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**Other Calendar Extracts, with Comments.**

See Below.

In compiling this index I am impressed by the sheer range of subject-matter covered by the Volume. It ranges from substantial articles, worthy of the closest study and attention, to the shortest of pieces, mostly but not all of my selection, which, by their style and quality of expression, seemed to call for inclusion. These are too numerous for detailed recognition in a list of this kind. The vastness of the material we handle humbles one in facing this task, and God's grace and your prayerful interest and support are continually needed.

(Editor).
I look not back — God knows the fruitless efforts,
The wasted hours, the sinning and regrets;
I leave them all with Him who blots the record,
And graciously forgives, and then forgets.

I look not forward — God sees all the future,
The road that, short or long, will lead me home;
And He will face with me its every trial,
And bear for me the burden that may come.

I look not round me — then would fears assail me,
So wild the tumult of life’s restless seas;
Nothing I see but failures and shortcomings,
And weak endeavours crumble into dust.

But I look up — into the face of Jesus!
For there my heart can rest. my fears are stilled.
And there is joy, and love, and light for darkness,
And perfect peace, and every hope fulfilled.

Contributors to this issue may seem to many readers of Scripture Truth like new names as writers, but only Mark Davison is truly in this role. I welcome him to these pages. His paper, as received, was of a length which required some division. I have left over his third section, ‘Power in Christian Service’, to the next issue. Arthur Goodwin wrote one previous article, ‘A Man in the Glory’ in 1980. I suggested to him the title for the present paper, and he has responded in a way which stresses how vitally important is respect for God in all our ways before Him. Martin Girard has only lately appeared in these pages. His paper here is the first in a sequence of three — ‘The Church — as Building, Body and Bride’.

Bos Menzies wrote a few papers long ago, in 1968/72, and I welcome his return. His article also begins a short sequence — but I particularly pick it out to stand on its own at the start of Volume 50. I believe we must begin by recognising the plain truth of some of his statements here. (Ed.)
From Weakness to Winning

BOS MENZIES

Part 1  Despair

“As I read the biographies of Christians of bygone days and distant lands, I sometimes feel despondent. God does not seem to work so dramatically where I live, nor amongst the people I know.” Does this strike a chord in your heart? Many of us, no doubt, are longing to see the Lord’s work prosper. “If only more people would come along to the Gospel Meeting,” we say. “If only people had more respect for God.” But sophisticated twentieth century citizens seem to be heedless of God. They seem to prosper without God; and our small assemblies seem to dwindle in powerlessness.

In our time . . .

There are some people who would point to the warning which Paul wrote to Timothy about evil-doers in the last days. Peter and Jude, too, make clear that there will be scoffers and deceivers. Is it not therefore only to be expected that the church of God will be under pressure now? Is it not to be expected that there should be signs of smallness? To me this is a “counsel of despair”. Paul makes quite clear in his writings that there is a fight to be fought and a race to be run. He does not say: “In the last days the church will be small and weak, and you must expect to dwindle into insignificance.”

Even if we take the letter to Philadelphia as applying to God’s people under pressure in the last days, we cannot overlook the positive statement: “Thou hast a little strength”. Too readily we emphasise the words — “a little”, and thus miss the important word — “strength”. “Behold,” says the Saviour, “I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8).

Peter writes of our privilege as chosen people, a royal priesthood, and focuses attention upon the activities which should engage us: “ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” Jude also emphasises a practical and energetic response to the evils of the last days: “Be merciful to those who doubt, snatch others from the fire and save them.” Of course, we need to be wary of the darkness around us. “Show mercy,” says Jude, “mixed with
fear.” But to be sitting in our empty rooms, fearful of the world and hiding from it, seems to be accepting defeat. It reminds me of Gideon’s early life.

A man of faith

Gideon is one of the people listed in the letter to Hebrew Christians as an example of a man of faith. His story is one of transformation from the bitter and fearful experience of weakness to the elation of winning. Often we focus our attention on the victory over the Midianites, but the start of the story was as unpromising as our contemporary predicament, and is instructive.

The promised land, miraculously handed to His people by the all-powerful God was now over-run by enemies. The Midianites certainly had the Israelites on the run. Those to whom the land had been given were so hard pressed that they were living in caves in the countryside. Terrified to take up their heritage, they cowered away from the marauding invaders. When the Israelites had sown their crops, the Midianites and Amakelites came and reaped the harvest. They came with their cattle and their tents, and encamped around the Israelites looking just like a swarm of grasshoppers. There was barely enough food for the Israelites to survive.

I can imagine Gideon regretting that the amount of grain which he had managed to keep should be so small; he was determined that no one should snatch it away. He took his paltry portion and hid in a wine press. There he threshed the grain with fear in his heart. Perhaps he was saying to himself: “It is a day of small things; I should be glad to have any grain at all. I’ll have to keep it to myself, though. There’s not enough to share, and if I let anyone know about it they will surely snatch it away.”

The wrong idea

Whatever Gideon thought as he worked in secret, he was soon to be startled out of his reverie by the voice of a stranger who said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.” Gideon could hardly believe his ears. The stranger seemed to have made two mistakes.

“Oh, my lord,” said Gideon, “If the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us?” Gideon knew all about God’s power. He had heard all about the deliverance from Egypt, but that was now historical detail. He had no experience of God at work in his day, so he felt defeated. Anyone nowadays who spends all the time thinking about the wonderful things the Lord used to do is in danger of Gideon’s error. We remember huge Sunday Schools, we remember powerful addresses by well-known speakers in well-packed halls. But what is happening now? We take the words
of Revelation 3:8, “thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word and hast not denied my name” — and we guard these words as Gideon guarded his grain. We hide in a wine press, and feel helpless.

Gideon thought that the stranger had made two mistakes. First, he seemed to think that the Lord was with Gideon. Gideon did not feel God’s power. He could only see breakdown and weakness, the strength of the enemy and the despair of his people. Secondly, the stranger imagined that Gideon was a mighty man of valour. Gideon told him that this was not true. From an insignificant family, Gideon reckoned that he was about the most insignificant person in it. And yet, Gideon’s action in guarding his grain and being determined to survive in the land which God had given to his ancestors really was a sign of strength. He knew what God’s promise had been, and he was doing his best to realise it.

**A challenge**

Dare we identify with Gideon? If we keep God’s word, and if we do not deny His name, then we are holding on to the only secure foundation for survival in this age, or the age to come. But like Gideon, we feel weak; we fail to perceive that what we have could be shared and could become a plentiful harvest. This is partly because we settle for a day of small things.

**Greater is He that is in you . . .**

God is good to us, and we enjoy fellowship together over His word. It is a privilege for us to meet with our Lord and to remember Him as we break bread together. Together we offer our praise and worship to Him for what he has done. We know that we are His, and that because we are His children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts so that we can call out to Him — Abba! Father!

We have the pleasure of intimacy with the Father Himself. We are secure in our relationship with God. (More secure, in fact, than Gideon was.) We are favoured, and we are glad; but we are not very effective. We dissociate ourselves from the disobedient Israelites in the wilderness who said, “Is the Lord among us or not?” Of course, He is among us. He promised that He would be with us right up to the end of the age. It seems strange that we forget the power which is His. We must never forget that our God is real, He has supernatural power, and this power is not diminished in this age. We are certain that He will never leave us nor forsake us. that being so, perhaps we are ready for the next part of the message to Gideon:

“Go in this thy might . . . have not I sent thee . . . surely I will be with thee.”
The thoughts which I share with you below have been very much in the front of my mind in the last few days. As I write, I have just returned from a week at a children’s camp. On the Thursday evening, we were feeling a great concern that none of the children had openly shown any response to the Gospel message. The following morning, I had the task of giving a ‘thought for the day’ to the officers and the Lord gave me thoughts from which the following has developed. I trust that the Lord will bless these things to all who are active in the service of the Master and particularly to any who are feeling discouraged in their service.

(1) Our responsibility in Service

In 1 Corinthians 3:5-8 we have clearly laid out before us the responsibility which is laid to the door of every sincere servant of the Lord. The first thing which strikes me in these verses is that the work which we do, IT IS GOD’S WORK. The work which God does is totally outside of our ability — it is initially the saving of souls and subsequently the building up of believers in their faith. According to verse 6, He is the one who gives the growth. If you are a gospel preacher, a Sunday-school teacher or speak at Women’s meetings, never forget that this is God’s work which you are doing. What an immense honour we should consider it to be — a part of His working. He need not use us, His Word is all-powerful and yet in His grace, God uses such as you and me.

What then does this mean for us as servants? Exactly that — we are Servants of the Master. In a large, wealthy household, the servant does his allotted task or whatever the master asks him to do. It may be that the required task is something totally puzzling to the servant but he must nonetheless carry it out. He may not have any idea why that thing must be done, but do it he must. Why? Because the master has said that it should be done AND HE KNOWS EXACTLY WHY! So it is with God. We know well the hymn which begins: “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform”, and often we cannot understand why He should require something to be done. But it must be carried out just the same. Have you ever thought what went through the minds of the children of Israel when
they brought an animal for sacrifice? Why should God find the system of sacrifices satisfactory? As we look back from our position in time, we can see quite clearly why it was. For what greater picture could there be for us of the death of the Lord Jesus? Similarly, I often think how inexplicable the words of Isaiah 53 must have been to the Prophet and yet what profound meaning they have to us.

The work which we do must always have God's interests at the centre. We are merely instruments in His hand and as such should crave no glory for ourselves. How satisfying I often find it when a person comes up to me after a gospel meeting and says how much they have enjoyed it. I wonder what God thinks of me at that moment? He works through the servant and all the glory and honour must be His. Paul says in verse 7 “Neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth, BUT GOD GIVETH THE INCREASE”. It would seem clear from verse 4 that divisions were occurring in the assembly at Corinth. Believers were taking sides against fellow believers — what a familiar story in the history of the church down through the centuries. Paul, therefore, finds it necessary to emphasise to them in verse 23 that the servant is nothing but Christ is everything. None of us are any greater than another in the sight of God.

Finally, I come to the very heart of the matter of our responsibility. The Lord lays a task at our door to be carried out. We do it, and then leave it with God to bring the fruit. It may be that we never see the fruit of the work, BUT WE HAVE FULFILLED OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD AND MUST LEAVE THE OUTCOME TO HIM. Whilst at the camp of which I spoke above, one lad gave testimony to the fact that he had accepted Christ as his Saviour at camp two years previously. We had known nothing of this until then. What evidence this is to the fact that Eternity alone will tell of the fruits of our service to the Master.

Note that there is no credit given to Apollos or Paul in this scripture for the fruit. The latter's eyes were firmly fixed on his Lord and Master and saw His hand working in everything. (We will consider this in greater depth when we look at our Motivation to service.) Philippians 2:16 says this: “Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain”. There was nothing for Paul to be proud of whilst in this world but rather, at the judgment seat of Christ, then will he be rewarded according to his faithfulness in carrying out his responsibility to God. Do not, therefore, look around for results and become discouraged when you see none, rather, KEEP YOUR EYES FIRMLY FIXED ON CHRIST and be encouraged in the fact that you are serving Him.

In the light of the scriptures then, I challenge you to ask the
following questions of your own heart:

(a) Am I fully carrying out my responsibility in service to God?
(b) Why am I discouraged when I am doing His work?

(2) Our Motivation to Service

We come now to the question, "Why do I do it?" This is perhaps the most vital question we can ask ourselves in relation to service. For the Lord is not interested in the volume of His work which we do, but rather in the reason why we do it. We could do no better in understanding this than to look at some illustrations from Scripture. Colossians 3:23 says in very plain language: "Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." Here we clearly can see the requirement of us in service. The standard set is very high and we would often do well to remember this. But the emphasis here is not so much on the activity of serving but on the motive behind that activity.

Turn firstly with me if you will to Luke 10:38-42. Here we read of a visit the Lord made to the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus at Bethany. Martha was busy in preparation but Mary sat at the feet of the Lord. The former became very disgruntled and complained to the Lord; "Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" The Lord graciously points out to her that it is more important to have our thoughts centred upon Him than to merely serve for serving's sake. This was Martha's problem — the work which she was doing had become central to her and she had lost sight of the Master whom she sought to serve. ALL THE SERVICE WHICH WE CAN OFFER TO HIM IS OF NO VALUE AT ALL UNLESS OUR FIRST AND CENTRAL OBJECT IS THE LORD. The Lord gave His approval to the place Mary had taken, for there she was occupied with Him and her eyes were fixed firmly on Him.

We might look also in the second chapter of the Revelation. There we see the church at Ephesus. What activity was going on there! Verses two and three show how outwardly they were extremely Godly and serving faithfully. But here is the one with "eyes like a flame of fire" (1:14). He saw that the motivation was not right — they had departed from their first love (verse 4) and so also from the first works (verse 5). In the words of F. B. Hole, "While the mechanism was still moving with fair regularity the mainspring was seriously weakened". So it is that, if we are faithfully serving, that is, serving with the right motivation then we will be able to do the 'first works', i.e. God's work, that which is acceptable to Him.

Returning to the question which we began with, Why do I do it? Have I departed from serving Christ and having my eyes fixed on Him? Am I motivated by something else? Maybe I feel the pressure put on me by my
brethren (alas, this is often the case in our assemblies), or I do not want to be the odd one out. If this is the reason for what we are doing, then we had just as well not do it. CHRIST MUST BE CENTRAL IN EVERYTHING AND WE SHOULD NOT BE LOOKING FOR ACCEPTANCE OR PRAISE FROM MEN.

Lastly, look at the slave in Exodus 21. We see that he desired to serve because of his love of the master (verse 5). Have you ever meditated on the greatness of all that Jesus has done for us. He loved you so much that he was willing to die in your place — does not this cause us to want to serve Him more? In connection with this, the desire to serve came from the slave himself — not the master. Service is a voluntary thing and should come out of our love for our Lord Jesus Christ — there is no compulsion.

In this day of grace when there is much evangelising and teaching to be done, we must judge our own hearts in the presence of God as to whether we serve the Lord with the right motives or rather for our own glory and gratification.

(To be continued)

Real Respect for God

ARTHUR GOODWIN

At first glance there appears to be something wrong with the title to this paper. Reverence for God is an acceptable term, but respect for Him is a somewhat unusual expression. Nevertheless it is this latter notion which we wish to consider, although it is immediately granted that respect would embrace reverence. Respect has the thought of attention or deferential esteem shown towards a person, whereas reverence would be confined more to that which is sacred. Moreover, it is ‘real’ respect, not simply a superficial acknowledgement. The vassal may tug the forelock when meeting his patron and thus show outward respect, but his inner feelings may be quite the contrary. And it is respect for ‘God’; that is the whole of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In considering a subject such as this one automatically thinks along human lines. What commands respect for our fellow beings? How is such respect shown? If we have certain standards in this realm, how superior, how much more elevated they should be when the object of our respect is God. Let us try and answer the two questions that we have asked. What commands respect? The first thing that comes to mind is the status of
a person and the authority that such a position confers. For example, the one to whom we owe allegiance in our daily employment, be he the chief himself or his delegate: those who have positions of responsibility in government; kings and those in authority. Indeed the Scriptures themselves would seem to exhort this — see 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Romans 13:1-7. Coupled with this would be the moral qualities exhibited by a person. Anyone whose manner of life commended itself to us would command our esteem and respect. Haman was a man in authority, set there by the king himself but Mordecai refused to give him honour because of his wicked ways. Similarly Peter and John could not respect the orders of the Sanhedrin because they were contrary to the commands of God. So, the person, however humble positionally, who displays a spirit of love, kindness, uprightness and other such moral features draws out our respect. Now transfer these considerations to the divine realm. The Almighty God is none other than He who is from eternity to eternity, who has created the universe and all that it comprises, man himself included: “whose chariots are twenty thousands, even thousands of angels” (Psalm 68:17). Truly, He is “The great, the mighty God, the Lord of hosts is His name, great in counsel and mighty in work” (Jeremiah 32:18~19). Such an one demands our respect. Then dwell a little on His disposition towards His creatures. His very nature is love; “Who hath saved us . . . not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9). His care for His own is beyond measure, the very hairs of their heads are numbered. Expressions such as the loving kindness of God, the goodness of God, the mercy of God and the grace of God occur throughout Scripture and are indicative of His surpassing beneficence. Is not such an One worthy of our very real respect? If He is, then how may we show it? It is submitted that we do so in very much the same way as would pertain to those human relationships already referred to. Our behaviour, attitude, obedience, speech would all demonstrate the measure of respect which we have for God.

In considering the three Persons of the Godhead and our relationship with each one, it is a matter of wonder that we have been brought into a position of such nearness. With God's ancient people He dwelt in a mount that might not so much as be touched, but which burned with fire and was enshrouded in blackness and tempest (Hebrews 12:18). The Christian however is called into a fellowship (and the word means oneness) with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). We have been brought into a family relationship and nothing can be closer than that; but this should in no wise belittle our respect for either. We are to come to the Father with our prayers and indeed the invitation is “Let us come boldly unto the throne of
grace” (Hebrews 4:16). Boldly, without fear, yes, but surely not flippantly or brazenly, without due respect for the One who is upon the throne. Much better to have the spirit which Moses showed when he approached God at the burning bush, with unshod feet and bowed head. Here it is submitted is where real respect takes on the character of reverence.

Our God and Father unto Thee,
As pilgrims weak we now draw near,
To breathe our prayers on bended knee,
And supplicate thy gracious ear.

Then too we may show our respect for the Father as worshippers. The Lord said to the Samaritan woman at Sychar’s well, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23). Think of it! The Father — and remember those glorious and mighty attributes which are His and to which reference has already been made — is seeking worshippers. Who are they? Where may they be found? Clearly it is they alone who worship in spirit and truth, that is those who have the Spirit and know the truth. Paul puts it succinctly, “We are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh” (Philippians 3:3 N.Tr.). Another has defined worship as “The out-going of the renewed heart and spirit to God Himself in reverential acknowledgement of what He has revealed Himself to be and of what He has done in righteousness and grace for lost and sinful man” (W. J. Hocking). By availing ourselves of our priestly calling (1 Peter 2:5) and responding to the desires of the Father, we may show our real respect for Him.

We are aware, of course, that the term ‘respect for God’ is not a Scriptural one although we are convinced that its concept is inherent throughout the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not ask that His disciples should respect Him, but He did ask that they should love Him. Surely though, it is not feasible that love can be shown where there is no respect. How then may we show our love, and hence our respect for Christ? Our Lord said: “If ye love me, keep my commandments”, and “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:15,21). And yet we find very few direct commandments given by our Lord during His earthly ministry. The most direct one, of course, is given in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another”; and is repeated in John 15. Respect is demonstrated by obedience, and love for the brethren — and that means all the brethren, not simply those known to us
in our immediate circle — is obedience to Christ. They are all His: more than that they are vitally united to Him in one body. He remonstrated with Saul, the tormentor of the disciples, “Why persecutest thou Me?” Indifference to, impatience with, hostility towards them touches Him. Lack of respect for His own is lack of respect for Him.

On the night in which He was betrayed our Lord instituted His supper and requested His disciples “This do in remembrance of me”. If it is not exactly a command that He gave, it surely becomes virtually that for those that love Him. And so on the first day of the week when the table is set and the saints meet together around it, we have a unique opportunity of showing our real respect for our Saviour, by calling Him to mind as we partake of His supper. It need hardly be said that a deliberate absence is nothing short of gross disrespect.

Then we might ask ourselves, how much esteem do we pay or how much attention do we give to the Spirit of God? 1 Corinthians 6:19 tells us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and the Lord Himself confirms that He abides with us for ever (John 14:16). We have with us at all times a Divine Person and certainly real respect for Him would ensure that our behaviour, speech, the places to which we go, in short the deeds done in the body would always be in keeping with His holiness. Anything less than this is to ignore Him rather than respect Him.

We have endeavoured to show how real respect for God may be demonstrated having in mind the analogous concept of respect in the human realm. From such a consideration a few further thoughts are suggested which bear on our deportment and behaviour when we come into the presence of God. For instance, were we invited to attend a function given by Her Majesty The Queen, we would certainly ensure that our appearance was suited to the occasion. We would not present ourselves unkempt and in our gardening clothes. Why? Because in this way we show our respect for the Queen. And should anything less suffice when we come into the presence of God? In many Christian circles today the impression is given that careless informality is a virtue. If such is not the case in the presence of earthly dignitaries, surely neither is it in the presence of God. Then there is the matter of physical posture. It is not an uncommon sight to see brethren addressing the Father in worship during the singing of a hymn with one hand in their pockets or lounging in their chairs when prayer is being offered. Are such things right? If we have any sort of feeling for the occasion we must admit that they are not. One last point. We read in Luke 22:14, “And when the hour was come He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him”. At the appropriate time the Lord was there. And so today; when the hour strikes for the supper, or the prayer meeting, or the
gospel meeting (for He has promised to be with His servants who preach the glad tidings (Matthew 28:19-20)), He is there. Are we there in time to meet Him or do we show our indifference and lack of respect by arriving after He has sat down? Were He visible to our mortal eyes we would hang our heads in shame if we were guilty of such behaviour. There is a misguided notion in the systems of Christendom today that Christians, in order to gain those in the world have to become like them. The world's ways, its mode of life, its speech, its songs, its leisure activities and many other features of the world have been moulded into the Christian standard, and it has not been for the better.

The purpose of this paper is to exhort its readers to have a greater appreciation of the majesty and greatness of all three Persons of the Godhead and to encourage all to show that reverence and respect both inside and outside the assembly that is due to them.

A Temple Greater than Solomon's or, The Church as a Building

MARTIN GIRARD

Many of us, no doubt, have heard or read ministry from the Old Testament on the subject of the Tabernacle. A study of its construction can be a most rewarding exercise pointing us, as it does in so many of its features, to our Lord Jesus Christ. Another subject that is not considered so often is the Temple, yet this too can be an extremely fascinating topic to examine.

As the Lord Jesus left the Temple in Jerusalem, His disciples drew His attention to its remarkable architecture. Truly, it was one of the wonders of the world in its time! Taken up by its sparkling beauty as it glistened in the sunlight, they exclaimed, "Look Master! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (Mark 13:1). This was Herod's Temple that had already taken 46 years to build — and still it was not finished!

Perhaps to their surprise, the Lord Jesus did not seem impressed as they were. The history of the Temple was a sad one. Solomon's Temple, built almost a thousand years before, had taken seven years to complete and had stood in its glory for more than 350 years. In 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar and his armies from Babylon had attacked Jerusalem
and destroyed its temple. There was great joy later in the same century when Cyrus issued a decree that the temple should be rebuilt, but many of the older people who saw the temple completed under Zerubbabel's leadership felt deeply saddened, realising that it did not possess the glory of the temple built by Solomon (Haggai 2:3). King Herod had virtually rebuilt Zerubbabel's Temple, adorning it with costly stones (Luke 21:5). Surveying this impressive splendour, the Lord Jesus told His incredulous disciples that not one stone would be left upon another (Mark 13:2). He knew that the Romans would destroy the city and temple, and His words were fulfilled with absolute precision in AD70. Solomon's Temple had been grand, but One "greater than Solomon" was here, and the Lord Jesus could look ahead to a greater temple than Solomon's — "a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21). This building would not be of material stones, but of people — "living stones", alive with His life (1 Peter 2:5). Unlike Solomon's temple, or any later one, this temple would never be destroyed nor impaired by any other power whatever. For almost 2,000 years now God has been building His Church, which will be displayed to all, one day, in magnificent glory.

For every project an architect, a builder, and a construction team are needed. The building of Solomon's Temple was no exception — and we find the same true in the building of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we consider the erection of Solomon's Temple in the light of New Testament teaching, many precious truths can be revealed to us.

When we turn to 2 Samuel, chapter 7, we discover that the architect of Solomon's Temple was King David. It was his desire to build a temple for the glory of God and, although not permitted to do so, his desire was one that God appreciated (2 Chronicles 6:8). In the New Testament we find that God is a Person with desires too. He is not willing that any should perish and longs to deliver sinners from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4). With a desire in his heart, an architect commences his design. In 1 Chronicles 28 we read of all the trouble that King David went to as he planned for the construction of the first temple. After considerable thought, he called his son Solomon and gave him "the pattern" that he was to follow — a pattern that God Himself had revealed to David (verses 11-19). In addition to this, David prepared gold, silver, iron, and cedar wood, because he intended the temple to be "of great magnificence and fame and splendour" (1 Chronicles 22:3-5).

As we turn to the New Testament we discover that God also had a design. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians that he was given special revelation of the glorious plan and purpose of God that had been hidden
from eternity past. God's plan went beyond the bounds of Israel and encompassed the Gentiles who had previously been without hope. Through the riches of His grace they were also to be saved, made holy, and prepared for glory. The gold that David prepared surely reminds us of the Christ who indwells us and is "the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Every architect, having drawn up his plans, must designate someone to carry out the task. King David designated Solomon (who was God's choice) as we see in 1 Chronicles 28:9-10. Similarly, God had only one Person in mind to carry out His work as Builder of the Church. The opening verses of Hebrews present to us His glorious Son, sent from heaven to complete the work of redemption. Each builder, receiving his instructions from the architect, must have a purpose. Solomon's words of intent were: "I purpose to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God" (1 Kings 5:5). The One who is "greater than Solomon" declared with certainty when on earth: "I will build my Church" (Matthew 16:18). He was a greater Person, and His work was so much greater for "the gates of hell" would never prevail against His Church. It would stand firm for eternity! No nation, world power, or demonic force could possibly succeed against Him!

Already we have seen that David had made preparation in his lifetime. This, however, was not enough, for Solomon wrote to Hiram, King of Tyre, asking him to cut down some of his finest cedars in order that God's house could be built. As we relate this to our Lord Jesus Christ we see at once a striking similarity. The prophet had declared that He would be "cut off out of the land of the living" (Isaiah 53:8), speaking of a violent death. It is sobering to think that before the Church could be built the Lord Jesus had to be cut down like the fine cedars of Lebanon and suffer the awful agony of the cross. How we should praise Him for His great grace in becoming poor and stooping so low in order that we could be saved!

Further details given in 1 Kings 5:13-16 show us the personnel appointed by Solomon. There were carriers, stonecutters, foremen, as well as the skilled servants of Hiram who were employed in felling the cedar trees. Yet all the time Solomon remained the builder. He "commanded" (1 Kings 5:17), he "began to build the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 6:1), and eventually "he built the house, and finished it" (1 Kings 6:9). When the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven He appointed His workmen and "gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians 4:8). Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers were all to share in different ways in the work of building the Church; but, like Solomon, the Lord Jesus remained the great "Master Builder" — in complete control and fully responsible for everything.

It is instructive to consider the work in Jerusalem of the construction team about 3,000 years ago as the building of Solomon's Temple proceeded.
Their first task was to lay the *foundation* of the temple, and this was done by putting down “large blocks of quality stone” (1 Kings 5:17). A building of such immense proportions needed an unshakeable foundation. There can be no doubt as to the foundation of the Church. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:11, that He is “the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20). Samuel John Stone’s famous hymn penned during the last century reminds us that “The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord”. The apostles and prophets of the early Church era laid the foundation, as we also read in Ephesians 2:20. Their ministry was completed long ago. Upon this firm foundation, the *framework* of the building was placed.

In Solomon’s time, his workmen used “timber and stone” (1 Kings 5:18), each stone being cut to shape in the quarry (1 Kings 6:7). Today building sites are often some of the noisiest places imaginable, yet here in Jerusalem not a sound was to be heard! In the same way now the Lord Jesus is quietly building His Church. From the dark quarries of sin and shame, stones are being lifted. They have no life but miraculously are brought into contact with “the Living Stone” and at once become living stones too (1 Peter 2:4-5). With new life from Christ within, each “living stone” is thus fitted to share with all the other “living stones” in the growth of this “holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21). The *function* of Solomon’s Temple was to be “a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel” (1 Kings 8:20). He was to dwell there, and the glory cloud that filled the house was the very proof of His presence. Similarly, the Church is to be “a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). He does not dwell in temples made with hands today, we learn from Acts 7:48, but in the midst of His people. How vital it is therefore that we should live holy lives as we reflect upon this very wonderful truth.

When Dr Culyer first saw Cologne Cathedral it was in the process of construction and was disfigured by scaffolding. Years later, when he saw it again it was completed, and he declared that it was the most magnificent view from the Alps to the sea. Today the Lord Jesus is building His Church. We are not really conscious of its glory, for the scaffolding of man hides its splendour from our view. One day the last stone will be added to the building, the scaffolding will be removed, the Lord will come and the Church will be displayed “having the glory of God” (Revelation 21:11). How much greater this will be than the glory of the finest earthly cathedral designed by man! Every conversion should thrill us and cause us to rejoice that another stone has been added to the building. When the building is completed, everyone who sees it will recognise that all the glory is God’s and will exclaim, “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in
our eyes” (Psalm 118:23). May we labour with untiring zeal that the Lord may use us as members of His construction team to add further living stones to His Building while we wait for the glad day of His return.

On Christ salvation rests secure;
The Rock of ages must endure;
Nor can that faith be overthrown
Which rests upon the ‘Living Stone’.

No other hope shall intervene:
To Him we look, on Him we lean;
Other foundations we disown,
And build on Christ, the ‘Living Stone’.

In Him it is ordained to raise
A temple to the Father’s praise,
Composed of all the saints who own
No Saviour but the ‘Living Stone’.

View the vast building, see it rise;
The work how great, the plan how wise!
Oh, wondrous fabric, power unknown
That rears it on the ‘Living Stone’.

But most adore His precious name,
His glory and His grace proclaim:
For us, condemned, despised, undone,
He gave Himself, the ‘Living Stone’.

S. Medley

“Let us lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith . . . who has . . . (now) sat at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1,2 NASV)
Devotedness to Christ

R. A. CREETH

Johnathan, Ittai, and Mephibosheth are three examples of wholehearted devotion to David, the king whom they loved and served. We can learn much from men like these, inspired as they were by intense loyalty, deepest affection and true-hearted devotion. What we need today is a greater appreciation of the unsearchable love of Christ, so that our affections are stirred and our response to that love is shown in our daily lives. (Author’s introduction.)

1. David is a striking type of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was God’s chosen one, the anointed yet rejected king, later to be crowned and acknowledged king of all Israel. Sent by Jesse his father with a message to his brethren in king Saul’s army, he won a great victory, overcoming the mighty champion of the Philistines and securing freedom for the Israelites. What a picture of the great victory of our Lord Jesus Christ at the cross over our mighty foe, the devil (see Hebrews 2:14-15)! Through the death of Christ, death’s dominion has been overthrown, the devil’s power annulled and a mighty deliverance has been secured for the people of God.

David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, he smote the Philistine and slew him. Does not this remind us of Revelation 5:5? “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof”? But there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore he ran and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword and slew him. Then he took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent. So he came before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

At this moment, as David returned, Jonathan saw him with the token
of victory in his hand, and his soul was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (1 Samuel 18). The victor, not the victory, won his heart. But another thing characterised Jonathan: his heart was so attracted to David as he stood before him that his faith saw in him the future king of Israel, so he stripped himself of his robe, his garments, even to his sword, his bow and his girdle. All were surrendered with a willing heart to David, because he loved him as his own soul.

How beautifully does Jonathan respond to the glorious victory of David! Without a thought of jealousy he divests himself of his own dignities and badges of royal authority and gives them to David, and this not merely because of the victory, but because his soul was knit to him and he loved him as his own soul. Let us challenge our own hearts: can we say that we have been so attracted by our blessed Lord that we are constrained to strip ourselves of all that we might boast in and lay all at His feet because we love Him so?

The Lord Jesus is the mighty Victor, but it is His blessed Person that satisfies our hearts and is the attractive Object of our souls. He gave Himself for us in self-surrendering love at the cross: He now looks for us to be entirely His, even if this involves the giving up of much that would attach us to this present evil world and hide His peerless glory from our eyes. Is He not the altogether lovely One, the chiefest of ten thousand to our souls? After all that He has done for us He looks for the answering affection of our hearts, and is He not worthy to receive it, our blessed Redeemer who bought us with such a price? Do we not owe Him everything? Lord Lister, eminent surgeon and pioneer of antiseptic surgery, was asked by a patient after an operation, “What do I owe you?” The reply was, “You owe me your life”. My brother, my sister, let me ask you what do you owe the Lord Jesus? You owe Him your very life. Scripture reminds us that we are not our own, we are bought with a price (1 Corinthians 7:23). Surely

“Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands our soul, our life, our all.”

It is sad to think that after such a bright and promising start, Jonathan was not prepared to go all the way with David and share his rejection. But how beautiful was the devotion of the apostle Paul to the One whose outshining glory brought Him down to the very dust on the Damascus road, and the glory of whose Person captivated his heart from that moment onward! What does he say in Philippians 3? “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” This was his assessment in the early days of his conversion. Yet after lifelong suffering in the Master's
service he could say, “Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”. The first love of his devoted heart had not diminished: the same faith that filled his soul when he first served the Lord was bright and fresh at the close, when as a prisoner in Rome he could say, “I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him”.

“That I may win Christ!” What an Object before his soul! But is it ours? I believe that if our eyes were more steadfastly fixed on the Lord of glory, “looking off unto Jesus, the Author and Completer of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, having despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God”, we would be ready to cast away many of the “weights” that tend to drag us down while running the Christian race (Hebrews 12:2).

2. Let us now look at Ittai in 2 Samuel 15. At the revolt of Absalom his son, David is departing from Jerusalem, leaving the throne in possession of his rebel son. Was David thinking of his son when he wrote, “Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me”? How much more must Jesus have felt these words when, betrayed by one of His trusted disciples, He crossed the brook Kidron (Cedron, John 18) into the garden of Gethsemane?

At this moment Ittai the Gittite appears. He was but a stranger and an exile; he had come but yesterday to throw in his lot with the fugitive king. David gives him the opportunity to return, for he would not command the devotion of others and involve them in his own rejection. He would appreciate it when it came from one who truly loved him. And the Lord Jesus does not command our devotion. He says, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up the cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). He also says, “He who does not take up his cross, and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:38). Thus would He test the hearts of those who would follow Him in His rejection.

It was a testing time for Ittai. Bidden to return he could have lived on in ease and comfort in Jerusalem, instead of subjecting himself to the lot of an outcast and a wanderer in the service of David. How beautifully does this test bring out the depth of Ittai’s feelings for David! He loved David, and would he not accept the path of rejection to be with him whom he loved? Take note of the reply that springs from his heart: “As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in life or death, even there also will thy servant be.” Practically he put his life in his hands, and this self-abnegation is the grand requisite of a true servant. How could David refuse such
devotedness? He says to Ittai, "Go, and pass over". No more needed to be said. We are reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus when looking on to His own rejection He said, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be; if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour" (John 12:26).

Can we not trace the spirit of true devotedness in the apostle Paul, when as a prisoner in Rome he was awaiting the sentence of the emperor Nero? At such a time he could write "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die gain" (Philippians 1:20-21).

3. Now let us consider Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, who deeply appreciated the kindness of God bestowed upon him by David for Jonathan's sake. How did Mephibosheth react to David's great kindness? He could not do great and brilliant things, he would have been useless and a burden on the field of battle, yet there was something he could do — he could appreciate David's kindness and keep a heart loyal to him. Do we sometimes feel we cannot do great things for our beloved Master? We can give Him what I am sure He appreciates most of all, and that is the gratitude and adoration of our redeemed hearts.

The test came to Mephibosheth when David had to flee from the city of Jerusalem at the time of Absalom's rebellion. He would have shared the sorrow and rejection of the king if he could have done so, but he was forced to remain behind in the city that had cast off its king. While the people rejoiced in the presence of the usurper, Mephibosheth kept himself in strict separation from it all and mourned for the absent king. He "neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace" (2 Samuel 19:24). He was not occupied with his appearance, sufferings or comfort: he cared not for position, appearance or ridicule. He was interested only in David and in David's rights. Surely, dear friends, if we are as devoted to the Person of our Lord as Mephibosheth was to David we shall feel that a great moral gulf lies between us and the world that crucified our Lord, and it becomes us to walk in practical separation from it.

Robbed and slandered by his servant, Mephibosheth declined to put in a claim for any possession in the land, for when the question arose as to Ziba sharing the land that formerly belonged to him, he said, "Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house". He wanted only the king, and his grateful heart
found object enough in his lord. David had returned, Mephibosheth’s hope was realised.

Let us challenge our hearts; are we eagerly awaiting our Lord’s return, or has this glorious hope faded before our eyes over the years? Remember the Lord’s own words, “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord” (Luke 12:35-36). And there seems to be a special blessing for those who are watching for Him. “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching: verily, I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” What a stimulus to our “earnest expectation and our hope” is the prospect of being ministered to by our glorious Lord Himself!

Many years ago a servant of the Lord remarked, “We remember the day when there first dawned on our souls the truth of a coming Saviour. It was then so real that every night we prayed that, before we awoke, we might see Him as He is: and in the morning we thought of one thing — that before the evening came, the day of glory might arise for our souls” (F. Lavington). Let us ask ourselves, is this hope so bright and real to us today?

‘‘The Church, which is His Body’’

MARTIN GIRARD

The first paper in this short sequence on the Church appeared in the previous issue. In this second paper the Church under the figure of Christ’s body is picked out.

In His teaching, the Lord Jesus frequently used simple illustrations from everyday life in order to impart profound truths. Throughout Scripture, in fact, the Holy Spirit has adopted this effective method of teaching, conveying otherwise difficult concepts to us with clarity and precision. A number of very helpful illustrations are used in the New Testament to explain truths relating to the Church. In an earlier article we thought of the Church as a building in the process of construction. This time we shall consider the Church as “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27), and
seek to draw some practical lessons from this particular aspect of truth.

A building can be a highly impressive structure. Tourists in their hundreds can be seen visiting the famous cathedrals of our land, savouring the splendour of Salisbury or gazing at the glory of Gloucester. A body, on the other hand, may not be as spectacular as a towering edifice, but as we view a new-born baby we are at once conscious of the miracle of life. The baby is not impressive, but our minds are filled with wonder as we look at that perfectly formed little body and consider the inter-relation of the tiny parts.

Having described the triumph of the ascended Christ, the Apostle Paul concludes the first chapter of Ephesians by stating that Christ is head of "the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all". How are we "the Body of Christ"? What does this expression really mean? How are we expected to function? In order to answer these and other questions, let us pursue our study by considering firstly the design of the Body and then the display of the Body.

At the commencement it should hardly be necessary to state that there is only "one Body" (Ephesians 4:4). All true believers, irrespective of denominational label, are members of that "one Body".

Long ago, David the Psalmist marvelled at God's wisdom in fashioning his own body. "I will praise Thee," he exclaimed, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Just consider your own body. You played no part in the planning or the design of it. Think of the veins and arteries, the capillary tubes, the digestive system — all designed to function without you having to think about it! Truly, it is a masterpiece of divine wisdom! The Church (which we could call "the Heavenly Body") is like the human body in that it too is designed to function perfectly and is an expression of divine wisdom (see Ephesians 3:10). The classic chapter dealing with the design of this Body is 1 Corinthians 12. Turning to this chapter, let us see how the heavenly Body is like the human body. I am no expert in physiology, so the points that I make will be basic and fairly obvious to all!

1. The human body is a vehicle by which a person expresses himself. Your body is only the "outer shell"; the real "you" is the immaterial part — the spirit and soul. However, the only way you can express yourself in this world is through your body. In just the same way, the Church (as the body of Christ) is a vehicle of expression. The Lord Jesus Christ is not present bodily upon earth today, but the Church is the body by which He expresses Himself in this world. It is the Church that the Holy Spirit uses to express God's plan and power in this age.
2. Each human body is made up of many parts, yet is one complete unit. Although we have two eyes, two arms, two legs, ten fingers, etc., we each possess only one body. Paul teaches that "as the body is one and has many members ... so also is Christ" (v. 12). The members of the true Church number millions, yet there is only one "body of Christ".

3. Although there are many parts, each part shares the same spirit and the same life. It is "by one Spirit" that "we were all baptised into one body" (v. 13). In spite of much teaching to the contrary, the Scriptures state clearly that all believers have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As individual believers, 1 Corinthians 6:19 teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. The life of the Spirit is in each member of the Body of Christ.

4. Each part of the body is important. It would be foolish in the extreme for the foot to say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body", or for the ear to say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body" (vv. 15-16). Obviously, "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?" (v. 17). No part should be undervalued. Every Christian is important.

5. Each part has its own function to perform. Some parts are clearly visible. Others, like the heart, liver, lungs, and stomach, are hidden from public view. But "God has set the members ... in the body just as He pleased" (v. 18). One part cannot say to another part, "I have no need of you" (v. 21), because all are necessary. Similarly, some members of the Body of Christ (like preachers) have public functions to perform. Others, who never occupy a prominent place, are no less important. (Indeed, we could say that it is the "hidden" parts of our bodies that perform the most important functions.) The sister who spends much time in prayer at home performs just as vital a part as the brother who is frequently in the pulpit. In fact, in God's estimation her role is probably more important.

6. Each part of the body feels for the other parts. There is an inbuilt and instinctive empathy. When the legs have carried the body victoriously across the finishing tape in record time at the end of the 1,500 metres, the clenched fists are raised in exuberant triumph. Conversely, when the left ear aches the palm of the hand gently covers the troubled part in an attempt to bring soothing comfort. In the Church, "the members should have the same care for one another" (v. 25). Without being nosey, we ought to take an interest in the lives of other believers — as taught in
Philippians 2:4. We should “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

7. Each part of the body receives its orders from the head. The right arm does not tell the body what to do! Very clearly, “Christ is the head of the Church” (Ephesians 5:23). Although local leaders are needed, all directions for the Body upon earth must come from the ascended Head in heaven.

From the analogies considered, it will have become quite apparent that although there are many parts and many performances, there is but one Body. When the Lord God had created the first human body, He pronounced it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). As He looks at the “Heavenly Body” can He say the same? There ought to be glory for God “in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages” (Ephesians 3:21). We know that when the Church is taken home, she will be presented “a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5:27), but is God really being glorified in the Church today? As we move on to consider the display of the Body, a number of important features emerge. Although some have been mentioned already, it is worth emphasising that the Body of Christ should be marked by unity, interdependence and submission.

The Body should display unity — not uniformity. We are told that “there should be no schism in the body” (1 Corinthians 12:25). Shortly after Pentecost, “all who believed were together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). Sadly, this visible unity was soon to disappear as sectarian voices cried, “I am of Paul”, or “I am of Apollos”, or “I am of Cephas”, or even, “I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12). Sabine Baring-Gould, comparing the Church of God to “a mighty army”, declared boldly:—

“We are not divided, All one body we, One in hope and doctrine, One in charity.”

A more recent parody compared that same Church to a clumsy tortoise, and went on:—

“We are all divided, Many bodies we; Not much hope or doctrine, Little charity.”

Ashamed, we have to confess that, to observers, this has often appeared the truer version. In spite of Paul’s scathing rebuke in 1 Corinthians 1, the names of such great leaders as John Wesley and William Kelly are still used by some believers to identify themselves. Surely, the spirit of the chapter teaches us that all labels are wrong!

Unfortunately, unity and uniformity are often confused. Tracing the
history of the Brethren Movement, Dr H. A. Ironside expresses his conviction that “the chief cause of the apparent failure of the testimony of the Brethren . . . was through their failing to maintain the principle that unity is not necessarily uniformity”. The Lord used both scholars and fishermen to pen His sacred Word. With differing backgrounds and styles, a wonderful unity nevertheless is displayed in their testimony. “It is not uniformity that we want, but really manifested heart unity”, Hudson Taylor wrote, aware of tensions on the mission field. God does not want to press us all into a mould so that we come out expressing some sort of identical liturgy — though our brethren sometimes want to do this! It is unity that matters, a unity made possible through the same Spirit indwelling each believer. Grant Steidl’s comment is perhaps a fitting summary: “God delights to display in creation, in His Word, and among His Redeemed people a beautiful unity but not a monotonous uniformity”.

How can this unity be displayed? Being “members of one another” (Romans 12:5), we should “receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). In 1839 J. N. Darby stated quite plainly, “Whenever Christ has received a person, we should receive Him”. He went on to say that “as our table is the Lord’s and not ours, we receive all the Lord has received”. Do we? Perhaps this will come as a salutary reminder to some of us.

The Body of Christ should also display interdependence — not independence. No part of the Body is to be discarded or ignored. In the context of our local fellowships, we need one another. Actions speak louder than words, and our Saviour commanded us to love one another with a love like His (see John 13:34-35). If we are to “care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25), and to “bear one another’s burdens”, (Galatians 6:2), more of life than just our formal times of fellowship will be affected. This interdependence should be expressed in the interaction of our daily lives.

Another feature that should be displayed by the Body of Christ is submission — not subversion. Just as the head, where decisions are reached, is the “control centre” of the human body, so Christ is the “Head of the Church” (Ephesians 5:23). Denominational headquarters where legislation is passed is not called for, neither is any brother in a distant town to dictate to the assemblies — no matter how eminent he may be! Because Christ is the Head, the Church should be “subject to Christ” (Ephesians 5:24). Submission to Christ means obedience to His Word, and obedience results in the Church being what the Lord wants it to be.

Let us remember that the Church is a living organism — not a lifeless organisation. As members of the one glorious Church through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, let us praise and worship Him for His wisdom in
such a design and for the wonder of being part of His Body. Then, considering the implications of the display of the Body, let us remember how “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25), and seek, by His grace, to love our fellow members worldwide too.

From Weakness to Winning

BOS MENZIES

This is the central paper of three, finding needed lessons from the O.T. story of Gideon. We follow from Despair to Determination and then finally to Decisive Victory as the series proceeds. May we follow what is suggested in our practice too.

Part 2. Determination

Gideon was a reluctant hero at first; but he soon realised that he did not have to be a hero at all. God was powerful and was both willing and able to bring blessing and peace to the Israelites. Because he was so feeble at the beginning of the story, Gideon seemed to need extra help from God. Knowing that he, Gideon, could not perform miracles, he needed to be certain that God could; let us notice, however, that he did expect God to be able to do supernatural things. In our day, the problem is that because we cannot perform miracles, we tend to forget that God does still act in a real and miraculous way.

Willingness

In two direct actions, Gideon proved his willingness to be obedient to God. It is especially important to link these two factors in Gideon’s story. First, he was willing to throw down the altar of Baal, apparently cherished by his father, and to cut down the sacred grove dedicated to the worship of the Canaanite fertility gods. Second, that accomplished, he rose up early and set about the task of putting the Midianites to flight.

Gideon’s father had engaged in worship of Baal; he had stopped looking to God for all his needs. He no longer recognised that it was God who gave him all things. The strength of his commitment to Baal may be judged from the fact that Gideon dared to overthrow the altar only at night. We should take heed to this action of Gideon’s. It was a sign of his
obedience to God, and without such obedience on our part, we cannot expect victory from God. I do not want to overstretch the illustration, but it seems clear that any object of devotion, or anything that encroaches upon our time and energy must be recognised as a competitor for our allegiance. Spiritual discernment is needed here, however. What Gideon cast down and destroyed was obviously evil, and when he took this determined action, God answered his faith in that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.

If we are to follow Gideon’s example, we must be ready to act in a similar way. However, the history of the last 150 years should warn us to be certain that what we cast down or destroy really is evil. It seems to me that the allegation of “evil” has been used only too readily merely for practices with which the accuser has not agreed. We must be cautious; we have seen, in the past fifteen years or so, a serious attempt to mend the damage done through destructive division. Like Gideon, we must displace false worship and must clearly give allegiance to the Lord alone if we are to be powerful, but let us not belittle any worship of God which is real and sincere — even if not expressed in the way to which we are used.

Perhaps Gideon might have been satisfied with the overthrow of Baal. The second action, however, was equally important. He had to be prepared for battle. Single-hearted devotion to God was to have an impact far wider than among his father’s household or the men of the city only. What Gideon was to do would bring large scale prosperity to the people of God. Further, it was to be international proof of the reality of God’s power. It is important to link his quietly performed, almost private action of purging his home town of Baal’s influence with Gideon’s greater and more public work; and between these two great moments was Gideon’s private struggle with the promises of God.

**Two tests**

Still feeling inadequate, even though perfectly willing to do what God asked of him, Gideon pleaded with God to make His presence felt. The two signs which God gave Gideon through the dew and a fleece of wool have, no doubt, been the subject of much imaginative speculation. What is clear to me is that even on the edge of an enormous work for the Lord, Gideon needed to have his faith strengthened. I am not afraid to identify with this aspect of Gideon’s character. What a disaster it would have been, though, if Gideon’s doubts and fears had prevented him from putting into practice what he felt God was asking him to do. If we are to learn from Gideon, we must learn that we cannot do anything for the Lord in our own strength; but equally we must learn that we can expect him to confirm
our faith. We should look for signs which confirm our faith. If all we face is defeat and dwindling fellowships, dare we ask God: is our faith rightly placed? Are we really in God's will?

Paul said he had been given courage by the Lord's promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness". There is a challenge in this, however. It is not our weakness which becomes our strength; it is God's strength which overcomes our inadequacy. Both Gideon and Paul had to accept their limitations and put their weakness aside to do mighty things in the strength of the Lord. Paul was determined to declare the oracles of God; he knew physical weakness, but he also knew spiritual strength. Gideon was willing to do God's bidding, because after the two tests with the fleece, he knew that he was not going in his own weakness, but in God's mighty power.

Worship

A man of action was Gideon. He was willing to pitch his tent on the southern edge of the Midianite encampment. He was ready for battle. And yet he took time to build an altar to the Lord. How easy it would have been for Gideon to be so occupied with his campaign that he neglected the important moments for worship. Before he did anything at all, Gideon built an altar and called it Jehovah-Shalom: the Lord is peace, or the Lord give peace.

In naming the name of Jehovah and invoking God's peace, Gideon was clearly focusing upon the right aim. "Mighty man of valour", the Lord called him. There was the possibility that Gideon would be intrigued with this idea, amazed that God could call him this, pleased to be so regarded — and thus fully obsessed with thoughts of himself. How different the facts are. Here is another key to Gideon's transition from weakness to winning. It was not enough simply to express a willingness to obey; Gideon showed clearly that all his actions sprang from a deep appreciation of the Lord Himself. Gideon did not rush into a "holy war", he worshipped the Lord Jehovah who alone could bring peace to the oppressed people.

Here again is a key for our own transition from weakness to winning. Let us be less introspective and negative; let us rather focus upon the Lord who alone can bring peace and victory to us in our behaviour before Him and our witness to a hostile world. The late David Watson rightly said that what attracts people of the world is not the weariness of long sermons, but the witness of lively and deeply enjoyed worship of the Lord. It is sadly possible that our worship could become stale because our appreciation of the Lord could become stale. Worship and work must go hand in hand. Gideon worshipped the Lord in the way that he did because he had never
until that moment realised just how wonderful Jehovah was. I must feel the challenge. When did I last express that sort of delight in the Lord? Sometimes we are so careful to make our worship fit the words of beautiful hymns, or well-known passages of scripture, or lovely expressions we have heard others use. But what will build us up is fresh, vital worship which flows from genuine contact with God. Do our worship meetings flag because everything is so predictable? Perhaps the same seven hymns are recycled week by week. We need to share honestly with each other and with the Lord all the wonders of His person which we appreciate. We need a fresh, daily vision of His majesty and power. We deserve nothing. He, who has everything, has given us Himself! It is right for us, daily to be bowled over by the magnitude of His grace. Then will flow worship. We cannot win in God's strength, unless we revel in the God who is so strong. We must worship Him, and as we do so we will grow in our knowledge of His power. Then His strength will be perfect in our weakness.

Two lessons for us

Thus we learn from Gideon: we must allow ourselves to be astonished at the greatness of God's mercy and power; we must be willing to do His bidding. To us, also, the Lord says: "Surely I will be with thee". And because, in worship, we have an enhanced appreciation of the person who gives this assurance, willingly we must set out to win.

Service Godward

MARK DAVISON

Here is the conclusion of the paper commenced in the previous issue.

(3) Power in Christian Service

And so we come to the third of the points which we will consider in relation to our service to God. My dictionary defines Power as follows: "The ability to do something. Control. Influence. Authority." The matters which we need to consider here are three-fold: (i) ability; (ii) power; (iii) authority. These three, however, are closely linked with each other so we shall deal with them together.
We should never have any fear as to what will happen in our service to God because there is ample evidence in Scripture to show that God is with His servants and will equip them with everything necessary to carry out His work. Consider these two verses by way of example:

1. “I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say” (Exodus 4:12).
2. “Go in this thy might... have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14).

In the first of these verses, we are reminded of the commission which came to Moses from God — he was to bring God’s people out of the terrible oppression of Egypt. Moses protests to God that he is totally unable to do this task. He says that the people would never listen to him and that anyway, he is not eloquent. He is assured that God would give the ability to carry out the task ahead. How much this might be a picture of us — ever seeking to find excuses why we cannot do it. “Lord, I’m too tired to go to the meeting tonight”. “Why me, Lord? Why not Brother X, he’s much better at it than me!” Do these echo your own words at times? I challenge you to read these words of God to Moses again: “I WILL BE WITH...”. What further room for questioning God's call can there be? Why should we doubt when our Master gives us such a great assurance as this?

In the second passage, we read of the work given to Gideon by God. He was to “save Israel from the hand of the Midianites”. Here again, great power can be heard in the words spoken and whilst Gideon doubts his own ability, he is assured by the Lord, “Surely I will be with thee” (verse 16). Gideon was left in no doubt where the source of his strength was to lie. We must ever remember that we have the power of God at our disposal when we are serving Him faithfully and that all we do will only bear fruit if we rely wholly upon Him.

This, then, brings us to the question of Power.

We have already mentioned the power of God and have just said that it is at our disposal. But WHAT IS THAT POWER IN WHICH WE GO OUT TO SERVE? I suggest to you humbly from the scriptures that it can be nothing other than THE NAME OF GOD, or better put in this church-age, THE NAME OF THE LORD. Frequently, in the miracles which the disciples and apostles performed in the gospels and Acts, the source of the power is attributed to the Name of the Lord. Let us spend a moment considering this as it is so very important to understand.

Turn firstly to David in 1 Samuel 17. As he stood face to face with the formidable opponent Goliath, curses are called down upon him. There is the giant, armed to the hilt and a seemingly ridiculous situation exists. Yet what does David say in verses 45 and 46?
"I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts . . . This day will the Lord deliver you into my hands."
The young servant of God drew his power in his greatest hour of service from the only source he knew, the name of his God. He was well aware of the power that was vested there and knew that it was sufficient to keep him. What would you have done in his situation? Would you have had the confidence in God to go to the king and offer to fight with Goliath? I guess like me your answer may be no! David had no doubt — TAKE A LESSON FROM HIM!

To take a second illustration from the scriptures, we must look as we stated above at the disciples and apostles. You will remember the incident in Matthew 8:26. Here, supreme power is demonstrated to the awestruck disciples:

"Even the winds and waves obey Him!"

Now read John 14:12:

"... Greater works than these shall he do . . .".

I am not suggesting for one moment that we should all have the power to heal people or calm the stormy seas, but these verses show clearly that the Power of God is ours if we are sincere in our service to Him. How forcefully the apostles demonstrated this power in the Acts. I think of the third chapter where Peter and John were given the power to heal the lame man. Note carefully what they say in chapter 4, verse 10:

"... by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . doth this man stand before you well."

Here was their source of power; not themselves, but, as with David, the name of the Lord.

Why, oh why, is this power not evident in our lives today? God has not changed, therefore the fault must lie with us. Indeed it does. Materialism, wealth, social security, etc., have all emerged in recent years and HAVE UNDERMINED MUCH OF OUR DEPENDENCE UPON THE POWER OF GOD. Few people in our Western lands feel the need entirely to trust in God from day to day. We must ask ourselves the question before a righteous God who knows all things, have we become so attached to things 'below' that things 'above' have been crowded out? Are we too comfortable in our present circumstances? If the answer is 'yes', then small wonder that the power of God is not in evidence in us. This is an individual matter as much as being corporate.

Lastly, let us consider briefly the matter of Authority. My dictionary defines Authority as "The power or right to take specific action". I refer you here to the words of our Lord Jesus:

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19a).
"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

In order to drive a motor vehicle, one requires authority from the governing bodies. This is given in the form of a licence. When this has been obtained, then there is no hindrance. So it is with our service to God. The Lord has given us the authority in the verses above to go out and serve Him. Are we, therefore, going to sit at home and do nothing? It is worthy of note that these quotations of the Lord were COMMANDS and not requests. He has given us the power, He has given us the authority, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

In conclusion, I would like to make three general statements which sum up all we have been considering in these papers.

Every true believer in the Lord Jesus is a servant — we have all received the commission of the Lord as above and all have a responsibility to carry it through. Remember that in a time to come, every one of us must stand before the Judgment seat of Christ and have a personal interview with Him (2 Corinthians 5:10). What will you be able to say to Him in that day?

Secondly, the Lord has said that we are the salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13). If we do not stand out for Him here, then who will? The order in this verse is also very significant — firstly salt (what we are), then light (what we do). A life lived worthy of the Lord frequently speaks more to people and can often be more of a witness than anything we can say.

Lastly, we are saved to serve. Being Born Again is not the end of the story, rather, I suggest it is the beginning. We have a responsibility to our Master and to the unbelieving world around us to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and to show the way in which they should go whilst we have the opportunity.

May these thoughts be of help and encouragement to every active servant of the Heavenly Master.

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Right Perspective

or, Fear and Faith

When Goliath appeared against the Israelites, the soldiers all thought he was too big to kill. David saw the giant, and thought him too big to miss.

*Reader's Digest*
The Upward Spring

COLIN CURRY

"The water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life." (John 4:14)

"In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaræan rise up and walk . . . and immediately his feet and ankle bones were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." (Acts 3:6-8)

The thought of coupling these two incidents together came to me a month or two ago when, in a morning meeting, after a solemn time considering our Lord’s sufferings, the change to praise and worship was beginning. At that point a hymn of pure praise to Him, now exalted, was suggested — upon which the brethren to a man (including sisters!) jumped to their feet to sing it together! It was as spontaneous as quick human reactions could be. It reminded me of those early Christian days when the believers were ‘of one accord’.

This paper is the outcome. It is basically ‘a word of exhortation’; I trust readers will be willing to accept its message (see Hebrews 13:22). (Paper written December 1988).

The mood that stays sitting when hymns are sung (especially during the Lord’s Supper and the ensuing praise and worship) is not necessarily always suitable. It may indicate complete restfulness in God’s presence; though, equally, it may be the symptom of inertia. Outward signs can mislead as indications of what goes on spiritually and inwardly.
But with the impotent man who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple, the inward power of the Spirit of God, at the mentioning of the Name of Jesus, was in evidence through his outward behaviour. His was a remarkable case. From a drab life, apparently without prospect of change, existing rather than living, lame and without any kind of vitality, he became a vigorous person, changed so completely that observers were amazed. Much the same happened with the woman of Samaria. Hers was an empty life, burdened with the continual chore of lone trudges to that well, for water supplies which too soon were exhausted. It seems she was avoided by her fellow-Samaritans. Burdens on her conscience possibly added to her misery. But, how distinct was the change in her, and how soon! What made the difference in both these cases? Unquestionably it was the power of the Name of Jesus that so changed that man, begging his meagre existence outside the temple. And it was her meeting, and conversation, with the same Jesus, that changed everything for her!

Remarkably Jesus spoke. Soon He was speaking of what He had to give — a well of water "springing up unto eternal life". Not really understanding Him, she asked for this gift — and before the passage ends it is obvious she received it. A new urge within her sent her back to Samaria to tell of this great Man who knew and had searched out all her inward being. Gone was the misery, the aloofness and shame before others. Within her now was that upward spring of occupation with Him, and also that outward spring speaking of Him.

The poor lame man had new life now, real physical vigour, never known by him before. The effect upon him of the command "in the Name of Jesus" was to impart strength, causing him to stand, rise up, and to walk. Soon we read of him leaping up, and moving with them into the temple. It all was immediate; "walking, and leaping, and praising God", and all the people were amazed at what had happened! One of the features about this man is that we are not told anything he said. Later we find him standing with the servants of God, adding to the weight of their witness by the silent testimony of his life and bodily soundness.

It cannot be doubted that it was the inward power of the Spirit of God, so recently descended to indwell believers, that enabled this man, as the Name of Jesus was exalted, to act in life as he had never done before. His outward vitality carried his witness to others, and added so much discomfort to those endeavouring to suppress the witness to the risen Lord. The Samaritan woman, on the other hand, had much to say about the newly-discovered Person who had filled her with new joy, and opened such new horizons to her. Such was her inward spring of satisfaction that it must burst out in words to her fellows. "Come see a man that told me all
that ever I did”, she said. Soon there were many more, finding for themselves that “this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world”.

Reader, is not the living character of the activities of these persons the main feature of the record of each of them? Are these things given as mere stories, or is it intended that in our day there should be people having the same living experiences, and acting in the same style?

Further down in John 4, before the woman moved off into Samaria, the Lord Jesus had spoken with her about worship. True worship, He said, was not (as heretofore) a formal procedure in a material place. Now it would go on “in spirit and in truth”; taking place in the spirits of persons, in the light of the truth that He revealed — the truth that God is Father, known in Him, the Son, and responded to by the Holy Spirit within. What she grasped of this at the time is perhaps unclear, but this clearly ties in with His earlier words, about a fountain of water within ‘springing up’ unto eternal life, and in her response to Him she knew something of that inward (but upward) urge of a heart filled with Himself.

Let us ask ourselves: Do we know this inward experience? Do our hearts and our spirits ‘leap upwards’ at times, when the glories and beauties (the sufferings too) of our Lord, set us going in near-spontaneous response to Him? Are we overpowered by the surpassing marvels of His love, coupled with the Father’s love to us, so that sometimes we must overflow in responding to it? Can we allow ourselves to be dead-pan in the face of such things? Ought we? Let the words of Scripture about these sample persons show us the way.

It should be understood that no artificial joy, no superficial activity, is suitable. In referring to ‘walking and leaping and praising God’ we do not advocate ‘dancing in the aisles’ as is done in some circles. Manifestations of that kind may well be questionably spiritual. “Decently and in order”, is the Scriptural norm for activity led of the Spirit. What is chaotic, undignified, unbelievably noisy and disorderly, over-the-top in one sense and yet thin on substance (edification) in another, is strongly discouraged in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Indeed it is a poor substitute for true occupation with our Lord, yielding responses which are acceptable to the Father.

Our main point is this: Enthusiasm arising from some real appreciation of Christ is right. It is totally remote from that inward deadness and lethargy which can at times descend upon us. Nor has it anything to do with the empty enthusiasms which can be confused with it.

We conclude with a few quotations from “Spiritual Songs”:

The heart within us leapeth,
   And cannot down be cast,
Since with our God it keepeth
Its never-ending feast.

The sun which, smiling, lights us,
   Is Jesus Christ alone
And what to song incites us
Is heaven on earth begun.

P. Gerhardt
Rise our hearts and bless the Father,  
Ceaseless song e'en here begun,  
Endless praise and adoration  
To the Father and the Son.

Miss C. Thompson

Grateful incense this, ascending  
Ever to the Father's throne;  
Every knee to Jesus bending,  
All the mind in heaven is one.

J. N. Darby

"The Bride, the Lamb's Wife" (Revelation 21:9)

MARTIN GIRARD

This third paper brings to an end the sequence which has singled out, for our help, three biblical views of the Church — building, body and bride.

Although many Bible students have been perplexed by the book of Revelation, some of its features are crystal clear. In the prologue the Apostle John falls at the feet of the risen, glorious Lord as he views the majesty of His person. The reader faces many turbulent chapters until, the stormy scenes over, he enters the great calm of the last two chapters. One object of particular interest, especially dear to the heart of our Lord, is described in Chapter 21. The invitation given to John is brought to us again by the Holy Spirit: "Come hither, I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb's wife" (v. 9).

Like John the Apostle, John the Baptist knew something of the majesty of the Lord Jesus. As the last of the Old Testament prophets, John was like the best man at a wedding. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the Bridegroom, was the focus of attention. He must increase while John decreased. (See John 3:25-30). As we consider the Bridegroom (the Lord Jesus Christ) and the Bride (the Church), perhaps the words of C. H. Spurgeon's hymn will be a fitting prayer:
"Thou glorious Bridegroom of our hearts,
Thy present smile a heaven imparts.
O lift the veil, if veil there be,
Let every saint Thy beauties see!"

In this series of articles we have considered the Church as a building where each living stone is needed to complete the magnificent structure, and a body displaying fellowship between the members. As a bride, the thought of companionship is paramount. Please turn to Genesis 24 as we pursue this thought, for there can hardly be a better chapter to use as a base for Scripture's teaching about the Church as the Bride of Christ. As we examine this chapter, seven distinct movements can be seen.

1. The Plan of the Father (vv. 1-9)
Abraham was now an old man. God had richly blessed him and had promised him many descendants, but his son Isaac had no wife. Knowing that a bride must be found for Isaac, Abraham called his servant and gave him strict instructions to search among Abraham's relatives and to bring the bride back with him. On no account was Isaac to settle with his wife in a distant land.

In the story Abraham is clearly a type of God the Father who planned that His Son should have a companion. Rebekah, introduced later, is a type of the Church. Isaac, the son, is a type of the Lord Jesus, while the servant is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, Isaac is not seen until the end of the story. According to the typology this is quite correct, for today the Holy Spirit's task is "to take out" from the nations of the world "a people" for Christ — people who together will make up His Bride (Acts 15:14). God the Father's plan is not for the Church to remain on earth but to be delivered "from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). As believers in the Lord Jesus, we need to let this plan affect our lives. God wants us to be dissociated from the world and to anticipate the moment when we shall be taken to the Father's house — as Jesus taught in John 14:2.

2. The Part of the Servant (vv. 10-21)
The servant's first part was to be sent. We assume that this highly responsible man who was entrusted with his master's goods was Eliezer, mentioned in Chapter 15:2. In order to secure a bride for His Son, God also had a Servant whom He sent when the Lord Jesus had returned to heaven (see John 16:7).

Abraham's servant also had to search. Reaching his destination in the evening time, he prayed this beautiful, specific prayer because he
wanted to find an appropriate bride for Isaac, as well as one who would please Abraham. In response to his prayer a most attractive young woman appeared and offered, to his joy, not only to give him water but to provide for the camels too. As she worked industriously giving water to the thirsty animals, the servant watched her to see whether she was really the intended bride for Isaac.

The Holy Spirit was sent from Heaven in order to search for a companion for the Lord Jesus. His ministry today is to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8), and to convert lost souls by bringing them to Christ for salvation. In order to enter the Kingdom of God we must be “born again” — a sovereign work of the Spirit of God (John 3:3). Like the woman in the parable searching for the missing coin, the Holy Spirit has been sent to “Sweep the house”, to disturb the dust of sin, and to uncover precious souls so that the set of coins is complete (Luke 15:8). Truly He does “seek diligently” until this work is done!

3. The Present for the Bride (vv. 22-27)
The servant had no doubt in his mind that this was the woman he had been sent to find. It was the custom of the day to present valuable gifts to the bride, and without any delay he presented a ring and bracelets to her because she had responded in the way he had desired. The present was an initial one (for more gifts were to follow later) but was exceedingly precious — as we see from verse 22.

In just the same way the Holy Spirit has a present for the Bride of Christ. It is instant, for the moment we believe we are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). More is to follow this initial gift, as we shall see. Yet believers are given the most precious gift imaginable. In Scripture gold is always a symbol of deity, and the marvellous truth is that God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, has come to dwell in our hearts (see 1 John 4:13). Like the engagement ring there is the promise of so much more too because we have been given “the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 1:22).

4. The Place of the Servant (vv. 29-36)
Two things are to be noticed about the servant at this point. First of all he was welcomed into the house by Laban (v. 31). Perhaps Laban’s motives were not altogether honourable; he may have been influenced by the servant’s riches! Nevertheless there remains an important point for us to consider. Is the Holy Spirit really welcome to control all areas of our lives? Is He Sovereign in my life as He should be?

The second point is that the servant was specifically a witness.
Seeking no honour for Himself, he identifies himself simply as “Abraham’s servant” (v. 34). Throughout this narrative, never once does he draw attention to himself, and his name isn’t even mentioned! Is this not exactly like the blessed Holy Spirit? Although He is “the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:12), He never seeks to glorify Himself. His one purpose is ever to glorify Christ, as we see in John 16:13b-14a. Just as the servant extolled his master Abraham who was “great” (v. 35), so the Holy Spirit always honours God and assists us as we worship Him (see John 4:24 and Philippians 3:3). But Abraham’s servant went on to speak of Isaac, the heir. “To him he has given all that he has,” he said (v. 36). In the same way the Holy Spirit delights to exalt the Lord Jesus, the “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2). God has put “all things” into the hands of His well-beloved Son (John 13:3). How right it is that we should adore this “Lord of Glory” who is the “rightful Heir and Lord of all”!

It is not possible to comment at length upon verses 37-49, but note in passing the similarities between the Holy Spirit and Abraham’s servant. As he explains the purpose of his mission, he ever keeps before his hearers the honour of Abraham and the position of Isaac, the heir.

5. The Preparation of the Bride (vv. 50-53)

With permission given for the servant to take Rebekah to Isaac, preparations for the journey had to take place. Gifts of silver and gold were presented to her, as well as garments. In a similar way the Holy Spirit prepares the Bride of Christ. In addition to the initial gift of verse 22, the further gifts here remind us of the gifts of the Spirit given “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). The garments given to Rebekah surely speak to us of the way that believers “have put on the new man” (Colossians 3:9-10). The same imagery is found in Isaiah 61:10 — “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord . . . for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness . . . as a bride adorns herself. . . .” We could never meet the Bridegroom without these garments from his own wardrobe, for He Himself is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

6. The Passage of the Bride (vv. 56-58, 61)

The servant did not want to be delayed. The Lord had prospered his journey, and it was time for the bride to be travelling with him. Rebekah faced a momentous decision. Would she be prepared to leave her family and accompany this man into the unknown? To the servant’s delight she had no doubt and said simply but sincerely, “I will go” (v. 58). This is exactly where we are now. The previous five movements are all really past events.
The Church at the present time is travelling home to where the Lord Jesus is. We are a pilgrim people (see 1 Peter 2:11).

As well as travelling, Rebekah was trusting, for she “followed the man” (v. 61). Not having seen her bridegroom, she had to believe what she had been told about him. Faith played a vital part. She did not look back as she fixed her eyes upon the man who was her guide. Today, the Holy Spirit “is leading home to the Lamb, His bride”. The children of God are to trust this One who leads (see Romans 8:14). We can well imagine the servant telling Rebekah all about Isaac and answering her many questions. As we travel Heaven-bound the Holy Spirit wants to reveal Christ to us so that our hearts will love Him more. If Rebekah had seemed disinterested, the servant would surely have been very disappointed. We are told specifically not to “grieve” the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). He wants to make Christ more real to our hearts as we journey home. Are we letting Him reveal the Lord Jesus to us?

7. The Presentation of the Bride (vv. 62-67)

At last the wilderness journey was over. It was evening time; the day’s work had ended, and Isaac was meditating in the fields. When he saw the camels approaching he hurried over to meet and greet the travellers. There can be little doubt that we are living in the evening time of this world’s history. Surely, day is almost over and the shadows are beginning to fall all around us. At any moment the Lord Jesus is going to step out from Heaven into the air above to receive His Bride unto Himself. The familiar words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 explain to us how our “Isaac” will catch us up to Himself on that glad day when we shall see His lovely face.

This beautiful chapter ends with the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. The pathway was reviewed by the servant (v. 66), reminding us of that day when “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body” (2 Corinthians 5:10). With the pathway over, Isaac “took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her” (v. 67). We also know that “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it . . . that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25,27). Then the Lord Jesus will see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied (Isaiah 53:11). For ourselves, this eternity of blessing ahead will cause us to “be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come” (Revelation 19:7).

What a glorious future awaits us! We began by thinking of that scene in
glory where the Lord is revealed in His majesty with His Church "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). How will we be dressed in that day? Although we are already clothed in Christ's righteousness, it has been said that there is a sense in which we are weaving our wedding garments now. The "fine linen" of the Church in that day "is the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:8). May the Lord free us from the attractions of this world so that we may fully appreciate His desire that we should be with Him where He is (see John 17:24). Then we will be able to echo from our hearts the glad refrain, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

From Weakness to Winning

BOS MENZIES

The series based on the story of Gideon, here completed, has given us much cause for humble self-examination. It surely should point the way ahead in overhauling our approach to personal and assembly life.

Part 3 Decisive Victory

As he set about his task, Gideon was given many moments of encouragement. The end was assured before the battle could even begin. God was giving Gideon the privilege of doing something for Him. Or, more accurately, God was showing Gideon just how powerful He is. Because he was willing to view the task from God's perspective, Gideon could see God at work.

Confidence

An army general who could easily in a day recruit 10,000 volunteers might well feel encouraged. Gideon was confident only when he had eliminated 9,700 men whom God had not chosen. Of course, some soldiers had been eliminated because they were fearful, but others were removed for less obvious reason. The important factor was that there would be a victory given by God and not achieved by strength of manpower. The men were not necessarily wrong-doers, or deficient in any way; but God was all-powerful, and the Israelites were to understand this. The scripture
record underlines this important point, emphasising the vastness of the multitude of Amalekites and Midianites. They were as grains of sand by the seaside for multitude.

A more experienced soldier than Gideon would not be ashamed to feel daunted by such numbers. Yet, as Gideon had been willing to take God at His word, so God was to allow him an insight into the minds of his opponents. He overheard a Midianite recounting a dream in which a barley loaf had tumbled into the camp and had overturned a tent. The interpretation given by another Midianite was that God had delivered Midian and all his host into the hand of Gideon.

No room now for despair. Surely Gideon would be elated. The enemy realised what a powerful leader he was. He could surely be confident. Certainly Gideon had confidence, but when he overheard this conversation, he worshipped God. At the moment when he was ready to organise his soldiers, when — we might expect — he so rightly was busy with administration, Gideon worshipped. Quite simply he gave God first place. He fully acknowledged His power and His mercy. Never for a second did Gideon suppose that his own skill or virtue would have any part to play. Nor did he give the host of Israel any chance to have false impressions of their skill. In quiet confidence, he boldly asserted: “The Lord hath delivered into your hands the host of Midian”.

**Balance — worship and work**

Action was still needed, however. the moment of worship was important, and the worship would still reverberate in Gideon’s heart, but he had to lay before the people the plan of campaign. A trumpet, a torch and a clay pitcher made up the equipment of each soldier. At the appointed time, the middle of the night, the Israelites encircled the Midianite camp. Then they shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” At that signal, the pitchers were broken, the lights shone out, the trumpets blared and, in terror, the Midianites fled, fighting one another as they ran.

What would have happened if, knowing that God would deal with the Midianites, Gideon had done nothing? It is unthinkable. There would be no story to tell. Is it possible that there are no stories of great victories for us to recount because, although we know God will be victorious over Satan, we do nothing? Are we the reason nothing seems to happen? Perhaps we are not letting God use us. Or is it possible that, like Mary of Bethany, we have chosen a quiet retreat in closeness to the Lord, leaving others Martha-like to serve? This would imply some lack of balance, I fear. Gideon enjoyed his worship and his work. He was active because he went in the power God had given him. The history of the people of God in the past
centuries seems to have been full of moments when one activity or another was emphasised at the expense of others. It is true that some Christians seem to spend all their time on evangelistic outreach, rarely pausing, apparently, to enjoy the riches of truth to be found in the scriptures. Equally truly, it seems that some are ready to spend all their time and energy in the exploration of Paul’s epistles or in prophetic doctrine. Do we hear more about the Millenium than we hear about the millions who are dying without Christ and without hope in our day?

Decisive Victory . . . even for us?

Gideon was given a victory quite simply because he saw things from God’s view, and acted upon that vision. His weakness was not evident to the Midianites, but God’s power positively shone out. Gideon’s sense of weakness finds an echo in our experience; if his willingness and his worship also find an echo, then we can expect to win.

When we realise our limitations, we are convinced that we lack the courage and insight to be mighty men and women of valour for the Lord, then we must rely upon the power of God. When we are willing to depend upon God fully, then we realise that “He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”. Our willingness is what God calls for before He shows His power. It is God who works in us; both to will and to do what pleases Him (see Ephesians 3:19; Philippians 3). As we realise the power that works in us, we expect to see an outpouring of blessing to those around us, and a vast expression of praise to God Himself. Unto Him then, there will be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus. Then must there be worship in our hearts and a determination to work. As I write this, I challenge myself to put all this into practice. What folly to know it and not to do it!

God’s power is available to give us strength when we are impotent; it is His power which sustains us day by day; it is at work in us. . . . All this is absolutely true; and yet we are not effective. What made Gideon different? We read that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. As those who are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, we are as well favoured as Gideon. What we need to do is to put aside our fears, our anxieties, our feebleness, even our strength, and certainly our prejudices. These might well be termed “human frailty” or “the flesh”. It is open to us, as Christians, to live day by day in the power that God has given us. This will necessitate taking God’s word seriously. We are assured, “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you”. See Romans 8 verse 9 onwards: “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His”.

Paul prayed for the Colossians, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord
in every good work . . . strengthened (empowered) with all might according to His glorious power”. In sum, this means that we can please God only when we let His power work in us: with the Ephesians, we are urged to be being filled with the Spirit.

Shining out

As Gideon and his people broke the pitchers, the light shone out. If only we could break the obscuring earthenware in which we hide the glorious light which God has given us, then would God work among us. Paul reminds us that the “earthen vessel” is only a container for a magnificent treasure, and that our experience of frailty is to underline the excellency of the power which is solely of God. We need to focus upon the greatness of God, and the purpose for which he gives power. If power is evident in any of our activities, then it is of God. If power is not evident, then the earthen ware obtrudes, and must be dealt with. Simply arranging meetings week after week will not in itself guarantee that any blessing will follow. How easily habit and tradition form a crust of earthen ware around the treasure which God has entrusted to us. We must allow God’s Spirit to work; we must not quench Him, and sincerely seek not to grieve Him. But, equally, we cannot limit Him. “Behold,” said the victorious, risen Lord Jesus, “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”

After His resurrection, Jesus showed Himself to His disciples. Filled with wonder at the demonstration of power which had made Him to be alive after He had died, so very publicly, on the cross, they worshipped Him — but some doubted. Then came Jesus to them and said: “All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth”. Then he charged them to teach all nations, and to baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. As God promised to be with Gideon, so Jesus promised: “I am with you always — even to the end of the age”.

Is it relevant?

What is our response? Must we shrink away from the task which faces us, powerlessly to regret that our meeting rooms are not full, and helplessly to watch as the numbers dwindle? God is working in this age. He wants us to be involved in His work. If we will not, others will. Shall we see our children and young folks joining with other Christians in other fellowships where numbers are stronger, God’s power more evident, and the activities more attractive? And then, shall we, like the weak Gideon, take our paltry grain and thresh it in hiding? Shall we lament the smallness of our
portion, and yet, in exclusiveness, neither share it with others nor sow to yield a more abundant harvest?

Rather let us join Gideon’s people. With a confidence in the Lord’s promise to the small band of folk, let us announce boldly: “The sword of the Lord . . .”. Without fear of any person, let us sound the clear trumpet call of mobilisation. Let the earthen ware be broken. Then let the light of the glory of the knowledge of God be displayed clearly as the love and life of the Lord Jesus is seen in our attitudes and actions. When His glory is central to our plans, then we will see both ourselves and the world around us through His eyes. We will see how much there is to be done, and how little we have done.

We can and should acknowledge our weakness. But as we hear His promise to be with us, let us worship the Lord. Willingly let us set out to win the battle against sin and indifference in ourselves, first. And then, in the power which He promises us, let us win against Satan. there are so many to be snatched from the fire, as Jude puts it. There is work to be done, an open door of opportunity to pass through; but the Lord Himself is with us. We shall win.

**Keeping Your Balance**

**ANDREW NUNN**

(Reprinted from “Grace and Truth”, April 1988)

“Charlie one seven on final approach to land,” I barked into the microphone. And the tower answered, “Charlie one seven, Roger.” From then on my eyes darted between the ‘piano keys’ at the end of the runway (which gradually became bigger and bigger) and the Air-Speed Indicator.

I was flying my first solo, and had the difficult job of getting THE RIGHT BALANCE: Go too fast and you overshoot the runway; go too slow and you stall. (“You fall out of the sky like a stone,” our instructor reminded us). Go too steep and you don’t make the runway; go too shallow and you overshoot. Go too far to the right or to the left and you land on the grass, if at all.

The universe is a majestic display of God’s creative show of balance.
The very planet on which we live floats in space balanced on ‘nothing’. Much more than a million megajoules of energy are carefully balanced in the paper you have in your hand. A slight imbalance would result in an atomic bomb!

God's plan for our lives is also one of BALANCE between conflicting forces — a balance similar to that required to land an aircraft; similar to that which we find in nature. When we lose the correct balance, giving too much emphasis to one principle at the expense of another, we fall short of God's perfect plan. Further, we fall short in proportion to how far out of balance we get. In this article, I would like us to look at some areas in which God wishes us to grow in wisely balancing 'conflicting principles'.

Conflicting priorities/use of time

"Life is not primarily choosing good and rejecting bad, but amongst the good, choosing the best." The old saying holds a lot of wisdom. In the three areas which probably take up most of our time (family, spiritual and secular activities) are we wisely and consciously allotting out time in a way that honours God? Have we fallen into the trap of becoming ‘workaholics’? Are we neglecting our family responsibilities by over-emphasising either of the other two areas? Have we become ‘passive Christians’, forgetting that we are members of Christ’s body with definite and real functions?

Let us not be guilty of “burying our talent” (Matthew 25:25); nor of “being busy here and there” (1 Kings 20:40) and letting our real responsibilities escape us! There really is a “time for everything” as described in Ecclesiastes 3.

Materialism/Stewardship

An old friend of mine recently gave me this opinion: “Many Christians in North America (and the rest of the western world?) have fallen into materialism, not for love for money but because they have come to believe in the world's standards of ‘what is necessary' through the influence of advertising, neighbours and friends.” Does this opinion fit us?

God’s Word says, “Work with your hands . . . so your daily life will win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody” (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12). It also says, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

On the other hand, our Master Himself balances this out by commanding us to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” and to “not store up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Matthew 6:33,19). And to make sure we do not get our standards of living distorted, Paul tells us, “If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that”
(1 Timothy 6:8). Sounds a bit much? In God’s estimation, anything else is unbalanced!

**Legalism/Liberalism**

Have you noticed how political parties classify themselves as Right or Left? Even in theological circles men have divided themselves into Liberals (left) and Conservatives (right). The same was true in Jesus’ time. The Pharisees were like dry orthodox Jews who had taken the books of Moses and turned them into long and complex lists of dos and don’ts. The Sadducees were much more ‘liberated’. They did not even believe in angels, spirits or the resurrection.

“Be on your guard,” Jesus told His disciples, “against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:5-12). Some of Jesus’ strongest words were directed against the Pharisees. He called them “sons of hell . . . blind guides . . . hypocrites” (Matthew 23). And of the Sadducees He said, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matthew 22:29).

To what extent are we also guilty of one or both of these errors? Is our Christianity a list of rules and regulations? Are we guilty of adding to God’s Word, insisting on things which are not directly written there? Or on the other hand, is our Christianity lacking in the true knowledge of the Scriptures and the power of God? Are we worried about following what God clearly shows us because we do not want to be called extremists? If so we also are in error! May God help us to find and practice a doctrinally balanced Christian life.

**Separation/Witness**

One of the biggest issues which the Christian church has had to face down through the centuries is HOW to be separate from the world and its corruption while remaining in the world as a witness. We experience little success in solving this one. Jesus’ prayer for His disciples was not that the Father take them out of the world, but that He “protect them from the evil one”. He went on to pray, “They are not of the world even as I am not of it . . . as You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15-18). And Paul urges us to “not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of (our) minds” (Romans 12:2).

How well are WE learning to apply the balanced two-edged principle of:

Separation from the world with its methods and values: AND Being in the world with a visible faith and witness that is real
and relevant to twentieth-century sceptics and materialists?

OR Have we fallen into either of two relatively easy positions:
   *Exclusive monasticism* — limiting our contacts as much as possible
to believers and forgetting that we are to be light to the world:

OR *Living a ‘camouflaged/adapted’ form of Christian life* which will
not be ‘offensive’ to the world — in fact, they will most probably
not even detect it?

May God help us to find the right balance: In the world but not of it.

**Conclusion**

God calls us to live a balanced Christian life. This will probably involve
a painful process of allowing our Father to point out to us where we are
unbalanced — where we are holding on to ideas or ways which we like
because we're comfortable with them, but which do not balance correctly
the biblical principles involved.

Therefore, with God's help we must correct the points which He shows
us. This may involve other truths-in-tension than those which we have
discussed, such as: Love/discipline; freedom in Christ/responsibility
towards weaker brethren; good traditions/positive changes; submission
to authority/standing up for what is right; words/actions.

To ride a bicycle, one must balance it correctly. For a bow to be of
use, its two ends must be held in tension by the arrow-string. May God
help us. *(All quotations from the N.I.V.)*

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**A Tribute (written by Mr W. Kerr)**

The Publishers of this magazine have thought it fitting to pay tribute to the
late Hedley Murray of Cartington Farm, Thropton. In 1976, when the Depot
moved from London to Wooler, Hedley and another semi-retired farmer
pledged their practical support in the work. From then on for upwards
of ten years Hedley gave of his time unstintingly to the work. This work
involved many kinds of labour from building shelves to parceling books;
whatever was needed was undertaken and done well. Many happy and
profitable discussions on biblical topics being held while together. Many
happy memories are engraved on our minds and hearts as we look back
over that period. Hedley is now at home with his Lord, whom he loved
and served, at home, in the depot, and in the assembly at Thropton. He
was a faithful shepherd. Our thoughts and prayers are for his dear wife,
sons and daughter who feel the loss most keenly.
Our Good Land

W. Kerr

Deuteronomy 8:7-11

Our brother continues here in the book of Deuteronomy, following on a previous paper 'Love and Obedience' which appeared in July/August 1987.

Our Good Land (Deuteronomy 8:7-11)

In an earlier paper we spoke about the strong appeal that was made to God's people Israel. This appeal called for a response in love and obedience, this is largely the subject of the book of Deuteronomy. It emerges very clearly in this interesting book that the possession of the land is in view, consequently in chapter eight there is a very detailed description of the land. Thinking again of the clear statement in 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, there is typical teaching for us in the consideration of "the good land". In the description given there is moral and spiritual teaching that would encourage us to appreciate the content of our good land, i.e., the spiritual area where we can identify the things that are typified in the features and fruits mentioned in this chapter eight.

Firstly in verse 7, "a land of waterbrooks, of springs, and of deep waters, that gush forth in the valleys and hills" (N.Tr.). We believe that many of the references to water in the Scriptures are typical of the Holy Spirit in His activities in us. Now these activities would be productive of fruitfulness as a result of this divine provision. The waterbrooks indicate the diversity of the Spirit covering the land to irrigate with a view to fruitfulness. John 7:37-39 would answer to this particular activity of the Spirit, the thought being of living water, flowing through the believer as partaking of the source of living water, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The springs would rather answer to the thought in John 4:14, "The
water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”. That perennial spring of life in the believer fills him from within by the Spirit.

Deep waters would carry the thought of progress under the Spirit's guidance, giving us understanding in our apprehension of the Word of God, promoting growth and development as we go in to possess the land. John chapters 14, 15 and 16 would suggest something of the depths to which the Spirit would conduct us. Aspects of this are found in John 14:17,26, bringing the words of our Lord to our remembrance and teaching us as the Spirit of truth; in John 15:26-27, the Spirit's testimony through believers is to the Lord Jesus Christ now risen and glorified; in John 16:13-14, the Spirit will guide us into all truth and teach us concerning things to come and glorify Christ. So then we have truth, testimony, and prophecy, all presented as the energetic activity of the Holy Spirit within the believer and the company. All of this has the effect of glorifying Christ, giving present enjoyment to the believers, and enlightening with regard to the future, for the glory of God in the fulfilment of divine purpose.

It is a land of wheat and barley and vines (Deuteronomy 8:8). Wheat suggests to us the Man Christ Jesus, as the One who came out of heaven and in the language of 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”. The result of the harvest of wheat is seen in believers who as fruit of Christ's death are wheat for God's garner. Barley carries our thoughts to the first-fruits, bringing the thought of Christ in resurrection and the assurance that since He is risen and glorified as the first-fruits from among the dead; so we in turn shall be raised and changed into His likeness (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). The vine suggests that which produces joy and gladness. The Lord Jesus is the true vine, hence real joy and lasting gladness are found in Him. We can draw from Him something of this joy and gladness as fruit of His work on the cross and in His resurrection. He could say to His own anticipatively: “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

The fig tree symbolises the nation of Israel from whom God sought fruit, but sadly this fruit was not forthcoming as depicted in the parable in Luke 13:6-9. This kind of fruit in its present form would be “the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11). This fruit would be produced as the Spirit of God forms us in the character of Christ now. How good it is to realise the Spirit's work within us would produce this kind of fruit. It is instructive to have those thoughts typified in the inspired Old Testament writings.

It has been indicated that the pomegranates are typical of the fruit
unto holiness gathered from the reference in Exodus 28:34. The pomegranates were interspersed with golden bells, being connected with priestly service. This kind of service is sustained in us by the Holy Spirit and the mediatorial service of the Lord Jesus Christ at God’s right hand in heaven. This fruit is also mentioned in connection with the porch in the Temple (1 Kings 7:18). Also in the Song of Solomon 4:13, “Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits”. There, predominantly, are the fruits of love in response to the Bridegroom, holy affections produced in believers in responsive love to our Lord.

How sad to read in the prophet Joel, “Be ashamed ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; for the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree also . . . because joy is withered away from the sons of men” Joel 1:12. If unfaithfulness brings this sad condition, thank God recovery and revival are possible; this we believe is the burden of the book of Deuteronomy. Here in chapter 8 the wealth and fruitfulness of the land are detailed to attract the hearts of God's people. This can be true of us, spiritually speaking, if our hearts are attracted by the Holy Spirit to see the value of our land.

The olive tree speaks to us of the Spirit given to us from God producing in us spiritual fruit characterised by the sweetness of divine love, typified in the honey. This blend of oil olive and honey would speak of that which effectively combines to produce in the saints features of Christ in fellowship and unity. The result of this is Deuteronomy 8 verse 10, “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.”

Iron and brass give the sense of security in the face of the enemy. Iron suggests power to stand in the face of the opposing forces around us, brass on the other hand would suggest a right judgment to walk in separation from evil.

It is important to see that these materials come as a result of mining operations. The fact of their being dug from the earth would encourage the believer to dig in the Word of God for the spiritually precious materials. Job 28:1-2 reads, “Surely there is a vein for the silver and a place for gold where they fine it. Iron is taken out of the earth and brass is molten out of the stone.”

May the Lord give us by His Spirit a deepening interest in discovering more about the vastness of the spiritual blessings which are in the Lord Jesus Christ. We may discover too that underlying seemingly obscure books of the Old Testament, inspired by the Holy Spirit, there are many precious fruits for our souls.
The chapter studied in this paper completes the record of the overthrow of the powers resisting the occupation of the land by Joshua and Israel. With chapter 12 (which lists kings subjugated in this action) it rounds off the first section of the book. Thereafter the division of the land, and its allocation to the various tribes, is recounted. Our brother hopes to complete his coverage of the remainder of the book, not chapter by chapter, but by selecting special features in a few more papers.

JOSHUA Chapter 11 — “AND THE LAND HAD REST FROM WAR”

The name of Charlotte Elliott is well known as the authoress of perhaps the best known and loved of all gospel hymns: “Just as I am, without one plea”. What appears to be much less known is her hymn of foes and battle, of armour and ambush, which begins, “Christian, seek not yet repose” (Spiritual Songs 1978 No. 282). This hymn is adapted to the book of Joshua: and verse 3 in particular relates to our theme in chapter eleven. Taking account of the fact that Merom was the mustering point for un-numbered foes, verse 4 is so exactly applicable as to qualify to be the heading to this chapter:

“Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours:
Watch and pray”.

Vv. 1-5. The usual geographical summary in verses 2 and 3 is not for the purpose of specifying the area of conquest, but to underline the immense zeal of Jabin king of Hazor in sending out king’s messengers to summon all the nations of northern Canaan to repel the invader. This is one of several instances when all the seven nations are listed, with the exception of the Girgashites. These were the kings of the area which afterwards under Jeroboam became the kingdom of Israel. This enormous host, “as the sand which is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many”, joining its several units together, mustered at the “waters of Merom”, perhaps ten miles north-west from Hazor, and encamped there “to fight against Israel”.

Vv. 6-14. It would appear that Jabin looked on the waters of Merom
as so strong a position that his forces were halted there and awaited the attack of the Israelite army. Once again Jehovah intervened with His word to Joshua; it must always be an element of sovereign importance to have the Word of the Lord injected into any situation. We see Joshua in all this narrative as primarily presenting to us the activity of the Lord Jesus Himself in gaining the victory. But this is by no means an obstacle to our taking to ourselves the lessons of these means to victory, especially where it stresses the commanding need for our receiving the Word of God for every situation. What came from Jehovah to Joshua, probably while still at Gilgal, was a word of encouragement, of promise, and assurance: “be not afraid, tomorrow about this time, I will deliver them up”; and it also was a word of command for the destruction of that mighty force in its totality.

We would do well to pause at this point to take account of the richness of provision for the needs of God’s people in all ages to give them victory in His Name. There is in these words to Joshua what meets the needs of men and women with respect to the emotions, the intellect, and the will. It is no small part of our spiritual exercises to note and apply such communications as they appear in every reading of Scripture. No doubt stimulated by such communications Joshua once again acts with such vigour as to achieve a surprise attack “by the waters of Merom ... and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them” in three scattering directions, until they left none remaining. And Joshua ended the distant pursuits with exact obedience to Jehovah’s command: “he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire”.

At this point Joshua turned his attention to the great city Hazor, formerly the “head of all those kingdoms” and its king, Jabin. “Utter destruction” had been the command given to Moses by Jehovah (Deuteronomy 20:17) and passed on to Joshua. The head of all those heathen kingdoms could not have any part in the new dominion of Jehovah; and utter destruction and burning with fire was the fate of Hazor, that great city.

There has been some confusion about the meaning of verse 13. On a point such as this, that is, of pure language and grammar, NEB must be treated with respect. “The cities whose mounds are still standing (presumably at the time when the book of Joshua was written) were not burned by the Israelites; it was Hazor alone that Joshua burned”. This has the air of a matter remitted to the archaeologists. Of all the cities involved in this part of the narrative, none has yet been excavated except Hazor, and the excavation of the Hazor tell showed unmistakably that Hazor did suffer an utterly destructive burning at this time. The confirmation of the fate of the other cities still lies under the soil of Palestine.
We may note words spoken regarding a later Jabin, king of a later Hazor: “Arise, and take thy captivity captive”; and these words take us to Ephesians 4:8 (where they are quoted from Psalm 68:18) to which our studies in this part of Joshua lead us — to the position of Christ which He now occupies as a consequence of His victory by death and resurrection over principalities and powers. It is there that we now behold Him by faith, seated at the right hand of His Father and awaiting the moment when His foes will be made His footstool. In the meantime this view of Joshua leads us to see that it is from this position, consequent upon His victory over spiritual foes, He distributes the fruits of His victory (Ephesians 4:7-11). There is a clear parallel between this distribution in Ephesians 4 and the allocation of the inheritance in Canaan which occupies so large a part in the later chapters of Joshua from chapter 14.

Ministry which arises from such a study as that of the book of Joshua, and indeed all true ministry, must have for a major objective the stimulation of the spiritual exercises which have been mentioned several times. As we think of the passages in the Epistle to the Ephesians so recently considered, the writer and the reader might well be moved to question their own hearts. How much time have I spent in the contemplation of Christ in glory? This is certainly the theme for meditation which lies before us — and what a deeply moving theme it is!

In this epistle the person of Christ comes before us from beginning to end in His heavenly resurrection glory “far above all heavens” and seated at God’s right hand. Very early (1:6), as the Father’s Beloved, He is the measure of the believer’s acceptance, and the thought of the Father’s pleasure in Him is a never-failing source of delight throughout Scripture. Meditation on Christ in His suffering and death of course takes primacy, because of the Lord Jesus’s institution of His Supper — but let us never forget the central place in Christianity of the upward look to Him where He is.

Moreover, in addition to these general remarks on the importance of meditation, there are exceeding great and precious promises explicitly attached to contemplation of Christ in glory. The theme of 2 Corinthians 3 is “the glory that excelleth” shining now in the face of Jesus glorified. The metaphor is exceedingly striking. No terrestrial object takes on a new image more rapidly than a mirror turned to face a new object. The change is instantaneous. In the metaphor, the open face of the believer is the mirror, and the fulness of the blessing for the believer is unmistakable; “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (v. 16). The action of the believer to receive such a
blessing, is to “turn to the Lord” in the way of meditation.

The words “And the land had rest from war” (11:23), already referred to, are followed in chapter 12 by the list of kings east of Jordan destroyed by Moses and Israel, as well as the list of kings smitten by Joshua and Israel on the west side. Thus chapter 12 completes the account forming the first main division of the book of Joshua. We shall not comment in detail on chapter 12, since it is a summary of what has gone before. What lies before us next therefore is the account of the allocation of the tribal inheritances, beginning with chapter 13.

Bring Me a Minstrel

JOHN BARNES

2 Kings 3:15

In Hebrews 1:1 we are told that God spoke in O.T. times “in divers manners”. This unusual article is concerned with the unexpected ways in which Elisha the man of God fulfilled his prophetic calling. While the paper hinges on 2 Kings 3:15, some general reading around the whole story of Elisha will help the reader in following it, and gaining its lessons. It has real encouragement for us too.

A minstrel sings with the voice of experience. Psalms, sung in this way, revived from the sacred treasury of experience with God, recall the way in which His hand guided in days past, and confirm in the psalmist’s mind the truth that the hand which wrought those works at that time is not shortened that it cannot save now (e.g. as in Exodus 15).

The valley was an evidence of the difficulties the people were in. They were on the bottom and there was no way forward, for that way was blocked by the Moabite army. Israel’s actual situation was grave. There was no water for the men or their beasts, and there was no way back, for they had made a circuitous approach to this encounter with the Moabites, and this had taken them seven days to complete. When you are shut in as they were, in the valley, without supplies, without a way forward and with no reasonable retreat possible, you can only appeal to the Lord. Still, you need a righteous basis for such an appeal (James 5:16). But for the presence of Jehoshaphat, Elisha would not have agreed to intercede
for them; however, the king of Judah still had some influence with the
prophet, though his situation was compromised, since he was unequally
yoked with unbelievers. Would the Lord intervene to save this beleaguered
army? Jehoram was full of unbelief, for twice he affirmed his conviction
that the Lord had brought the three kings together to destroy them; and
the king of Edom was a pagan.

We may note that Elisha did not give an immediate answer to their
agonised appeal for help. Instead, he called for a harper; “Bring me a
minstrel”. Some of the anxious soldiers may have wondered, “Why does
he need a musician? Must he get in the mood first?” But, Elisha had his
own way of working; he did not use other peoples’ ministry or adopt
another man’s line of things ready to hand; instead, he got his line of things
from the Lord. If you read the record of his service you cannot fail to be
impressed by the originality of the prophet. The poor water of the city
of Jericho was mentioned to him; could he help? His reply was, “Bring
me a new cruse and put salt therein”. When the sons of the prophets found
that poisonous matter had, inadvertently, been introduced into their soup,
they cried to Elisha in alarm, “There is death in the pot”. The prophet
said, simply, “Then bring meal”. So, here we find this seemingly
incongruous call for a minstrel. The harper was certainly not needed to
get Elisha into the groove with some of the music of the day. We are in
deeper waters than that. The prophet of the Lord, whose help is sought
in present difficulties, and who may look into the future, will also look
at the past. One of the prophetic functions is to recall erring believers to
truth already made known to them. The God, whose present dealings we
consider, and who governs us today, perhaps with a chastening hand, acts
according to certain principles, and a consideration of His past dealings
greatly helps in the understanding of the way in which He is moving at
present, because He has told us, “I am the Lord; I change not”.

The advice of the prophet following the service of the minstrel sounds
even more remarkable. “Make this valley full of ditches”. The men of Israel
may have said, “Just a moment, Elisha; we are in deep trouble as things
stand. Do you seriously suggest that we get in deeper?” This, however,
was the style of the prophet’s ministry. In the case of the lost axe head,
he cut down a branch from a tree and threw it into the water where the
axe had sunk. This may have looked a bit like throwing good money after
bad, but the iron swam. Salt introduced into the unpalatable water of
Jericho would surely make the water yet more undrinkable but it healed
the water. The widow’s resources were limited to a pot of oil, and to pour
this out seems like a prodigal waste of limited supplies, but the oil was
multiplied. In the case before us the prophet called for the use of the
shovel. A minstrel and a shovel! In what way could such strange suggestions assist the beleaguered army in their desperate need, or help them get out of an utterly fatal situation? If you are already on the bottom and you dig in, you can only sink deeper into trouble. Yet, this is where the Lord can work. It is those who are low that He can lift up, even from the dung heap. So it seems that not only should we be consciously down there, where life's disasters have dumped us, friendless, helpless and resourceless, facing a stark dawn loaded with terror, but that we should, with our own hands, dig the valley even deeper, in personal acceptance of the situation.

It may be asked: Where would the men procure the implements required for such a herculean task? Every Hebrew soldier carried a small shovel as part of his equipment. You can find the details of this in Deuteronomy 23:12,13. This implement was not intended for digging foxholes; it was a toilet shovel and was provided to ensure cleanliness in the precincts of the Hebrew camp. There is not the least doubt that there is sound clinical reasoning in this arrangement, as there is in many other details in the law, but its primary purpose was moral; "The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp to deliver thee and to give up thine enemies before thee". So, the need for cleanliness in the camp was that God was there. Digging for water with the dung shovel does not look like attractive work, but down in the valley of death is not an attractive place; it is a location big with danger. I believe that it was Guy Fawkes who coined the expression, "Desperate diseases require desperate remedies". It is none the less true. The men of Israel would have no time to argue the pros and cons of the situation. The need for action was urgent and they must resort to the humiliating use of the dung shovel without further delay. Everything of us has to go. All that we are; our wisdom, our ability, our pride, our resourcefulness; all this has to go in the valley of ditches. If the Lord is to bless us and bring us fully into the benefit of the Holy Spirit's work and of victory, He must do it in His own way, and that rules out any activity of man and his schemes.

Through the minstrel's psalms, the seer had probably been helped to look back into the experiences of the saints and had recalled how the Lord enabled them to triumph over odds as formidable as those which confronted this army in the valley; such as Israel at the Red Sea, at the end of their tether, and wholly incapable of resolving the problem. It was then that the Lord acted and saved them in mighty power. Or like the trembling warriors of the nation confronted by the terrifying force of Goliath and the sneering host of the Philistines. The mere shepherd lad who, on that memorable occasion became their deliverer, descended into the valley floor to ascend in the Lord's power against the proud aggressor,
and to meet and destroy him and silence his vain voice for ever.

Abraham, utterly alone in an alien land, knew what it meant to use the shovel. In the valleys of Canaan it was needful to remove tons of earth if life-sustaining water was to be located. So the patriarch dug wells; back-breaking and dangerous work. The sides could easily cave in and bury the digger there, as a recent sad case has proved. You accept death and burial for yourself. The lesson is that to have the things of the Spirit, the things of the earth have to be got rid of, and this is hard and costly work. What I am by nature has to go down in the pit; my personal advancement or ambitions have to go; the world with its schemes for improvement have to be abandoned.

Isaac succeeded his father in this enterprise. I think we must divest our minds of the idea that Abraham’s neighbours, though generally respectful to him, had any real sympathy with his faith and outlook. In fact, they filled in the wells which he had dug out at such great effort. In Genesis 26 we read that they filled them with earth. Mr Darby translates this word as ‘dust’. In the Bible, dust is the symbol of death. These invaders of the land, living there without divine invitation or authority, had no place for God in their scheme of thinking and they were in opposition to that which these men of faith had worked out so earnestly. We are surrounded by similar people today. The outward semblance of religion conceals a total rejection of the Holy Spirit and His work. The truth of the Lord’s virgin birth, His atoning death, His resurrection, His present glory with the Father, His headship of the assembly, His return for the church and His coming glorious reign — so carefully taught by generations of faithful men and lovingly maintained by earnest believers in the little companies of the saints, are being buried beneath the crumbling dust of man’s sterile philosophies. The men who teach these lifeless theories are not, themselves, spiritually alive, and are like their predecessors, the Pharisees, blind leaders of the blind. If we Christians today are true Isaacs, sons of faithful Abraham, we shall continue to work at those wells to keep them open for ourselves, our children, and the sheep of the Lord’s flock.

The minstrel’s psalms may have revived such memories as those pastoral scenes. Then there would be desert experiences to recall, for it is in the wilderness that experiences with God are to be found. The sinking of the well by the nobles of Israel would perhaps be recalled, as they dug with their staves in the barren waste to reach the precious water hidden below. We can hear the echo of their exultant welcome as the living fountain gushed upwards; “Spring up, O well!”. Those nobles were men who had known the searching depths of the brazen serpent experience.

Digging in the valley is not a mere symbolic gesture such as putting
up a sticker or wearing a badge may be. The prophet's instructions were, "Make this valley FULL of ditches". The work indicated had to be carried out thoroughly. Every remotest wadi in the valley was to be excavated. What a night of travail that would be for those weary, thirsty men, but the dawn would bring them not only the supplies which they so urgently needed, but also a mighty triumph which, by this time, they least expected. Merely to be supplied with water would have satisfied them, but this was not enough for the Lord. To be accepted as a humble servant in his father's well-supplied household would have satisfied the returning prodigal, but not his father; he would have him home as a son. To these needy people the Lord would grant, not only the water they needed for themselves and their animals, but also an amazing victory over their enemies. When God gives, He does so generously, often evenlavishly. Spiritually we have come to understand something of this truth. The Father has opened the heavenlies to His sons, where His own Beloved sits, ensuring for them victory over every foe.

We are sometimes inclined to look at ourselves and the very real deficiencies which mark us. No one can find encouragement there. But the Lord often waits till we are deeply conscious of this, and then He can act in His own power, and bring in His own resources. What we have to do is to dig, in obedience to His directions, and He sends the life-sustaining water. We do not look down into the arid bed of the sterile valley and reason, "This can provide nothing"; we look up to the mighty hand of the living God and confess, "God can provide everything" (2 Kings 3:15, last clause). We lift up our eyes to the breaking dawn and see the enemy, whom we feared so much, disarmed and in disarray, and unable to defeat us.

In this day of such brokenness and scattering, we may not feel that we can look for great things for ourselves, but the Lord is on the throne and the future is bright with hope. The coming of the Lord draws near, and the prospect for His opposers is the valley red with blood; but for the saints the outlook is fulness of victory and fulness of blessing with the Lord. The present blessing which we need and long for requires that we obediently fill the valley with ditches. Malachi reminds us in those well-known words; "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse... and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it". In John 2, the needed wine became available for the wedding guests when the obedient servants filled the water pots to the brim. Making the valley full of ditches brought supplies of precious water; filling the water pots with water brought supplies of joy.
The Burning Bush

COLIN CURRY

"Behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." "God called him out of the midst of the bush . . . and he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

(Exodus 3:2-5)

The story of the burning bush has a certain fascination about it. One has felt that it may have more significance than has been drawn from it. In this paper we present some thoughts of our own for the consideration of readers.

It was a great sight to behold even from a distance — a sight that made Moses turn aside to see it. It was something quite unique. In a place where bushes catching fire may not have been unusual, this one did not burn out. It burned and was not consumed. That made it outstanding, attracting Moses closer, because of its exceptional nature. Then, quite remarkably, Moses heard a voice from the bush, cautioning him against a too close approach, and stressing the need too for unshod feet in the presence of God. Jehovah had come down to deliver His people Israel, hearing their cries from their bondage in Egypt.

All this is the gist of the Bible story as it is related to us in Exodus. Supposing now we turn in thought to the N.T. and consider the greatest sight of all there — the cross on which the Son of man was 'lifted up'. Here we have a great and unique spectacle, greater by far than that which absorbed Moses' attention. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all (men) unto me" He had said (John 12:32). Here is a centre of attention for all. Some, though aware of it, treat it as of very little account; but, if that attitude is maintained, they will be made to face it seriously. Too late to benefit from it, nevertheless they will have to honour and acknowledge the One who was 'lifted up' there. But, more happily, there are others who are drawn and inwardly moved by that unique scene. Our hearts are touched by realising what it means for us. Looking back to reconsider it, that cross is our focus of attention, our strong centre of attraction, our cause for ardent celebration of His worth. This is so for a whole medley of disparate people — people who could never have been united nor stirred apart from such a sight. These gladly gather together unto Him, deeply thankful that
so great a theme affects their spirits, stirring their allegiance to Him. It sets their hearts alight in affection for Him, with a strong impulse to respond in a proper way to Him.

What made the burning bush unique? Surely it was the fact that it was inconsumable, burning and continuously burning — going on constantly and unchangeably. God spoke, and drew near to the people in this way. That was the outstanding and remarkable feature.

But how much more does the cross of Christ make patently clear those things about God which are unchangeably the same, invariant and indestructible indeed? God's own changeless standards were (and are) asserted there, unbroken in their eternal continuity. Consider (i) His inflexible and impartial righteousness, always acting, as only God can, in a pure and absolutely just way; (ii) the depths of God's love, in all its surpassing quality and vastness; (iii) that same love being also an utterly holy love, showing total abhorrence of sin, and unsparing wrath against all that is evil and sinful. Does anyone believe that these great characteristics of God will ever discontinue? No indeed, these are never, ever, to be relaxed — from eternity to eternity.

Such thoughts caused me to meditate on those things about God asserted in the scriptures as being sure and never-varying — things also underlined and made absolutely clear when our Saviour was 'lifted up'. The Hebrews' letter has several such passages. Of the material things, which we tend to think of as durable, the statement is made in 1:11,12, "They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail". What a total contrast is here made between deceptively permanent things which will pass away, and the truly permanent characteristics which belong to God Himself! Is this less true of our blessed Lord Himself? For a clear answer look at 13:8, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". The body of the epistle, too, has numerous indications of the ever-living continuity of all that belongs to Him. Among these, Chapter 7 seems to say (as its main and recurring point) that, though other things may fade, He ever liveth. This is in total contrast with a succession of priests (under the old order) who needed replacement when they died. He, our blessed Lord, "continueth ever". It is clear that another (different) kind of priest has now arisen, appointed of God, an undying priest, who functions "after the power of an endless (the word means indestructible) life" (7:16). Everything about Him has the impress of eternity on it!

Before leaving Hebrews, we should notice chapter 12:26,27. Here are more words close to our theme. The speaker from Sinai has spoken again,
speaking this time from heaven, and warning of an action promised and
soon to be fulfilled. "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also
heaven"; this we are told "signifieth the removing of those things that are
shaken, as of things that are made, that those things that cannot be shaken
may remain". Verse 28 has a clear indication that we (i.e. Christian
believers) have a part in "a kingdom that cannot be moved". Our link with
Christ links us with the unshakeable things, the eternal ever-continuing
things. That being so, it requires of us to live in accordance with what
God has made known of Himself to us; "Let us have grace that we may
serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear". Then, last, comes
the solemn word "For our God is a consuming fire" (v. 29). We noted that
the principal feature of the burning bush was its unceasing burning — the
bush burned, but was not consumed. Moses had to draw near cautiously,
respecting the holiness of God who there revealed Himself. God's constant
and utter repudiation of sin and evil was indicated there and still more
surely at the cross. Behaviour in accordance with what Christians know
of God, seen there at the cross, must reflect the character of God in all
its features there displayed, and we must be open to the responsibility of
living according to His holiness.

Passing now from Hebrews, a few further passages may be referred
to. 2 Peter 3:10-18 seems very close to this last reference. There, judgment
by fire of the whole present scene is foreseen. It is as sure as God's word
is sure. The heavens and the earth are kept in store for this. "The heavens
shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent
heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up". The
immediate lesson for us is put in the question "What manner of persons
ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?". Heaven and earth
will pass away but, beyond all that, new things, a new heaven and a new
earth, a state of affairs fresh and new and according to God will eternally
remain. God Himself will be all in all: but still He will be the unchanging
God whose character has been seen, in all its unconsumable perfection
at the cross.

But there is another passage speaking of the 'new heaven and the new
earth'. The lessons of the 2 Peter 3 verses need our attention, but this one
(in Revelation 21:1-9) has much comfort within it. Here again we are shown
the ultimate end-stage, well beyond all the intervening happenings which
occupy the bulk of Revelation. Here again we learn of "the former things"
which at that stage will "have passed away". Several other things will be
no more. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying (said
to indicate crying out, perhaps under injustice), neither shall there be any
more pain". But what remains? God Himself, ever the same, remains.
He "tabernacles with men", is their God, and they His people. But perhaps most moving of all, we read of Him, true to Himself indeed, wiping away all tears from every eye. How marvellous, too, that John was told specially to record it. "Write, for these words are true and faithful".

There is little difficulty in finding several other relevant passages. But another side of the subject needs a few comments, and we must proceed to this now.

What is the effect on us of knowing such a God as this? Moses found he could draw near to the burning bush, though cautiously. We too are able to draw near to God, as known at the cross, where the Son of man was 'lifted up'. Only through His death for us on that cross is there any possibility of drawing nigh to God. That sight draws us near, and affects us deeply — but it is also the basis on which we can in any sense draw near. The burning, unconsumable, intense holy love of God, seen there, affects those who are attracted by it, and who feel its impact. Should it not have the effect of producing a reflection (pale maybe, but growing) in ourselves, who stop to weigh and sense what a momentous and significant action it was? Do we find something burning within us, firing us with keen desire to reflect in life that serious consuming desire to honour God at every step, as seen so perfectly in our Lord? Let us remember One who put into effect what was already in scripture about Him, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (see John 2: 17). That kind of pure perfection is of course unattainable. But let us remember that Paul, though not without his shortcomings, nevertheless showed that spirit to a remarkable degree.

What a change his conversion involved! From total and adamant zeal against the name of Jesus to thorough and consuming zeal in devotion to Christ, and in the service of God. To some he wrote, "We are zealous, whether present or absent (from the immediate presence with the Lord), to be agreeable to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9, N.Tr.). Of what went on continually in his life for Christ, he said, "the outward man is consumed, yet the inward man is renewed day by day (4:16, N.Tr.). Burning with zeal for God, consumed by physical wear and tear, yet his inner man was not consumed, but renewed and refreshed daily! Of course he was a special person, a special servant indeed. But is it related only for us to admire? Or are there attitudes that we should follow here, though no doubt at a distance? It may involve more commitment than at present we show, more time in meditation on the wonders of the cross, where God was fully manifested. In that way, and by the Spirit of God, may we be enabled to act more devotedly, fervently reflecting the character of God as seen so evidently there.
PERSONAL ESTEEM FOR SCRIPTURE

"The entrance of thy words giveth light, giving understanding unto the simple."  
(Psalm 119:130)

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."  
(Psalm 119:105)

I have a profound, unfeigned faith in the Bible. I have, through grace, been by it converted, enlightened, quickened, saved. I have received the knowledge of God by it, to adore His perfections — of Jesus, the Saviour, joy, strength, and comfort of my soul. Many have been indebted to others as the means of their being brought to God — to ministers of that gospel which the Bible contains, or to friends who delight in it. This was not my case. That work, which is ever God's, was wrought in me by the written Word. He who knows what the value of Jesus is will know what the Bible will be to such a one.

If I have, alas, failed it in nearly thirty years of arduous and varied life and labour, I have never found it fail me. If it has not failed for the poor and needy circumstances of time through which we feebly pass, I am assured it never will for eternity. "The Word of the Lord abideth forever."

If it reaches down even to my low estate, it reaches up to God's height, because it is from thence. The love that can reach even to me, and apply to every detail of my feebleness and failure, proves itself divine in doing so. So none but God could do this, and hence the Word leads me up to Him. As Jesus came from God and went to God, so does the Book that divinely reveals Him come from and elevate to Him. If received, it has brought the soul to God, for, He has revealed Himself in it. Its positive proofs are all in itself. The sun needs no light to see it by.

J. N. Darby

Psalm 119 is a pattern, a thing done like embroidery, stitch by stitch, through long, quiet hours, for love of the subject and for delight in leisurely, disciplined craftsmanship.

This is not priggery nor even scrupulosity; it is the language of a man ravished by a moral beauty.

C. S. Lewis.
"Behold my Hands and my Feet"

GORDON HUGHES

The content of these papers is simple yet profoundly stirring. The author has a note at the start, which says "For brevity, only key references have been given. The reader is strongly urged to look these up and read around them."

Old Testament writers, although inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), faced problems in describing God's actions. These problems arose from the fact that God is a spirit but the only language available to man was that of human experience. Necessarily then they portrayed God's actions in terms of His hands, His eyes, etc. This language, anthropomorphism, while falling short of a full description of God, nevertheless produced some marvellous statements, e.g. "The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Isaiah 59:1); "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

At the heart of the Christian gospel is the amazing fact that God, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, came into our human experience. He came, not as a spirit, nor assuming some other form with which man could not readily relate, but as a Man. In this way men through their direct experience of Him could the better appreciate who and what God is. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life" (1 John 1:1); "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

The purpose of the present study is to survey what the Gospel
writers have to tell us about the actions of the Lord Jesus so that seeing Him through their eyes, as it were, we, in turn, might learn something of the nature of God. With this in mind, we shall look at what the Gospel writers have to tell us about the hands, the feet and the ears of the Lord Jesus. Our purpose in attempting this study will certainly not be to present an anatomical description! Rather may the study produce in each reader the spirit of joy and worship evidenced by those who, on that first Easter day, were bidden by their risen Lord, "Behold my hands and my feet" (Luke 24:39). It will then be appropriate to challenge ourselves, as those who belong to this risen Lord, as to how closely our ways match His.

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

The Hands of Jesus

For brevity, we shall confine our attention to those Scriptures which explicitly mention the hands of the Lord Jesus. Many other Scriptures imply the operation of those hands with characteristic words, e.g. touched, ministered, washed, but the reader must be left to pursue his own meditation on such Scriptures. At least three characteristic features are exemplified by the hands of the Lord Jesus.

Blessing

"And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10: 16).

Down through the ages artists and hymn writers have been drawn to portray this most delightful of scenes — children, judged by the disciples too unimportant for the attention of the Master, yet gathered around Him in a closeness of affection and receiving His blessing. Little wonder that Mrs Jemima Luke could write:

"I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arm had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
'Let the little ones come unto Me'."

It is interesting that Mark uses here a specially strengthened form of the verb "to bless" which might more properly be translated "blessed them fervently again and again" (see also Weymouth translation). That particular form of the verb is used nowhere else in the New Testament and indicates the unique place that children occupy in the affection and purpose of the Lord. Let us not think less of them than did the Master! Indeed some of His strongest condemnation is directed against those whose actions might in any way offend such (Matthew 18:6).
But those hands were full of blessing for all who came to Him in that same dependence and helplessness that characterise children (Matthew 18:3). How often has it happened that a man, exalted to a position of power and glory finds himself changed, and not for the better, by that position. “All power corrupts” says the world. How lovely then to find that, in resurrection glory, as He would leave His disciples to return to heaven, the Lord’s attitude towards them was still full of blessing.

“He led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them” (Luke 24:50).

Those hands have never ceased to minister blessing to His people down through the ages.

**Fellowship**

It is clear that the New Testament church saw in the laying on of hands an act of fellowship and identification (Acts 13:3). That same spirit of fellowship and identification moved our blessed Lord to lay His hand upon a leper. “Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him” (Mark 1:41).

Who can tell the thrill of that moment for the leper? It may be that for many years he had remained an outcast from fellow men. The only physical contact he would have experienced would be that with fellow lepers, with their maimed and broken hands. Now for the first time he experiences the touch of a hand that was whole — human and yet, at the same time, divine. It is noteworthy that in the New Testament several Greek words for “touch” are used. However in Mark 1:41 the verb used is the strongest form, implying “to hold on” or “to embrace”. Could ever two such dissimilar beings be found in such close contact with each other? On the one hand, we see the leper, an outcast in all his uncleanness, and on the other hand, the Son of God in all His spotless purity. And yet, at the same time, there is a sense in which both were outcast — the leper in a physical sense and the Son of God in a spiritual sense, coming unto His own and His own receiving Him not (John 1:11).

Leviticus 13 details the treatment of the leper under Mosaic law. It is remarkable that although the priest is enjoined some twenty-six times, with almost monotonous regularity, to look upon (or see, or consider — the Hebrew word is the same) the leper, not once is he commanded to touch him. That act would have rendered the priest ceremonially unclean, and would have required his exclusion from the Israelite community. Yet here the Son of God, in all the incorruptibility of His divine nature, stoops to touch a poor leper and in that instant, in taking upon Himself that man’s disease, cleanses him (Matthew 8:17).
Power

We can distinguish three ways in which the hands of the Lord Jesus are characterised by power:

(a) in service
(b) in the protection of His own
(c) in authority

(a) in service: Mark tells us that the crowds were astonished and asked: “What wisdom is this which is given unto him that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?” (Mark 6:2). It is surely significant that in the Gospel in which the Lord is presented as the perfect Servant, such eloquent testimony be given as to the effectiveness of His service. What better commendation could any servant wish for but that he had a good pair of hands? On another occasion, a woman touching Him is healed of her haemorrhage. Unlike Matthew and Mark who also record this incident, Luke, the doctor, lets us into the secret that this healing was only accomplished at the expense of power going out of the Lord (Luke 8:46, JND trans.). That same power flowed through His hands in the many acts of healing recorded in the Gospels.

(b) in the protection of His own: Peter experienced that protection, in the purely physical sense, when having begun to walk on the water to go to Jesus, he found himself in danger of drowning. “Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him” (Matthew 14:31). How deeply grateful must Peter have been that day for the reassuring protection of that outstretched hand. That physical picture illustrates the far more wonderful truth that, in a spiritual sense, all His own may know that same reassuring protection: “My sheep . . . neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27,28). Marvellous security of the sheep! Those hands, wounded at Calvary, are the hands of the good Shepherd who cares too deeply for each one of His sheep ever to let one go. Each one was bought so dearly at Calvary. As if to emphasise the security of the sheep, the Lord Jesus goes on to point out that they are, at the same time, in the security of His Father’s hand (John 10:29). What eternal two-fold security!

(c) in authority: The greater part of this study has been taken up considering the Lord as the One who “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Mark 10:45). How unceasingly those hands ministered blessing to others. Yet this study would be incomplete without the solemn
reminder that the Lord Jesus is the divine Executor of all the Father's purposes. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (John 3:35). Even so, John 13 reminds us that it was in the full consciousness of all things given into His hands (v. 3) that the Lord Jesus, in matchless grace, could still stoop and take a towel and a basin of water and wash His disciples' feet! That full execution of all His Father's purposes awaits a coming day but how our hearts thrill at the knowledge that to no other hand could the Father commit such authority in the confidence that it would be properly executed. John the Baptist foresaw something of the judgment that this would entail: "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). While this study has emphasised His acts in grace, a foretaste of that judgment which He will eventually execute is given in the two-fold cleansing of the temple, firstly at the beginning of His public ministry (John 2:13-17) and again at the end (Matthew 21:12,13).

""From the Top to the Bottom"

COLIN CURRY

"And lo, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom" (Matthew 27:51)

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he, being rich, became poor, in order that ye by his poverty might be enriched" (2 Corinthians 8:9)

"The veil of the temple was rent in two". How significant! How momentous and profound! An impassable barrier stood between God, behind that veil, and every man in his sin and remoteness from His all-holy presence. Throughout long years God was never fully known, and sinful man was debarred from any proper drawing near to Him. But what a change when Jesus died! The N.T. teaching bases itself on that wondrous death, starting from the very moment it was accomplished.

But also, that veil was rent "from the top to the bottom".
Did we ever consider why this seemingly small detail is related? What would we lose without it?

The second verse quoted helps us. A brief heading to the verse might be: “From riches to poverty”. Our Lord’s action, spoken of there, began from a point of indescribable wealth, and brought Him to the uttermost depth of poverty. Who did it? In grace “our Lord Jesus Christ” spanned that gulf. He made that move. All the way down He came. He started at the very top, in His unique and supreme place above. He took that downward course alone. He did it in response to His Father’s sending, yet also of His own will and obedience. Down He came, ever down, to the very bottom. The awful end-point of that course was Calvary! There the absolute bottom was reached. There He ‘bottomed’ the extremity of total self-giving, of utter poverty and dereliction. Reader, do you allow such grace to appeal to you? Do you feel continually your sense of indebtedness to Him? Do you thank Him for this, deeply, genuinely, and again and again?

The veil of the temple was rent from the top. The move was from above! In those tremendous scenes at Calvary we see God in action. He acted in sovereign initiative in those stages that led to Calvary, and especially in that central work laying the essential basis of His power to bless us. The love of God was there fully displayed — so utterly amazing in its quality and scale — and His unbelievable readiness to bless sinful men in a manner in harmony with all that He is in holy righteousness. What a sight was Calvary! How it promotes our adoration! Small wonder it was signalized so strikingly!

But also that veil was rent right down to the bottom. How far did the Lord Jesus reach down? To the uttermost point of deepest loss! Here we draw near to an abyss of suffering experience that He alone could fathom. We can only peer into this. But He knew it to the full, and felt it with extreme sensitivity. Only the restrained but profound words of Scripture can give some small sense of this, and our inward being ought surely to be deeply and continually stirred by such a meditation.

But not only did He come down to suffering that none other could know, but He came down to such as ourselves — to grapple with, and meet the plight of fallen human beings, the plight of humankind. And truly, we were at the very bottom. If the question were asked: What did we contribute to the great work of Calvary? then the answer would be: Nothing whatever. Yet in another sense one answer would be: only our own unworthiness, unloveliness and lovelessness, our enmity against God, our total lack of anything meriting such sacrificial love. The awfulness of humankind, the hardness and callousness of the human heart, of our own hearts, is also plainly witnessed at the Cross. From God this great action took place,
unasked and quite undeserved! “He loved us when we loved Him not” — what a great and glorious story this is! It tells the shame of humankind, our shame indeed — but also, what a sight of God it gives!

“Tell it again! Tell it again!
Salvation's story repeat o'er and o'er
Till none can say of the children of men
Nobody ever has told me before."

The writer remembers Mr James McBroom quoting this old Sankey hymn with great vigour and enthusiasm. Would that our sense of fervour about it, and our desire to disseminate it, could be as vigorous. Why are we so tepid nowadays?

There were two sides to that veil. God, within the veil, was inaccessible to fallen men. “The way into the holiest was not made manifest”. God did reveal Himself in earlier days in limited and incomplete ways, but approach to Him was only in figure and in type. Romans 3:25 tells us that remission of sins in pre-Christian times was only available to faith, being based on what would come into effect later through the death of our Lord. The true basis of blessing and benefit to persons of faith was obscure until then. But now, as the same passage says (verse 21) all is different — God’s flawless righteousness in saving believers is perfectly clear, and to be relied on. God can bless any of the sinful race who in repentant faith seeks Him. He is free to do it, since Christ has died. The full fountain of love from the heart of God can lavish itself on the sinner who believes. God seeks such persons. God welcomes them. This in no way condones their sin. All is strictly in accord with God’s own absolutely high standards.

And so the N.T. speaks in much less restrained terms about God’s attitude to men. It speaks of sin abounding, but also of grace ‘much more’ abounding. It speaks of ‘joy in heaven’ over the recovery of ‘the lost’. It speaks of a lavish welcome for the returning prodigal, humble and repentant in his manner. The instances of God’s perfect freedom to bless unworthy persons are widespread in the N.T.

The book of Acts shows this grace spreading abroad and multiplying widely. It began at the very place where Christ was rejected and crucified. From Jerusalem and all Judea, to Samaria, Caesarea, then out to the Gentiles (overcoming much prejudice). It reached Rome, as the Acts tells, but its intended limits were to be “the uttermost parts of the earth”. The grace of God, on offer to humankind, is limitless, and the message has now been disseminated far more widely by faithful witnesses. “If this work is of God, ye cannot overthrow it”, said Gamaliel, at an early stage, attempting to be neutral. But it was the truth. That energetic outflow
of amazing grace from God has shown itself to be unstoppable! It met with prejudice, attempted neutrality, apathy, vicious opposition too, but it overcame all resistance — all that was thrown at it. Saul of Tarsus proved the truth of Gamaliel’s words, when, full of zeal and rank hatred for the Name of Jesus, overwhelming grace knocked him flat to the ground! It humbled him at a stroke. It disarmed him completely — it set him on a new course quite the reverse of an antagonistic one. He became the principal and energetic proponent of God’s grace to those still unaware of it. “The grace of God was exceeding abundant” he wrote later, still overpowered by the wonder of it.

Having considered briefly the outflow of that magnificent grace flowing freely from the heart of God, indicated by the rent veil — we now dwell a little on the possibility of inward movement, i.e. approach to God. Who, if any, are able to do this? It will be recalled that the high priest, once every year, as representative of all Israel, must draw near within the veil. That was the only inward movement; and one clear point to note was its rarity. It was to be done following strict instructions from God, which emphasised the holiness of the ‘holiest of all’ into which he entered. He was to enter “not without blood” — the prescribed sacrifices had first to be made, the sacrificial pictures of Christ’s death were enacted with exactitude. The whole procedure took place against a background of fear and risk. For instance, the cloud of incense covered the mercy-seat “that he die not” (see Leviticus 16:2,13).

But how strong is the contrast with the invitation (in Hebrews 10) held out to ourselves today: “Let us approach with a true heart, in full assurance of faith”. This is not for one special person, but for all Christian believers who have true faith in Christ. “Boldness . . . by the blood of Jesus” (verse 19), shows the ground for this confidence, though of course the humble attitude is needed, respecting deeply the holiness of the presence of God. This kind of approach has nothing at all akin to an easy-going and familiar manner.

It remains for us to refer to the other side of our verse in 2 Corinthians. In staggering grace our Lord stooped from the highest of riches down to the deepest of poverty. But with what object, what outcome? It was in order that we, through His poverty, might become rich. Ask yourself the question: How rich am I, as a believer in Him? Any careful reading of the N.T. must impress you with the scale and magnificence of the wealth which is yours — entirely based on His descent to those depths. We have just referred to the high privilege of access to God. Then there is the knowledge of God, fully revealed, known now as Father, of acceptance in His Beloved One. We are able to come to the Father by Him, who is the Way, the Truth,
and the Life. We have our firm status “in Christ”, established beyond all gainsaying. We have more than relief from all that our sinnership merited for us, from fear, from accusation, from qualms and doubt. But positive activities are ours to occupy us. Continually we can “Joy in God, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” as well as being able to look forward to marvellous eternal joys ahead. “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God”. We can “worship the Father in spirit and in truth” expressing in His presence our appreciation of the spiritual wealth He has lavished upon us. Not least, what joy it is to dwell on the glories of the One in whom that wealth centres, and who channelled all those blessings to us. How exhaustless is that great occupation!

But, conscious of the thinness of this attempt to outline the Christian’s riches, we must now stop. It will be apparent that the subject becomes too great for us! But we may console ourselves by thinking that, throughout eternal days, we shall explore the length and breadth of those riches secured for us by our Lord in that ever-remembered time when He “became poor”.

David’s God

ALLAN RETALLICK

David, despite his shortcomings, was “a man after His (God’s) own heart”. David, too, had a high appreciation of his God. This article concentrates on these themes.

In the historical books (Kings and Chronicles) we often read that a king walked in the ways of his father David, or else that he did not serve the Lord as his father David had done. Even Solomon, in his latter years, “went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father” (1 Kings 11:6). We remember that Saul, the first king of Israel, was rejected by God, who said: “The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people” (1 Samuel 13:14). It is true that David’s imperfections are also recorded in the sacred scriptures, but, even when he had so grievously sinned, he was ready to submit to the discipline of God: “Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great” (2 Samuel 24:14).

It is not surprising, then, that when David came to the end of his
life, he could leave such a clear testimony of the faithfulness of God. Psalm 18 is almost an exact replica of 2 Samuel 22, which were spoken in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies. It is in itself a confession of what his God meant to him.

The psalm begins with the words: "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength". I understand that this word “strength” can also be translated "help". When David kept his father's sheep, he was conscious that it was the Lord's hand that had given him the strength and courage to kill the lion and the bear, and this provided him with the confidence that even Goliath would fall by his hand. No wonder he loved Him!

In this psalm David speaks of how, in his distress, he called upon the Lord, who heard his cry and delivered him. Looking back upon his life, he can recall how his enemies were scattered, while he received mercy. "By my God have I leaped over a wall" (verse 29). His experience taught him that none was so great as the Lord: "Who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God?" (verse 31).

In the second verse of our psalm we read something of what God meant to David. "The Lord is my rock". The word used here means a high, craggy rock, a lofty stronghold, the sort of place where the eagle would build its nest. When we think how often David had had to shelter in a cave, and came under the fire of Saul's archers, how good it was to know that his God was for him a lofty stronghold. Later on he says: "Who is a rock save our God?" (verse 31) and "He setteth me upon my high places" (verse 33). Do we know God like this? Are we set on high, so that we can look down on the events that engulf us, seeing them as God sees them? Only when we get this exalted view can we say: "As for God, His way is perfect" (verse 30).

Next he says: "my fortress". This is a similar word to the one that he had just used: a castle, a stronghold, a fastness. This is something more permanent, I believe, than a cave or rock, however high. David could remark that he dwelt in a house of cedar, a royal palace. Does this make us think of the place prepared for us in the Father's house? At present we dwell in a tent, a tabernacle, but presently we shall receive a house "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). We may groan in our tabernacle, as David did when the Philistines had taken possession of Bethlehem, and he sighed: "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" (2 Samuel 23:15). With David it was a living hope: "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Then, too, God was his Deliverer. Many times in the history of Israel we read how God raised up saviours, or deliverers, even in the times of the
judges, when things were at such a low ebb. David himself was regarded as the deliverer of his people, but he knew that it was only because God was his Deliverer. “He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms” (verse 34). We are charged to fight the good fight of faith, and not to give ground to the enemy. We can do this only as our God teaches our hands to war. But our weapons are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds (2 Corinthians 10:4). “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

We have seen that God was not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, and He is referred to, as we have seen, as the God of David, the ancestor of succeeding kings of Judah. Even when they had forfeited much of their inheritance, God still said that He would spare them “for David’s sake” (e.g. 2 Kings 19:34). So here David, with holy confidence, says “The Lord is . . . my God”. In a much later day a heathen king could speak of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, and the God of Daniel. Here, too, David describes this God as One whom he could trust, his strength. This is a different word from that used in the first verse, and signifies a boulder, and the word ‘trust’ is also sometimes translated ‘hope’ or ‘refuge’. The thought is then that God was for David an impregnable abiding place, and his constant hope and refuge against all the storms of life. In verse 48 we read: “He delivereth me from mine enemies”, and we know that these were many. We too can say, with the writer of Psalm 48: “This God is our God for ever and ever”. We can certainly trust in Him at all times.

The next description used by David is “my buckler”, or my small shield to protect my heart. “Keep thy heart with all diligence”, we read in the book of Proverbs, “for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). “Is thy heart right?” is a question that we might address to our own souls. God will protect our heart if we allow Him to do so, but we must also take care that our hearts are not set on the things of this world, for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. If our hearts are set on the things that are above, where Christ is, we shall know His protection too. Not only do we need the small buckler, but also the shield of faith, to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. If we have been kept until this hour, it is because of our faithful God, who will not fail or forsake us. We are “debtors to His mercy alone”.

Two more epithets are employed by David: “the horn of my salvation” and “my high tower”. The first of these reminds us of the words of Zacharias at the birth of his son, John the Baptist: “He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David” (Luke 1:69). We may
think of a false prophet who made horns of iron to pretend that his heathen master would gain the victory, but that was a vain hope, as Ahab found to his cost. We may rather think of the pillar before Solomon's temple, named Boaz, "in Him is strength". The horn of salvation envisaged by Zacharias was plainly the Lord Jesus Himself, and we know Him as the One who conquered death, as well as him that had the power of death. Most significant is the expression in verse 35: "Thy gentleness hath made me great".

"By weakness and defeat
He won the meed and crown,
Trod all His foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down."

Paul could beseech the Corinthians by the "meekness and gentleness of Christ". The Lord Himself besought His followers to learn of Him, who was "meek and lowly in heart". Peter, too, speaks of Him who "when He was reviled, reviled not again . . . who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:23,24). The believer, too, may know, as Paul experienced, that his strength is made perfect in weakness.

The final description of David's God is "my high tower". This word, again, can be translated as a cliff, an inaccessible place. It makes one think of a place where prisoners were incarcerated with no hope of being rescued; but it may have a completely different meaning, in that the believer is in a place where no foe can get at Him. We see how these various attributes have one central thought: David knew that so long as God was on his side, no harm could come to him. God was his God, his shield, his strength, his fortress, his high tower, his deliverer, his protector against all the onslaughts of his enemies. That is why he can say, towards the end of the psalm: "Therefore will I give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, amongst the heathen, and sing praises unto Thy name" (verse 49).
Baptism in the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12: 12, 13

This helpful quotation (on a much misunderstood matter) is taken from one of a series of books entitled “What the Bible teaches”.

A careful student of the Word wrote asking for my view of verse 13. He quoted comments on it by four authoritative writers whose remarks can often be relied on (F.B.H., J.N.D., W.K. and H. P. Barker). It was clear that there was much diffuseness and indeed considerable disparity between their pronouncements. I had felt some feeling for the teaching of that verse, but to state it clearly was, I knew, beyond my ability. So, being busy, I asked him to allow me some time. The book mentioned above came to my notice meanwhile. The extract which follows is what I ultimately sent him. I felt it to be so explicit, well presented, and free from extraneous sidelines, as to feel I must agree with what it says. Readers may also be persuaded by it.

Extract:

Taken with permission from half-volume of “What the Bible Teaches”; “1 Corinthians” by J. Hunter. (Publisher: John Ritchie). Comments on 1 Corinthians 12:12,13.

The Body and its Members (vv. 12-27)

This section divides into two paragraphs: the first the Baptism in the Spirit (vv. 12,13); the second the Functioning of the Members (vv. 14-27). The first is doctrinal in its contents, the second practical in its outworking. Let us look now at the first.

12 It is clear that the body mentioned is the human body and that its illustrative emphasis is its unity (‘one’) and diversity (‘many’, ‘all’). “So also is the Christ” indicates that it is a simile of the Body of Christ. He gives His name to it, thus indicating the vital union between Him and His people. It is the whole Church that is in view, the dispensational Church. How it came into being is explained in v. 13.

13 “In (the power of) one Spirit were we all baptised into one body” by Christ. “Baptised” is in the aorist tense, which not only looks back to an act, but views the act in its completeness, as accomplished. The verb
‘baptised’ refers, therefore, to Pentecost, and gives us the doctrinal explanation of that event. All seven references to this baptism have Pentecost in prospect (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5) or in retrospect (Acts 11:15; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Again “baptised” links with what took place in Acts 2, where we are told that the Spirit filled the house. It was a literal baptism. The Holy Spirit had come in answer to the promise of the Lord in the Gospels (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7) to form the Body of Christ. Those present were actually baptised in the element, the Spirit. By the descent of the Spirit they were all baptised into one body. When Paul says ‘we’ he has in view the whole Church in contrast to ‘ye’ (v. 27), referring to the local church. Do not the words of John the Baptist in the Gospels indicate that all whom he baptised in water would be baptised in the Spirit (Mark 1:8)? In the mind of God all Christians were seen to be baptised. It is essential to see that the Holy Spirit only came down once. His coming was unique and final. It was unique for it never happened before; it was final in that it will never again happen in that way. There was only one baptism of this kind. It was the birthday of the Church. We speak of our next birthday, but actually we have only one birthday, the rest are anniversaries. Believers are not baptised in this way at conversion; they come into the good of what took place at Pentecost. There is no Scripture that states that believers were baptised in the Spirit at conversion. The words used of what takes place at conversion are indwelling; anointed, sealed, earnest, but not baptism.

At the close of Acts 2, 3,000 souls were saved and received the Holy Spirit without any outward evidence. There was no phenomenon. They were indwelt by the Spirit as we were indwelt, for no believer now has experience as in the early verses of Acts 2. This demonstrates that the experience of the 3,000 at the close of the chapter is the normal, and draws attention to the uniqueness and finality of the early verses of Acts 2. Nevertheless the 3,000 now stood associated with the original baptised company in the Body of Christ. It was the same with us when we were converted. We entered into the benefits of the once-for-all outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

This association with the experience of an original company is scriptural. In the history of Israel related in chapter 10 we note that “all were baptised unto Moses . . . and did all drink the same spiritual drink”. This baptism was collective and national and was never repeated; it was positional and was something performed by God of which they were not aware. In contrast the drinking was individual; it was something they did for themselves. Anyone born later did not have the initial experience of the baptism, but drank of the water. They stood associated with the
experience of the originals. So baptism in the cloud illustrates baptism in the Spirit, whereas drinking of the spiritual drink corresponds to drinking into one Spirit. In Amos 2:10, God spoke to the generation of Amos, “I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorites”. But that generation had never been in Egypt, nor in the wilderness, nor led into the land. Quite true, but they stood associated with those who had — the originals. What was true of them was true of that generation. So we too have come into the reality of all that took place at Pentecost.

We are told in John 1:29 of “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”. This looked forward to Calvary. In John 1:33 it is stated of Christ, “he which baptiseth in the Holy Spirit”. This looked forward to Pentecost. Just as we came into the good of Calvary the night of our conversion, so we also came into the good of Pentecost. If there is no problem about the first, wherein lies the difficulty with the second? Again, when Adam first fell the whole race fell in him; when we were born we entered into the effects of the Fall. So Christ baptised the whole Church into one Body; when we were born again we entered into all the benefits of that act. The whole Church was there in prospect, seen as one Body, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostal teaching maintains that the Spirit here is the Baptiser, for they view this verse as different from the other six references noted earlier, where Christ is stated to be the Baptiser. They teach that in this verse all are baptised by the Spirit into one body, but not all have been baptised with the Holy Spirit. If the other six references denote clearly that Christ is the Baptiser, it would normally be accepted that the seventh is the same. The onus of proof lies heavily on those who believe otherwise. But careful thinking will show that the Spirit cannot be the Baptiser. In any baptism four things are necessary. There must be a baptiser, the person being baptised, the element in which the baptism takes place, and the reason for the baptism. Now in this verse (v. 13) the baptiser is Christ, the baptised are all Christians, the element is the Holy Spirit, and the reason is encapsulated in the phrase “into one Body”. If it is maintained that the Spirit not Christ is the Baptiser, then the element is removed. But it is not possible to have a baptism without an element. So the theory must be rejected.

This verse also states that all believers have been baptised in the Spirit, which contradicts their teaching that only some believers have received it. Again all are united in this baptism into one body, whereas their teaching divides believers into those who have experienced the baptism and those who have not. Finally, “and all have been made to drink into one Spirit”
refers to the reception of the Spirit at conversion. Grammatically the presence in one verse of two aorist verbs, does not necessarily demand that they refer to the same event. ‘And’ introduces a new statement, and helps us to understand how we came into the good of the previous statements. Godet comments on this in his exposition. “Kai, ‘and’, indicates a new fact. If the second proposition serves only to reaffirm in another form the idea of the first, there would be an asyndeton”. Paul is looking back as we all must do; that is why both verbs, “were baptised” and “were made to drink”, are aorists. They refer to the same truth, but at different times. Firstly, what took place at Pentecost is highlighted in “were baptised”; what took place at conversion when we entered into the reality of it is illustrated by the second phrase “were made to drink”. The whole verse teaches that what took place at Pentecost was realised at conversion, and was the experience of the 3,000 as we have noticed. This also was the experience of Cornelius and his household. Peter’s reference in Acts 11:15-16 has to do with this aspect of the reception of the Spirit.

(The writer now proceeds to verses 14ff.)

The whole series of these books will cover the N.T. in nine volumes. Some have not yet appeared. I have seen several of those already available, but have not been able to look closely at much. As may be expected when several writers each take a single N.T. book, the quality seemed to me to be somewhat uneven. But there was much that seemed good, and one cannot fault the basis from which they start — a high and proper view of Scripture, a deep desire to honour Christ in all His excellence, Church truth and its importance and setting in the prophetical background; the future, and the true hope of the Church. The respectful and humble manner in which they write is evident throughout.

In short, there is very much I feel I can commend here. This series will be worth consulting, and will often be of good guidance, for any reader who has a sincere interest in “What the Bible teaches".
The "'Our Father'"

CHRISTIEN BRIEM
(translated from the German by MICHAEL VOGELSANG)

This paper appeared in "Emunterung und Ermahnung" in April 1989, and I am grateful to its translator for submitting it to me. Among other things it shows evidence that Scripture Truth is read beyond these shores; and that fellowship in helping in this kind of work is real. He took very seriously my remark (in November 1988) about "the diminishing flow of fresh material coming my way". I thank him warmly for his support.

The paper itself shows that the wide use of "the Lord's prayer" in Christendom today should not be taken as scripturally justifiable.

The Lord's Prayer, as it is often called, the so-called Our Father, nowadays plays an important role in Christendom. It is prayed on every occasion, e.g. in connection with the Lord's supper, baptism, sermons, funerals — at every opportunity.

But, if we have a look at the prayers which are mentioned in Acts, we notice that the first Christians never used this prayer. And further, apart from the Gospels, it is never mentioned in the New Testament. How have we to understand this? Is the Lord's prayer not good enough? Didn't He teach it to His disciples, saying, "When ye pray, say . . ." (Luke 11:2)?

The Lord's prayer which He taught His disciples is good, it is perfect. There can be no doubt about this. But another question is, is it a suitable prayer for Christians? His words, "When ye pray . . ." were addressed to his disciples, who followed Him on earth and were not yet on Christian ground.

The propitiatory work of Christ had not been fulfilled nor had the
Holy Spirit come to earth. That's the decisive fact.

The Lord Jesus had taught his disciples about the Father, and only He, the Son, could reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27). He had introduced them into the knowledge of the Father and had made Him known to them, so that He could say to His Father before His crucifixion: "And I have declared unto them thy name and will declare it" (John 17:26). Therefore the question arose in the hearts of His disciples how they should pray.

Because they had the impression that the old Jewish forms of prayer were no longer in accordance with their position as disciples of Christ, into which they had been put through the revelation of the Father, the Lord fulfilled their desire ("Lord, teach us to pray", Luke 11:1) giving them this prayer, which is not quite accurately called The Lord's Prayer or the "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9-13). Not quite accurately as the Lord Himself never uttered this prayer. If anything is His prayer, then it is the one in John 17, where He as the Son talks to the Father. Nevertheless I will use these terms for the sake of simplicity.

From the fact that the Lord Jesus gave His disciples this prayer we learn a very important thing. A prayer should always be in accordance with the revelation He has given of Himself. Or, in other words: the measure of revelation which God gives of Himself at a particular time is the basis of the relationship into which the believers have come and is therefore also the basis of their prayers. The kind of prayer is determined by the intimacy of the relationship which they enjoy through the grace of God.

This prayer, which starts with the words Our Father, was the suitable expression for the disciples, who surrounded the Lord as Messiah on earth and were already brought into relationship with the Father in heaven. We can be sure that they prayed it until the crucifixion of the Lord, although we have no information about that. They surely prayed this prayer each for himself, because a common prayer of the disciples is never mentioned in the Gospels. The "Our Father" was definitely not given as a collective prayer, even if it was in the "we-form", which only shows that others are also brought into this relationship with Him as our Father.

But the Lord's teaching about prayer in Matthew 6:5-15, which is ended by the "Our Father", only deals with the prayer in the closet ("But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet", v. 6). That point is usually missed. The "Our Father" is a personal prayer, not a collective one.

But for us as Christians, who are brought into the position of sons of God, who have the Spirit of God in whom we say "Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15) the "Our Father" is not a suitable expression for our feelings and our thoughts. It is our privilege to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus.
But we would like to point out some moral teachings of the "Our Father". Even if this prayer is not intended for our actual use, it contains some important points which are of great value for us, too.

The prayer consists of six requests in which we find six divine principles. This is their order:

**HONOUR**
- Hallowed be thy name

**GOVERNMENT**
- Thy kingdom come

**OBEDIENCE**
- Thy will be done in earth

**DEPENDENCE**
- Give us this day our daily bread

**RESTORATION**
- And forgive us our debts

**PRESERVATION**
- And lead us not into temptation

What an accumulation of divine truths in only a few words! What a perfect pattern of a prayer from the lips of our Lord! How could it be otherwise, when He, the great teacher, teaches us!

We notice that the first three requests are connected with God, the last three with men. Let's realise this: In the Lord's prayer the rights of God have the supreme place, the needs of men come only second.

Isn't that a moral principle, which we should remember — not only in our prayers but also in our whole life? Should not the things of God have the first place in our life and consequently in our prayers, too? "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). How sad to say that it is often the other way around!

Apart from the moral principle which we see in this prayer may we ask ourselves, keeping in mind the first request: How important is it for us, that His Name be honoured by us and by others? Is that the governing principle in our life?

The second request deals with His kingdom. Today, Satan the prince of this world, governs this earth — and what terrible results this has for men! Have we not enough reason to be rejoicing, that this will not last for ever and that God will assume His government on earth in the person of His Son? Are we longing for this moment, when His Son, our Lord, will gain His rights here on earth and will restore everything in a way God ever wanted it to be? Are we among those that "love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8)?

And what does obedience to His will mean for us? Is it more important for us to obey Him than to please men? Have we learned yet that without obedience there is no blessing? Of course, the time when the will of God will be done in heaven and on earth is still future. Apart from the presence of Satan in heaven (Job 1; Revelation 12:7-12) the will of God is done in heaven, as the angels "do his commandments" (Psalm 103:20). But the
earth is the scene of the self-will of men. Therefore morally speaking there is a “partition” between heaven and earth. This partition will eventually be removed in the millenium, and there will be harmony between heaven and earth, because the will of God will govern in both spheres. But today we are called “unto the obedience of Jesus Christ”, called to obey God as Christ obeyed Him. The people of this world don’t care about the will of God, but is His will governing at least our lives? Are we willing to say in connection with our lives “thy will be done”?

Do we in our affluent society realise day by day our dependence upon God in all questions of our daily lives? Do we still give thanks to Him that He gives us our bread daily as well as all other things we need in this world? Are we thankful that we as children of God know the principle of restoration? If we fail through sin, God in His grace restores us again and again to the practical enjoyment of fellowship with Him. That is wonderful. But do we also have a forgiving spirit towards those who have sinned against us?

Could we pass through this evil world with all its dangers for spirit, soul and body, and reach our destination unharmed, if we did not experience the perpetual preserving of God? But are we also aware of our own inability and weakness to stand in the trials into which God brings us (that is the meaning of temptation here, because God does not tempt with evil; James 1:13)? Or are we self-confident and trust in our faithfulness and experience? These are all heart-searching questions, and so this prayer is speaking to us, too, through the principles it contains. Indeed, we have much to learn from it, morally.

I would like to add a word concerning the fifth request as it is often misunderstood, “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”. We must remember that the Lord didn’t give this prayer to men in their natural, sinful state, but to His disciples, who were already believing. Unbelievers could never say “Our Father”. The tax collector in Luke 18 could only say “O God” (v. 13). This request, “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”, doesn’t show the way a sinner can obtain forgiveness of sin. No, the Lord speaks of the believer and the mind he ought to have if others should have sinned against him. In His governmental ways God wouldn’t answer a request in prayer from someone who has an unforgiving mind. How solemn is that also for us and our prayers!

We may utter all our faults and our daily failures confidently before our God and Father; but then we have to be in a forgiving spirit towards those who have sinned against us. We have a very similar word in the Gospel of Mark 11:25 “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive
you your trespasses”. This passage deals with forgiveness in the governmental ways of God with His people not with eternal forgiveness. May we therefore learn from the Lord’s prayer this as well: If we want our prayers to be answered, we’ll have to have a mind of forgiving mercy and mustn’t be filled with ugly feelings against our brother. The genuine Christian standard for our forgiving is, by the way, much higher than that of the “Our Father”: We should forgive one another “even as Christ forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

I hope very much that we have learned to see the difference between a practical application and the actual use of this precious prayer. As a pattern it is of utmost moral value for us, but as a prayer we as Christians cannot possibly pray it. It was and is determined for another time and for other believers.

We only take the second request as an example: “Thy Kingdom come”. Apart from the moral application which I have tried to give, can we actually pray that request in our prayers? No, impossible! It would mean that we direct our view below and not above, that we were waiting for the coming of the kingdom in power and glory — and not for the coming of Christ for the rapture of His bride. It would mean that we were waiting and longing for nothing else but the establishment of the kingdom. But that is certainly not the Christian hope. Therefore the prayer of a true Christian is not “Thy kingdom come”, but “Amen. Come. Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

But how suitable was the request “Thy kingdom come” for the disciple at that time, to whom the kingdom had been preached as “at hand”; first through John the Baptist and then through the Lord Jesus Himself (Matthew 3:2; 4:17)! They were rightly expecting this kingdom. They couldn’t know yet, that it would be postponed, because its king, their Lord and Master, would be rejected by His people.

But the application of this prayer given by the Lord to His disciples is not the only meaning and application. When the assembly, which is being built today, will have left this world, there will be again a faithful remnant among the Jewish people here on earth. They will go through incomparable tribulation (Matthew 24:15ff), and at that time this prayer, the “Our Father”, will again be prayed, and certainly the second request, ‘Thy kingdom come’ will be uttered with special fervour.

Coming back once again to the beginning of the “Our Father”, do not the introductory words “Our Father, who art in the heavens” (JND) indicate a kind of distance?

The Lord had indeed tried to give His disciples an impression of who the Father was, so that they no longer knew Him only as “the Lord
of all the earth” (Joshua 3:11) or as “the God of heaven” (Daniel 2:18,37). Nevertheless the Father is seen as *in the heavens* and those who are approaching Him are on the earth, at rather a distance, so to speak. At that time they couldn’t have that consciousness of His nearness, which is our privilege today. We are seated in the heavenlies in Christ (Ephesians 2:6) and it wouldn’t be appropriate in our position of nearness to the Father (Ephesians 2:18) to pray to Him as *in the heavens*.

We learn from all this, that this prayer, as perfect as it is in itself, can’t be the appropriate expression of those who are children of God and have known the Father (1 John 3:2; 2:13). They have the marvellous privilege of praying in the name of the Lord Jesus.

**(2) The Feet of Jesus**

GORDON HUGHES

The earlier paper, on *the hands of Jesus*, was remarkable in its simple and heart-stirring quality. This paper has the same stamp upon it. The set of papers will (DV) be completed with a third one on *the ears of Jesus*.

It is impossible to read the Gospels without marveling at the many miles travelled by the Lord and His disciples both in and around Jerusalem and in Galilee. Little wonder then that John notes that Jesus, perfect Man that He was, wearied by His journey to meet a Samaritan woman, sat on the well-side (John 4:6). We do well to ponder such unrelenting and unremitting service.

“But who, Thy path of service,  
Thy steps removed from ill,  
Thy patient love to serve us,  
With human tongue can tell?” (J. N. Darby)

However, for the purpose of this study we shall focus attention on the attitudes of those who, in the Gospel record, found their way to the feet of the Lord Jesus. That special place served at least four different needs:

1. the place of penitence
2. the place of acknowledged need
3. the place of worship
4. the place of communion and instruction

We shall consider each of these in turn.
The place of penitence

“A woman in the city, which was a sinner . . . stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment” (Luke 7:37,38). Scripture does not record the motive of Simon the Pharisee in inviting the Lord Jesus into his home. The hardness of his heart is evidenced in his discourtesy in neglecting to provide water to wash the feet of his Guest (Luke 7:44). But here comes a woman, a sinner and known in her town to be such, and makes her way to His feet. Without a word from the Lord, such is the effect of His presence upon her that she is moved to tears — tears undoubtedly of contrition for her past life. How readily she must have identified with the five hundred pence debtor in the story which she heard the Lord tell Simon. How great was the seal of approval which the Lord placed upon her act of contrition and upon her act of love in anointing His feet with ointment: “She loved much” (v. 47). It was that same sense of contrition which, after the miraculous draught of fishes, drove Peter to fall down before his Master (Luke 5:8 — though on this occasion Luke records that it was at Jesus’ knees). “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord”, were Peter’s words. Yet who can doubt that, driven though he was to his Master’s feet by a sense of his sinfulness and need, Peter found himself all the more strongly bound to Him who alone could meet that need. Perhaps if we were more at His feet, the sense of His worth would so enhance the sense of our unworthiness that we too, as five hundred pence debtors, forgiven much, might find ourselves loving much.

The place of acknowledged need

“And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them” (Matthew 15:30). Lame, blind, dumb, maimed . . . each one was a hopeless case so far as the resources of this world were concerned. Did those who came, or those friends who brought them, say, “Lord, we’ve been everywhere. We’ve tried everything. We’re at our wits end. Now as a last resort we’re here — at your feet”? Whatever the language of their hearts, it was at the feet of Jesus that they found the answer to their need. That same sense of need brought others also: Jairus for his daughter (Mark 5:22), the Syrophenician woman for her daughter (Mark 7:25), and Mary in her bereavement (John 11:32). Of each of these it is explicitly recorded that they fell at His feet. Each one found that need wonderfully met there! Where do we turn when, confronted by seemingly insoluble problems in life, we find ourselves at wits end corner?
Perhaps if we could learn the lesson of these who came so that we ourselves came, with all our problems, and found our way to His feet, we might find delivering grace before ever wits end corner was reached. What matter if, at His feet, we find ourselves scarce able to put into words the problems that face us, seemingly unanswerable as they are; we have the assurance of God that when we do not know what to pray for as we ought, the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26,27).

“All your anxiety, all your care,  
Bring to the mercy seat, leave it there,  
Never a burden He cannot bear,  
Never a friend like Jesus.” (E. H. Joy)

The place of worship

“One of them . . . fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan” (Luke 17:15,16).

We have previously noticed that on another occasion the Lord touched a leper and cleansed him. Here it is through obedience to the Lord’s command that ten lepers are cleansed. Only one, a despised Samaritan, is sufficiently moved by thankfulness to make his way back to the feet of Jesus. Despised Samaritan that he was, there was nothing to be despised in that simple act of thanksgiving. Indeed the Lord sets His approval upon it. “There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger” (v. 18). In everyday thought, glory to God is often associated with magnificent ecclesiastical architecture or splendid religious ceremony. How wonderful that, in setting His seal upon this simple act of thanksgiving, the Lord brings within the reach of each one of us the possibility of giving glory to God! As redeemed and cleansed by the precious blood of Christ, we have far greater reason to be at His feet in thanksgiving. Whether in individual or collective worship may we each be ready to bring our sacrifice of praise, giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15).

The homage of the leper is but one instance in a chain of worship that began with wise men at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:11), found full expression in the devotion of Mary of Bethany (John 12:3) and finally continued right through until that glorious day of His resurrection (Matthew 28:9) and His ascension (Luke 24:52).

The place of communion and instruction

“Mary . . . sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” (Luke 10:39).  
To sit at another’s feet was an expression used in New Testament
times to indicate instruction received. Thus Paul paid tribute to his education received under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

It is noteworthy that, on each of the three occasions on which we read of Mary of Bethany in the Gospels, we find her at the feet of Jesus. We have already noticed her there acknowledging her need and in worship. Here we find her hearing His word. Again the Lord puts His seal upon this act by describing it as "that good part" (Luke 10:42). Perhaps it was in that act of communion that Mary came to appreciate the fact of Jesus' approaching death and His subsequent resurrection. Certain it was that most of the disciples found great difficulty in accepting Jesus' intimations as to these (Luke 18:31-34). However Mary, as we have seen, was moved to anoint the Lord before His death, while she had the opportunity. "She did it for my burial", was the Lord's approval of that act (Matthew 26:12). To have saved the ointment for later, like the women who came on that early Easter morning with their spices to anoint the body of Jesus (Luke 24:1), would have been too late.

"We sit as learners at Thy feet,
Thy words than honey far more sweet." (J. G. Deck)

That same spirit of learning surely characterised the demoniac (Luke 8:26-40). Men had been unable either to help or to tame him. Yet after the demoniac's experience with Jesus, men come and find "the man... sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind" (v. 35). We can readily understand the man's sense of indebtedness to the Lord. That showed itself in his desire to go with the Lord in His journeys (v. 38). But the Lord had better things for him to do. "Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee" was Jesus' command to him. But what was he to tell them? Apart from telling what the Lord had done for him, the man would be able to tell only what he had learned, sitting at the feet of Jesus. Yet the effectiveness of this man's testimony may be readily gauged. The initial, sad response of the inhabitants of Gadara on finding the devils cast out of the demoniac was to beg the Lord to depart from them (v. 37). The sheer holiness of His presence and, no doubt, the realisation that much in their own lives needed to be cast out made them uncomfortable before Him. Yet after this man had lived among them for some time and witnessed to them, such was the effect of his testimony that "the people gladly received" Jesus when he returned later (v. 40). In present day concern for effectiveness in gospel outreach, there must be a lesson to be learned from this man's experience.
"Low at thy feet, Lord Jesus,
This is the place for me;
Here I have learned deep lessons:
Truth that has set me free."

The Three Ministries (2)

GORDON SPRATT

THE KINGDOM (Part 1)

Some time ago there appeared a preliminary article, introductory to the forthcoming series. This was more than a year ago (pages 210ff of volume 49). This introduction indicated that the substance of much of the doctrinal content of the New Testament centred on the contributions from the apostles Peter, Paul, and John, their themes being respectively the kingdom, the church, and the family of God. Some overlap was of course evident, but these were the main distinctive lines in their writings.

A busy life, engaged on many things, has kept Gordon from pursuing this further, but we welcome this start into the substance of this series. For myself, I find the kingdom aspect of N.T. truth among the most difficult to grasp, and look forward to the papers as they arrive.

Having established, hopefully with the confirmation of Scripture, that the New Testament Ministries of Peter, Paul and John present respectively the Kingdom, the Church and the Family of God, we are now in danger of finding ourselves in watertight compartments, whereas it is abundantly clear that each of the three Apostles received and taught all three aspects of Christian truth. If we start with the premise that Peter was the Apostle of the Kingdom, we have to come to terms with the fact that the first positive statement ever made about the Church was addressed to Peter in Matthew 16:18. Also that the statement, "that ye might be partakers of the divine nature", which lies right at the foundation of the idea of the divine family, comes from Peter (2 Peter 1:4) and not from John. Similar considerations apply to the other two apostles, so we shall need to seek confirmation in each case that the distinctive rather than the exclusive
subject of each ministry is as we have stated it.

Why then do we associate the Kingdom in a particular way with Peter? The answer is to be found partly in Peter’s personal history as recorded in the Scriptures, partly in the internal evidence of his Epistles. We shall hope to deal with the first of these in this article, and hopefully return to an examination of the Epistles at a later date.

But first we must remind ourselves of what we mean when we say “the Kingdom”. It is a curious thing that many Christians today have a much clearer idea of what the Church is than of what the Kingdom is, so a few broad guidelines may help. It is not an idea that can be expressed in a simple, comprehensive definition, but the following considerations need to be understood:

1. In general theological terms the Kingdom is the sphere of the authority of God. In many contexts, though not all, the word is used to describe the outward profession rather than the real character of those who are the subjects of the Kingdom. It is so, of course, in our ordinary usage: not every holder of a British passport is a worthy and obedient subject of the realm, but the United Kingdom is understood to include all who can present valid credentials, irrespective of loyalty or moral standing.

2. Scripture teaches that all authority has been committed to the Son. Isaiah 9:6 says, “and the government shall be upon His shoulder”. The Lord Himself says, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). John the Baptist witnesses the same: “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand” (John 3:35).

3. Following the rejection of Christ by His earthly people, the public expression of His Kingdom remains in the future, though it is clearly foretold in prophecy (see, for example, Daniel 7:14, Zechariah 14:9). In the meantime He is absent and His servants are left to serve Him faithfully in view of His return. The parables of the Talents in Matthew 25 and the Pounds in Luke 19 describe the situation.

4. Against this background the present expression of the Kingdom can be looked at in two different ways. Firstly, from a public point of view, there is in the Christian profession a recognition of the authority of Christ. In it there is a mixture of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, the true and the false, the genuine and the counterfeit, so confused that no man can disentangle it until Christ Himself comes to identify and claim what is really of Himself. It is this aspect of the Kingdom that is described in the “kingdom” parables of Matthew 13. But, secondly, there is an individual aspect. When I take the Lord Jesus as my Saviour and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, it is a mark of the work of the Spirit within me that I not only receive Jesus as Saviour, but I confess Him as my Lord. What does
that mean? Practically, that I recognise His authority in every department of my life. My mind, my body, my time, my service, my home, my family, all are His because He has acquired complete authority over me. That we all fail in this total commitment to Christ, is sadly true, but it remains the proper place of all those who own Him as Lord, and it is the present positive expression of the Kingdom.

A simple illustration may help to clarify the matter. For the greater part of the 1939/45 war, France was under the domination of an occupying power. Daily life for the French was lived in subjection to a government which could not expect the willing allegiance of any true Frenchman. Over in London, under the symbol of the Cross of Lorraine, was another government, in exile, without apparent power, yet commanding the loyalty and affection of its suffering people in France who waited daily for its vindication and return. So it is with the true-hearted believer. Our hearts surely cannot find satisfaction in the things of this world, when our Lord is absent and rejected, but we look for the return of the one "whom having not seen, we love" (1 Peter 1:8), and in the meantime it is our duty and privilege to serve Him faithfully in the place where He is disowned.

Perhaps, before returning to Peter, I may be allowed an observation here. It seems to me that Scripture teaches that in our Christian experience we develop through three areas of experience. The first is the Gospel, where I learn my own utter helplessness and need, and the grace of God in meeting that need through the death of His Son. It is a poor Christian who ever forgets that wonderful, unmerited work of reconciliation. The next experience, which should follow hard on the heels of the first, is the Kingdom, where I turn my life over to Christ in personal subjection to His authority. It is an individual thing, but there can be no such thing as a kingdom composed of one person, so I find myself in a collective association with others who live under the same authority. And this leads to the third experience, wherein I learn that "by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). I understand that I am in a corporate relationship in which my individuality is submerged in activities and experiences in which I am interactive and interdependent with every true believer. We call this the Church.

My observation takes the form of a question. Is there the danger that in discovering the blessings and privileges of the Church, and passing from the individual experience of a sinner saved by grace to the intimate association with others which is the Church, I may have neglected the Kingdom experience? It is easy to shelter behind the forms and rituals of Church experience, and in benefitting by the spiritual strength and leadership of others, to become something of a passenger. It is in the
owning of the Lordship of Christ in my personal life that I will become a vigorous and useful Christian. If a particular company of believers have been favoured with distinctive teaching as to the Church, there must be the concomitant danger that a strong personal and individual commitment to Christ may be neglected.

But we must return to Peter. We have just seen that the idea of the Kingdom can be looked at publicly — the whole Christian profession; or personally — the response of Christians individually to the authority of the Lord Jesus in their lives. Both of these aspects are relevant to our study of the Apostle Peter. We must look very carefully at his connection with the Kingdom officially, for some very erroneous ideas have come to be connected with statements made about Peter, particularly in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. We will devote the rest of this article to a consideration of this aspect and leave other considerations to another occasion.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says to Peter, “And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”. There are two particularly important statements here: “Upon this rock I will build my church”, and “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”. Both have given rise to centuries-long controversy, and we need to be clear as to what they mean.

The conferring on Peter of the keys of the kingdom has, of course, nothing to do with such popular absurdities as Peter standing at the gate of heaven, still less with the traditions of the Roman Church which make him the first pope and the beginning of the line of apostolic succession. It was clearly a dignity conferred upon Peter personally and the keys were certainly used in his proclamation at Pentecost of the Kingdom in its present character, and subsequently in his announcement in the house of Cornelius which effectively opened the door of faith to the gentiles. But it is open to serious question whether the keys were given to Peter exclusively and not to others. Let us compare another statement drawn from the previous verse in Matthew 16. Jesus confers upon him personally the name Peter, “a stone”, but the idea is extended in Peter’s first epistle to those others who, as coming to the Lord, are built together as living stones into a spiritual house. In both cases it seems reasonable to infer that what is addressed to Peter as a result of his confession recorded in Matthew 16:16 may be understood as representative rather than as purely personal. Certainly Paul, at Ephesus, exercised an authority very similar to that of Peter (Acts 19:4-6).
But are we right to confine the idea of the keys to those comparatively few occasions when some new development was sanctioned, as at Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius? The Lord Jesus refers to "keys", in the plural, and F. W. Grant has pointed out that you do not need two keys to open the same door twice. The commission to the eleven apostles in Matthew 28:19-20 is twofold: "baptising them" and "teaching them". Are not these the two keys of admission to the kingdom? On the one hand the public act of admission into the Christian profession; on the other hand that process of teaching without which there can be no practical submission to the authority of the Lord. If this is a reasonable inference, then the keys are as actively in use today as ever.

It perhaps reinforces the view that the giving of the keys to Peter was not an exclusive gift if we consider what follows in Matthew 16:19. "And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". In other words discipline is to be exercised on earth in the Lord's absence. But what is in chapter 16 committed to Peter is extended to the whole company of disciples in chapter 18:18.

We must now consider the other statement made to Peter: "Upon this rock I will build my church". There are, in the New Testament, three statements regarding the foundation of the Church, and each must be understood in its context. In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul says, "... I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth upon it. But let every man take heed now he buildeth upon it. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ". The subject is the Church composed of responsible members each of whom is contributing something to it by his (or her) work. The work may be of value and enduring, or it may be valueless and eventually be destroyed, but the point is that it is man building and not Christ. Paul has laid the foundation, according to the commission given to him and recorded in Ephesians 3:9. That foundation is Jesus Christ, and cannot be altered or replaced, whatever the quality of work that man builds upon it.

Ephesians 2:20 says, "ye are ... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone". Briefly this refers to the fact that Christ is building His Church through the gifts which He confers from His present place of glory, and that foundational among those gifts have been those distinctive initial gifts, the apostles and prophets. Ephesians 4:11-13 describes the process, and the apostles and prophets are there listed first among the gifts.

The third statement regarding the foundation of the Church (though of course first in the scriptural record), is our verse in Matthew. The
important words are, “I will build”, for it is Christ’s building that is in view, and it is to be perfect in every particular. Much has been made of the name conferred upon Peter and out of it has grown the notion that Peter was to be the foundation upon which the Church was to be built. What a shaky foundation the energetic and well-intentioned, but weak, erratic and prejudiced Peter would have made! We return to Paul’s assertion, “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”.

As to the distinction often made between petros — a stone, and petra — a rock, no doubt it is a valid one since Matthew wrote in Greek and the distinction between the two words would have been much clearer than in the English translation. But too much must not be made of it, for it has been pointed out that Jesus would actually have spoken in Aramaic and the name given would have been “Cephas” rather than the Greek equivalent, Peter. The truth is that the Lord identified Peter simply as material suitable along with other “living stones” to be incorporated into that edifice which He was to build. Peter’s own personal and distinctive place was to be more in connection with the Kingdom than the Church, which was to be the special province of Paul, and that view is consistent with the general premise of this article.

For reasons of space we must now leave for another article two other considerations which connect Peter with the Kingdom. The first is Peter’s relationship with the Lord Jesus and how that sheds light on our acceptance of His authority in our personal lives. The second is the written ministry of Peter in his two letters and its undoubted emphasis on what we call “kingdom truth”.

**APPOINTMENTS** (Acts 17:30,31 and Hebrews 9:27,28)

“God . . . now commands all men everywhere to repent. Because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead.”

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”
“And as He drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a very considerable crowd of the city was with her. And the Lord, seeing her, was moved with compassion for her, and said unto her, ‘Weep not’. (Luke 7:12-13)

Over the fairest scenes of this world there lies the dark shadow of death. Nain was beautiful, but death was there. Yet into this world of death the Lord of life had come, and not alone with power to raise the dead, but with the love and sympathy that can feel for us in our sorrows, dry our tears, and heal the broken-hearted. Jesus went into the city of Nain, and “His disciples and a great crowd went with Him”. This company with the Lord of life in the midst meets another company with a dead body in the midst; for as the Lord came nigh to the city, “a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she a widow.”

How beautiful is the way the Lord takes to heal her broken heart. Moved with compassion, He first dries her tears, and then removes the cause of her sorrow. We should probably have first raised the dead, and then said to the woman, “Weep not”. But Jesus takes another way — a better way. He first says to the broken-hearted mother, “Weep not”, and then raises the dead. Thus He shows by His compassion and sympathy that He can wipe away our tears before He raises our dead.

This suits our case, for Jesus is gone, and He does not yet raise our loved ones when they are taken from us; but He speaks comfort to our broken hearts and dries our tears while we wait for the day when He will raise our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus. His compassions go before His mercies. We have the comfort of His love while we wait for the display of His resurrection power when “God shall wipe away all tears ... and there shall be no more death.”

Hamilton Smith

APPOINTMENTS (continued from page 95 — Hebrews 1:2)

“His (God’s) Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom he made the worlds.”
Wisdom

... for the passing years and decades, and indeed for each fresh day in life.

"Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

(Psalm 90:12)

"I say unto all, Watch’; “Be like unto men that wait for their Lord.”

(Mark 13:37; Luke 12:36)

“Looking steadfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith.”

(Hebrews 12:2 N.Tr.)

Looking unto Jesus and at nothing else; not at ourselves, not at the world, not at Satan, not at our creeds, not at our position, not at our education, not at the brethren, not at our obstacles, not at our troubles, not at our loved ones, not at our earthly pleasures or possessions, not at causes, not at our interests, not at our sincerity, not at our own strength. Looking unto Jesus, and not at our sins, not at the pretence of our own righteousness, not at the law, not at our deeds before men, not at our success, not at our spiritual gifts, not at our sorrow and humiliation for our sins, not at the joy of our position, not at the strength of our assurance. Looking unto Jesus, and not at the warmth of our love, not at the heights of our holiness, not at our defeats, not at our victories, not at our doubts, not at our fears, not even at our faith.

The enemy would have us look at any or all of these things rather than Jesus, and the last device of the adversary, when he cannot make us look at anything else, is to make us turn our eyes from our Saviour to our own faith, and thus to discourage us if it is weak, and fill us with pride if it is strong. Either way he weakens us, for power does not come from faith but from the Saviour by faith. It is from Him and in Him only that we learn how to look upon all these other things. All that is desirable for us to know, the Lord Jesus will teach us; all that we do not learn from Him, it is better for us not to know.

T. Monod
Self Offering

ALLAN McCANN

This paper is reproduced from ‘Words of Help’. It appeared there in September 1970. Though it is somewhat longer than usual, I feel I must reprint it. This is because of its quality, and the high thoughts of Christ it imparts, together with the requirements upon ourselves which is presses.

The first two books of scripture contain three instances of men offering themselves unreservedly: Isaac, Judah, Moses. Later books provide other examples, but there is something so striking about the self-offerings recorded in Genesis and Exodus that we do well to ponder them in the light of New Testament revelation.

Isaac

The story of Abraham’s offering of his son on Mount Moriah in Genesis 22 is so well known that it may be considered briefly. The figure of the ‘father of the faithful’ is so prominent in that, knowing him to have been a man of like passions with ourselves, we marvel at his breathtaking faith (Hebrews 11:17-19), shown out by works (James 2:21), and can well understand how he came to be called the friend of God.

In the testing of this father’s heart, we see a beautiful foreshadowing of the One who spared not His own Son (Romans 8:32) — if indeed we may speak of foreshadowing in connection with that which formed part of the eternal counsels of God. And the ram caught in the thicket by his horns is the clearest possible picture of the all-important gospel doctrine of substitution.

But what of Isaac’s part in this strange scene? He is pre-eminently the son — the free-born son. Ishmael has no place here. For Isaac there is no question of acting under duress. His later history seems to confirm an element of passivity and submissiveness in his character which did not mark Abraham or Jacob in the same way, and we cannot trace to what extent this was fruit of the divine life or how much was the outcome of natural temperament. Even so, in the crisis on Mount Moriah, it was surely a power above nature that sustained him, for had he not been told beforehand what was to take place? Self-preservation is a strong and universal instinct, and mere nature would have impelled Isaac to resist.

It is just here that the beauty of the type shines with greatest lustre.
Isaac's heart was tested to its depths, but bowed to the will of God, and the obedience of both father and son being manifested at that supreme moment, Abraham's hand was stayed and a substitute found. The son was received again as from the dead; the Divine pledge was given of immutable blessing in the risen seed; and as father and son returned to the servants, they walked — in a figure — in the pathway of resurrection.

Judah

The believer likes to dwell upon the touching and delightful scene in Genesis 45, where Joseph can at last reveal his identity to his brothers. But in the chapter which leads up to this it is Judah who is the central figure.

Joseph's stratagem was designed to test his brothers' hearts — to ascertain their feelings towards their aged father. If they sought to protect Benjamin, then grace had wrought within them and they were changed men.

So the cup was found in Benjamin's sack! Such a happening his brothers might earlier have welcomed as a providential opportunity to rid themselves of him. For Joseph being dead, as they thought, would not their envy of him tend to express itself in hatred of his younger brother? Instead, they rent their clothes and threw themselves despairingly on the ground in the presence of the dreaded despot of Egypt.

Before leaving home, Reuben had in vain offered his two sons as surety for Benjamin. Later, when the family had used up the food brought from Egypt, Judah pledged himself to guarantee Benjamin's safe return, and Jacob reluctantly consented to let him go with his brothers. Now that the worst had happened, Judah steps forward to plead with the ruler of the land in order to make good his suretyship for Benjamin.

Is this the callous, calculating man who had proposed that Joseph be sold to the Ishmaelites — the man whose relations with the Canaanites are recorded in chapter 38? It is the same Judah: but now, thank God, how different! Do we realise what it must have meant to one who from his youth had known only the free, proud life of a nomad, to offer to become a slave in Egypt? No doubt he took it for granted that Joseph had died from inhuman treatment at the hands of some cruel master. Now he was prepared to undergo himself the fate to which some twenty years earlier he had consigned his own brother. A changed man indeed!

It was at this point that Joseph's semblance of severity broke down. How did the interpreter manage to translate, sentence by sentence, Judah's impassioned torrent of words? Probably his services — part of the facade — were redundant anyway, since Joseph heard and would understand his native tongue! As Judah spoke of his father, and the lad, until he reached
the climax of his magnificent plea to be accepted as Benjamin's substitute, Joseph could no longer contain his pent-up emotions. That day Judah found himself, not the slave of a ruthless tyrant, but the welcome guest of a long-lost brother.

**Moses**

Exodus 32 unfolds the tragic but inevitable consequences of the "law-principle": the law is the strength of sin; it makes the offence abound; it works wrath. The people of Israel had placed themselves under it. When it had been proposed to them they had, three times over, unanimously promised obedience (chapters 19 and 24). Redeemed out of bondage, borne on eagles' wings, brought to God Himself, what other answer could they give? And yet, with the deceitfulness of the heart of man already evident by their murmurings along the way, how desperately imprudent a promise to make!

They pledged themselves to obey when at a distance from God and when heart-obedience was impossible. Their desire for a visible god evinced self-will and impatience, and by playing on his weakness they dragged the more responsible Aaron down to their own level. This was the drama of Eden all over again, while the blend of good intentions and fleshly self-confidence reminds us of Simon Peter on the night of his Master's betrayal. In every case the fall was immediate and complete, but here at Sinai, the ordained high-priest having fallen with the people, Moses himself takes on the office of high priest and intercedes for them — how mightily, and with utter self-denial! For his heart is searchingly tested by the offer that he should become the progenitor of a greater nation than Israel. But he pleads God's own glory and His promises on Israel's behalf, so that the nation is spared.

His zeal for that same glory causes him to break the tables of the law at the sight of the people's sin, and he executes unsparing judgment. But his heart is still filled with love for his nation as God's people, and "fearing and quaking" he again climbs the mount of God, if so be that he may "peradventure" make an atonement for them. As mediator he will identify himself with them so completely that he pleads to be blotted out of God's book for their sakes. How like the great apostle to the Gentiles, whose love for Israel produced not only great grief and uninterrupted pain in his heart, but even the desperate though passing desire to be made a curse from Christ for their sakes (Romans 9:1-3).

But the Divine answer to Moses was: "Whosoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." True, Moses' mediation presently obtains a fresh covenant. This, however, while proclaiming God as slow
to anger, abundant in mercy and truth, and showing grace to whom He will, leaves the people still under trial, a trial which culminated at the cross. And the apostle characterizes this covenant as the ministration of death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3). Great as was Moses' love for his people, it could not save them from the ultimate consequences of sin against a holy God.

Some contrasts

All these things were written for our instruction, and the foregoing three men, in the reality of their self-sacrifice, stand out as witnesses of what the Spirit of God has wrought in renewed human hearts. They are, at the same time, figures of Him who was to come, and, like the two Adams of Romans 5, they teach us by way of contrast as well as by likeness.

In their free, voluntary self-offering, they are beautiful types of the One who offered Himself without spot to God. And let us bear in mind that when the Holy Spirit describes, in the opening chapters of Leviticus, the offerings that look on to the work of the Son, He begins, not with the sin-offering, but with the burnt-offering: that which is most precious to God's heart occupies the first place.

On the other hand we know that, with all their willingness, their self-offering was not consummated: that for which they offered themselves was not ultimately required of them. (This is also true of those of like spirit in later O.T. times, as David's three mighty men, Esther, Daniel's companions).

Here the contrast is complete, as it was intended that the Lord of glory should have the pre-eminence in all things. In His one offering, we see obedience perfected to the point of death, even the death of the cross; unmitigated Divine wrath endured and exhausted; life voluntarily given up; and love strong as death — love to His Father and to ruined sinners — finding an eternal redemption.

The details of those other self-offerings set up other contrasts:

(1) Isaac on the way enquires "where is the lamb?"; but the divine record lets us into the secret of eternal counsels in which the Son undertook to come into the place of weakness and suffering in order to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

(2) Judah offers himself in complete ignorance of the true state of things: he does not know that Benjamin is innocent, nor that the one he regards as a terrible tyrant is his own brother whose loving heart harbours no resentment whatsoever against him. But the blessed Lord offers Himself in full knowledge of the guilt of man, and also, thank God, of the heart of the Eternal that devised such a wonderful plan of salvation.
(3) Moses offers to make atonement, but he is morally unfit to take that place. While spiritually and intellectually he towers above his weak and idolatrous people, yet he partakes of the same fallen nature as the most degraded of them. In seeking their good he had, earlier on, committed murder; at a later date he was to give way to unbelief and impatience (Numbers 11:11-15; 20:7-13); and beside such extreme outbreaks of his old nature, the tests and tensions of daily life produced minor failures and shortcomings, as even the most saintly of any age can testify.

But what a privilege it is to turn from “man whose breath is in his nostrils” to the second Man out of heaven, victorious at every point where the first had failed, and at the end of His course marked out as perfectly fitted to make atonement, not merely for a chosen people, but for the sins of the whole world.

The lawgiver went up with the vain hope of making atonement: the Son, lifted up from the earth, made full atonement, and then ascended to the highest place in glory in virtue of that one offering. We who believe see ourselves accepted and set apart for God in the full value of it.

Christ alone could make propitiation; yet as regards the self-emptying lowliness which was manifested in that act, we are exhorted to have the same mind (Philippians 2:5-8), and to follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21).

As types, those O.T. worthies necessarily fall short of the great Antitype; yet, looked at in themselves, they may be of great service to us if the thought of their devotion leads us, not to morbid introspection, but to humble and healthy exercise in view of the apostle’s appeal in Romans 12:1. They offered themselves at a given moment of crisis, whereas our intelligent service is to maintain a constant attitude of heart and mind. True, the new nature, however excellent its desires, is not sufficient by itself to carry this out in practice; but is not the indwelling Spirit present to produce — continuously — fruits equal in quality to those exhibited, in times of testing, long ages before Pentecost?

Single persons praying effectively:

“Fear not Zacharias . . . thy prayer is heard”  (Luke 1:13)
“Cornelius . . . thy prayer is heard”          (Acts 10:31)
“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”  (James 5:16)
Behold my Hands and my Feet (3)

GORDON HUGHES

The Ears of Jesus

This paper rounds off a short series which has warmed the hearts of many readers. It has done this simply by picking out and putting together relevant scriptures on each of the three themes in turn. In result, to the appreciative reader, something is received which is profound indeed.

Previous studies have considered the hands and the feet of the Lord, explicitly mentioned in the Gospels. By contrast, no explicit mention is made of His ears in the New Testament. Nevertheless there are Old Testament Scriptures which have a prophetic bearing on this subject.

"Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened" (Psalm 40:6). That the Lord Jesus is in view here is clearly supported by the fact that verses 6-8 of Psalm 40 are directly applied to Christ by the writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:5-7). The word used for "opened" is literally "digged" — the same word used when Isaac's servants dug a well (Genesis 26:25). Prophetically the Lord would seem to be saying that there was a direct, unobstructed channel of communication between Himself and His Father, this ever-opened ear implying a complete readiness to do His Father's will. There is considerable truth in the saying, "There's none so deaf as those who don't want to hear". No fewer than sixteen times does God lament through His servant Jeremiah that His people "hearkened not" unto Him. The delight of the Lord Jesus both to listen and to do His Father's will shines out in beautiful contrast against this dark background of wilful disobedience.

Interestingly, the quotation of "mine ears hast thou digged" in Hebrews 10 becomes "a body has thou prepared me". There is no contradiction between these two in so far as the totality of obedience resulting from this direct channel between the Lord and His Father corresponded to a "body prepared".

One other Old Testament Scripture has a direct bearing on our subject. "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned (or instructed). The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I
was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (Isaiah 50:4,5). That these Scriptures are directly applicable to the Lord is justified by the fact that the subsequent v. 6 is entirely in harmony with the treatment meted out to the Lord by His enemies just before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:67; 27:26). This Scripture again emphasizes the openness of communication between Son and Father and the complete readiness of the Son to be instructed and to be obedient. What vital lessons these are for all children of God today!

Even though the Lord’s ears may not be explicitly mentioned in the Gospels, their use is necessarily implied. In the solitary Scriptural mention of His boyhood, we see Him in the temple “both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). With no trace of bumptiousness or arrogance, He beautifully displays the place of subjection as befitted a twelve year old boy.

If we accept that prayer is a two-way process, i.e. not only talking to God but giving time to listen to Him too (though, alas, we often emphasize the former at the expense of the latter), then in the Gospels we frequently find the Lord Jesus engaged in this two-way process. It is significant that Luke’s Gospel — the Gospel of the dependent Man — instances no fewer than seven occasions on which the Lord was found in prayer:

(1) 3:21 praying at His baptism
(2) 5:16 praying in the wilderness
(3) 6:12 praying all night prior to choosing the twelve
(4) 9:18 praying alone
(5) 9:28,29 praying on the mount of transfiguration
(6) 11:1 praying and thus provoking disciples to desire “Lord, teach us to pray”
(7) 22:41,44,45 praying in Gethsemane

How perfectly was His dependence shown!

The Scriptures considered so far have emphasized the ears of the Lord Jesus as always ready to listen to His Father’s word. Yet the Gospels clearly demonstrate that the Lord was fully attuned to all that was going on around Him and nothing escaped His attention. The charge of being so heavenly minded as to be no earthly use could never be levelled against Him!

“Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee” (Matthew 4:12). We are not told how Jesus learned this news though no doubt the Lord was waiting for this signal. He would not begin His public ministry while John the Baptist still occupied the public gaze. Notwithstanding that John would readily defer to Him (John 1:27; 3:30), the Lord would in no way detract from this honoured servant of His by seeming to set up a rival ministry.
“And his disciples (i.e. of John) came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart” (Matthew 14:12,13). This time the disciples of John the Baptist themselves brought the sad news of their master’s death. That Jesus felt the matter keenly is evidenced by His wish to be alone. In a busy life of ceaseless ministry, He still found time to be acquainted with and to feel for the needs of His own.

“I must tell Jesus all of my trials;
I cannot bear these burdens alone.
In my distress he kindly will help me;
He ever loves and cares for His own.”

May we, too, remember that His ear is always available to us in our needs. Men today lay great store on “having the ear” of someone in a position of authority and power. But we have the ear of the most understanding and the most powerful of men — the Man in heaven.

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” (John 9:35). Again we are not told how news of the once blind man’s excommunication reached the ear of the Lord but that news moved the Lord to immediate action. Nor are we told how long the Lord spent looking for him until He found him (just as Scripture does not tell us how long the shepherd sought until he found the sheep that was lost (Luke 15:4)) but find him He did. The Lord so reveals Himself to this man that now not just his physical eyes but, as it were, his spiritual eyes are opened and the man is moved to worship the Lord. Happy outcome indeed! The Jews had sought, by excommunication, to deprive the man of the presence of God, as they thought. But the solicitude of the Lord ensured the man a place in His own presence to worship Him.

“When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (John 11:4). Mary and Martha’s almost automatic response in their need was to send a message to their Master. Although He heard their news, He would only move in answer to their need at the right time. That absence of immediate response must have sorely tried Mary and Martha as to whether their cry from the heart had gone unheeded. It is noteworthy however that Scripture plainly insists, whatever might be the outcome, that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus (v. 5). Whatever their temporary sorrow, how they must have rejoiced subsequently when their dead brother, Lazarus, was restored to them and for the vision of the glory of God (v. 4) that was theirs through this experience.
How often amidst trouble or difficulty we are inclined to think that nobody cares or is concerned or even knows about us and our problems. May this study reinforce in each one of us the sense that there is absolutely nothing which concerns His own which escapes our Lord's attention. Truly we are of more value to Him than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

Our response

We have previously considered the total commitment of the Lord Jesus to His Father as expressed in His life through His hands, feet and ears. We began with Peter's reminder that He has left us an example that we should follow His steps (1 Peter 2:21). This study would be incomplete without considering the challenge that faces us as we consider Him.

Two Old Testament pictures may be helpful. The first concerns Aaron and his sons in their consecration to the priesthood (Exodus 29; Leviticus 8). Their fitness to minister before God rested on the sacrifices that were offered on the day of consecration. The ram of consecration, with which Aaron and his sons were identified by the laying on of hands, was killed and its blood was first applied to the right ear of Aaron and his sons, to the thumb of the right hand and to the big toe of the right foot. The remainder of the blood was sprinkled upon the altar. There was thus enacted before their eyes the reminder that the same blood which answered to God for them at the same time laid claim upon ears to listen to His word, upon hands to carry out His service in the sanctuary, and upon feet to walk in His courts. Subsequently oil was placed upon ear, thumb and toe — figurative of the Holy Spirit in whose energy that commitment might be carried out.

A similar picture unfolds in Leviticus 14 in the cleansing of the leper. When, by the grace of God, the leper found himself made whole, sacrifice must be offered and the blood again applied on the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand and the big toe of the right foot. Again these are, as it were, cleansed and claimed for God but this time with a view, not to service in the sanctuary as with Aaron and his sons, but rather to walk in the world.

Now it must be said that the Lord Jesus needed no sacrifice to make His service fit for His God. Indeed Scripture jealously guards the perfection and absolute sinlessness of Christ (He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22); He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21); in Him is no sin (1 John 3:5)). It was because He needed no sacrifice for Himself that He was able to become the sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 7:27; 9:24-26). The New Testament however, repeatedly emphasizes the fact that in coming to Christ as our Saviour and thus availing ourselves of His sacrifice at Calvary, we at the same
time come under the obligations of that sacrifice. “For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Peter solemnly reminds the Christians to whom he was writing that they were set apart not only to the sprinkling of the blood of Christ but also to the obedience of Christ (1 Peter 1:2). We have considered throughout this study something of the obedience of Christ as expressed in His service to His Father and to men through His hands, His feet and His ears. May that same obedience find its expression in our lives too!

The only hands God has to do His work in this world are our hands. The only feet God has to run on His business in this world are our feet. The only ears God has to which He can speak and which, in turn, can listen out for the needs of others in this world are our ears.

“His hands and feet and heart all three
Were pierced for me at Calvary,
And here and now, to Him I bring
My hands, feet, heart an offering.” (D. Wood)

Unfinished?

PAUL FOOT

Acts 28:30,31

This short paper was written down by its author, in response to suggestions from others, only days after he spoke on the same lines at a fellowship meeting in early November 1989. It was the closing word of ministry at that meeting. Of course I welcome it, not least because it shows that, while in “this earthly tabernacle”, young or old, free or restricted, our business as the Lord’s people is to use our time and opportunities in His concerns.

One of the schools of Christian thought of a past generation held that the Book of the Acts of the Apostles would be better entitled the Book of the Acts of the Risen, Ascended and Glorified Lord. At the opening of the book, Luke speaks of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach during His
earthly ministry being recorded in his first writing, the Gospel. Whilst it is an unassailable truth that the mighty work of our redemption effected at Calvary was once and for all (John 17:4; 19:30; Hebrews 7:27,28 etc.), Luke describes in Acts how as risen, ascended and glorified the Lord Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit is continuing that work that He began to do and teach as He operates through the church, His body on earth at the present time. So Luke's account ends with the statement that Paul was in his own hired house, thought by some to be up to forty miles from Rome, but blessedly available to all who desired to avail themselves of his company. We would call it “house arrest” — not in conditions of discomfort as he experienced in jail at Philippi, but none the less conditions of restraint.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul likens our present mortal body to a temporary dwelling, the final dissolution of which is, for the believer, entrance into the Lord's immediate presence, which is far better. So one feels justified in likening our present portion in this life to the apostle's existence in his own hired house, not entirely disagreeable, for in it we prove so much of Divine mercy and blessing, but still awaiting our full liberation and fulfilment when we shall see Him and be like Him, having our bodies fashioned like to His glorious body (Philippians 3:21).

How are we using the time in the hired house of our own bodies? The apostle was freely available to all who wished to come and learn from him, and the preceding verses show that he was able to invite persons to come to him. How well he used those two years! How challenging, yet encouraging to us all!

But his great objective, his constant occupation was to preach the kingdom of God, and to teach the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom is the sphere in which God's rights are owned and His rule known in all its beneficent but undisputed sway. Christ alone amongst men could so speak of Himself — “the kingdom of God is among you” Luke 17:21. Paul did not preach a social gospel, or any shade of political opinion, though as any intelligent Christian, he would have a judgment as to the inability of the first order of man to fulfil the responsibility of administration of even earthly things, as we noticed when looking at Genesis 2 and 3 this afternoon. But he did teach the things which concern our Lord Jesus Christ — again, our thoughts have been directed to the wonderful and beautiful typical teaching as to Christ and the church seen in those earlier portions of Genesis. Eve the help meet, the fitting counterpart to the man, so clearly exhibiting the Divine pleasure and intention which is to be fully realised in that coming day of display, when Christ has His rightful place at the head of the new order of things, the world to come, of which we speak
(Hebrews 2:5). Christ the Head, at His side the Bride, a spectacle for men and angels to wonder at! We have also profited from the consideration of the exalted place that the Man Christ Jesus has in the mind of God, as seen in Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2. Time precludes the prolongation of this wonderful theme, suffice it to say that Paul fully utilised the two years of his enforced restriction to continue that work that Jesus began to do and to teach.

Surely the great privilege and responsibility of the church now — of its every individual member indeed, is to use the time left to us in the occupancy of our own hired house, our earthly tabernacle, in the demonstration in every detail of our lives, of the beneficent result of the rule of God's kingdom, and in teaching, probably by discussion, the things concerning our Lord and Saviour.

Many dear brothers and sisters are obviously in restricted conditions, perhaps in countries where government is oppressive and even atheistic. But in the relatively free Western world, some are in conditions of financial restriction, or severe physical disablement. All such can be visited, and most such saints can invite folk to them. One would encourage all such to persevere in prayer and to engage in the ongoing work, the Acts of the Risen, Ascended and Glorified Lord in teaching these heavenly matters that we have briefly but blessedly touched upon this day. This great involvement must be the Church's activity, till He comes. Not till then will that work be complete. Musicians may enjoy the Unfinished Symphony, Christians enjoy participation in those things that Jesus began to do and to teach during His earthly ministry, and which He, by the agency of the body, in the power of the Holy Spirit, graciously continues till that soon-coming moment of rapture. Then that which is unfinished shall be completed, to the eternal delight of Divine persons. Amen.

Life in our mortal bodies:

"Ye are not your own... ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

"My earnest expectation and hope... (is) that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death."

(1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Philippians 1:20)
The Mediator

COLIN CURRY

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” 1 Timothy 2:5,6

This paper was originally to be a short introduction to a series entitled 'Shadows of the one mediator', which would have picked out a few examples of the spirit of the mediator, mostly from the N.T. It has been on the shelf for at least two years, since the series has not yet been proceeded with. I include it here however, as a single paper. It fits in well with the paper on 'self offering', and also it makes points on the assembly prayer meeting which I think are important.

The short sentence “there is One God” is one of the most direct and straightforward assertions in Scripture. Today there are those who boldly deny this statement, but more often its truth is ignored, even by those who might agree with it if challenged.

Where the Christian gospel was first preached, especially among non-Jews, there were, in the wider world, “gods many, and lords many” (1 Corinthians 8:5,6), but the writer of that passage could pick out Christian believers in saying that “to us there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ”. This quotation distinguishes true Christians from unconverted Jews and adherents to non-Christian ‘faiths’. Over the face of our earth there are vast numbers never yet having been exposed to the light of Christ. These fear ‘many gods’ and are in bondage to false beliefs and superstitions. Sadly also, in the present sophisticated Western world, all kinds of unwitting devotion to ‘other gods’ carries on under the ‘Christian’ umbrella. Other objectives replace ‘the One Lord’ as the great Controller over the lives of many. This is prevalent. There is surely a great need to think of our opening verse as covering more than tenets easily subscribed to, but issues to be faced squarely in our own present-day personal lives.

Our intention was to follow a short series of meditations on the Mediatorship of Christ. We had hoped to pick out a few Scriptural illustrations of ‘the One Mediator’. Of course, none of these other persons can at all adequately fill the role of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless we can see in them some features which are pale reflections of Himself. Quite
plainly in the text we are considering here, there is no other person in view, apart from Himself. HE occupies His own separate and unique position as the One totally competent to stand between God and man.

First, however, the opening of chapter 2 should be seen in its context. The words 'first of all' (in 2:1) should be noted. Paul, in this epistle, entrusts the younger Timothy with a charge (chapter 1). He must convey to the assembly where he was (Ephesus), details about godly order and behaviour there. There are specific things later — regarding men, women, husbands, wives, widows (young and old), rich people, recognition and respect for elders. There are words about the importance of overseers, persons of some experience and weight, guides and helpers, and other kinds of contributors towards the well-being of the Christian gathering. There are words directed to Timothy himself (though highly important for ourselves also), telling him how he may be a person able to speak for God, yet also exemplary in manner, so that he may affect others for their good. In broad terms the rest of the epistle covers these details.

But what comes first, before all this? "First of all, prayers . . . for all men." All aspects of prayer, for all men, in their wide variety of kinds and stations. We might ask ourselves whether this, particularly the assembly prayer meeting, comes first among our priorities. This is the Word of God to us all.

But why is this desirable? The answer to this, in verses 3 and 4, is that it is good and acceptable to God, since it reflects God’s own disposition towards men. It is His desire that all men should be saved and blessed. In praying thus we show that we are in tune with Himself. Do we ever think that coolness regarding assembly prayer, and especially in this aspect of assembly prayer, may indicate weakness in real zeal for the blessing of men? There may be many burdens to present to God at our prayer-meetings, but do we put first, as Paul seems to do, the desire for the salvation of men? It is a testing question.

At that point our headline text follows. Repeated references to 'all men' thread through the opening of this chapter. We are to pray for 'all', because the One God, our Saviour, desires (without any discrimination) the same blessing for 'all'. The measure of that desire is that One great Mediator is available, who has given Himself a ransom for 'all'. Would that our concern for men at large, and for individual persons, may show something of that genuineness and earnestness which motivated the Man Christ Jesus in His self-giving on their behalf!

Verse 7 links with the close of verse 6, saying that the great action of the Man Christ Jesus (giving Himself a ransom for all), now accomplished, was being witnessed to on a wide scale. Paul himself had been raised up
to carry a major part in the early testimony to it. It is of great importance to seek to participate in that testimony, actively and by strong support in prayer, and not to flag in this so long as its ‘due time’ continues. Perhaps it is not surprising that the whole passage, which arose from the need for urgent prayer for all kinds of men, reverts again (in verse 8) to the urgency for comprehensive prayer in all places where believers are gathered. Men are to pray, ‘lifting up holy hands, without wrath or doubting’, and sisters to act quietly, supporting by their presence, in their appropriate manner, as becomes women showing the fear of God in their demeanour. Why is it that the least attended is often the prayer meeting, the one that is first chosen for opting out from? In some cases missing the gospel prayer meeting seems almost the norm for sisters.

In a recent paper (Volume 49 1988 p. 234) we quoted J. G. Bellett, referring to Moses and Elias, David, and Paul, as showing traces of Christ, God’s perfect Servant. Having done so, he continues as follows: “Lovely reflections of the perfect Servant such actings were. But they, and all like them found in Scripture, or among the saints, are more distant from the great Original than we have measures to measure.” If we look at things pictured in the actions and attitudes of some Scriptural figures, as has been done in Allan McCann’s paper, we certainly find this comment relevant. HE stands quite alone and apart. Lovely features of our blessed Lord may be seen in others, yet all these illustrations fall far short of HIMSELF.

“All are too mean to speak His worth
Too mean to set the Saviour forth.”

Assemblies urged to pray:

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2)

“Continue instant in prayer.”
(Romans 12:12)

“Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks:
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus
concerning you.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:17,18)
More Precious than Gold

ALLAN RETALLICK

Even on the material plane few things would compare in value with gold. Lifting our sights to the spiritual level however, many things rank far higher. The author here says his paper arises from thoughts on some expressions in Proverbs.

Very early in man's history we find that he sought after riches. Even Abraham, we read, was "rich in silver and gold", and on the first pages of the Bible we read of the land of Havilah, "where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good" (Genesis 2:11,12). Yet in the Book of Proverbs we find some things that are more to be sought after than gold or silver. The first of these we find in Proverbs 2:4. Many times, indeed, in this book we read of wisdom, knowledge, understanding and prudence. There are several Hebrew words for these qualities, and it must have been a difficult task for the translators of the Bible to find suitable words in our language for these. Verse 3 of this chapter advises the reader to seek wisdom, and our verse suggests that we should use the same diligence as if we were looking for a hidden treasure. When we think of men that have spent their lives in scouring the sea-bed, or digging in the earth, simply to find some supposed hoard that has been lost to sight for centuries, we may wonder how much time we are prepared to spend in seeking the true wisdom, which the scriptures tell us is to be found only in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Wisdom of God. The writer of this book assures us that if we are ready to seek out these admirable virtues, we shall understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. This reminds us of the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy, when he writes: "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). May we emulate the psalmist, who tells us: "I love Thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psalm 119:127).
The next we find in chapter 8, verse 10, "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold." Here it is Wisdom personified speaking. In the later verses of this chapter we come to the conclusion that this mysterious Wisdom can be no other than our blessed Lord Himself, daily the Father's delight, and with Him "in the beginning". Our Lord said to His disciples in the upper room: "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to Him" (John 14:21). We are assured that His commandments are not grievous, and what a reward there is for heeding His "instructions"! To be loved by the Father and the Son, and to have the Son of God manifesting Himself to us is surely more precious than "thousands of gold and silver". The earliest followers of the Lord Jesus were characterised by obedience to His words, and even their enemies took note of them, that they had been with Jesus. He was manifested, not only to them, but in them. It is not enough to delight in reading the Word of God, but we shall find that true blessing comes from total obedience to it. If the love of money is a root of all evil, "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

When we come to chapter 10, we find something that has a very up-to-date ring about it. Verse 20 speaks of the tongue of the just, which is as choice silver, while the heart of the wicked is of little worth. This book has much to tell us about our tongue and our lips. For the believer it is important to pray, as the Psalmist did: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). How much damage can be done by slander, evil speaking of our brethren, repeating things that are best left unsaid! A proverb reminds us that "speech is silver, but silence is golden". Our blessed Lord gives us a wonderful example in the times when He would easily have defended Himself, but knew that it was the time to keep silent. Even His enemies marvelled that He was able to "guard the door of His lips", lips which could, on occasion, speak words of peace to a repentant sinner, and yet condemn the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Since the words that we speak are the manifestation of what is within us, the tongue and the heart are both mentioned in this verse. Each one of us who knows the plague of his own heart, must yearn to be able to speak only that which edifies. In this same chapter we find that the mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom, and the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable (verses 31 and 32), and verse 21 tells us that the lips of the righteous feed many. Let us cultivate such lips that may glorify our Lord and be of profit to others! Then we shall fulfil the words of Proverbs 20:15: "There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel".
Chapter 22 begins with a statement that has stood the test of time: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold". Many fabulously rich people have sacrificed all that was worth while in their pursuit of wealth, and at the end of their lives have discovered that they were not loved or respected by anyone. Surely it is far better to be poor and honest, respected by those that know us best, than to compromise with evil, and lose our good name. For the believer it is vital that we behave, as the apostle warned the Ephesians, circumspectly: that is, that the world can see us from all sides, and yet not be able to point the finger at any inconsistency with that which we profess. This is a high standard, but it is that which our Lord Himself set for his followers. He could challenge His enemies: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" Even His accusers could find no true ground of evidence against Him. The second part of the verse speaks of "loving favour", which, we are told, is better than silver and gold. There are various opinions as to the meaning of this expression, but for the believer it must be God's favour that is sought rather than the opinions of men, and then there will certainly be the fruit of which Proverbs 8:19 speaks: "My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold." Of more than one patriarch we read that "he walked with God", or "God was with him". Then the opinions of men will be esteemed as less than worthless.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (25:11). This is a development of the thought that we had earlier. If the lips are the means of expressing the thoughts of our heart, then it follows that those who are constantly occupied with the glory of the Lord cannot do otherwise than speak of Him. If gold speaks of the glory and righteousness of God, then the silver reminds us of His redemptive grace. The Colossians were enjoined: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6). Even the people at Nazareth were impressed by the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth (Luke 4:22). We have all known ministering brethren who always had the right word on any occasion, and, even when there were delicate matters to be discussed, could do this in a gracious way. One could detect in this that they were constantly in the presence of the Lord, who is meek and lowly of heart. Such words are remembered when other, perhaps more eloquent, lectures have been forgotten. In this, too, we need to "learn of Him".

The last chapter of Proverbs is well known to most of us. The last section speaks of the virtuous woman, of whom we read that she is one that fears the Lord. Of her we do not read that she is "worth her weight in gold", as some husbands are willing to testify of their wives, but it does tell us that her price is far above rubies (verse 10). We read that her
children arise up, and call her blessed, and her husband praises her. She is the exemplification of the text that we found in chapter 22: she has a good name, both in her own home and also in the eyes of all who come into contact with her. Happy the man who has such a wife! Happy, indeed, are all who are, even if not of the wealthy ones of this life, “rich in good works”. They are of the company that, like Moses, can afford to refuse the standards of this world, “esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt”. Let us, too, seek the things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. He will then entrust to us the “true riches”.

A Voice in the Wilderness

D. S. HODSON

Outside the Camp

Those who receive the circular ‘Tidings’ would find the following paper enclosed with it in December 1989. Its writer appends the phrase ‘A voice in the wilderness’ with his signature. The content of the paper rang true as I read it; particularly so because it stays with Hebrews 13:11-13 in its context, and does not extend beyond those limits.

Its writer assures me that he has no wish to criticize any of his brethren — only that we all should reconsider together these and kindred verses, so that, seeing more of their teaching, we may be enabled to obey them more closely. I need hardly say that I have his permission to reproduce this.

But the paper is not really one single lone voice. It will echo the thoughts of several today, who, abiding by the Scriptures as they are, will find much to support its writer here.

Until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Jews in the Land could be said to be in possession of the true worship of God. The Lord Himself recognised it. He could speak of Herod’s temple as being His Father’s house, and Jerusalem ‘where men ought to worship’, and He observed the National feasts. On the other hand the Gentiles were complete outsiders, ‘without hope and without God in the world’. The worship of
the true and living God was therefore a privilege that belonged peculiarly and exclusively to Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6).

The Lord intimated to the woman at the well that Gerizim and Jerusalem, as places of worship, would soon be superseded by worship of a spiritual character; no longer requiring a vast building and an ordained priesthood with all its accompanying accessories. To worship the Father in spirit and in truth would be the new divine institution: this anticipating a sacrifice that could make the individual believer so perfect in the sight of God, that God could righteously dwell with him, and give him the capacity, by the Holy Spirit, to worship Him in truth.

"But Christ the heavenly Lamb took all our guilt away, A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they."

And while the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ was primarily Godward, i.e. propitiatory, answering to all the claims of God’s nature and upholding the integrity of His throne, it has also given the believer the right and privilege to enter the Holiest to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. So that the elaborate Jewish system with its pompous atmosphere and exacting regulations has no place today. It is in abeyance until Millennial times. Meanwhile, the Church is where God has been pleased to place His worship.

Between the ascension to heaven of our blessed Lord and the continuance of the Temple services to 70 A.D. the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews rightly judged that Jerusalem, together with its apostate devotees, represented the Camp where God had previously set His name — the very system which earlier had repudiated the Son of the Father’s bosom, and at the Cross had reviled Him as the confessed Son of God.

So, beloved brethren, let us be clear about this. It was the Camp that crucified the Lord of Glory. The mass of the dwellers of Jerusalem, and the elders particularly, denounced both the person of Christ and His teaching. They would not allow that He was the Son of God — the God whom they professed to worship. At His trial the most damaging indictment brought against Him was that He said He was the Son of God.

Another feature that identified the Camp was idolatry. (Certainly Judah had renounced idolatry after the captivity.) But when Moses came down from the Mount with the tables of the Law he was provoked to great anger when he realised the people, who had already been sprinkled with the blood of the Covenant, had so quickly countermanded their allegiance to it. Indeed this was idolatry. They had turned from the true and living God to the golden calf. Moses thereupon withdrew from the Camp; God acknowledging his action by transferring the cloudy pillar to his place of separation. In 2 Corinthians 6 it was idolatry, particularly, that provoked
the Apostle's injunction "come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing".

So here we have the two principal features that designated the Camp both in O.T. and N.T. times, viz. idolatry and the denial of the Sonship of Christ (John is more emphatic, the Father and the Son), to which also should be added the defunct Jewish legal system. And where do we see the Camp today? Certainly the Papal system is a classic example of it. It perpetuates most of the features of Judaism and adds Mariolatry and other blasphemies thereto; yet ironically confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. Indeed all religious groups that deny the Sonship of Christ and exalt their man-exalting schemes is the Camp in principle. Therefore in this context, we today, need much wisdom in discerning where the truth lies in view of the complex structure of the Christian environment. It is clear that every true believer has the Altar — which is in contrast with the Camp; the Altar presumably speaking of Christ, and the two figures speaking of grace and The Law respectively. It is axiomatic, therefore, that to be associated with the Altar is to be outside the Camp.

Outside the Camp is a place a rejection with Christ; of reproach; of unpopularity, where the holiness of God and His truth are maintained, however feebly. No place here for spiritual conceit and human traditions and worldliness, but rather for humbleness of mind, and kindness and grace — solicitous of other believer's welfare, together with a clear proclamation of the Gospel to whosoever will. Oh beloved brethren we are well off course if we imagine that aloofness from other fellow believers is the path of Christian separation and faithfulness to God. Is it not high time that this separatist idea of religious elitism ought to be eliminated from our attitudes and theology? It is man's invention and entirely unscriptural. Outside the Camp is where the Church testifies, and in the Body aspect they contribute — provided they are in communion with the Head — to the well-being of the whole. This is more obvious, of course, in the local setting. The better instructed believer who finds himself outside the Camp yet separated practically from other Christians, because of their unawareness of Assembly truth, should show his genuine concern by living Christ before them — showing forth His excellencies — and such an attitude would captivate. The cynical frown or closed shop is hardly so effective!

Hebrews 13 does not give us authority to classify born-again Christians outside brethren circles as coming within the Camp. Which poses the question, to what extent may one have fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ who are impeccable in doctrine and practice save in Church truth? The Apostle seems to be saying in 1 Corinthians 10 that by breaking the Bread we are already having fellowship with the whole
Body of Christ, “for we being many are One Bread and One Body, for we are all partakers of that One Bread”. It is as though such persons are in the same Meeting Room as ourselves when we break bread. How tragic therefore, that in practice we hold such ones at a distance. Is it that they are defiled? God forbid!

The Apostle also said we should “follow righteousness, faith, love and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”. And are not the pure-hearted ones those who uphold the glory of the person of the Son of God and have purged consciences, and thus fitted for the Holiest?

Further, Hebrews 13 does not imply uniformity, or getting into a mould where human strictures are in evidence. Even Nature itself contradicts the idea with its varied colours and forms. And surely ones of different backgrounds and dispositions who are redeemed by the blood of Christ are brought into the Church and are not part of the Camp, where legality, idolatry, and denial of the Son of God are characteristic. Enlarging the Camp to include all believers outside ‘Brethren’ circles seems a serious departure from the teaching of Scripture. While we cannot go along to the denominations and proselitize their members, we can show our warm love for them when we meet them, and welcome them to our meetings. Oh don’t, dear brethren, frown upon them, they are so precious to Christ, who died for them as well as you.

Let us, dear brethren, do some re-thinking on this subject, and let us forthwith esteem other saints better than ourselves. “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren”. “Beloved let us love one another for love is of God.”

“Lift up your heads, ye gates; yea, lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is he, this King of glory? Jehovah of hosts, he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:9,10)

When the time came for the Shepherd of Israel to come in grace to His own sheepfold, He entered by the door, the porter opening it for Him (John 10:2). He came in grace at that time, recognized only by His own sheep whom He called out of the fold of Israel, to begin the forming of His flock, the church of God. For centuries since that time the nation of Israel has been desolate, without a Shepherd, for they rejected Him.
Factors in Spiritual Increase

COLIN CURRY

Mark 4:21-27

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

(Proverbs 11:24)

"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister (servant) of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine . . . in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

(1 Timothy 4:6-16)

I have found F. W. Grant's remarks on this passage helpful, and to some extent the paper which follows arose out of those remarks.

There seems naturally enough to be a tendency to take special notice of prominent parts of Scripture, leaving aside other parts which do not register so decisively in our minds. For instance, familiarity with the Gospels could mean that we recall the fact that Mark 4 begins with the parable of the sower, and also that it finishes with the stilling of the storm on the lake. But what intervenes between these passages? This less readily comes back into our minds. This paper touches on the close of the parable of the sower, but dwells more on those intermediate verses, which also stress important things for us, some of which are passed over in the other Gospels.

The rooting and grounding of spiritual life

The parable of the sower might be thought of as picturing causes of barrenness when the Word of God is heard. That Word has the potential for initiating life, whoever may hear it. But it is the reception the hearer gives to it that determines the outcome. A sower sows a field knowing well that some seed will be 'wasted' (i.e. unproductive). The whole operation is worthwhile despite this. The parable has some obvious lessons for Christians. It encourages persistence in 'holding forth the word of life', undeterred by non-successes. There is a further lesson too — it tests us about our own reactions when the Word of God is presented in our hearing. Few among real believers can honestly claim that they are never inattentive nor hard and unresponsive when a message from the Word is put to us. Nor is the response of quick enthusiasm, the shallow enjoyment of a message (though soon quickly forgotten), unknown to us. How
commonly pre-occupation with 'other things' causes the loss of the life-giving benefit of a word from God, which becomes choked within us? It seems that in Mark's Gospel the emphasis is upon hearing. The whole passage starts with the Lord's word 'Hearken'; and, following this, He twice stresses the same point with the words "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear".

Since 'spiritual growth' is our theme, it will be well to underline this as a basic factor. There is no growth of the right kind, without the Word of God, properly attended to, at its root. There is neither beginning nor continuing without it. Growth, increasing growth, only arose where the seed was received. A receptive, obedient heart, humbled and emptied of all resistance, free from the reasoning and argumentative spirit (which is no less than arguing with God), is the only suitable attitude to it. Paul was thankful that the Thessalonians had received the message of God's servants "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Much of that epistle shows how, though young as a Christian assembly, they grew and abounded in effective Christian life. The prophet Hosea's word to Israel, repeated later to Judah by Jeremiah "Break up your fallow ground" (Hosea 10:12; Jeremiah 4), surely needs our attention too. Is the way we read Scripture casual, inattentive, marked by the absence of the contrite and respectful spirit?

Testimony — effective or masked?

Verses 21-25 follow straight on with something rather different. The seed broadcast by the sower represents the Word of God — no different on whatever kind of ground it may fall — carrying with it the potential for life. But now we read of a candle, a light-bearer, which needs to be put on a stand in a prominent place, so that its light may be dispersed abroad widely and freely. First, seed, scattered widely; next light, which should shine abroad in an unimpeded way. This, after all, is the sensible use of a candle or a lamp. Having light (from Himself) it would be foolish and incongruous to do with it the other things He indicated. Yet, strangely, Christians who have life, can adopt these ways with their 'light'. This is very pointed. Surely we must not ignore this lesson from Himself!

If the parable of the sower picks out causes for barrenness among hearers of the Word, a feasible heading for the present verses might be hindrances to testimony with those who possess life — who can fail in letting their light shine. The light may be put 'under a bushel', or, it may be put 'under a bed'. Its proper place is 'on a stand', where it can shine brightly. No one would think of the earlier possibilities with an actual candle. But
they are done in the spiritual sense.

A bushel is a measure of corn or grain. Inverted over a candle it would ultimately extinguish the flame. With too much busy activity, one's life and one's time can be over-absorbed to the full. Things not necessarily evil can distract us from letting our light shine before men. The bushel prevents and obstructs the clear outshining of the light. Ultimately the light flickers and fades out. This is not an overdrawn illustration; it does happen. Our Lord would not warn about it otherwise. But sadly believers can carry little testimony to Himself if totally and busily occupied with things which steal away all their opportunity to be loyal faithfully and outspokenly to Himself and His Word.

Alternatively, a full bushel may be in mind, which may suggest business of a successful, profitable kind. This, while not to be criticized, nevertheless can fill the mind with the main thought of enlarging material gain, with possible distraction from the light-bearing activities which ought to have priority for a believer. Either way, the bushel can hide and weaken his light.

A bed is a place of rest and inactivity. Too much attention to our comforts easily diverts us from our proper priorities, once the life-giving word has been received. Our light is to shine out forthrightly for all to see. Idleness and luxury do not help in the business of testifying to our Lord. Of Og, king of Bashan, the main information Scripture gives is the size of his bed (Deuteronomy 3:11)! As we might expect, he was an enemy of the people of God. Idleness, and inertia, and a liking for our own comforts, are in the same bracket. Let us take to ourselves the lesson that slothfulness and indolence are highly unsuitable with those who purport to have received the living Word.

A day will come when everything kept secret will be manifested (verse 22), including those things which have masked our clear testimony for our Lord. How much more honourable if today, in all our commitments, we make it plain now that we are believing and loyal servants of Christ.

Verses 24 and 25 teach a further lesson, “take heed what you hear”. What one disseminates as light from God, what one passes on as the life-giving Word, needs weighing carefully. Mistakes can be made. One must be on guard. To minister, one must receive. Our responsibility is to scrutinize the material we may think to pass on. Let us be sure we have it from the Lord and from His Word. If so, we can present it.

But also, if we are sufficiently cautious, so that only truth from the living Word is imparted, there will be returns. What one measures to others is the measure of recompense to oneself. You gain in scattering. More is given to him that hath, and who uses it. Truth dispersed leads on to fresh truth. Usefulness for the Lord prepares for more.
One can see this principle in Paul's words to Timothy (1 Timothy 4). He is urged to put the brethren in remembrance of certain things. It had to be done courteously. But if he became a 'sample believer', after the model Paul enjoins, this would both benefit himself and influence others. "In so doing thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee".

Does it ever occur to us that proper growth and expansion within one's own soul, has to do with passing on what we have already learned from the Lord through His Word? Many seem to think that study of the Word, amassing for ourselves some of the teaching we find there, is enough. No! Sitting on what we have found in the Word is not sufficient. Scattering is the way to increase.

**Survey in brief parables**

As the section reaches its end, there are two short parable-pictures. One of these is unique to Mark's Gospel — the picture of the unseen growth after the original sowing, continuing right on to the harvest-time (vv. 26-29). Then comes a single parable, akin to what is in Matthew 13:31,32. The mustard seed, which develops after sowing into a great tree — seems a reduced picture of all those unsatisfactory developments appearing in detail in the earlier Gospel. It seems that here there is no amplifying in detail of the whole picture, as in Matthew; but main overall lines of developments, right through from sowing to harvest, are singled out very briefly.

The verses on the 'unseen growth', 'the earth bringing forth fruit of herself', contain no indication that anything abnormal is intended. Perhaps we need to be assured that, since God is in it (and it is His work from the start) nothing will really fail that He has initiated. Side issues, complications, the other actors, the devil's workings, the false seed sown, strange developments, evil teachings and behaviour, are quite secondary to the main positive action. They do not, and could not, thwart God's plans. This parable is bold enough to leave on one side all that is of this (secondary) nature, forbidding though it may seem to be. This is a good example of a parable, a picture which 'drops everything else' to make a few main points (only a single main point here).

Coupled with this (quoted from Matthew in very much reduced form) is the single parable in which the mustard seed when sown becomes a great tree. It is the one example of a sowing with a strange result. F. W. Grant describes this as 'the success which is failure'. This, here, has to stand for all developments, internal and external, mostly abnormal, presented in the sequence of parables in Matthew 13. Often it seems in Scripture that 'a great tree' represents a power in the earth. Nebuchadnezzar (in Daniel 4) is a good example. It was never intended that Christianity should
become a great power on earth. If people have had that as their target it has not been according to God.

The Rat Race

L. J. ONDREJACK

The term 'the rat race' has only been in use for some decades. It is not exactly a complimentary way of describing human pursuits. But it agrees with some Scriptural descriptions of the pointless involvements of human lives — such as 'striving after the wind' and 'labouring for that which profiteth not', for example. This paper sees another way, the Christian way, which has high value and satisfaction in it.

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The rat race has been around for a long, long time. These two words have been used to describe the daily competitive rush of the work world and the market place. The workers are viewed as rats¹, and their activity as a race fit only for those rodents that are for ever scurrying somewhere.

In the early 1960s a news correspondent for The Times (London) was attributed with coining the phrase, when he defined the rat race as "any occupation or profession in which the participant can find little purpose or inspiration, but by pressure of environment is bound to show signs of activity and get ahead". ²

While a reporter may have popularized the rat race, the idea for the comparison between rat and human endeavour most likely came from the research laboratory of the behavioural psychologist. There, among the rodent cages, one finds various 'occupations' for these animals to prove themselves better than one another at accomplishing a pointless task for a paltry reward, such as a food pellet, that momentarily reinforces appropriate behaviour.

1. In 1 Samuel 6, rats and mice are not only 'unclean' but they are also associated with 'false gods'. The child of God, to the contrary, has been made clean by the blood of Jesus Christ and has turned to the one true God from idols according to 1 Thessalonians 1:9.
The real origin of the rat race, however, is not the laboratory of the researcher, but the Garden of Eden. The real paltry reward was the bite of the fruit that proved to be the symbolic ticket to enter the ‘cursed’ and ‘painful’ race where every succeeding bite would be hard earned in ‘toil’ and ‘sweat’ on a course of ‘thorns and thistles’ (Genesis 3:16-19, N. Tr.).

The real rat race, then, is life itself. But, since the analogy is to the activity of rats in a lab, let’s use it to see what we can learn from it. Rats, it seems, will do anything for that next morsel of food. They’ll run through mazes or on treadmills, or exercise wheels, going nowhere fast, seeking after one more bit of temporary satisfaction. This, indeed, may be the meaning or purpose-for-living for those who view themselves through the evolutionary lens of ‘science’. However, the child of God, looking through the lens of Scripture, can see various aspects of the rat race for what they really are; and also see some divinely given alternatives.

Aspect 1 — THE RAT TRAP

Surely, the beginning of Exodus records a rat race of the worst sort. Not only were the Israelites forced to serve the Egyptians “with harshness”; but also the harder they worked, the more they were expected to do and the less they were given with which to do it (Exodus 1:13,14; 5:6-13). Consider this bondage that the world imposes on every man, and you have a rat race that is really a rat trap!

Alternative — SALVATION

The Israelites were slaves and there was no way out, until God who chose them, heard their groaning and provided a saviour who could both defeat their captors and lead them into a new life in a new land (Exodus 2:24,25; 3:16,17). If you, dear reader, have not cried out to God and followed the only Saviour who is Jesus Christ, then you are trapped in a world-imposed rat race.

Aspect 2 — SELFISHNESS

Another rat race is addressed in Haggai, but this time it is a self-imposed one. Finding themselves in Babylonian captivity, the people of God are given the opportunity to get out of the rat race and, instead, go to work on the rebuilding of His temple. While all had the opportunity, only a remnant took advantage of this opportunity to give up worldly comforts for heavenly service. To make matters worse, those who chose to serve the Lord soon fell into a self-imposed rat race of self-service. To this, the prophet said, “Is it time for you that you should dwell in your ceiled houses, while this house lieth waste?” (Haggai 1:4).
Alternative — SERVICE

Haggai then depicts, better than any other ever will, life in that self-imposed rat race: “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but are not satisfied; ye drink, but are not filled with drink; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages for a bag with holes” (Haggai 1:6). Have you been called out of captivity to serve the living and true God by building up His temple in the presence of His enemies? Have you then gotten side-tracked into the rat race of self-care? If so, please heed the words of the prophet and “Consider your ways”. Then get back to work for Him: “Build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified”.

Aspect 3 — THE MAZE

Watching rats in a maze is watching frustration being defined right before your eyes. The object of the maze is for the rat to go from entrance to exit as quickly and directly as possible. However, the future is unknown and the present is nothing but right angles, dead ends and blind alleys. When he gets to the end, the reward is a meagre morsel. If the rat is weak, the frustration leads to breakdown. If strong, it leads to the prospect of harder and more puzzling mazes. Ultimately, it’s a race to nowhere, with no end in sight.

Alternative — THE STRAIGHT PATH

There are no mazes where the Christian race is concerned. To begin with, we are told in Hebrews that the faith race is not a maze, but a “straight path”. We are not merely observed by a researcher with a theory, but rather by “so great a cloud of witnesses” who are proof that the race has been run successfully. It is not a frustrating race, but one that can be “run with patience” because we can fix our eyes exclusively on “Jesus, the leader and completer” of the race, and our guide. Finally, we race not for mere morsels, but for “the crown of righteousness” which is the result of our having “finished the race” (Hebrews 12:1-13; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; and Psalms 32:8, 73:23-24).

Aspect 4 — THE TREADMILL

I remember seeing a film in psychology class of a hungry rat on a treadmill that was linked to a small generator. A short distance in front of him dangled a bit of food he wanted desperately. When released, he

3. Haggai 1:8. For us today, the temple to be built up is pictured in Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:11-17 and elsewhere.
started chasing that proverbial carrot on the stick. The faster the rat ran the more electricity he generated. The light bulb grew brighter and brighter, and gradually went dim as the rat collapsed from fatigue. At the end of all his effort, that rat was exactly the same distance from the reward as he was in the beginning.

If the treadmill is a picture of exhaustion, the worst kind to be on is the one in which the effort produces no good and no reward. No matter what we do, if we don’t see value and purpose in it, our daily work can easily become nothing more than a rat race on a treadmill. This can quickly lead to what society calls ‘burnout’.

Alternative — TESTIMONY FOR CHRIST

At the end of the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians, Paul addresses bond-servants. If any occupation could be considered a treadmill, that of a bond-servant surely qualifies — repetitious, menial work for meagre pay. But rather than spend time dwelling on the treadmill aspects of that occupation, the apostle quickly elevates the servant’s labour for his Master by giving it Godly purpose and reward: “Whatsoever ye do, labour at it heartily, as doing it to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance; ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Aspect 5 — THE EXERCISE WHEEL

As pre-teens, my sons raised mice for sale to pet stores. Among other things each cage of mice was equipped with an exercise wheel. Day and night we could hear those wheels turning as mouse after mouse ran to nowhere fast. One pet store owner told us what purpose these wheels served: they kept the mice occupied, and got them into shape to be good food for the boa constrictor and other mouse eating animals he kept for sale. Exercise wheels are everywhere today. Some are called ‘fitness centres’. Others are jogging routes. Then there are contraptions at home such as exercise bicycles, rowing machines, and weight benches. It is not that these things are wrong in themselves, they only become so when they take undue prominence in our lives.

Alternative — RIGHT PRIORITIES

It is a question of priorities. Have we become more concerned with

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4. 1 Timothy 5:18, 1 Corinthians 9:9, and Deuteronomy 25:4 all allude to the treadmill, but in all three the instruction is to the master who is to allow the ox to benefit from its own labour. The N.T. references are to the labourer in the Lord’s work. We should heed them, and properly reward Godly service.
physical fitness than spiritual fitness? Are we spending more time trying to turn our bodies into temples man will admire than we spend making ourselves more presentable “temples of the Holy Spirit”? Paul encouraged Timothy to give priority to spiritual exercise in the following words: “Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For boldly exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

The Rat Race — IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE?

The unbeliever, at best, goes from one race to another. But the child of God should be able to see the rat race for what it is and alter his course according to the Word of God. If he does, he can come to the end of the Christian race with the same sure sense of victory expressed by Paul, “I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

(Continued from page 119)

But the time will come when both doors and gates of that long unhappy people will open in enthusiastic welcome of this same Jesus. When they are brought down to a state of utter helplessness and destitution, with enemies eager and ready to obliterate their very name from under heaven, they will cry out in desperation to the God of their fathers, pleading that He will send the Messiah for whom they have waited so long. God will answer.

What is His answer? “Lift up your heads, ye gates.” Gates are the great public entrance to a city. Here the meaning is much the same as that of the door in John 10. These are the gates of the great prophetic Scriptures that declared the many glories of the One worthy to enter as God’s true King. But they also speak of a magnificent public entrance, with every gate of the city of Jerusalem thrown wide open to Him.

What of the everlasting doors? Not only one door now, as in the sheepfold, for this shows the fullest acceptance of Him in the whole city, the door of every house thrown wide open in an everlasting acceptance of the King of glory.

Who is He? The very One whom they crucified because He said He was the Son of God, He is Jehovah of hosts, the King of glory.

L. M. Grant
The Christian’s Calling

R. A. CREETH

“Called from above, and heavenly men by birth,
(who once were but the citizens of earth)
As pilgrims here, we seek a heavenly home,
Our portion in the ages yet to come.”

The above lines by the hymnwriter J. G. Deck suggest the wonderful calling of the believer that is presented to us in the New Testament scriptures. Let us consider this subject under three distinct aspects. It is a calling on high (or an upward calling) in Philippians 3:14 in contrast with the earthly things that occupy the minds of men down here. It is a heavenly calling in Hebrews 3:1 in contrast with the external calling of Israel in the land. It is a holy calling in 2 Timothy 9 emphasizing its true character in a day of evil and declension.

The Calling on high

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14).

It would seem that the apostle was viewing himself as a racer stripped for the contest, his eye steadfastly fixed on the goal, with the all-absorbing object before him of winning the race and receiving the prize at the last. Ever since he had had the vision of the Lord in glory on the Damascus road he had the burning desire in his heart to be like his glorified Lord, and this he knew could only be obtained through resurrection. So he says, “that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death”. The apostle would welcome even a path of suffering and death if it brought about the accomplishment of his earnest desire to be with and like his glorious Lord, “if by any means I may arrive at the resurrection from among the dead”.

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Like the wayfaring Israelite in Psalm 84 on his way to Jerusalem the ways were in his heart. He loved the way of Jesus, the way of suffering and the cross, because he knew it led on to the glory. So he says in effect, "Not as though I had already received the prize, but I follow after (or pursue), if also I may lay hold of (or take possession of) that for which I have been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Just as Christ had taken hold of Paul, so would Paul take hold of (or appropriate) Christ for himself. With his eye fixed upon Christ in glory he presses on in the race, with one object before him, forgetting the things behind, not occupying himself with his failures or his progress, he is stretching out to the things that are before, the heavenly things on high, for Christ is there, and he would be there too.

Beloved brethren, how we need to follow the example of the devoted apostle, to have the single eye, to have one purpose before us, this one thing being to look off unto Jesus, the Author and Completer of faith, and to run with endurance the race set before us (Hebrews 12:2).

"Run the straight race, through God's good grace,
Lift up thine eyes, and seek His face.
Life, with its way, before us lies,
Christ is the Path, and Christ the Prize."

The heavenly calling

Writing to Hebrew Christians the apostle says, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus, who is faithful to Him that hath appointed Him" (Hebrews 3:1). He addresses them not merely as brethren, but as holy brethren; not merely as called ones, but as partakers of a heavenly calling. In 2:14 Christ is viewed as partaking of flesh and blood — a sinless partaker of our humanity — in order that we might become partakers of all that His death has won for us. We are partakers of the heavenly calling.

As a nation the children of Israel looked for an earthly inheritance, for God had promised them the land of Canaan which was to be their portion when delivered out of Egypt. Here the apostle speaks of something infinitely better. Their hopes were no longer to be centred around Jerusalem and Canaan, "the glory of all lands", but their expectations were to be directed upward to their heavenly inheritance.

We might ask ourselves, what is it that makes this inheritance a heavenly one? It is remarkable that there is no description given of this glorious inheritance which is reserved in heaven. But surely what makes it a heavenly one is that Christ Himself is there. As the great Forerunner
of His people He has already entered in (6:20), and as the great Captain of salvation, made perfect through sufferings, He is leading many sons to glory (2:10).

The apostle exhorts these Hebrew believers, and ourselves too, to consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus. This is really a summing up of the first two chapters. In chapter 1 He comes from God as the Apostle, or sent One, with representative authority, to unfold the mind and will of God. In chapter 2 He is viewed as High Priest, and having made propitiation for sins He enters the very sanctuary of God, there to provide succour and sympathy for His weak and failing people. Thus He comes from God to man on earth: He goes from man to God in heaven.

Well might we consider this glorious Person, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, who has made us partakers of a heavenly calling. The word “consider” implies, not a mere fleeting glance, but a rapt and measured consideration, similar to the exhortation of 12:2, “looking steadfastly on Jesus, the Leader and Completer of faith”.

The holy calling

Paul’s second epistle to Timothy presents the professing Church as having fallen into disorder through the failure of man, and instruction is given how to act in a day of declension and ruin. The apostle would remind Timothy (and ourselves today) that in a time of defection and increasing evil God’s purposes remain sure and unchanged. Timothy is encouraged to be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God, who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling (1:8-9).

Two aspects of the gospel come into view here: salvation and calling. Not only does the gospel unfold God’s way of salvation, but it also declares that He has called us with a holy calling, “not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”. Thus as one writer puts it, “Salvation sets us free from our sins and this judgment-doomed world: the calling links us with heaven and all those spiritual blessings which God has purposed for us in the heavenlies in Christ” (H.S.).

God’s eternal purpose has now been “made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath annulled death, and brought life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel”. What a blessed truth that Christ has fully met all the judgment of death that we deserved, and has brought us into a scene of life and incorruptibility. At our conversion our souls pass out of death into life (John 5:24), and here it is added that the body will put on incorruption. Our very bodies will be fashioned like unto His body of glory (Philippians 3:21).
How encouraging it is to realise that in these last days of abounding evil and departure from the truth God’s eternal purposes remain secure and unchanged! How instructive it is to note that in a day of outward failure and increasing evil, there is *no lowering of God’s values*! It is not only an upward calling or a heavenly calling, but it is emphatically a *holy calling*. “Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, for ever” (Psalm 93:5). So let us pursue holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). As we seek to follow Him, the Holy and the True, may we walk in practical holiness, as Peter exhorts us, “As He who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:15).

Christ the Firstfruits, the Forerunner, the Firstborn

JEFFREY BRETT

1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Hebrews 6:18-20; Romans 8:28-30

*These three titles given to the Lord Jesus not only express wonderful truths about His own glory, but also about our close association and relationship with Him.*

I have broken up the paper into three distinct sections, so that the reader, if he wishes, may take them piecemeal — a section at a time. It is a very positive paper, making much of our Lord.

The Firstfruits

As the Firstfruits He is seen in 1 Corinthians 15 as coming forth from the dead, the beginning of a new order of manhood. He is the first of a great harvest of those who live because of His going into death and rising again. These will be like Him, and share in all that He has received as man. A verse helping us to understand the scriptural use of the word firstfruits is Romans 11:16 “For if the firstfruits be holy, the lump is also holy”. This means that what is true of the firstfruits is true also of the rest of the harvest. When the priest of old went into the field to select the sheaf of firstfruits he took what was a sample of the whole harvest. It all came from the same seed and had the same nature and life.

Now when we consider this in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ’s going into death and coming forth having conquered death, a vast harvest of believers has been secured for God, who are of Him and like Him in
CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS, THE FORERUNNER, THE FIRSTBORN

life and nature — “they that are Christ’s at His coming”. In 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 Christ is viewed as the Head of a new race. As Adam was the Head of a race in which all were involved because of his sin, so Christ’s progeny have their part in what He has secured in resurrection. This truth is further illustrated for us in the feast of Firstfruits in Leviticus 23:10 — “When ye come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest”. This took place, “on the morrow after the sabbath”, after the Passover. Now the Passover directs our thoughts to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ in order to accomplish redemption. Thus the basis, the righteous foundation was laid; redemption, reconciliation and forgiveness of men’s sin so that they might now please God, are founded on this. The feast of firstfruits took place on the eighth day. This I believe speaks in scripture of a new beginning, and is the day in the N.T. upon which the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, “the first day of the week”. On that day He met Mary with those words “Go, tell my brethren”. There had been formed in His death and resurrection a new relationship with His disciples. Later He was to breathe into them and impart His life in order that they might have a share in all that He entered, when He “ascended to my Father”.

Further on in Leviticus 23 we find instructions as to the new meat (or meal) offering. They were to count fifty days from the offering of the sheaf of firstfruits, and were to bring out from their habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals of fine wheaten four, and in verse 17 these are called “the firstfruits unto the Lord”. These loaves were made of the same ingredients as was the meat offering that was offered with the sheaf of firstfruits. That meat offering speaks, I believe, of the perfect manhood of the Lord Jesus, while these two wave loaves speak of those who have become Christ’s as a result of the work of God in their souls.

We may see this fulfilled in Acts 2:1. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place”. The Lord Jesus Christ, risen and ascended on high, sends down His Holy Spirit on that company that He has fitted, by His death and resurrection, to become His body, to form the Assembly, to become the House of God, the Bride of Christ, and the New Jerusalem. Involved in these truths of Scripture is all that will glorify God and Christ during the present time of testimony to Christ, and that which will be for God’s pleasure, and for the heart of Christ throughout eternal days.

The Forerunner

When we think of the Lord Jesus as the Forerunner, we have in
mind His having carried manhood through this world, through death and resurrection, and having arrived at the end of that course in the glory of God. There He appears for us as priest "bringing many sons to glory". Hebrews 6:19 seems to connect His place there with the thought of an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast. We are connected with that which is immovable when we by faith reach out to Christ in glory. This gives stability of character, and enables us to run the race set before us, not giving up or giving way. He has completed the whole course of faith, having been tested in every department of human life even unto death. He has gone triumphantly through it all to the glory of God and is there as a surety for all those who come unto God by Him. Because He has arrived there, we shall arrive there too.

This truth seems to be connected in Hebrews 5 and 6 with His Melchisedec priesthood. Chapter 5:7-10 refers to those prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, uttered in that time of obedience here. He passed experimentally through every trial and test that may be ours as believers. And now, ascended, He is able to sympathise with us, supporting us, so that He will bring us triumphantly through them all, ultimately to reach Himself where He is in the glory of God.

The story of Melchisedec meeting Abram after the slaughter of the kings, in Genesis 14, throws light on this. Abram had just accomplished a remarkable victory of faith, with only three hundred and eighteen men, trained and armed of his own household. He had defeated the armies of five kings, rescued Lot and recovered all the goods that had been taken. We might well have thought that Abram was invincible because of this, but not so. There awaited him a far greater temptation and test of his trust in God, and God knowing this sent Melchisedec to meet him, who fed him with bread and wine and blessed him. In calling upon God, Possessor of heaven and earth, he seems to remind Abram that he during the battle had called for help upon such a One, and that the One who had answered his faith with victory was able to enrich him in a way that the king of Sodom never could. So he refuses the very least of what the king of Sodom offers, and God in the next chapter immediately appears to him with the wonderful words "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward". Likewise if we, when going through the trials and testings of faith know the support and succour of our great High Priest, we shall not only be overcomers, but will understand what a treasure we have in knowing God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus be able to refuse the passing riches and pleasures offered by this world.

Our great High Priest knows every ploy of the enemy and every weakness of our hearts, but is able to supply that grace in time of need,
and when we may not be aware of our danger, will guard and keep us through every trial to the end. Then we shall enter with Him into our eternal home. So, as the Forerunner He has completed the course of faith and has gone as man into the presence of God, and is the assurance to faith that we shall arrive there too.

The Firstborn

Lastly we consider the Lord Jesus as the Firstborn. Now while it is historically true that Jesus was Mary’s first born son, I do not believe that this title of Firstborn refers to that event. The use of it in scripture seems rather to be connected with the thought of pre-eminence or the chief in rank. There are some in the O.T. who, although they were born first, do not take the place of chief. In Israel, the first-born son had a special and unique blessing from his father. But there are sons not born first that receive the blessing of the first-born. Joseph certainly is seen in supremacy, not only among his brethren but also over all Egypt, and he seems to have been born the twelfth. Then there was David, the youngest, and having been overlooked by his father, takes the chief place among his brethren, after one by one they had been looked over by Samuel.

In Colossians 1:15 the Lord Jesus Christ is called the Firstborn of every creature. Now this could not be so historically, but it is used of Him having taken His place in the creation (which is said in the next verse to be created in Him, for Him, and by Him). He must because of who He is in His person be First in rank as to that creation. (See notes on this verse in the N.Tr.). Then, verse 18 says, “Who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. This directs our thoughts to the Lord Jesus having come forth in resurrection, as the beginning of a new order of manhood to which sin and death will never have anything to do. Among that race, He is Chief.

In Romans 8:28, the apostle, previously had dwelt on many of the trials and difficulties of the path of faith, and confessed that there are many things too hard for us to understand. Also he has said that nevertheless we are sons and have the Holy Spirit, who bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and joint-heirs with Christ. He reaches a point where he uses the words “But we do know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (N.Tr.). He then speaks of that sovereign working of the purpose of God, concerning those whom He did foreknow, “He also did pre-destinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren”. We are led on to that glorious end that the Father from eternity had in mind. It was that His Son should be pre-eminent in the centre of a vast company, who are of Him and like
Him to His praise and glory for evermore. I believe that the Lord Jesus refers to this in John 17:24, “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”. This glory that we shall behold, but not share, is His alone, the Pre-eminent One, supreme in that scene.

“All like thee, for thy glory like thee, Lord
Object supreme of all, by all adored.”

Surely then as we have thought of the Lord Jesus as the Firstfruits, the Forerunner, and the Firstborn, our thoughts and minds are lifted to another world, where everything is of God, where sin can never come, where we have a place with God’s Beloved in God’s eternal day. Christ is there already and because He lives we shall live also and be with Him there. Though here beset with trial and weakness, He will bring us to glory, to be for Himself as the eternal satisfaction of His heart, the Father’s answer to the sufferings of the cross, His joy and ours complete. Another verse of a hymn comes to mind:

“He and I in that bright glory,
One deep joy shall share,
Mine, to be for ever with Him,
His, that I am there.”

The Three Ministries (3)

GORDON SPRATT

THE KINGDOM (Part 2)

While it is very readable and clear, like its predecessors, this paper needs close attention if its full value is to be gained. As presented to me, it would have required six sides of Scripture Truth to cover it. I have therefore decided to help the reader by taking it in two stages. As indicated at the close of Part 1, there are two parts in the author’s mind still to cover in his survey. The dividing line in his text is also clear. So here is Part 2, and the remainder will be headed Part 3.

When we speak of Christians in the Church we frequently refer to them as members of the Body of Christ, and this is not only a scriptural
expression but also a term descriptive of the way in which various members, though very different one from another, are related to one another in a unity of interactive behaviour. In such scriptures as 1 Corinthians 12, the Bible uses the human body as an analogy of this. It would sound strange to speak of members of a kingdom, and the word that we would use, even in a secular connection, would be subjects. This word is also descriptive, because a kingdom is a sphere of authority, and what characterises its subjects is, or should be, subjection to its properly constituted authority.

It will be so in the coming Kingdom of which the Bible speaks in many places, for the whole world, long in rebellion against God, will be brought into subjection to Christ's universal rule. And it is so now for the Christian, for the aspect of the Kingdom which has particular relevance to the present time is that those who have a relationship by faith with the Lord Jesus recognise His authority over their lives, even though He is personally absent and publicly dishonoured in this world. Sadly, with many who outwardly profess to be Christians, there is little or no living relationship with Him, and Jesus in some of His parables speaks of this empty profession rather than the real thing. But if we are to see the Kingdom of God working practically today we must look at the personal relationships with the Lord Jesus of those who own His total authority over their lives.

If the apostle Peter is, in a distinctive way, the apostle of the Kingdom, then we might expect to find what we have just said demonstrated in his personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, as well as in His teaching as an apostle. Let us first look, therefore, at that relationship.

It was a very individual relationship. There were twelve apostles and many other disciples, but each was different and each had his or her own particular experience with Jesus. Thomas, Philip, James and John, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary her sister, they were not just cardboard cut-outs, but real living people with diverse natures and differing strengths and weaknesses. And in the Gospels we find so many of them in personal meetings with Jesus. Thomas with his scepticism, Martha with her brisk practicality, James and John with their ambition, and so with them all. Few of us in our world have the privilege of personal acquaintance with the earthly Sovereign, but in the Kingdom of God we are brought into contact with One who knows all about us and is intent upon a process of education and adjustment designed to fit us into His divine plan.

Peter saw this: when Jesus identified him with the words, "Thou art Peter" (Matthew 16:18), it set off a train of thought in Peter's head. "A stone" — rough, ill-shapen, abrasive, but capable of being formed and fitted under the chisel and the mallet to be built together with others into an
edifice of strength and beauty. And so he says, “Ye also, as living stones, are built up, a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

In the record of Scripture we have more about Peter’s personal relationship with Jesus than that of any other individual. Deeply attached to his Master, warm-hearted, energetic and impulsive, the lessons of subjection did not come easily to him. How often have we recognised in our own rebellious hearts the contradiction first voiced by Peter upon the housetop: “Not so, Lord!” (Acts 10:14). But Peter had his work to do in the Kingdom, and in one incident after another as we read the Gospels we can see him being prepared for that work. Let us take just a few examples.

First of all, three lessons. On three very significant occasions Jesus was accompanied by the same three apostles, Peter, James and John, and in each case there was an important lesson of the Kingdom to be learned. The first occasion was the raising from the dead of the daughter of Jairus: it was the lesson of power. Examples abound in the Gospels of the power of the Lord Jesus, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, commanding the winds and the sea, but here in this incident is the first public demonstration of what Jesus says in John 5:25, “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live”. It was a rare thing: there are only two other specific instances recorded of Jesus physically raising the dead, and two others when first Peter himself and then Paul did so in the exercise of their apostolic authority, but here was the ultimate proof of the central truth of the Kingdom expressed in the words of Jesus in Matthew 28: 18, “All authority is given unto me in heaven and upon earth”. And if the raising of the physically dead was a marvellous thing, what of the spiritually dead and the countless multitude who have proved the truth of John 17:2, “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou has given him”.

There is a detail in the story of Jairus’ daughter, which doubtless was not lost on Peter and which might well be heeded by those who in popular Christianity lay much emphasis on gifts of healing. In Luke’s account we read that immediately prior to the performance of the miracle, “he put them all out”, and when it was over He instructed the parents that “they should tell no man what was done”. Power was there, and with it the proof of the authority of the Person who exercised it, but it was not for public display.

The second lesson for Peter was on the Mount of Transfiguration. Again John and James were also there, and the lesson this time was about glory. The Jesus they were familiar with was to all appearances the lowly son
of the carpenter, the despised Galilean, but they were to learn the secret of His glory. Again, it was not for public proclamation, for the day of His public glory was, and still is, future. But in that transfigured Person, and in the words from the cloud, “This is my beloved Son”, there was an impression of the glory of the Lord Jesus which remained with those apostles for the rest of their lives. We need it too: our Lord is despised and disowned in this world, but Peter speaks like this: “Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:18).

The third lesson was without doubt the most difficult. It was the lesson of suffering, and it was learnt in the garden of Gethsemane. Those three men, Peter, James and John again, were totally inadequate for the experience: Jesus says to Peter, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” But something of what he saw, the readiness of Jesus to take the way of suffering and death in response to the will of His Father, left its mark upon Peter. Despite the heady days of outward success and expansion which followed the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he wrote later, “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings . . .”.

Power, glory, suffering: Peter learned that these three characteristics enter into our present experience of the Kingdom. But there was to be another and even harder lesson. The first three he had learnt as a spectator, having the wonderful privilege of seeing the Lord Jesus in these various situations. But he had to learn not only objectively through his nearness to Jesus, but also subjectively in a deep and bitter experience of his own. And so his three lessons were followed by three denials. The self-confidence that made the boast, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death” disintegrated into the shame of those three denials, and we read that “Peter went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). One of the most difficult lessons of the Kingdom is the lesson of our own utter nothingness.

But Peter was restored through the grace of a risen Lord, no doubt chastened and humbled, but ready for another stage of his preparation for the service of his Master. It is described in John 21:15-19). It was not to be another lesson as an onlooker, or an abject personal failure, but a threefold personal challenge as to his fitness for that service. What was the service to be? The caring for Christ’s sheep. And what was Peter’s qualification to be? Not a university degree, or a diploma in social service. Not even his love for the Lord’s people, but his love for Christ. “Lovest thou Me?” is the thrice repeated challenge. The authority of the Lord Jesus is not an authority of law, but of love, and what was true for Peter is true for every other disciple, that the mainspring of all true and fruitful Christian service must be personal love for Christ.
It seems to me that this paper could have been freshly written in 1990 — it carries very few of the old-style expressions, common when it was written in 1917. It is an extract from the Scripture Truth volume of that year. But, whatever the style of writing, it would be foolish to allow our own pre-dispositions to make us unprepared to attend to things central to our own personal Christian living. This paper, like many another of early times, gains full marks on that score.

Devotedness to Christ is, at once, the first duty and the highest privilege of the Christian — yours and mine. It is our duty when we think of our indebtedness to Him, and our privilege in view of the honour such devotion entails. There is none like it. Christ and the Christian — the pardoned, the justified, the reconciled to God, the son and heir, the member of the body, part of the bride of the Lamb — all this wealth of blessing, this divinely-given freedom from the claims of law, the power of sin, and Satan, and the dread fear of death and judgment — all this is, through boundless grace, ours now and for ever, at the cost, however, of that which He underwent for us on the cross at Calvary.

That cost was absolute, the ransom complete, the redemption meritorious; so that, on our part, no addition can be made thereto. We are liberated!

Hence, if we speak of duty, it is not that of the slave, nor of the hired servant, nor of the one who seeks, by its fulfilment, a place in divine favour or relationship. All that is settled. Grace is our perfect standing-ground before God; sonship is our privilege and joy.

The blessed Lord gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

Mark these words. Consider the gift in its immensity, not only of all that He had, but of that which He was — Himself — with the marvellous end in view — our redemption from all iniquity, together with the present effect of our purification unto Himself a peculiar people (whom He could claim on that ground as “His own”) and who should be “zealous of good works”.

“His own” — peculiarly and absolutely and for ever His own, over
whom there should be no rival claim, redemption having set Him over
them as His precious and inalienable possession. They are His, and He
is theirs.

But who is He that paid such a price for this possession? He is the Son
of God in the glory of deity, and Son of Man in the truth of perfect and
sinless manhood. It is He who presented Himself in patient grace for the
acceptance of men, only, alas, to be set at nought and crucified; but to
be "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father", and, in actual
manhood, to take His place now on high as Lord and Christ, the once dead
but now living glorious Lord and Head — full of grace and power as also
of sympathy and unchanging love. He is theirs — He is ours, but we too
are His. To Him, and to no other, do we belong. He is as truly our Lord
as He is our Saviour. He claims us peculiarly — that is, as "His own". Let
us, oh! let us realize this — we are His own.

It is seldom, I think, that His claim upon us as Lord is apprehended
at the moment of conversion. The soul, at that glad instant, is rather in
the happy experience of the kiss, the robe, and ring, and sandals, and the
unexpected welcome to a full forgiveness and the Father's house. He
exclaims, "My Beloved is mine!" His joy flows from that which he has
consciously received. He sings of the "happy day"; but presently, and
gradually, He learns that his own personal joy and blessing are not
everything. He has been saved indeed, but saved that he "should not
henceforth live unto himself, but unto Him who died for him, and rose
again". The risen Saviour has become his Lord and Master. His "henceforth"
is therefore to be marked not only by the joy of salvation but by the
obedience of discipleship. He is to devote himself to the Christ who died
for him, and who lives on high in all the authority of Lord. "I am my
Beloved's" is his further frank acknowledgement and confession.

What a mark is left on the life that owns Christ's lordship! How vastly
that lordship, when humbly accepted and retained (when recovered too,
if lost) affects and influences, divinely, those who prove it. I would urge
all who read these pages to learn in practical power, ever more fully, the
supreme authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. It lies at the bottom of the
Christian life. Its practical value, in all true testimony, whether in individual,
personal, collective or corporate, whether in the assembly or in private
life, whether in view of Satan or of man, anywhere, everywhere, the first,
deepest, truest breathing of the Christian should be the name of the Lord
Jesus. Every tongue shall yet confess that "He is Lord to the glory of God
the Father". Thrice happy they who, today, when that name is refused
and derided, seek faithfully to confess it before God and man and the devil.

Oh, for souls consecrated to Christ, devoting themselves and their all to
Him — the rejected but soon-coming Lord — instead of wasting their time and strength and golden opportunities in self-interest and the ten thousand follies of this “Vanity Fair”, only to discover, at the close, that the one chance they had to “live unto Him” was flung selfishly away — never to be recovered again. The loss shall be theirs indeed, but it must be His as well.

Remember that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

May each of us carry this solemn and searching word into the presence of God and get under its mighty and most salutary influence.

"Ambassadors for Christ’’ — 2 Corinthians 5:20

MARK DAVISON

It is good to see a young man very much in tune with the apostle who first used the title as his job-description, linking it with others too. Surely Paul would have approved of this.

The dictionary definition of an ambassador is “A diplomat sent by one country as a permanent representative or on a special mission to another”. When we think of a British Ambassador in a foreign country, he must maintain a blameless and upright course. There must not be seen in him or in any way connected with him any immorality, discourtesy or questionable behaviour. Why? Because he represents the Queen in the host country. He stands for everything for which Britain stands, reflecting the whole country and its attitudes. What a responsibility he bears! If he commits a misdemeanour then the whole nation is disgraced. No longer does he answer only to himself for his wrongdoings, but now he is responsible to another.

What a good illustration we have here of the life of the believer. Surely it will be agreed that we are the representatives of Christ in this world. So we must “be blameless and harmless . . . without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Philippians 2:15).

If the earthly ambassador carries a great responsibility, does not
this verse show that we have an even greater responsibility?

The Greek word translated ‘ambassador’ in 2 Corinthians 5:10 carries with it a sense of age or experience. It would naturally follow that the person chosen to represent a country abroad would have a wide experience of his own land, people and culture. Unless you are well acquainted with the Lord Jesus you will find it difficult to be a faithful agent for Him. Verse 5 of Philippians 2 says: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”.

If you do not take time to learn of Him through reading and studying the Scriptures, you will not know how to answer when called upon.

I have realised through events in my own life recently that we should be extremely careful in our speech and actions. It has been made clear to me in my office that people are watching and judging me in their own minds. If I am critical and scathing about a colleague, a mental note is made of it. If I appear peaceful and calm in times of pressure, this is noted also. Our Lord Jesus said Himself:

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

A work colleague said to me recently, “I’ve noticed that these people have a peace I cannot find, and I want that peace”. Praise the Lord for the ambassadors she had come into contact with, unknown to me. They had represented their Master faithfully and I was able to point this one who was seeking peace to the Prince of Peace.

I want to take you back to Matthew 5. Verses 13 and 14 speak of believers as being the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world”. I stated in a previous paper that the order here is significant. Firstly, salt (what we are) and then light (what we do). We cannot possibly represent Christ if we are not personally right in the sight of God. This may be an obvious statement about unbelievers, but what about you? No doubt you are saved by the grace of God but are you fit to serve your Master? Is your life worthy of Him? Are you a good AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST?

Secondly the ambassador in a foreign country has an active role to play. He must be there when problems arise, and should actively seek to promote the interests of his country. He must shine as a light in his surroundings to show others the virtues of his homeland. If the ambassador remains cocooned in his embassy, then no one will be the wiser about his country. Let us be careful ourselves not to become cocooned in our halls, traditions or life-styles. If we do not ‘promote’ the interests of God, then who will? I repeat again, we are His Ambassadors here. Are you actively working to promote the kingdom of God in this poor, dark world?
My friend, you are the person from whom God's light can shine out, and if you are preventing this from occurring, then you are preventing others from coming into a saving knowledge of Jesus.

In conclusion let me remind you of one more fact. In the Civil Service there is what is called 'Detached Duty'. This is a period of time in which one might work at a different location to one's normal office. It implies, however, that it is a temporary measure and that one will eventually return to the correct place. As an ambassador for Christ, you are on detached duty. We are told quite clearly that we are citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20), and that we are in this world but not of it (John 17:16,18). Never forget that we are looking forward to that day when we shall be recalled to our rightful home.

May it be that each and every reader may receive a mention in the heavenly honours list for services rendered to Master and country.

Paul's Master Passions

"Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel."

(1 Corinthians 9:16)

"I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."

(Romans 1:14)

"I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh: that their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God . . . in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

(Colossians 2:1-3)

How intense is Paul's expression — 'conflict' — anguish of soul and mind on his knees. How deeply keen Paul is — for Christ and His gospel's sake, for more hearers to be affected by it, and for the well-being and growth of fellow-believers. Though Paul was an outstanding person, do we share those deep concerns of his in any degree?
If we wish to increase in the knowledge of God, it must be recognized that there will be many things quite beyond natural human grasp, but which are of the Spirit of God to present to us from His Word. Let us suppose that all were perfectly plain to us, humanly speaking; or even becoming clearer through our own study and acumen. Then would it not be obvious that our ‘search for God’ (however well-intentioned) must have missed the mark? We would have set up God ‘in our own image’, within our own compass. The true and living God far surpasses the most exalted thoughts we may have of Him.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8)

I have had in mind for some time to attempt to highlight some of the deepest things in Scripture, of which there are many, on which it will be our wisdom to accept its plain statements. We must bow to them humbly and reverently as before God, without seeking to theorise or speculate upon them. It is a difficult project, and I need help and prayerful support from readers. But I think it could be gainful for everyone, with help from the Lord, and from yourselves.

If we can accept that much will be “darkness to the intellect” and yet “sunshine to my heart”, I believe we shall be well on the way to receiving help in this field.

There should be nothing in this series, however, to deter personal and devoted study of the Word of God, even finding precious and fresh things at times in its exhaustless store. I believe there should be more of this. Sadly, a diminishing number give sufficient attention to it, despite what 2 Timothy 2:15 urges. But I am sure Paul in that place encouraged Timothy towards a full and careful approach to that God-honouring duty.

Paul the apostle prayed that his readers might be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10). In another letter he says “Not as
though I have already attained . . .” (Philippians 3:12). It is important to be aware that while we may be at different stages, teachers and taught, all are learners still in this great progression forward into a vast and open-ended field. We need to remember this. If enabled to instruct others, it must be done in a way consciously showing that inexhaustible and vast things are further on ahead — far beyond what we pass on. Teaching in this area is by no means a passing on of academic or technical-style information. Think how Paul, one of the great conveyors of truth did this. Taken up by his themes, he often was absolutely overpowered and amazed, when, under the Holy Spirit, he passed them on. A prime example is the Ephesian letter, but it is characteristic generally of the style of teaching in his N.T. letters. Surely there is room for freshness and humble amazement when ‘the deep things of God’ are considered.

All the articles we shall consider (DV) will be on highly profound subjects, of such a kind that it would be impossible to think that one is more important than another. The paper which comes first has been a theme of meditation with me for a considerable period. Perhaps this is my reason for putting it first. But I hope it will promote that respect for God, that acceptance of His word, and that care in our expressions, suitable for us to show.—Editor

Beyond our Depth (1)

COLIN CURRY

Alone and yet not alone

“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” (John 16:32)

At the cross, unsparing and unutterable wrath from God was borne by our Saviour. And yet — the extreme pleasure of His Father delighted in Him at that very extremity. Can I understand this? No. It is far beyond my understanding. It is something to be accepted from God as a profound mystery. But the following verses say both of these things quite clearly (and these are only some verses of the same kind).
In utter suffering:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1)

“Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.” (Psalm 88:7)

In the awareness of the Father’s unclouded love:

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” (John 10:17)

“No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is (eternally, and without discontinuity) in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:18)

Taken separately, both of these themes completely exceeds our grasp. We must think of God’s wrath as fearsome and unbelievably severe. But because we cannot imagine the grossness of sin, in its offensive nature to Him, and in all its varied manifestations, we have no yardstick for estimating its awfulness. But at least we can say God’s utter abhorrence of sin is absolute. Let no one underestimate this, even though its severity cannot really be measured. A thorough feeling for the gross sinfulness of sin deepens our indebtedness to the Saviour who ‘took the sinner’s place’.

But also, we have no sufficient conception of the love of God, though we believers know enough of it already to rejoice in it, and should do so with vigour, and increasingly! But if we speak of the love of the Father for the Son, surely this exceeds all our measures of love! In this is the very heart of the Christian revelation. Apart from the Son revealing God as Father on earth, we should have ever remained in complete darkness about it.

Clearly either of these themes alone could have formed a subject for our series, but we consider here the amazing fact that at the cross both occurred, the centred upon the person of the sacrificial victim: the one acceptable offering, “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”.

First, a few introductory words:

At the Lord’s Supper, when the bread and wine are received, a hymn often is sung, which says:

With joy and sorrow mingling,
We do remember Thee.

Joy and sorrow! Though they might be considered to exclude each other, it is true that they can coexist. Christians know about this! Paul writes a letter from prison, brimming with joy, and encouraging those believers
to show the same spirit. Yet he has *some* words which speak of sorrow, though even there he says that the trouble was not so much as he had feared. Onesiphorus, who was ‘nigh unto death’, survived. “God had mercy on him.” Though thankful for his brother’s recovery, he also says it was partly “lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” and “that I may be the less sorrowful” (Philippians 2:27, 28). The only hint of sorrow in the letter! (Though he grieves over questionable Christians in another place.)

How many burials believers attend, too, at which an element of poignant joy pervades, though sadness and sorrow are also deeply felt and shared. The sense of the love of Christ softens the loss, and gives hope and support, not least the most wonderful of certain hopes soon to be realised. It softens and brings confidence into such scenes. The sting of death is removed, and victory belongs to those who rely on Him. As the oft-quoted passage says — there is comfort in “these words” of Scripture (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

We draw attention to these points merely because they show that at times things which do *not* seem to go together *are* in some Christian situations experienced together. Of course this does not seem to provide any clue to the main mystery we are facing. Nor are we looking for an explanation of that great matter. *That*, we believe, goes beyond our human kind of understanding — and it is unwise to probe it further. Better, surely, to believe the Word of God, to accept and be amazed at the magnitude of what it has to say, particularly about our Lord’s death. As a further lesson, this consideration may have the effect of instilling a careful thoughtfulness into all our pronouncements on that crucial death.

It seems to me, hearing many who speak about the work of our Lord on Calvary, and who value it greatly for themselves, that many genuinely declare that “Christ died for my sins”. How marvellously Scriptural and true! What a cause for rejoicing is this! This is exactly what a genuine first-time hearer can grasp in faith, and say with confidence, from the start. Soon he will be more conscious of all the load of sin the Saviour carried, and will be filled with true indebtedness to Him, accepting and confessing Him as Lord, and handing over his life to be dominated by that one great Lord — to “serve the Lord Christ”.

But later perhaps, as he continues to read his Bible, he will find that there are other parties gaining from the death of his Lord. Other fellow-believers, yes indeed. But, more than that, he can hardly long be blind to the great truth that God the Father sent forth His Son on a mission for *Himself* — as Jesus said, “to finish the work that thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). The context of that verse clearly shows that His work in that sense was completed gloriously at Calvary. My Saviour did a mighty
work for me (and for each of the redeemed) in that dread moment when God's wrath upon my sin poured itself upon Him there. But another work was undertaken by Him there, pleasing the Father to the uttermost. It was done in flawless perfection. That pure devotion was surely appreciated to its full there, in those very scenes. The fragrance of it will fill the eternal realms!

Let me say some brief words as I close — cautionary words, or perhaps I might say advisory words.

Unthinking words, spoken by ourselves rather easily and without much care, are perhaps not highly damaging. I do not think God is so heavy-handed as to make a man "an offender for a word". Nor do I think believers should show that spirit amongst themselves. But it may be wise to think with care how we express ourselves — especially when so holy a subject as the sufferings of Christ is in mind. I have said that the conjunction of these two features of the story of Calvary surpasses my understanding, but it should be noted that Scripturally this distinction is maintained — God's wrath and God's judgment fell on Him because of His bearing our sin there, but also the Father's joy and total delight in the person of His Son never found such occasion for supreme and absolute pleasure until that climax was reached.

A little thought on this would help us to see that such thoughts as "the Father pouring out his wrath upon Jesus" or "the Father forsaking the Son" there, are not quite in tune with Scripture.

I trust, however, that a larger view of the great central scene at Calvary, and all that was enacted there, will be the dominant effect of careful perusal of this paper.

One hour there is on history's page
Pre-eminent o'er all the past;
Twill shine and shine from age to age
While earth, while heaven itself, shall last.

Christian, 'tis thine alone to know
And prize it more than all beside;
So bright with love, so dark with woe,
The gracious hour when JESUS died.

Thou'lt say — What deed of glory gave
Such lustre to that single hour?
Go ask the earth, the sun, the grave,
They all confessed its thrilling power.

Verses from 'The hour' by
Sir Edward Denny
The Three Ministries (4)

GORDON SPRATT

THE KINGDOM (Part 3)

The whole sequence of papers hopes to outline the ministries of Peter, Paul, and John. These, together, cover a major fraction of the written ministry of the N.T. apostles. This brings to an end the outline coverage of Peter’s ministry, and concentrates now on his letters.

Let us turn from Peter’s experience to his writings. It is in the different emphasis in those writings from what we find in those of Paul and John, that we find justification for the statement that Peter’s distinctive theme is that of the Kingdom.

There is, of course, no contradiction. Peter shares with both the other apostles a heavenly perspective beyond any of the events of time, however glorious. He writes of “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven . . .” and of “the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory by Christ Jesus”. But he has also a nearer horizon within the confines of time, when the One who suffered will reign, when the One who was dishonoured and rejected will be glorified.

Peter had understood the message of the prophets. He had witnessed the rejection of the One who should have been Israel’s King, but he lived in the light of the coming Kingdom, “when his glory shall be revealed” (1 Peter 4:13). He understood also the present time, knowing that though Jesus is absent from this world, He is nevertheless in the place of power. It was Peter who, at Pentecost, had made the announcement to the nation of Israel: “that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”, and in his first epistle he confirms the same truth: “Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Peter 3:22).

The title “Lord”, so often used by Peter both in his personal relationship with Jesus and in his writings, has a particular relevance to the subject of the Kingdom. The title “King” has increased in usage so much of recent years, particularly through the singing of popular choruses, that a brief look at the subject might be helpful. Scripture usage is very clear: it would
be difficult, perhaps impossible, to find a scripture which associates the title “King” with the Lord Jesus during the period from His resurrection to His second coming in glory. The reason is simple: it is a title which carries with it not only the idea of authority, but also of public glory. That glory awaits the time of which the prophet Zechariah wrote, “And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one”.

In the meantime, the appropriate title is “Lord”. As we have seen, Peter announced at Pentecost that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ. Later, in the house of Cornelius, the representative of imperial Rome, he maintains the same: “He is Lord of all”. And through his epistles the distinctive title of Christ is “The Lord”. A very simple way of expressing the idea of the Kingdom in its present form would be to say that it is the sphere of the Lordship of Christ.

Peter had his own distinctive view of the Lord Jesus. He had also a view of the Lord’s people which was consistent with his Kingdom perspective. In his second epistle he asks the question, “What manner of persons ought ye to be?” In the first epistle he has already given a pointer to the answer. He says: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a people of his own, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out darkness into his marvellous light”. It is perhaps helpful at this point to remember that these words are addressed not primarily to Gentiles but to converted Jews scattered through Asia Minor. They would have been familiar with Israel’s responsibility as God’s earthly people to maintain what was suitable to that relationship. Their national character as distinct from other nations, their personal conduct as Jehovah’s chosen people, and the maintenance of the sacrificial system of worship which He had ordained, these things they would have understood. They must also have known that Israel had failed in its relationship with God, and Peter is now saying that what Israel had failed to be as a nation is now to be realised, morally and spiritually, in those who are the “children of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:38).

As a royal priesthood, they are to offer up spiritual sacrifices, the sacrifice of their lips in praise and worship, but also the sacrifice of committed lives. As a holy people they are to be a witness to God in their separation from an evil world. The implications of such a calling raise many practical questions about the practical conduct of the Christian, and Peter’s first epistle abounds with exhortations regarding behaviour and relationships, in the family, in the Christian fellowship, in the workplace and in the world generally. The recognition that Christ is our Lord and that we are His people thus enters into every aspect of Christian
living. This, quite simply, is what we mean, or what we ought to mean, when we speak about “kingdom truth”.

But there is another aspect of the Kingdom that Peter does not fail to notice. This is that the Kingdom is the sphere of the government of God. Even that great potentate, Nebuchadnezzar, was brought to recognise that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men”. When Isaiah prophesies “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given”, he adds the words, “and the government shall be upon his shoulder”. The Lordship of Christ is not confined to His people, for He is Lord of all. His government is exercised at the present time in an unseen way, and it might appear that man is getting his own way, but nothing is out of divine control, and the time is soon coming when the Lord Jesus will intervene personally. Isaiah, in the same prophecy (Isaiah 9:6-7), says “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever”.

Peter’s first epistle concentrates very much on the position and prospects of the Christian: the time of trial and suffering in the absence of the Lord Jesus, and the bright prospect of being glorified with Him when He appears. In the second epistle he turns to the more general subject of God’s government directed against false teachers in the Christian profession and against a world that has long turned away from God. It is a searching ministry, but it looks on to the end of the ways of God in time, and to what lies beyond, which Peter describes in these words: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness”.

So what are the characteristics of the Kingdom for the Christian? Faithfulness in the absence and rejection of our Lord. Subjection to His will and energy in His service. Patience in the time of trial while we wait for Him to come. Expectation of His appearing and glorious reign. And intelligence, as we understand from the Scriptures how the purpose of God in relation to His universe is working out under the authority of the Lord Jesus. These are the themes that occupy the ministry of the apostle Peter. They find their focus in the Person of the Lord Jesus, and should lead us with Peter to his closing doxology, “To Him be glory both now and forever, Amen”.

The Mountain of Ministry

TOM TYSON

This paper gives in note form the first of a series of addresses. These were given in Otley in December 1989, on 'Mountain scenes in Matthew's Gospel'. The relevance for present-day believers of 'the sermon on the mount' is perhaps not understood by many; but all hearing this talk felt its importance. Like many of the words of our Lord the lesson was practical and searching.

The writer, in approving this outline of his address, says: Those who care to go through it with the chapters in front of them will follow the thoughts well enough. Over to you then, reader!

Matthew 5-7

If we step back to chapter 4:17, we find Jesus preaching 'the Kingdom of heaven is at hand'. This same statement had been announced previously by John the Baptist. But now that moment had arrived. The King was here in person. Thus in these three chapters the King lays down the principles of His rule. It is "instruction in righteousness" (see Isaiah 53:11 N. Tr.). But here there is no mentioning of redemption, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, etc. This, while not exactly 'Church' truth, has nevertheless much instruction and challenge for ourselves today. While certainly this is not the time of the kingdom publicly, we believers do form part of the kingdom 'in mystery', and should be demonstrating in our practice that we are its subjects.

In chapters 5 and 6, I wish to draw attention to four new ways of thinking which the Lord Jesus announces as characterizing the Kingdom.

(1) A new happiness or blessedness (5:3-12). Many of these 9 'blesseds' must have seemed very strange to those looking for a place in a kingdom of power and glory. They also are challenging to us because they run counter to the natural desires of self, and to current attitudes in the world.

Firstly, there are four opposites:

a. Blessed are the poor in spirit, entering as a little child would be so contrary to the self-opinionated attitudes adopted by many — the kingdom belongs to such.

b. Blessed are those that mourn. The king himself was once 'the man of sorrows'. We should note how frequently Scripture links heirs and glory
with the sufferings of this present time. The contrasting note is ‘they shall be comforted’.

c. Blessed are the meek. It is a mistake to think of meekness as weakness. Meekness is power under control. The world thinks little of this — it admires power in display. In contrast these meek ones will inherit the earth.

d. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Do we long for this, looking on to that day when ‘a king shall reign in righteousness’? The contrasting clause is ‘they shall be filled’. It reminds us of the verse “Jesus Christ . . . is made unto us . . . righteousness”.

Secondly, are three statements, of a ‘cause and effect’ type:

e. Blessed are the merciful. In chapter 6 the Lord speaks about forgiving others if we would know the forgiveness of our heavenly Father. The result is — they shall obtain mercy. (Eternal forgiveness is not in mind in this context.)

f. Blessed are the pure in heart. This speaks of clean, undivided integrity. The result of this — ‘they shall see God’. It has been said ‘what the heart loves the eyes will see in everything’. If our heart is set upon God we will see God in everything.

g. Blessed are the peacemakers. Remembering that God is the God of peace, and that Christ is the great peacemaker, having made peace by the blood of His cross, those of this character bear the family likeness — they are the sons of God.

Thirdly, there follow two totally unexpected things:

h. Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake. While the King is rejected and disowned, those under His rule find themselves in opposition to the world. He Himself said “If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). Losing the world is the cost of gaining the kingdom.

i. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you for my sake. Notice the change to “ye” here, i.e. the disciples. Here it is not only right actions, but personal devotion to Him. The quotation from John 15:21 also says “they will do it unto you for my name’s sake. Love is what the Lord desires above all else in this commitment. Thus the corresponding answer is great. “Rejoice,” He says, “and be exceeding glad — for great is your reward in heaven.”

(2) Additionally to this new happiness, there follows (vv. 13-16) a new sort of service. Both the illustrations used for it are passive. What is important in each is its essential quality. Salt carries a savour — light
shines. Without their essential quality they are valueless. So with subjects of our Lord. Notice too, that each has its effect noiselessly. See 1 Corinthians 13, where sounding brass and clanging cymbal contrasts with the silent work of love.

(3) Thirdly a new idea of what law is is drawn to our attention. Under the law outward compliance was required — but now, essentially, inward motive is stressed. Heart obedience exceeds this and lies at the root of the matter.

When we speak of not being under law, let us remember this. It has been said “we are not under the law, because the law should be inside us”. This may be a quotation from somewhere, but its source is not known. Our Lord said “Thy law is within my heart”, and what a perfect model of this He was!

“Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you. . . .”

Note the bare and basic items of the commandments, but also how He goes beyond them to the very root of each one.

Ye shall not kill . . . but what about anger, quarrelling, and bitterness?

Ye shall not commit adultery . . . but what about other covered-up ways of indulging the fleshly lusts?

You can divorce your wife . . . but how does God view it?

You shall not break an oath . . . but why do you need to use an oath? Should you not rather be those whose word alone can be relied on?

An eye for an eye, or, stick up for your own rights . . . but what about foregoing your own rights to win your enemy?

Love your friends, and hate your enemies . . . love your enemies, bless for cursing, do good for hating, pray for those who ill-treat and persecute.

“that ye may be the sons of your Father — who makes His sun to shine upon all — and of course we believers know the Father in a fuller, deeper way as ‘The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’.”

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Ephesians 4:32 - 5:1).

(4) Fourth — a new attitude to possessions (Chapter 6:19-34). Here come two great questions, and two corresponding exhortations:
Q1 Where is your treasure?
His advice — lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

Q2 Why are you worried?
Advice — Seek first (as a priority) the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

Finally, in Chapter 7 the Lord deals with the effect or non-effect of His teaching. There are five relevant passages, which may be covered briefly by five don'ts.

vv. 1-6 Don’t concentrate on the faults of others. Make sure you yourself are seeing clearly.

vv. 7-11 Don’t lack because you have not asked. God is ready to give, but we must ask.

vv. 13-14 Don’t miss the way. Choose the narrow way, however difficult it may seem.

vv. 15-20 Don’t be led astray. Test the supposed teachers by their fruit.

vv. 21-27 Don’t just listen — do. Saying, 'Lord, Lord', and hearing, are not enough in themselves. Doing (obeying) is essential to avoid disaster.

[The address moved too quickly at the end, for reasons of time. But, though sketchy, these notes may be valuable in bringing these matters to a wider notice.]

‘He Shall Testify of Me’

J. W. WOLF

(Acts 7:56; 2 Kings 2:9-13; Ephesians 4:13)

The writer, though by no means elderly, has recently retired. It is good to find someone who is prepared to use part of his time in this way. His theme is certainly an important one. The present witness, by the Holy Spirit, centres upon an exalted Man now in the glory of God. This is very much a distinguishing feature of Christian testimony.

We often speak of ‘maintaining the testimony’ and have many ways and notions as to how this should be achieved. First of all we need to understand what the testimony is. God does not leave Himself without a testimony.
There have been His witnesses throughout the developing ages. However, we now have a new testimony, which began when Stephen looked up into heaven and testified of the risen, glorified Lord — the Man in the glory. Consider Stephen’s address to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious leaders. He parades before them the great witnesses of Scripture, beginning with Abraham (called out by God), who was recognized as the father of the nation. He traced their history, mentioning the covenants, the promises, the growth of the nation, and the enslaving of that people by a king who knew not Joseph (God’s provider). Then he speaks of their conduct in the promised land, and of David (God’s choice of King), of Solomon who built a house for God. All these witnessed to the fact that Israel was a favoured people, chosen by God and the recipient of special blessings.

Up to that point the Sanhedrin gave him a quiet hearing. We can almost imagine them preening themselves, lifting their heads a little higher; proud of the position, the culture, and the standing of this nation of theirs. Little did they realize that Stephen was not giving them a history lesson. He was outlining their position of responsibility before God.

We now see the cutting edge of the sword of the Spirit. Stephen tells them not what he thinks of them, but rather what God thinks of them and their religious efforts. They are cut to the heart and gnash on him with their teeth (verse 54). To use modern parlance the whole scene erupts in an uproar of fury, and the malevolence of man comes out as they pour their abuse upon this witness of the exalted Christ. Stephen, true to his witness, looks up and says “Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God”. To the true Christian this is a delight to his heart, but to these leaders of the people it was another opportunity to turn to the Christ they had rejected. But they sent a message after Him, right to the glory, saying “we will not have this man to reign over us”. Stephen saw the Son of Man standing, indicating His readiness still to be their King, but they showed clearly that they would still reject Him.

Notice how Stephen shows the spirit of Jesus:

The Lord Jesus — “Father into thy hands I commend my spirit”.  
Stephen — “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”.  
The Lord Jesus — “Father forgive them for they know not what they do”.  
Stephen — “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”.

The Holy Spirit ever magnifies the Lord, and to those of us who know where His grace has placed us, that grace will make us like unto our Lord. It is the responsibility of every Christian in the scene where He was rejected to be descriptive of our Lord Jesus Christ, the exalted Man.
An O.T. example of this is Elisha. Here, before His death, Jesus beforehand told his disciples He was to depart, but also spoke of another gift to comfort them. He always knows what is best for His own. He does not give them exactly what they would desire. Elijah asks Elisha what he would desire when they were parted. “A double portion” would be granted “if ye see me when I am taken”. Elisha fulfils the condition — he sees Elijah taken up. Do we not also have a condition to fulfil? Yes, “we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour” (Hebrews 2:9).

Elisha was conscious of the fact that he was now the prophet in Israel; he had a new position. Are we conscious of this? As soon as Elisha had received the power commensurate with that new position, he took off his own garments, rent them in pieces, and took up the mantle of Elijah. Nothing here should satisfy us but to be as those who would testify to the glory of the exalted Man in heaven. Do we have the power to do this? Certainly not in ourselves. But, “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me”. We believers, the instruments — the Holy Spirit the power. Even the youngest of us, the most inexperienced, as well as those further on in experience, have this blessed comfort. The Lord Jesus having gone away, has left us here with the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and “He shall testify of Me”.

We have so far looked at the testimony in the light of the individual. But the testimony is a corporate matter. Those individuals are members of one body. Saul of Tarsus, hearing the Lord Jesus from heaven, on the road into Damascus, was astounded to hear that challenging voice asking “Why persecutest thou me?” The Man in the glory was claiming that the one whole body of Christians on earth formed His body. “We are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Corinthians 12:27). We are not mere lone saints here in the place where He was rejected. That we are involved in this ‘one body’ is part of the reason we are left here at all. If you take the individual stance, it carries the assumption that you can stand in the place where He was not allowed to do so. When born again we enter a new realm, a new position. We are not now connected with earth and with earthly things, but with heavenly things and with that blessed Man who is already there, in the glory of God.

He is the Head of His body, the church (Colossians 1:18). Connected in this way, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can show forth His virtues, as lights in a dark place, dimly perhaps, but nevertheless like unto our Lord.

In Ephesians, we find that Paul does not speak of our practice until
he has made us aware of the power for it. Chapter 1 speaks of the counsel of God. We read there of “the greatness of His power to us-ward who believe” (vv. 19-23). Chapter 2 tells us that the same power that set Christ at the right hand of God has raised us up to the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (v. 6). In Chapter 3 we can survey the breadth, length, depth and height, and are brought to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. We are made aware that God is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think (vv. 18,20). There is power at our disposal enough to enable us to face all opposition. We have acquired much indeed from God, in His gracious favour to us.

So we come to our practical conformity with these high truths, fitting us to reflect them. In 4:13 the unity of the faith is the measure, the standard by which we should measure ourselves. Some have watered this down by saying it is future only, when we are given our new bodies in the glory. We should never lower the standard, but should remember this is something we should be moving towards, progressing on to it. “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 fulness of Christ”.

May we ever realize that we are connected with the risen exalted Man in the glory, by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. This is the power given us, enabling us for this testifying. Thus we have the power to put off the old and to put on the new, and to be living here for Christ. In this there would be a living testimony to His grace and glory.

The Perfection of Christ

“What is thy beloved more than another beloved? . . .
My beloved is . . . the chiefest among ten thousand”

(Canticles 5:9-10)

Christ’s perfection does not glitter, it glows. The saintliness of the Lord Jesus is so warm and human that it attracts and inspires. He receives sinners and eats with them — Nicodemus, the moral religious sinner, and Mary of Magdala, “out of whom went seven devils”, the shocking kind of sinner: He comes into sinful lives as a bright, clear stream enters a stagnant pool. The stream is not afraid of contamination, but its sweet energy cleanses the pool.

He is always being “touched with compassion”. The multitude without a shepherd, the sorrowing widow of Nain, the little dead child of the ruler, the demonic of Gadara, the hungry five thousand — whoever is suffering touches His heart. And what grace in His sympathy. Why did He touch that poor leper? He could have healed him with a word, as He did the nobleman’s son. Why, for years the wretch had been an outcast, cut off
from kin, de-humanized. It was defilement to approach him. Well, the touch of the Lord Jesus made him human again.

But it is in His way with sinners that His supreme beauty is most sweetly shown. How gentle He is, yet how faithful; how considerate, how sympathetic. When He speaks to that silent, despairing woman, after her accusers have gone out one by one, He uses for “woman” the same word as He uses when addressing His own mother from the cross. “Woman, hath no man condemned thee?” Even in the agonies of death He could hear the despairing cry of faith. When conquerors return from far wars in strange lands they bring their chiefest captive as a trophy. It was enough for Christ to take back to heaven the soul of a thief.—C. I. Schofield

Concern for Spiritual Growth

“For God is my witness how I long after you all in the bowels of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in full knowledge and in all intelligence, that ye may judge of and approve the things that are more excellent, in order that ye may be pure and without offence for Christ’s day, being complete as regards the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, to God’s glory and praise” (Philippians 1:8-11)

Paul had a concern for others. What was that concern? It was that they would grow spiritually. Paul expressed a similar concern in Colossians 1:9-10. “We also . . . do not cease praying and asking for you, to the end that ye may be filled with the full knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so as to walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the true knowledge of God.”

Paul’s concern for these saints was sincere to the point that he could call upon God as his witness. God knows the heart, and He knew that Paul longed for them with the tender mercies of Christ. Paul, earlier known as Saul, was one who went about imprisoning and killing Christians. Now by the grace of God he actually longed for them with the heart of Christ. Legalism will never produce such a concern. Only grace could free Paul from self-seeking, and self-glorifying legalism.

The servant must have a sincere interest in the growth of others, a real desire to see them walk according to the will of God and to mature in His things. He should never be a stumbling block, but should “pursue the things that tend to peace, and things whereby one shall build up another” (Romans 14:19). Make it a personal objective to be sincere (real, pure, without hypocrisy) as you serve others, and never to stumble (trip, cause to fall) another brother or sister.—S. J. Hulshizer

[Note: I am indebted to The Lord is Near Calendar for the above quotations.—Ed.]
The Breaking of Bread

GORDON SPRATT

HIS PERSONAL REQUEST

"Do this for a remembrance of me"

A series of four addresses on "The breaking of bread" were given on February 12th to 15th of this year. Two of these were in Otley, and two in Bradford. The freshness and centrality of the theme came over with force. Our brother is heavily-committed in many ways and contributes much already to this magazine. Yet this material is too important for my readers to miss — so I offered to try to get it down from the tapes, and into print. Much of what was expressed was carefully said, and could easily be distorted, so he has agreed to check through my version each time. This first address covers the primary reason for treating our Lord's request seriously. I hope the direct and strong nature of our Lord's appeal to each reader will clearly be felt.

The whole of 1 Corinthians 11:20-30 was read first.

I have felt impressed to speak on 'the breaking of bread' this week. Whether we call it this, or 'the Lord's supper', or whether we use terms drawn from Christendom at large, like the eucharist, the mass, holy communion, etc., it is a service with which almost the whole Christian profession is familiar. Without at this point emphasising differences, it is plain that through nearly 2,000 years since our Lord asked for it to be done, it has been done. We must remind ourselves in our meetings this week of the vital importance, the centrality in the Christian faith, of what we call "the breaking of bread". It is because I believe that it has that importance that I feel the need to speak about it. I am disturbed and distressed when I find some Christian companies ignoring it altogether, or tacking it on as peripheral to something
that they seem to feel more important, or doing it at fairly long intervals. These things I find difficult to understand, hence the desire to look at the Scripture again.

For the purpose of what I want to say, I suggest four prime reasons why we should break bread:

1. Because it is the personal request of the Lord Jesus.
2. Because it is the expression of our unity.
3. Because it is an act of testimony.
4. Because it leads into the Sanctuary.

Some of these points will become clearer as we proceed, but taken together they are surely enough to persuade us of the importance of this act of remembrance. Now we go straight to the first reason.

This, His personal request, even apart from the others, ought to be sufficient for us. It is hard to see how anyone could ignore it. If we read the account of it in the synoptic gospels, we might possibly think that the request was made just to the disciples who surrounded Jesus in the upper room. But it is reinforced by the Lord, from the glory, through Paul in this passage in Corinthians. No one can think that any lover of Jesus is omitted, as He speaks here from heaven. It is binding on us. It was His strong desire. "Oh, deep desire of love", the hymn says. Whose desire? It was His desire. The setting in which the supper occasion was inaugurated should be a great lever in our hearts.

The setting

"The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread...". It is remarkable that Paul did not write: "on the same night in which He was arrested", or "on the evening before He died". No. It was "the same night in which He was betrayed". It is related in a way that brings Judas into focus — one who in the prophetic word was His own familiar friend, who had companied, in the closest possible communion, with Him here in this world — and he betrays Him with a kiss! The night in which Judas perpetrated that most terrible act of betrayal, the Lord Jesus took the bread and the cup and said, "This do...". Is it not our desire, our duty if you like, the obligation of our love for Christ, that here where He was betrayed in the house of His friends we should do it? Let us not dwell on Judas, except to recall how often the spirit of disloyalty and betrayal has been in us. Take it home to yourself, each one, this "deep desire of His love". Is it any less deep now, as He seeks our response today? Not at all. The setting of this remembrance must surely have a tremendous impact upon us. He had Gethsemane in His vision — unlike us who
do not know what lies just around the corner. Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Golgotha — He knew it all, just a few hours ahead. Soon the sweat of His agony was to fall like drops of blood to the ground. Have we a reason why we are not breaking bread? It should be our whole desire to do it. Looking down through the centuries He says: “I want you to do this”.

As He sat at the last Passover feast of His life on earth, He made of it something entirely new. Perhaps for the last time He would consider those disciples as Israelites. With them He was to be linked in a new way as the fruit of His death. And all the sufferings immediately ahead were weighing upon His holy soul at that very time when He said to them — and to us — “This do . . .”.

The significance

Along with the poignancy of the setting in which the Lord’s supper was instituted, we are to be reminded of its significance. His own words point to this. He, the Lord Jesus, took an ordinary loaf and an ordinary cup of wine. Of all the articles He might have selected, as emblems, as memorials, it would be difficult to think of any others which could have deep spiritual significance and yet be simply and easily available to every company of Christians over nearly 2,000 years. What divine wisdom was shown in the choice of these things! They were both readily available and perfect in their suitability to convey His intended and worship-provoking meaning to us. Let me try to point this out. Verse 24: “This is my body” (not, of course, His literal body, but a symbol of it). Think of that body. Remember the verse “A body hast thou prepared me . . . Lo! I come . . . to do thy will, O God”. The most wonderful body that has ever been here in this world! The only body ever here that did not become the instrument of sin! Absolutely unique. The only body that was held entirely for the will and pleasure of God. The only body in which a man never, ever, thought about himself. “This is my body, which is for you”. What a body was the body of Jesus! How could those men take that body, and mar it, and scourge it, and hang it on a tree? How did they do it? They had no understanding whatever of what a body it was. What it meant to God! I wonder at the forbearance of God in allowing it — but where should we be without it? On the one hand “He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”; on the other hand, “He was taken by wicked hands, and crucified, and slain”.

Then He takes the cup. “This cup is the New Testament (or the New Covenant) in my blood; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me”. What kind of blood was this? Blood had been shed on Israel’s altars for more than a thousand years. The hymn says:
Not all the blood of beasts, on Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace . . .
But Christ, the spotless Lamb, took all our guilt away. . . .

Peter writes: “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot . . .”. Wonderful blood — the blood of Jesus. It is treasured up before God as the continual memorial of that perfect redeeming work once done at Calvary.

I want to suggest to you that all the great foundational truths of Christianity are associated with those two symbols on the table when we break bread every Lord’s Day. They are meant to be portrayed to us in the bread and the wine. **Incarnation.** “This is my body”, says Jesus — God had never before inhabited a body. “The Word became flesh”, became incarnate, at His birth. “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, bodily” — in a body. A great mystery indeed, but true! God had never been seen before, but John says, “We have heard . . . we have seen . . . our hands have handled (Him)”. What a body it was into which Jesus came! Also **Substitution** — another of those long doctrinal words — “This is my body, which is for you”. It was a body which bore the whole of God’s awful judgment upon sin, *in my room and stead*. Did I deserve it? Did you? No, it was the unspeakable love of God which gave His beloved Son to take a body and to go to the Cross. “He bore our sins in his own body on the tree”. Do you think sufficiently of *that* when you hear His words, “This is my body . . . for you”?

Then there is **Propitiation**, a difficult word, maybe. Romans 3:25 uses it. Here is God’s wonderful basis of blessing. Of ourselves we could do nothing to escape from our plight, but God from His own side had planned that great moment when the precious blood of Jesus should be shed. What a propitiation for our sins! what satisfaction for the heart of a holy God!

Next, **Reconciliation.** Wonderful indeed it is to be reconciled to God — we who were alienated, enemies in our minds by wicked works. More than that, He has reconciled all things to Himself. “Having made peace.” How? “By the *blood* of his cross.” More still: “Reconciled in the *body* of his flesh through death” (see Colossians 1:22). What wonderful things are inherent in those emblems of which we partake! How comprehensive they are! Then **Redemption.** Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 say the same: “In whom we have redemption through his *blood*, the forgiveness of sins . . .”. **Justification** too. “Being now justified by his *blood*, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9). We celebrate it at the remembrance meeting. There can never be a stain upon us in God’s holy sight, since that
blood has removed every taint of sin for ever. Do we take it too much for granted?

Sanctification. "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate". Do we think of these things, dear brethren? Or do we come simply out of habit, expecting to see a loaf and a cup on the table, and hardly thinking of the significance of what we do. Each of us should examine himself, or herself, on this. Let us bear always in mind that our Lord looks for an understanding of, and response to His immeasurable love, the love that led Him on through every kind of abuse inflicted on that holy body, until the moment when the soldier thrust the spear into His side, and thence “flowed forth the blood to save”.

Final Words

I want to go on a little, because so far I have occupied you only with what happened in the upper room, and Paul’s reference to it later.

But questions are often asked. When and how often should the breaking of bread take place? What form should the service take? Certainly one of the most notable things about it is the continuous participation, in one form or another, which has gone on from Pentecost until now. Never in the history of the Church has there been a time when people were not breaking bread. Yes, they have made mistakes. Yes, they have brought man-made ideas into it. Yes, they have associated with it practices which are dishonouring. But they have broken bread together in the world in which Jesus was crucified. They have done it, and will do it, Paul says so clearly, “until He come”. Its beginning had nothing to do with doctrinal prescription. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul sets in order a practice which in certain ways had got out of order. They had been breaking bread for some considerable time when Paul’s letter was written. It began from Pentecost because the Holy Spirit engaged their affections with the Lord Jesus. They did not need a prescription -- He had said “This do”, and they did it!

Three thousand souls were converted on the day of Pentecost, and the record in Acts 2 makes it abundantly clear that they were all baptised and began to break bread immediately. “They continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and prayers.” No inquisitions to see who was suitable. No enquiries as to who was old enough or worthy enough. They loved the Lord Jesus, and had heard of His words, “This do for a remembrance of me”. And they did it! They were waiting for Him to come according to His promise. Their hearts were warmed with gladness and expectation. They had His word, heeded it, and obeyed it.

When we come to Acts 20, we find Paul visiting Troas. By that time it had clearly become the practice of those early Christians to break bread
weekly, on "the first day of the week". The Jews among them would have been brought up to regard the seventh day as Sabbath, but I suppose they would have attached significance to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. Whatever the reason, it seems that by then the breaking of bread had been formalized (forgive the word) as a weekly occasion. Broadly speaking, this has been the pattern ever since. Like many others, I should feel bereft without it — as the weekly focus of love for Jesus. I accept that there can be exceptions and special occasions, but the weekly remembrance, honoured by both Scripture and tradition, is a happy norm.

But we must not become too formal. Perhaps I may be allowed to tell you about some recent experiences in Portsmouth. We have discovered that if we wish to hold what is known as a family service, it is not a bit of use setting it for 6.30 p.m. on a Sunday. We just cannot compete with the TV at that hour. But there is a possibility of persuading some people to a gospel-type service on a Sunday morning. Many others have discovered the same. So, after discussion and prayer, it was agreed to hold a family service once a month at 11.00 a.m. and to break bread at 3.00 p.m. Some were a little anxious about this break with tradition, but it is certain that Scripture specifies no time for the breaking of bread. Evidently at Troas they broke bread in the evening. At least I hope that is true, since Paul went on speaking until midnight! No doubt these people were employed during the daytime, and they had no free Sunday as we know it. Perhaps we should be more thankful for the freedom of the Lord's Day.

We did find families who would come to such a meeting, and afterwards we all had lunch together in the Hall. Afterwards some stayed on and witnessed the Lord's supper. We felt that we had lost nothing, but gained much, by venturing to depart from the traditional pattern. No departure from Scripture had taken place.

We feel that we are beginning to be known by, and closer to these few local people. We still see them, and the relationship is promising. I relate this experience simply for encouragement: if there is some good reason for rearranging your times, be ready to do so. Let us do everything with a view to the furtherance of the testimony of Jesus. Let us choose our times according to the demands of that testimony, bearing in mind that the Lord's supper is a part of it, as a later address will stress. The breaking of bread should not be governed by arbitrary considerations of tradition, but by the desire in our hearts to have fellowship together in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus, at the same time recognising our obligation of loyalty to Him in witness to others during His absence.
Green Pastures

JOHN BARNES

This paper presses a different lesson than that usually found in Psalm 23. Nevertheless it is a vital lesson for all who would thrive as Christians.

The verse from which these words are taken is, of course, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2). The idea generally derived from this idyllic text is that the believer is enabled to be at rest in places of quiet and refreshment, in order that he may enjoy the precious benefits he has been brought into in Christ. No one would dispute this conception, since we all do enjoy these times; but there could be other lines of truth enfolded in the text. A number of years ago I was standing with my father-in-law near one of his fields, and I remarked to him that all the animals were lying down chewing the cud; and added that they appeared to be quite at rest. He replied, “I like to see my animals lying down quietly and chewing the cud. It is then that they are putting on beef”. That remark set me thinking. Chewing the cud is not merely restful; it is an activity which has purpose, and this is what I would like us to think about.

Anatomists assert that ruminant animals have four stomach chambers. The grass which the animal crops, is swallowed down into the first stomach. Then later, when suitable conditions make it possible, the animal regurgitates the grass, chews it over, and swallows it again when it passes into the second compartment. The remaining two chambers of the stomach continue the work of trituration to convert the food which the animal has eaten into the ingredients required for building up the body. The cow eats, not simply to enjoy what it eats; it eats to live. The grass, hay and other parts of its diet are transformed, by the digestive process and succeeding arrangements, into bone, muscle, sinew, blood and the other things that the body needs for continuance of life. What I am trying to say is that what the animal eats and chews over in cud becomes a vital part of it. And I wish to apply this to us as Christians. Meditation on the Word, alone, though it is valuable, is not the end of the process; it is only part of it. So will you bear with me while I seek to apply the cud chewing process to our position as believers? When we read the Scriptures, we do so to feed our souls. I wish to present what I have to say on this subject under four headings.
1. Reading the Word

The first step in the complex mechanism of the development of the ruminant animal is taking in food; and the first step in the process of growth and healthy development in the Christian is taking in the truth. In order to do so we must have an appetite for the Word. It is astonishing how some Christians expect to be healthy and vigorous believers on the little food they take in. This is certainly the first step, and it must be taken. When Israel were on their wilderness journey, the Lord rained manna on the desert around their encampments, and all they had to do was to gather it up. This demanded certain antecedents. Firstly, a man had to be hungry to get out and gather the manna. Indeed this is noted in the account. “They gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating.” The man who had an appetite for the manna gathered it as he needed. Secondly, they had to get up early. If a man lay on in bed and could not be bothered to get up to gather the manna, he went hungry that day, because the day’s manna would not last over to the following day. Moreover, it did not remain on the ground after the sun was up. It had to be taken up freshly, each morning. This principle quite certainly applies to us regarding our intake of divine food. We must want it more than anything else, and we must be ready to get up and get it in the dew and freshness of the morning.

The food, thus taken in, is stored in the first part of the digestive system, but we cannot simply complete the initial step and hope that it will do its work automatically. In the case of the animal, the process becomes involuntary once the grazing and swallowing of the grass is completed. The animal chews the cud instinctively. We cannot depend on the process going on without exercise, interest and prayer. So I go on to the second of our headings.

2. Reflecting on the Word

Once we have read the Word, we must make time for meditation on what we have read. However we may view it, this much is certain; we must give deep consideration to the truth that we take in. This would apply just as clearly to what we listen to in the way of ministry as to what we may take in during our private readings of the Word of God. What we read or hear will have no beneficial effect on us unless we give it prayerful thought. The apostle Paul makes it clear with regard to ministry. What is set before us has to be given discriminating thought. “Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the others judge.” This does not mean that we should listen in a spirit of criticism, but that we should listen carefully to what is offered in ministry, and that we should give it discerning thought.
and follow up for ourselves the references given. The Bereans were commended for this practice. They did not check up on Paul to see if he had made a mistake; they searched the word to ensure that what he had taught them was in accordance with what was written. The apostle Paul urged Timothy to “meditate on these things”. The Lord told Joshua concerning the law; “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night” (Joshua 1:8). We read of the blessed man in Psalm 1, that he “meditates in the law of the Lord day and night”. And to the Philippians Paul wrote: “Think on these things”. Every word of God is pure and valuable. As we read a book, or a chapter, we are able to ponder on the meaning; what does the book teach? What is this chapter intended to convey to me? What does this word mean? As we are able to think along these lines, and more especially if our reading has been really regular, and has ranged widely enough in the scriptures, other texts will be recalled which have some connection with the subject, and our understanding will grow and our minds will be furnished with material of eternal value.

3. Receiving the Word

But even should we have proceeded thus far, we have still not gone far enough. The truth of scripture is not given us merely for our INFORMATION; it is provided for our FORMATION. The Lord did not give Israel the wonderful manna simply for them to be interested in it. They said of it: “What is it?” But a philosophical discussion of the manna was not the purpose of it being given. It was sent for them to eat and to live by. The word of God is not given to us to form suitable subjects for us to discuss together; it is given to us for us to live by. It is to form the saints in the likeness of Christ. If the process stops at being only a system of truth, however accurately we may hold it, it has not accomplished its purpose in us. The apostle Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, notes how they had received the word which was brought to them, “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”. This is how we should receive it into our hearts; it is the word of our God and merits our complete reception and our most careful thought. Every word of God sent to us is “worthy of complete acceptation”. We are to take it into our hearts and lives wholeheartedly.

4. Responding to the Word

Then, finally, there is the fourth stage in which the food partaken of is distributed throughout the body as the vital elements required for the healthy survival of the animal. In our lives there is a similar process,
but in a spiritual sense. We need our hands to be renewed day by day for the service of the Lord; we need our feet to be strengthened to fortify us for the arduous pilgrimage through the barren wilderness; we need our spiritual muscles to be strengthened for combat with the enemies. So, what we take in has to be worked out in daily living. A capable cattle breeder would be able to tell by an animal’s hide, or by the way it stands or walks, if all is not well. If our walk is defective, if how we stand as Christians is deficient in certain features, if our eye is not single and bright, these may be signs that the fourfold process has broken down somewhere. The word taken in is to be built into us, constitutionally. In the Christian these matters are not exactly involuntary; but are promoted by exercise and interest and prayer.

Facets of a Servant of God

STEPHEN RENWICK

When as a young boy I (the writer of this paper) looked at my father’s overflowing bookcase it was with a sense of awe and amazement. Could anyone possibly read and find lasting benefit from the sepia coloured pages of those sombre looking volumes?

In God’s grace I have discovered that there is indeed much of great interest and blessing contained in the writings of early brethren indwelt as they were by the Holy Spirit.

The following are a few thoughts based around some observations made by a brother James Smith almost a century ago, regarding “the facets of a servant of God”.

The context of his observations was the call of the prophet Ezekiel, as found in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of that name.

In these chapters we can vividly see seven facets (features) which characterize a servant of God:


“The Spirit entered into me when he spoke unto me and set me on my feet; and I heard him that spoke unto me.”

Time and again in Scripture we see that a true servant of God is a person full of the Holy Spirit, e.g. Stephen (Acts 6:5), Barnabas (Acts 11:24),
John on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:10).

What then is the evidence of being “filled”? Stephen, for example, “wrought wonders and great signs among the people”. Our verse, however, reminds us of the silent blessings of this filling of the Spirit — Ezekiel and any true servant of God is able to hear and discern the call and leading of the Spirit. This new perception is similar to having an interpreter in a foreign land. He brings understanding and direction never experienced before and wholly beyond our own capabilities.


“Son of man I send thee” (N. Tr.).
The mission upon which Ezekiel was sent was by no means easy; he was sent to a ‘rebellious’ people who had ‘transgressed’ against God. Ezekiel, like ourselves in our mission in this world (Matthew 28:18, et al) would soon learn that progress forward is only possible in God’s strength. Indeed the very name Ezekiel means “God Strengthens”.


“He said . . . eat what thou findest . . . so I opened my mouth. Son of man cause thy belly to eat and fill thy bowels with this roll . . . and I ate. . . .”

What was the outcome of Ezekiel’s eating? Was he left with a bitter taste? No, scripture records for us that Ezekiel counted the taste as sweet as honey. Do we treasure moments spent contemplating God’s word? Do we find it sweet as honey?

James Smith could ruefully say, “If the Word of God was more simply and fully received there would be more delight in it and more power through it”.

The Apostle Paul could say, “I delivered unto you that which I first also received” (1 Corinthians 15:3). God’s word must first be made our own before we can pass it on.

When we look among those with whom we meet we can identify those true servants of God, those who love His word and find it in their oasis in this wicked world.


“The house of Israel will not hearken to thee . . . I have made thy face hard against their faces . . . fear them not.”
The army of the Lord is not a place for the faint-hearted, just like Ezekiel we are faced daily by the forces of the wicked one. It is only by grasping hold of the fact that we are not so much on the winning side as on
the side that has won ("Fear not, I have overcome the world" John 16:33), and thus we have no need to fear, that we can become courageous servants of God. Remember that lovely verse in Isaiah 43:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine."


"The Spirit lifted me up and took me away and I went. . . ."

When God calls, we must obey. Reflect on these wonderful events, and think what might have happened if disobedience had come in:

- The call to Macedonia,
- The witness to the Ethiopian eunuch,
- The invitation to meet Cornelius.

Ezekiel went in bitterness but when we hear the call of the Lord how shall we respond? Remember these Old Testament words:

"To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams."


"I sat where they sat. . . ."

A saint of God who is aloof is unlikely to see the need of people around him. Our loving and gracious Lord made time to meet with social outcasts, e.g. "He must needs go through Samaria", and He also dispensed with social niceties, e.g. "He touched the bier . . .". He freely handled the leper, etc. Ezekiel paid not a fleeting visit to these 'captives' but abode with them at Tel-Abib for seven days. Paul again gives us an example when he "became all things to all men" that he might win them for Christ.


"I have appointed thee a watchman . . . his blood will I require at thy hand."

Ezekiel had a tremendous commission from God. He had to warn both the righteous and the wicked alike and go on warning them. We too have words from God to share with saint and sinner alike (Acts 20:26,27). Just how seriously do we take our commission? Remember 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word, be instant . . .". These are challenging matters which need prayerful consideration.

Conclusion

I must conclude from these challenging scriptures that I fall far short of displaying and fulfilling many of these facets. It is, however, my prayer
that we may be encouraged to “Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and thus to strive to be more like Him, the Perfect Servant”, on our pathway home to glory. Amen.

The Transforming Power of Christ (1)

ANDREW HILL

Some thoughts on Luke 24 and Acts 8

This paper is in two parts. First, we have the transforming power of Christ known on the very day of His resurrection, at the closest of quarters, by two persons. These, to their total surprise, moved over from utter sadness and disappointment, to unbelievable joy and wonder. Jesus made Himself known to them, filling their lives with new vigour and understanding. Secondly, we find another person, also disappointed and sad, as he puzzled over the Scriptures, after a fruitless visit to Jerusalem. Needing help, God by the Holy Spirit met that need. As a result, the One found in the Scripture, though no longer here on earth, revealed Himself to him. It was as effective as it had been in the first case. That man “went on his way rejoicing”, overjoyed and deeply satisfied. The same experience has been known by many, and is still known again and again today.

For 2,000 years these two passages (and others) have borne testimony to the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ in the lives of individual men and women. Even today, people are still experiencing real life-transforming events which they attribute to the same Lord Jesus Christ. These accounts are clear in the Scriptures as examples or patterns of the way God has sought to work in people right through the centuries of the growth of the church. The passing of time in no way diminishes the way in which people are being brought to know the Lord Jesus. History has shown that, from the very time of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, a means of meeting the deepest spiritual needs of mankind has been available. This was never known before. Nor is it to be found anywhere else.
It would hardly be possible to get closer to the heart of this matter than considering Luke 24. The two followers of Jesus were in a very special position. They were among the very first witnesses of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord. Indeed, their transformation took place on the very day of His resurrection — and this was only three days after they had seen Him die on a cross. They were in the exact time and place to know Him personally. It seems they must have seen many of His actions, and heard His words, and before His death had come to some conclusions about Him. They believed that He was “the Messiah who would redeem Israel” — a great political and religious leader sent especially from God, expected to banish the Roman domination, and rule in Jerusalem with great wisdom and authority. Until only a few days ago things seemed to be heading that way. He had entered Jerusalem in triumph with welcoming crowds lining the streets, shouting “Hosanna in the highest”. The turn of events in Luke 21 and 23 came as an utter shock to them. Within a matter of hours the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities had arrested Jesus and sentenced Him to death. In an extraordinary turn of popular opinion, the very crowds who had recently welcomed Him were now crying aloud in anger, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him! We will not have this man to reign over us”. He was led away as a criminal, although no fault had been found in Him, and He was crucified on a hill outside the city walls.

No wonder these two of His followers were so devastated and quick to leave Jerusalem, perhaps in fear. They were at a complete loss to understand the events which had so dramatically unfolded before them. All the good teachings of Jesus seemed pointless now. All His miracles that they had seen, and which had so convinced them seemed to count for nothing. His death, so sudden and dreadful, and His complete rejection by the mass of the people may have made them fearful. Deep doubts and questions about His integrity, though He had brought them so much hope, filled them.

The transformation for them began very gently and unobtrusively. Bowed as they were, deep in grief and bewilderment, they hardly noticed a fellow-traveller, who “drew alongside”, and soon was quietly asking why they were sad. There was nothing spectacular, but simply a companion who walked with them, willing to listen as they explained what had upset and astonished them. What an outpouring it was! Still more amazing was His understanding of the death of Jesus — of a kind they had never begun to appreciate for themselves. “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” — He questioned. As He opened the Scriptures to them they began to understand the whole purpose of the cross, seeing that it had all been clearly foretold, had they looked in
their scriptures, or even taken in Jesus' own teaching before He died. Recognition of the true nature of their companion dawned on them later, as He broke bread in their home at Emmaus. He left them quickly at that point. But they had seen enough! They were convinced. They had seen Jesus! Jesus — Jesus alive, the other side of death. He had walked and talked with them. They had shared a meal with Him! Everything was totally transformed for them. Resurrection had taken place — they had witnessed it with their own eyes!

Though late in the day now, they were soon retracing their journey, with new vigour and joy, arriving at Jerusalem to find that several now had heard the news, and soon to find that Jesus Himself came amongst them. It was so wonderful that "they believed not yet for joy”. Completely transformed indeed they were. Reader, if you believe that Jesus rose again, does it stir and excite you? Does it transform you?

Those two who journeyed with Him to Emmaus, receiving light on the O.T. from Him on the way, could now see His life, death, and resurrection with a new perspective. They knew that He was far greater than they had ever realised before. He had come to accomplish much more than they had earlier acknowledged.

Yes, no longer did they see Jesus as a prophet, a teacher, or popular leader — but they saw Him to be God the Son. He had not come to affect just the Jewish people and the area around Jerusalem, but to reach out to all men everywhere. He was not going to leave a mark on history for the span of a lifetime, but to transform the history of centuries, and make a great mark on eternity itself. They had seen the life of the Lord Jesus, that it had been pure and perfect in obedience to God's will and in service to men. They had seen the death of Jesus, and knew that He had not gone to the cross in any sense because He deserved to die, but that He had willingly allowed wicked men to take Him there. He had died in the place of sinners, to bear for them God's righteous judgment. They had seen the resurrection of Jesus. They knew the Deity of Christ was asserted there. His victory over sin and death and Hell had been won. Eternal life was made available in Him. In short, He had fulfilled the Name He had earlier been given — the Saviour of the world!

The transformation of the two disciples was very real because they grasped for themselves personally all that Jesus had done for them. He had done it all. That perfect life reached its climax when He offered Himself spotless to God in death for them. They could never have borne God's judgment for their own sins, let alone the sins of others. He had risen triumphant over death and the grave, so that they could be brought into eternal life, which they could never have earned. And He Himself had
drawn alongside them, revealing Himself, and opening their understanding.

All these were glorious truths which they witnessed personally in Jesus Himself. They had been clearly foreseen in the O.T. Scriptures. Here the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, and the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, are made clear. The Scriptures are all about Christ, and Christ is the complete fulfilment of the Scriptures. Here is the seal of God's intentions of love towards all men everywhere.

[Part 2 will follow later]

“My favourite highway sign is the one that reads “END OF CONSTRUCTION”. Especially after driving several miles at a snail's pace with frequent stops, my frazzled nerves delight to see open highway again. I settle back with a sigh of relief — that is, until the next sign that reads: “CONSTRUCTION ZONE — NEXT 8 MILES”.

The Word of God abounds with passages that describe the “END OF CONSTRUCTION” for believers: for although the work of Christ has perfectly fitted us for heaven from the moment we believe, the work of the Spirit is to conform us increasingly to Christ while we live on earth. There are potholes to be filled, rough places to be refinished, and sometimes even a temporary detour indicated. At times, some of the “lanes” of our lives may become so worthless that they must be marked off as unusable.

But of this we can be sure. The One working in our lives with absolute skill will never make any unnecessary repairs, nor will He ever do any work at the wrong time. Further, He will not stop constructing until the work is complete. Then, “this corruptible will put on incorruption, and this mortal will put on immortality”.

Standing before Him in all the perfections provided by His infinite grace, we shall know that we have come to the “END OF CONSTRUCTION”, and exclaim:

“All Thy works shall praise Thee, Jehovah,
And Thy saints shall bless Thee.”

(Psalm 145:10)

G. W. Steidl (from The Lord is Near Calendar)
Two Men of Remarkable Faith

R. A. CREETH

Caleb in the Old Testament and Paul in the New are examples of extraordinary faith and spiritual vigour.

Caleb is first mentioned in Numbers 13:6, when Moses sent a man of each tribe to search the land of Canaan. Amongst the twelve men were Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Oshea (later called Joshua) the son of Nun.

From now on the name of Caleb is closely linked with that of Joshua, who is a type of Christ as the Captain or Leader who brings His people into the promised land. Together Joshua and Caleb search the land and bring back a good report, together they cross the desert, together they enter Canaan and take possession. They are united in faith and purpose, and tread the same path together with the same object in view. What an example to us to be so associated with Christ as Caleb was with Joshua, to have His companionship day by day, step by step, along the pilgrim path!

Do we not see this steadfastness of faith and spiritual energy exemplified in the pathway of the apostle Paul? He tells us that his earnest expectation and hope was that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. For, says he, “for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:20-21).

The twelve spies sent by Moses reach Hebron (Numbers 13) and thence proceed to Eshcol where they cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes which needed two men to carry it. They also brought of the pomegranates and figs, all proving the magnificent fertility of the land. But it was not Eshcol which arrested the attention of Caleb, his faith reached on to Hebron whereon his feet had trodden, and from that moment it became the great desire of his heart. He longed to possess it for his inheritance: it became a prize set before him.
Similarly, when Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road first had a vision of the glorified Lord he could say, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ". He had come in contact with a divine Person, once crucified but now the glorified Christ of God. Christ had won his heart, and He had become the one absorbing Object before his soul. From henceforth he would press on, until in resurrection he would be glorified like his Lord.

Caleb’s faith was greatly tested. With the rest of the spies he had seen the walled cities and the giantlike sons of Anak, but his heart was undaunted. He was for pressing on. "Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it." These bold words of faith came from a courageous man who was "strong in the Lord and the power of His might". But all in the camp rejected his counsel and that of Joshua, and threatened to select a captain and return to Egypt. Overcome by their unbelief and fear, the people never reached the promised land.

Caleb had to wander in the wilderness with the others, but throughout that long and wearisome journey did he not learn more and more of the sufficiency of his God, and prove the truth of J.N.D.’s beautiful hymn?

"In the desert God will teach thee
What the God that thou hast found,
Patient, gracious, powerful, holy;
All His grace shall there abound."

In the case of the apostle Paul, not only had he counted all things but loss for Christ when he first saw His glory on the Damascus road, but after many years of faithful and arduous service he could say, "Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them as refuse, that I may win Christ". And though sorely tried by a thorn in the flesh he learned the sufficiency of his Lord, who said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Forty-five years passed, and Caleb stood before Joshua, his old friend and leader. He was now four score and five years old, and Hebron was still in his heart, as it had been at Kadesh-barnea. At last he could lay claim to it — Hebron on the hill, where his feet trod in the day when he first viewed the fruitful and pleasant land. He says, "As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day when Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in". He goes on to claim his prize: "Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how
the Anakims were there, and the cities were great and fenced. If so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said." In the face of such steadfast faith and confidence, what could Joshua do but bless him and give him Hebron for an inheritance, because he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel (Joshua 14:11-14).

We may learn much from each of these two men. Let us follow Caleb's steadfastness, and press towards Paul's mark. Caleb fixed his eye upon an earthly inheritance: Paul looked for a heavenly portion with Christ above. Caleb set his heart upon Hebron: Paul's mind was on Christ, and conformity to Him in glory. He was captivated by the beauties and glories of Christ, as he says by "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord".

Caleb endured the rigours of forty years of desert life, followed by intense fighting to dispossess the fierce Anakims, all the while patiently waiting to take possession of his longed-for inheritance. Paul was filled with an intense longing to know Christ, to share His sufferings, even to pass through death as his Master had done because that would bring him into the presence of his glorified Lord. As Caleb steadfastly pressed on to his goal, so Paul says, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus".

It is worthy of notice in regard to Caleb that neither his great age nor the weary desert journey had diminished in the smallest degree his strength. Was not this because he had no confidence in himself, but he relied entirely upon the Lord? How true it is that we realise strength, spiritual strength, as we mistrust self! It is thus we go from strength to strength. Similarly the apostle says, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10) — weak in natural strength, but strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Ephesians 6:10).

Now let us consider another comparison between Caleb and Paul. Both exhibited considerable determination and perseverance which had an effect on others. Caleb had a nephew named Othniel who courageously smote the town of Kirjath-sepher and took it, and for doing so won Caleb's daughter Achsah as his wife. Caleb gave Achsah a goodly portion of south land, but a south land without water would soon be dried up, so she moved her husband to ask yet more. "Give me also springs of water," she requested, and her persevering faith was rewarded; springs of water were richly bestowed upon her. These springs of living water are types of the Holy Spirit given to us to make our heavenly inheritance real and living to us.

As for Paul, his steadfast and persevering faith was reflected in
Timothy whom he called "my own son in the faith". Writing to the Philippians the apostle could say of him, "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on. For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 2:20-21, N.Tr.). To the end of Paul's life his dearly-loved Timothy remained his devoted friend and helper, and it is clear that in Paul's two epistles to Timothy the aged apostle looked to Timothy for a continuance of the truth which he himself had so faithfully expounded.

May we be encouraged to persevere in our Christian witness as we reflect on the lives and service of these two devoted servants of the Lord. Let us cultivate the faith and determination of Caleb to value and appreciate more and more our heavenly inheritance, and to press on with the single-mindedness and longing expectation of the apostle to the goal set before us — conformity to Christ in glory.

The Transforming Power of Christ (2)

ANDREW HILL

The second part of this paper continues the same theme, considering instances of that complete change in lives as they move over from sadness and disappointment, to the deeply joyful experience known when the living Christ is known.

The first case was special in that the two disciples discovered Him to be alive on the very day of our Lord's resurrection as He revealed Himself directly to them. This second example could be thought of as more normal today, when Jesus is ascended and the Holy Spirit works within souls (through the Scriptures, and using the Lord's servants) to awaken them to Christ.

The Ethiopian's openness to the Word, and to the one who was able to help towards opening his eyes to Christ is also clear, and surely provides a needed lesson for ourselves too.

Not only did Jesus appear in resurrection to those two of His followers, but to all of His disciples — each of whom experienced the same transformation (apart from Judas the betrayer, who killed himself). Here
THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF CHRIST

is a great testimony to the historical fact of the resurrection, quite apart from the massive evidence surrounding the actual events at the tomb. Sorrow was turned to joy, fear to courage, deep doubt to glowing faith. Later as many as 500 people at once saw the risen Christ. They were convinced of His deity, and that all He had accomplished was for their eternal salvation.

However, the consequences were to extend beyond the immediate ones. In His appearances to His disciples, Jesus told them to wait for power from heaven after He had ascended and would no more be seen. Then they were to go out into all the world with the message about His life, death, and resurrection, and the salvation to be found in Him. One illustration of the work which followed from this stage is found in the Ethiopian’s story. This is where we begin to see how it is that people ever since have been able to undergo the transforming power of Christ. The amazing thing is that the message carried by the disciples, about Jesus, has exactly the same effect upon people as He Himself had on those who had seen Him directly.

The Ethiopian had been seeking God for a long time. In the end he made the hazardous journey to Jerusalem. Clearly it seemed to be a great final attempt to find the true God. But he found no help in Jerusalem, and, like the two from Emmaus, he left the city depressed and still full of doubts and questions. The religious people there could be of no help to him — they had recently rejected the Messiah so clearly foretold in their holy writings. They put Him to death outside the city walls. In fact, in his chariot he was reading the passage in Isaiah 53 which foretold these events perhaps more clearly than any other. But he was puzzled by them, and needed someone to explain it all to him.

Meanwhile Philip, one of the twelve disciples, felt a direct word of guidance from the Holy Spirit (the great source of power from above, promised by Jesus, who had come upon the disciples at Pentecost). Philip had gone out beyond Jerusalem in obedience to the Lord Jesus, and was now finding many hearers in Samaria. Strangely, however, he was bidden by the Spirit to leave that busy work and to go down to the lonely desert. Yes, God was concerned with a single enquiring soul — out there in the desert! Philip was led to that dear man, confused and in difficulty while travelling home away from Jerusalem. In a manner reminiscent of the previous story, Philip “drew alongside” the chariot, and quietly asked the question that touched the depths of the traveller’s need — “Do you understand what you are reading?” Immediately on hearing his further question “WHO is this passage talking about?” Philip had a ready answer, of course. His wonderful opportunity was to “preach to him JESUS”. The
Scripture focused on Jesus. Jesus, the One who came to bring salvation to men — to open the way for true reconciliation and relationship with God. He alone could remove the barrier of sin and provide that avenue into the true worship of God which he had been seeking.

Once again the transformation was clear and immediate. For this Ethiopian, Jesus Christ now held the answer to every question. He found fulfilment not in a religious system, not in a holy place, but in a Person. The Scriptures, and the testimony of Philip, a Christian guided by the Holy Spirit, were enough. He was introduced personally to Him on that (for him) momentous journey, and finally “went on his way rejoicing”. The seeking soul found what he sought; his serious seeking was rewarded. The One who died for him was risen too, and though ascended now to heaven, had revealed Himself to him, and was still approachable in repentant faith. His disappointment was transformed to joy on hearing about this great Person. No doubt he himself began to tell many of his countrymen about Jesus as soon as he arived home.

So it is that the message spreads more and more in our day, with no loss at all in the saving power of the Lord Jesus with the passage of time. The New Testament now stands complete as a further and clearer testimony to Him. Christians can still quietly draw alongside any person who is seeking the truth, and simply point them to Jesus. They can have the thrill of seeing the response of faith in Him. The resurrection still has the power to bring people into a completely new life, as many individuals are “born again” into the everlasting kingdom of the Son of God. People still experience, not a human message, but the person of Jesus Himself, reaching down from heaven in love. Yes, all the honour still attaches to Him. Christians merely point the way. He draws near to those who come to Him in repentance and faith. He will “walk with them and talk with them, right along life’s narrow way”. They are destined for His own home in heaven, in the day when faith gives place to sight. Then, “lost in wonder, love, and praise”, they shall know Him for evermore.

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Our Lord’s Words: Go . . . teach . . . baptise . . . “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”.

“With stately impressiveness this asserts the unity of the three by combining them all within the bounds of the single Name; and then throws up into emphasis the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the single article.”

Quoted from B. B. Warfield
The Breaking of Bread (2A)

GORDON SPRATT

The expression of our unity

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16,17)

We come now to the second of the four reasons why we should break bread. We do so because it is the expression of our unity as believers. The passage above speaks about the communion of the blood of Christ, and the communion of the body of Christ. The word communion carries the idea of fellowship or partaking — a sharing of something. Clearly then this is more than being together as individuals. We cannot have all believers together in one place — it was hardly possible even on the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 souls were saved. From the very beginning Christians have met together in companies smaller than the whole body of believers. Maybe in the earliest days believers were absolutely one in outlook, doctrine and manner of life, but even then it was physically impossible that they should all meet together in one place. Today other considerations have added to the obstacles to one unified gathering, even in the same neighbourhood. It would be wonderful if all true believers in Otley (say) could all be together in a practical expression of unity, but sadly it is not so.

It is not my purpose, however, to look at the reasons for that practical disunity, but rather to press the categorical statement of Scripture in Ephesians 4, that "There is one body". This means exactly what it says. Every blood-bought saint is a member of that body. William Kelly states: "Faith does not see many bodies and one Spirit: it knows but one body". We can tend sometimes to forget it. In our headline Scripture the first-mentioned matter is the blood of Christ. Why? Because the blood is the very basis of our unity. Every blood-bought, Spirit-endowed believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a member of that body. Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostalists, Roman Catholics — never mind: we are not dealing with what divides but rather with what unifies. The great point of essential unity lies in the blood of Christ.

Let me illustrate. Imagine yourself in Egypt in one of the households of the Israelites, and outside on the doorposts and the lintel has been painted the blood of the Paschal lamb. Within these houses all kinds
of individuals are found, old and young, good and bad, and many other
differences. In other circumstances these differences might be important,
but what matters solely at this point is that they are together under the
shelter of the blood. It is their great point of unity. The blood of Christ
is foundational to our blessing, and it links us to every true believer
worldwide.

"The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of
Christ?" I suggest that, whereas the blood refers to the basis of our blessing,
or the basis of the existence of a unity between us, the idea of the body
refers more to what is put into expression. I don’t need to go further than
1 Corinthians 12 to demonstrate this point. Paul uses the human body to
show it. A dismembered head has no means of expression. I can conceive
all kinds of things in my head, but without arms, legs and other organs
of articulation, there is no expression. The expression of Christ which
should be in evidence in the Christian company arises because we jointly
participate in the “communion of the body of Christ”. We find in 1
Corinthians 12:12-13, “as the body is one and hath many members, and
all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is
the Christ. For by one Spirit were we all baptised into one body;
whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have all been
made to drink into one Spirit”. What a wonderful body is the body of Christ!
If I went to Egypt today I might have difficulty in understanding some of
the local customs, why they do this and why they do that; but with my
Egyptian Christian friends, I should be immediately at home. No national
differences, cultural differences, social differences, can spoil the unity of
the body of Christ.

Even differences of Christian outlook and dogma, unless they touch
the fundamentals of our faith, should not be allowed to hinder the
recognition of the fact that there is one body, and, in the breaking of bread,
a divinely instituted means of expressing it. As we look round in our own
familiar gatherings, we see sisters sitting in comely silence, some brothers
contributing audibly, others for the moment silent. A brother gives thanks
for the bread and the cup, not by human appointment, but as led by the
Holy Spirit, and not as an individual but as representing all the others.
For we are in a body, and this is the expression of it. We do not act as
so many individuals, but as members of Christ’s body.

“So also is the Christ.” He is represented in this world by this act of
communion. Of course He is also represented practically in many other
ways — in our activities and in our relationships one with another, in the
warmth of affection and practical unity of those who are “members one
of another”. But surely, in a very special way, as we sit around the
emblems of our Lord’s death, there should be a real and regular expression of that unity — the communion of the body of Christ.

People speak of the “Baptist communion”, “the Anglican communion”, etc., but this is not at all in line with Scripture. Rightly speaking there is only one communion, the body of Christ. What a privilege to have our part in it!

In the figure of the one loaf something of the nature of that unity is also indicated. Jesus, in John 12:24, refers to His death as like a grain of wheat which, if it dies, produces much fruit, or “many grains”. His dying, in this sense, produced many of the same kind — many who partake of the divine nature — all of the same nature as the one grain. We, the whole body of believers, are “one bread”. We had no right, and no natural desire, to be that, but mystery of mysteries it is so. The workings of God’s grace and power, the redeeming work of Christ, and the operation of the Holy Spirit have brought it about.

Whilst there may be superficial differences, of age, of intelligence, of temperament, nevertheless a oneness of nature binds us together. It is the nature of Christ, of course. The one grain and the many grains. The consistency between the seed and the fruit is clear in John 12:24.

So the oneness of the whole body of Christ is an element in what is celebrated when we take the Lord’s Supper. At other times we may be engaged in individual services for Him, and there will inevitably be distinctions of responsibility, opportunity and capability, but unity is the hallmark of our presence together at the breaking of bread. There we all act jointly and on an equal footing.

We come now to a difficult part of our subject. On the one hand the Lord’s Table must be guarded against intrusion. On the other hand there should be, and in a certain sense must be, an expression of the unity of the whole body.

Is there not a danger that we may be so occupied with our correctness, and with the shortcomings, real or suspected, of others, that we make of ourselves a spiritual élite? Elitism is the “we are the people” attitude, and it is a great evil in the things of God. We are one body in Christ, and that is the basis on which we receive persons to the Lord’s Supper. So let us ask ourselves this question: Who is to be received, and why?

The clear answer is, every sincere believer in the Lord Jesus who is practically walking true to His Name. Every single one. How often have we transgressed that scriptural principle? Have we not perpetuated legalistic traditions and inherited malpractices in this particular matter? We say, for example, “But he’s from the Open fellowship”, or “But he doesn’t have a letter of commendation”. And so on. Do we think to
ask the basic question, "Is he a member of the one body?"

I do not like to quote from others, since it may suggest that we do not go by scriptural authority alone. But spiritual leaders, whose respect for the authority of the word is beyond question, can be quoted by way of guidance. Kelly writes, "Where a soul confesses Christ, really and truly, confessing Him in a way that commends itself to your own conscience as divine, receive him, for God has". How sad to refuse someone whom God has received. He adds, probably because he wrote it in a particular context, "He may be a Baptist or a Paedo-Baptist, never mind, receive him". How far have we got away from these pronouncements of our predecessors in the truth! We are almost surprised to learn that they said them.

J. N. Darby (in 1839) wrote: "I would add that all of you who are really Christians are free to come to the communion at Bridge Street, Hereford, without yielding any of your opinions, and even when attending other places of worship. We welcome the lowest and feeblest real Christian, even though they continue in worldliness, both of worship and practice, though of course we wish it were otherwise". Ah yes, you may say, but that was before the great division of 1848. True, but in a letter dated 1869 Darby writes, "The question is as to the reception of saints to partake of the table of the Lord with us — whether any can be admitted who are not formally and regularly amongst us. Suppose a person known to be godly and sound in faith, who has not left some ecclesiastical system as to which his conscience is not enlightened; nay which he may think more right. He is a godly person, known such. Is he to be shut out? If so, the degree of light is title to communion, and the unity of the body is denied by the assembly which refuses him."

That is as true today as when it was written. Whether we have adhered to the principle of it is a serious question. You may say, wouldn't it be good to have a letter of commendation? Of course it would. Every possible means should be followed to establish the genuineness of those who present themselves for fellowship, whether by letter or by personal commendation. Someone responsible should always be at the door to establish the credentials of any stranger who comes with the intention of breaking bread. I labour the matter because there is a need to do so. There is no consistency of practice among assemblies in this country, dear brethren. But the authority for proper practice in this area must always be the word of God.
Sin — Exceeding Sinful

"Sin, by the commandment, became exceeding sinful"

(Romans 7:13).

A tremendous theme, of gravity far beyond any real human estimation, is the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Human sin — indeed our own sin. This must appear early in our coverage of these subjects; since without this, well-retained in our minds, other great themes which follow later could lose some of their lustre and wonder — the series would stand on too shallow a foundation.

The passage quoted above from Romans 7 envisages a human being under spiritual exercise — conscious of inward sin, endeavouring to defeat it by keeping the law. This does not succeed. The law only exposed his non-ability in his own strength to obey it. The effect of the law on him in that situation was to make it seem grosser — apparently worse, exposed now as disobedience.

I say apparently worse, since the foulness of sin, its absolute abhorrence to God, is not a matter which gets worse because of any man's deepening experience of it. As was said in Part 1, sin in its total offence to God is measured by the depths into which the Saviour went, enduring God's wrath against it, when He suffered for sin at the cross. There was no mitigation whatever of that awful suffering.

Here then we are touching on a matter which leaves us quite "beyond our depth". To say even some very inadequate words about it is difficult. I have decided to draw attention to three cases from Scripture in which the persons concerned suddenly came face to face with the truth that their course in life had been shockingly sinful and deeply offensive to God. The effect was that they became acutely aware of themselves as utterly foul and sinful persons. They were so humbled, so reduced to zero in their view of themselves, that they were obliged to side with God against themselves. From that point onwards they were totally overwhelmed by God's magnificent grace to them. Also, they needed a considerable time to recover from the shock of that self-revelation, and to learn to marvel at God's intervening grace. This brought them so low before Him, causing deepest indebtedness to Him. It completely re-oriented their lives.
The three examples are:

(a) David, in Psalm 51, after his lust for Bathsheba, and the success of the plan to murder her husband.

(b) Saul of Tarsus, struck down on approaching Damascus, heavenly light totally humbling him — so that he needed time to take in the shame of all his previous activities, and to understand the absolute marvel of God's grace to him.

(c) Repentant Israel in a coming day, as their blind rejection of their true Messiah dawns upon them "in that day".

Psalm 51

"My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3)

The caption to Psalm 51 indicates the circumstances. David, though often approved by God, is at the lowest point in his whole career here. His conduct had been untrue to God, whom he had a special responsibility to represent. Yet he was oblivious to the shocking character of his recent actions. But God's word through Nathan the prophet, shook him to the core. "Thou art the man!", pin-pointed it, leaving him with no escape from his guilt. This, of course, brought him low before God, and soon he confessed deeply the gravity of his actions; and the assurance of forgiveness from God followed.

But, that being so, it was not a soon-forgotten matter. The depths of his sin must be realised, and would leave a long-standing mark on him. While the child lived, he poured himself out to God, pleading for that life to be spared. But the plea was unavailing. In addition to that harrowing time, there were unavoidable repercussions which he reaped, in his own family and elsewhere, to his own distress for the rest of his life. Never was there a person who knew, better than David, the truth expressed in the N.T. that "whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap". Sin, though totally forgiven, can wreck a man's life. His own sons took their cue from David's lapses — lust, with Amnon; murder, with Absalom. Even Joab, though unrelated, an accomplice in the death of Uriah, unprincipled in behaviour, learned more of treachery by witnessing it in David. "The last words of David", a beautiful poetic passage (in 2 Samuel 23) sees ahead to the days when the true King will reign, and sets this against the weaknesses and shortcomings of David's own rule. He rehearses again the lack of quality and firmness in his own handling of the kingdom. But, all will be done justly and in perfection when the "greater than David" rules.
The Psalm indicates that, once penetrated by God's direct message through Nathan, and despite the clear assurance of forgiveness, other things were still engraved upon him. Those sins were so gross that David could not detach himself from the shame of it all. These were now an irrevocable part of his own life — they were clear evidence of his basic weakness. The terms he uses about himself are the severest. Plainly he has no excuses, but instead there is a developing perception of the wholly corrupt nature underlying such vile actions. All fallen human beings possess it, and are capable of the most shocking manifestations of it. "Born in sin, and shapen to iniquity"; human beings at their very core are shot through and through with the propensity to sin, from before their birth. Thorough and radical treatment is needed if cleansing from sin, and purging from iniquity is to be theirs. In short, though David himself could not realise how it could be, the work of Christ is needed to lift us out of our dire plight. Yet, on the other hand, David, deeply humbled in this way, expresses some marvellous thoughts of God as he senses that God holds the key to his plight. In the face of human sin in all its gravity, God's loving kindness, the multitude of His tender mercies, can be highlighted. It can match, and more than match, the awful depths of human sin. He senses that wonderfully, and appeals to it.

Thanks be to God if we know God in this way, and though our plight was dire indeed, and our sin exceeding sinful, far beyond our full realising, yet we know a God who outmatches our sin and wilfulness, swamping these grave realities within His matchless grace.

**Acts 9**

"And he was three days without sight, neither did eat nor drink"

*(Acts 9:9)*

"I went into Arabia . . . then after three years I went up to Jerusalem"

*(Galatians 1:17,18)*

To trace Saul (later Paul) in his early after-conversion years we need to pick up a few scanty points from Scripture here and there. We are told that he was blinded by that light from heaven, and was in that low state, alone and shattered, until, days later, God directed Ananias to see him. His sight was restored, he was baptised, and soon was preaching that Jesus is the Son of God. There was a period in Arabia (possibly trans-Jordan), and a return to Damascus. He did not go up to Jerusalem for three whole years, and that visit was only a quiet one, for fourteen days only, seeing Peter mainly, and James the Lord's brother. Later we find that he was in Tarsus, his home city, for several years. It was fourteen years after his
conversion when he appeared for the second and longer time in Jerusalem. Barnabas, we are told in Acts 11:25, brought him from Tarsus to Antioch, where a Christian assembly had been established, and an expanding evangelical work was proceeding. Soon after, the Holy Spirit called Paul, with Barnabas, on the first mission to the Gentiles. Though we can hardly believe that Paul was inactive in these “dead” periods, it is evident that we are not told about those years. But it is clear that Antioch was the starting point for his work among the Gentiles. After a time at Antioch the call to this work for God was clear and specific, to himself and Barnabas, and soon we read of them setting forth on the first missionary journey, with the blessing of the church at Antioch. Thereafter his main work for God among the Gentiles lay ahead of him.

But, leaving aside what would then follow, does it not appear that a long period was needed, perhaps, in which Paul could thoroughly learn “the exceeding sinfulness of sin”? It had displayed itself in all its horror in his pre-conversion life. The three sightless days before Ananias came, the early suspicions about his genuineness among the true disciples, the time in Arabia, and the longer spell in Tarsus, all gave him ample time to learn the deep lessons about himself, so sinful to the core. Also, of course they fitted him to become the great and selfless servant of the Lord that he was, later still. With the lapse of time he never lost sight of those lessons. In 1 Timothy (a later epistle) he recalls them, calling himself “the chief of sinners”. He feels amazed still, describing himself then as “injurious, an insolent and overbearing man”, who nevertheless “obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief”.

Believing readers, let us never lose sight of, nor act as though we have forgotten, “the horrible pit” out of which God has lifted us.

**Zechariah 12/13**

“They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn” *(Zechariah 12:10)*

The first phrase of this quotation is referred to by John in his Gospel. That piercing, he says, was an action that needed to be taken when the body of Jesus hung dead on the cross, so that the written Scripture, here in Zechariah, might be fulfilled “in that day” when “every eye shall see Him”. This Revelation 1:7 foresees. The soldier, unaware, acted in a way that fulfilled Zechariah 12:10, which predicted this day, envisaged in Revelation, not yet written when he pierced the side of Jesus! This combination of prophecies, looking forward and backward to that great moment when the blood of Jesus was shed, is to me quite unique.
But Zechariah has much about happenings “in that day” — a future day, when Israel will be fully reinstated, and all God’s unconditional promises to that nation will be fulfilled. The verse quoted above comes in a section where this prophecy in Zechariah is being foreseen.

The Scriptures speak constantly of ultimate blessing for Israel. Today we live in a day when several steps setting the stage for that future day have materialized. Israel is now a recognized nation. The Israeli state exists, since the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The return of the Jews to Palestine was indicated in the prophetic Scriptures, and brethren in the 1800s saw that this was a clearly-indicated stage in the prophetic programme. Today it is a reality, though different aims have brought together many of the dispersed Jews. Today there are at least a million returned Jews residing in Tel-Aviv alone.

But while the regathering of Jews in Palestine is one thing, repentance is another. That is awaited. The day will come when the nations, gathered against them, will be put to confusion by the advent of Christ, when He will come as deliverer to Zion. The Deliverer will ultimately devastate all the opposing nations encircling Jerusalem and aiming to exterminate God’s people. But the remnant of Israel, survivors and emerging from the greatest of times of trouble, will find a way of escape provided. When, at last, as He said, His feet stand again on the mount of Olives, cataclysmic geographical changes will ensue, allowing this. But this great victory will not only devastate the opposing nations — it will have an amazing effect on Israel’s remnant. The Victor, for them, will be none other than the Christ whom they once rejected, as a nation, and, in the midst of triumph, there will be “great mourning” — repentant at last, filled with shame indeed, for their past behaviour as a nation.

James Ayre* quotes from Adolf Saphir, a great Jew, and a Christian, a student of the Scriptures, who says that Zechariah 12:10 is one of the most touching and moving verses of Scripture. The simple unadorned beauty of the text: They shall look on me, says God in that day, whom they have pierced. Then extraordinarily, the pronoun alters: And they shall mourn for him. In other words, although they are delivered, there is no spirit of shouting when they come out of the agony: there is no spirit of triumph, or boasting or singing; just bitter, almost unconsolable mourning; that is what the Scripture is saying here. So you have a mighty deliverance here, and when it is achieved the people break down; they are totally

*“In that Day” — an Exposition of the Book of Zechariah, by James Ayre — is a book which can be recommended. It is up to date, fresh, and it opened my eyes to the book as a whole. I have a few reservations, which the discerning reader will share. (Obtainable from C.B.H.T., Wooler.)
broken-hearted since God is pouring out upon them at the same time the spirit of grace and of supplication. Then the details of the mourning are enumerated, family by family, mourning as one mourneth for his own son.

That Day! The Jewish nation will be overcome in the day of deliverance with a terrible and overwhelming sense of guilt and of sorrow; it will be so intense as to be hardly believable. Their stubborn opposition to their God as a nation; their stubborn opposition to their Messiah whom they crucified and pierced — literally pierced; their incredible and insufferable pride, their self-worship and their Babylonish spirit and activities, they will recognise as a shame, and a curse. What a change “that day” will witness!

Their arrogant attitude to non-Jews is patent to visitors to Israel today. They have tended to take the credit to themselves for all the progress they have made. “We won the war”, was the slogan as victories were allowed to them, in the 1967 war for instance. They boasted in their own prowess and efficiency. But their mood will change. They will repent “in that day”. Like all others, they will find themselves as confessed “debtors to mercy alone”. What humbling changes are still ahead for them, and what rich blessings beyond!

So, the story of the deep-rooted nature of sin, exceeding sinful indeed, repeats itself in these instances. We believers are each involved in this — equally in debt to God’s pure mercy, but able freely to count on His marvellous grace, and on nothing else whatsoever.

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**Precious Faith**

Faith is precious because it is the channel by which precious things flow into our hearts. Suppose a city under siege, dependent upon one pipe alone for its water supply, the preciousness of that pipe is not measured by the price it would fetch if it were put up by auction, but by what flows through it, and without which death and defeat would come. And my faith is the channel by which the water of life comes sparkling into my soul. It is the opening of the door “that the King of Glory may come in”.

(from *Scripture Truth* 1928)
Jehovah possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from eternity, from the beginning, before the earth was.  

(Proverbs 8:22-23 N. Tr.)

The beautiful language found from this point to the end of chapter 8 is that of the Lord Jesus Himself, who is the wisdom of God personified. In verses 1 and 2 and in chapter 9 wisdom is spoken of as “her” and “she”, because those cases speak of wisdom subjectively: wisdom as it affects those who receive it. The latter part of chapter 8 presents wisdom in an objective way, as it is seen in Him who is God’s Object of purest delight. It lifts our hearts altogether above the way in which we are affected, to rather become worshippers of One who is worthy of deepest adoration.

“Jehovah possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old.” He had no beginning: He was “in the beginning”. Though we are told too that “the Word was God” (John 1:1), yet added to this is the precious truth, “He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:2). Both statements are true: He is God, and He was in the beginning with God; therefore He is both a divine Person and a distinct Person. He was “set up from eternity, from the beginning”. We cannot possibly imagine what it means that He was set up from eternity; that is, there was never a time when He was not present: He had no beginning. At such a stupendous fact we can only marvel, and become worshippers.

Little can we imagine the sweetness of the perfection of fellowship enjoyed between the Father and the Son in eternity past, but the very contemplation of it is another reason for our adoring worship.

L. M. Grant
(extracted from The Lord is Near Calendar)
A Call to Faithfulness

W. KERR

As we enter another year, there can be no more important call to would-be men (and women) of God, whether younger or older, than the call to faithfulness. So great and so glorious is the One to whom we as believers belong, and so total is His own commitment to each of us, that this call for faithfulness asks only what is due to Him. We need to have begun on such a course, and not to slacken in it. So I trust that every reader will give urgent attention to this appeal.

2 Timothy 1:1-2:1

As we consider the apostolic ministry for the last days, as given in 2 Timothy, it is clear that the emphasis is on faithfulness. With God-given insight, the apostle Paul could see the beginning of that decline which would increase as time passed. Hence the strong appeal to Timothy, regarding the importance of maintaining the apostolic teaching presented by Paul in all his letters. In Chapters 1 and 2:1 three resources for the believer are stressed: (1) an outline of sound words, (2) the indwelling Spirit as enablement to keep the committed truth, and (3) the grace that is in Christ Jesus. In view of the exhortation to commit this charge to faithful men, it would be helpful to look at three O.T. men who were designated as faithful. Moses Samuel, and Daniel; each showed in turn that character and deportment, that kind of faithfulness, that we believe to be the burden of Paul's epistles in the N.T.

In Numbers 12, we have a kind of rebellion against what could be called the prophetic voice in Moses, and the clear indication that God will brook no interference with the positively stated Word which was communicated 'mouth to mouth' to Moses. It was the 'God breathed' inspired word. The anger of the Lord is stirred in defence of the word that came directly from Himself and not through any other medium. Aaron and Miriam were instructed by God as to the necessity of bowing to the authoritative word. No less do we as believers need carefully to recognize the authority of the Lord in the solemn warning conveyed in this episode in history. Moses and Paul have much in common in having their apostolic authority called in question. The serious consequences of such questioning are clear in this passage in Numbers. Moreover, today it is not unusual in some circles for Paul and his doctrine to be under-rated. To have an outline (or framework)
of sound words is enjoined, and we do need to lay it to heart. God draws attention to the faithfulness of Moses; and the character formation that we see in his history was, no doubt, due to his bowing to the authoritative communications received from God.

Samuel, like Moses, owed much to the godly concern of his mother. In an extremely dark day in the national history, we read of her self-sacrificing vow to the Lord. Evil was abounding, even in the environs of Shiloh (the precursor to the temple). He arrives on the scene as a young child, with an ear opened to hear. It was a crisis time in Israel, and 1 Samuel shows clearly that from his most youthful years Samuel was faithful. If Moses was faithful in speaking, Samuel was faithful in hearing, reminding of the prophetic word about the Lord Jesus who had “His ear opened morning by morning to hear as the learner” (Isaiah 50). Hearing instruction, and obeying, would correspond to recognition of the Holy Spirit as our guide enabling us, as in 2 Timothy 1:14, to “keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us, that good thing committed”.

The result with Samuel was that he carried out his duties all the days of his life, keeping to the course, walking faithfully, and returning to Ramah (the ‘heights’) regularly. The result for God was that the evil was cleansed, and order restored. May we in turn have opened ears to hear and receive the prophetic apostolic word and to respond as Samuel did.

Daniel also, as we learn from Daniel 6, was a strong character in purposefully showing openly his determination to ‘hold fast’ in the crisis-time in which he lived. Captive in exile but faithful and undaunted in the practical demonstration of divine strength communicated to him, his faithfulness brought him to his knees in full view of the enemy on the one hand, and in full view of the divine centre (Jerusalem) on the other hand (6:10). So he prevailed and was exalted. If we draw from the ascended Lord Jesus, we shall receive that grace for the pathway, and the kind of strength we need for purposeful prayerful and prosperous lives in faithfulness here. So Daniel teaches us that purposeful commitment in faithfulness is the key to developing character pleasing to God. For us strength is “in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”. In the following verses (after 2:1) three pictures are given: the soldier, the athlete, the farmer. The discipline of the soldier, the dedication of the athlete, the patient devotion of the farmer, all provide patterns for increased faithfulness in the path of faith.

May the Lord help us to maintain faithfulness in this threefold way, having an outline of sound words, keeping the committed truth by the Holy Spirit, and deriving the strength for it through the grace that is in Christ Jesus — and seeing these features in men of old as supports to our personal faithfulness in this our day.
This paper has had a much longer shelf-life than most. Indeed it could be 10 years since I first produced a draft of it. Of course I looked at it at times, and made what I felt might be improvements, but always there was a niggling element of dissatisfaction with it. But at last a final effort has brought it to what I judge to be fairly acceptable. I have no doubt that its message is critical and requires attention by all.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12,13

We quote this text for two reasons. First, it emphasises that the will to do things pleasing to God, and the actions themselves, both spring from God’s unimpeded work within believers. Secondly, since verse 13 arises from verse 12, it is clear that we are being pressed here to see what pleases God, to desire to go that way, and, furthermore, actually to go that way. The verse treats as separate the willing to do God’s will, and the doing of it. The outworking of the Philippians’ own salvation had nothing to do, in Paul’s mind, with meriting the salvation of their souls, but everything to do with practical obedience to the will of God, as he had indicated it in the opening verses of the chapter (i.e. vv.1-4, supported by the supreme model found in vv.5-11).

A question asked by our Lord, not often referred to, sharpens this up for us. In Matthew 21:28-31, He spoke of two sons, one of whom agreed to obey his father, apparently quite readily, yet did not move a single step in obedience. The other turned down his father’s request, yet finally fulfilled it. Which did the will of his father, He asks? In these words we must see the proud Jew, committing himself to an obedience far beyond his own abilities: and alongside this the much less promising state of unworthy and despised people, some of whom, affected by the grace personified in our Lord Jesus, had now the power for obedience under the rule of that grace.

But there is a more direct voice to ourselves here. It makes plain the danger of knowing God’s will, agreeing with it, yet falling short on the doing of it. Equally plain is the base attitude of not caring to know what His will for us is. As believers, true obedience can only come about if our
will is renewed, and aligned with God's will. Knowing His will is the first step. Gentiles, and other unprivileged people of our Lord's time, far away from God, could be described as relatively un-enlightened (though not really without excuse). But, especially where the Bible is available, the same is not true today. No Christian, particularly, has any grounds for failing to see what is the will of God for him in practical terms. Look more than casually, for instance, through the practical instruction in the N.T. about what we should be as believers: in our thinking, in the purity of our ways, our dependence, our concern and prayer for others, our co-operation, fellowship, and love for other believers, our steadfast support for the Lord's interests and for the testimony to His Name (to mention only some matters).

Is it not true that what would be pleasing to God in our lives is spelt out clearly in Scripture itself? Do we care to look at these things thoroughly enough even to start to have the will to do them? It is a challenging question. The Scriptural order, of course, is that motivation can only come from drawing on the Source of all Christian life and energy — from the sense of that love of Christ, and of His grace, and the high glory of His great Person. Coolness in the very desire to know God's will in our lives must be related to a certain poverty in our attachment to Him, and that too is a very sobering consideration.

But what about the will to do God's will, supposing we have some awareness of it? Our Lord's word about this states the essential situation in His own thoroughly perceptive manner. "If any man will to do His (God's) will, he shall know the teaching ... (and its Source)" (John 7:17). Here a distinction is made between our will and God's, and the vital need for our will to fall in with God's will, in working it out in practice. Otherwise, He seems to say, obscurity will remain about the things God has made clear for us, and God can empower us for. This will be closely tied up with our own reluctant attitude. It was so in the major matter confronting His hearers when that statement was made. A clear display of Himself, the glory of His Person, and the Father's authority backing all His words and ways, met with opposition and unbelief. Glorious truths, embodied in Himself, were obscured by the self-will which lay behind their unwillingness and unreadiness of response to Him. So it will be with us: we shall not see clearly what the will of the Lord is, clear though it may be, apart from preparedness to go forward with it.

In those days the Jews boasted in many things, the long history of God's special connection with them, the possession of the Law, besides much else of their own devising and of a far less valuable kind. But the possession of undoubted truth is of little value unless it is allowed to search
and direct those who have it. No more is possession of a Bible, respect for it, familiarity with it even, worth anything in its own right. Good books, a good heritage of "truth", an excellent background, are no substitute for obedience — the basic inward effect upon us of such privileges is all-important. The quick-fire apparent obedience of the one son "I go, sir" (saying but not doing) has nothing to do with true obedience. Agreeing with teaching which is part of our background, counting on the superiority of our "light", is a poor kind of respect for God's Word, and falls far short of putting the will of God into practice. "Take heed," says our Lord, "that the light that is in thee be not darkness." "Let us not love in word, but in deed and in truth," said the beloved disciple, among the last-written things in Scripture. Shallowness, along with high pretensions, must be seen as a serious possibility, even a tendency, with ourselves.

How does a real will to do God's will arise with us, then? "Doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6), though a simple text, is surely important. "The Spirit of the living God" writes "on the fleshy tables of the heart" of a believer who is a true subject of the work and will of God within him (2 Corinthians 3:3). "God be thanked," Paul writes to the believers at Rome, "ye have obeyed from the heart the form of teaching delivered you" (6:17). Though needing instruction, he has confidence in them, expecting a good response to it, because of their inward (far from mere formal) obedience and faith, from the time of their first response to the gospel. The heart is the chief organ of physical life, and (as used in Scripture) stands for the hidden springs of the personal life. What indication is given by our outward behaviour as to the very heart of our inward life? What lies at the root of our thinking, our desires, our actions? How much of self-service still lingers about our ways? These are indeed searching questions. The verse quoted from Romans 6 comes after important teaching on what is really involved in true faith in Christ. Self and self-interest, let alone sin, no longer rule the inward being of a true believer. He has died with Christ. If identified with Christ in true faith, the man he once was "is crucified with Christ". Grace is in control now, affecting his manner and area of living; "walking in newness of life" is his opportunity and obligation; "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord", his new kind of living. These things are true, if there is a proper faith. We are instructed about them, however, so that we may feel the shame of living in ways which are inconsistent; so that, knowing their truth, we may reckon accordingly, and affirm them now in the very aims and pattern of our lives.

Thus, understanding a little of the comprehensive effects of the death of Christ, and not without deep heart-response to God and Christ,
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setting us free from slavery to self and sin, we shall find ourselves in practical obedience to this teaching, under the rule of grace. Only thus the power to be the servants of Christ, bringing forth fruit unto God, will be known. The will to do God's will comes about this way, and the impulse to do it.

It is right, surely, to refer at the end to the Lord Jesus Himself. How perfectly He set the pattern in both willing and doing "those things that pleased the Father"! How entirely His will was in agreement with the will of God! How closely and wholly He fulfilled it! "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." Understanding and agreement with that will was absolute with Him. No other will was ever entertained. And the doing of it was as perfect and complete as His commitment to it! "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Psalm 40, from which Hebrews 10 quotes, uses the words "I delight to do thy will, O my God". Here is stated the inward motions of His heart, His inward joy, in going forward into every experience, even the most demanding experiences of all. Much that was entailed for Him was His alone to do — it was His unique accomplishment, flawlessly done. We have no share in this at all. But much also in detail in that submissive and holy life, in His thoughts and ways of action, sets a pattern of obedience to God's will which requires some correspondence in the ways of believers. "Let this mind be in you" closely precedes the verse we have principally considered. The model of Christ Himself, the humble mind of submission and active obedience, is pressed in these very verses. Let us, while appreciating this great passage, also be stirred in responsive love to fulfil it in deed and in truth.

Gordon Spratt writes: In Gordon Spratt's article on the Breaking of Bread in the September/October issue, the word "Mass" appeared among other descriptions applied in the Christian profession to what is more scripturally called the Breaking of Bread or the Lord's Supper. One correspondent is troubled about this, fearing that the impression might be conveyed that the breaking of bread and "the mass" are one and the same thing. No such idea was intended, and the author recognizes and deprecates the distortion and denial of truth implicit in the Roman Catholic celebration of the mass.

Why then was the word included? Simply because the starting point in the reasoning of the article was the undoubted fact that in almost all departments of the Christian profession some practice having its origin in the "Upper Room" occasion has persisted through the centuries. That is certainly true of the Roman Catholic profession, however much the mass may have departed from the truth of Scripture.

It is hoped that this explanation will allay any anxieties on the subject felt by any of our readers.
An Encounter with God — Adam

DAVID PULMAN

Unlike the previous one, this article came only in the last few days. My pleasure at receiving something so unexpected is indicated by inserting it immediately — it fits into a space that seemed to wait for it. The consequences of Adam and Eve’s failure have indeed been vast, so that the story about it is grave indeed. But it has lessons which are pointed out here. This paper could stimulate someone to surprise me again with a further short contribution, on the great counter-action of the second Man, the last Adam, the One who ‘restored that which He took not away’.

In Genesis 3:8 we have one of the most dramatic meetings between God and man. “They (Adam and Eve) heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.” This kind of situation had not arisen before, although we can assume from previous scriptures that God and man had met together previously on acceptable terms. The instructions had been imparted regarding which food to eat, what not to eat, the forming of a help meet for Adam and the naming of the creatures of creation. Probably it was the desire of God to come down in the cool of the evening and talk with man. Adam and Eve as the product of God’s creation would at that time be suitable and fit for the presence of God, because there was no sin.

What had happened to produce the fear and the hiding amongst the trees? From the beginning of chapter 3 we find that the serpent (Satan) had been able to deceive Eve with lies and doubts. Adam and Eve, through not totally relying upon God and His word, disobeyed. As a result sin entered to mar creation. This had the dramatic effect of separating man from God. Adam and Eve’s efforts with the fig leaves do not ease the conscience; they still hide. As the serpent had rightly said, they would know good and evil. However there was no power or ability in any way to do good.

One major lesson can be seen already, it is essential to know closely the word of God. Eve’s failure is probably partly due to not knowing the word of God, misquoting the word, and in a certain sense not aware of what could have been her ‘salvation’. Are we today aware of our
salvation, the how and why and most importantly the WHOM? Our safety is in close adherence to the word of God. Ephesians reminds us of “being girt about with truth” and the use of “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”. Our salvation is based on the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, His shed blood and the fact that He is alive today in the glory.

I suppose Adam and Eve little realised the full consequences of their actions. God’s judgement was swift. Sorrow for Eve, creation cursed, Adam to toil in work, and both driven out of the garden. There is however the promise of victory in the Seed of the woman, fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, some time later, sin manifested itself with the murder of Abel. But in the garden, before being driven out, God sweeps aside man’s effort at a covering hoping to be acceptable. God provides coats of skins to make them suitably dressed. The death of another is required to make man acceptable. God now requires a sacrifice. This again is only fulfilled by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. His death alone is acceptable to God and this is the only basis in which we can be found acceptable to God. John the Baptist would say “behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world”. Man, away from God, says of the Lord Jesus Christ, “this is the heir, come let us kill him”. However what man was allowed to do was determined beforehand by God so that salvation might be offered freely to all. We are reminded in Romans 5 that “by one man’s offence death reigned” and from 1 Corinthians 15 “in Adam all die”. However, God’s wonderful grace announces to all that “in Christ shall all be made alive”. A new order has been established in Christ as the last Adam. He gives new life.

Adam lived for over 900 years after being driven out of the garden. Over that time he would see the effect of sin, the death and failure that now marked mankind. Today we can view the victory which our Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished nearly 2000 years ago. The Lord Jesus Christ, as man, had the most dramatic encounter with God on the cross. We who know Him as Lord and Saviour should know the power of His victory in our lives. Ephesians 1 tells us that we should know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe”. Do we know it?

I do not know your circumstances, neither are you aware of mine, but one thing is certain, the Lord knows. Not only does He know but He cares. Finally, God requires a total commitment from us all. When God has us totally, then God can use us fully. In this I speak to myself more so than anyone else.

I trust these few thoughts on Adam’s encounter with God will prove to be of encouragement to us all. A victorious life will only be possible by full surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.
The Breaking of Bread (2B)

GORDON SPRATT

The expression of our unity — Problems

At this point we resume the account of the second address by looking at some situations envisaged in Scripture which are not so straightforward, and we seek its guidance on these.

These cases might be called non-normal. Some need extreme disciplinary action, others less so, but all require gracious handling. All who aim to help here must have Galatians 6:1 in mind.

Surely it must be an urgent hope and constant prayer with us all that the Lord will preserve His people, so that such happenings will be rare, so that open, positive, and loving relations may be enjoyed and appreciated amongst believers.

The paper proceeds by asking a number of questions.

Who is to be received to the Breaking of Bread? We have already seen the simple Scriptural answer — every sincere believer in the Lord Jesus whose life is morally upright. Why? Because God has received such persons. It is a joy to welcome a believer whose heart is deeply drawn towards the Lord, who may nevertheless need much enlightenment. It is a dreadful thing to reject one from the breaking of bread who ought to be there. You may say that mistakes can be made, and we may be deceived by unworthy persons. That may be, for we are but human, but the Holy Spirit will normally give discernment. As in all else we must go by Scripture. At every Brothers’ Conference for several years the question of the basis for reception has been raised, and every time agreement on the foregoing Scriptural principle has been reached. Yet somehow there is disquiet about it, and the question is raised again. We must be clear that when we act in this matter we do so on the solid ground of Scripture.

Of course we need to give proper weight to the principle that “Holiness becomes thine house, O LORD, for ever” (Psalm 93:5). There must be no question of allowing the Lord’s table to be polluted. If a man or a woman presents himself or herself in an offensive manner, insisting on the right to be received, overbearing and ungracious in behaviour, perhaps, as has sometimes happened, showing signs of intoxication, our consciences must immediately tell us that something is wrong. As a matter of order such persons would have to be excluded, at least until the unacceptable
condition was judged. If a person claims to be a true Christian, we would expect that his manner would confirm it. But let me ask the practical question: how often does someone come and say, "I want to break bread", and his conduct prove him to be unworthy? Many will never have met with such a thing.

But the thirsty soul, with a genuine desire to please the Lord Jesus, with love for Him springing from a sense of indebtedness to Him? Do we receive him gladly, or do we rebuff him, making an issue of something or giving the impression that we are cold and unwelcoming? It is deeply sad when such a real Christian is turned away.

**Then who is to be refused?**

There is only one example in Scripture of a person who is to be "put out" from the privileges of Christian fellowship. This is in 1 Corinthians 5:11-13. "Put away that wicked person." Was he the only transgressor in Corinth? Hardly, for all manner of weakness was there (see 1 Corinthians 11:30,31). But this was a case of serious moral failure, and a public scandal. I am not in any way countenancing any degree of failure in our Christian conduct, but here is the prime example — one who is walking in immorality, whose conduct does not stand up to moral examination. Is there not the danger that, through lack of courage or want of discernment, we may allow serious matters to go on unchecked. No doubt at Corinth their standards were too low: public failure of a moral kind must be dealt with in discipline, which is a characteristic of the house of God.

I believe also that where there is fundamental departure from the truth of God, Scripture would indicate that those guilty of that departure should be shunned or even excluded, until there is repentance. I shall return to the question of doctrinal error later, but at this point it must be emphasised that for whatever reason a person is disciplined, repentance and restoration must always be a first consideration. 2 Corinthians 2:4-10 emphasises the spirit in which restoration is to be brought about. But now I turn to another question:

**When am I ready to break bread?**

Let me take two cases: (i) a new convert of whatever age, (ii) youngsters from Christian homes or from Sunday Schools and other places of Christian instruction.

(i) A convert, who has put his faith in Christ as Saviour and whose life bears the marks of that change which comes to those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit — when is he ready to break bread? The answer is, immediately! Is that our custom? I wish it were.
(ii) What about the typical practice with those who are young in years?
I have noticed that when a youngster is converted at 10, 12, 14 years old, we all rejoice; and then what do we do? Nothing, is often the answer. We tend to expect that in a couple of years or so he will come forward nervously and ask for baptism. Then, perhaps after another interval of time, he will come again with trepidation, and say “I would like to remember the Lord Jesus”. I say: what an intolerable burden to put upon a young believer. I remember from 50 years ago how hard it seemed to me. I began to wonder whether it was all worth while. The impression was that the brethren wanted to keep me out! Perhaps it is better today, but the point I am making is that young people need to be encouraged.

What happened to the 3,000 converts at Pentecost? They were baptised and they broke bread. It is the Scriptural principle. In Baltimore, Maryland, I was asked to say a word after the remembrance service and I spoke about the breaking of bread. A young lady there had been waiting and waiting, believing that she was unworthy to remember the Lord. Something that I said encouraged her to come forward, and she was quickly and happily received. The gospel hymn has some relevance here — “If you tarry till you’re better, you will never come at all”.

I believe sincerely that at the beginning the ‘sacrament’ of baptism was committed to the evangelist and not to the person converted. “Go out . . . and baptise them”. People were baptised immediately upon conversion. Why? Because baptism is simply entrance into the public profession of Christianity, entrance into the kingdom by the baptism of water. Such new believers would normally carry on to break bread without delay, unless there were some good reason to the contrary. There may be some wisdom in waiting in the case of very young children who could hardly understand the significance and responsibility of breaking bread, but I have been speaking about the basic Scriptural principle.

**What is “not discerning the Lord’s body”?** (1 Corinthians 11:29)
Strictly speaking, this refers to what was happening at Corinth. At the Lord’s table they were more concerned with their own bodies — with the satisfaction of their natural appetites — than with the symbols of His death. They came to the Lord’s Supper with improper motives, improper desires, to indulge in satisfying themselves. So Paul instructs that a man must examine himself before eating, judging his own motives and revising them if needs be. The breaking of bread is not to be done in a light-hearted, superficial manner: the tremendous significance of what we do should remove all casualness of approach. But, as the reader will see, the verse has nothing whatever to do with our reception at the Lord’s table, but
rather with the need to understand and feel the significance of what the items on the table represent.

There is something else. Along with the primary association of the bread with the Lord's personal body, there is a secondary connection expressed in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:17: "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread". It is a reminder of the nature of our fellowship; not a convivial or social fellowship, but a fellowship based on membership of that one body. The whole body is in view, so that any sectarian thought based on any lesser company, excluding those whom Christ has not excluded, is rebuked by this expression, "not discerning the body".

**Can anyone be put out of fellowship?**

In my own early and sad experience, no end of people were "put out of fellowship" on the most slender of pretexts, as if it were the first sanction to be applied to any offender. In the strictest sense of the word, no person can be put out of fellowship — it cannot be done. "God has called us into the fellowship of His Son . . .". One respected brother once told me that the fellowship of God's Son is a body that you can get into, and that you can be put out of. I do not believe it. That is not to say that a person walking disorderly, behaving immorally or denying the truth, may not be put under discipline — and in the extreme may be denied the privileges of Christian fellowship, at least until there is repentance. But how careful we need to be before we exclude anyone. I was taught years ago (and it helped me) that when a person is excluded from the Lord's table, those who take that action are declaring that he is not fit for Christian fellowship anywhere. That should be in our minds if we turn a person away from the door of our meeting room. A tremendous burden of responsibility rests upon us if we do so. We need to be fully persuaded that we have full Scriptural justification before we take any such action.

I now comment briefly on some scriptures often used in connection with our subject:

**Immoral behaviour (1 Corinthians 5:11)**

This we have already referred to. There can be no question about it at all. Where a person publicly and seriously fails morally, he or she must be excluded. I say publicly because we all fail, but I am speaking of a case where the failure is known and unjudged, and such as to bring dishonour to the Name of Christ. But it must be repeated that any such case must be approached in that priestly spirit which looks always for restoration, and desires only an opportunity for forgiveness. The Corinthians had
not learnt that lesson, and Paul has to say in his second epistle: “Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was of many, so that . . . ye ought to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow”. Let us be instant to recognize the signs of repentance, instant in the spirit of forgiveness.

Doctrinal error

A Scripture which has been much used, and I believe very much misused, is 2 John 7-10. “Many deceivers . . . confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. . . . If there come any unto you . . . (that deny) . . . this doctrine, receive him not, not into your house.” Here is unequivocal Scriptural ground for rejecting a person of a certain character. Though written to a lady, and therefore primarily a personal thing, I am sure that it would extend to an assembly. There can be no doubt that such a person as is described should be totally denied Christian fellowship of any kind. But I have to say, dear brethren, that many a soul who is under some doctrinal misapprehension, some imperfection of teaching, some personal uncertainty, has been rigorously denied the fellowship of the Lord’s table on grounds which I believe to be totally unjust. Personal experience has made me feel very deeply about it.

How sad when we analyse doctrine — often in matters far beyond our human understanding — and use it as a ground for turning away a sincere believer in the Lord Jesus. It needs wisdom, it needs the living power of the Holy Spirit to judge when a person has denied the doctrine of Christ. The scripture we are considering is not concerned with a special, esoteric aspect of doctrine, but with the whole wonderful truth that is embraced in our Lord Jesus Christ — come in flesh, yes, “God manifest in the flesh”. Who can claim fully to understand it? Humility is our proper place in the presence of such a revelation. But how many have been identified as having “not God”, and far too readily labelled “deceivers” and “antichrists”, when they are simply mistaken, untaught or immature in Christian understanding. Let us be guarded. Let us guard on the one hand what is due to the honour of the Lord Jesus. But on the other hand let us be careful that our desire to protect what is due to His Name does not spill over into that Pharisaism and legalism that arises from standing too dogmatically on doctrines which are but little understood.

Other passages

Now consider Titus 3:10,11. “A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject”. This has often been made a basis for excluding a person from the Lord’s table, and I do not say always wrongly, but
let us be careful. We should know what is meant by “a heretic” first. The Scriptural use of the word is, “a person who uses a particular point of view to create a division”. Not a person holding something mistakenly, nor a person ill-taught, but one who uses his opinions to create a division among the people of God. That is a heretic. What is to happen to him? Admonish him once, twice, then have nothing to do with him. It says nothing at all about rejecting such a person from the Lord’s table. I suppose in an aggravated case it could amount to that, but it does not say it. The New International version renders the Greek pretty accurately: “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.”

We are responsible for behaviour within the Christian company (see 1 Corinthians 5:12,13), and for the company we keep. Sometimes that may have to go as far as the exclusion of a guilty person from the privileges of fellowship, particularly the breaking of bread. But short of that ultimate sanction, matters of personal concern may lead to a person being shunned. That is what it means in the passage we are considering: avoid him, have nothing to do with him. 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15 is another case, but see what verse 15 says, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”. Let us be careful not to use the Scripture as a rod with which to beat one another.

Considerations of the same kind apply to 2 Timothy 2:16-26, a Scripture which has been called “the Brethren's charter” (in itself an elitist claim on the part of those who use it). What is 2 Timothy 2? It is a pastoral injunction from Paul to Timothy about his own walk and about how he is to deal, as an individual, with subversive persons in the Church. It speaks of various kinds of person: “profane and vain babblers” and others who would “overthrow the faith of some”. Examples are given: Hymenaeus and Philetus with their false teaching. It makes much of purity in heart. There are statements about the sure foundation of God and the seal upon it, and the need to depart from iniquity. All this is Paul's inspired counsel to every believer. Then comes the picture of the great house, Paul’s illustration of the broad Christian scene. It is like a mansion where there are high quality vessels of gold and silver up there in the dining room where the Master is served, but down in the kitchen vessels of lesser quality unsuitable for his use. Having given this illustration, and hopefully ignited within us the desire to be serviceable to the Lord, he goes on, “If a man purge himself from these” (from the vain babblers, from the purveyors of ‘words to no profit’, from the Hymenaeus and Philetus kind of false teaching, purging himself internally too, as a choice vessel must be clean within) “he shall be a vessel to honour, fit for the Master”.

On the other hand there are “vessels to dishonour”. I feel constrained to say that I have heard, and been deeply hurt by it, godly believers labelled without any justification whatsoever as vessels to dishonour. What a dreadful thing if I attach that description to a sincere believer, whose walk may be purer than mine and whose service for the Lord more effective than mine, merely because he holds some different opinion or interpretation. It is incumbent on every one of us to follow the Word of God for ourselves, but not to make sweeping judgments of others.

Underlying all this, and here we return to where we began, lies the truth of the one body. It will never be easy in days of great public confusion to find a path which expresses this truth and at the same time maintains what is due to the honour of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless there is one body, and every time we break bread we bear testimony to it.

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“Therefore let us go forth to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach: for here we have no continuing city, but we seek the coming one.” (Hebrews 13:13-14 N.Tr.)

A believer was attending an educational institute at a university in New England. During the first session of the group, as a get-acquainted activity, the members were asked to identify themselves by their favourite book title. As they got up to introduce themselves they were to name the book, tell what it was about, and why it was their favourite.

After hearing group members identify with such books as *Warden, The Odyssey, The One Minute Manager*, and *Megatrends*, the believer identified himself with *The Bible*, because it was the Word of God that brought the promise of salvation through the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Needless to say, several interesting things followed.

To begin with, he got the nickname of “the preacher” for the duration of the conference. Secondly, whenever any of the readings contained any biblical allusions or references, he was called upon to explain them. Thirdly, while groups gathered each night to go drinking, he never had to worry about making excuses, because he was never invited. Fourthly, from the time he made himself known as a Bible believer, he became introduced to other Christians in the group. And finally, by humbly taking his stand with Christ, he had several opportunities during the three weeks of the institute to speak to others about Christ.

While many believers work very hard to separate from the world, this man of God found the key. Identification with Christ leads to separation from the world. As you take your place with Him, while those who hate the light will separate from you, those who love the light will join you in it.

**L. J. Ondrejack** (also from *The Lord is Near Calendar*)
Incorporating *Words of Help*  March, 1991

**My Beloved**

MARK DAVISON

**THE VOICE OF THE BRIDE**

This article comes first in the issue, and in my view, deserves first place. It is at once both spiritual and simple. It is based on the Song of Songs chapter 2. This is a difficult part of the Bible to write about, yet our young brother treads carefully and delicately here. There is no trace of impurity whatever as he highlights the enraptured nature of the bride's pure love for the bridegroom. It is all so naive and open as she expresses without shame her single-hearted devotion to him. Like Mary of Bethany, so utterly undistracted as her Lord alone filled the whole picture with her in that supper scene in John 12. Like Paul, who learned much about Christ, yet had the strong desire to know more of Himself personally, not only facts about Him, but to know His love and all the wonders of closeness to Him in love.

Necessarily, our magazine will present factual things about the Bible, and even about Christ, but let us not stop there. We have a plain example of a church in Revelation 2, where the mainspring was faulty, yet to all outward appearance it seemed to run on well and accurately. No piece of clockwork would behave like this, but in Christian assemblies it is possible. Our Lord notices this lack, and calls for repentance.

"Nowhere in Scripture does the unspiritual mind tread upon ground so mysterious and incomprehensible as in this book, whereas saintly men and women throughout the ages have found it a source of pure and exquisite delight." So says C. I. Schofield in his notes at the beginning of the Song of Solomon. I have to confess that, even as a believer, I find the Song of Solomon hard to comprehend.
We can find in this book various pictures and interpretations. Literally, of course, it is the expression of Solomon’s deep love for a Shulamite girl. How beautiful is the language used and how explicit in places. The latter leads me to believe that the Shulamite girl was his bride and in this we can find a picture of God’s immense love for His people the Jews (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

For us today however, I feel that there is an illustration of the love which has been shown to us. Jesus’ love and the Father’s love (John 17:26). In Revelation 19:7-9 we have what we believe to be a description of the church in glory as the Bride of Christ. So we can see that there is a parallel with the beautiful Song of Solomon to his loved one.

Firstly in chapter 2 we hear the voice of the bride. She speaks of the wonderful position which her Beloved accredits her with:

“I am the Rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley.”

Sharon was a beautiful and fertile area in the land of Palestine. There you would have found many lovely flowers growing, giving colour and scent. This is the setting in which we find ourselves. We all admire the wonderful colours which can only be found in flowers and so acknowledge the One who created every one. How much more then we should wonder at the fact that HE SEES US IN JUST THAT WAY. Of how much more exceeding value we are to Him than any flower. When I read of the lily in verses 1 and 2, I am reminded of the Lord’s own words in Matthew 6:28-30. If the flowers of the field are of so much importance to Him, how much more He cares about you and me. A chorus says, “Why should He love me, I never can tell”. Is that not true? Yet, whilst we cannot find any cause for Christ to love us so much, He does just the same. Do you praise Him for that? Do you realize that? I well remember the feelings which I experienced as I saw my bride walking down the aisle towards me! How much greater is the love of the Lord towards us, unworthy sinners though we were.

The words of Solomon in verse 2 remind us that we are indeed to our Saviour as lilies among the thorns. As He looks upon us, He sees those attributes of Himself in us as distinct from unbelieving sinners still attired in their sins. What pleasure He finds in us. He is glad to look upon us. He wants to talk with us (v. 14), such is the delight He finds in our company. Are you replying to that fact? Do you meet with Him? Do you talk with Him?

If you are taking delight in His presence, you will be able to repeat the words of the bride in verse 3. We see there that she finds two things which give her satisfaction in the One she describes as an “apple tree” — shade and fruit.
Firstly, she sits down “under His shadow with great delight”. So many people, no doubt many believers amongst them, look around in the world today and are fearful of what is happening. Yet if we are truly trusting the Saviour with our lives, we need not fear. Do you remember the conies in Proverbs 30:26? They were very wise because they made their home in the rock. They knew that they were safe there from the predators which would like to devour them. We, too, can find safety and peace in the One who is our Rock, the Lord Jesus:

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

So great is the love of the Heavenly Bridegroom towards us that we can be sure that He will keep us.

Secondly, she says, “His fruit was sweet to my taste”. Maybe she knew the words in Psalm 34:8:

“Taste and see that the Lord is good!”

If you read John 6, I think you will see that we should be in the same position of feeding on our Lord Jesus as the bride was here. Just as my body needs food to prevent decay, just as my mind needs stimulation to prevent it stagnating, so my soul needs spiritual food to prevent me from slipping away from God. Wholesome food can only be found in Christ. Do you feed on Him daily, or do you fill your time and thoughts with everything else, giving Him no time? You can be sure that there is no more ‘organically sound’ food than this for your soul! Note finally that the Bride took “great delight” in being in his presence. We shall mention this again later.

When we come to verse four, we have a timely reminder of the privileged position Christ has placed us into. The words banqueting house have the literal meaning of ‘house of wine’. We know that the mention of wine in the scriptures often indicates joy and happiness given by God. How true, the Bride would say, are the words of Psalm 16:11:

“In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

One can imagine the anticipation in her heart of the time to be spent with him. To be with him was not just a duty or habit which she performed. That challenges our hearts, does it not? Yes, it is vitally important that we are in His presence Lord’s Day mornings to remember Him (Matthew 18:20), but do you take “great delight” in being there in His company, or are your thoughts occupied with how long Mr X’s prayer will be, or is that sister’s hat annoying you again? And so you become distracted
from the main reason for being there (compare Luke 10:40). Furthermore, when you have been to the Breaking of Bread and evening service, are you then looking forward to the prayer meeting and Bible study meeting. I know that we all can find excuses not to be there, but never forget, above everything else, we are coming into HIS presence, we are meeting our Lord and that *should* fill us with joy.

When the bride is there, she finds that she is protected by love. There can be no greater motivation to protect and help a fellow being than love for him or her. Is that not exactly what our Saviour did when He came from Heaven to redeem us? (Romans 5:8). Will He not continue to care for us until we come into His presence in Glory? Remember, we are always in His presence, even now (Colossians 1:27).

In verse 6 we find an embrace of great intimacy, surely an embrace which could only be fully enjoyed by two deeply in love. Think though of where the bride's head would be — close to her Beloved's heart. There she would learn his very dearest thoughts. This reminds me of the place which the disciple John had (John 13:23). There he is "Leaning on Jesus' bosom" and it goes on to say of him, "whom Jesus loved". He enjoyed that close position and how much he understood of the Lord's Deity as we read the Gospel through. I believe that you will learn of Him too if only you will draw near to Him.

With verse 8 comes a change of subject. Still it relates to Christ and His bride but *now* the emphasis moves away from the wonderful love of the Beloved, to His return for His bride.

How I can imagine the bride's heart would leap when she heard the voice of her loved one announcing his arrival! It takes my mind to the well known verses in 1 Thessalonians 4. Have you ever really thought, *THE LORD IS COMING PERSONALLY FOR YOU* (v. 16)? A far too precious event to Him to entrust to anyone or anything else. What is more, we shall hear His call and go to meet Him "in the air" (v. 17). Note that "in the air". Not this time coming to the earth. No more will He be humiliated and caused to suffer in this world. Note that in verse 9 of our chapter, He stays outside and peers in. He will call us out and we are going to be with Him. Are you excited at that prospect? Are you looking out for Him (I guess the Bride was watching at the window for her Beloved!) and listening for his call? Or maybe you have become quite comfortable here and really are happy for things to stay as they are. If that is the case, I plead with you to examine your values and priorities in the light of Matthew 6:19-21 and Colossians 3:1-4.

And so in verse 10 we hear the words of the Bridegroom:

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."
Where he was going to take his bride I know not, but I DO KNOW where the heavenly bridegroom is going to take me — to the FATHER'S HOUSE (John 14:2-3). He is there now making preparation for us to come, and when the right moment arrives, we will hear the words:

"Come, for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17).

What a time that will be! I cannot possibly imagine what it will be like but I am certain that it will be far better than anything I have experienced before. Never again to be parted from Him, always to be in His company.

This wonderful occasion is further emphasized in the following verses:

1. The winter is past (v. 11). Winter is the dreary time of the year to us, but when we arrive at the Father's house, there will be no more dreary times. Revelation 21:4 makes this abundantly clear. If there are no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain, it is evident that there will be nothing to cause them. The verse also states that the rain is over and gone. No more death, so the rain is no longer needed. What a time! What a place!

2. The flowers appear (v. 12). We have just seen that the rain is gone and yet still the flowers are growing. God is sovereign, this is His wonderful home and He has no need to rely upon the rain. Here is a place such as could never be found in this world. Therefore, it is out of this world and that is where you and I are going to spend eternity because of God's grace towards us.

3. The voice of the Turtle[dove] is heard (v. 12). The turtledove is a migrating bird in Palestine and so its return indicates that spring is on its way. Yes, when the Lord returns for us, the dreary times will be behind and the day will dawn when all will be perfect and glorious.

In verse 14 he describes her as a dove. We are familiar with the common image of the dove — peaceful, pure and innocent. That is the way we are now seen by God through Christ. If He can describe us in such a way inwardly (i.e. our sins have been washed away and we are cleansed), can the same description be applied outwardly? Do you live a life which reflects that inward purity? And where does the dove find shelter? In the cleft of the rock (we have mentioned this already above), but also in the secret places. We sang the hymn at our wedding which includes the words:

"Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone."

Be sure that you do this whilst you are waiting for your Bridegroom to return, otherwise you will not be in the position of anticipating His presence for eternity, rather you will be saved "yet as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

We must be active too whilst waiting for Him. The bride here and in
other chapters speaks of the vineyards where she spends her time (vv. 13, 15). What is the object of her working there? Surely it is to bring forth fruit from the vines. We should be occupied with His work, especially (but not exclusively) in evangelism, “Redeeming the time”. We will always encounter the “little foxes who spoil the vines” (v. 15), but do not be discouraged, “Greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

No one will ever take from you the assurance found in verse 16:

“My beloved is mine, and I am his.”

There cannot be any more reassuring statement than this in the scriptures. We are His because HE LOVES US, have you fully taken Him for yourself?

Finally, the last verse seems to imply that the Beloved is still active whilst he is absent. The roe and mountain goat are lively animals, always moving from one place to another. We know that the Lord Jesus is active on our behalf in Heaven — interceding for us before the throne of God (Hebrews 7:25). Because He cares so much for us, we are constantly in His thoughts and He is ever bringing our names before the Father’s throne.

So great is the love of Jesus towards us that we could never find words to describe it. Obviously so, as it is a Divine love, beyond our ability to understand. May this mysterious book in the Old Testament help you to appreciate a little better the depths of the wonderful love which our Lord and Master has for us.

The Word of God must settle and govern every conscience. There must be no appeal from its solemn and weighty decision. When God speaks, every heart must bow. Men may form their own opinions; they may adopt and defend their own practices; but one of the finest traits in “the Israel of God” is profound reverence for, and implicit subjection to “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord”.

Of the wise woman it is said, “the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her”. Let it be our ambition that our Lord may safely trust in us, but we prove by what we do whether this is so or not. “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you” are His words to us.

(Quotations from S.T., 1935)
My Outlook

JAMES A. HARROW

This is an exceptional paper, produced in 1975 by an old brother, then 109. The prospect which occupied him then was realised in the next year, when, at 110, he was believed to be the oldest man in the country.

His joy, and his clarity of expression, is remarkable for one so old. The music of heaven seems to break through as he writes! It surely is a tonic to us all.

Being now in my 109th year, the time cannot be far distant when I will be privileged to enter the audience room of the King of Kings, the One whom I have for ninety-three years, happily and thankfully acknowledged as my Saviour, my Lord and my God.

On entering the Art Gallery of the Celestial city, it will not be the portraits of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other notable saints of God that will be the attraction; it will be my happy privilege not only to behold them there, personally in their glorified bodies, but to enjoy happy converse with them, possible to learn from their own lips their deep and real appreciation of the wondrous love of the One who, in sovereign grace fitted them (despite their many failures when here on earth) as He has also fitted me, to occupy a place in the glory of His presence, by removing from us the defilement of sin and clothing us with His own magnificence.

Passing into the Celestial Music Room, where the sweet Psalmist of Israel will be seen harping his tuneful harp, it will be the Chief Musician, Christ Himself, that will be the centre attraction, as in the midst of the glorified company, He strikes the chord and leads the song of praise to God, one in which I will most heartily join. But one song leads to another, and I now look forward in glad and happy anticipation to the outburst of praise and worship that will then flow forth to the Captain of my salvation, the Man of God's right hand, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who will there be seen as a Lamb as it had been slain. This song of praise is recorded in Revelation 5.

I may add that I have been appointed a place in this Celestial choir, and have for many years been practising the choruses that I shall so joyfully sing. The theme is one in which all the Celestial intelligences will spontaneously join, the Hallelujah chorus which will eternally ring through
the heavenly courts, the theme being the worthiness of the Lamb to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.

Entering the Celestial Observatory, I will need no telescope to aid my vision of the view that will be in open display before me. I shall there and then behold as face to face the King, yea, the King of Kings in all His glory and beauty, crowned with many diadems. His glorious clothing, the regalia of Deity, perfumed with frankincense, myrrh, aloes and cassia, the fragrant spices which proclaim the preciousness of His glorious Personality, whose fragrance will eternally pervade His celestial abode. I will not feel out of place in that scene of glory, for I shall then be clothed in a body of glory like unto His own most glorious body. For to see Him is to be like Him, to reflect Him.

The Celestial Conservatory is also a banqueting palace, in which I will ever have access to the Tree of Life, an evergreen, heavily laden with enjoyable fruit, consisting of twelve varieties. Thus my spiritual life will be divinely satisfied as with marrow and fatness, for this Tree of Life is Christ Himself, He who, for me, entered into death that thereby He might introduce me into life. Thus it is under His shadow that I shall sit, eternally finding His fruit sweet to my taste. This I am assured of, having in a limited measure sampled and enjoyed the windfalls that have come within my reach.

The glory associated with the Throne in the Celestial city is so searching that hitherto no mortal has been able to stand before its piercing rays. But wonder of wonders, sinner though I be, by nature and practice, I am able to look forward in joyous anticipation to the moment. Then I will be introduced to the Throne of the Majesty in the heavens, for the glory of the light that proceeds therefrom, that which Isaiah glimpsed, causing him to cry “Woe, woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of Hosts”, the glorious light that transformed the proud Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, into Paul, the chief of sinners, that penetrating, searching, displaying light will disclose no imperfections, but rather will make manifest the absolute perfection of the work of my Redeeming Lord, when in leading from the meeting place “in the air” He presents me faultless, holy, unblameable and unreprouvable before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Whose is the joy? Both His and mine. I am one of those over whom He will joy with singing. Even here and now I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.

Viewing afresh these divine marvels, I can here and now sing:

Glory, honour, praise and power,
Be unto the Lamb for ever!

Jesus Christ is my Redeemer! Hallelujah! Praise we the Lord.
The Three Ministries (5)

GORDON SPRATT

THE CHURCH (1)

The set of outlines of the ministries of Peter, Paul, and John, is resumed here. After the Gospels and Acts, these apostles together contribute a large part of the rest of the N.T. We now proceed to the ministry of 'the Church', through Paul.

Nowhere in Scripture can we find the explicit statement that Peter is the Apostle of the Kingdom, nor that John is the Apostle of the Family. To reach such conclusions, as we have found earlier in this series, we must examine first what the Scriptures tell us about the personal history of these apostles, and then the general tenor of their writings.

In the case of Paul, however, we have a clear statement, albeit in his own writing, of his commission as the Apostle of the Gentiles and his particular mission in connection with the Church. In Ephesians 3:2 he writes, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me toward you, how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel, of which I was made a minister. . . . Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship (or administration) of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages hath been hidden in God . . .". The context of the passage shows that the "mystery" here referred to is the Church. So the distinctiveness of Paul's unique ministry is clear enough in the claim that he himself makes. Nevertheless it can be further substantiated by a brief study of the man and his writings, and in that study we may learn something of the way in which Scripture presents the truth of the Church.

We begin with the question, What kind of man was required to undertake the work of extending and ordering that great work of the Holy Spirit begun so powerfully at Pentecost? Perhaps we can look at three areas: firstly the human equipment, physical and intellectual, necessary for a task of such tremendous proportions; secondly the political qualities essential
to bridge the deep divide between Jew and Gentile; and thirdly, and most importantly, the spiritual qualifications required in a man who was to be the chief human instrument of the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is inconceivable that the work committed to Paul could have been accomplished without immense stamina, indefatigable energy and exceptional intellect, and no one who reads the Acts of the Apostles will deny that Paul possessed all three. Thorn for the flesh he may have had, defective eyesight or whatever it was, but for a man to survive the imprisonments, scourgings, beatings, shipwrecks and other perils described in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, he would have needed no ordinary physique. And to face up to the rabbis in the synagogues, the philosophers of Athens, the governors of imperial Rome, not to speak of the crop of false teachers which pestered the early Church, required a massive intellect.

But more than this was needed. It is difficult in the 20th century to imagine the jealousy with which the orthodox Jew of the time of Paul guarded his ancient rights and relationship to Jehovah, and the abhorrence with which he regarded the heathen Gentile. What kind of man was needed to preach the gospel that was to “reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross” (Ephesians 2:16)? Paul was very evidently that man.

A Jewish aristocrat of the favoured tribe of Benjamin; a member of the strict sect of the Pharisees; taught by the illustrious rabbi, Gamaliel; a Hebrew, that is to say a speaker of his native Aramaic in contrast to the Greek-speaking Hellenist Jews: in every way his credentials as a representative of Jehovah’s chosen people were perfect. Born in Tarsus, in Cilicia, he would have understood the situation of the colonies of Israelites dispersed through the gentile world. But he would also have had a significant rapport with the Gentiles, for Tarsus was one of the prominent seats of learning in the Roman world, and Paul’s speech on Mars’ Hill in Athens demonstrated a considerable knowledge of Greek philosophy and literature. Furthermore he was a freeborn Roman citizen, which would have greatly facilitated his missionary work.

So it is apparent that in choosing His “elect vessel” God had selected a man ideally, and probably uniquely, qualified for a remarkable work. There remains, however, the most vital question of all, Paul’s spiritual preparation for the task ahead. Arrogant Pharisee as he was, he needed to be taught humility. Violent opponent of everything and everybody associated with the Name of Jesus, he needed the spiritual experience of conversion so as to recognize in the despised Galilean his Saviour and Lord. All this was accomplished in the blinding light that struck him on the Damascus road.

But more than this, he evidently received in that encounter an
impression which never left him, and which imprinted its distinctive mark upon his whole ministry. As the voice of the Lord challenged him with the words, “Why persecutest thou me?” he suddenly revised dramatically and permanently his view of those hated Christians whom he had so zealously persecuted. Insignificant, weak and downtrodden in this world, nevertheless they were vitally associated with the Man of Calvary who was now in the place of power and glory. He was their Head in heaven: they were the members of His Body on the earth! The truth of the Church was never for Paul a set of theological propositions: it was all about people, and not just so many individuals, but “built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

We might have supposed that, with this revelation from God, and with the words of the Lord Jesus, “... the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee”, burning in his heart, Paul would have been off post-haste on his missionary travels. But the Lord prepares His servants with patience and there is often a significant interval between the “call” and the “sending”. So it was with Paul. When he would have been impatient to be about his mission, we hear of him apparently inactive in Arabia. And then we find him “sentenced” to six years in his home town of Tarsus. He was no doubt learning during this time the lessons of patience and subjection, and deepening his understanding of the special ministry committed to him. It cannot have been easy for him — as it never is for any of us — but the period of education bore its abundant fruit in later years.

The next move was to a more active ministry, when he was called to Antioch (Acts 11). That wise man, Barnabas, having accomplished his own “kingdom” ministry of teaching the disciples there that “with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord”, recognized that they needed an instruction which he could not supply. So he went to look for Paul. We may imagine that Paul did not need much persuading to come to Antioch and there teach them the truth of the Church.

No doubt, however, he would still have been anxious to set out on that wider ministry that had been committed to him on the Damascus road. It seems clear from Acts 13 that the elders at Antioch shared his urgent sense of mission, but even then there was no haste, for it was as they “ministered to the Lord and fasted” that at last the clear call of the Holy Spirit came: “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them”. The rest is history — the preaching of the gospel across Asia Minor and into Europe and the establishing and teaching of churches wherever Paul went.

But one more thing must be noticed. We might have thought that the last thing that Paul needed in his active ministry was to be put into
prison. And yet it was in the wonderful ways of God, that the years he spent in prison towards the end of his life, though so irksome to a man of Paul's energetic spirit, were used to produce those priceless gems of truth, the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians. Someone has put it like this: God had plenty of activists, but He needed a theologian. So He converted Paul. Paul promptly became an activist! So God put him in prison because people who are put in prison write books. Paul became a theologian again!

We can turn to those prison books as well as to Paul's other writings to see how his ministry is distinctively, if not exclusively, related to the Church. But that must wait for another article.

The Times and Seasons

FRANK WALLACE

Apart from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, which refers to the affairs of man there are only three passages from the Word of God referring to God's wise arrangements as 'times and seasons'. This paper focuses on these. Its strong emphasis is upon the supremacy of God in both power and wisdom.

Scriptures: Daniel 2:19-23; Acts 1:4-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5.

In the respective contexts of these passages we can learn about God, in His greatness and ordering of things. He alone arranges times, definite periods which He in His wisdom defines. The seasons may refer more to the character of His dealings with His creatures. The Bible reveals God as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Such a God has no difficulty in arranging times and seasons to suit His will and purpose. "O the depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and untraceable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor? or who has first given to Him, and it shall be rendered to him? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things; to Him be glory for ever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36 N. Tr.).

1. Daniel

In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar's dream showed the incompetence of men's intelligence, and the adequacy of God's revelation. Babylon's wise
men, astrologers, magicians and scribes were baffled in recalling the forgotten dream, or in interpreting it for Nebuchadnezzar. Hearing of this, Daniel, also threatened, with his three friends, prays to the God of heaven. The numerous gods of Babylon were useless, but from the true and only God the precise details of the dream are imparted to Daniel, and he learns its meaning too. First their hearts and lips are opened in praise to God, from whom the message for the king had been sent. In this note of praise we find more about the God who arranges the times and seasons. In God there is a combination of irresistible wisdom and might. Not only does He know what to do, and when to do it, but He has full power to accomplish His ‘grand designs’. Men have had great plans and schemes but often have lacked power to put them into effect. While many of God’s plans for men’s blessing have been attacked by Satan and sin, they will finally be consummated in God’s glorious Son. He himself is God’s power and wisdom, and the final Victor over Satan (see 1 Corinthians 1:24, and 2 Corinthians 1:20). Every promise of God is secure in Him.

In God’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, given to Daniel, was a vivid expression of God’s ability to change times and seasons. This He did by setting up kings and replacing them. It was of God’s arrangement that Nebuchadnezzar should begin the times of Gentile rule on earth. He had given Jehoakim king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand. God decreed that Babylon should be captured by Cyrus, Isaiah 45:1-3. This was in view of a remnant returning from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the destroyed temple and later the walls surrounding Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:24-28; Ezra 1:1-4). Neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Cyrus would be fully aware that they were being used for God’s purposes. The empire of the Medes and the Persians was overcome by Alexander the Great of Greece (Daniel 8:21), and his successors. The fourth kingdom has been identified as the tremendous power of Rome’s military and political genius. This will be the final expression of the corrupt and godless rule of the Gentile times. Revelation 13:1-10 describes the N.T. version of this great power. It incorporates the features and bestial character seen in Daniel 7:1-8, lion, bear, leopard, and a grotesque creature that has no counterpart in nature. In Daniel 2 the emphasis is on different forms of government, while Daniel 7 presents their evil character. The destruction of the great image (chapter 2), by a stone cut out without hands, has its N.T. revelation in Revelation 19:11-21. Jesus, the Lamb, who is also King of kings and Lord of lords, will remove every vestige of opposition to God; every feature of misrule and maladministration, and introduce a millenial reign of righteousness, according to Revelation 20:1-6.

Does it matter if the wisdom of man rejects what is written in God’s
Word? Not a bit. The revelation of God is absolutely reliable, and as time unfolds His purpose before wondering eyes, His greatness and His glory will be manifested. In Daniel 2 the references to revelation come repeatedly (in vv. 19, 22, 28, 29, 30, and twice in 47). Without revelation men are in profound darkness indeed. “The hidden things belong to Jehovah our God, but the revealed ones are ours and our children’s for ever, to do all the words of this law”, Deuteronomy 29:29. The foolish reject the things of God, but they are revealed to the babes, the simple believing ones, Matthew 11:25. The greatness of the Son of the living God is revealed to Peter, Matthew 16:17. The deep things of God are revealed to us by His Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:10. The mystery, Christ and the Church, was revealed to Paul and others, Ephesians 3:3,5; Romans 16:25. Revelation is the God of the universe writing history in advance — an impossible endeavour for even the most acute human mind. “Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done; saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. Yea, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it, Isaiah 46:9·11. Note the ‘I wills’ — the language of Deity.

A prophet of God announces the name of a coming king 300 years before the king was born. God revealed this by His servant, 1 Kings 13:2. Jesus says to Pilate, that his power over Jesus was allowed by God, John 19:11. The prayer meeting in Jerusalem confirmed this by quoting words written centuries before by David, king of Israel, Psalm 2:1,2 and Acts 4:25-28. It might not appear that God is in control but He surely is in charge, “The Most High rules in the kingdoms of men” Daniel 4:17. Because of this confidence we can have in God overruling world affairs, we Christians are urged to pray for kings, rulers, those in authority, 1 Timothy 2:1-3, and to be subject to authorities. There is no authority except from God, Romans 13:1-7. See also 1 Peter 2:13-17.

2. Acts

In Acts 1 the risen Christ is seen with the disciples. For 40 days He was with them and during that period He taught them about the Kingdom of God. It was understandable that after such teaching they should ask the question dear to every Israelite’s heart, “Is the kingdom to be established now?” The two on the way to Emmaus had expressed similar sentiments to the Lord Jesus as He walked with them, Luke 24:19-21.

No; the time of the Kingdom, as foretold in many O.T. prophecies, had not yet arrived. Israel, presented with their Messiah, had rejected
Him and His claims. They had crucified Him! Their house was left desolate. His reply was that the question of the setting up of the Kingdom was safely in the Father’s hands and in His good will. The Father is Lord of heaven and earth, Matthew 11:25. The Creator is Lord of heaven and earth, Acts 17:26. Abraham said “Jehovah is the God of the heaven and the God of the earth”, Genesis 24:3. God has determined and ordained times and boundaries, Acts 17:26. The Kingdom will be introduced on earth after a time of unparalleled suffering and judgment, see Revelation 11:15-18.

Shortly after the Lord Jesus ascended to God’s right hand a new era began which is not connected with times and seasons. The Church, the body of Christ, the habitation of God in the spirit, was formed. The church is the product of eternal counsel and purpose, Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:1-11. Its origin was before time began and its destiny is in glory with Christ. It is distinct from Israel and the nations, but includes Israeliis and Gentiles who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today. All who believe in Him are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and joined to their Head in glory. Times and seasons in relation to Israel and the nations are in abeyance during the Church period except in the way God overrules amongst the nations. Those who formed the Church, our Lord said, are empowered by the Spirit to be witnesses to the glorified Christ. This testimony was not confined to Jerusalem, or Israel, but to extend worldwide. The Church’s testimony is not determined by a fixed period of time. Only the Father knows when the time of witnessing will come to its end.

3. Thessalonians

There was no need for Paul to write to the Thessalonians about times and seasons. He had already informed them about this when with them. While he preached at Thessalonica he announced that another king was coming — one Jesus, Acts 17:7. Paul had preached to them about the death and resurrection of Christ, and no doubt His ascension to glory. As He preached from the O.T. Scriptures the prophecies concerning the sufferings of Christ and the coming glories would be stressed. The supremacy of Christ as King of Israel and the nations embraces the times and seasons of God’s appointing. They have to do with matters relating to earth. But what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 required a separate divine revelation to Paul. The O.T. is silent about it. Dead and living believers of the Church age will be taken clean away from earth and have bodies “like unto His glorious body”. It had never been revealed to prophets of old.

The day of the Lord will signal the start of God’s dealings again with His beloved people Israel and also the nations. During a fixed time of about 7 years — a time characterized by judgments and sorrows, Israel will be
cleansed by judgment and forgiven under the terms of the New Covenant, Isaiah 1:24-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34. The bulk of O.T. prophecy is connected with the day of the Lord and what follows it. Zephaniah 1:14-18; Joel 1:15, 2:11,12; Isaiah 2:9-11; Jeremiah 30:4-11, with several other passages give graphic accounts of that great and terrible day of the Lord. But the sons of light will not be overtaken by that day. They are not in fear that the Lord may come on them as a thief in the night. The believers who form the Church, the body of Christ, are watching and waiting for the coming Bridegroom, and, in unison with the Spirit, the bride of Christ is saying “Come”.

Mary, of Bethany

"Mary therefore, having taken a pound of ointment of pure nard of great price, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment”  
(John 12:3)

She came not to hear a sermon, although the First of teachers was there. But to sit at His feet and hear His word (Luke 10:39) was not her purpose now, blessed as that was in its proper place. She came not to make her requests known to Him. Time was, when in deepest submission to His will, she had fallen at His feet, saying, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:32). But to pour out her supplication to Him as her only resource was not now her thought, for her brother was seated at the table. She came not to meet the saints, though precious saints were there, for it says, “Jesus loved Martha . . . and Lazarus” (John 11:5). Fellowship with them was blessed likewise, and doubtless of frequent occurrence; but fellowship was not her object now. But she came, and that, too, at the moment when the world was expressing its deepest hatred of Him. She came to pour out what she long had treasured up, upon the One whose love had made her heart captive and had absorbed her affections. She thought not of Simon the leper; she passed the disciples by; her brother and her sister engaged not her attention then. “Jesus only” filled her soul, her eye was on Him; her heart beat true to Him; her hands and feet were subservient to her eye and to her heart; and she “anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair”.

Adoration, homage, worship, blessing, was her one thought; and that in honour of the One who was “all in all” to her. Surely such worship was most refreshing to Him.

From The Lord is Near Calendar. Author unknown.
A paper by David Pulman, in the January/February issue, was entitled ‘An encounter with God — Adam’. Along with this the editor appealed for a further short paper on the great counter-action of ‘the second man’. This has stirred our brother Donald to suggest these ‘few thoughts’ in response.

As David’s article rightly states, “Adam and Eve, through not totally relying upon God and His Word, disobeyed”. As we know, this is the nub and crux of the matter. The first man disobeyed, and so sin (with all its dire and extensive consequences) arose. But One entirely unique Man in utter contrast was marked by complete and perfect obedience to God and His Word — our Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 40:8 prophetically indicates His attitude before Jehovah — delighting to do His will, “yea, thy law is within my heart”. When He (the second man) was led of the Spirit “to be tempted by the devil”, we remember His wonderful threefold reply “it is written”, using the book of Deuteronomy. In particular, think of that remarkable statement, summarising the whole principle of His life: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God”. Whereas Satan succeeded in causing our first parents to doubt the word of God, and to disobey God, in Eden, he signally failed in his encounter with “the second man”. In defeating the great Adversary in this way, our Lord bound “the strong man”, and then began in His mighty works of grace, and His miracles, to “spoil his house” (Matthew 12:29).

Scripture dwells on His perfect obedience in three clear ways:

1. **He came into this world in perfect obedience to the Father’s will.**
   
   “Then said I, Lo I come: In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God”. Psalm 40:7
2. **He passed through this world in perfect obedience** to the Father's will.

   "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His Work."  
   John 4:34

   "I do always those things that please Him."  
   John 8:29

   "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."  
   Hebrews 5:8 N.Tr.

3. **He passed out of this world in perfect obedience.**

   "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."  
   Philippians 2:8

Having perfectly glorified God, in the place of (and regarding the whole question of) sin, a righteous basis has been laid down upon which erstwhile sinners can be made "the righteousness of God in Him" 2 Corinthians 5:21.

The full verse from which the title of this paper is taken is "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" Romans 5:19. The bearing and force of these words is this: the one act of obedience is so much greater than the one act of disobedience as our Lord Jesus Christ is so much greater than Adam. One man disobeyed, sin entered, death passed upon all. But, blessed be God, one man obeyed, and now grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21). The first man, by disobedience, brought about vast havoc and ruin. But, thank God, "the second man, the Lord from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:47) has established a wealth and an eternal economy of blessing. All has been done by reason of who He is, what He has done, and the marvellous way He has done it.

The incident of 1 Samuel 30 may be recalled. The Amalakites (typical here of the sinful flesh, energised by Satan) took captive David's wives, and the other inhabitants of Ziklag. In answer to David's enquiry of the Lord "shall I pursue?" the Lord replies "pursue" etc. We are subsequently told twice over that "David recovered All." We can thank God that we belong to One who has indeed "recovered all" — both for the glory of God, and for our eternal good and blessing — One who will eventually deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, in a perfect condition, having "put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Such truths are of course of great spiritual interest and enjoyment to us. But they are not solely for our souls' enjoyment. They should also have a practical response in daily life.
1. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”. 1 Samuel 15:22

2. In 1 Peter we are said to be “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”. That is, we are to obey in our lives as Christ obeyed in His life when He was here in this world.

3. Paul writing to the Philippians says “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (2:12,13). This is our day-by-day salvation. We are to ‘work out’ in our lives daily what God by His Spirit is ‘working in’ us.

May the Lord graciously help us to do this, until He comes.

The Three Ministries (6)

GORDON SPRATT

The Church — Part 2

This series began with the observation that the ministries of Peter, Paul and John took their distinctive character from a unique experience of the glory of the Lord Jesus. In the case of Paul this coincided with the conversion experience which changed a proud, persecuting Pharisee into the man who subsequently claimed to be both the chief of sinners and “less than the least of all saints”. So does an encounter with Christ break down the arrogance of human pretension. And with Paul that encounter not only struck at the root of what he was, but also served to sow the seed of what he was to become. For the voice which so radically changed his view of himself was the means also of revolutionising his view of those Christians whom he had so vigorously persecuted.

“Why persecutest thou Me”, said Jesus. The word “Me” must have sounded so personal. Not just my people, but Me. And surely it suggested to Paul the truth which became the central element in his teaching regarding the Church. The people whom he had so despised were clearly no leaderless, disunited rabble inspired by the desperation of despair.
He was to realize that, far from being leaderless, they were in direct touch with their Head, raised from the dead, ascended and in the place of power and glory; that, far from being disunited, they had been "baptised into one body" by the coming of the Holy Spirit. And so came the revelation to the Apostle of that view of the Church which sees it as Christ's body, linked indissolubly to its heavenly Head, and therefore which sees individual Christians as members of that body, not only joined to Christ, but joined also to one another, interdependent and interactive, though differing one from another.

Three views of the Church

We shall see, as we proceed, that Paul presents the Church in three distinct ways. He uses an architectural metaphor to describe God's dwelling among His people, different words such as habitation, house, temple, expressing various aspects of that view. He uses the relationship between husband and wife to present the idea of the Church as Christ's Bride. But let us begin with the anatomical metaphor, which serves to explain the thought expressed in Ephesians 1:22, "the church, which is his body".

The Body of Christ

This view of the Church is again subdivided. A number of passages use the metaphor of the head and the body to convey ideas such as unity, control and supply. Medical science was at one time content with "heart death". When the heart stopped beating, death was assumed. But with the recognition that the control centre of the human organism lies in the brain, we now have "brain death". One occasionally hears of a beheaded chicken still for a time running round the farmyard, but it is not alive despite the muscular spasms that give to it an appearance of life. So Paul, in Colossians 2:19, warns against, "not holding the Head, from whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." The Head is the necessary source of life.

This analogy is used to show that the Church is not an organisation, as many human institutions are, working within a predetermined set of rules, but an organism, instinct with divine life through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and controlled through its connection to its heavenly Head.

A development of this idea is conveyed in the phrase used in Ephesians 1:23: "The church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all". The word "fullness" conveys the idea of expression, in the sense that the human body, whilst controlled from the head expresses itself through its various members. This thought underlies two distinct presentations of the Church in Paul's epistles.
In Ephesians 4:13 we encounter the same word, “fullness”, in this context: “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”. What is envisaged is the process by which, during the whole Church period, the body has been built up by the endowment of gifts given from Christ, its ascended Head, towards the great end result — a perfect man, a full expression of Christ. The idea is not local as to place, for the gifts have been given for the building up of the whole body. Nor is it limited as to time, for the whole Church from its inception at Pentecost to its final Rapture is in view — as the Lord Jesus said to Peter, “On this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). It declares the divine purpose that Christ will be glorified in what is expressed of Himself through His whole Church — “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

In 1 Corinthians 12 we have a very different view of the Church, yet with the same underlying idea of the body as a vehicle of expression. This time, if we may allow ourselves a photographic analogy, it is not a long-running film, but a snapshot — local as to place, for it is concerned with what should have been found at Corinth and with what ought to be found in any place at any particular time in the history of the Church. It envisages individual members of the body — eyes, ears, nose, arms, legs, all different yet each making its own distinct contribution to the whole. No member can function of itself: each is interactive with others and all are necessary to the efficient working of the body. And the result, dependent upon the direction and empowering of the Holy Spirit, is a present testimony to Christ: “So also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Sadly we are inclined to look at these truths from the perspective of human failure and the resultant fragmentation of the Church publicly, but the view of the Church that we have been discussing looks beyond the breakdown of a religious profession which contains much of what is spurious, and sees what is genuine and living. Ephesians 4:4 says, “There is one body, and one Spirit . . .”, and every real believer is a member of it.

**God’s Dwelling Place**

The idea of God dwelling with man runs right through the Scriptures. We may reasonably infer from Genesis 3 that, had it not been for Adam’s sin, a close relationship between God and the newly-created man was in prospect. It seems consistent with this thought that we can turn to the end of the Bible and find these words: “The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them . . .” (Revelation 21:3). Between these two extremes the idea recurs in various ways. For example, the instructions
given to Moses for the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness begin with the words, "And let them build me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them". Paul takes up the thought as another aspect of the Church, and expresses it in several different ways.

First, he uses the word "habitation". Ephesians 2 closes with the words, "Ye ... are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit". It conveys the meaning that God does not dwell in this world, but that as every true believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, there is constituted a dwelling place for God. It reminds us of the great privilege of forming that habitation.

An illustration may help: Some years ago the Queen was visiting the west country, and because of a sudden storm she was not able to return to London. In these unusual circumstances she spent the night at a small country inn in Gloucestershire, and one can well imagine the feelings of the landlord and his wife. No doubt they would have felt quite unworthy of providing the Queen's habitation, even for a single night, but the sense of privilege will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

That rather inadequate illustration leads us into another part of our subject. The country inn might have been the Queen's temporary habitation, but it was certainly not her house. Anyone invited to Buckingham Palace would soon discover the difference, for the informality of the inn would change to the regulated order of the Monarch's residence. So it is in our Church experience: the expression "the habitation of God" reminds us of the great privilege of the presence within us of the Holy Spirit; another expression, "the house of God" is used to convey our responsibility to maintain what is suitable to the presence of God. Paul's first letter to Timothy deals with this subject, and in that letter occurs the verse, "... that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth". There is a growing tendency in the Church at large to a freedom of the "do your own thing" variety, and we need to be reminded sometimes that there is guidance in Scripture as to what is orderly and suitable in our approach to God.

As well as the habitation and the house, God's dwelling among His people is referred to as the Temple. This does not mean a material Temple such as the Jews were familiar with, but it conveys the idea of the holiness that ought to distinguish the place where God dwells. This becomes a real challenge when we find that Paul sees this analogy applying in three ways. First, in Ephesians 2:21, he speaks of the whole Church: "... in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple in the Lord". Then, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, he refers to a local assembly: "Know
ye not that ye are the temple of God?" and adds the solemn words, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are". Then in 1 Corinthians 6:19, he makes it an individual thing: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? . . . therefore glorify God in your body".

The Bride of Christ

As soon as God created man He made a pronouncement which has a significant bearing on Paul's doctrine regarding the Church. He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone", and right through the Bible we find pointers to the fact that Christ, having become Man, should have a companion suitable to Himself. Thus we have the idea of the Bride, which is the third general way in which Paul speaks of the Church.

Of course the Church did not exist in Old Testament times, since it was not formed until Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. And the truth regarding the Church was a mystery which awaited the revelation made to the Apostles, and particularly to Paul. But in many of the types of the Old Testament, particularly in the account of Isaac and Rebecca given in Genesis 24, there are indications of the purpose of God to secure a bride for His Son. Paul refers directly to this when he says in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it". He goes on to say, "That he might present it to himself, a glorious church", and John takes up that theme in Revelation 19, when he records a great voice in heaven, saying, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready". The inference is that the bearing of this aspect of Church doctrine and experience is largely future, and that the present is a time of preparation. Nevertheless it is a very wonderful thing to reflect that a company formed of sinners saved by grace is being secured out of this world by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, and is being formed so as to respond suitably to the love of Christ and to be His eternal companion.

This brief review of the church ministry of Paul has concentrated mainly on its doctrinal foundation. It must not be supposed, however, that the Apostle was simply a religious philosopher. He was a practical man with enormous energy, exemplifying in his own life and service the things that he taught, and always concerned that those who received his teaching should similarly put them into practical expression. He would have heartily concurred with the exhortation of that other practical man, James, "But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only".
The Middle East (1)

COLIN CURRY

Daniel 11 and 12

This paper arose in my mind from local Bible studies in the book of Daniel. The final two chapters are enigmatic to most people. The broad lines for their understanding need clarifying. I have no capability in this area. But an outline of what faithful servants of God, under the Holy Spirit, and knowing ancient history, have indicated, may help.

But also, and more relevant today, the book of Daniel is not a mere mass of ancient and problematic material, but is living and apposite today — especially these chapters — when the middle-east is prominent in everybody’s mind. In these chapters there are tensions and conflicts between powers in the middle-east uncommonly like that which has blown up so fast in that region today. History is on the move, and men’s hearts fail them for fear, except where confidence in God, who over-rules all things, prevails.

I should say that this paper is written in the last week of 1990, when there is no sign whatever that major conflict will be averted. We are now within weeks of the U.N. deadline for conflict, and, since printing takes time, what you read here may be out of date as you read it. Turmoil in the middle-east will come. But, nearer still than the absolute worst that will happen, “the blessed hope” of the Christian — our Lord’s home-call to His church, must be on the very threshold. Whether the present crisis becomes just one more of the many conflicts of history, or something much more serious, this last statement will remain true.

[NOTE, 23/1/91: The conflicts of mid-January have now begun, and time alone will reveal the outcome. Everyone involved recognizes this. Only God Himself ‘knows the end from the beginning’. I have labelled this paper Part (1), allowing for a possible Part (2). But, though out of date, I feel it still has value. It shows (a) what a hot-bed of trouble centres on the middle-east, long indicated in the Bible, (b) how hectic, fast-moving, and uncertain is the current world situation — the very need for change seeming to correspond with the fluid day-by-day changes in the war developments; and, most important, (c) emphasizing how right it
is to expect at any moment the Saviour from heaven, 'our Deliverer from the wrath to come'.

It may be possible to print a Part (2), when and if the picture becomes clear enough for some valuable Scriptural observations to be made.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Daniel chapters 11 and 12 is the reference again and again to northern powers and southern powers. The standpoint is not of course our land, but Daniel's land, the land of God's allocation to His earthly people, Israel. Daniel's people were plainly the focus of Daniel's interest, and of his deep concern, throughout the book. Thus, our title 'The Middle East' (using our own standpoint) is a little off-centre. Daniel would certainly understand this revelation as referring to the whole area around the centre of God's attention and favour on earth, around Jerusalem indeed.

Another clear point is that happenings in sequence, over a span of time, are related over many verses. Since this is so, 'the king of the north' will mean the head of the northerly power at that point in time, and a sequence of such northern rulers will in time succeed each other. Similarly with the southern rulers*. Actually, as far as past history goes, what is here is quite clear to interested historians concerned with these ancient times. It is possible to give the names in secular history of all these powers, north and south, even to identify the marriages alluded to. So accurately are these things indicated that some have felt obliged to 'explain away' this prophecy by thinking of it as history written after the events. This is a common habit with many. They think that anything is believable rather than accepting the supernatural nature of the Word of God.

Only later (in Chapter 11) the climax of these times begins to fill the picture. 'The time of the end' dominates, in near prospect and then in reality, towards the end of the message.

But surely we have much to take notice of today when similar things are mounting up so fast in the same area. The way of national conflicts, powers jockeying for self-advantage, using intrigue, falsity, duplicity, promises that cannot be backed up, that do not stand, is clear here. Mutual trust is in short supply today. 'Speaking lies at one table' — the Word of God is forthright — and not only about ancient times. The shallowness of the international scene, including the self-interested political tactics, even within our own nation, are self-evident today. How little of what is planned

* Daniel could not know the names of these foreign rulers, but they are well-known in history. I recommend 'The Ryrie Study Bible' as a source-book for this information, with maps and tables at the end. It uses the New American Standard Version, a reliable translation.
materialises! All this happened then, and does happen currently. 'He shall not stand' 'it shall not stand' — is a repeated statement about many of these leaders and their plans. Shallow and passing are the attempts of men. But God says "my Word shall stand, and I will accomplish all my counsel". Ultimately this alone will come about, at the time of the end, though there will be forbidding times, especially for Daniel’s people, and the nations, on the way to it.

In the earlier parts, there is room for some difference as to what is past and what will yet be seen in fuller form. There seems little doubt that Alexander the Great of Greece is envisaged in verse 3, a leader speedily conquering a vast area of the middle-east in his youth, who died young, and the Grecian kingdom then was parcelled out between his four generals. Thereafter, two of the four became prominent, and there were the Seleucids in the north. Their empire covered much of Assyria (what is Iraq today). Syria was only one small province of it. Its headquarters was at Nineveh. In the south, the Egyptians, under the Ptolemies, formed the other main section arising from the Grecian empire. Though attempts at liaisons between the northern powers and those to the south were made, none stood for long. ‘The land’ and Jerusalem were permanent sores in the middle area, and a continual bone of contention. In 11:5-20 is described the continuing tension between these powers in that period, see-saw struggles going on constantly.

But verses 21-35 seem to highlight a northerly leader, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes, B.C. 175-164). He, having difficulty in Egypt, returning, vented his anger on the Jews (v. 28) and desecrated the temple and the Holy Place. Some of the Jews were martyred. The Maccabean revolt followed soon. This particularly is in the past, but not only so there. It is a clear example of something here in these old days yet to recur in more offensive and horrible form. The Lord Jesus Himself warned Jews of His day of what would be imminent when “the abomination of desolation” stood in the Holy Place. He told them what to do when they saw it, and of the terrible time of trouble that would begin then and mount up to its terrible peak (Matthew 24:15).

Coming nearer the end of chapter 11, it becomes clear that we have left behind past events now, and the message looks ahead again, finding an indication of “the time of the end” building up. Also a new person, not seen before, appears on the scene. This is “the king” in verse 36.

We might have had difficulty here, but 2 Thessalonians 2 informs us of this individual. Both passages are so close that the same man must be in view in each of them. Thessalonians speaks of him as “doing according to his will”, “exalting and magnifying himself above all that is called God”.
Not only does he claim to be superior to every god, but also he will speak blasphemous words against the God of gods. He will be allowed to “prosper till the indignation be accomplished”. Isaiah uses the “indignation” as a special term for God’s governmental judgment upon the nation of Israel. Also this man will “not regard the God of his fathers, etc.”. Clearly he will be an apostate Jew, rejecting Jehovah.

He will urge his fellow Jews to “honour the god of forces”. This seems to refer to the great military power of the western nations, under Rome. Here is ‘the beast’, the first beast of Revelation 13. ‘The king’, subscribing to the power of Rome, in all its anti-God might, will also believe in the supremacy of might over right. He (the second beast of Revelation 13), under that allegiance, will seek to organize the land of Israel, following his own will and pleasure.

All this is so much in contrast with the true Christ, that such a wicked person merits the name of “Antichrist”. He reproduces in full-blown form all the aims and targets that Adam and Eve grasped for, when tempted by the Devil, in the garden. An apostate leader of an apostate nation, indeed!

But apart from Antichrist, misleading the Jews from within, and finding them so ready to be duped, there is another enemy — an external enemy from the north, who will dominate over most of their other enemies. He will overflow and pass through the land. The very end of chapter 11 (verses 40-45) refers to this. From successes in the south, news from the east and north comes to him of enemies from those quarters, and he returns “with great fury”.

On verses 36-45 — it will be best to quote Hamilton Smith here: ‘Here we see a vivid picture of the Jews at the time of the end, when they will be gathered back in their own land in unbelief, rejecting Christ as their Messiah. They will have rebuilt their temple and resumed their sacrifices. Having rejected their king they will, according to our Lord’s own words, receive “another that shall come in his own name” (John 5:43). Thus they will accept Antichrist as their king. On the north of the land, Syria* will be established under a powerful king. On the south, Egypt will prosper

* Perhaps it would be preferable to read Assyria here, since Assyria, though a great power in history, is also a power appearing at the end stages foreseen in prophecy. Assyria was a fearful war-machine and a merciless enemy of Israel, used by God to terminate the northern kingdom (the ten tribes), scattering them among the nations at the time when He judged their iniquities to merit it. But Assyria’s determination to do the same with Judah was not allowed. Sennacharib from Nineveh sent a powerful force to lay siege on Jerusalem, and though many of the walled cities in Judea succumbed to such attacks, the faith of Hezekiah, supported by Isaiah, in dependence on God, resisted him. Rab-shekah in truculent self-
under its own king, “having treasures of gold and silver”. Ethiopia and Libya will exist as distinct nations. On the east, Edom, Moab and Ammon will be re-established. In these circumstances, the Jews, having accepted the rule of Antichrist, will become apostate, and their land will fall a prey to their northern enemies.’

Chapter 12 — The great tribulation

The angel’s message to Daniel continues into this chapter, but now singles out ‘the time of the end’. This is the period of ‘the great tribulation’. Jews have known unbelievable sufferings over years and centuries, but this trial will be more intense than they have ever known. The reference to Michael the archangel in v. 1 reminds us of Revelation 12:7-17, which speaks of ‘war in heaven’, and Michael casting Satan down to earth. It also picks up the thread of Daniel 10, which was an introduction to this message, explaining the angel’s delay in getting the reply to Daniel’s prayer through to support him. The prayer was heard from the moment it was made, but other unseen adversaries, opposing ‘the business of heaven’, held back the messenger. Here we are given an insight about powers, for and against the man of faith, in the unseen realm. This verse tells of Michael, the great prince, standing up to defend the interests of God and His people Israel. A heartening truth, surely, to impart to Daniel, with such a grim message to be passed on.

Daniel 12:7 and Revelation 12:14 are close enough to indicate the same happenings. More prominently here there is reference to the godly in Israel. Deliverance, whether by survival or by non-survival, is envisaged. Everyone whose names are written in the book, will be victors. The wise shall understand, but none of the wicked will understand. Jeremiah 30:3-7 predicts solemnly the intensity of the trial during “the time of Jacob’s trouble”, but also speaks about the ultimate release from captivity. In Matthew 24, too, our Lord forewarned of this, drawing attention to one critical point within the last week of the ‘seventy weeks’ vision of Daniel 9, when more commonplace sorrows will give place to the most acute and indescribable trials. This comes at verse 15. It will be a time for instant action, and His advice is in the ensuing verses. But it is clear too that,

confidence boasted in what the might of Assyria would do, but the story of God’s intervention on behalf of Jerusalem — in Isaiah 36 and 37 — and the simplicity of Assyria’s overthrow, is remarkable. Isaiah 10:12-19 and Isaiah 14:24-29 are passages that see the Assyrian in prophetic aspect. A comparison of Isaiah 14:25 and Daniel 11:45, seems to support this identification of the northerly power with the Assyrian. It should be noted that Nineveh is today in N. Iraq. Babylon, or its ruins, is in S. Iraq. It was Babylon which took Judah into captivity later.
from this godly part of the nation, a great and effective testimony will be raised (see v. 14, for instance).

All this suggests a well-defined, limited period, soon specified in days here. “Except those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved”, Jesus said. The same period is variously specified — 3½ weeks (or years); a time, times, and a half; 1290 days and then, slightly more — 1335 days. Daniel is told that all these coming trials will be used by God to purify and refine the godly among His people, fitting them to move into the kingdom of Christ.

With a final word, counselling patience, and with a clear word of approval, assuring him that his worth is recognized, and his place in the future is not in doubt, the book closes down. Daniel saw world-shaking events in his time, and others in vision. He had the faithfulness to stand in the midst of them, and to honour his God at all times, though not easily. In our day, fearful things develop. Our course thus far may not have been very testing. But, whatever may be in store, may we find in our God the strength to follow in Daniel’s pattern.

(I am aware that it is possible to write about these matters in an unfeeling way, overlooking the personal cost to so many, not willingly involved in the ravages of war. I must genuinely express how I feel and sympathise with people of all kinds who have been personally hurt and bereaved by the awful losses this war brings so near to them.)


“Be Still . . .”

“God is our refuge and strength, a help in distresses, very readily found. Therefore will not we fear. . . .”

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:1,10. N.Tr.)

“Be careful for (anxious about) nothing. But in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God shall guard (fortify) your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6,7, N.Tr.).
“Known unto God are all His works, from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18)

Nothing ever takes God by surprise. Consequently, with Him, there can be no afterthought. All was foreseen long, long before its actual occurrence, everything was provided for. Satan, sin, and their attendant evils have in no wise interfered with His purpose, “who works all things according to the counsel of His own will” (Ephesians 1:11).

Where had His grace found its manifestation, had not sin been permitted? All the glory of the Cross would have had no place if the serpent’s entrance into the Garden had been denied. How different would have been our thoughts of Him had our guilt never have given occasion for His emptying Himself of His dignities to become a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death! We would never have known Him as Man had not sin necessitated for us a Mediator. Had He sovereignly chosen to become Man, though we needed Him not, we could only call Him Lord and not know Him as Saviour, whose precious blood redeemed us to God; how little could we then have appreciated Him! It is our deep and bitter need which has revealed to us the heart of God.

Whenever one’s spirit is chafed and fretted by abounding iniquity, it is well to remember that there is One who abides in eternal peace — “the peace of God”. Not that He is indifferent to the evil, but He sees, as we cannot, how blessedly all shall yet result to the glory of the Son of His love. Evil, dreadful as it is, is but the dark background that throws into relief His wondrous purposes of love and grace. It is well for the soul of the believer to grasp this and rest upon it.

An extract from H. A. Ironside

A Question Answered

(The answer to this question was given by the previous editor, in S.T., January 1968. This is a subsidiary to the main line of our current “breaking of bread” series).

Is the implication of the following sentences true or false? If unconverted persons break bread, it is their responsibility. Who are we to judge?

If unconverted persons break bread it is unquestionably their responsibility,
as in the case of all their acts. But the responsibility of unconverted persons if they break bread is surely not the really important question for us to answer. I propose to assume that it is the questioner's intention that the matter of unconverted persons breaking bread should be made the subject of enquiry from Scripture on a wider basis.

The first point to be made is that Scripture firmly allocates responsibility for care of the local Church in all its aspects to persons variously called bishops or elders, each in the particular local assembly where he is found. It is not allocated to a "brother's meeting". It is not allocated to the Church in its entirety. Acts 20:28 — "Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers (bishops).

1 Peter 5:1 — "The elders which are among you I exhort, ... feed (shepherd too, tend, care for) the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight (bishopric). 1 Timothy 3:2-5 — "A bishop ... must ... know ... how to ... take care of the Church of God".

On some detailed ways in which this care will be required, and is to be made effective by the action of the elders Scripture is no less explicit: to watch over and keep pure the doctrines taught (1 Timothy 1:3); to rule well (1 Timothy 5:17); to give hospitality (Titus 1:8); to convince gainsayers by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9); to stop the mouths of unruly talkers (Titus 1:12); to work hard at the job of eldership and so to provide leadership and advice (1 Thessalonians 5:12); to warn the unruly and comfort the feeble (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Will anyone doubt that these are primary needs today, or that local assemblies would be different from what they often are if these functions were being diligently fulfilled?

In the second place, the problem created by the wish of unconverted persons to join themselves, temporarily or permanently, to the Church of God in any city was not an issue in Bible times, or in the persecution centuries, for obvious reasons. It is not therefore listed among the primary jobs allocated to elders. Nevertheless we believe that the Word of God provides the guidance needed for every age and condition. What guidance does it give about unconverted persons breaking bread?

One only really needs to ask whether this problem fairly comes under the heading of watching over and caring for the Church. It is immediately seen to be essential for this. Let anyone put together two verses of Scripture. Acts 20:29-32 is explicitly given as guidance for future conditions not then existent. "After my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you ... therefore watch ... and (as your sole resource in dealing with these future problems) I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace." Along with this, consider John 10:12,13 'He that is ... not the shepherd ... seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep ... because he ... careth not for the sheep. Can we (seeing these two Scriptures)
doubt that elders today must be cautious about permitting entry into Church fellowship of any persons who might be wolves?

Again, consider Church history. What was the real point of origin of the state of affairs in which we find so many so-called Churches almost completely secularized? (the Church condition many of us believe we have by the grace of God been recovered). It stems unquestionably from the action of Constantine in making Christianity for the first time a state religion. The necessary consequence was that the heathen nations incorporated into the Empire were by that fact assumed to have the right to Christian privileges. Conversion to Christianity was by the sword. It should have been for those at that time ... to prevent entry into the Church of those hordes of unbelieving persons. Christianity thereafter passed into centuries of near-complete darkness, from which only partial recovery has been granted.

Further questions arise. I cannot escape the feeling that the question ultimately concerns permitting Christians not normally in the same fellowship to break bread. Is the expression “breaking bread with” really a Scriptural idea? Breaking bread includes a grand fulness of meaning for the Christian heart and it is the badge of devotion to Christ and of the communion of His body, the Church. Should we permit our use of words to suggest that “to break bread with” is in God’s sight an act of committal to any fellowship smaller than the Church of God?

Another series of questions arises about elders. Many early brethren believed and taught that the dispensation is in ruins, and we must not and indeed cannot, attempt to restore the official structure of elderhood. But they did not deny and refuse to act on Scripture. They believed and acted on certain passages which they held to justify recognition of elders not ordained by apostles. Of these the most representative are 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 16:16. I will suggest my own translation of the former. “And we beseech you, brethren, to recognize the men who are in fact undertaking the toil among you, and providing the leadership, in the Lord, and whose counsel is in fact proving helpful.” Should we be less definite today? Should we ever take refuge behind the absence of apostolically appointed elders as an excuse for not carrying out the functions for which the Lord provides “the mighty ordination of the pierced hands”?

“Likewise ye younger, be subject to the elder; and all of you bind on humility towards one another.”

“Remember your leaders who have spoken unto you the word of God; and considering the end of their conversation imitate their faith.”

“Esteem them very highly for their work’s sake . . .”

(1 Peter 5:5; Hebrews 13:7 N.Tr.; 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13).
Fulness of Times in the New Testament (1)

FRANK WALLACE

Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 21:24-28; Galatians 4:4-7; Romans 11:25,26 and Ephesians 1:9,10.

We quote a brief extract from each of these passages, so that the main distinction between this and the recent paper ‘The times and seasons’, and also the intention of the present one, may be clarified,

1. “Can ye not discern the signs of the times?” or, from Luke, “How is it that ye do not discern this time?”

2. “Jerusalem shall be trodden down . . . until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

3. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son.”

4. “Blindness in part . . . to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

5. “He has purposed in . . . the fulness of times . . . (to) gather together in one all things in Christ . . .”

Our brother kindly allows me considerable latitude in handling his written material, and I have made substantial use of this here. It seemed preferable to condense, as much as I can, the earlier parts of his address, and to expand in a second paper the part dealing with quotation 5.

The word ‘fulness’, or something akin to it, appears in these passages, but is used in different senses. These should become
clearer as they are taken, one by one, and the gist of each passage briefly explained.

At the close, the great and perfect consummation in Christ towards which, under God, all earlier times are leading, receives more emphasis.

This closing section of the address, thrilled many listeners, and it is worth a rather more expanded treatment. This will be done in the further paper — Part 2.

These passages pick out periods of different character, more or less distinct from the dispensations — the 'times and seasons' of the recent paper. Some of them, though wonderful, have arrived and are past, e.g. 3. Others (e.g. 2 and 4) describe what is continuing to an end-point, when a transition to a changed situation will occur (Jerusalem no longer trodden down; blindness lifted from Israel). The last, 5, is a culmination of times, all the times wonderfully headed up in Christ, according to God's sovereign will and pleasure.

The Signs of the Times

The passage in Matthew 16:1-4 tells of the Pharisees and Sadducees, those determined opposers of Jesus, asking for a miraculous sign from heaven. They were true to the character that Paul the apostle gave to them — “Jews ask for a sign” (1 Corinthians 1:22). But they did this in spite of the plainest of signs already open to them, which their unbelief ignored. Able to foretell the weather prospects (not difficult in Palestine), they were insensitive to the much greater sign so apparent in His presence amongst them — this was the blindness of sheer prejudice against Him. Their Messiah was there, with all the attendant signs that their very Scriptures had indicated. His manner of birth, His forerunner, His mighty works, His teachings, His fulfilment of so many detailed indications in the O.T. — a few only of the significant foreseeings from the prophetic word — now being realized before their very eyes. Yet their opposition to Him blinded them to it all! What else but a sign of judgment (the sign of the prophet Jonas) awaited them?

The Times of the Gentiles

God in sovereign purpose intended a unique place for the nation of Israel: See Deuteronomy 32:8,9; 33:28,29; Numbers 23:9; 24:7,8, 17-24. They were to be the head of the nations, and not the tail. Their power and success depended on their obedience to God's declared will in His word to them. But Scripture shows how lamentably they failed. The success of
David, the warrior king, and the splendour of Solomon's reign, was wasted by disobedience and idolatry. There came a point when they were rejected and God allowed the Gentile to gain the supremacy. Judah was given into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian monarch. Then began Babylonian rule, with Jerusalem trodden down (see Ezekiel 5:1-10), and Judah in captivity. The ten tribes of Israel had been dispersed by Assyria earlier. Daniel is the principal prophet concerned with "the times of the Gentiles".

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar, interpreted by Daniel in chapter 2, envisaged a sequence of empires — Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome. The great image here covers the whole period of "the times of the Gentiles", and its termination will be when God takes up, in the rule of Christ on earth, His promised purpose for the earth. This totally replaces "the kingdoms of this world". An everlasting kingdom is set up; the stone cut out without hands will smash the image, totally judging and replacing all the failure of Gentile rule. The saying will yet be fulfilled, "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:16). But it is clear that the Gentile nations, put in responsibility under God, also signally fail.

The fulness of the time

This expression refers to a climax, a limited period in time, now past. God sent forth His Son! His appearance here, "in the days of His flesh", was a turning point in the whole story of God's dealings with men. All the earlier O.T. times, when God dealt with men in a probationary way, testing men and seeking an acceptable response, came to a head at this point. In every sense man showed that he was thoroughly incapable of pleasing God. He was incurably and hopelessly so. Time and again he forfeited every claim on God's favour. What would God do when this became clearly demonstrated? He sent His Son!

So, the fulness of the time is the end-point of all those trials, seeking for something good from man. But there is also a sense in which this statement means "When the time was ripe, or, at the most opportune time, God sent forth His Son". Certainly, as has been often noticed, what arose out of the incarnation period (founded on it) — i.e. the free grace of God, and its proclamation to "whosoever will" — found the world situation in early N.T. times ideal for the wide dissemination and proclamation of that message. Receptive ears for that message, proclaimed in the Holy Spirit's power, led to the founding of assemblies in many places in the then known world. Remember our Lord's word, "I will build my Church". It started from this great event, following the sending of the Holy Spirit, and still continues.
Space forbids amplification of all the beauties and graces of the incarnate Son, though the wish to dwell on it is strong. Of course we must understand that “the days of His flesh”, as used above, covers the whole interval between His arrival here in flesh and His departure, as a man ascended into heaven. It includes the redemption He effected at Calvary, and also His resurrection in power and triumph ‘from among the dead’. The surety and certainty of God’s handling of all developments, in heaven and on earth, hinges on this climactic point in history. Our heading to this section stresses this, the key event of all.

The fulness of the Nations (Gentiles)

This passage (paraphrased) seems to mean ‘Except for the converted minority amongst the Jews, they are blind now; this is to continue until the harvest of God’s gospel testimony to the nations is complete’, i.e. until the last Christian convert has been gathered in. At the first, the early Christians were mostly Jews, but the book of Acts relates the move-over to the witness to the Gentiles. Along with this the developing outreach to the Gentile world took place. Also there is a perceptible hardening to that testimony amongst the Jews seen taking place in the Acts. Saul of Tarsus, a leading antagonist to Christ, by a tremendous intervention from heaven, from Christ personally, in astounding grace, became the very apostle to the Gentiles, so recently despised by him. The chief antagonist to the Lord Jesus became, in overpowering grace, His chief and tirelessly active protagonist. So, where Christ was crucified, where sin abounded in the extreme, grace super-abounded. In Jerusalem, the very place of Christ’s rejection, the testimony to God’s grace began and spread afar. Its scope is “to the uttermost bounds of the earth”.

The river of God’s grace
Through righteousness supplied
Is flowing o’er the barren place
Where Jesus died.

This great outflow is still progressing, and how thankful we must be that our own climes have heard this message, and we ourselves, by God’s inward work, have been brought to know its power. How sad too to find people hardened to it, and turning away, counting it as irrelevant today. Let us personally be guarded against dullness of enthusiasm for it. But the in-gathering of the Gentiles will reach its end-point. The last invitee will come. The door will be shut. The Church (all believers of the present day) will be raptured. They that are ready will enter with the Bridegroom who is coming at any moment. “Watch”, said our Lord, “for you know not the day nor the hour”.

(It is of interest to notice verse 12 in Romans 11, where the word 'fulness' again appears. "If the fall of them (Israel) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness!" What has become available to the wide world because of the unbelief and general blindness of Israel cannot be over-estimated. These are riches of the highest quality indeed, though they can be under-rated and rejected. But what is in store for Israel when they are awakened, and their blindness removed, is more splendid still. Of course it will be of a different character from the blessing that faith brings today, when Christ is still rejected. God's purpose is that blessing for men will come, and honour to His beloved Son. Alternatively, all intransigence will be rebuked. All offensive things will be swept away in judgment, by our Lord. So, the great and glorious times envisaged in our final section will come to pass, "to the praise of His glory".)

In part 2 we hope to give more attention to this — i.e. to "the dispensation of the fulness of times".

The Breaking of Bread (3)

GORDON SPRATT

An Act of Testimony

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye show forth the Lord's death till He come." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

A continuing witness

When we break bread we show forth, or proclaim, the Lord's death until He comes. We do not know how long it will be, but we do know that He will come; and He has left us this privilege until He comes! It is remarkable that, despite all the changes of the centuries, despite all the variants that men have introduced into their Christian worship, one central thing has remained — the "breaking of bread". You may say, it is different wherever you go. Well yes, externally that is so; different in what man has attached to it. But what the Lord Jesus initiated, however little understood, however distorted by various traditions, has continued until now, its essential meaning unchanged. The bread and the cup, and the service of praise and thanksgiving which has always been associated
with it, remains in almost every Christian community as a continuing witness in this world to the Lord Jesus. If there had been no breaking of bread, if the Lord Jesus had left His disciples no pattern to be followed, would there not have been a multiplicity of means devised for His remembrance, and a chaotic result in consequence? But in His wisdom He has left a simple pattern which has broadly been followed.

It might be contended that the breaking of bread is something done privately, behind closed doors, and that it cannot therefore be thought of as a public testimony, but this is not really so. Maybe what happens when a small company of Christians gathers to break bread is largely unobserved, in the sense that others rarely come, but it is a well-known thing that there is a Christian community in this world and that there is an ordinance which we call the "breaking of bread", which links together believers in the Lord Jesus from every nation under heaven. What a privilege it is to participate in a continuing testimony, and to have the assurance that this testimony will continue in this world until Jesus comes. Every effort has been made to extinguish it, but it will surely continue. Look at Eastern Europe today. What has happened to Communism? I grew up with the belief that in the east Communism had a kind of permanency — yet today it is fading, almost gone. Possibly it may prove to have a lifespan of no more than about 70 years. But the breaking of bread has been going on for almost 2000 years! The Christian testimony has survived all the violence directed against it and all that human philosophy has devised to undermine it — a continuing testimony indeed.

A physical witness

What do we mean by a physical witness? Christianity proper, as it has developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has only two physical symbols. Of course we have the Bible, the Word of God in physical, tangible form, but that apart, what have we in true, biblical Christianity of a material kind? We have a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. Some churches have other impressive things — splendid architecture, golden altars, ikons, censers of incense, ornate garments — all the trappings of Christian tradition. Is it according to Scripture? Not a bit. It is just a revival of Judaistic ideas, despite the fact that the material symbols of Judaism have given place to the spiritual experience of Christianity. It is for this latter reason that many who have a desire to return to the simple forms of the New Testament Church meet in plain rooms around a table with just a cloth bearing the bread and the wine. We have the authority of Scripture for such a practice, and in it the focus of attention is those two simple but meaningful physical symbols, the bread and the cup.
I want to press upon you that these are the emblems of Christ's death. Humanly we might have expected some emblem of His glory. No other society, honouring some great man, would make much of his death. It would want to recall things which would make much of him as a man, his attainments, his distinctions. But the Lord Jesus left behind the tokens of His suffering love. There are Christians today who are intent on associating their testimony with glory and power, important things in their place, but this word, "ye do show the Lord's death" ought to give its character to the whole Christian testimony. We are witnesses of Christ's death. He has left us the reminder of the cross, of His death, of the love that took Him there. When He appeared to His disciples on the day of His resurrection, He did not occupy them exactly with the splendour and power of His resurrection, but He showed them "His hands and His side". He touched their hearts with the evidence of His suffering love. Our testimony, which we carry through this world as we wait for His coming, is principally to His death.

A personal witness

Does anyone notice that we break bread on the Lord's Day? That we don't mow our lawns on that morning; that we don't spend it at the club or the leisure centre; that there is a company of believers who are occupied with something else at that time. To the extent that such a custom marks the believer off as different from others, I believe that it is observed. In the vicinity of our meeting place there will be people who notice that we come regularly and quietly, intent on remembering our Lord. Sometimes we may have to tell our employers that we do not wish to work on Sundays. Maybe at times it will be unavoidable, but the point will have been made — there is something in our lives which to us is of the first importance. That priority, and the centrality to our lives of the breaking of bread, should be our personal witness. Is there anything more precious to us, is there anything that has a higher priority for us, than this personal honouring of our Lord. Is there anything that we could wish to pass on to our children more important than the fact that the Lord Jesus has asked us to do it, week by week?

When I was young the Christian group in which I was brought up never advertised the breaking of bread on its notice boards. I often wondered about the rights and wrongs of that. Behind it lay the fear that people might come who were not qualified to participate in the breaking of bread, and that it might be difficult to turn them away. I now believe that, if the word of God instructs us that in breaking bread we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes, then it should be declared on the notice board. The
problem of how to deal with strangers is a matter we shall have to deal with at the door. In all sincerity I feel that the breaking of bread is a public testimony, and for each of us a personal testimony to the death of the Lord Jesus and His absence from this world. Faithfulness and consistency in our Christian walk are the qualities which make it effective.

A united witness

What do we mean by this? On the face of it the Christian testimony seems far from united. Different places have different practices; different people advertise different services; different Christian groups go their several ways. Patently and sadly true. But I return to what was said a few moments ago: there is a central observance, not a mere ritual, of course, but something which characterizes Christianity and which extends to almost every Christian fellowship. Differences about baptism abound, various methods of bible study and widely differing attitudes to evangelism exist, but characteristic of the Church in every age and in every land is the breaking of bread in some identifiable form. To me this is not only a kind of expression of unity, it is also a great preservative of our faith. It protects against the tendency for the mind of man to take and distort the elements of our faith, because it calls us back time and time again to the fundamental importance of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus.

Let us pick up again the phrase from 1 Corinthians 11 which expresses our theme. “Ye do proclaim the Lord’s death, until He come”. The Lord’s death! If it were the remembrance of some great earthly person, what an empty, sad, hopeless thing it would be. In November, at the Cenotaph and at local War Memorials, those who have died in war are remembered. “At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them,” they say. I am not quarrelling with that for a moment. But they are honouring and remembering only lives lost in a virtually hopeless cause. There is little that is hopeful, vital, and living in the remembrance of the wartime dead, however precious the memory. It is not in that way that our Lord Jesus is remembered. Of the many positive considerations that enter into our remembrance of His death, I pick out three:

Firstly, it is the proclamation of something which has power — power to save. I do not suggest that the breaking of bread does this exclusively, for it is more directly proclaimed in its application to man’s need in the preaching of the gospel. But we bear witness to it at the Lord’s supper. We are not here to proclaim the power of the Holy Spirit: we are to profit by that and to express it in our lives and service. But we are to proclaim that great reality, the death of Jesus, which is the power of God unto salvation.
Secondly, **it is our point of severance from the world.** I must explain this. The phrase comes from the verse of a hymn by Miss F. J. Elwood, which goes like this:

\[
\text{Lost in Thy love, Thy death we deem}
\]
\[
\text{Our point of severance from this scene}
\]
\[
\text{Where man Thy rights did spurn;}
\]
\[
\text{To us earth stands in shadow now,}
\]
\[
\text{Tis but Thy grave and ours, till Thou,}
\]
\[
\text{Lord Jesus, shalt return.}
\]

What place does the Lord Jesus have in our affections? What is our relationship to this world, where our Lord was crucified? When John said, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world”, he was not enunciating a doctrine — he was speaking from a heart burning with indignation at the fact that this is the place where Jesus was crucified. The Lord’s Supper witnesses to the death of our Lord in this too, that we see in it, and in His cross, our point of severance from the world. Paul expressed the thought more than once in the short epistle to the Galatians. Look at chapter 6: “God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”. It will never be possible to say truly, “I am crucified to the world”, until it can also be said, “The world is crucified to me” — until the world has lost its charm, until the world has been put upon a cross, until the world has come under judgment in my heart.

The loving of this present evil world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, if unjudged, strikes at the very root of our Christian witness. I have to confess it for myself. What an awful thing it is to be at home in a world where Christ died, to settle down where He is rejected, instead of being part of the testimony to His absence, and finding that it separates us immediately from the place where He was crucified. Nothing else will wean us away from this world. Its attractions are far too strong for our poor mortal hearts, unless we see that Jesus died here, crucified and slain. Only in that way will His death become our point of severance from the world. Ask yourself, is it practically true? When I break bread, each time, am I owning in that testimony my separation from the world? This is a challenge to my own heart, and I believe it will also be a challenge to yours.

Thirdly, **it is the promise of Glory.**

Until He comes! What thoughts does that produce in your mind? Are our hearts burning at the prospect? Are they waiting with growing
expectancy for that day when Jesus will come? I have a very strong impression that, when we gather to break bread, reflecting on the significance of the emblems, looking backward to Christ's sufferings, looking back "to see the curse removed", enjoying too His personal presence with us, we should also be looking forward. Looking on to the wonderful and eternal consequences that Jesus made possible in His death — the Lord's death! We must sense the promise of everything new, living and eternal, implied in His words, "the new covenant in my blood". The promise of His coming, the prospect of the Father's house, is made good to us now in a living relationship by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We look on to the day when God will bring many sons to glory, knowing that we shall have our part in that favoured company. A promise of glory! One can think of many verses. I just select one from 1 Thessalonians 5:10. "Who died for us that, whether we wake of sleep, we should live together with him." That is the full result of His death — the certainty that we shall live together with Him, whether we die and are raised at His coming, or whether we are still here to be raptured when He comes — that is our prospect. "That where I am, there ye shall be also." He has said it, and He will fulfil it.

And there is another perspective: the time when He who was rejected here will come to reign must be just ahead. This is not our eternal destiny, but it is a great expectation. Jesus is coming: He will reign and be publicly glorified. Now is the suffering time in which we share in the fellowship of His death. But the reigning time is coming, when the earth will be filled with response to Him, and every voice will proclaim Him Lord. And beyond that again, in the final accomplishment of the divine purpose, will come the eternal day, when all will be for the pleasure of God and our blessing will be full. And all that realisation of life and relationship with our God and our Father results from the death of Jesus! How tremendous is the testimony borne by the simple act of breaking bread. The message, "Ye do show the Lord's death" proclaims the certainty of a glorious future, to which we have the privilege of bearing witness at the present time.
"I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand" (1 Samuel 27:1).

Whatever made David, the anointed of the Lord, a man after God's heart, go down to the enemies of God's people, whose champion Goliath he had slain? It is true that Saul still sat on the throne, but God had promised David the kingdom, and even Saul knew that he would surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel would be established in his hand (1 Samuel 24:20). How could Saul kill him, since God had promised him the kingdom? Let us not criticize David, but rather ask how many times we have failed to stand upon the promises of a God who cannot lie? This forgetfulness on the part of David led him into many doubtful and dangerous situations, until at last he had lost all that was precious to him in the Philistine country, and even his own men were ready to stone him (30:6). It was then that David at last remembered all that God had promised him, and we read that he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God". From that moment he began once more to put his trust in this faithful God, and enquire from him what he should do next. Then we read that "David recovered all".

David was not the first to make this mistake. His forefather Abraham, the "father of the faithful", as he is often called, was privileged to hear the voice of the God whom he served. In Genesis 12 we read that God told him to leave his home, and to travel to a country of God's choice. He promised: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee. . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed". Abraham obeyed the voice of God, and went to Shechem, where God appeared unto him with the promise that his seed would possess the land. Abraham built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord.

Then there came a famine, and Abraham forsook the land of promise, and went down to Egypt. Since his wife, in spite of her age, was quite attractive, he begged her to say that she was his sister (which was partly
true), for, he argued: “They will kill me, but will save thee alive”. He might have reasoned otherwise: “Since God has promised that I shall be the father of many nations, nothing can befall me”. Alas, when a man of faith acts after the flesh, he often behaves in a manner that even worldly standards condemn. Happily, God delivered Abraham from the results of his lack of faith, and in the end he left Egypt richer than when he arrived there.

We might suppose that Abraham, as he grew older, would forsake the mistakes of earlier days, but we know only too well that the aged do not always understand judgment (Job 32:9). Even Solomon, as he grew older, seemed to forget the lessons of his youth, and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, who had appeared to him twice. So, in chapter 20, we find Abraham committing the same fault, this time in Gerar, among the Philistines. Once again he reasons: “I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife’s sake” (20:11). Again God intervened on behalf of His saint, and even bade Abimelech to ask Abraham to pray for him, “for he is a prophet”! Here again we see the contrast between what the believer is in his own weakness, and what dignity is given to him in virtue of the work of Christ. In the next chapter he tries to accomplish the fulfilment of the Divine promise by listening to Sarah’s proposal, and becoming the father of Ishmael. The results of this grave misjudgment are still very evident. The epistle to the Galatians teaches us the lessons to be learnt from this mistake. The flesh is ever with us, and we know that it is not capable of pleasing God, and yet how slow we are to see the practical side of this!

Happily, God does not fail His servant, with all his weaknesses. The child of promise, Isaac, is born, and in chapter 22 we see Abraham’s faith put to the test. This time he does not fail, but, rising early in the morning, he goes to the place, and carries out the instructions of the God whom he has learned to know as One that is able even to raise the dead. The result of this obedience is another confirmation of the promises of God, “because thou hast done this thing”, “because thou hast obeyed My voice” (vv. 16,18).

Isaac, the son of promise, is also faced with a famine, like his father before him. This time God appears to him, warning him not to go down to Egypt, as his father had done, but to remain in the land of promise. Again the faithful God reiterates all the blessings that were promised to his father, and reminds him that he too will have a progeny that shall be for blessing to all the nations of the earth. He adds: “Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, and My laws” (Genesis 26:5). Yet, surprisingly, Isaac repeats Abraham’s failure. Having heard these words, he dwells in Gerar, and when the inhabitants
of that place ask him about his wife, he says: “She is my sister”. Like his father, he reasons: “Lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah”. How could they kill him, since God had promised that he was to be the father of many? Must we not often hang our heads in shame when we begin to argue like the men of this world, and lean upon the arm of flesh?

Happily the faithfulness of God protects His weak servant, and prevents the heathen chieftain from touching his wife. It is remarkable that the next verses tell us that “Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him.”

The descendants of Abraham and Isaac, as described in the historical books of the Bible, failed just as their ancestors, but, as we read in Nehemiah 9, although they had failed Him again and again, and lost sight of His promises, yet “Thou in Thy manifold mercies forsookest them not” (Nehemiah 9:19). We too can say: “This God is our God for ever and ever”. Peter reminds us that “exceeding great and precious promises” are given to us, and he points out that “by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature”, and that is why he follows with a practical admonition to see that these things (faith, virtue, knowledge and the like) exist in us, and abound. He warns that “he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:9).

“Oh, that we never might forget
What Christ has suffered for our sake.”

“From us the doubtful mind remove;
We boast a God who cannot lie.”

Aftermath of the Middle East war

Our paper on the Middle East in the May/June issue now needs updating, though final comment on that continuing situation will be difficult to make, since the one certain fact, the rapture of the saints, must be nearer still. That will pre-date much of the increasing turmoil in the middle east. But the merciless acts of leaders so full of pride and desire for self-glory have been well demonstrated, to the hurt of many — and more of the same is in store. A book “The Rise of Babylon”, soon to be reviewed in “Scripture Truth Quarterly”, makes almost compelling reading, and can be recommended. It is obtainable from Scripture Truth Publications.
"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ"

(2 Corinthians 11:2)

In its original intention, this text has reference to the apostle Paul and the Corinthian assembly, though its truth must be extensible. I wish to make an application of it, not as to an assembly, but to some individuals, and to look at how it affected them and how it may apply to us today.

1. Rahab

When we first meet this woman in Scripture her manner of life is indicated with great plainness. She was a harlot and her house was open to any man. The Lord had been working in her heart and had brought spiritual enlightenment into her dark life. It is difficult, indeed it may be impossible, for those who have been privileged to enjoy a Christian upbringing, and who have never lived in a heathen village, to realize the dense darkness which enveloped such a place as Jericho. Rahab’s house was built on the town wall. In ancient cities walls were intended to keep evil and enemies out of the place, but Rahab’s house gave access to the tread of men’s feet bringing corrupt behaviour into her home, and so into the vital defences of the city. However, the Lord had blessing in view for this woman, and it was to her house that He had directed the two spies, and she gave them shelter, indicating thus that a new chapter had begun in her life. These two men were the messengers of the Lord’s host and the Lord now mattered to her more than anything else. All the residents of Jericho had heard the same testimony concerning the Lord and His activities in Israel, but she had received the word into her heart and had believed it. After the fall of the city and the promised salvation of herself and her family, she became absorbed into the nation as an honoured member. We read: “She dwelleth in Israel even unto this day because she saved the messengers”. Later on she was to be married to Salmon and become a respected wife among the people of Israel. She who had been available to any man who came along was now espoused to one man, and as we know from the records, she became a direct ancestress of king David, and thus of the Lord Jesus according to His birth into this world.

The name Salmon is said to mean “a garment”, from a root meaning “to wrap up in a cloth”. This fact may recall the request of another
alien maid to Boaz: “Spread . . . thy skirt over thine handmaid”. Salmon spread his garment over this Amorite woman and took her under his wing and into his family.

The question might be asked, What do these other men represent, those who mark a path up to the door of one's house? This may take one of a number of forms. In Corinth, where the saints had been espoused to one Man, they had experienced several of these other men. There were the philosophers with their airy theories of life; there were the politicians with their systems of government; there were the commercial tycoons with their schemes of enrichment; there were the pleasure seekers and providers with their opiates to anaesthetise the mind (the word 'amuse' means to stop thinking); and there were the literary men with their cunningly devised fables. The Corinthians had known dealings with all these types and, no doubt, many others. Perhaps they were not far behind the Athenians who, despite their vaunted learning, were swayed by every fad which was introduced. But the apostle Paul had espoused the assembly in Corinth to one Man, the Man Christ Jesus. Writing to the Philippians, Paul says, “To me, to live is Christ”. No other man had any place in his heart or in his outlook, and his ambition for the Corinthians was that Christ should mean as much to them as He did to him. So it was with profound sorrow that he learned of their admittance of other men, now in a religious sense, to displace the one Man whom he had announced to them. This new cult of different men had split the assembly into several parties, the Paul party, the Apollos party, and so on; but these great servants of Christ, even had their own names been used in this way, would have no part in such divisions. Paul reminded them, “Ye are Christ's”. He was the only Man in their lives. As a chaste virgin they must exclude all others and cleave to Him alone. There are plenty of men today who would beat a path to our door, even in a religious sense (and we all know those who seek to do so), that we may give to them the allegiance that we owe to the Lord alone, but we have been espoused to one Man and He is more than sufficient to fill our hearts and our lives. Their aim is to have disciples for themselves; Paul's aim was to attach the saints to his Lord.


In this chapter we read of another woman whose life had known many men. Attempts have been made to “clean up” the reputation of the Samaritan by suggesting that she had several times been widowed. It seems to me that such an idea could not logically be construed from the story. Moreover there is no need for it, for the Lord came to seek and to save that which was lost, and more than likely she was what she appears to
be, a loose woman. What we were by nature before the Lord took us up in grace is all of the same colour, whoever we are and wherever we were. It is all dark with sin, and the whitewash of respectability does not remove it but merely conceals it. The Lord Jesus did not make his way to Sychar because she was a decent woman, but because she needed salvation and He must needs go there to bring it to her. It is possible that God had begun a work in her heart. It is sure that her conscience was active. She had also been thinking about worship, about the relative claims of Gerizim and Jerusalem in this regard, about the promised Messiah and what would be the outcome of His appearing. She had thought, too, about truth; we say this but the Jews say that. Evidently she was searching for truth, for answers to the questions of her heart. The manner of her life had estranged her from the community. Each time she admitted a new man into her life she probably robbed another woman of her husband and broke up another family. She was now living in sin with a man who had not even bothered to marry her, so widening the circle of her sinful influence. Having been found by the seeking Saviour, and having been brought to a knowledge of Him, she hurried back into the city against which she had sinned significantly, with a message concerning one Man; “Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did”. The people well knew many of the things to which she referred, for some of the city’s households had been grievously damaged by her behaviour. It was not brazenness that impelled her to speak to them; she had felt shame, as her avoidance of publicity makes evident; but it was the effect of light bringing out the truth. She had faced the facts of her case in the Lord’s presence, and all had come into the open, so she could now face them before men. Henceforth the woman whose life had been lived for many men would be devoted to one Man only, the Messiah who had sought her out and found her in her disordered life, and she could now commend Him to others: “Is not this the Christ?” In her heart she gave Him the place which God had already accorded Him as His anointed. She did not speak to the people of Sychar of any other men. Those men had not brought her the security, the satisfaction, the tranquility which she sought; they had brought her shame, sorrow and isolation. But this Man, the one Man now for her, had brought her forgiveness and light and joy.

[I regret that the third part of this paper must overlap into the next issue. Our brother’s third paragraph refers to ‘The woman of the city — Luke 7’. When you receive the present issue, please retain it until the September/October issue arrives, so that the paper can be read as a whole. I trust John will accept my apologies for this.]
A Remarkable Prophecy

R. A. CREETH

"What is His Name, and what is His Son's name, if thou canst tell?"

"The words of Agur, the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel and unto Ucal." (Proverbs 30:1-4)

Only fairly recently a Calendar extract, centring on these words of Agur, has appeared on the inside back cover of the magazine. Mr Creeth has now produced this paper on the same passage. While the other quotation was concise, this is somewhat more detailed.

The meaning of "Agur" is said by some to be "gatherer", and maybe we have here the gathering up of all wisdom. Agur speaks unto Ithiel (or "God with me"), even unto Ucal ("the Mighty One" or "God for me"). Does this not remind us of the incarnation, of Immanuel — God with us (Matthew 1:23)? And further, in resurrection He is revealed as the mighty One — God for us.

It must have been in the light of God's presence that Agur the gatherer had learned what he was in himself, and made his remarkable confession, "Surely I am more brutish than any man and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy". In some way or other he had learned the true condition of fallen man and that he was part of a fallen race. Thus in real abasement he took the lowest place among his fellows. It is good for each one of us when we can say with the apostle, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing", for "the flesh profiteth nothing" (Romans 7:18; John 6:63). "The carnal mind (or the mind of the flesh) is enmity against God; It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; so then they that are in the flesh cannot
please God" (Romans 8:7-8). What an indictment of man’s utter ruin, but the apostle goes on to say that we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be the Spirit of God dwells in us.

Agur, having come to the end of himself, the Spirit of God turns his thoughts away from himself, to occupy him with God and His Son. Thus he utters this wonderful prophecy which begins “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?” Does not Paul answer this question, when, referring to the Lord Jesus he says, “Now that He ascended, what is it but that He descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:9-10). Yes, the One who first descended to accomplish eternal redemption is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The next three questions remind us of the almighty Creator of the universe. “Who hath gathered the wind in His fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth?” How salutary it is for us to be reminded in troubled times like these that “God sits as sovereign on the throne, and ruleth all things well”. Even the winds and the waves are controlled by His power and obey His voice, as was manifested on several occasions by the Lord Jesus here on earth. All creation was brought into being through Him, and He, even now, upholds all things by the word of His power.

But let us consider how all is summed up in the answer to the final question, “What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if thou canst tell?”

While God has many names and titles, let us look at three chief ways in which He has been pleased to reveal Himself in the Scriptures. First, the Creator God (Elohim of Genesis 1) appeared to Abraham and the patriarchs as “El Shaddai” the Almighty God, God the All-sufficient (Exodus 6:3). Secondly in covenant-relationship with the people of Israel He took the name of Jehovah, I am that I am, the self-existent God. The name is composed of three Hebrew words, and we almost get a translation of it in Revelation 1:8 — the self-existing, self-subsisting, Eternal God.

Thirdly, the most wonderful and to us the most intimate revelation is that of Father. The apostle John tells us that “No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. And the Son Himself could say, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:28). How wonderful it is that through faith in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ we can take to ourselves the words of John in his epistle, “Beloved, what manner of love the Father
hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God” (1 John 3:1). How great the privilege — to be brought into His family and to have intimate acquaintance with Him as children with a Father!

Abba, Father, thus we call Thee,
Hallowed name! from day to day
'Tis Thy children's right to know Thee,
None but children, Abba, say.

We shall now consider the last part of Agur's prophecy. “What is His Son's name, if thou canst tell?” Before our Lord's birth the angel told Joseph that Mary should bring forth a Son, and He was to call His name Jesus, which means Jehovah the Saviour, for He should save His people from their sins. This was a fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah, “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:20-23). As we remember that He came to suffer and to give His life a ransom on the cross we might well exclaim along with the hymn-writer:

Man of sorrows: what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Now let us look at the fivefold name as given in Isaiah 9:6. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of eternity, the Prince of Peace.”

“His name shall be called Wonderful.” When Manoah asked the angel his name, the reply was, “Why askest thou my name, seeing it is Wonderful” (Judges 13:18 AV margin). Did not the disciples own it when they said “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him” (Matthew 8:27)? And was it not demonstrated in the garden when the soldiers came to take Him. For as soon as He said unto them I am, they went backward and fell to the ground (John 18:6)?

“Counsellor.” We recall the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 11. “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; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls”. We come to Him initially and receive the rest of conscience that He alone can provide, but how precious it is to be subject to Him, and in His blessed presence find peace and rest of heart! How sweet to sit at His feet like Mary of Bethany and learn of Him, the meek and lowly One! Let us covet the privilege of
sitting as learners at His feet, His words than honey far more sweet, as the hymn puts it. Then we shall prove the reality of the promise, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee with Mine eye upon thee” (Psalm 32:8 N. Tr.).

“The Mighty God.” This is the central glory of the five-fold name — the name of the Omnipotent One, the mighty El (the last syllable of Emmanuel). Such a name sets forth the Deity of the Lord Jesus. It was seen when He multiplied the loaves and fishes to satisfy the hungry crowds, and when He demonstrated His power over death by raising dead persons to life.

“The Father of Eternity.” Does not this remind us of His eternal existence and His essential Deity, as in John 1:1-3? Or again Colossians 1:15-17 tells that He is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things subsist.”

“The Prince of Peace.” At His birth the angels proclaimed “peace on earth”, but now, in view of the Lord’s rejection, it is “peace in heaven” (Luke 19:38). Peace is now centred in the risen Christ, as Paul writes to the Ephesians, “but now ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one (Jew and Gentile) . . . to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace . . . and came and preached peace to those afar off and to them that were nigh” (Ephesians 2:13-17). Peter too presented Him as Prince of Peace to Cornelius and his Gentile friends. “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)” (Acts 10:36).

Israel rejected their Messiah when He came to them in lowly grace, but the day is surely coming when there will be a repentant remnant looking for Him to come as Prince of Peace; they will say in that day, “Lo, this is our God! we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isaiah 25:9). Then will be fulfilled the Scripture “of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, and He will establish the kingdom with judgment and justice for ever” (Isaiah 9:7).
One Man

JOHN BARNES

"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:2)

(Continued from page 256, previous issue)


In this tender passage we are granted a glimpse of a moving scene. The woman Luke refers to was evidently a prostitute, and her life had known many men. It would not be impossible that some of the high ecclesiastics had been among her customers, for they were only whitewashed sepulchres, these vessels of moral death. She had had relationships with the philanderers and the prelates, the politicians and the philosophers, who had found their way to her door in the darkness of night (cf. Proverbs 7:9-10).

We are not let into the secret of how a divine work had begun in her ruined life. Indeed, as someone has pointed out, the Holy Spirit has not revealed her name to us at all. It is clear that a work of repentance had been wrought in her heart, and that life, which had been an open house for many men, had now become a holy shrine for one Man, a little temple reserved for the Lord Christ. The flask of precious ointment, sealed for future use, probably on herself, was broken open that its rich contents might be lavished upon the Lord. Modern women spend vast sums of money on themselves in the way of expensive cosmetics alone; this dear sister poured out her treasure upon the one Man who was the Lover of her soul and to whom she was now wholly devoted. Her courage in braving the scorn of the company in the Pharisee's house was very great. There she performed services upon the Person of the Lord which others had neglected, and she did these services herself, and with herself; with all that was within her, her emotions, her affections, her gratitude, her hair, her tears, her valuable ointment. She washed those beautiful feet which had trodden a path of blessing to her door, to give, not to get; to bring forgiveness, to bestow true joy, life and hope. We could not imagine this dear, ransomed soul, returning to her former ways from which infinite grace had rescued her. From that fragrant moment she would walk her quiet way in the peace ministered to her by the one Man who had now become the sole Object of her affections, and the sweetness of those
moments spent in adoration at His feet would endure for the remainder of her days on earth, enriching her memories as she recalled the grace, the tenderness, the compassion, and the kindness of the one Man who had brought only blessing into her shattered life.

Perhaps the dear brethren at Corinth would have some sense of the vast privilege of being espoused to the one Man in all the universe who can bring blessing into men's ruined lives and make them pleasurable to God. The Lord Jesus seeks such a place in our hearts; He merits such a place. May we be helped to have all others deposed and Himself, alone, exalted to the place of pre-eminence.

The Breaking of Bread (4A)
GORDON SPRATT

Leading into the Sanctuary

*Read carefully: John 13:1-5 and John 17:24-26.*

*We should remind ourselves that while the breaking of bread is not recorded in John's Gospel, the verses above relate to the same upper room occasion when the breaking of bread request was made by our Lord. All His words between the above limits were heard by His own on the night of His betrayal. The relevance of this section in John should become apparent as we proceed.*

*We shall base this paper on the O.T. material tabernacle set up by Moses as Israel traversed the wilderness. Much of this will need to be brief, though the length of this paper will require two parts.*

Along with other considerations which have already figured in this series, the breaking of bread is important because it provides an occasion when the Lord's people, met together, can be led into the Sanctuary. We shall need to explain what we mean, because we are to consider a different perspective from the teaching we have found in 1 Corinthians which focuses exclusively upon the tokens of "the Lord's death", necessarily so because it is these tokens which form the basis of the whole occasion. But from the earliest Christian times the same occasion has been connected with thanksgiving, praise and worship. In other words, it has not only been
a remembrance occasion, but also a worship occasion. That this has developed as a tradition is undoubtedly true: what we are to ask ourselves is whether there is a scriptural basis for it.

At this point a word of warning is appropriate. We do not, or should not, control what happens at this most spiritual of occasions — the Spirit of God does that — and the tendency to formulate a set of rules to govern the proceedings has frequently resulted in a lack of spiritual liberty and spontaneity, even sometimes in open disagreement and division. So we must not go down that road.

On the other hand if we distinguish between our individual worship and our corporate worship, it is almost beyond question that the latter will find its focus principally, though not exclusively, at the occasion when our minds and hearts are stirred by the contemplation of the emblems of the Lord’s death. It seems reasonable also to expect that worship of this kind, whilst not to be tramelled by liturgical constraints, should nevertheless manifest that orderliness that results from the living presence of the Holy Spirit. The question before us now is whether we can find in that earthly sanctuary, the Tabernacle, which formed the basis of Israel’s worship in the wilderness and later in the Temple worship at Jerusalem, some basis for public and corporate worship today. We shall assume that it is so, and let the Scripture speak for itself.

The earthly tabernacle was a complicated structure set up by Moses under God’s detailed direction. It was the expression of the public relationship between God and His people in the wilderness, and the basis of their access, their approach to God. Let us see how it worked out for them in this material structure, so that from that we may learn something of our spiritual relationship to God.

The typical picture

The construction of the Tabernacle was remarkable: simply designed so that it could easily be set up and dismantled, portable so that it could be carried by the Levites as Israel journeyed, yet containing a variety of rare and precious materials, it was a suitable expression of the presence of God with His people in their wilderness experience. The outer court was about 150 feet long by 75 feet wide, and every Israelite had access to this area. Once inside, three main structures could be seen: first, and nearest the entrance, a large bronze altar; then a large bath called the laver, also of bronze and containing water; finally a tent into which only the priests had access. This tent was divided into two areas. Two-thirds of the space was called the Holy Place and was separated from the remaining third by a beautifully embroidered curtain, called the veil. This
smaller area was called the **Most Holy Place**, and was a place of even more limited access since only the high priest went there on a set day once a year. The expression *The Sanctuary* was used in a general sense of the whole Tabernacle structure (Exodus 25:8), but more particularly of the Holy Place (Hebrews 9:2), and it is in that sense that we shall use the word here.

It will be apparent that for the Israelites, there were three distinct levels of approach to God. The ordinary people were allowed only into the outer court, the priests had access also into the Holy Place in order to conduct the service of the Sanctuary, and the high priest had access once a year into the Most Holy Place. Let us consider these three distinct functions as they affected Israel, so that we may consider their application to Christianity.

**The Bronze Altar**

The outer court was the place where the Israelites offered their individual offerings as described in the opening chapters of Leviticus. There were two main categories: (i) when a person had sinned, a sin or trespass offering had to be offered, (ii) offerings pleasurable to God could be brought on a voluntary basis. Sin offerings were not optional: they were a necessary recognition on the part of an Israelite that he had sinned. The other offerings, sometimes called "sweet savour offerings", could be brought by individuals, but they had to be presented through the priests.

This brings us to an important distinction between the Israelite and the Christian. In Israel, only the family of Aaron could be priests, whereas in Christianity every believer is a priest. Revelation 1:5 says, "Unto him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us a kingdom of priests unto God and his Father . . .". The idea, held in some Christian circles, that the believer needs a priest as a mediator between himself — or herself — and God, is a dreadful delusion, for "there is . . . one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). This is a most important consideration when we come to the next part of our subject.

**The Sanctuary**

In addition to the task of presenting the individual offerings of the people, the priests had another function. They had the privilege and responsibility of maintaining a service in the Sanctuary. We shall look at the detail of it in a moment, but the significant thing about it was that it was done **on behalf of the children of Israel** (see Exodus 27:21). In other words, it was not now an individual but a corporate activity. It has a modern counterpart in the practice of ordination under which only ordained
persons are allowed to perform certain priestly functions, a sad failure to recognize what is sometimes called "the priesthood of all believers".

The Most Holy Place

In Israel, there was a further restriction, for the veil between the Sanctuary and the Most Holy Place was a barrier beyond which only the high priest was allowed to go. That Most Holy Place contained the Ark of the Covenant, that small but precious box which was a symbol of God's presence among His people, and the "mercy seat", which was His place of meeting with them. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest took in the blood of a bullock and sprinkled it on and before the mercy seat, recognizing in a typical way that the efficacy of the blood of Christ is the only ground on which God's people can be in relationship with Him.

When Jesus died we read that "the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom". In other words, His death removed the great barrier between the sinner and a holy God, and the believer now has the liberty referred to in Hebrews 10:19, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith".

But we must return to our main theme, which can be expressed in the question, Are we entitled to draw a parallel between the worship of the Tabernacle and our experience of corporate worship today? And the further question, Can this parallel be discerned in our experience when we meet for the breaking of bread? I believe that the answer to both questions is in the affirmative. Look at Hebrews 8:1-2, and couple it with Hebrews 9:11.

"We (Christians) have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens: a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man."

"Christ . . . a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more permanent tabernacle, not made with hands . . . not of this building . . .".

Thus the epistle to the Hebrews validates our application of these Old Testament passages in a Christian and spiritual sense. We must learn that our standing with God is on no other ground than the perfect work of Christ, but also that God desires that we should approach Him freely with our praise and worship. "The Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). Our offerings are typified in the animal sacrifices of the Tabernacle, for they all looked on to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. But we do not bring
animal sacrifices any more, for the types have been fulfilled in that one
perfect sacrifice made at Calvary, never to be repeated, as it says in
Hebrews 10:14, “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that
are sanctified”. What the Christian brings are spiritual sacrifices (see 1 Peter
2:5). We can offer nothing to God other than Christ, but we do not bring
literal sacrifices. Rather do we bring our appreciation of Him — the
perfection of His work and the beauty and greatness of His person. Let
each of us face up to the question, When I come to the breaking of bread,
what do I bring? Have I gathered up a spiritual offering as I have occupied
my heart with Christ, or do I come empty-handed. These individual
offerings are the spiritual counterpart of the personal offerings made at
the bronze altar, and surely those suitable for the remembrance meeting
would be the “sweet savour” offerings which reflect God’s perfect delight
in the person and work of His beloved Son. What answers to the sin offering
should be dealt with before we come: “let a man examine (judge) himself,
and so let him eat . . .”. (1 Corinthians 11:28).

How we come to the Lord’s Supper, and what we bring as individuals,
is of great importance, for if we do not come with our hearts full of Christ
it is questionable whether we should be there at all. But the breaking of
bread occasion is in its essence of a corporate kind, and we must therefore
move forward to the sanctuary experience, where, as with Israel, what
one does is representative of all. As the priests made their way towards
the Holy Place, they came to the laver and there they washed in order
that nothing defiling should enter the holy precinct. “Holiness becomes
thy house forever”, says Psalm 93. No uncleansed person must come within
the courts of God. So we have seen the need for self-judgment and cleansing
in order that we may partake of the Lord’s Supper worthily. In our verses
at the beginning of John 13 we have something similar. Jesus washed the
disciples feet so that they should be in a state fit to enter into the sanctuary-
truth He imparted to them in the ensuing upper-room discourse.

The Furniture of the Sanctuary

As the priest entered the Holy Place, he would see three important
objects. First of all, on the left-hand side there was the candlestick, or more
accurately, the lampstand. There was no natural light there, only the light
of the lampstand, and it reminds us that there is no place in the things
of God for the light of our human intelligence or reasoning. It was a unique
light, a seven-branched lampstand exquisitely fashioned of pure gold with
seven oil-fed lamps so arranged that their light displayed the beauty of
the stand. It is one of the most striking types in the Old Testament, declaring
the truth that the light of God, all that we can know of Him, shines
out in Christ, but telling us also that it is the present occupation of the Holy Spirit, whom the oil represents, to cast His light on the perfections of Christ. "He shall glorify me", said the Lord Jesus. In this type we have one of the great lessons in spiritual perception.

Opposite the lampstand, on the right-hand side, was the table of showbread, a golden table bearing twelve loaves of bread. The loaves would remind the priest that in the service of the sanctuary he acted not as an individual, but on behalf of the whole company, in Israel's case the whole twelve tribes. Transferring the significance of the type to Christianity, we are to learn that the sanctuary is the place of communion for the whole Christian company, the body of Christ. When we break bread we have a reminder of it in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body". However small the company actually assembled to remember the Lord, the whole body is represented there.

There are two other important considerations connected with the table of showbread. The first is that the loaves had to be renewed every week. Nothing old or stale was to be presented before God. Do we come into the sanctuary with stale offerings, threadbare words and the same half-dozen hymns? Or is there something fresh and vibrant on every occasion? The second thing is that the loaves became the food of the priests. Do we take away from our worship meeting something that remains as spiritual food for the remainder of our time?

Central in the Holy Place, standing immediately in front of the veil, was a golden altar. What was offered on it? Exodus 30 has been called "the worship chapter", and in that chapter we learn about the composition of the incense which was to be offered on the golden altar. Literally, it was a blend of sweet spices, compounded together, pure and fragrant, and reserved exclusively for the service of Jehovah. Spiritually, it represents the glories and perfections expressed in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. As His people gather to remember Him in the time of His absence from this world, there is, or should be, an appreciation of Him, which, as each contribution is made, is blended by the Holy Spirit into a united response which rises as incense to the Father. It is not our blessings and the meeting of our need which go to the compounding of this incense, but the glory of the One who is ever the delight of the Father's heart. Surely, as we participate in this experience, it is our entrance as priests into the sanctuary.

We have noticed earlier that, whereas with a single exception the priests of Israel could not pass beyond the veil into the Holiest, that veil has now been removed in the death of Christ. The result is that even the
simplest Christian has not only the privilege of entering into the sanctuary, but also the joy of a spiritual nearness to God, known in a way Israel never knew, as Father. “Now in Christ Jesus ye who once were far off are made near by the blood of Jesus” (Ephesians 2:13).

[Fulness of Times in the New Testament — (2)]

FRANK WALLACE

“In the dispensation of the fulness of the times He (God) will gather together in one all things in Christ”. (Ephesians 1:10)

As we have seen in Part 1, this (the fulness of the times) is the end-point towards which all times are moving, when all things in heaven and in earth will be consummated in Christ. Every function which was entrusted to men in their fallen condition, failed in its execution. But each will find its perfect realisation when Christ is supreme.

The day when Adam sinned and was expelled from the garden was a day fraught with disastrous consequences. God pronounced a curse upon the earth, and Adam’s dominion, and that of his seed, knew the blight of this. That curse has not yet been rescinded. But when all things in heaven and in earth reach their climax under Christ, the curse will be removed and the earth will be delivered from bondage (Revelation 22:3). “The wilderness and the dry land shall be gladdened; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1,2). What was lacking because of Adam’s sin will be seen in completeness for God’s glory and man’s blessing.

After the devastating judgment of the flood in the days of Noah, God gave precise promises and guidelines for Noah. Seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night would continue in the cleansed earth. Noah was responsible to govern the earth and to replenish it in every way. Animal life, bird life, fish life, and vegetable life were under his hand and for his benefit. Eating of blood was forbidden, and just judgment was to be executed upon murderers. Did Noah succeed? Have
his progeny succeeded? We have to say ‘No’. After thousands of years of misrule and maladministration, all forms of life including human life are in grave danger. Pollution and extinction are all around. The blight of sin, greed, selfishness and carelessness, threaten chaos and destruction. It will be far different when Christ gives a fulness to the Divine principle of rule. All that God has placed in this world for the benefit of mankind, used so far for self-aggrandisement, will then be administered by God’s Son with equity for the benefit of all. Never again will the riches of this world be manipulated for the benefit of the few, but in Christ’s wise and capable hands famines, shortages, droughts, and other evils, will be eradicated from this earth for ever. “Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, and thy dominion is throughout all generations. The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and thou givest them their food in their season. Thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:13,15,16. N.Tr.).

The Law was never obeyed in its fulness by Israel. The reverse was true. God was not central in their affections, and every evil path was followed, instead of righteousness. Their failure was highlighted when the Messiah of Israel, Jesus the Son of God, was rejected and cruelly crucified. The period of the law ended, and was followed by the reign of grace, beginning when Jesus ascended to the right hand of God His Father, and the Holy Spirit was sent down to indwell the bodies of believers in Christ. When Christ is installed as Head over all things the law will find a completeness in Israel, which it never had before. The law will be written in Israel’s hearts and in their inward parts. God will be their known God, and Israel will be God’s people in truth. The knowledge of God will be universal and the weight and guilt of sin will be removed for ever (Jeremiah 31:31-34). At the end of the days, the future days of the Messiah, the law shall go forth out of Zion, and Jehovah’s word from Jerusalem. The nations shall be adjusted to God’s will and war will be abolished. The law will be an operative spiritual force as God intended it should be (Isaiah 2:2-4).

In Exodus 28:1 God indicated that Aaron and his four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar were to serve God as His priests. He chose them for a most important and dignified service. A tremendous honour and privilege was conferred upon them. Sadly they failed in the responsibilities of this high office. Aaron complied with Israel’s desires, making a golden calf for them to worship, and allowing shocking scenes of uncontrolled lust (Exodus 32:1-6). Of course he should have known better. Nadab and Abihu, ignoring their solemn duty, offered ‘strange fire’ before Jehovah (Leviticus 10:1). They paid dearly for their folly and presumptuous sin. The priesthood had failed at its commencement, and subsequent priests were marked by failure. It culminated in the atrocious
behaviour the Lord Jesus received from the priests of His day.

While the present, perfect expression of priesthood is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, the world to come will see a most wonderful fulness when Christ as a priest for ever in His Melchizedek order of priesthood will function for God and for Israel. A perfect picture of this is in Genesis 14, where Melchizedek is described as the priest of the Most High God. Hebrews 7:1,2 explains that the Name means King of Righteousness, and Salem means King of Peace. The Most High God is a Name of God that indicates His power in ruling among the nations. Jesus, the Son of God, will perform the dual functions of King and Priest for God in the millennial reign. Psalm 110:1-4 and Zechariah 6:12,13 also refer to these important roles. Jesus, the Son of God, is a priest for ever. He will not die nor relinquish His office to another. In millennial times the office of Priest will receive a fulness, a completeness it never had before. Isaiah 61 shows Israel as blessed as priests to God. All that was lost in sinful human priests, will be recovered in and through Christ, the Son of God.

The history of the children of Israel abounds with the appalling failure of those who professed to be prophets of God. The book of Jeremiah is full of references to false prophets. They professed to speak in God’s Name but were liars. Jeremiah was a true prophet. He spoke out the truth of God without any consideration of the consequences for himself. Moses, in Deuteronomy 18:18, foretold the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, God’s Prophet. Peter confirmed this in Acts 3:22, and Jesus Himself inferred that He was a prophet, in Luke 4:24 and 13:33. Two of His followers described Him as “a prophet mighty in deed and word” (Luke 24:19). But, despite this, He was crucified and His ministry rejected. But all will be different when all things are headed up in Him. His forth-telling of God’s word will be for blessing and for judgment. “By His knowledge shall my righteous servant instruct many in righteousness” (Isaiah 53:11). Every thought of blessing for men will then be made known perfectly. But also God’s thoughts of judgment will be exercised by ‘the Word’. “And out of His mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword, that with it He might smite the nations”. All will be performed in perfection and righteousness. God’s prophetic office will be filled out in completeness to His glory.

Whether we read of Jewish kings or Gentile kings the same is true of them all — they failed. Some were gross failures — others less so. David, perhaps the best king of them all, failed personally and seriously in his affair with Bathsheba, and later, when persuaded by Joab to number the people his pride led him astray. There were a few kings in Judah that acted responsibly for God in various ways, and they were blessed by God. Israel, the ten tribes that separated from Judah, could not boast one good king.
They forsook God's ordained centre, Jerusalem, and went further astray, becoming idolatrous.

But for the 'thousand years' God will display in Christ a completeness and fulness of regal glory and majesty. "A king shall reign in righteousness". Isaiah 32:1 will be God's answer to the misrule and maladministration of previous monarchs. Romans 13 states that God ordains powers. The principles they are to maintain are twofold — first to promote good, and second to curb evil. Unrighteous rule ignores these important features. Christ will enforce them in this great period. All injurious and social evils will be removed by power. Wars will cease. Large-scale productivity will be for the benefit of all mankind, and not for personal gain. Psalm 72 is a graphic picture of the coming reign of Christ: While the Psalm is a prayer for Solomon, King of Israel, it was not, and could not be fulfilled in him. But it will be fulfilled perfectly in Christ. The mockery of Pilate's judgment hall, and the cruelty of the cross, will be changed for the majesty and splendour of a King who will bring glory to God in His faultless reign. "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, when I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, who shall reign as king, and act wisely, and shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell in safety, and this is his name whereby he shall be called 'Jehovah our righteousness' " (Jeremiah 23:5,6). That kingdom will never be destroyed, nor overthrown (Daniel 2:44). Its King will be the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings (Revelation 19:16). When this great and glorious King completes His beneficial and glorious reign, He will hand over the kingdom to His God and Father; not a tarnished kingdom but one which has endured in freshness and operative power, bringing untold and universal blessings to this earth. No other kingdom, empire, or dynasty could at all match such outstandingly magnificent and glorious features.

How infinitely great is God's purpose for Christ when He brings about His sovereign intention for Him to administer the fulness of the times. And how wondrously great is our Lord Jesus Christ who can undertake these matters with such perfection and fulness, here where men have attempted them with such weakness and failure.

_Thy fulness, Lord, of light and love divine,
No thought can grasp, nor human mind define._

_The whole vast scene of glory will display_
_That fulness in a quickly coming day._
When all things filled by Thee are wholly blest
And God's deep love eternally shall rest
In that which ever speaks to Him of thee,
Thy greatness, Lord, The universe shall see.

Spiritual Songs No. 7

Commitment

“And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God:
Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.

When she (Naomi) saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.”

These pure words of Scripture, lifted by the Spirit of God, and spoken, as is due to the Word of God, in clear and distinctly confident terms, made a deep mark on many hearers of the ministry at the Spring Bank Holiday gathering in May, in Northumberland.

Would that our loyalty to Christ may be such that it would seem useless to persuade us differently!
Beyond Our Depth (3)

COLIN CURRY

Sovereign Choice

"Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world"
(Ephesians 1:3,4)

This series has been held up for a period, though there is no shortage of suitable themes. On such themes we must openly say that our understanding is limited. To make a show of understanding them, or to give the impression that they are simple matters, underestimates them seriously. That being so, we shall be wise to stop before we pursue the satisfaction of our over-enquiring minds too far. The matter will be 'too big to handle'; we shall be 'beyond our depth'; but the effect will be that, content not to understand at all fully, we shall nevertheless gain much in deeply increasing wonder and respect for God, as He reveals Himself thus in His Word by His Spirit.

I feel I must caution myself and also the reader as we venture further into the kind of themes ahead in this series. The reasons for this are:

It is always true that Bible truths, since they are God's truths, have His own stamp upon them. Thus to approach them as mere 'topics' for discussion can be unwise, facile, and could be most disrespectful to Him. Our last paper, 'The exceeding sinfulness of sin', had much about our own plight, once deep down in that awful thing, sin, which God utterly abhors. We had every cause for real repentance, and need ever to sustain thankfulness, recognizing His abundant mercy, which through Christ has lifted us out of it. That demanded continual wonderment indeed. With us every reason exists for humility and perpetual gratitude.

It is no less so as we consider the mystery of God's sovereign choice,
and similar kindred matters. I consider it a real danger to enter this field as if into 'a theologian's paradise', as it were — amassing a kind of textbook knowledge of these great Bible themes, with every small item well-docketted and slotting into its correct place in our scheme! Any such approach effectively beclouds the profound depths of truth — truth which is of God and from God in its nature. Such an approach runs the risk of being proud of our knowledge — a grave risk indeed. I would not wish to direct nor encourage any person that way. There are people who claim to 'have the truth', proudly contrasting themselves with others 'not having the truth'. There seems unwarranted lack of humility in this, something I am sure God does not wish us to display. Our business must surely be to 'buy the truth and sell it not', to value it, refraining from any spirit of boastfulness. We are not called to assess or demote others.

The problem to be faced here can be introduced by quoting two stanzas which impressed me in my youth, and which have remained with me ever since:

> Why was I made to hear thy voice?  
> To enter while there's room  
> While others make the wretched choice  
> And rather starve than come.

> 'Twas the same love that spread the feast  
> That gently drew me in,  
> Else had I rather stayed outside,  
> And perished in my sin.

From these verses two points should be noticed. First, here is a person who views the matter from the inside; someone who has responded to an overpowering love, which has drawn him within its clasp, embracing and welcoming him. Secondly, it reflects his own wonderment that such a thing should have happened. Despite himself he has himself been included. It causes a continual "Why?" within him. He is overwhelmed by amazing love. He is full of responsive appreciation of the great God who has so acted towards him.

These features are prominent in the Scriptural passages which cover God's sovereign actions of this kind. Paul, expounding such truths, is amazed at their wonder, amazed too at such grace that has pursued and enveloped him, when he was such a bitter rebel. Most remarkable of all, amazed that he has been entrusted to propagate and represent this kind of truth among the nations. It makes him humble indeed, yet, above
all, it bows his heart in deep response to God the great Dispenser of such sovereign grace.

In remarking on such passages, one often hears them illustrated thus. One unquestionable truth is that God’s invitation to human beings at large is “Whosoever will may come”. There is no question about the genuineness of that offer, nor about men’s freedom to take it up. In the illustration it is likened to a public notice, on the outside of some large premises where attractive things are being enjoyed. But once the offer is acted upon, once the will to come is put into effect, the person yielding to the free invitation finds almost unbelievably rich experiences there, which he could never have expected before he crossed the threshold. Looking back, from within, he sees the words “Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” surrounding that same portal over which the public words “Whosoever will may come” were inscribed outside.

This is a good illustration, but only an illustration. It is not an explanation. It makes the same point as was made in my first comment on the verses quoted above. So I think there is some risk in thinking of it as an answer to the mystery of God’s sovereign choice. In reality, at best it is a re-statement of the problem and really leaves it unsolved. Both sides of the truth are to be accepted purely because they are equally taught by God in His Word.*

Another ‘solution’ sometimes proposed, but perhaps not a solution at all, is to say that ‘God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility are like parallel lines that only meet at infinity’. We are not explaining, or solving anything in such statements; but I think we may be admitting that the infinite things are beyond our finite human comprehension. Yet at least this is perhaps also an acceptance that both aspects are clearly there in God’s eternal Word.

To us they are a paradox, but not so to Him. For God is God, and it is not at all surprising that our human limitations set bounds on our own ability to stretch to the fulness of His great wisdom and knowledge. This, accepted in all humility, should cause us pleasure as we become aware that some of these imponderable matters, which involve His own glory, are revealed to us in His Word by His Spirit. We should expect that to us there will be inscrutable things about God that we are unable to grasp. It is our attitude to them, humble, or resisting them in unbelief, that determines whether we gain the benefit of them.

*Free-will is a term sometimes used, though we need care here. Some have doubted whether the will of the unregenerate man is totally free. Luther’s book ‘The bondage of the will’ has been followed by other similar books. I do not follow this up, since I think it could be confusing and unhelpful.
It is not the teaching of the Bible that any human being is pre-destined by God for eternal judgment. On the contrary, that idea seems to be deliberately avoided. There are numerous verses which indicate that God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth", also that He "willeth not the death of any". This is a piece of false logic on our part. It is wrong to misrepresent God and Scripture thus. Of course it is a different matter if we flout God, resisting His grace. We are doing our own choosing in this.

1 Corinthians 1 and 2 are helpful chapters needing our attention. Paul contrasts the natural man with the spiritual man, but at the overlap between chapter 2 and chapter 3, he introduces the carnal man. The natural man is a non-believer, who may be brilliant and capable in various fields. More normally he may be just an ordinary, plain man. But he lacks, as yet, anything of God's Spirit within him. But the spiritual man is regenerate, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. That is his power to please God, and, more than that, his power to know and discern the things of God — even "the deep things of God". Paul does not doubt that these Corinthian believers had the Spirit indwelling, but 3:1 shows that he thinks of them not as 'spiritual', but as 'carnal' Christians, immature in their faith — babes, indeed. Their small growth needed to be highlighted for their own profit. They might have advanced much further in spiritual growth. It was their party-spirit, their admiration of men, that merited this criticism, and he expresses his disappointment in them. There are, no doubt, other ways in which we may be immature, and un-perceptive in the spiritual sense.

It is possible to meet some of these difficulties arising in the present series, in what may be called "the argumentative frame of mind". Some feel that these opposite sides of the truth are logically untenable, and do not hesitate to say so. If seriously said, the question must then follow: do we reject the Bible because of this? This should make us pause in our judgments. But, more Biblically, Paul meets this attitude head-on, in Romans 9:20 "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" We forget how puerile we can be when we match ourselves against God. God does not even take the trouble to answer these shallow and immature reasonings. Basically this defiant logic, countering the truth of God, derives from the unsubdued natural man, seeking to show his skills in the logical field. There is nothing spiritual in such exchanges. Unfortunately, the carnal man, though indwelt by the Spirit, can be trapped into indulgence in such reasonings. No growth arises if we think we can progress that way.

Finally, let us rejoice and join in vigorously with the note of high praise, which includes the statement discussed above. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual
blessings in heavenly places in Christ . . . he has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world . . . .” I have emphasized the us here, though I do not doubt it is true of each of us separately. It is true of all Christian believers today, Jew or Gentile, together — as the epistle will stress later. Brethren, we are all in this ‘together’ and it is entirely of God’s favour, and to His praise. Let us neither fail nor flag in responsive praise to Him for this.

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WHY DID THE LORD CHOOSE JUDAS?

W. R. DRONSFIELD

“How I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”

(John 6:70)

How often one has heard this puzzling question, Why did the Lord choose Judas to be one of His disciples, when He knew from the beginning who should betray Him? (John 6:64).

Was it necessary for Him to have a betrayer? The Pharisees thought it was necessary, for they did not know where He went at night when the crowds were not pressing around Him. They were afraid to arrest Him in front of the people, and they wanted to get Him into a quiet place where they could take Him. They were very glad, therefore, when Judas promised to lead them to the Lord when only His disciples were present.

The Lord had taken part in flesh and blood in order to go through death; but He had no need of a betrayer. He could Himself have given His enemies a clear indication of His movements.

The answer to our problem is given by our Lord Himself in John 7:70 but the translation has not helped us to understand His words. Most readers of this text will assume that the word ‘devil’ here is, as usual, a translation of the Greek word ‘Daimonion’, which would be better rendered ‘demon’. These demons are evil spirits, probably fallen angels, who are under the control of their supreme commander who is called Satan.

But, surprisingly, the word the Lord uses here is ‘diabolos’, always translated the Devil, and always being — except in this case — the name of Satan himself. The word means ‘accuser’, which is Satan’s role. He accuses men before God day and night (Revelation 12:10). Those not cleansed in the blood of the Lamb have no defence against his accusations. His whole object is to estrange men from God, but he has no case
against those who are justified by the shed blood.

So the Lord actually said, “One of you is an accuser”. Judas was the accuser.

Judas was chosen to be one of the strong proofs of the perfection of our blessed Lord. The disciples were ordained by the Lord to be with Him (Mark 3:14). For three years those disciples accompanied the Lord, day and night, hearing His words, watching His actions, and amongst them was a man who had never loved the Lord, a man with a critical spirit (John 12:4-5) serving for base motives (John 12:6). No one is better qualified to expose a man’s inconsistencies than one who has been his intimate acquaintance. The Lord chose an enemy to be amongst His attendants, who nature was to accuse, to justify himself by accusing others. What better man could the Pharisees find when they looked round for prosecuting witnesses, than Judas who had known the Lord so well, and yet was His enemy? Yet Judas never came forth to be a witness against our blessed Lord. He was an accuser without an accusation! Not a spot or blemish could he find! All he could cry was “I have betrayed innocent blood”.

What a perfect Saviour we have! What moral glory is His!

The Breaking of Bread

GORDON SPRATT

Leading into the Sanctuary — Part B

Having now, I hope, shown that there is some ground for taking a spiritual view of the tabernacle system today, I wish now to ask: Does Scripture support this concept? Different Christian companies, we know, have different practices. It is unwise, no doubt, to judge, but it seems fair to ask whether Scripture justifies something on the line indicated in Paper 4A. I believe that it does.

Consider the whole of the “upper room discourse” as recorded in the chapters beginning with John 13. These words were spoken on the occasion when the Lord’s Supper was instituted. Gethsemane and Calvary were just ahead. Notice the special character of this discourse. It begins with the suffering and the death of Jesus. He was leaving them and departing to the Father, but He “loved them to the end”. Is not this where the
breaking of bread experience begins — with the remembrance, in the bread and the cup, of a suffering love that never faltered. Was it not a love that went consciously on to the bitterest of ends, the death of the Cross?

But was that the only end that His love had in view? Not at all, for what immediately follows in John 13 brings another objective into focus. First the Lord Jesus, pursuing to the end His own word, “I am among you as he that serveth” (Luke 22:27), washes the disciples’ feet, and then, when Peter protests, He says, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me”. What did that mean? Peter can have had little understanding at that time of many of the Lord’s ensuing words, and the other disciples would have been equally in the dark. Later the coming of the Holy Spirit would give them, and us, enlightenment as to the fullness of the divine purpose. They were some of “His own that were in the world”, and He loved them to the immediate end of Calvary, and far on beyond it into the eternal day. We too can rejoice in that sovereign grace which had as an object that we should be with Him in those eternal realms of love. That was the terminus toward which He would take His disciples as He faced those dark experiences which were His alone. The hymn-writer expresses it well:

_In peaceful wonder we adore_  
The thoughts of love divine,  
Which in that world, for evermore,  
Unite our lot with Thine._  

**Spiritual Songs No. 453**

Some regard this as future only, but in this whole discourse there are many indications of what is to be a present experience, enjoyed through the living presence of the Holy Spirit. “I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you” (John 14:18) is one only. Read the words that refer to knowing the Father, asking of the Father, experiencing the Father’s love, and ask yourself if this passage does not describe a present experience. And as we gather to remember the Lord Jesus is it not to share communion with one another, but also to enjoy “part with Him” in this access to the Father? “Eternity’s begun,” we sing. Surely what lies behind those words is an experience which carries us beyond the simple remembrance occasion into a spiritual world of present enjoyment which anticipates our eternal destiny in the Father’s house.

Now consider another Scripture. Hebrews 2:10-13, though briefly expressed, moves along the same lines as the chapters in John which we have considered. Verse 10 says, “It became him (that is, God) . . . in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect
through sufferings”. There is the reminder of the love of Jesus expressed in suffering and death. A terminus is stated, for God, through those holy sufferings, is bringing us to Himself, to His eternal glory. But a nearer objective is implied in the present tense of verse 11: “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren”. Here is a wonderful relationship to our Lord. Peter was to have “part with Him”, and so are we!

“He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” No distance, but the closest possible relationship. We are His body — all of one! And His brethren! He used the term in speaking to Mary on the morning of His resurrection. “Go to my brethren . . .” He said. And then, “My Father and your Father, my God and your God”. Our passage in Hebrews 2 says, He is “not ashamed to call them brethren”. How very like John 17, where He prays for those to whom He has revealed the Father’s Name. Who can deny the intent of the Holy Spirit to bring us into worship when we meet to remember the Lord Jesus. “Behold I and the children whom God hath given me”, is another quotation here. Do we realize at such times our privilege as members of the family of God, a priestly family acting in concert under Christ’s leadership as the minister of the sanctuary, joining in praise to the Father. Is there room made in our Lord’s Day morning meetings for this? Or have we failed to respond to that moving of the Spirit of God which directs us, as a present experience, into the Father’s presence to know the liberty of worship there? This is not a matter of making rules, but of discerning the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23). Surely the Holy Spirit, at some point in our occupation with the Lord Jesus will lift us to a point where the following lines are appropriate:

Rise our hearts, and bless the Father
Ceaseless song e’en here begun,
Endless praise and adoration
To the Father and the Son.

Spiritual Songs, No. 98

At this point it must be underlined that the tabernacle experiences of Israel fell very far short of what we are at present considering. What we can enjoy today far outshines what was open to the godly in Old Testament days, for God has opened up to Christians wonderful new relationships, never available to Israel. We enter into these as we share together in the remembrance service.
One view of the Church sees it as Christ's Bride. Israel was in a sense the bride of Jehovah. The Song of Solomon and other Old Testament Scriptures are built round that idea. But further back, when Adam was formed, we have God's thought in the sentence, "It is not good that the man should be alone". We may well take it that behind that statement lies not merely a provision for mortal man, but also the divine purpose that an eternal companion should be found for Christ. And so we have the idea of the Bride. She is to be the true counterpart of our Lord, sharing for eternity in the closeness of His love, and suited too to share with Him in the administration of the millennial kingdom. He gave Himself for her, the one pearl "of great price" according to His valuation. And He is occupied in the process of preparation, nourishing and cherishing her, purifying her by His word, all with a view to that heavenly ceremony when He will present her to Himself, perfect, without blemish, fair and fresh for eternity!

It must be realized that this bridal view of the Church has its primary fulfilment in the future, and the present is a time of preparation. But is there not a present opportunity for the expression of those deep emotions which go beyond our individual relationships with the Lord Jesus and which remind us of Paul's words, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2)? And that opportunity must surely be when we meet in united affection for the One who "loved the church and gave himself for it". As we proclaim the Lord's death "until He come", there must be some upsurge of that longing expressed in the language of Revelation 22: "The Spirit and the bride say Come".

We must not, of course, confuse the Church's destiny as the Bride of Christ with those Scriptures which concern Israel's relationship to Jehovah. The Song of Solomon, as we have already noticed, comes into this category, and whilst that lovely book has provided an inspired spiritual vocabulary for Christian use, it needs to be used with care lest ideas unsuitable to the present place of the Church gain a currency.

The fact that the Lord Jesus identified His disciples as His brethren has already been mentioned, and we can now return to that thought. It implies that "part with Him" is not only a matter of sharing an experience, but of partaking in the same nature, members of the same family. Jesus says, in John 17:26, "I have declared unto them thy name" — the Name of Father. The Christian can enter by title into all the love of the Father's heart, and into all the dignity of sonship, for God is "bringing many sons to glory". Did Israel ever enjoy such things? Never! Surely, in the light of such wonderful favour, it would be surprising if we ever met to
remember the Lord Jesus without being led into the spiritual experience of the worship of the Father.

Just to underline the matter, the scriptural order of what we have been discussing, according to the Scriptures we have considered, seems to be that the contemplation of the suffering love of Christ leads into the experience of sharing with Him in relationships which, in their turn, give access to the Father in worship.

There is another side to the matter. Along with the guidance we can derive from Scripture, there is the consideration of time-honoured tradition. This is something of a minefield, since different companies of Christians have tended to develop different practices, and there is the ever-present danger of making rules. Authority in these matters can lie only in Scripture, never in tradition. Nevertheless, where long years of happy experience seem to indicate the living and guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, this is not something lightly to set on one side. The Holy Spirit led the early believers to break bread and has clearly associated, down through the centuries, praise, thanksgiving and worship with the remembrance of the Lord Jesus. No doubt He will continue to order things as we make room for His unhindered presence.

Perhaps I may be allowed a personal comment here. Whilst anxious always to avoid any semblance of rule-making, it is my own deep conviction that we come together for the primary purpose of breaking bread, and that the spiritual experiences we have been considering flow out of it and not into it. What do I mean? I have sometimes felt that when the act of breaking bread is left to a point unduly late in the meeting, there may be neither time nor opportunity for our remembrance of the suffering love of Jesus to expand into that further experience envisaged in the Lord’s words, “The Father seeketh such to worship Him”.

Another lovely hymn puts it this way:

O blessèd Lord, what treasured thoughts unfold
In light divine, as we Thy face behold!
Now on our view unbounded glories break,
That speak Thy fame and songs eternal wake.

Spiritual Songs No. 394

Sometimes on a Lord’s Day morning we seem just on the verge of that vista of eternal glory. It is an experience to be treasured until the moment comes when the day breaks and the shadows flee away.
"Ye would not!"

ALLAN RETALLICK

"How often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not". (Matthew 11:37)

It is plain that God, the righteous judge, takes into account sins of omission, as in this text. In John’s gospel we read the sad comment of the Lord Jesus to the Jews: “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

When Israel was in the wilderness, God gave plain and positive commandments to His people, but Moses had to say to them: “So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 1:43). We know that it was on account of this that all the grown men, with two exceptions, perished in the wilderness. The Psalmist later sums it up in the words: “They believed not His word, but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord” (Psalm 106:24,25). Much later, when they were in the land of promise, and Hezekiah’s son sat on the throne, we read that “the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people; but they would not hearken” (2 Chronicles 33:10). How often would this have to be recorded of us, who have the whole revelation of God at our disposal, and yet so often choose to omit anything that will involve some sacrifice? We know that the result of Manasseh’s failure to listen had a bad influence upon his son Amon, of whom we read that “he trespassed more and more”. Those of us who are parents should remember that our conduct speaks more to our children than our words. If they see that we are heedless of the clear teaching of the scriptures, how can we expect them to be obedient to us or to God?

The prophet Jeremiah was entrusted with many warnings to the people of Judah, but they would not listen to him, and even imprisoned him because of his faithfulness. Early in his prophecy he tells them that they “received no correction” (Jeremiah 2:30). There are many examples in the Bible of those that “hardened their neck”, and we may be sure that this is not confined to Judah in a former time, but could be just as well written of some of us. We have the sad example of King Solomon, who began well, but in his old age departed from the ways of the Lord, and “went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father” (1 Kings 11:6). Earlier in the chapter we read that his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, and later on that he “kept not that which the Lord commanded” (vv.
We need to be warned that the enemy is always active, and, unless we are watchful and diligent, he will make shipwreck of our Christian lives. How we need to “cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart”, as Barnabas counselled the early followers of the Lord. We know that Solomon’s unfaithfulness resulted in the division of the kingdom, and the northern kingdom began and continued in idolatry, until the day when the ten tribes were carried away to Assyria. The sacred record tells us that this was “because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them” (2 Kings 18:12).

In the Book of Daniel we find a way back for those that have failed to hearken, and rejected God’s laws. Daniel, who himself had from his youth purposed to serve with an undivided heart the God of his fathers, was one that could effectively intercede for his people. In chapter 9 of his prophecy we read of his wonderful prayer. In it he confesses the sins and failures of his people as if they were his own. He owns that they had not hearkened to the prophets, “neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord”, and owns that they had not even made prayer before the Lord their God, that they might turn from their iniquities, and understand His truth (Daniel 9:10,13).

May we too be ready to intercede on behalf of God’s people, but also own that we have our part in it as well.

The prophet Zephaniah describes the city of Jerusalem as filthy, polluted and oppressing, and sums up her sins in the striking words: “She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God” (Zephaniah 3:2). What a description! We see a steady decline in these words, and it may be wise for some of us, as we get older, and perhaps succumb to spiritual pride, to ask if this is the sort of progress that we are making! It begins with neglect of the plain commandments of the Lord, and concludes with distance from the source of all blessing. We may remember how a young man had to speak to Job and his friends, reminding them that “great men are not always wise; neither do the aged understand judgment” (Job 32:9). We may with profit listen to younger brothers and sisters, who may be nearer to the Lord than we are, and it is a sad day when we are not ready to be corrected.

The epistle of James is very practical, and perhaps we ought to read it more often than we do; but even the beloved disciple John speaks again and again of the practical side of our faith. He reminds us of the words of the Lord Himself, when he says: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren”. Then he adds the solemn warning: “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14). It is plain that the word ‘brother’ is to be recognized in its widest sense,
to include anyone that is born again, a member of the family of God. Do we love each other? Or do we shut up our bowels of compassion, as he describes it, and withhold the exhibition of brotherly love? Paul, too, speaks of love as the fulfilling of the law. The Galatians were biting and devouring one another. Those in Corinth were puffed up, and negligent of saints that were in need. The church at Laodicea was so smug and self-centred that the Lord was left outside. The Pharisees in the time of our Lord were strict in their observance of tithing mint and cummim, but they forgot to show kindness and hospitality. We may be in danger of self-approval—“I have not missed a single meeting. I read the scriptures every day. I put my money in the collection. I pray for the missionaries in far lands". Is there perhaps something that we have left out? Have we a quarrel to make up? Is there a brother or sister waiting for a visit or a letter from us? Is there an act of kindness that we ought to have done?

Let us not follow the example of the people that returned to Jerusalem, to whom Zechariah was told to speak: "execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother... But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear" (Zechariah 7:9,11).

COMMITMENT (2)

ITTAI THE GITTITE

The example of Ruth the Moabitess quoted in the previous issue, we may now refer to as ‘Commitment (1)’. Her commitment was firm and outright, though in the face of a kindly persuasion to take a less firm line. It has a counterpart in Ittai the Gittite's devotion to David, at the time when Absalom, David's son, rebelled against him.

The plain words from Scripture are found in 2 Samuel 15:19-23, as follows. David, ousted by the usurper, is passing over the brook Kidron, going toward the way of the wilderness. Many devoted ones accompany him, sorrowing.

"Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite. Wherefore goest thou also with us? Return... for thou art a stranger, and also an exile... thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee to go up and down with
us, seeing I go whither I may, return thou and take back thy brethren, mercy and truth be with thee”.

“And Ittai answered the king, and said: As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in life or in death, even there also will thy servant be.”

“And David said unto Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice.”

As we said about Ruth the Moabitess — would that our loyalty to our Lord would be such that it would seem useless to persuade us differently!

**COMMITMENT (3)**

**DAVID’S MIGHTY MEN — 2 Samuel 23:14-17**

“And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem.

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me a drink of the water of the well in Bethlehem, which is by the gate!

And the three mighty men broke through the host of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD.

And he said, Be it far from me O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men.”

The context speaks of the cave of Adullam, and there is much that tells of the feats and courage of David’s mighty men. Only this particular action, however, is dwelt upon in detail.

It seems therefore that the incident belongs to earlier days when Saul was still hounding him. But surely these three loyal men (and their fellows in this list) provide examples of that outright commitment which is due to our Lord.

The record of David’s devoted men here fits in well with the context. First in the chapter are David’s last words, feeling so much the shortcomings of his reign, expressing its weaknesses, though in a beautiful manner (befitting ‘the sweet psalmist of Israel’, though speaking in contrast of days when Christ, the true King, will be supreme).
David valued deeply the costly devotion of his loyal subjects, but felt that this tribute to him was not right for him to accept. The only rightful claimant to such all-out devotion was Jehovah. We must surely join him in this attitude. One Person alone — even our beloved Lord himself — claims our devotion and our commitment, which ought to be far in excess of the half-commitment with which we can at times be content.

COMMITMENT

NEVILLE WHITE


1. God commits Himself to men. In offering salvation by faith.

Before time was: God chose present-day believers in pure grace, to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ.

They were “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

Believers today can rely on passages like Romans 8:32: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

2. The believer is committed to Christ. In reliance for salvation.

In total commitment, after the pattern of Ruth the Moabitess, David’s loyal men, and Paul the apostle, who wrote, “If Christ died for all, then were all dead: and He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

3. 2-way Commitment (Believer with Believer). “Beloved, if God so loved us we ought also to love one another.”

“How shall ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

“My little children, let us not love in word, but in deed and in truth.”

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”
"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

(Scriptures quoted: 1 John 4:11; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 3:18; 1 John 4:20; Ephesians 4:32.)

A SEQUENCE ON PRAYER

“One of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

A sequence of helpful points on prayer appeared on tear-off sheets (of The Lord is Near Calendar in recent weeks). Since most will feel that our prayer-life seriously needs His guidance, as found in Scripture, it is our hope to reproduce these, a few at a time, in coming issues.

Prayer Basis

Nothing is beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside of God's will. True prayer is not conquering God's unwillingness, but laying hold of His willingness by bringing our prayer in line with His will. "And this is the boldness that we have towards Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14,15).

AN APPEAL:

I appeal to my readers that they should reveal anything which may appear in the magazine about which they are disquieted, or may even disagree. If such things exist, it is well that I should not remain in the dark about them. There will be trivial matters which I do not encourage you to enlarge upon. I myself allow things to appear on which I do not wholly concur, knowing that a spiritual author should be free to judge the matter in his own way. But there will be more major matters too, and these are those that I should be told about. Undercover disagreement, nursed, and especially shared, but not brought to light, seems furtive, and can assist partisan feelings. I consider it my duty to try to avoid fostering growth of this kind. Therefore — I say it again — please be open with me about anything of this nature.

The above appeal is general. It applies to any matter that is worth raising, genuinely felt by any reader.