wherever and whenever His people meet in His name.

On Lord's Day mornings then, we have a pressing appointment.

We go to meet the One who has invited us to join Him and to remember Him. Together we break bread and drink of the wine and remember Him. In a physical sense we remember the Lord in the place where He was rejected; we remember an absent Lord. But because we meet in His name, He has a place in our hearts; there He reigns and is lifted up in honour. But this is not a metaphor — it is a fact. He is there in the midst of us. Our prayer as we set out for the meeting might well be “Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus”.

3. The Significance of the Substance

Invited — or rather entreated — by the Lord Himself, we remember Him. We gather in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to remember His actions of love and grace and mercy to us. More than this, we meet with Him for He has promised to be wherever we gather in His name.

We have no doubt that the actions we perform in taking bread and wine have specific meaning. “As often as you do this”, Paul instructed “ye do show the Lord’s death till He come”.

It is important to be quite clear as to what happens when we break bread or partake of the Lord’s supper. Paul speaks of this as “the communion of the blood of Christ”, and “the communion of the body of Christ”. We have seen that the Lord asked His disciples to do this in remembrance of Him. We have seen that at this meal He is the host, the convener; it is at His request we take the loaf and the cup. He promises to be with us, and so He is. It is not true however that He is with us inside the actual bread or wine. To suppose this would be to miss the full force and value of His promise to be in the midst wherever two or three gather in His name. Further, to suppose this would be to miss the greatness of the fact that the work of salvation is complete. Only once did He give His body; only once did His blood pour forth for us. That sacrifice will never be repeated and needs no re-enactment. Consequently He is not present in the substance of the bread and wine. Rather they are symbols which He chose in order to portray certain important facts which we shall be the poorer if we miss.

This is a memorial feast, we remember the Lord Jesus as the perfect Lamb of God. We can never exhaust the fulness of His perfection and glory as Son of Man and Son of God. As we remember Him, eating the bread and drinking the wine we enjoy communion or fellowship with Him. Our fellowship is on the basis of the blood which atoned for our sin and the fact that in His body He bore our sins on the cross. We are one with Him because of what He has done for us, and this is expressed in our partaking of the bread and wine. No oneness is conferred by the substance of bread or wine, however. That could only be conferred by the actual death of the Lord Jesus — His once-for-all sacrifice, appropriated personally by faith.

With Horatius Bonar, we can say,

*Only bread and only wine,
Yet to faith the solemn sign
Of the heavenly and divine;
We give Thee thanks O Lord.*

And to say this is not to underestimate the value of the sharing of the bread and wine. How right it is for forgetful man to be given a simple visual and tactile aid to remember the Lord and His suffering. Can we ever forget the anguish of the Lord Jesus when we see the bread broken. What pain He bore in His body on our account! Can we ever forget the awfulness of our sin when we see the wine and call to mind his blood? And yet, as George Herbert wrote,

*Love is that liquor sweet and most divine
Which my God feels as blood, and I, as wine.*

If we realise the fulness of God's judgment upon sin when we realise that in real anguish our Lord gave His blood and in pain bore our sin, taking the wine we taste the sweetness of God's blessing upon us. Our very real sins required the Lord Jesus' real blood. His effective sacrifice of Himself has brought us into the fellowship of joy and peace. For us then, wine; for Him, blood. Paul rightly speaks of "the cup of blessing"; with him we reiterate, "which we bless".

There is a further point of significance related to the bread of which we partake. Clearly it symbolises the perfect body, prepared for the Son, but also it symbolises the one body in which through His death we all have fellowship. Not only is it a picture of the suffering of the Lord Jesus and the body which bore the penalty of sin so that we should never have to bear it, but also it tells of the body of Christ as it is now — His Church, of which He is the risen Head. In breaking bread then, we remember too, that all who trust in Him for their salvation are members of that one body and partakers together of the bread. He has triumphed and has secured for Himself a body of people who will be to His praise here and now upon earth where He was, and still is, largely, rejected. In this we are privileged to have a part.

In both symbols of bread and wine then, there is the remembrance of suffering and death; in both too, however, there is the unmistakable evidence of His great victory. No doubt with this in mind, Paul says, "Ye do *show* the Lord's death". It is important to remember that there is a public aspect to the remembrance of the Lord. It is true that the occasions when we join together with His people and know His presence with us are often the most sublime occasions afforded to us here in time and place. Undoubtedly they have the atmosphere of heaven — and yet they take place here and now. It is significant that Paul adds "till He come". Remembrance with symbolic aid will not be

necessary when we have heard His summoning call, and have been taken to be with Him for ever. But it is an important part of our spiritual life and witness now. It is an announcing, not a re-enactment of the death of the Lord. "No gospel like this feast", wrote E. R. Charles. Though it is a feast prepared for His own, by the Lord Jesus, it is also a witness to the world of the basis of our blessing, the fulness of our salvation, and the certainty of His victory over all the force of evil.

How then shall we respond?

Confronted with the reason for His request, what can we do but obey? Old or young, man or woman, experienced or new to the faith; whatever our supposed status, if we are ones of those for whom Christ died, then we are of those to whom He says: "Remember Me".

Aware of the promise of His presence, and equally aware of the reality of His presence as we meet in His name, our response must be to worship; not just to stand in amazement, but to bask in His love, to be led by that love into all the wonder of the Father's desire for us, and the Father's satisfaction with the Son. Truly we lose ourselves in the depths of love and wonder into which we are able to enter.

Knowing the significance of the substance of the bread and wine, perhaps we can pray as Spurgeon did:

*If now with eyes defiled and dim
We see the signs but see not Him,
Oh may His love the scales displace
And bid us see Him face to face.*

"What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!"

"What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God!"

(Matthew 8:27; 1 John 3:1)

The expression "What manner of" basically means "Of what country?". The Lord Jesus was an unearthly man, a *heavenly* man. The Father's love belongs to a different climate, and exceeds in quality all earthly kinds of love.

Poured out. Wasted?

ALLAN McCANN

We warmly welcome a new contributor to these pages, and are sure that readers will share in appreciating the spiritual substance of this article.

As first presented, the article listed eight Scriptural quotations, as a basis for what followed. We deal with these a few at a time, though the whole set can be referred to by picking out the (italicised) Scripture portions which break up the paper in this way.

"Half a hin of oil; and of wine . . . half a hin for a drink-offering." (Numbers 15:1-6)

"However he would not drink of it, but poured it out to Jehovah." (2 Samuel 23:13-17)

"Thy Name is as ointment poured forth." (Canticles 1:3)

If we consult a concordance we shall find the Holy Spirit using different words in the many O.T. references to pouring out; in the N.T. the inspired evangelist has one word to describe Mary's sacrifice, the apostle of the Gentiles another for his self-offering¹. We may not be able to distinguish the fine shades of meaning; but surely the thought running through these various passages is that of unreserved outpouring (granted that Numbers 15 may seem an exception in that it prescribes a given measure).

In Scripture the first mention of a subject can be the key to subsequent references: wine is usually² a symbol of joy — the drink-offering was to complete the sacrifice, so to speak, adding the element of rejoicing³. We find it introduced in that wonderful 35th chapter of Genesis. Jacob had to experience a series of trials; but what a blessed contrast with his first arrival at Bethel in chapter 28! There, when

fleeing from his enraged brother, he had that great vision of the ladder reaching to heaven, and God's gracious promises⁴, but they gave him no joy. The thought of the house of God filled his heart with terror. His vow took the form of a legal bargain⁵ — he only poured oil on his pillar — he may not have had wine, but in any case a drink-offering would have been quite inappropriate. Now (in ch. 35) he is given his new name, as though he had not received it at Peniel (and God reveals His own name as El-Shaddai), sets up a memorial pillar — and the drink-offering takes precedence of the oil — and renames the place Bethel, this time with a heart joyfully at rest.

Then we find in Exodus 28 drink-offerings with the sweet-savour offerings, in connection with the consecration of the priests; in Leviticus 23, on the day of the wave-sheaf and at the feast of weeks (in N.T. language, the joy of the Lord's resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit).

In Numbers — the story of Israel's 38 years' wanderings — the libation is particularly prominent: in all the failures and sorrows of the wilderness journey, how refreshing to find such insistence on joy! In chapter 6 it forms part of the Nazarite's offering on the completion of his vow; in chapters 28, 29 it characterises the sacrifices at Israel's set times — even on the Day of Atonement; but it is especially beautiful in chapter 15. This (coming immediately after the rebellion of the generation that came out of Egypt and the sentence to 40 years of wandering, and just before the gainsaying of Korah and the revolt of Dathan and Abiram) shows us God resting, as it were, in the settled purpose of His own counsels, and reminding His people of the good land He is giving them. We have details of the free-will sweet-savour offerings. The oil and the wine are to be in equal proportions, although these will vary according to the animal offered and the accompanying oblation. In N.T. terms these bespeak joy produced by the Holy Spirit in the appreciation of the Son here below, whether in His perfect life (the oblation) or in His offering Himself without spot to God (the burnt-offering and in some aspects of the peace-offering)⁶.

The historical books contain a vivid and precious picture of the spirit of the drink-offering. The Holy Spirit has taken pleasure in presenting it twice: in 2 Samuel 23, and in 1 Chronicles 11. David is in the cave of Adullam, and those in debt, discontent, or distress are flocking to him. He is surely in a depressed mood at this point, and his thoughts may be running on these lines: "King of Israel indeed! To think that I was anointed by Samuel himself to come down to this — leader of a gang of outlaws who only stick to me because they have made a mess of their lives — just as I have! Was I born to end up in this wretched existence of continual harassment and danger, whether from Saul or from the Philistines? Oh, for those carefree days with the flock in the wilderness pastures! Oh, the joy of those long, cooling draughts

from the well by the gate, at the end of a hot, dry, dusty day! What would I not give for a sip of it now!" David's poignant nostalgia has become audible. Three of his men are near enough to catch his words. It could be they had sacrificed their harvests to join him. Noiselessly, they pick up their weapons, and an empty pitcher, and move out of the cavern. United in purpose, once outside they race towards Bethlehem. We are not told what was involved, but that mission succeeded though the risks were great. All three actually returned alive to David with their precious love-offering. His sorrow is turned to joy at the sight of it, but it is too sacred to be drunk — only Jehovah is worthy of it, and it becomes a precious drink-offering from the hands of His anointed king. Like Epaphroditus in a later day, these men 'gambled with' their lives for his dear sake.

"Therefore will I assign Him a portion with the great . . . because He hath poured out His soul unto death." (Isaiah 53:12)

"There came a woman having an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly; and having broken the alabaster flask, she poured it out upon His head." (Mark 14:1-9)

The utter devotion of David's three mighty men may lead our thoughts on to the One who could say "But that the world may know that I love the Father . . . arise, let us go hence." The glory of that one offering runs throughout the written word — climaxed, may we say, in that supreme, central saying, "He hath poured out His soul (life) unto death" — life not merely risked, but deliberately, voluntarily laid down, to be taken up again in resurrection. This action furnished a fresh motive for the Father's love to Him.

The eternal value of that finished work flows from the glory of His person and this becomes a touchstone for the hearts of human beings. Mark 14 and John 12 show this well. Mary of Bethany sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His word, and she knew Him now as the resurrection and the life. With a woman's intuition, but taught of the Spirit, she sensed the murderous hatred in the hearts of the religious leaders, and, unlike the other women who came too late to the sepulchre, she acted without words, but with perfect timing. She broke the neck of the alabaster flask, pouring all the precious nard upon the uniquely worthy One. He discerned perfectly what she did; "Against the day of My preparation for burial hath she kept this". All in the house were made aware of the pervasive fragrance. But it provoked angry reactions: first of all in the thief and the betrayer — the price of it could have found its way into his bag. But his protest was taken up by true disciples: "they spoke very angrily at her". To them it was a total waste; the poor were more deserving. The Lord, however, who had earlier vindicated Mary before her sister, with her mistaken priorities, defends her before these

disciples: “she hath wrought a good work as to Me” — “she hath done what she could”. Even as Abel and Enoch in their day had testimony borne to them, so now He announced that, all through this universal and long-extended day of salvation, not only would the eternal efficacy of His finished work be proclaimed, but that Mary’s appreciation of His person would be an abiding witness of what is most precious in His sight. And so, in the time of His absence, the supreme privilege of His own (however lightly esteemed by many, and however blessed evangelism is in its place) is to call Him to mind “till He come”.

“For I seek not yours, but you . . . Now I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved.” (2 Corinthians 12:14,15)

“But if also I am poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice in common with you all.” (Philippians 2:17)

“For I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is come.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

The apostle Paul had received this as a special revelation from the Lord. He had not companied with Him in the days of His flesh; but how feelingly He looks back to that unique self-offering! “He gave Himself for our sins”; “The Son of God . . . has loved me and given Himself for me”; “Christ loved us, and delivered Himself up for us an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour”; “Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered Himself up for it”; “the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all”.

And in glad response he would be poured out for Christ — in serving those who form His body, the fulness of the Head in glory. With his beloved Corinthians (wayward, superficial, conceited as so many of them were) he was eager to spend and be utterly spent for their souls, even at the risk of his love being spurned.

With his tenderly-remembered Philippians, beloved and longed-for, his joy and crown (following on his reference to the self-emptying obedience of Christ Jesus) he pictures their faith as a sweet-smelling sacrificial service ascending up to God. He thinks of himself (if Nero’s sentence is to be for death) as merely a libation to complete their offering by adding the element of joy. It is all to be a matter for mutual rejoicing.

In his last recorded letter, as he seeks to encourage Timothy, his beloved child in the faith, death at the executioner’s hand is very near. Maybe he is already breaking up physically: he fears the approach of winter. Here again he uses the self-same figure: he is just the drink-offering; his life has been a continual outpouring in unparalleled devotedness to his Lord, and the time of his release has come at last.

The days when the word of the Lord increased and prevailed at Ephesus were now long past; conditions in the assembly of God were at a very low ebb; the Lord's people were turning away from Paul; the enemy was more active than ever, both in violence and in seduction. And how this is echoed in our own day! Behind the various 'curtains', persecution rages; in the democracies, Satan uses his willing slaves (some dedicated to the point of utter self-denial, including regular fasting) with definite targets in view, such as leading evangelical Christians, aiming to destroy their influence and credibility. Satanists boast of outstanding success in this sphere. Such activities of the "universal lords of this darkness", "in the heavenlies" indeed but working through human agents, may well fill the hearts of the Lord's people with grief and shame as we look within and around. But what an added incentive to that "poured out" spirit exemplified in David's dauntless three, in Mary, and in Paul! However misunderstood or despised by the many, this will have the Lord's own approval, in secret now, and in public in the day of manifestation. To the one who keeps, not merely His commandments but His word (John 14:23), what a breathtaking reward even here and now!

References

1. And John uses yet another in the terrible description of Revelation 16 — the emptying of the seven golden bowls in which the fury of God will be completed.
2. In Revelation, and other prophetic passages, it speaks of wrath.
3. The idolatrous Gentiles knew it (Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 16, Jeremiah); but in this paper we are only concerned with the Divine and blessed side of it.
4. God's angels were ministering to the guilty fugitive; in John 1 their service was to the holy Son of man.
5. God reminds him of it at the end of his 20 years in Padan-Aram, but he goes on in his old Jacob ways, even after his return to Canaan.
6. Many passages speak of joy in the Holy Spirit, as Acts 13:52, Romans 14:17, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

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be heaven . . . is the actual relationship with the Father and the Son which is perfected there. It is of this that the Spirit's present ministry to us is the first instalment." The Spirit as power for entry already into rich things associated with Christ exalted is here recognised, but is not a main emphasis of the book. There are other things that perceptive readers might have wished for — but perhaps not fair to expect from a writer with so much on his hands already.

Appetite for a book like this will depend on the reader. For myself I felt impelled to read it all closely: and, while no book is flawless, I have to say that I should have missed a lot had I not seen it.

C.C.

The Doctrines of Early Brethren

J. N. DARBY

A letter written to a French Catholic newspaper in 1878.

This letter answers an inquiry from the Editor of that paper, asking for a statement about "The Brethren, their doctrines, etc." It is reprinted using an earlier reprint in "The Witness" in October, 1929.

I believe that the Christian calling is a heavenly one, that the Christian is not of this world as his Master is not of it, and that he is placed down here as an epistle of Christ to manifest the life of the Lord Jesus amongst men, whilst waiting for the Lord to come to take him to be with Himself in the glory.

As editor you will quite understand that articles written in order to inculcate such principles as these would little suit a political newspaper. Now I live only for these things — a life feebly realised I am ready to confess — but I live only for them. However, I will communicate to you what appears to interest you, namely, what has led me, and others with me, to take up the position in which we find ourselves as Christians.

It is well, perhaps, in view of the infidelity which is spreading every where, to begin by saying that I hold, and I can add that we firmly hold, all

The Foundations of the Christian Faith —

the Divinity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, one God, eternally blessed — the Divinity and humanity of the Lord Jesus, two natures in one Person — His resurrection and His glorification at the right hand of God — the presence of the Holy Ghost here below, having descended on the Day of Pentecost — the return of the Lord Jesus according to His promise.

We believe also that the Father in His love has sent the Son to accomplish the work of redemption and grace towards men — that the Son came, in that same love, to accomplish it, and that He has finished the work that His Father gave Him to do on earth.

We believe that He has made propitiation for our sins, and that after having accomplished it, He ascended to Heaven — the High Priest seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

Other truths are connected with these, such as the miraculous birth of the Saviour, who was absolutely without sin — and yet others;

but, you will readily understand that my object is not to give a course of lectures or a theological summary, but to make it quite clear that it is in no wise on the giving up of the great foundations of the Christian faith that our position is based. Anyone who would deny one or other of these fundamental truths would not be received amongst us, and anyone who, being amongst us, adopted some doctrine which would undermine one or other of these same truths would be excluded, but only after all proper means to bring him back to the truth had been exhausted. For although these are dogmas, we hold them as essential to living faith and to salvation, to the spiritual and Christian life which we live as born of God.

But you wish to know not only the great truths which we hold in common with others, but also

What Distinguishes us from Others.

Now, without even professing to give a course of Christian doctrine in connection with the truths I have just pointed out, I am anxious, indeed I would heartily desire, to set them forth as the foundation, recognising as true Christians and members of the Body of Christ all those, who by the grace of God, and by the operation of the Holy Ghost who has been given to them, truly believe these things in their souls.

Converted by the grace of God, I spent six or seven years under the rod of the law, feeling that Christ was the only Saviour, but not being able to say that I possessed Him, or that I was saved by Him — fasting, praying, giving alms — always good things when done spiritually — but not possessing peace, whilst at the same time feeling that if the Son of God had Himself forgiven me, I owed myself to Him — my body, soul, and means. At length God gave me to understand that I was in Christ, united to Him by the Holy Ghost — “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20), which means that when the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, should have come, the disciples would *know* these things.

The promise of the Spirit is given to all those who have part in the remission of their sins, for “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:17). Hence Christians are temples of the Holy Ghost. “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

At this time the Word of God became for me an

Absolute Authority as to Faith and Practice,

not that I doubted it previously, but it had now become such from conviction, implanted by God Himself in my heart. In this way the assurance of salvation through the work of Christ, the presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling in me, by whom “having believed, ye have been sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 1:13,14), salvation known and possessed, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost giving us the assurance of it, constitute the normal state of the Christian. He is no

longer of the world, save to pass through it peacefully, doing the will of God. Bought with a great price, he is to glorify God in his conduct.

This brings in the thought of the Church and of its unity. For me the body of Christ was now composed of those who were united by the Holy Ghost to the Head — Christ in Heaven. If we were seated in the Heavenly places in Christ, what were we still waiting for? For Christ to come and place us up there in fact. "I will come again" said the Lord, "and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). We have been converted "To wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10).

Hence the presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling in him, and the attitude of waiting for the Lord constitute the normal state of the Christian. But all those who possess this Spirit are, by that very fact, one Body. "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). This baptism took place on the Day of Pentecost.

All those around me had not reached that point, at any rate they did not profess to have, and it was easy, reading Acts 2 and 4, to see how far we had got from what God had set up on the earth.

Where was I to look for the Church?

I gave up Anglicanism as not being it. Rome, at the beginning of my conversion, had not failed to attract me. But the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews had made that impossible for me. "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

Then again it rendered impossible the idea of a sacrificing priesthood down here between me and God; seeing that our position, as the result of the work of Christ, is that we have direct access to God in all confidence. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the Blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19).

I am stating facts; I am not entering into controversy; but faith in an accomplished salvation, and later on the consciousness that I possessed it, hindered me from turning in that direction; whilst having grasped the fact of the unity of the Body of Christ, the various dissenting sects no longer attracted me. As to the unity to which, as we all know Rome pretends, I found everything in ruins. The most ancient Churches did not want to have anything to say to her, nor did Protestants either, so that the great majority of those who profess Christianity are outside her pale. On the other hand, it was not a question of seeking this unity amongst the Protestant sects. Besides, whatever their ecclesiastical position might be, most of those who call themselves Christians are of the world, just as much as a pagan might be.

Now the 12th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians shows clearly that *there is a Church formed on the earth by the descent of the Holy Ghost*. "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one Body"; and it is evident that this is on the earth, for "Ye are the Body of Christ,

and members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

The Assembly of God, then, has been formed on the earth, and ought always to have been manifested. Alas! It has not been so. In the first place, with regard to individuals, the Lord had pointed this out beforehand. "The wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep," but, thank God, "No one shall catch them out of My hand," said the same faithful Shepherd (John 10:12, 28).

But this is not all: the Apostle Paul, bidding farewell to the faithful of Asia, said: "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30). Jude declares that already in his time, deceitful men had crept in among the Christians, and which is of all importance, they had been marked as being the object of the judgment of the Lord when He comes again (Jude 4).

He (Paul) warns us that "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse" (2 Timothy 3:12, 13); but he gives us as a safeguard the knowledge of the person from whom we have learnt those things which we believe; it is the apostle himself, with the Scriptures, which can make us wise to salvation by the faith which is in Christ Jesus. He assures us that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for correction," etc. (2 Timothy 3:16).

Thus we have proof that evil, having entered into the Church, would continue.

"The Mystery of Iniquity",

says the apostle, "doth already work; only he who now hinders will hinder until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the breath of His mouth, and shall destroy by the brightness of His Coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:7, 8). The evil which was already working in the time of the apostle was, then, to continue until the Wicked One himself should be revealed. The Lord will destroy him then by His Coming; and although it be not spoken of the Church properly so-called, the same thing is revealed to us in regard to Christendom, for we learn that tares have been sown in the place where the Lord had sown good grain. When the servants desire to pull up the tares, the Lord forbids them, saying, "Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matthew 13:24-30). The evil done to the Kingdom of God was to remain in the field of the world until the judgment. Christ will doubtless gather the good grain into His garner, but the crop is spoiled down here. You will tell me "But the gates of Hell are not to prevail against that which Christ has built". Granted, and I bless God for it with all my heart, but we must distinguish here as the Word of God does. There is on the one hand the work of Christ, and on the other what is done by men and under their

responsibility. The enemy will never destroy what Christ built (we speak of the Church of God), nor will he prevail against the work of the Lord.

Whatever be the evil that has come in — for that there are heresies and schisms we do not deny — that which Christ works has endured and will endure for ever.

This is what the Word of God presents to us historically and prophetically in the New Testament: this Word, addressed by the teachers to the faithful, is our resource when these perilous times should come; and, if that were necessary, the facts have borne out all that it says.

What is to be done? The Word declares to us that where two or three are gathered to the Name of Jesus, He will be there in the midst (Matthew 18:20).

This is What we Have Done

There were only four of us to do it at the first; not, I hope, in the spirit of pride or presumption, but deeply grieved at the state of that which surrounded us, praying for all Christians, and recognising all those who possessed the Spirit of God — *every true Christian wherever he might be found ecclesiastically* — as members of the Body of Christ. We were not thinking of anything else than of satisfying the need of our souls according to the Word of God. The same needs caused others to follow the same road, and thus the work has extended in a way of which we had not the remotest idea. It commenced in Dublin, to spread to the British Isles, in France, where a great number of persons, open unbelievers, were converted; in Switzerland, where the work on the Continent had commenced; in Germany, in Holland, in Denmark, where it is commencing, in Sweden, where a great religious movement is going on at this moment. The path we follow has spread to a considerable extent in the British Colonies, and in the United States, in Asia, in Africa, and elsewhere. The Spirit of God acts and produces needs of soul to which the religious systems offer no answer.

In a word, this is definitely the position of those brethren who rest on the authority of the Word of God. Christ is seen in this Word as the Saviour in three different positions: first, as accomplishing redemption on the Cross; then as seated at the Father's right hand, the Holy Ghost being thereupon sent down here; finally as coming back to take His own to be with Himself. These Christians believe these things, have the assurance of their salvation, having faith in the efficacy of this redemption; and finally, being sealed with the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every true Christian, they wait for the Son of God from Heaven without knowing the moment of His Coming. We believe in the promise, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

Absolute faith in the efficacy of redemption; the seal of the Spirit

which gives the assurance of salvation and the consciousness of being children of God; the attitude of waiting for the Lord — this is what characterises these Christians. Bought with a great price, they are bound to regard themselves as no longer belonging to themselves, but to the Lord Jesus, to please Him in everything and to live only for Him.

I do not mean to say that we all walk at the full height of the Heavenly calling, but we acknowledge

The Obligation to do so.

If anyone fails openly in what becomes a Christian — in point of morality or in what concerns the faith — he is excluded. We abstain from the pleasures and amusements of the world. If we have evening parties, it is for the purpose of studying the Word and of edifying ourselves together. We do not mix in politics; we are not of the world; we do not vote. We submit to the established authorities, whatever they may be, in so far as they command nothing expressly contrary to the will of Christ. We take the Lord's Supper every Sunday, and those that have the gift for it preach the Gospel of salvation to sinners or teach believers. Every one is bound to seek the salvation of his neighbour according to the capacity which God has given him. Feeling that Christendom is corrupt, we are outside the Church-world, by whatever name it is called. As to the number of those who follow this course I cannot tell you what it is; we do not number ourselves, wishing to remain in the littleness which becomes Christians. Besides, *we reckon as a brother in Christ every person who has the Spirit of Christ.*

You ask me what is the advantage of this course. Obedience to the Word of God suffices to decide us. To obey Christ is the first requirement of the soul which knows itself saved by Him, and even of every soul acknowledging Him as the Son of God, who has loved us so much and has given Himself for us. But in fact, in obeying Him, in spite of weakness, faults, and failures, which, on my part I own, His presence manifests itself to the soul as an ineffable source of joy, as the earnest of a bliss where failures, blessed be His Name for it, will no longer be found, and where He will be fully glorified in all believers.

"Be mindful of your (past) leaders . . . such as spoke to you the word of God, and, considering the issue of their course, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ (is) the same, yesterday and today and for ever."

"Obey your (present) leaders and submit, for they watch for your souls as having to render an account. . . ."

(Hebrews 13:7, 8, 17; translation by Wm Kelly)

The Pure in Heart

COLIN CURRY

2. In the New Testament

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God".

(Matthew 5:8)

"Follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

(2 Timothy 2:22)

This paper is a short addendum to the previous one on Psalm 73 (in Scripture Truth Vol. 48, p. 257). It needs to be read in sequence to that paper. There is no attempt here to cover all the references to purity of heart in the N.T., though these are quite few.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" is a principle, not specifically Christian, though no less relevant in the Christian day. Purity of heart is not a product of effort, but *faith* is the key to it; faith that centres on God. "God", says Peter, put no difference between Gentiles and Jews, "purifying their hearts *by faith*" (Acts 15:9). Cleansing, and access to God, removal of distance and enmity of heart, all have a firm basis: the death of Christ is the ground of reconciliation. It is good to be clear about this, and to know that we cannot draw near to God on any other ground. Nevertheless faith in individuals like Asaph, and many another, enabled approach to God, and appreciation of Him, *apart from* understanding the vital groundwork of that approach (which was to be laid at a later time than theirs). Romans 3:25 shows how the value of the work of Christ extended to earlier times, as well as forward in time, so that remission of sins of bygone times, before He died, was possible in the light of it. The primary point we stress, however, is that understanding of truth, though highly important, is not an absolute essential for drawing near to God. Asaph came near, with close delight in Him, with no awareness of truth taught in the N.T. Knowledge is not the criterion for the purity of heart that "sees" God, though it would be wrong to stay in the dark when truth can be known, and (held in a right way) can help greatly towards a better awareness of God.

After the comments on the Psalm itself, the following remarks arise from the appearance of the same expression "a pure heart" in 2 Timothy 2:22.

The Psalmist appreciated his link with God before Christian times; and *purity of heart* was the key to his enjoyment of it. But 2 Timothy

relates to very different times. The Christian revelation was complete; the Christian Church was in being. Its early times of great life and power by the Holy Spirit were still fairly recent. But declension and corruption soon developed; and the time came when, though an outward form of Christianity was preserved, evidence of its inward power was less frequently observed. Timothy is told about conduct for "the man of God" in *that* environment. Despite the major changes since O.T. times, purity of heart remained vital for inward knowledge of God, and for reality in response to Him. The emphasis on this in verse 22 needs more attention than it sometimes receives, since it may well be the prime requirement stressed in these verses. The whole section is of high importance if there is to be behaviour "suitable to the Master" today; and it seems that the teaching here *can* be pressed in a way that puts a premium on *understanding* the current position, discerning the outward state of the Church, and following a course of action with others who obey this teaching in the "correct" way. Awareness of these matters *is* desirable, and we do not decry it here. But can one be well-versed on the line to be adopted in obeying this passage, yet somewhat short on humility, "the power of godliness", and "purity (and simplicity) of heart"? The possibility can hardly be denied. "He followeth not *us*" was a reason given by close disciples in support of an adverse judgment of another, who certainly valued the Name of their Lord: and it received and merited His correction (Mark 9:38). There was more of *pride* than of *purity* of heart in that attitude. Men of God of last century, whose guidance in obedience to such Scriptures we have every reason to respect, warned strongly about this possibility. Mr Darby's writings are imbued with a real spirit of humility which accompanied moves he was impelled to take, after deep exercise over such verses. In his exposition of 2 Timothy, Wm Kelly wrote: "readily does the assembly slip away from . . . the Lord . . . to set up a gradually growing plea of indefectibility. . . . A new and pettier Rome soon develops and is cried up as the only right thing. . . . We are bound, if we would please Him, to sift ourselves by His word even more rigidly than others". One more recent comment may be added: "Let not this (our adherence to 2 Timothy 2:21, 22) also be mere profession; it would be more guilty than all the others. To claim to be those 'who call on the Name of the Lord out of a pure heart' runs the risk of becoming vain pretension, the worst kind of Laodicean boasting" (André Gibert, *Scripture Truth* 44, 141).

These important verses are only properly put into practice with delicacy and self-judgment. That self-assumed air of correct action which sometimes is seen, does not accord with true obedience to them; nor does a hard cast about our application of them to others. In the process of standing clear from iniquity, and pursuing righteousness (and its other attendant virtues) it is possible to be failing *in our manner* on

these very points. We can be more remote from purity of heart and from righteous judgments than we realise. Non-recognition of those that may truly *be* pure in heart (sometimes with a certain disdain for them) is also easy when this frame of mind is upon us.

Perhaps we shall always be in danger if the positive ingredient in "purity of heart" is underplayed. The Psalmist moved away from impure and low-quality thoughts (unworthy of him as a man of God, and dishonouring to his God), in the very process of recovering the undivided pre-occupation with his God, so manifest later in the Psalm. If the supreme excellence and attractiveness of the One who also is our Lord absorbs us, it will also dominate us; and we shall become increasingly sensitive to what is untrue to Him and unlike Him, with a strong desire to clear ourselves from such things. Internal cleansing, in *thought* and in *attitude*, will be important to us if we truly obey this instruction in 2 Timothy. Indeed it is of primary importance, taking priority even over such urgent things as recognition of trends (teachers and teachings) inimical to the very foundations of Christian faith, and the realisation that much that bears the 'Christian' name is abnormal and hollow by N.T. criteria. Disassociation may be needed but much will depend on the spirit in which it is done, and sustained, if there is to be value in it in the Lord's eyes. Furthermore, He knows those that are His, and discerns those who are untouched by defilement elsewhere than we might expect (see for example, Revelation 3:4). We ought surely to be on the look-out for some of these, with no severity of attitude to them, welcoming them with a generous recognition of their attachment to the Lord; indeed, not failing to detect "purity of heart" where it really exists.

Would it be helpful perhaps to think of ourselves more as humble learners in this field of obedience to Scripture; in discovering the all-absorbing excellence of the Lord Jesus and its purifying effect upon us? Paul, dominated by the vision of the glory of His Lord, readily adopts the humble stance. "Not as though I had already attained", he says (Philippians 3:12). "Changed (or *being* transformed) into the same image" (2 Corinthians 3:18), as the glory of Christ engaged him, is another of his descriptions of the same continuing process. The energy and integrity of his ways, as the context shows, was the product of *that* pre-occupation at the heart of his moral being. We, too, will need to follow that line if "purity of heart" is to mark us in any degree. We shall be remote, too, from cold-shouldering any who are deeply attached to the Lord Jesus.

BOOK REVIEW

KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT by J. I. Packer.
Inter-Varsity Press, 1984 (301 pp.). £5.50

To the reviewer, a fresh book by Dr Packer is immediately of interest. This is because some of his earlier books (including powerful statements on the Authority of Scripture and kindred matters) have been found so valuable. *This* book has also impressed me: a review is now attempted since few *Scripture Truth* readers will have seen it.

The book attracts me in *three* ways. First, and principally, the opening chapters seem the best in the book. He starts by showing that *strong emphases* on what are no more than *facets* of the Holy Spirit's present work, stressed in the past, or current today, can leave a totally unbalanced view of what the Holy Spirit is about today. And so he addresses himself first to a basic question, often never considered. In his own words: "What is the essence, heart, and core of the Spirit's work today? What is the central, focal element in His many-sided ministry?" Two thorough and highly-biblical chapters pursue the answer to this. These chapters "Getting the Spirit in focus" and "The Holy Spirit in the Bible" (the first 90 pages) constitute a remarkable section. This alone would make the book worthwhile to me. All Spirit-oriented movements could well search themselves in the light of this. The following sentences show what answer he finds to that basic question. "A properly Christian account of the Holy Spirit is an account that builds consistently on the thoughts which Jesus Himself expresses in John 14:16-23 and 16:14, 15, and will not be drawn away from them". By this he means he is "highlighting the Christ-centredness of all these deeds of the Spirit . . . following the lead of the Bible itself". "Jesus spoke of the Spirit as One who would be self-effacing, directing all attention away from Himself to Christ and drawing folk into the faith, hope, love, obedience, adoration, and dedication, which constitute communion with Christ. This, be it said, remains the criterion by which the authenticity of supposedly 'spiritual' movements may be gauged". "Too often our concept of the Holy Spirit's ministry is related only to our lacks and needs, and not thought through in terms of the truth that the Spirit is here to glorify Christ. . . . The result is a view that is Christian-centred instead of being Christ-centred". If you can see or borrow a copy of this book, read and absorb *these* chapters at least. You may query an occasional point, but it is all so close to the Bible that it will happen rarely!

In two more ways the book seemed valuable. The book opened my eyes to past and present versions of "life in the Spirit". It certainly is informative for those not in touch with these matters. Here one encounters Wesley's perfectionism, classic Keswick teaching, contemporary charismatic spirituality, and older views traceable back to

Augustine. All of these are handled in a carefully-judged way, *using* the N.T. criterion already mentioned as the test of these emphases. It is good to see a biblical principle being *applied*, and in the light of the facts presented one must agree with most, though not all, of the judgments expressed. The *information* here, exposed to careful and fair Scriptural comment, forms the second sense in which I found the book rewarding.

Lastly, Dr Packer's *approach* to the whole process of forming critical judgments seems admirable — a model for anyone who would make assessments of almost anything. As a sample, see how he comments on the charismatic movement. How easy some would find it to make sweeping adverse judgments here! But for Dr Packer 'criticism' must first of all be well-informed: then it seeks for things it can approve, and last of all points out weaknesses. Because it is so Scripturally based, it carries conviction. No less than twelve points are listed, described as positive aspects of the charismatic movement — but later ten points on the other side appear, its negative aspects. Complacent, orthodox people, ought to be shaken by some of the points on the credit side enumerated. "Their pursuit of the simplicity and joy of loving and knowing God", he writes, "sets charismatics apart from the grimmer and more judgmental sort of believers, but not, it seems, from the teaching of the N.T." He follows this up with ample backing from Scripture. Much here should prompt some self-examination among ourselves. The second list, of the weaknesses rather than the strengths of the movement, necessarily follows, since Scripture is his guideline. "Charismatic preoccupation with experience observably inhibits the long, hard theological and ethical reflection for which the N.T. letters so plainly call. The result is naiveté and imbalance in handling the biblical revelation; some themes — gifts and ministry in the body of Christ, for instance — are run to death, while others get neglected." The author judges that much of the Bible understanding, thought to justify the charismatic way and experience is naïve. He has some searching questions on Spirit Baptism (pp. 202 ff.), tongues, etc., which ought to be faced properly. So he proceeds, through many a ramification of the whole charismatic picture — almost bending over backwards to do it justice, and yet fairly stressing shortcomings too. This is only one instance — the last — of things that come up for assessment in this balanced way.

The section 'The Anointing, the Witness, and the Earnest' (p. 76 ff.) hints at some things I should like to have seen more of. Consider these words on the Spirit as Earnest — "I hold that the Holy Spirit given to us is the "earnest" of our inheritance in this precise sense: that by enabling us to see the glory of Christ glorified, and to live in fellowship with Him as our Mediator, and with His Father as our Father, the Spirit introduces us into the inmost essence of the life of heaven. What makes heaven to

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