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Characterised by Mystery

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CHRISTIANITY AS CHARACTERISED BY MYSTERY (1)

Matthew 13:1-12; Matthew 13:24-52

AJG It is clear from this chapter that the thought of Mystery enters into Christianity, the Lord saying to His disciples that it was given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to others it was not given. There is a certain element of what is judicial in the blinding of the eyes of those who reject the testimony, so that divine things are hidden from them, but to those who are subject to the Lord, and truly disciples, the things of God are presented in a way that is comprehensible to them, but not to others. That really involves the Spirit, so the Lord said, speaking of the Spirit, that He would beg the Father and He would give us another Comforter, "that he may be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor know him; but ye know him, for he abides with you, and shall be in you." John 14: 16, 17. So that the presence of the Spirit involves that there are certain things known to believers which are entirely unknown, and impossible of being known, to others. That brings in the thought of mystery as properly belonging to the saints, something that we should particularly cherish, that it is given to us to be initiated into the thoughts of God which are hidden from men in general.

I think Matthew 13 presents things first of all from the standpoint that, if there is to be anything for God, there must be a divine sowing, as in the parable of the sower, but even that brings to light that there are certain adverse influences, the wicked one catching away the seed sown by the wayside, and tribulation and persecution, and thorns, cares of life and so on. Then there are the six subsequent parables, which are definitely called similitudes of the kingdom, divided into two threes, the first three giving the position of things publicly, and being intended to open our eyes as to the way that Satan is acting in opposition to what is of God. The last three give us what is really of God and are intended to give us to understand the true features of it, and I think as the Lord may help us we shall see that the features which are found in the first three similitudes of the kingdom all find their answer in the last three.

EAK Does the apprehension of the element of mystery, as you are calling attention to it, as laid hold of by us in the power of the Spirit, greatly help us practically in realising the true greatness of what Christianity is, because all that is connected with it outwardly, and particularly the position of reproach in which we are, is rather small and insignificant?

AJG Yes, I think that, and therefore it is of particular value for all of us to get a sense that to us it is given to know divine mysteries. It sets us apart from the whole course and outlook of this world and gives us the consciousness that we have part in and entrance into a system of things of God that the world has no part in and cannot possibly apprehend at all.

JWH Does the matter of doing the will of His Father enter into the side of understanding the *you* that you have referred to?

AJG You are referring to the end of chapter 12. Yes, I think that greatly helps, that the Lord repudiates His brother and sister and mother; that is, His brethren after the flesh, and indicates that He recognises and identifies with Himself those who do the will of His Father who is in the heavens. Those certainly become the disciples; in fact, they were the disciples.

JE Is there a general correspondence between the scope of things covered in this chapter and the letters addressed by the Lord to the seven assemblies in Revelation chapters 2 and 3?

AJG I think there is, but would you say a little more what is in your mind?

JE I was thinking of what was inaugurated originally, and then the finish of things. What is of God carries through, does it not? I was thinking of the public side in Laodicea, but the vital side of things in Philadelphia answering somewhat to the last three similitudes.

AJG I think that entirely. I believe it is of great importance to be given to see how God views things as they are on the earth at the present time in Christendom. The kingdom of the heavens, I take it, specially refers to Christendom; that is, that part of the earth which publicly acknowledges the name of the Lord Jesus; but these parables will help us to see that the public condition of things is the result of Satan's work, so the true character of it is exposed to us in order that we should not be deceived by it. On the other hand, the last three parables will show us what is vital and precious in the sight of God, and one thing that will be noticed in relation to the treasure as it appears in the first of the three last similitudes, is that the character of being hidden is impressed upon it. The treasure is found hidden in the field and when the man finds it he hides it; that is, the character of being hidden is particularly - impressed, deliberately impressed upon what is really of God in the world, and it is a great safeguard to see that, because then we become content with the hidden position.

JM Is there a militant aspect of the matter in the way the full position is secured in this element of mystery?

AJG What do you mean by militant?

JM Well, it may not be active, but divinely the position is guarded, so that those who have no part in it do not have a part in it; and yet it is open, as you have suggested, to those who are initiated and there is liberty to move as recognising that it is in mystery.

AJG Well, I think that is implicit in the presence of the Spirit, "whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor know him," the Lord says. So that in that way, by the gift of the Spirit, the Lord introduces His own into the things of God and excludes those who have no part in them. It is very important, I think, to see that the Spirit of God involves ability, capacity to enter into the thoughts of God fully, and it also involves a deliberate exclusion of those who have not the Spirit; the mind of man cannot possibly compass divine things.

WCB Does it show how God is carrying things through while still allowing Satan's power to be active in certain directions?

AJG That is what I thought was one great value of these parables, and hence, if we take up the parable of the tares, what is clear is that an enemy is at work; the Lord definitely says so, and he is at work in introducing publicly those who have the appearance of the true thing, for the tares resemble the wheat in outward appearance, but actually they are sons of the wicked one. The word is to let them both grow together; that is, God is not intervening publicly to alter that position. Then in the next parable of the mustard seed, that which commenced in what was very small has now become outwardly very large, what we speak of as Christendom. It becomes such that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches; that is, there is room in it for every kind of evil doctrine; the whole position, so to speak, being discredited, but that is the position publicly. Then finally in the parable of the leaven there is a certain element introduced into Christianity which pervades the whole thing, and that, I believe, is that the first man, whom God has set aside judicially in the cross of Christ, has been re-introduced, so that what is of man instead of what is of Christ pervades Christianity in its public aspect. Those, I believe, are the three outstanding characteristics of those three parables, and I believe we shall see in the other three, although not necessarily in that order, that all these elements are met in the vital thing.

JSB I was wondering if the importance of the thought of what is to be known in mystery is not emphasised, seeing the enemy has his counterpart? In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 "the mystery of lawlessness already works," and in Revelation 17 the name in the forehead of the great harlot is "Mystery, great Babylon."

AJG I think it is important to see that, that there is mystery connected with what is evil, and these parables are intended to open our eyes to it. Evil is working systematically, but in such a way that the world does not recognise that it is evil, but the saints' eyes are to be opened to it, to see that God is Master of the situation and that in His own hidden way He is working among the saints the complete answer to all that Satan seeks to introduce.

JE Would you say that these three elements or principles are working at the present time, the principle of admixture which is always foreign to the work of God, then the tendency to assume proportions never divinely intended, then the subtle, secret working of evil as seen in the leaven? Are we constantly facing these principles in assembly matters, assembly sorrows and so on?

AJG I am sure that is right, and I think it helps to see that in the divine thought of the assembly, these evil principles are completely renounced and the opposite to them is established. So that, for instance, it seems to me that the parable of the treasure hid in the field is the answer to the parable of the mustard seed; that is to say, in contrast to that which assumes great proportions, the saints understand that the divine idea is that what is of God should be hidden, and we accept that position that our life is hid with Christ in God. The affections of the saints are bound up with Christ, and He being hidden we are content to be hidden. Then the parable of the leaven finds its answer in the pearl, because the leaven is the reintroduction of the man whom God has set aside in the cross, whereas the beauty of the pearl is that the assembly is for one Man only, for Christ. "I have espoused you," the apostle says, "unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ," 2 Corinthians 11: 2, and as the affections of the saints are held by the one Man, they refuse the re-introduction of the other. Then finally, the parable of the tares finds its answer in the net, the last of the similitudes, because there is the principle of discrimination between good and evil in the assembly, "They... sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away," thus good and evil are to be separated. It is very important to see that in the assembly there is to be the complete answer to all these elements of evil introduced in the public systems.

EAK I was thinking that what was said might suggest that in the idea of the treasure our minds would be directed to Colossians, whereas in the similitude of the pearl, would we not have the great divine thought of the assembly as in Ephesians?

AJG I have no doubt that the treasure links on with Colossians, as you say, and the pearl is peculiarly the beauty of the assembly as wholly for Christ, so that is no doubt before us in Ephesians, and I believe works out in a practical

way in the exercises of the testimony. So that Paul in the 2nd epistle to the Corinthians insists on the fact that he had espoused them unto one Man. I believe that is wherein the beauty of the pearl lies; its oneness, undivided affection for Christ.

RLH Is there any significance in the fact that the first three parables are spoken by the sea, and the last three in the house?

AJG I think that is significant, because the first three are dealing with the public position, whereas the last three, as you say, are spoken in the house, and are the result of the disciples having come to Him and said, "Expound to us the parable of the darnel of the field." The parables are intended to induce a spirit of enquiry with us and enquiry which would lead us to the Lord to ask Him in the house, so to speak; you might say when together in the assembly, when together as we are at the present time, or, of course, in private; the idea of the house being private in contrast to what is public.

WHG Is it in divine wisdom that these evil principles have been allowed to operate in their intensity at the present time to bring out the glorious lustre of the assembly?

AJG I think so, and to see that God is always victorious all along the line. Outwardly. Satan may appear to hold the position, but then as our eyes are opened to what is in mystery we see that God is working triumphantly all through, though in secret, and using the very presence of evil to develop what is of Himself. I mean as the saints see false elements in the church they repudiate them in faithfulness to Christ and to the truth, and that strengthens what is of God.

JM Would it be right to say that if we only take account of the public position we will lose our way, we will not be able to find our bearings? We need some instruction as to the inside position; that is connected with the house.

AJG I am sure that is right, and hence the value of these parables, and the Lord's instruction that to us, to the disciples, it is given to know the mysteries. It says in Proverbs 25, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," verse 2. God loves to hide what He is doing because that shuts out man. But then it says that, "the glory of kings is to search out a thing." The kings are the saints in their dignity and it is to our honour to search things out, that is, things ought not to remain a mystery to us but we ought to have understanding in regard to them.

LGL Is there a sense in which things need to be maintained in mystery as suggested in Hezekiah's action in regard of the enquiries of those from Babylon? He lost his power once he opened things out in a public way, so that

there seems to be a necessity for things to be retained in a sense in a hidden way in the soul, rather than to be affected by what comes from the outside place.

AJG I believe the secret of retaining things in secret is our links with Christ; that is, our understanding that the assembly is bound up with Christ, as we were singing in our hymn. The more we get the sense that the assembly is for time and eternity bound up with Christ, as a wife is to her husband, the more we shall be prepared to accept a position of being hidden and being out of this world because that is in keeping with Christ's present position. He is out of sight as regards this world.

JST Is all this we are speaking of together dependent upon the Spirit and our spirituality, and is it all covered in the expression, "God's dispensation which is in faith"?

AJG Yes indeed, the dispensation which is in faith. Quite so. It is in faith on the one hand, so that the angels spoke to the disciples as the Lord was taken up into heaven and they said, "why do ye stand looking into heaven? This Jesus... shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven," Acts 1: 11; it was now a faith period and the Lord was removed from sight and they were to accept that because it was a faith period. But then the Lord said, "ye will receive power, the Holy Spirit having come upon you," Acts 1: 8, it is also the period of the Spirit, and in the Spirit the things of God can be entered into and the position accepted because we see that God is in it.

JST So we do not wait until the harvest. He said "Suffer both to grow together unto the harvest." Our spirituality would detect things incipiently, I suppose, at the outset, would it not?

AJG Yes, we have to leave things to the harvest so far as the public position is concerned, but privately we accept separation from evil, in faithfulness to the name of the Lord, and in that position the whole truth regarding the assembly in its proper features can be worked out.

JE Do you feel that, having the Spirit in the way the Spirit is available in this dispensation, we have the means of understanding all that can be understood by the creature? Paul speaks of completing the word of God. There is nothing to come, is there?

AJG No, there is nothing more to come, and I believe what you say is right, as having the Spirit there is no reason why we should not enter intelligently and feelingly into all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

Ques Is the prophetic word the solution for the moment?.

AJG I think it is. It is a remarkable thing that this very chapter describes Asaph as a prophet; we should never have known that Asaph was a prophet, as far as I know, if this chapter had not told us so. But this chapter quotes from Psalm 78 which is written by Asaph and says, "so that that should be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet," bringing in, as you say, the prophetic word.

TRY Why is the expounding connected with the first three parables?

AJG I think because the state of things in Christendom publicly is so confusing, unless the matter is explained. Hence the Lord explained the parable of the sowing, that there could be nothing for God at all apart from divine sowing, but also that the sowing would be in the presence of all kinds of influences that would seek to counteract it. Then he explains also the first of the first three similitudes that, as we have been saying, we might be fully intelligent as to what it is that Satan is doing and has been doing publicly. But over against that, not to be over-occupied with the negative side of things, the Lord brings forward three similitudes to which we are intended to pay great attention, the treasure and the pearl and the net.

EAK Do we rely wholly upon the Spirit for the understanding of these three inside similitudes which have been so misapplied by the profession around for that very reason?

AJG Quite so. The profession around would make the leaven a good thing and refer to it as the influence of Christ spreading through the whole world and so on. That is obviously a misapplication of Scripture: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump," 1 Corinthians 5: 6, the apostle says in the epistle to the Corinthians referring to the moral evil that was there, and "A little leaven leavens the whole lump," Galatians 5: 9, he says to the Galatians, referring to the principle of legality that had come in in the churches in Galatia. It is quite clear that leaven in Scripture is an evil principle, not a good principle.

EAK Yes, and I was thinking of the current application of the pearl to the gospel. Would you be free in the scope of what is before you to say a word as to the current thought of the treasure, and what is historical as connected with the pearl? I believe it might help us all.

AJG I suppose the treasure refers to what there is of God, or rather what He has in mind to bring to light in the world, "a treasure hid in the field" which has to be brought to light. It has been helpfully connected with the passage in Genesis 2: 12 which refers to the river Pison which surrounds a certain territory, and it says that the gold was there - "the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there." That is to say, the passage there refers to

a certain territory in which there was treasure, what was of real value, so from that point of view the field was not necessarily the whole world, it is a more limited thought; it is the field in contrast to the city or town. We have to recognise that Paul in his labours was definitely directed not to go in one direction, eastward, and definitely directed westward in his activities. All that rather bears out the thought that in God's ways and His sovereignty what He is bringing to light as of Himself during this period of Christianity is found in one particular part of the earth.

JE The principle of new birth and the wind blowing where it listeth - is that the way the treasure is presented in John 3?

AJG Yes I think so. The treasure is the result of divine operations in the souls of men, but it has to be brought to light, and so it says that it was hid in the field, "which a man having found has hid... and buys that field." I have no doubt it is being brought to light through the Lord's activities in the gospel. It is striking that it is not only hidden in the field and then the man finds it, but having found it he hides it. The thought is that what is secured through the glad tidings finds a resting place for the moment in the assembly. It is not to have any other position or aspect than that of being hidden for the moment.

JNG Would you make a little clearer the difference between the expression in this parable, "sells all whatever he has," and "sold all whatever he had". Does the first refer to current activities?

AJG As far as I understand, the first refers to activities by means of the gospel, for it is still going on, bringing to light what is of God, for the great thing is to bring to light what is of God; that is to say, unless God works there is no fruit from the gospel, but what God does work is real treasure; there is something of intrinsic value in it. In the second similitude, referring to the pearl, it says, "he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it," that is, it is something done once for all. It says, "even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it," Ephesians 5: 25. It is done once for all, so to speak, but it is brought in in order to show the immense value of it to the One who sold all that He had in order that He might possess it.

WCB What is involved in him selling "all that he had"?

AJG I think it is just a figure in order to impress us with the fact that the Lord had just one object before Him and was prepared to devote everything to securing that object. We might rightly say He had certain rights in regard of Israel. He relinquished those for the time being. But I believe it is intended just to convey that the pearl was of such value in the sight of Christ that He

would devote Himself wholly to it and surrender everything in order to secure it. After all, we cannot have anything more than that He gave Himself for it.

JE You understand that the pearl is denoting the assembly as developed under Paul's ministry, the fruit really of divine counsel; but the treasure would raise the moral side would it not, in that the material is secured in one place and transferred into another? The whole moral side of the truth would come to mind in regard to the treasure, would it not?

AJG I would like you to say a little more.

JE I was wondering if the treasure would involve the same persons found in a responsible setting, taken up in that setting and transferred into another setting.

AJG I think that is right. You mean found in the world, so to speak, and transferred into the assembly. It is what is of God coming to light in that way, and it is treasure, something that the Lord can use too. It is of value to Him.

RHG Does the hiding of the treasure in that way link on with the upper room in contrast to the temple?

AJG Yes it would; the upper room is where they really had their associations of life, you might say. It was in an upper room withdrawn from the level of what was here, whereas the temple would be their position in testimony amongst men, as coming into it really from what the upper room would speak of.

ET Would the idea of mystery enter into our preaching of the gospel? It is not presented to the natural man, it is presented to faith. In that way the truth is presented so that there would be a response from what is true.

AJG I am sure that is right. A gospel preacher who understands the truth would not attempt to work on natural feelings or anything of that sort, because he understands that all that is of no value. But his object is to present the glad tidings, to present Christ, and what God has to say in relation to Him, in order that, by means of it, God's own work in souls might come to light. It is only that that is real treasure.

JWH Would you mind indicating the distinction further in relation to the buying of the field and the pearl that is bought?

AJG I suppose the buying of the field would refer to the fact that the Lord through death has established rights over all men, but it has in view the bringing to light of the treasure, wherever it is.

JE That is what I was trying to get at. The assembly as such is never presented as being redeemed, but the securing of the treasure would involve the work of redemption, would it not?

AJG I think so, as I understand it. When it comes to the pearl, the assembly in its beauty, that for which Christ has given everything, it is regarded as bought, not as redeemed. *Redeemed* has in mind that there are certain encumbrances or liabilities attaching to the person or thing and these have to be discharged in order that the one who owns it may have it unencumbered; but *bought* simply stresses the great value of it and the great price that has to be paid for it.

EAK So that in Acts 20 it is "the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own," verse 28. Is that the thought?

AJG That is it. It is interesting in Exodus 15 it says first of all, "Thou by thy mercy hast led forth the people that thou hast redeemed," verse 13, but then in verse 16 it says, "Till thy people pass over, Jehovah... that thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them". When they are the other side of Jordan they are regarded as purchased, not as redeemed; but as brought out of Egypt, they are regarded as redeemed.

JM Would you make a little clearer the difference between purchased and redeemed?

AJG Redemption contemplates, as I understand it, that there is a past history. It is understood in business matters that if there is a mortgage on a property and you want to have the property entirely unencumbered, you must discharge that mortgage, that is, you have to redeem it. Redemption looks at things from that standpoint, that we belong to God, but that there were our guilt and sinful condition and the liability to death - all these things attaching to us - and redemption was necessary if God was to have us for Himself. But when it is a question of the assembly according to divine purpose, that is regarded as not having any past history at all, and therefore there is no question of redeeming, but there is the question of purchasing it. The word *purchase* is used to indicate to us that it is of very great value in the sight of God and of Christ.

EAK Are both thoughts introduced in the book of Ruth, the thought of redemption and also the thought of purchase? He says, "I have purchased".

AJG Yes, you get both thoughts there. We have been referring to the pearl and linking it with Ephesians. I believe the great thought in the pearl is that it is *one* pearl, "one pearl of great price", and I believe in that way the thought of oneness is to stress the beauty that attaches to the assembly as marked by

undivided affection for Christ. I believe that is the thought, and therefore, while I have no doubt that it is rightly connected with Ephesians, I believe it also links with the position in Corinthians where the apostle was greatly concerned that, having espoused them to one Man, they should be maintained in the simplicity that that required.

WHG Does it answer therefore to the leaven?

AJG It is the answer to the leaven, I believe. The leaven is the re-introduction into the things of God of the first man. You can see that on every hand in religious systems. It is just man's learning and man's will and man's glory pervading the whole scene, whereas in the assembly you have just *one* Man, that is, Christ, and the assembly refuses to take character from any other man, that is, if she is true to Christ.

JM Is this matter important, the teaching emphasising the necessity on our side of putting heaven's valuation on the assembly? I was thinking of the word, "I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly," Ephesians 5: 32. Is that not a feature of the present ministry, the greatness of the assembly, its value to God, to divine Persons?

AJG Well it is, and the very fact that it is introduced so early in the divine record of the Scriptures as Genesis 2 ought surely to affect us, and that centuries afterwards Paul should refer to the woman as formed, built out of the rib taken from the side of the man and brought to him, as definitely pointing to the assembly - Christ and the assembly - should greatly affect us. That thought came in at the very outset and all the rest, so to speak, of the revelation of God has come in after that.

JE Therefore the conception as to the pearl, what the assembly is to Christ, should govern us in a distinctive way in assembly administration working out locally. I was thinking of each gate of one pearl, in the city. That would be in keeping with the trend of things in Matthew's gospel, would it not?

AJC That is what I feel. I believe it is particularly brought in in that way in an administrative setting, and it would greatly help us in all we do if our one concern was that what is done is done under the influence of Christ, in the wisdom that is derived from Him and the love that is learned in Him. These things are to characterise us in administration. The more we are under the influence of Christ the more we shall be characterised by wisdom and tenderness and love in the way things are handled administratively.

EAK The idea of suffering is associated with the way the pearl is produced. One wonders sometimes whether it is the fear of incurring suffering makes us slack in facing assembly administrative exercises, but what you are saying

would stimulate us as to the attractiveness of it in view of the great result to be secured.

AJG One can see more and more the wonderful value and wisdom in God's ways in allowing the assembly to be here so long, that every kind of test is allowed to arise in order to develop in us these features of faithfulness to God, and wisdom and love amongst ourselves which we can learn from Christ, so that, as our brother said, in the heavenly city every gate is of one pearl. That is, administration throughout the whole of the city is marked by the same features.

Well then in the parable of the net cast into the sea it says, "which has gathered together of every kind, which, when it has been filled, having drawn up on the shore... they gathered the good into vessels and cast the worthless out." That is an important matter too, that in relation to the truth of the assembly, we are concerned as to those to whom we commit ourselves so that there is the refusal of what is worthless and the retention of all that is good, all this is of God, the retention of it in vessels; and hence in the assembly, and in the administration of the assembly at the present time, there is the complete answer to the parable of the pearl. Outwardly and publicly the good and the evil have to be allowed to go on together until the last days, but in the assembly we do not allow that. Fidelity to Christ requires that there should be discrimination and the refusal of what is worthless.

EAK What you are saying is in keeping with Jeremiah where it speaks of separating the precious from the vile, and then it goes on to say. "thou shalt be as my mouth," Jeremiah 15: 19. Is that the way the truth is preserved amongst us in its purity?

AJG I am sure it is, and the only way, so we can see that where there is the refusal to exercise this discrimination, or neglect as to it, the truth becomes lost.

WCB Is the sitting down important?

AJG It is important. It involves that it is done deliberately, carefully. The beginning of this chapter presents that very feature, "Jesus went out from the house and sat down by the sea."

RMY Would you suggest that this last similitude has a peculiar bearing on the end of the dispensation in which we find ourselves?

AJG I think it has, because God has stressed it the last 120 years, and He has specially drawn the attention of the saints to the importance of the second chapter of 2 Timothy and the principles that are laid down there. The recovery

of the truth which we are enjoying has flowed from adherence to those principles, and if they are sacrificed everything will go.

CBS Would this thought which you have referred to of exclusion and discrimination link on with the earlier parable of seeking goodly pearls; does the seeking of goodly pearls involve the exclusion of everything else? There is this one thing that would be for the joy of the heart of Christ.

AJG Yes, it is in keeping with seeking goodly pearls. The merchantman seeking goodly pearls would be one who knew the value of a good pearl and would have the discrimination to refuse what was spurious.

JE If you take the public position as it stands, there is the great house and, ecclesiastically, we are in it, we cannot escape the position, can we, but is it a question of sitting down and taking up this exercise of discrimination within that area, so to speak?

AJG That is it, and gathering the good into vessels. That is to say, the truth of God now is worked out and maintained in local companies who have been gathered together on this very principle of discrimination, of refusing the evil, but recognising all that is of God.

JM I notice in the first parable of the wheat, it says, "Gather first the darnel, and bind it into bundles to burn it," but in relation to the fish, "they gathered the good into vessels and cast the worthless out." Is there a difference? They seem to be concerned with the good.

AJG Well, that is what the saints have to be concerned with. We have to be concerned with the good and just reject the worthless. But it says in the parable of the darnel, "Suffer both to grow together unto the harvest... but the wheat bring together into my granary." I think that possibly in the way things are working out in the world, that is going on already. I think there is more and more a gathering together of the evil into bundles. Men are getting together and combining together, and I believe that, governmentally, these things are already beginning to take shape.

JM That is very interesting seeing that the first parable refers to the public position, and the ways of God enter into it in connection with what is evil; but does it not emphasise the need of the saints today to be occupied with the good; that is our matter?

AJG That is our matter, exactly. The world we leave to God.

RHG Would the good and the worthless suggest those who are marked by the features of the Spirit or otherwise, as available in view of the testimony and pleasure of God?

AJG Yes, the good would certainly refer to those who have the Spirit and who are governed by the truth. You cannot regard anyone who has not the Spirit as good in this sense.

JM What do we understand by the vessels?

AJG I think the thought of the vessels would be the local companies of saints. It is important to see that the economy of Christianity, if one may use that expression (I am not referring now to the economy of the Godhead) involves the way it is set out as in local assemblies; that is, it is not the saints going on as isolated individuals but in local companies.

JE While the sowing in the first place would refer to the ministry of the Lord Himself, when we come to the finish, it is very clear that Paul's ministry and Paul's service are in mind, for it was Paul who set up local companies first of all, was it not?

AJG It was indeed.

JSB You would encourage every soul to be on the line of the disciples who were followers? In your opening remarks you spoke of these matters in mystery being known to the initiated. I was thinking that faith and obedience are necessary for any who would be enquiring.

AJG Yes, and so the Lord in verse 51 says, "Have ye understood all these things?" That is, the Lord would raise the question with us all as to what understanding we have of these matters. "Have ye understood all these things? They say to him, Yea, Lord. And he said to them, For this reason every scribe" (Mr. Taylor has often remarked that the idea of a scribe is one who is accurate in divine things, because a scribe has to write things out, and if you have to write things out, you are forced to accuracy. You have to think out what you are going to write because you are committing yourself to it) "discipled to the kingdom of the heavens... brings out of his treasure things new and old." It is a question of a scribe discipled to the kingdom of the heavens, that is one who has come under the teaching of the Christ and is subject to Him. The great thing is to be in the current of what the Lord is giving at the moment. The Spirit is necessary for that, and then if we are in the current of it, we shall find that old things, we might say the Old Testament or whatever it is, have a bearing on it and can be brought forward to support it.

AHS With reference to enquiry which you stressed earlier, the importance of our enquiring into these things, is it significant that the disciples enquired only as to the parable of the darnel, and then the Lord not only answered that but brought in all these positive things?

AJG Well that is interesting and important too that the Lord explains the bearing of the public position, but He would not leave us merely with having an understanding of the public position, so far as dealing with evil is concerned, but He would show us that there is what is vital to be going on with although it be in smallness and hidden. Every one of us should understand the great value of the assembly and that, without assumption, without claiming to be it, we may have the assembly in all the features proper to it. I believe that is what is so important, that we should not merely get into the way of coming to meetings, so to speak, and just enjoying being at meetings, but we should be intelligent as to what it is we are having part in, that is the assembly, and all the features that are proper to it.

WHG Does not this bring out the greatness of Christ in that He, as the Head of the assembly, anticipated the conditions of our own day, as well as bringing out the greatness of the assembly to Him?

AJG Well it does, quite so. We were referring two nights ago to Philadelphia, and the fact that the Lord at the close could bring out such a state of things as is presented in Philadelphia is a wonderful testimony to Him and to the faithfulness and resource that are in Him.

JM Is not the great weakness of Protestantism that it is thought sufficient to say that I protest. The first three parables alone will not help us in relation to the public position, what we need is the last three, and does it not help us to view the matter in balance in every way according to God?

AJG I believe there is nothing more important for us all than to understand that about 120 years ago, the Lord commenced a definite work of revival that had in view the recovery of the whole truth regarding the assembly, and it is given to us, in the grace of God, to live in the days when that takes place. We ought to esteem it above everything else that God has given to us in His grace to live in the day in which the truth of the assembly in all its features is being recovered, so that He might have His pleasure in the saints and that Christ might have His place with us.

CHRISTIANITY AS CHARACTERISED BY MYSTERY (2)

1 Corinthians 2: 6 - 12; Colossians 1: 24 - 29; Colossians 2: 1 - 10

AJG We were remarking this morning that the thought of mystery in divine things, as far as our entering into it is concerned, involves the presence of the Spirit, the Lord having told the disciples, "I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor know him," John 14: 16 and 17. So that the coming in of the Spirit evidently involves, for those who have the Spirit, that they are set up in the possession of things that are entirely outside the range of this world. I think this passage in 1 Corinthians enlarges on that in that the apostle intimates that he had wisdom to speak of. He had just said that he renounced entirely man's wisdom, but the Corinthians were to understand he had wisdom to speak of. It was necessary, however, that there should be a certain state in the saints in order to receive it, and that state, alas, was lacking with the Corinthians. In writing to the Corinthians the apostle does not proceed to develop what it is he has to speak of, but just says sufficient to induce interest in these things on their part. He says, "we speak wisdom among the perfect," and then at the beginning of the third chapter he has to tell them they are far from being perfect in that they were babes, and hence the point in this passage in Corinthians I think is just to stimulate our interest in the hidden wisdom which Paul has to make known to us, and to make it perfectly clear that only in the Spirit can this hidden wisdom be entered upon. On the other hand, as we were saying this morning, it is to show us that there is no limit to what can be entered on in the Spirit. The Scripture says, "for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God," so that, no doubt, while the apostle had in his mind the mystery, he does not call it the mystery in Corinthians but simply says, "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, that hidden wisdom which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory."

Then if one may just intimate what is in mind in the passage in Colossians, he definitely introduces 'the mystery' and introduces it as something that is extremely great, speaking of it as "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations" then showing that his great exercise was that the saints should be knit together in love; for unless we are united in love, there is no power to enter upon the mystery however much we may think we understand it objectively. Then finally, he introduces what is the kernel of it, that is, in Christ "dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," so that nothing outside of Christ is needed by the assembly.

AHS Is it a challenge to us then in the use of this word *perfect*? Is there a link with the way he speaks of it in Corinthians and in Colossians where he desires to present every man perfect in Christ?

AJG I would say that. I think the idea of *perfect* in Corinthians does not go so far as Philippians 3 where the apostle says that he does not regard himself as being yet perfect. I think in Corinthians what he has in mind is that we have come to recognise the import of the cross of Christ and are ourselves in accord with it. We recognise that man in flesh has been set aside judicially in the cross and that everything now for God in us is in the Spirit. It is only as the Spirit is thus recognised that the deep things of God can be taken up.

RHG Does fruitfulness for God also depend on the Spirit? Referring to the first parable this morning the seed was sown in good ground and brought forth some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty fold. Is what we bring forth dependent on our making room for the Spirit?

AJG Yes, everything in the way of subjective results in the saints is dependent on the Spirit. In Matthew, which has in mind the position publicly and dispensationally, it says, "one hundred, one sixty, and one thirty," chapter 13: 8, showing that there is decline and that the dispensation closes with what is outwardly very small. But in Mark the similar parable says, "one thirty, and one sixty, and one a hundred," chapter 4: 8. Mark being the servant's gospel and showing that the servant is to aim at a full measure of result. Then Luke in the corresponding parable says, "bore fruit a hundredfold," chapter 8: 8, which again would link with our own state of soul, "an honest and good heart, having heard the word keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience," verse 15. That is our side of the matter, not the servant's, that we on our part should not have anything less before us than the full measure of fruit.

WCB Would the knowledge of the mystery in Corinthians have the effect of disentangling us from everything that was connected with the princes of this age, and would Colossians give rather the positive side linking us up with "Christ in you the hope of glory"?

AJG Yes, I would say that. It is remarkable the *nots* we get in this passage in 1 Corinthians 2. It says, "we have received, *not* the spirit of the world," verse 12, then it goes on to say, "which also we speak, *not* in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit," verse 13. Previously in verse 6, "we speak wisdom among the perfect; but wisdom *not* of this world, nor of the rulers of this world," so there are *nots* running right through this passage - it is to exclude this world and the whole course of things.

JNG Does the thought of the mystery enter into the way things are communicated as well as the way things are received?

AJG Yes, I believe that is very important and, therefore, those who would minister should be concerned not to make undue effort to make the truth simple. It is quite right to minister according to the need - some may need milk and some may need strong meat. But it is a mistake to attempt to make the truth of God too simple. The point is that it is to be communicated by the Spirit and it is to be apprehended in the Spirit.

LGL Is that evidenced in the contrast that is suggested in the scripture in Corinthians referring to the princes of this age, "for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory", but, lower down, there are things which God has prepared for those that love Him and He has revealed them unto us by His Spirit, suggesting that there are things which are hidden from the princes of this world which are known to the saints as communicated by the Spirit?

AJG Yes, I think so, and the fact that it says, "Things... which God has prepared for them that love Him" is very striking, raising a challenge with us, not only as to whether we are perfect, whether we have accepted the setting aside of the first man and are on the lines of recognising the Spirit, but whether we really love God, so that our hearts respond to the thought that God has prepared certain things for those who love Him. Great wealth is opened to us if we are among those who love God.

CPP Is that just a suggestion of what is unfolded in the epistle to Ephesians that could not be unfolded to the Corinthians?

AJG Yes, I believe the point in this passage is that the apostle is seeking to stimulate the Corinthians to spiritual energy and self-judgment so that they may be able to lay hold of God's hidden wisdom, as much as to say, There are great things before you if you will only learn self-judgment and yield yourselves to the Spirit.

JE Is it not interesting in the typical part of Scripture, that after the lesson as to the brazen serpent and the recognition of the Spirit in singing to the well, you have a man taking up his parable and wondrous thoughts that God has prepared for His people come out?

AJG Exactly. Then you get Moses given a view of the whole extent of the land, that goodly land which God had prepared for those that love Him, you might say.

Ques Does this involve the knowledge of the assembly?

AJG I have no doubt it does. I have no doubt that is what the apostle was labouring for; so in Colossians he introduces the thought of Christ's body which is the assembly. He only says sufficient in Corinthians to enlist their interest and stresses that there is no possibility of their entering upon these things save in the Spirit. But then they are for us; they are prepared for those who love God, and there is no limit to what we may enter upon. Indeed the chapter ends with the remarkable statement as to those who have the Spirit that we have the mind of Christ, which is really the thinking faculty of Christ.

VD What are we to understand by the depths of God?

AJG In Ephesians 3 the apostle speaks of the breadth and length and depth and height, so that there is a great scope of things and a scope of things that is varied in character. Proverbs 8, which speaks of wisdom, refers to a time when there were no depths,

"When there were no depths, I was brought forth," verse 24. I think the depths have come to light in the death of Christ, and the Spirit of God would enable us to become increasingly conscious of the depths that have now come into expression in the death of Christ; whereas heights have come into expression in the heights to which Christ has gone and the immensity of blessing and glory which God has for us in Christ.

RMY Why does it say that the hidden wisdom is for our glory?

AJG I think it is just to stimulate our interest in these things. If we belong to the world, we glory in the things of the world, but the Spirit of God is urging us to take account of the fact that there is an entirely new world, an entirely different system of glory in which we are to glory. It consists of things which God has predetermined before the ages, which really links on with Ephesians. Here, because of the state at Corinth, the apostle cannot open it out. He has just to give them enough to get a taste for heavenly things.

CPP Does the reference to the ignorance of the princes of this world suggest that they did not realise God was working out these eternal thoughts, and that we should reach His end by these means?

AJG They crucified the Lord of glory. How thoroughly they were exposed as devoid of wisdom. As we see how the wisdom of the world has been exposed at the cross, we become all the more ready to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit, that we may enter into the things that God has prepared for us as among those who love Him, and that involves the assembly.

JE It speaks of Hebron as built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. Does a man like Caleb in the Spirit's power really take possession of that as he is found on

the line of searching out?

AJG Yes, exactly. Zoan, I understand, was a seat of learning, so that Hebron stands in contrast with the learning of this world.

JNG Do you think as things are presented in ministry, perhaps difficult for us to understand, it becomes a test how much we love God as to how far we will pursue in our enquiry?

AJG I think that is good, because God's love to us has come out in that He "sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh," Romans 8: 3, so that we might receive the Spirit. Hence if I am careless as to the import of the death of Christ, if I am still going on allowing that which God has dealt with judicially in the death of His Son, others may well question whether I love God. The love of God towards us has come out in that way; He sent His own Son, the great expression of His love, in likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, and condemned sin in the flesh in order that we might receive the Spirit.

TRY The thought of mystery is singular in these scriptures. In Matthew it is plural. Is there any significance in that?

AJG "God's wisdom in a mystery." I think the apostle really has in mind *the* mystery which we come to in Colossians. There is that which Scripture speaks of as *the* mystery. I think the passage we had in Matthew, and other passages which may come before us in a later reading, will show there is an element of mystery in God's ways which goes beyond *the* mystery. What is spoken of as *the* mystery is, so to speak, the cream of what God has in His wisdom reserved and kept secret until this present day, the day of the Spirit, and that is that Christ should have a body, that He should have the assembly as His body, and that that body should be composed of those secured by the gospel from all the nations.

JM Are the Corinthians being initiated, and is this the beginning of their initiation, and have they to become accustomed to the idea of things on this line of a mystery?

AJG I think so, and it is a challenge to us as to how far we lay ourselves open to apprehend the things of God. We have the Spirit given to us for that express purpose, "we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God." So there, is no credit in ignorance of divine things. Not one of us ought to remain content to be ignorant, for we have received the Spirit of God in order that we may know the things freely given to us of God.

JE The treasure as it came before us this morning would allude to persons would it not, whereas the thought of wisdom here would rather allude to resource, the wondrous system of divine resource that becomes available to us in the Spirit, to be drawn upon in His power?

AJG Yes, I think so, and I think too that the apostle is speaking of wisdom in this way, "God's wisdom", because wisdom is such a feature of the world. That is to say, it is not true wisdom of course, but man vaunts himself in wisdom, that which the natural mind is capable of. Hence the apostle is seeking to show us that in the assembly there is that in which true wisdom is to be found, which entirely eclipses and displaces the best the world can produce; and the best the world can produce in the way of wisdom has no ability even to begin to understand God's wisdom.

RHG Is that because the wisdom of the world has in mind the glory of man, whereas the hidden wisdom has God's glory in view?

AJG Exactly, the wisdom of the world is really part of the mystery of lawlessness; it is a great system which Satan is building up in opposition to what is of God.

LGL In chapter 1 it says, "Since Jews indeed ask for signs... but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews an offence, and to nations foolishness; but to those that are called... Christ God's power and God's wisdom."

AJG Quite so. He is God's power for the setting aside of man, that is setting him aside amongst the saints, and He becomes God's wisdom so that indeed He is made wisdom to us, and He is everything to us in Colossians.

LGL So that it is a contrast to see that the Greeks seek wisdom and, in all their seeking along the lines of the wisdom of this world, they are unable to find it, and as you have indicated, do not enter upon it even at the commencement.

AJG No, that is so. So that each of the four gospels tells us there was a time in the history of our Lord when they came to the place of a skull. Each of the four gospels records that. There are not many things which all the four gospels record, but this is one. They came to the place of the skull; that is, that man in his vaunted wisdom is exposed and utterly devoid of wisdom, for there is nothing so barren and empty as a skull.

CPP You referred this morning to the thought of the temple. Does this work out in a local collective setting as in the next chapter in connection with the presence of the Spirit, the temple light shining as to the things of God?

AJG Yes, I would say that, but I think when we come to Colossians the apostle is concerned that we should have an apprehension of the greatness of *the* mystery; that is, in the assembly, Christ has a body. His body, and the more we think of that, the more wonderful it will become, because it means that the assembly is intended to be a vessel in which all that Christ is as a Man can find expression; and hence the possibilities in the service of God are immense. The service of God is something that the Lord is stressing at the present time; and that we should understand that in the assembly there is a possibility of Christ's own affections God-ward, and His own intelligence of divine things, of divine glory, finding expression in the saints, is very wonderful and ought to stimulate us to desire the Lord's help to move into these things.

JE One was thinking of Proverbs 8 on that line, how early in the creation the quality of wisdom was presented, "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from eternity," verses 22 and 23. When the Lord Jesus was here on earth, wisdom had a residence in Him fully. Now that residence is the assembly. Is it not so that the full thought carries through from eternity and finally it will go into eternity?

AJG That is it. Proverbs 8 is a very profitable study because it shows that, before God began any of His operations, He had committed Himself to wisdom. Wisdom was set up or anointed: that is to say, God was moving in wisdom and had the whole plan before Him before He commenced operations, and then all His operations from creation onwards have had in mind the working out of the plan He had already formed in wisdom. It is well to see that.

WHG Is it important for us to have in mind always that the Spirit of God is a divine Person and, therefore, all that is of God is with Him?

AJG Indeed it is. Like the servant in Genesis 24: 10, "all the treasure of his master was under his hand."

JNG In the passage read in Colossians the Spirit is not prominent, would you tell us why?

AJG The Spirit's function is to glorify Christ and to take of the things of Christ and show them to us, so that in the epistle to the Colossians, Christ is magnified before us - Colossians 1 particularly setting Christ before us in His glory, indeed in His varied glories, typified in Joseph, I think, in his coat of many colours.

AHS Would you mind enlarging on what you said as to the possibilities of Christ's affections God-ward finding expression in assembly service?

AJG That is involved in the fact that the assembly is the body of Christ: that is, she is the vessel in which all that is found in Christ as a Man is to be expanded and find expression for the pleasure of God. In 1 Corinthians 2 it says, "we have the mind of Christ," the thinking faculty of Christ, showing that we are capable, in the Spirit, of having Christ's own thoughts and His own intelligence, and then it says also that we have the Spirit of Christ, which is character. But we have the Spirit of God's Son, showing that we are capable of the same affections God-ward as Christ has, so it says, "but ye have received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father," Romans 8: 15. It is the exact expression which the Lord Jesus used in a time of greatest pressure, and expresses the most holy relations between Himself and His Father.

RMY You are viewing the body then not simply as the expression of the life of Jesus here man-ward, but the expression of that life God-ward. Is that right?

AJG Yes I think so; I think it leads to that. The, other side is also true, and I believe works out ultimately in the holy city, that is to say, the assembly, the body of Christ is really, as I see it, the extension of the mediatorial idea, that God has been pleased to place Himself in touch with men in the Person of Christ, Christ become Man, but then Christ has His body, that is to say a vessel in which all that He is as Man can find expression and expansion, nothing added to it, but expansion, and that will work out in a day to come in the heavenly city coming down out of heaven from God. She is identified as the Lamb's wife.

JE Hence we can understand the figure used, "the tabernacle of God is with men," Revelation 21: 3; the assembly being equal to this position.

AJG Exactly. It is also very important to see that when Christ became Man, God had in mind to secure man for His pleasure, not only in a mediatorial way to express Him towards the creation, but to secure man for His pleasure, and Christ as a Man becomes the standard of that, and that also is to find expression in His body, involving perfect response God-ward. Men are brought into sonship. A divine Person became Man and has taken up that relationship of sonship because that was in God's mind for men. Wisdom's delights were with the *sons* of men.

JM I would like to ask a question as to glory. In the first scripture the apostle speaks of that which was "predetermined before the ages for our glory: which none of the princes of this age knew, (for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;)" Then in Colossians he speaks of "the glory of this mystery". Did you intend to say a word as to the thought of glory connected with it?

AJG Well I believe the Lord would open our eyes to see that Christianity is a great system of glory. It will eventually be displayed in glory, but already it is a great system of glory and the Lord is the Lord of glory; He is over it, that is, He is in control and disposes of the glory how He will. So, for instance, He allows Stephen to be stoned. Why did He do that? He could have preserved him from it, but He did not. He did it because the feature of glory shone out in the stoning of Stephen. Stephen turned to the Lord of glory and he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," Acts 7: 59, and then he knelt down and prayed for his persecutors. That was glory shining out, and the Lord was there disposing of it. He could easily have saved Stephen from the persecution, but He did not; that feature of glory was to come out into expression. And then with Saul of Tarsus, the glory of grace in its supremacy came into expression when the Lord spoke to Saul of Tarsus. Christianity is a great system of glory unfolding in varied ways, and the Lord is Lord of it.

JE I was going to ask whether the ray of glory shining in the martyr Stephen was not used as a means of introducing Saul of Tarsus into the system of glory?

AJG I think it is extremely likely it was, because we are told the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul, and later on he tells us that he told the Lord that, when the blood of His martyr Stephen was shed, he was there holding the clothes, so evidently the stoning of Stephen had made a great impression on Saul. I have no doubt the pricking of conscience were prompted by what he saw in Stephen.

JE Is that why he speaks, as he does in Colossians 1: 24, of the acceptance of suffering on his part, and of his being prepared to go beyond his own personal measure, as it were, to fill up?

AJG Exactly. I suppose there was perhaps a little unreadiness on the part of the assembly to accept suffering, a little danger perhaps of evading it, and Paul was personally filling up what was lacking so that there should be no lack in the full measure of the sufferings of the body of Christ.

WHG Is that because the glory resulting from it for God is in view; Paul, in that sense, carrying on what shone out in Stephen, as you have said?

AJG I think so, so that there is glory shining in Paul and Silas in prison, and when the jailor says, "what must I do that I may be saved?" Acts 16: 30, they point him to the Lord of glory. They say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." There was real glory shining in the prison in Philippi, the glory of a system that could not be overcome by the greatest power in the world, for the Philippian jailor represented the power of the

empire of Rome. There were two servants of the Lord that could not be overcome; they were completely superior to it. So it is a great system of glory into which we are introduced.

AHS What is the meaning in the end of verse 27, "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory"?

AJG Christ had a place in the affections of the nations. Christ has a place in our affections. We can thank God that here in Australia, and in various parts of the world, Christ is held in the affections of the saints; that is a wonderful thing. Christ is held in our affections too in this way that we know that we are bound up with Him, and that when He is glorified we shall be glorified with Him. That is what the third chapter shows; when He shall appear we shall appear with Him in glory. So that it is not only that He is the hope of glory in the sense that we are going to be in heaven, but the fact is that He is the hope of glory because we shall share everything with Him; when He comes in glory we shall be with Him. And it is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations that such a portion should be known among the nations.

WHG That involves the utter displacement of man after the flesh, does it not?

AJG It does indeed.

RMY How are we to understand "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations," when we read the Old Testament types? Are we entitled to read the mystery into them?

AJG Yes, because the Old Testament saints could not understand what the types represented. It waited for Christ to come to whom all the types pointed forward, and then the Spirit to come. Hence the truth was there in the types; as for instance in Adam and the woman brought to him, but who could understand it? No one could understand it until now; the truth was there, but it was hidden from the past generations, and is now made known.

JE Does the type in Joseph fit into these two sections? In the Corinthians setting He is the power and wisdom of God, and now here it is a matter really of Joseph in his glory among the nations?

AJG I believe Joseph fits in particularly with the epistle to the Colossians; and the exercise of the final part of Jacob's history, when Joseph sends to him to come down into Egypt, is just to stimulate him to set his mind on things above. It is to stimulate him to move away from natural moorings in which he was living, and living in discouragement, and to find his life in the system of things which was headed up in Joseph; as he did move he became a changed man, and for seventeen years lived in spiritual dignity and contentment and

power. Before that, he had been a discouraged man saying all things are against me, and so on. It is just the difference that results as we move away from finding our life in natural things to find our life in Christ's things, that is, in the assembly.

JM Is that part of the teaching of the epistle to Colossians; to use an expression, that we might cut our anchor ropes in relation to the earth? Has it not heavenly mindedness in view and what is connected with that scene?

AJG Quite so. Hence the importance of our realising that we are part of the assembly, which is Christ's body, intimately bound up with Christ, and hence we are to set our minds on things above where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. But there is another thing of great importance that comes in in this passage in Colossians, the apostle says, "I would have you know what combat I have for you, and those in Laodicea... to the end that their hearts may be encouraged, being united together in love." It is a most essential feature of the truth of the assembly that we should be practically united together in love, because the idea of the body of Christ is an entity functioning, not a lot of individual brethren taking part, but an entity functioning, and therefore we must be first of all united together in love or else there will be that which will hinder the functioning of the body.

JWH Does the thought of presenting every man perfect in Christ underlie this thought of being united together in love?

AJG I think *presenting every man perfect in Christ* is an individual side of the truth - presenting *every* man would involve that. It would involve that we learn to walk in the Spirit; the first-fruit of the Spirit is love.

RHG Does not the truth of the assembly largely remain a mystery to us unless we are united together in love?

AJG I think it does. We may perhaps apprehend it purely objectively, but there is no realisation of the actual working out of it save as we are united in love, as it was remarked at the meetings in London last July that *unity body-wise underlies union*. That is, before we can enter into what is distinctly the assembly's portion in union with Christ, we must be united with one another in love. The Lord will not unite with Himself what is disunited in itself.

JM Is there wisdom in the way the apostle speaks to the Corinthians? He would encourage them and then he would tell them of the moral side; they were not really up to it. Is it not the same in Colossians, he is instructing them further now, and in chapter 2 he is suggesting the way it works, the vital spring of it, would you say?

AJG Yes I think so. He refers to the mystery of God in Colossians 2: 2. The true rendering is "the mystery of God; in *which* are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge." That is, the Spirit of God is stressing the greatness of the mystery, and that in the mystery are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

CS Does the love of the Spirit come into this matter of being united together? It is spoken of in the end of Romans 15 where Paul beseeches them by the love of the Spirit. Would that come into this matter of being united together in love?

AJG I would say that "your love in the Spirit" which we have in Colossians 1: 8 enters into it. Love in the Spirit certainly underlies our being united together in love.

CPP Does the place that Christ has in the affections of each saint come into it as the first chapter would bring Him before us as you have said?

AJG I think so, and I think we have to recognise that we are taught of God to love one another. It is innate in us to love one another. It is the divine nature working out, but sometimes things are allowed that interfere with it, interfere with the expression of love and interfere with the development of love, and hence we are to guard against those and to refuse everything that would interfere with the practical development and expression of love, so that we are united together in love.

LGL There seems to be a suggestion in connection with the range referred to in chapter 2. The apostle has combat for those at Colosse and those at Laodicea, and as many as have not seen his face, and then he goes on to the thought of being united together in love. Would there be an indication at the present time, in the measure in which that is developing among the saints universally, that these things are working out in our day in perhaps a fuller measure than we had known them previously?

AJG Yes, I would say that thoroughly. It is a most encouraging feature the way the Lord is binding the saints together, and we are to take account of that as a feature of our day, and to strain every nerve, so to speak, to guard against Satan bringing in anything that would interfere with it.

JE If we laid hold of the thought that in the assembly all this resource resides, it would deliver us from every other system that might exist, would it not?

AJG It would indeed, and though the Colossians were very considerably advanced in spiritual stature the apostle sees a very real danger with them, and that was a danger of turning aside to human wisdom, what he calls

philosophy and vain deceit, and hence, in order to meet that, he presents the greatness of Christ in a striking way - "in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell". The assembly has as its Head a divine Person in Manhood, and all the fulness of the Godhead is in Him, so we do not need to go outside of Christ for anything. Questions arise amongst us; where do we turn for wisdom? We are to understand that all wisdom for every matter is available directly in Christ and there is no reason why we should be turned aside to any other resource, because the assembly is set up in fulness of resource in its Head.

Ques In that way does the mystery of God involve all dispensations?

AJG The mystery of God is an expression which we get in Revelation and which we may touch on at a subsequent reading. I think the mystery of God does include all dispensations; that is, it has reference, I think, to God's ways all down the ages, but I would connect it *here* with the truth set out in this epistle.

JNG Does the fact that there appears to be no direct quotation from the Old Testament in Colossians emphasise how this mystery was hidden in past ages?

AJG That is very interesting and suggestive. It is quite clear it was hidden in past ages but is now made known. That is another thing that should greatly stimulate us to go in for these things, because God has now opened up in our day what He deliberately hid from past generations, that is to say, there are things now available to us that were not available to such great men as Abraham and Moses and David and others, and God has given us the Spirit that we may *know* the things that are freely given us of God, and hence we ought to be stimulated to really go in for these things.

RHG Apart from the revelation of the mystery, the Word of God would be in large measure at least a matter of history of God's dealings with men, would it not?

AJG Yes. I have no doubt there was some wisdom in God's ways all down the ages as to which one cannot say much, and that He was preparing the ground. I think the more the Lord throws light by the Spirit on the Old Testament, the more we see that all that He was working out in past centuries, in the lives of men or in nations, really had our day in view and had in mind illustrating the truth of the assembly for us.

LGL So that Peter's first epistle refers to those who sought out these matters and enquired into them in a past dispensation in order to arrive at the truth of what was being presented, but it is for the saints of this dispensation to move

into the good of it. Does it suggest that we might be diligent in this matter of enquiry?

AJG Yes exactly. Peter's epistle says, "Concerning which salvation prophets, who have prophesied of the grace towards you, sought out and searched out; ...the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed out, testifying before of the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these," 1 Peter 1:10,11, so the whole of the Old Testament really has been written for us.

WHG So the same Spirit we have been speaking of in Corinthians is the One who indited the Old Testament Scriptures.

AJG Quite so.

RHG And is it a fact that what is hidden in mystery, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, become available as we are united together in love?

AJG Yes, I think so, and as together we learn how to depend on the Lord. That brings in what we were referring to earlier as to the temple, what is possible in virtue of the Spirit being with us, the light that can be thrown on divine things.

ABJ Do you think an increased apprehension of these things including the mystery would greatly enrich our service of praise and worship?

AJG I do, because I think there is not only the riches of divine grace in our portion in the assembly and that is wonderful, but the riches of divine wisdom too. I think the more we see what wisdom there is in the very conception of the assembly as the body of Christ, what it has in mind, how perfect the response God-ward can be when the vessel of it has Christ as its Head, and how perfect, in a day to come, the representation of God toward the creation can be when the vessel of administration is one who is united to Christ and deriving from Him, the more we are impressed with divine wisdom, which is a feature of the glory of God.

WHG Does the truth of the body of Christ *underlie* the whole service?

AJG Yes I would think so.

WCB Does the fact that the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are said to be hidden indicate that to get the gain of them there must be a certain state with us?

AJG I think so, and I think involves that they are not to be known by us without being searched out. It says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings is to search out a thing," Proverbs 25: 2. They will not be known by us if we are dilatory. They are to be sought out.

JM Would you give a little more help as to the expression "the full knowledge of the mystery of God"? What is involved in the word "mystery of God"?

AJG While we get the expression in Revelation 10, I think there it is wider than what is brought in here. It is clear here that "the full knowledge of the mystery" evidently refers to *the* mystery, that is the truth of the assembly, which Colossians has in view.

JM That is what I wanted some help on and I am sure the brethren too, giving us some impression of the value of this vessel. Is it not something of the pearl, the precious beauty of the pearl coming to light?

AJG Yes, but I think it is even more than that because the pearl is, I think, particularly the assembly in its beauty under the Lord's eye as undivided in her affections for Him and held thus under His influence. But here "the full knowledge of the mystery of God;

in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge" I think shows it is the great vessel in which divine wisdom in its fulness finds expression.

RHG How does that differ from what you have in verse 10, "ye are complete in him"?

AJG "Ye are complete in him" is just to set before us that we do not need to go outside of Christ for anything. If it is a question of ability to serve God acceptably, we need to derive impulse and affections and intelligence from Christ and if we bring in anything else, natural sentiment or anything of that sort, or human learning, it will only spoil it. On the other hand, if it is a question of meeting things that arise (because we are in the presence at present of hades' gates and all sorts of things may arise) we do not need to go outside of Christ for wisdom as to how to meet what arises.

JE To make it practical, for instance, if an issue arises anywhere and the saints look to the Lord to come in, does He not really make use of what is already there in the assembly? Does He not draw upon this resource to meet any exigency that might arise at any time?

AJG That is what I understand. There is no reason why we should find ourselves nonplussed or overcome by anything that arises if only we are in the faith of what we have in our Head and are content to look to Him for wisdom and guidance.

JE Then on the other hand, in the service of God we have the thought in Hebrews 2 of Christ hymning God's praise in the midst of the assembly. That would be impossible apart from this thought, would it not?

AJG Yes it would. It must be a great thing to the heart of Christ, and very gratifying to the heart of God, that in the assembly Christ has a vessel that is capable of expressing His own praises.

WHG The responsible side of the assembly is the woman of worth at the end of Proverbs, the summation of the whole book?

AJG Yes, I think so. I think she is the product of divine wisdom in this world because Proverbs contemplates this present world and how the sons are to go through the world; they are to find their life and interests in the assembly, and the last chapter is the great product of wisdom.

TRY It has been said that 'response is equal to revelation'. Is that because it all centres in Christ?

AJG Exactly. Response is equal to the revelation; that is, God has come out in perfect revelation in Christ, a divine Person become Man; but response to it is equal to revelation because that same divine Person become Man, you might say, heads the response and gives character to it, and He has in the assembly a vessel in which that response can find expression in His own intelligence and affections. The response being equal to the revelation could *only* be true in Christ.

CPP Is the thought of the fulness of the Godhead connected with revelation in that way? What is the force of that expression for us?

AJG I would rather think it was connected with wisdom and resource; and all that is presented in God as revealed, is now to be found in Christ as a Man. Hence the assembly is set up, whether it be all that God is toward us as made known in Christ, or all that we are toward God as set out in Christ - so that we may be filled by it and take character from it.

JE Is this not unique to Christ personally? You could not exactly say the fulness of the Godhead was in the assembly?

AJG No, it is in Christ bodily, but then it is there available to the assembly, to His body. There is no object, so to speak, in Christ becoming a Man save that God has in mind to make Himself known to men and secure a perfect response from men; and response in the highest degree of intelligence and affection is secured in the assembly, the body of Christ.

AHS Does that wisdom have to be arrived at assembly-wise rather than merely individually?

AJG Yes surely. It is not exactly with a view to what is available to us individually. It is a question of what is available to the assembly in its Head.

JE Does the fulness of the Godhead become understandable by us as we see it in bodily expression in Christ? Is that not the idea that what no creature could possibly compass otherwise has been brought into expression in Christ personally?

AJG Yes, but then I think it is not only that it is in expression in Christ personally, but it is available to us. I think this passage has in mind to show what is available to the assembly in its Head. In the first chapter we have "all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross - by him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens." That refers to Christ as a Man here, that all the fulness was pleased to dwell in Him, and by means of the blood of His cross to reconcile all things to Itself, that is to the Fulness. Christ in virtue of redemption will take up all things and all things will be headed up and held by the One in whom all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell. In that way all things will be reconciled to the Godhead. But then the assembly has as its Head One in whom all the fulness of the Godhead is pleased to dwell bodily. That is to make us feel that in our Head as Man we have every kind of resource that is necessary, and that as we draw upon it there is no reason why we should not be perfectly filling out our intended position, whether it be God-ward or toward the creation.

There is a note at Colossians 2: 10 on the word *complete*, which reads 'or *filled full*, referring to all fulness being in him. The fulness or completeness of the Godhead is in Christ, as towards us; and we, as towards God, are complete in Him.' That is, we lack nothing because everything is in Christ, and hence there is no reason why the service God-ward in the assembly should not be fully worthy of God because we can derive impulse, affection and intelligence from Christ in whom "dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily".

JWH Why do you think the matter of being Head of all principality and authority is brought in here?

AJG I think to show how completely we are in immediate touch with One who eclipses and supersedes all others.

Rem We are hid with Christ in God, so that all these attributes must be available to us.

AJG *Our life* is hid with Christ in God, but then chapter 2 is to show us how completely we are set up in our Head, that we have as Head One who is no less than One in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells *bodily*. It shows therefore there is no reason why we should be lacking in wisdom or in

intelligence or in anything God looks for in His people, because all that will perfectly answer to what the Godhead is, is there now in Christ bodily.

CPP Is it right that all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge hid in the mystery are dependent on the assembly's link with Christ?

AJG Yes I am sure of that. Hence the apostle says, "As therefore ye have received the Christ... rooted and built up in him, and assured in the faith ... abounding in it with thanksgiving." The apostle is concerned that we should not be diverted from Christ and that we should be continually growing in the knowledge of Christ and of the fulness there is in Him.

RHG Was it the sense of that in his soul that really led to the combat he speaks of?

AJG Yes I think so, because he could detect there was at work an influence in Colosse that was turning them away from Christ, and therefore there was real combat in his prayers; he was conscious in his prayers that he was up against Satanic opposition that was working in that way to divert the saints from Christ.

CHRISTIANITY AS CHARACTERISED BY MYSTERY (3)

Ephesians 3: 1 - 12; Ephesians 5: 25 - 32

AJG In chapter 1 of this epistle we have the thought of the mystery of God's will which He has made known to us. We are intended to be intelligent as to what is about to come in, the heading up of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ, and the assembly's portion as inheriting it with Him. But in chapters 3 and 5 we have the Mystery as it is usually spoken of, that is *the* mystery - "the mystery of the Christ," as it says in chapter 3, and a great mystery in chapter 5, which the apostle says is Christ and the assembly. In chapter 3 we have what the mystery of the Christ is, that those of the Gentiles, the nations, "should be *joint* heirs, and a *joint* body, and *joint* partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings." So, as we were saying on Friday in connection with Colossians 2, there is great importance in our being united together in love; the apostle when he introduces the thought of mystery stressing this thought of "joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus," and then goes on to show that in the mystery the principalities and powers in the heavenlies are intended to learn at the present time the all various wisdom of God. Hence the mystery is presented in chapter 3 largely in relation to God, whereas in chapter 5 it is presented in relation to Christ, what it means to Him to have the assembly.

AHS Is the thought in this chapter as to joint heirs, a development of what there is in chapter 2: 15?

ATG Yes, I would say that; you are referring to the fact of Jew and Gentile being made one. In chapter 3 the apostle is stressing the fact that it embraces the nations, he says "that they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus." It is a very great conception, which was entirely new. It is a remarkable thing in God's ways that early in the history of man He separated Abraham's seed and made it a peculiar nation, and hedged it about, and forbid it to have much in the way of intercourse with other nations, so that for centuries there was one nation on earth that was peculiarly God's people. The revelation of the mystery, therefore, involved a complete departure in the ways of God, and the introduction of something that was entirely unknown, and in which the riches of divine grace and wisdom shine out. It is not just one nation, not simply Israel set aside and one other nation taken up, but it is a question of all nations, "they who are of the nations."

RHG Is it in order to magnify the grace of God that He would not be bounded by one nation?

AJG I think so. God is now bringing to light what has been in his purpose, as it says, "according to the purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," so that this is a prime thought of God. The setting aside of Israel as a nation came in in His ways. The ways of God are a very fruitful subject of enquiry as to the wisdom there is in them, but this is a question of what He has in His purpose.

JST Do you think in that way the man in Jerusalem who came into the temple and took the Babe in his arms, had an inkling of this when he said, "a light for revelation of the Gentiles," Luke 2: 32? Did the whole thing seem to be lighting up for a moment in Simeon's soul?

AJG It is very striking that Simeon mentions Gentiles first, showing that in the Spirit he became intelligent before his day, you might say, before the Spirit had come and before Paul had been brought on the scene. He really anticipated the mystery by saying, "a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel," Luke 2: 32. It is a great witness to the influence of Christ, and of course to the power of the Spirit, that those who are naturally so utterly diverse can be joined together in one body; that really was what Peter was given to see in the sheet let down from heaven, it was a vessel, and it came down from heaven and went up to heaven; that is, it was heavenly in origin, as has often been said, and heavenly in destiny, and yet the constituents of it were all manner of four footed beasts and creeping things, and so on; but then the word was, "What God has cleansed, do not thou make common," Acts 10: 15; God cleanses the hearts of the nations by faith, and then gives them the Holy Spirit, and it seems to me to be a wonderful testimony to the influence of Christ that such constituents can be bound together, united together perfectly in love in one body.

LGL So that in Acts 10 Peter says, "Can any one forbid water that these should not be baptised, who have received the Holy Spirit as we also did?" Is that an introduction to the thought of what you have before you?

AJG I think so, because the Lord speaks in Acts 1 of the Holy Spirit, and speaks of it as their being *baptised* by the Holy Spirit, which is an important matter, bringing in the thought of the submerging, so to speak, of all that is natural, but the merging together positively in the Spirit. It is a very important thing in assembly that we should learn to merge in the Spirit; we cannot get anywhere in assembly service unless we are first in the good of having been baptised together into one body in the power of one Spirit.

CPP I was wondering what the link would be as to the place that the Christ has in our hearts with our being merged together and able to move as one?

The thought of 'the Christ' seems to come into these Scriptures and be emphasised.

AJG Well, it is because 'the Christ' is Christ personally viewed as the One who is to accomplish all God's will, and take His place as the Head of the system of glory and blessing which God has in mind to bring in. He is the antitype of Adam, set over all the works of God's hands, and in that position the woman is brought to the man. It is important to have that view of the Christ, to get an impression of the vast system of glory that God has before Him to bring in, in Christ as the Head of it, and it is that One who loved the assembly and has delivered Himself up for it.

JE Do you feel the importance of being right in our outlook in the glad tidings, as free of all national bias? One was thinking of Acts 15 where James says in verse 14, "Simon has related how God first visited, to take out of the nations a people for his name. And with this agree the words of the prophets," and so on. In our chapter it is a question of the glad tidings. Do you think we need help on that line?

AJG I am sure it is well to bear in mind that the glad tidings is the means by which God brings to light those who are in His purpose, and whom He is taking up for no less a thought than this thought of the mystery, so that as you say it is a good thing to have a heavenly outlook in our glad tidings, in our preaching of the gospel. It is not confined in any sense to meeting the need of man (though the grace of God comes down indeed to meet the greatest need of man, and every need) but it has in mind the securing of the material for this great thought of God.

JE Mr. Raven used to speak of the glad tidings as the means by which God effectuates His purpose.

AJG Yes, I think it is quite clear from this chapter that that is a right statement.

CPP Is the expression as to the unsearchable riches of the Christ connected with the eternal thoughts of God and His purposes, and in no way a matter of meeting our need?

AJG I would say that, and then the apostle also says, "and to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things," Ephesians 3: 9. We are to have some understanding as to how it works, the administration of it.

JWH Is this an advance on the thought of the administration of it as through the apostle Paul? Earlier in the verses read, it suggests the revelation to Paul,

and what is revealed to the holy apostles and prophets in the power of the Spirit.

AJG In verse 2 he speaks of "the administration of the grace of God which has been given to me towards you, that by revelation the mystery has been made known to me," but I think when we come to verse 9, "what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God," he has in mind the practical working out of it among the saints at the present time in order that *now*, as it says, "to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God." What would you say to that?

JWH Yes, I think that is right. What was in my mind was in relation to what has been revealed in the power of the Spirit in relation to this mystery, involving the Spirit coming before the apostle had come to light, and whether in the coming of the Spirit there was not that inaugurated, and now the apostle having the administration of it given to him peculiarly. I am referring to verse 5.

AJG Yes, I rather question whether the mystery was known before Paul's day, although the Spirit had come. He says "has *now* been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the power of the Spirit." I should imagine it was not known before Paul's day save so far as there was an inkling of it in the light given to Peter in the sheet let down from heaven.

JWH That was what I wondered, whether that would bear upon it, seeing that the apostles and prophets are brought in.

AJG Yes, they are brought in so that the truth is now to be diffused so to speak, not only revealed to the holy apostles but to the prophets too; those would be New Testament prophets of course. The truth was to be diffused once it had come out. There was sufficient light as to it given to Peter to enable him to admit the Gentiles, to overcome Jewish prejudices, but it is a question whether Peter ever understood the truth of the mystery in its fulness until after Paul had had the ministry of it committed to him.

JST In regard to what you were saying as to the principalities and powers, this is a great advance upon the time when there were things that the angels desired to look into.

AJG Yes, they are now to see the all-various wisdom of God in the assembly.

JST Do you think in that way it is very significant that the cherubim in Solomon's day were looking toward the house and not toward the ark?

AJG Yes, that is very interesting, but it seems to me to impress us that we ought to be greatly concerned as to how we act and move in the assembly, and seek the Lord's help in relation to it, because principalities and powers in the heavenlies are looking on, and God intends that they should get an impression, not of confusion or of what is of the mind of man, or of weakness, but of the wisdom of God.

JE Is the assembly viewed in this chapter in its setting in relation to the universe, and for the moment the administration of God is confined really to that vessel, is it not? Could you speak of divine administration today apart from the assembly?

AJG No, I think not. There is a certain administration indirectly through government ordained of God, but the direct administration of God is in the assembly undoubtedly.

RMY Would the use of the word *now* confine this matter of the all-various wisdom of God being displayed to the present dispensation, or will the principalities and powers always see it operating in the assembly?

AJG I should think they would see it operating in the city, for instance, in the day to come. I think the great point is that they should see it *now* in the presence of moral confusion in the world. They should see a sphere in which every question could be solved according to divine wisdom, because it is a vessel which has Christ as its Head.

RHG When God created man, He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion," Genesis 1: 26. Is that looking on to Christ and the assembly coming in in the administration?

AJG Yes it is, as I understand it.

JE Perhaps you would help us as to your thought as to the place God has in this chapter.

AJG In the assembly at the present time we see various issues raised from time to time, because we are in the presence of Hades' gates, which would represent the counsels and wisdom of wickedness, and there is from time to time an effort to corrupt or overthrow what is of God in this world, and as the saints are held in relation to Christ, deriving wisdom and character from Him, we see that every issue that is raised is met, and met according to divine wisdom,

so that the assembly goes through, it is not overcome. Whatever attack is made upon the truth the assembly goes through, and I believe what is seen in the long history of the assembly here in meeting various matters that arise

and repudiating the various influences of the world, is the working out of divine wisdom in the great variety of it.

JE I was thinking of that. In the coming day the city in its public display will be God's answer in triumph to all that the enemy has introduced, but at the present moment is not divine administration in the assembly God's answer to Satan's attack?

AJG I think so. I believe it has a good deal in mind the answer to the wisdom of Satan, not that that is true wisdom, for Romans 16: 27 says, "the only wise God" which means, I think, God who alone is wise; there is no wisdom truly anywhere else. But then on the other hand, of the prince of Tyre it says, "thou art wiser than Daniel!" Ezekiel 28: 3, and the king of Tyre is said to have been full of wisdom, Ezekiel 28: 12, showing there is great wisdom of a sort with Satan, but what is to be displayed in the assembly is the all-various wisdom of God.

WHG Does that mean that the moral victory of God shines out in this day supremely? It is said it is hidden throughout the ages in God.

AJG Yes, it is hidden throughout the ages in God, but now made known. The point is that it is now made known, and it is to be seen. I do not know that it is only in the way in which evil is met, but I take it that it takes form in the response to God in the assembly, that there is seen in that way how God whose nature has been belied by Satan's lie, has operated amongst men who were morally dead and at a distance from Him, and secured in them, in the assembly under the influence of the headship of Christ, a response to Himself that is in holy affection and intelligence; that is a wonderful display of divine wisdom.

WHG In relation to the service of God, the present day is a great one for the glory of God.

AJG It is indeed, and the more we think of these things the more we shall see that the key to everything is the incarnation, the coming into manhood of a divine Person, and then the accomplishment of redemption where the depths have come to light, and then the coming in of the Holy Spirit. I believe those three things are the great keystone, so to speak, of all that God is bringing to pass for His glory, and they are the expression in a wonderful way of divine wisdom.

Ques Would that be the effulgence of God?

AJG It would be, the effulgence of God is the shining out of what He is, which is really love, but allied with that is the wonderful wisdom in which love has

acted, so as to bring to pass results which are compatible with what God is in His love.

BH Has the word in Acts 15 any relation to this in regard to building again the temple of God that was broken down?

AJG The prophet from which James quotes refers to God's work in Israel in a coming day, but James uses it by application in order to justify what God was then doing among the Gentiles.

ABJ We read in verses 10 and 11 as to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies, that they might know through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God. What effect should that have on us? Should it stir us up as to the intelligent working out of things?

AJG Yes, I think it should greatly exercise us as to the way things are done in the assembly, whether it does express divine wisdom. There is no reason why it should not if we are really true to our position as the body of Christ deriving wisdom from our Head. The queen of Sheba not only heard the wisdom of Solomon, finding all her hard questions answered, but she *saw* the wisdom of Solomon in the great regime that was there under his hand, culminating in the ascent by which he went up to the house of Jehovah; that is what she saw, and she saw the whole system moving in wonderful order and wisdom.

JST Does not the apostle Paul use it in that connection somewhat, when he says, "Do ye not then know that the saints shall judge the world?" 1 Corinthians 6: 2. The saints shall judge angels and are ye not able to settle these small matters? Do you think that comes in there?

AJG Well it does, I think. It is a question of wisdom being seen, the all-various wisdom of God, so that there is no matter that arises that cannot be met in divine wisdom in the assembly, but the secret of that is, of course, that she is the body of Christ. That is, she has as Head One in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and therefore divine wisdom in its fulness is there in Christ personally.

JWH Does the thought of access to God enter into this? The service of God would somewhat fill it out.

AJG I think so. I think it does include the thought undoubtedly of the service of God, because as you say, it immediately says, "in whom we have boldness and access in confidence by the faith of him," Ephesians 3: 12.

CPP We can see the importance of what you have said as to unity and love being operative amongst us as binding us together; otherwise the enemy will get an advantage instead of being defeated, will he not?

AJG Yes, he will indeed, but when we see what Satan has done in bringing in a spirit of divergence and hatred amongst men and scattering them, and belying the true nature of God, I think that to see a body, the assembly, held under the influence of Christ united together in love, and all responding with one heart to the blessed God, must be a wonderful demonstration in the eyes of principalities and powers in the heavenlies that God has wisdom that is far greater than the great wisdom of His adversaries.

CPP Not a wisdom merely that could deal with evil and judge it, but could bring out of such a state such a response to Himself.

AJG Yes, exactly. The very state that Satan had brought in in God's creatures being found in distance from God and distrust of Him, becoming the occasion of God to reveal Himself in grace and love, so that He is known in the hearts of men in a way that He would not have been known otherwise.

JE Do we not gather the impression that God in His wisdom will hold back nothing that is good for His people? That in itself refutes the enemy's lie originally - "hath God said?" - as if to suggest that God would hold back something that was good from man.

AJG Yes, exactly, and so the answer is found in the worship of the assembly. Worship is something far greater than mere thanksgiving for benefits received; it means that the assembly is in the presence of God, and is so impressed with what God is in His own blessedness that the only thing it can do is worship.

GH All that you have been speaking of as to the assembly is worked out in Paul himself, who once ravaged the assembly, but now he speaks of himself as less than the least of all saints, and entrusted with the administration.

AJG Yes. He was greatly impressed evidently with divine grace, speaking of himself in that way,

"To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given." It reminds one of David who went and sat before God, and said, "Who am I," 1 Chronicles 17: 16. It is in that spirit that Paul says, "To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given."

RMY Would you say a word as to why it is God who created all things, rather than the Father, who is before us in this chapter?

AJG It is a question, I think, of what is public, not simply a question of God as He is known by those who are brought into relationship with Him, but it is a question of God, and the assembly being the vessel in which God's wisdom is made known. It is a public vindication of God.

RHG Does God secure His original thought as to man in image and likeness in relation to Christ and the assembly thus?

AJG Yes, I think so. The very conception of a vessel that is the body of Christ is a very wonderful one on the line of what is mediatorial; that God should come out in Christ to begin with. He who is equal with God becoming Man, and thus bringing what God is near to man, is wonderful; but then that Christ should have a body which is His fulness, so that all that Christ is toward man as the expression of God, might be expanded in a vast vessel composed of those taken up from all the nations, is a very wonderful thing indeed, and is an expression of divine wisdom. It will work out in its fulness in the heavenly city.

JM What is the scope of the enlightenment in verse 9? It speaks of, "to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration," and so on. What is the scope of that *all* there?

AJG I should think he means to enlighten all saints. I do not see that it goes beyond the saints,

but I would think he would have us intelligent as to what there is for God in the assembly now, so that we do not think lightly of the assembly, and we do not just come to meetings, so to speak, but we really have the assembly intelligently in our minds, and are exercised that what is seen in it is worthy of it.

GH Would you help us as to why nearly all this chapter is a parenthesis?

AJG Well, it is clear from the beginning of chapter 4 that when the apostle commenced writing chapter 3 he had in mind to proceed to the exhortations that we get in chapter 4, but then his heart is so full of the mystery. He has it in his soul, and because of the deep feelings he had he is compelled, so to speak, by the Spirit to enlarge on this thought of the mystery, and then to show us how he prays, bowing his knees; I believe in order to encourage us to do the same. We cannot exactly get into these great things even by speaking over them with one another. We may get a certain impression of them which would induce desire to understand them more, but the great thing to do is to get to our knees. Paul did that, and he did it in secret, in private, because he was in prison, and I believe his intention in recording it, there is to encourage us to do the same.

JM Does it seem evident that Paul always had in his mind the great truth of the mystery? I notice in the close of the epistle to the Romans he gives a hint as to what is to follow where he says, "according to the revelation of the mystery, as to which silence has been kept in the times of the ages, but which

has now been made manifest," Romans 16: 25 - 26. Do you think that the apostle ever had this great thought of the mystery as a goal before him, and where he was able he would speak of it?

AJG Yes, I do, because it was revealed to him and given to him as a special ministry, so that just as Moses had the whole pattern of the tabernacle given to him in the mount, and laboured with that pattern in his mind, so Paul would have the mystery given to him, and then would labour among the saints with that pattern in mind. In chapter 5 we have what the assembly is to Christ specially emphasised, and the apostle at the end says, "This mystery is great, but I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly." We get the great love of Christ for the assembly, "as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present the assembly to himself glorious." I think the idea of presenting to Himself involves that He has in mind a vessel that should correspond in every way with Himself, and therefore it fits in with what we have in Genesis 2, where, as the woman is brought to the man. Adam says, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: this shall be called Woman, because this was taken out of a man," Genesis 2: 24. Now he has something that exactly corresponds with him, though in feminine features.

RMY How does the thought of sanctifying and purifying fit in with what was before us previously, as to no previous history and the thought of redemption not attaching to the assembly?

AJG As far as I understand it I think it refers to the present service of Christ, and would a good deal take form in the intelligence of the saints. It is the washing of water by the word; the word I think brings in the thought of an intelligent setting out of the truth.

CPP The expression is used, "we are members of his body," Ephesians 5: 30. Would you say a word as to that? Does that view the saints individually, as to our part in this vessel? Would it be in that relation that the cleansing and the sanctifying is needed?

AJG Yes, I would think that. I have wondered whether this sanctifying and purifying that is spoken of here links with what we get in John 17 where the Lord says, "I sanctify myself for them, that they also may be sanctified by truth," John 17: 19. He had in mind as setting Himself apart as Man in the presence of God, that we might learn in Him our true place or status, and I am just wondering whether this sanctifying and washing of water by the word has not something of that kind in mind; that is, the truth as it is to be learnt in Christ is to be continually brought before us, and then the import of His death

as that which enables us to detach ourselves from all that is connected with past history.

LGL Are these thoughts connected with the thought of Moses receiving the pattern? Are the saints while here on the earth walking in relation to the full thought that it will be a glorious church?

AJG I think that is what we should have before us. Hence Christ is presented to us as about to present it to Himself glorious, that should be before us too, the thought of there being no element of disparity, we are to be found in complete correspondence with Christ. That has to be kept before our hearts.

RHG Although the assembly as such has no past history, the death of Christ was a necessity, was it not, in order that it might be brought to light?

AJG It was indeed. The moral import of the death of Christ enters into the process of building because the vessel which is secured by Christ and for Him is a holy vessel, that is to say it must be capable of having Christ's own knowledge of good and His own perfect abhorrence of evil, and I think the death of Christ is the expression of love supremely, and also that in which all evil has been dealt with according to God. I think the import of that enters into the building, although it is not viewed as standing related to any past history on the part of the assembly.

GMCK In that connection it speaks of the edifying of the body of Christ in chapter 4, "until we all arrive at... the full-grown man." Has that any connection with what you were speaking of?

AJG I think so. That corresponds with the building of the woman, it is going on now I understand, the work of God by means of gifts; the work of the ministry has in view the building of the woman, the edifying of the body of Christ.

CPP Would the light of these activities of Christ's have a liberating effect so that He might have something of the joy of possession as in assembly, even now?

AJG I think that. I think "present the assembly to himself glorious" might be anticipated in the spirit of it in the assembly.

JE It is interesting, referring again to John 17, that while on the one hand those men were sovereignly given to Christ by the Father, yet on the other hand they were all the direct product of His own service, and He continues that service in setting Himself apart for man, does He not?

AJG Yes, quite so. And hence the assembly on the one hand is given to Christ by God, it is the result of God's own consideration for man, "It is not good that Man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate, his like," Genesis 2: 18. But then this Scripture shows that she is the object of Christ's own personal service from His position on high.

JM In what way does Christ nourish and cherish the assembly?

AJG I think we are conscious of it sometimes in the ministry of Christ to us. Nourishing would bring in the thought of food, that would build us up, and cherishing is more a thought bringing the sense of endearment to our heart.

RLH The first faculty brought into play in Adam after the deep sleep was the power of speech was it not? Adam *said*, "This time it is bone of my bones," and so on. Here the apostle says, "I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly." Are we being encouraged to speak of these great thoughts now?

AJG We are, but Adam speaking in that way shows how his feelings were moved as he saw the woman being brought to him; "This time," he says, evidently implying that he had looked for something that would correspond with himself before, and had not found it, but now this time his desires and affections were to be gratified as he saw the woman being brought to him. Hence I think we can rightly take that up in assembly, that the Lord finds great pleasure in the saints as they come under His notice, and additional pleasure not only because of what they are, but because they represent God's own consideration for Him; just as Rebekah brought to Isaac represents the consideration of the father for the son, because it was the father who set in motion that the servant should go and find a wife for his son Isaac.

CPP Would you think in that way the Father has a special pleasure in taking account of the movements of heart assembly-wise towards Christ?

AJG I would.

LGL In relation to the thought of what is going through, does it help us to get the encouragement from the scripture in Matthew that Hades' gates shall not prevail against the assembly? Here we have the thoughts of God going through to the completion of the vessel in which there will be no blemish of any kind, and the saints at the present time in the presence of evil are moving in the light of this.

AJG Yes, that is so. The end is reached here as the result of the service of Christ.

TRY Do we get the thought of union in chapter 5?

AJG Well I think it is implied, because after speaking of these things, the Spirit through Paul says, "Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh," so that I think the Spirit of God is really leading up to the thought of union, and it is entered into, so to speak, from Christ's own side; Rebekah is from the other side, the question is, "Wilt thou go with this man?" and she says, "I will go," Genesis 24: 58. And then it says, "she became his wife, and he loved her," Genesis 24: 67, so that the movement towards union is on Rebekah's side in Genesis 24, but in Genesis 2 it seems to be from the side of the man, a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, as though the Lord greatly rejoices in having this vessel secured for Him, that can now be united to Him, and derive from Him, and be moved under His impulse, in all that that will mean, both in the service of God and in the representation of God.

JM Would both phases that you referred to, Rebekah in Genesis 24 and also the reference in this chapter, find expression in assembly service, that is Rebekah moving typically towards Christ and Christ moving towards the assembly?

AJG I think so. We get in fact both sides in Genesis 24, because Isaac went out into the field to meet her, and he lifted up his eyes, and "behold" it says, "camels were coming," showing that he was stirred as he saw the movement of the camels.

JM Does this call for spirituality? The apostle says, "This mystery is great." What is the force of that?

AJG Well, I think it is just to impress us with the fact that it is mystery; that is, our natural minds cannot enter into it. It is really, I think, to cast us upon the Spirit of God, and our being conscious that we are cast upon God would show itself in prayer. It is a mystery, but then it is not a mystery that is beyond us, because the Spirit searches all things, yea the depths of God.

CPP Might I ask what is implied in the thought of the assembly being glorious?

AJG The impression it conveys to me is that she corresponds perfectly with Christ. I do not think there could be any greater glory than that in moral features and intelligence, she should correspond perfectly with Christ. To answer perfectly to His desires seems to me to be the acme of glory for the assembly.

RHG The nourishing and cherishing is because she is His own flesh.

AJG Yes, quite so.

JWH "Glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages," would be the consummation of all this, would it? If He presents it to Himself glorious, it is of that character that can go through eternally.

AJG I think so, and then it is as entirely with Him and with no disparity between her and Him, she is available under His hand for the ascription of glory to God.

CHRISTIANITY AS CHARACTERISED BY MYSTERY (4)

*Romans 11: 25 - 36; 1 Corinthians 15: 51 - 58; Revelation 10: 5 - 7;
Revelation 11: 15 - 19*

AJG We have been looking at the subject of mystery as characteristic of Christianity. We came to the subject of "*the mystery*," that is, the assembly as the body of Christ, and I thought this morning these scriptures might show that the element of mystery enters also into God's ways, His ways with Israel and the Gentiles as in Romans 11; and then the way that victory is brought in so that God is displayed on earth as completely victorious over all the power of evil. Then in Revelation we have the thought of the mystery of God being completed, which seems to be a very wide thought and refers, I think, to the mystery as to why God has allowed evil so long to prevail on the earth. For many centuries there has been little or no evidence of God being in control, for evil has largely had sway, but in the end it is seen that the mystery of God is completed. What is to be noticed in all these three passages in Romans and Corinthians and Revelation is that each of them leads up to an ascription of praise to God. Romans leading up to the great doxology, and in Corinthians what is unfolded impels the apostle to say, "thanks to God, who gives us the victory," (we have the victory already, before it is brought in publicly and that is intended to make us steadfast in the testimony), and then in Revelation the four and twenty elders celebrate the praises of God saying, "We give thee thanks, Lord God Almighty, He who is, and who was, that thou hast taken thy great power and hast reigned," Revelation 11: 17. One great feature, I think, in contemplating the mystery connected with God's ways is that it results in praise to God.

The passage we commenced with in Romans speaks of the goodness and severity of God; at the present moment Israel is experiencing the severity of God and we Gentiles are experiencing the goodness of God; but there is a warning that we also shall be cut off if we do not abide in goodness, and that cutting off is very imminent. Apostasy is rapidly covering Christendom and that means that the Gentiles are no longer abiding in goodness, so that the moment of their cutting off and coming under abiding severity is close at hand. That will become the occasion for Israel to be taken up afresh; but what it is leading up to is that, whether it be Israel, or whether it be the nations as brought into blessing, all is to be in the sense of mercy. God has concluded all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all.

WHG Is your thought as to the expression of praise that it finds an outlet in the form of service on Lord's day morning or on other occasions?

AJG Well, I would not like to say anything that would lay down in any way a kind of prescribed order as to what should find expression in assembly service on Lord's day morning, but the great thing is that we should become enlarged in our apprehension of God in the various glories in which He is to be apprehended, and there is a distinct glory in connection with the wisdom of His ways. So that this passage says, "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways!" And yet I suppose as having the Spirit of God, we are intended to be able to come to some understanding at least of His ways, so that we are capable thus of saying, "For of him, and through him, and for him are all things: to him be glory for ever."

JE So that the ways of God should not entirely be a mystery to us. The apostle's exercise here is that we should not be ignorant of this mystery.

AJG That is it. They are mysterious so far as what is public is concerned. Without the Spirit no one could understand God's ways or could have any apprehension that there has been any definite line of His ways in the course of things on the earth, but we are given to understand that there has been a definite way of God all through. It is for us to enquire into it so that we become impressed with divine wisdom.

JST Would you say a word about, "and so all Israel shall be saved"?

AJG Well, that is Israel in the mind of God - the elect Israel. It says in an earlier chapter, "for not all are Israel which are of Israel," Romans 9: 6. That is to say, it is not Israel according to flesh although it will be those who are truly of Abraham's stock.

JST I thought there was a most interesting allusion to it - in the prophets when Amos said that God would sift the house of Israel as a man sifts corn, yet shall not the least grain fall to the earth. I was connecting it with that; so all Israel, the true Israel shall be saved.

AJG Yes, there is no doubt about that. All Israel will be saved, as you say, not the least grain will fall to the earth. So that the elect of God in Israel will be brought to light, but they will be brought to light on the ground of pure mercy; because not only has Israel failed in its responsibility as a nation and forfeited all rights to blessing on that score, but has even rejected the gospel, the gospel which went out to all nations. It was open to any Jew to come into blessing as a man and not as a Jew. The nation as a whole has rejected that too, and hence Israel is left entirely without any hope save in the mercy of God.

EGJ In the service of 2 Chronicles 7, there is a definite note as to mercy or loving-kindness. It speaks of the instruments of music which David the king had made to praise Jehovah, for His loving-kindness endureth for ever. Would that fit in with what you were saying as to the service of God?

AJG I take it that we are tuned as instruments to celebrate God's mercy, and Israel will do the same on the earth in a coming day. It says in Ephesians, "God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us," chapter 2: 4. There should be a sense of mercy prevailing in the spirits of the saints of today as there will be in the elect Israel in a coming day.

JE Does the history of Jacob, as such, illustrate for us the ways of God in reaching a certain end? I was thinking of Jacob at the end worshipping on his staff. Would this link on with the end of this chapter?

AJG I think so.

RHG Have you in mind that the consideration of the ways of God would lead us to the end? God alone could reach the end He has in view, and He alone could reach it in the way in which He reaches it.

AJG Yes, I think so, and it is a subject of inquiry for us (not that one can say much about it) as, for instance, why God in His ways waits so many centuries before Christ is introduced, and why in connection with His ways He takes up Abraham and makes of him a nation and so on. The more you think of God's ways on the earth, the more you feel there is a great scope for inquiry as to what God had in mind in the detail of His ways. This chapter does throw some little light on it, and shows that He had in mind that everything should be brought in in the deep sense of mercy.

WCB Is that what really leads up to the ascription of praise, because the gifts and calling of God are not subject to repentance, and He brings them to pass in the sovereignty of mercy?

AJG Yes, I think so. He gives promises sovereignly, and faith can count on those promises in the darkest day and hold God to them. I believe He loves that faith should do that, but then faith has to rely on the mercy of God. When everything breaks down in the hands of man, faith has to rely on the mercy of God, and on that only, whether it be the Gentiles as brought into blessing in the assembly or the Jews as brought into blessing on the earth, all is of pure mercy.

GD Are all mankind the recipients of God's mercy?

AJG I think they are objects of His mercy, but some may refuse His mercy. It says of the Jews that they did not believe, "so these also have now not

believed in your mercy," Romans 11: 31, that is, in mercy shown to the Gentiles, they have not believed in it, and hence they have cut themselves off from the blessing that might have been theirs through the reception of the gospel, and of course many of the Jews will suffer eternal loss through doing so. The Jews nationally will yet become objects of mercy and will be restored to blessing on the earth on the basis of mercy, pure and simple.

RHG What is the distinction between His judgments and His ways?

AJG I am not sure one can say very much: His judgments would be the application to detail of what is right, the principle of what is right, and hence that would enter into what is governmental; that is that if, for instance, Israel as a whole rejects the Messiah, it is right as a matter of judgment that they should come into His judgment, but on the other hand, what about the promises of God? Hence God's ways, conciliating His judgments, so to speak, with His promises, have to come in, and He retires to the rights He has in mercy, founded in the death of Christ.

RHG So Abraham was justified by faith because he believed God, and yet he was brought in on the ground of mercy.

AJG Quite so.

RMY Would you say that the consideration of this mystery, and indeed of the other two, is calculated to have a moral effect upon us? I was thinking of the word as to high-mindedness.

AJG Yes. I think that, because the present position in the history of Christendom is that the Gentiles are just about to be cast off. Apostasy is nearly arriving at its head and hence in the light of that, the word is addressed to us not to be high-minded, but fear. Godly fear is what befits us as subjects of mercy, so that we abide in goodness and do not do despite to the goodness of God.

CPP Does this element of mercy as in the soul, lay a moral foundation for the moving on to what is connected with the eternal thoughts of God and His service at the present time?

AJG Yes, I think so. We enter into it; it is according to the glory of God's grace and the riches of His grace too; but I think as subdued, as having a sense of mercy, (God who is rich in mercy, and the mercy seat is the great centre, so to speak, of the moral universe) we come back to the glory of mercy, and His rights in mercy established through the death of Christ as the great basis on which the glory of the world to come is brought in.

JST Would you say a word as to the distinction of mercy and grace?

AJG Mercy, I think, has reference to our condition as having no hope apart from mercy because of what we were. Grace in a sense is what adapts itself to our condition as creatures, not simply as needing mercy, but there is the glory of grace that sets us up, for instance, in sonship according to God's eternal thought. That has no reference to our lost condition and is not exactly a question of mercy, but it is a question of great grace that God should have such thoughts in mind for those who are only His creatures.

CPP Does the failure that has come in leave God free to work out His own sovereign thoughts of love, no-one being able to claim anything, and He free to do as He will?

AJG Exactly. All is on that principle of the sovereignty of God's mercy - "I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy," Romans 9: 15. But then it says, "and whom he will he hardens," verse 18. It is not that God does that as taking any pleasure in it, but that if a person hardens himself against God's mercy and against His rights, God may fasten it on him and he will become permanently hardened, and in that way a vessel for God to show in him the greatness of His power and wrath. Whatever happens God will be glorified.

CPP Does the expression *through Him* involve both the work of redemption and the work of the Spirit in the saints?

AJG I would say so. It seems to me that all who are brought into blessing have to come to it that they owe their blessing entirely to God in every way, as originating the thoughts of blessing and as carrying them through, and then God Himself is the great end in it all, so it says, "to him be glory for ever. Amen."

JE It really gathers everything up, does it not? He is the great origin of all, and all instrumentality through which things are brought to pass is of God, and then finally He is the great end, the great objective, is He not?

AJG Yes, exactly. Both heaven and earth are to testify to this, so that the assembly is brought into a position of blessing in the heavenlies, supreme quality of blessing you might say, but then Israel is brought into the foremost place of blessing on the earth, so that heaven and earth are both alike to resound with the celebration of God's mercy and the appreciation of His glory.

EK Would that be illustrated in the ark of the covenant? The mercy seat is there.

AJG Yes, the ark, whether we regard it as the ark of the covenant or the ark of the testimony, is, I believe, a type of Christ as mighty on God's behalf to establish His own thoughts, to carry them through from God's side in power.

One great glory of Christ is that by means of His death He has established immutably, in righteousness, this ground of mercy on which God can effectuate all His thoughts, but it needed a divine Person to become Man in order to do that; no-one else was great enough for it, and hence that is the glory typified in the ark; a divine Person in manhood, establishing through His death this abiding ground on which God effectuates His thoughts.

RHG Is that why the apostle says here, "O depth of riches", that the work of redemption is involved in it?

AJG Well, it is. "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" But this is connected not so much with His counsels as with His ways. There is glory connected with God's counsels that He should have conceived and desired the great things He has, and then there is the wisdom of His ways, too. And the remarkable thing is that His ways also are hidden from the eyes of men. So that all along the line we see it is God's glory to conceal a thing.

CBS Would the ways of God lie behind the imprisonment of the apostle at Philippi in the formation of this chosen vessel for the mystery?

AJG I think we can see that God exercises control over everything. I believe the more we know God the more we see that, and that He makes everything work out as it says, "all things *work together* for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose," Romans 8: 28. So that things work together, God shapes them, whoever may be the agency or instrumentality. God is in control and shapes all things; that makes them work together for good for those who love Him.

AJW Is it all brought about by the deliverer coming out of Zion?

AJG Yes, nothing could come to pass for Israel apart from that; but then that is a question of mercy, and a deliverer coming in at the right time. For the moment, Israel is cast off. As regards the glad tidings they are enemies on our account, but then God has not forgotten His promises nor has He forgotten the fathers; they are beloved for the fathers' sake, and when once the unbelief of the Gentiles is complete, then God will revert to Israel.

CPP Is it not part of the glory of God that not only has man's failure not hindered Him in what He had in mind, but He has been able to make use of it to carry out His thoughts?

AJG Exactly. I believe the more we think of these things the more we shall see that everything from first to last is under divine control, and that what may be, and is, failure and breakdown in the hands of men, becomes the occasion under God's hand for bringing in His own thoughts in beautiful order so that

everything, so to speak, fits in. God has not had to bring in some afterthought to meet an unforeseen exigency that has arisen.

RHG It is not only the wisdom of God but the knowledge of God.

AJG That is a further thought. God's knowledge as well as His wisdom, and that is to enter into *our* knowledge of God, because the assembly, is to be fitted to ascribe glory to God unto all generations of the age of ages, and I have no doubt that the praises of the assembly will give a lead and tone to the praises of the rest of the universe.

TRY Do the ways of God apply equally to the assembly and Israel?

AJG I think this chapter shows that. Publicly Israel were God's people on earth, and there were certain promises to which God was committed, and this part of Romans shows how God's ways fit in with His promises. His promises do not fail, and yet government comes in; Israel having rejected the Messiah has to be cast off, yet during the period of the casting off of Israel God brings in the assembly; that which has been hidden from generations. He works this out now in this period of Israel being cast off, and then the very fact that He does that becomes a means of the provoking to jealousy the Israel in whom He will yet work, for God will open the eyes of the elect Israel to see that the Gentiles have come into wonderful mercy while they have been blinded, and that will encourage them to cast themselves upon the mercy of God.

JST The better we know His ways, the more we will understand His acts, according to the scripture you have quoted, "made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel," Psalm 103: 7.

AJG Exactly; if we understand God's ways we shall certainly understand His acts, but often we see His acts and do not understand them because we do not know God.

JSB Before passing on to your next scripture you would say a deepened sense of mercy should go on conjointly in our souls with the revelation of the mystery to our affections, so that we might be preserved from anything that is presumptive. One was thinking of the great truths in Ephesians and how the apostle is able to speak of God who is rich in mercy.

AJG Yes, I am sure that is right. The epistle to the Ephesians bears that out, it not only says, "God, who is rich in mercy," but later on in that chapter it says, "*remember* that ye, once nations in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that called circumcision in the flesh done with the hand; that ye were at that time without Christ... and without God in the world," chapter 2: 11, 12. We are to remember that.

WHG In expressing praise to God on this line, how would you address Him? Would you bring in the name of the Father?

AJG "One God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all," Ephesians 4: 6. We know God in that light, so whether we actually make use of the name of Father in addressing Him or not, it is in that light we know Him, that gives colour to our approach to Him.

RH Would you say something of the glory in this chapter? "To him be glory for ever".

AJG I think glory is just celebrating the particular feature that we have apprehended of God; it may be His love, it may be His wisdom, it may be His power, it may be His mercy, whatever features are before the soul, glory is that we are in the spirit of worship as appreciating them.

In Corinthians we have the mystery. "Behold," the apostle says, "I tell you a mystery: We shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye," 1 Corinthians 15: 51, 52. I believe that is to affect us. How very near we are to eternal things, to the spiritual and glorious condition which God has marked out for us. It will only take the twinkling of an eye to bring it in. Hence we should be concerned as to placing no hindrance in the way of the Spirit of God completing the work of moral conformation, because the work of bodily conformation will only require a twinkling of an eye. What is taking time is the process of moral conformation.

RHG So that we are to anticipate by faith what God is about to do?

AJG I think so. If faithfulness to the Lord necessitates our going to the wall publicly, if it should necessitate even death, the Christian is in the light of victory because he has this mystery in his soul, and victory which will be displayed on earth too, that is the great thing; resurrection does not take us off the earth, this light is given us in order to establish our souls in the sense of victory while we are still here, so that we realise that it is worth while to commit ourselves wholly to the present testimony.

RMY If the first Scripture would lead us to humble-mindedness, this one would save us from being too backward, would it not, and encourage us to go on to commit ourselves?

AJG Yes, it has in mind that we should be "immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord." That is addressed to all, brothers and sisters alike; it is not a question of gift, it is a question of all the saints. "So then," he says, "my beloved brethren, be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." There is some work for

everyone to do, every brother and sister, in connection with the testimony, because 'in the Lord' involves the testimony.

JE Is not the truth of this mystery intended to deliver us in every sense from being mystical as to that which lies ahead? The truth of the resurrection, the changing of the body, indeed the coming of the Lord, are all wrapped in absolute mystery as far as the natural man is concerned; but the apostle says, "Behold, I *tell* you a mystery," as if the truth of it would be unfolded to the saints, and hence we are not mystical as to the matter.

AJG No. It is not necessary that all should pass through death, "We shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed," he says. There is a divine necessity about these things, "For this corruptible *must* needs put on incorruptibility, and this mortal put on immortality"; if it did not, there would be the appearance of the defeat of God, but there has to be displayed on earth complete victory, that God is not in any sense or at any point overcome by the machinations of the devil.

JWH Is it not to be a present matter with us that we are conscious of being given this victory?

AJG It is, that is the whole point; he says, "Thanks to God, who gives us the victory," so that you enter into your part in the testimony, knowing it is a conflict, that Satan is against the truth, but in the full assurance that you are on the winning side. That is, there is no doubt at all that whatever the truth necessitates you can commit yourself to it, you need not fear the consequences; the consequences may involve suffering, indeed they will in some form or other: they may involve even death, but in the light of this mystery you are assured that you are on the side of victory from the very beginning.

RHG Would the acceptance of the truth that this corruptible must put on incorruptibility preserve us from seeking to add anything to the first man?

AJG It would. Life and incorruptibility have already come to light in Christ; that is, in Christ Jesus there is an order of manhood that is entirely incorruptible, and we by the Spirit are intended to be formed according to Christ so that morally we should be incorruptible now. It says, "every one begotten of God does not sin, but he that has been begotten of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him," 1 John 5: 18. There should be no element of corruption in a moral sense marking the saints now, but then what they are as wrought in by God and as created in Christ Jesus, necessitates a condition of incorruptibility; a bodily condition that is in keeping with the moral incorruptibility that characterises them.

WCB In the first scripture we see that God reaches His end in regard to Israel by mercy founded on the death of Christ; but here is this not, as it were, a greater triumph for God in that He puts forth divine power that every trace of that which sin has brought in is put away in the saints living being changed and the dead being raised incorruptible?

AJG Yes, I think so. It is a question of God being shown to be completely victorious on the earth in a scene where the challenge to Him has taken place; death is a great public dishonour to God, you might say, but the prophet Isaiah looks forward to the day when death will be swallowed up in victory, as it is quoted here. We have it in Isaiah 25: 8.

JM Does that suggest the two sides of the victory? There is a sense in which the saints privately are in the good of the victory now, but does it not await a moment of time when it will be publicly displayed that God is victorious in this matter?

AJG Yes, the light of it is given to us now in order to make us steadfast in the work of the Lord; it is not intended simply as light as to something that is going to take place in the future, but it is intended to have that present stimulating effect that we are always abounding in the work of the Lord.

CPP When results outwardly perhaps are very small, or even not apparent, would it encourage us that even so this work is not in vain?

AJG Yes, I am sure of that. It says, "your toil is not in vain in the Lord." The thing we are to be concerned about is whether our activities are *in the Lord*, whether they are really in the recognition of the rights of the Lord and what He would have us do. If that is so, it is not in vain.

JE It seems clear that the final solving of the issue as to good and evil must be consummated on earth, the scene where the issue was introduced. Then, in principle, does this really work out in assembly administration today amongst the people of God - every matter that arises, in principle, is a question of good and evil, is it not, and the solving of it, and bringing in the power of God?

AJG Quite so. For instance, it says in 1 Corinthians 1: 30, "of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God," and other things, so that Christ is made wisdom to us, which means no question can arise in connection with our position here in testimony as to which Christ cannot afford wisdom for its solution. There is no reason why the assembly should be overcome at any point; whatever Satan may seek to introduce that has in view the corruption of the truth or the scattering of the saints, there is wisdom in Christ to know how to deal with it.

JSB Would you say a word as to the full title being given in relation to the victory "by our Lord Jesus Christ"? Is that for the encouragement of our hearts?

AJG I think so. It is a kind of note of glory in saying "by our Lord Jesus Christ." The very mention of the full title of Christ in that way seems to bring in a glorious standard under which you are working.

RHG As we accept this truth, does death under the hand of the Lord become a servant for the saint, for God does not dispose of death, does He, at this point? Death is swallowed up in victory, but death continues until the completion of God's ways, for the last enemy that is destroyed is death.

AJG Yes, it does; so we have to learn how to use death; "death works in us," the apostle says, "but life in you," 2 Corinthians 4: 12. The working of death helps to maintain us in lowliness and dependence on Christ for power, and it becomes an expression of love. So the apostle says, "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus," verse 10, that is, he and his fellow workers were prepared to go the whole length of death for the sake of the saints, but they were encouraged to go that way by contemplation of the dying of Jesus.

CPP The apostle says in this chapter, "Daily I die." Does he stimulate others to move into the testimony in the light of the triumph of resurrection as the answer to being baptised for the dead?

AJG Exactly; so the young ones who belong to the Lord Jesus and have received the Holy Spirit should see to it that they take their place in the testimony, that they allow themselves to be enrolled. It is a question of being numbered, and submitting to being numbered. In Numbers 1 the tabernacle was already set up, that is, the testimony was there, God was dwelling among His people, the conditions that were suitable to God were secured; but then that had to be defended, and the Lord called upon His people to submit to numbering. Numbering is very affecting because it means that the Lord is looking round to see how many He can rely upon. Can He rely upon this one, can He rely upon that one? It is a question of each one by his poll coming forward and yielding himself to the claims of the Lord to be available for the defence of the testimony in this world, and to be in it with the saints, not in an isolated way. They were all to take their place in their tribes in their allotted camps, according to God's appointment. All that we can well afford to take up in the light of this scripture because victory is ours; we have this mystery given to us, and it is only a twinkling of an eye that will be necessary to bring us actually into victory, so near is it as that.

In Revelation we have the thought of the mystery of God to be completed. In Colossians 2 we have the expression the mystery of God, but evidently in a more limited sense as referring to *the* mystery, that is, Christ and the assembly; but in this passage in Revelation 10 the angel who is seen standing on the sea and on the earth, who is doubtless the Lord Himself, swears that "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the trumpet, the mystery of God also shall be completed, as he has made known the glad tidings to his own bondmen the prophets," verse 7. Daniel at one point asked, How long? and he was told that he must seal up the words of his prophecy and he should stand in his lot in the last days. He was given to understand that there was a considerable period of waiting to be gone through at that time before there should be an answer to all the evil that was developing and would develop on the earth. But now we come to a point in the vision given to John where the mystery of God is completed.

JE How would you define the glad tidings in this verse?

AJG I think, as far as I understand it, it refers to the light given to His bondmen the prophets, that evil is not going to be allowed to have its way for ever. There will be an end to this mysterious condition of things, that evil should have been allowed to go on so long and rise to such heights.

JE Do you think it might be said that even Enoch had it in his day?

AJG There is no doubt about that, he prophesied as to the coming of the Lord with His holy myriads; the light of that would be glad tidings to Enoch.

JM Why is this connected with the prophets?

AJG The prophets are those to whom God has revealed His mind from time to time, who have been used to sustain the faith of His people. It says in Hosea, "And by a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved," chapter 12: 13. That is the principle, that the prophetic word is intended to deliver God's people from the world, and as having been delivered from the world they are preserved by the prophetic word.

CPP The word in Jude that was referred to speaks of the Lord having come amidst His holy myriads. Does that show the triumph of God on the line of good before He takes up the matter of dealing with evil?

AJG Yes, I think so. I am glad you referred to that, because I think we can see that the presence of God's people on the earth in the midst of evil for so long is being used by God to develop in us appreciation of Christ, and of good, and abhorrence of evil; there is formation in the very presence of evil, of what is of God so that we might have part in the administration of good in the day

to come. God's thought is that the good that is in Himself and is known in Christ should be administered mediatorially through the City, and that requires a vast process of formation, because the vessel is so immense, and the process requires the whole of this period of the Spirit. I have no doubt there was a work of God in other generations before the Spirit came, as well, which will no doubt have a place; we do not know much, however, about other heavenly families as to what place they will fill.

JNG Does this mystery refer to the way God has been made known in the whole created realm?

AJG As far as I know, the mystery of God here refers to the mystery of His ways in allowing evil to predominate upon the earth so long, why it was, and what He has been doing in it, so to speak.

JE Would it not cover the whole range of God's ways on the earth from the beginning to the end? Is it not encouraging to see that God has those who are sympathetic with Him in these matters; for instance, persons of whom it can be said, His own bondmen, and there is the word in Jude that the Lord has His holy myriads?

AJG Yes, I think so. I think we can see that all God's ways concentrate on the assembly; so as to His ways in the past - think of the light He gave to Abel, the light He gave to Enoch, and then the light He gave to Noah, and so on; all was constructive and cumulative - really all had our day in mind. God was working out principles stage by stage in the lives of men - not setting it out merely in the Scriptures, but working it out in the lives of men - in order that we might be instructed, because this vessel is to be the fulness of Christ, a vessel capable of expressing God perfectly. Not only has, there been this extended period of formation lasting over 2000 years, but a lot of preparatory work had to be done in previous centuries, working out the truth in detail in the lives of men and women that it may become illustrated for us and become clearer to us. I believe all that enters into it.

JST Is all this really an answer to what was said so long ago, that He giveth not account of any of His matters? It seemed insuperable there in the book of Job. They had to be content with that, but now we understand the mystery of God in some measure.

AJG I think that is right, that there was much that was incomprehensible before Christ came, but Christ having come and the Spirit having come, I believe in this day of the assembly everything becomes clear.

WHG What you say makes what we have in Ephesians 3 intensely interesting; the principalities and powers who have followed all God's ways down the ages

now see His wisdom in the assembly.

AJG Yes, I think so. So in Revelation 11 it says, "The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of his Christ is come, and he shall reign to the ages of ages," verse 15, and immediately it says the twenty four elders who sit upon their thrones before God fell upon their faces and worshipped God saying, "We give thee thanks, Lord God Almighty, He who is, and who was, that thou hast taken thy great power and hast reigned... and to destroy those that destroy the earth," verse 17, 18. It is as though there is a complete answer now to all that has been on earth in testimony here for God in suffering, and God Himself vindicated in His ways.

JM Would you say a little as to the expression, Lord God Almighty?

AJG Well, it is the twenty four elders who speak, so it is a company that includes other heavenly saints beside the assembly, it is not normal assembly speaking, so to speak (though of course the assembly can compass every light in which God is known), but it is a title of God in relation to the creation - Lord God, but with the addition, in Almighty, of a reference to His power.

JE Is it not calculated to induce reverence, and perhaps we need to be a little more reverent in our attitude, particularly in our approach to divine Persons, do you think? The word here is to those who *fear* Thy Name.

AJG Yes, "He who *is*," first, and then, "who *was*," so it is God in a personal sense Himself who is before the souls of the twenty four elders, who are in a spirit of worship.

RHG Have you in mind that it awaited the assembly for the completion of this matter? God appeared to Abraham of old and said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" Genesis 18: 17. His ways were apparent, in a measure, were they not, but the end God had in view did not come to light until the assembly was brought into view?

AJG No, I think that is right, the assembly is the great masterpiece of divine wisdom and comes in near the end, not quite at the end, but very near the end of God's ways.

AJW Do we see in this chapter that God takes possession of the earth and the sea, and therefore evil could be allowed no longer?

AJG Yes, that seems to be so. In Revelation 10 it says the angel, "set his right foot on the sea, and the left upon the earth, and cried with a loud voice as a lion roars," verse 2, 3. It is a very stimulating scripture as showing how invincible and irresistible the Lord will be as He comes forth to take up His

rights and establish the rights of God on the earth; the earth and the sea are claimed immediately; it is the whole scene in that way.

AJW Evil being allowed, it is not apparent that the earth belongs to the Lord, but the mystery then will be ended, He takes possession.

AJG Yes. The delay for the moment is understood by us but it is not going to last much longer; that is, the time is appointed, "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the trumpet, the mystery of God also shall be completed," verse 7.

CPP It is a matter of the divine calendar is it? God is never hurried and never delays.

AJG Yes, it is a question of our being formed in patience at the moment; there is the patience of the Christ, we are to have our hearts directed into the love of God, and the patience of the Christ. The Lord is waiting in patience until the moment ordained of the Father, and we are to be with Him in the spirit of patience.

RHG So that every little bit of suffering in the maintenance of the rights of Christ and of God will find its recompense in that day?

AJG Yes, it will. There is the recompense to be given to "thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to those who fear thy name, small and great," Revelation 11: 18. It is remarkable the compass that is covered in that, coming down to "those who fear thy name, small and great".

RHG Does it bring out the faithfulness of God to His saints right down through the ages, magnifying God in that way?

AJG Yes, in that nothing is overlooked in those who fear His name. In Ezekiel, when the iniquity of Jerusalem had come to its head and God was about to visit it in judgment, He sent one to put a mark on every one who even sighed or cried because of the abominations that were committed, showing that God does not fail to take notice of the least evidence of the fear of Himself.

CCS Does the worship mentioned here in Revelation indicate the great glory that God has in mind for His creature? Is that the great end in view? Jacob has already been referred to.

AJG I think so. God desires worship, and there is no greater blessing or privilege conferred on the creature than to be brought to know God, and in the presence of God to be bowed in a spirit of worship.

JWH Is it not suggestive in what is said here, "He who is, and who was?" God Himself must be recognised in supremacy, and then all that He has acted in, in

power, is brought into accord with His own thoughts in relation to His ways?

AJG Yes, I think it is very beautiful that the end of God's ways is that "He who is, and who was" - God in His supremacy in the creation, becomes an object of worship.

JE Why is the temple referred to in verse 19?

AJG I think it is still the idea of what is secret being opened up to John; the temple all through Revelation is the inner shrine, referring to the holiest or the holy place. The temple of God in heaven was opened and the ark of the covenant was seen in His temple. I think it is the thought of John being allowed to see what has been a secret, so to speak. It has been there all along, the ark of the covenant is there. God has not forgotten anything that He is committed to.

JE And does the light of these things become available to us in the measure in which we are together as the temple of God now?

AJG Yes, I think so.

JM Is there not much to encourage us on the line of recompense to which you have referred? It is interesting that the scripture in Corinthians finishes with that, "Knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord".

AJG Yes. God always, I think, recognises that side of things, the side of recompense to those who suffer for the truth's sake, see for example, 2 Thessalonians 1: 6, 7.

CHRISTIANITY AS CHARACTERISED BY MYSTERY (5)

1 Timothy 2: 1; 3; 1 Timothy 3: 14 - 16; 1 Timothy 6: 1 - 12

AJG The *mystery* of piety is referred to in 1 Timothy 3: 16. Piety is the bringing in of God into the circumstances of our human life, that life being regulated by the light in which God is revealed and known by us. We are viewed in this epistle as constituting the house of God "which is... the pillar and base of the truth." The saints are viewed as identified with the truth and expressive of it, or they are intended to be. That makes our walk down here amongst men of great importance, as it says in chapter 6: 1, "that the name of God and the teaching be not blasphemed." Piety is an important constituent in the testimony.

I believe the more the Lord is opening up the higher levels of Christianity the more necessary it is to look to our foundations and roots. The apostle's prayer "that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love," Ephesians 3: 17, is stated where the heavenly side is stressed. It is most important to see that our foundations are stable, and they are only stable as governed by the knowledge of God. So I thought that, after what has been before us already, piety might be a profitable subject, especially as the thought of mystery is connected with it.

The understanding of mystery depends upon our having the Spirit of God and having the knowledge of God. We have something of which the world around knows nothing; it is that which constitutes Christianity; mystery in its different features.

Following on our knowledge of God as our Saviour God, it works out in features of "supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings... for all men."

Then it says, "For God is one." The God we know is the God whom all men may know. Our knowledge of God is intended to work out in our being marked by making supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings.

Supplications suggest what is earnest; with prayer there is not the same intensity of exercise as with supplication. Prayer involves intelligence.

Intercession means we have a position of nearness to God which we can use on behalf of men. It places the believer in a privileged position as marked by this feature in relation to all men. This applies to individual, household, and assembly prayer.

The first epistle to Timothy presents the truth of the house of God, which does not refer merely to saints as assembled, for we are always the house of God on account of the fact that the Spirit is indwelling us. Our conduct in the house

of God should be in keeping with the truth of the gospel, that the knowledge of God is there and He is the Saviour God. God is one; He is not one God to believers and another as presented to men. Our knowledge of God works out in this attitude of prayer for all men. As praying for all men we shall not have strong feelings of resentment against men. If people had the impression that we were praying for them constantly, it ought to affect them.

After exhorting that prayer should be made for all men, the apostle says, "for this is good and acceptable before our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."

Then there is to be prayer for kings and all that are in dignity that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all piety and gravity. We are here on this earth amongst men and the situation is a desperate one. Saints bring God into the situation; they pray continually and they intercede as those who have power with God; they pray for kings and all that are in dignity that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life. There was never more need for this than at the present time. Nearness to God is necessary for intercession. Abraham interceded for Sodom; he said, "Wilt thou also cause the righteous to perish with the wicked?" Genesis 18: 23. He was a friend of God, near to Him, and he pleaded with Him; he pleaded with God for fifty, saying perhaps there are fifty righteous in that city and God would spare the city for the sake of fifty, and God said He would forgive the place for the sake of fifty. Abraham continued to plead and he went right down to ten, and Jehovah said He would not destroy that city if there were ten righteous there. He pleaded with God in a becoming way, saying, "I, who am dust and ashes," verse 27. Therefore, he had power with God. He stops at ten, recognising that, if the city was so wicked that there were not ten righteous persons in it, it was only right that it should be destroyed. The intercession of Abraham had power with God, and Lot was saved.

It is not here a question of praying for *the* king, but for whoever the king may be at the moment - "kings and all that are in dignity" covering any form of government, for God uses government to keep lawlessness in check, therefore the saints should pray for it, and the more so as lawlessness increases.

The world sees nothing of what is going on in the houses of the saints. Power is being wielded of which the world knows nothing. These things are in mystery. If anarchy arose, there would be very little opportunity of bringing the gospel before men. Assembly truth cannot be developed without a measure of peace; we need peaceful conditions for it.

Spirituality is not the same as piety, but piety is a necessary foundation for spirituality. It says of Simeon in Luke 2: 25, "this man was just and *pious*

...and the Holy Spirit was upon him" and then "he came in the Spirit into the temple." Spirituality is stressed and before that it is said he was just and pious. None of us will be truly spiritual unless there is with us practical righteousness and piety. It says of Cornelius that he was pious and fearing God with all his house.

One line running through this epistle is the thought of the truth. The gospel is the public testimony in the world; God is known in the glad tidings, and the saints as committed to the glad tidings are to be careful that the name of God is not blasphemed. The assembly is the pillar and base of the truth; it supports the truth. God desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; that is the truth as to God. The base conveys the idea of support and the pillar that which stands out prominently, it is not hidden; it is what God is in the light in which He is revealed in the gospel. Therefore we should be careful not to harbour hard feelings against men, or to have a complaining spirit against the government, for it is very easy, as lawlessness increases, if we are not watchful, to be affected by the spirit of the world. James says, "According to his own will begat he us by the *word of truth*, that we should be a certain first-fruits of his creatures," chapter 1: 18.

Ques Do sisters come into the matter of supplications, prayers and intercessions?

AJG Undoubtedly they do. It says in verse 8, "I will therefore that the men pray in every place" and then the women are brought in, "In like manner also that the women in decent deportment and dress... what becomes women making profession of the fear of God, by good works." The sisters may surely be in this matter of supplications, prayers and intercessions privately in the homes, not that they would pray audibly in the presence of a brother, but they have their part.

The saints know the truth and as knowing it they practise it. The assembly normally would not allow anything that is contrary to the truth; they would maintain the truth at all costs.

Ques Is the thought of the house of God carried through in the assembly now?

AJG God dwelt of old in the tabernacle and in the temple, and now dwells in the assembly; that is the force of what we have in Psalm 93: 5, "Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thy house, O Jehovah, *for ever*." At the present time the assembly is the house of God because He is dwelling in it by the Spirit. The house of God is where God dwells; where He is known and that is in the assembly; it is not the assembly as convened only, but we

are always the house of God, hence this matter of behaviour should always have weight with us in our movements amongst men and at all times.

"The mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh." verse 16. This verse which speaks of the mystery of piety brings out the fact that God Himself in the Person of Christ was actually manifest in flesh so that piety was set out in Christ. Hebrews 5 referring to the Lord as a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec, says, "Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to save him out of death, with strong crying and tears; (and having been heard because of his piety)". That is to be continued with us. The mystery of piety is that God Himself was here in the Person of Christ; Christ came into conditions of human life. The Lord moved here in dependence and in contentment, putting His trust in God. These are the principles on which He went through this world, as knowing God; that is to enter into our apprehension of piety. It is the mystery of piety which we learn in that way. Outwardly there was not much to suggest that God was with Him or for Him; His circumstances were very trying. At the same time the Lord went through and the secret was that God was with Him.

Piety, if practised amongst us, develops obedience, dependence and confidence in God, and therefore restfulness of spirit and all that is conducive to the right atmosphere for service. If unrest marks us, the service of God will be impeded.

The knowledge of the truth, the light in which God has come out to us in the gospel, is the great power for piety. Piety is the knowledge of God brought into our everyday circumstances.

Then it says, "justified in the Spirit"; not justified outwardly, but in the Spirit. I believe that applies to us in principle as moving in piety. Although you may not get your trying circumstances altered, you have the confirmation in your soul that you are pleasing to God and that God is with you.

Ques What does "the mystery of piety is great" mean?

AJG It is to stress how great it is, so that we should not think little of piety, for it is a great matter and we need to understand the secret which underlies it. It says in Romans 8: 31, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who against us?" All this enters into the thought of practical piety. The more we take account of what God has done and what He is doing, the more it satisfies us that God is entirely for us and nothing can separate us from the love of God. At the end of Romans 8 the apostle says, "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,

shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," verses 38, 39. In the circumstances of our life, even when we cannot understand things, we can feel assured that we shall come through and that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Ques Would prayer and fasting come in in connection with piety?

AJG Yes. These are features that would mark piety. Fasting with us is not only the disallowance of the flesh but abstaining from legitimate things because of the urgency of the testimony.

In Psalm 16 there are many touches as to piety. It begins, "Preserve me, O God: for I trust in thee." Then it brings in the thought of contentment and separation from evil. All these things work out in the circumstances of human life, for it is the bringing in of the knowledge of God into our circumstances. Then death is taken up in perfect confidence in God.

Ques Would "justified in the Spirit" come in here?

AJG It is not in the sense of justification on the principle of faith, but the path of piety is justified; not justified outwardly as to our circumstances but the Spirit bears witness that you are on lines pleasing to God, so that the Passage in Timothy finishes with "received up in glory." There was no outward approval, for the Lord's life ended in the death of the cross. We know He had the consciousness that God was with Him; He said "I always do those things which are pleasing to him."

The last chapter of 1 Timothy brings in what is extremely important in a practical way. The spirit of the age, the increasing discontent and insubordination that marks employees, and whatever is current in the world, is always a menace to the saints. Whatever is in the world in that way is likely to affect the saints unless they are fortified by the knowledge of God. Hence the apostle says, "Let as many bondmen as are under yoke count their own masters (or despots) worthy of all honour, that the name of God and the teaching be not blasphemed." That is what is at issue, the name of God and the teaching. "And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren; but let them the rather serve them with subjection." The apostle is urgent about it; he says, "These things teach and exhort." He was urgent that no socialistic spirit should prevail among the saints. The knowledge of God requires that the different conditions in which we may be found, masters and servants and other relationships, should be properly recognised. There is always the danger of the saints being affected by what is current in the world, therefore we find in the Scriptures that which will meet any condition which may arise. This is a very important matter at the

present time. A spirit of contentment is the result of knowing God, and accepting circumstances in which we find ourselves as from the hand of God. Piety has to do with our wilderness ways and induces contentment and restfulness of spirit, but if that is lacking, spirituality is undermined.

In Psalm 16 we find the Lord Himself bringing God into the circumstances of everyday life, accepting the will of God; and it is for us to recognise that the principle of obedience to God's will is the great principle of a Christian's life. The Lord said, "If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, *as I have kept my Father's commandments* and abide in his love," John 15: 10. What wonderful grace that the Lord should say this! Then He says in Psalm 16, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." One might have said, What was His heritage? What were His circumstances? Well, He was brought up in Nazareth and was in a carpenter's shop, and when the time came for His service, He said, "the Son of man has not where to lay his head." But on account of what God was to Him and the joy He had in obeying God's will He could say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage."

"But piety with contentment is great gain," verse 6. Bondmen come into this. It is striking that these things were written when slavery was current. Some of the saints were allowed to be slaves so that this truth as to contentment should be exemplified in extreme conditions.

Rem Grace was needed on the part of Philemon in connection with Onesimus.

AJG Yes, and on the other hand Paul would see to it that Philemon's rights were recognised. Paul sent Onesimus back because he was Philemon's slave, but at the same time exhorting Philemon to receive him as a brother beloved to himself and to Paul.

Ques Is the little maid who waited on Naaman's wife an example as to piety?

AJG Yes; she desired the salvation of her master. There was not only contentment with her but, in principle, she was praying for her master and desiring his blessing.

The saints constitute God's house, the assembly of God which is the pillar and base of the truth, and every one who moves through this scene in a spirit of contentment, and of being gracious toward all, and praying for all, commends God.

The apostle says in this last chapter of 1 Timothy, "But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance, meekness of spirit." The man of God stands for the truth of God in days of

departure. He is told to pursue certain things. Righteousness comes first, then piety.

It says of Simeon, "and this man was just (or righteous) and pious," Luke 2: 25. There are things to flee and things to pursue. There is no thought of stagnation. We get the thought of fleeing in the second epistle, "But youthful lusts flee, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." Energy is needed. Things are not to be left to drop off, but are to be fled from and other things pursued.

The great objective is that we should be vitally connected with the truth of God. The truth has been challenged by Satan and this challenge has been met by the coming in of the Son of God. Then there are the glad tidings in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be here for the support of the truth, and we need to be preserved in a path that exemplifies the truth. The great antidote to disputings, envy, strife, etc., is contentment with piety which is great gain. Contentment is the result of knowing God.

Rem Seeking to be rich is the opposite to piety.

AJG Yes; that would be taking yourself out of the hands of God and thinking you can do better for yourself than God can do for you.

Rem Paul said, "for as to me I have learnt in those circumstances in which I am, to be satisfied in myself," Philippians 4: 11.

AJG Yes; that illustrates piety in a remarkable way; he said, "Not that I speak as regards privation, for as to me I have learnt in those circumstances in which I am, to be satisfied in myself." Then he said, "I am initiated both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer privation." That is the result of knowing God. In verse 19 he said, "My God shall abundantly supply all your need." The apostle had learnt it. It is a question of what we may learn in the circumstances which God has ordered for us. Our circumstances are the means God uses to deepen our knowledge of Himself.

"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content," 1 Timothy 6: 8. We are promised that in the ordinary way. The Lord said "Is not the life more than food, and the body than raiment?" Matthew 6: 25. It says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," Matthew 6: 33. If God has given us bodies and life we may count upon Him to provide a covering for the body and food for the sustenance of life. There is, however, the thought of suffering for the testimony; Scripture contemplates that. The apostle Paul says he suffered "in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness," 2 Corinthians 11: 27, but at the end of Romans 8 he says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall

tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" These things might be allowed to come upon us but they cannot separate us from the love of Christ. It may be a question of the testimony, or of the saints having to suffer governmentally with men. If God deals with men governmentally, the saints have to suffer along with them. These things are connected more particularly with the testimony, what may come upon the saints by reason of the hostility of the world because we are Christians, but in general God promises food and clothing. Although it is suggested in Romans 8 that nakedness and famine may be experienced, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. "And all indeed who desire to live piously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," 2 Timothy 3: 12. The exercise of piety would deepen our knowledge of God.

CONTINUANCE AND ENLARGEMENT IN THE TESTIMONY

2 Kings 2:1-14; 2 Kings 6:1-7; 2 Kings 6:14-17

AJG The passage we have read in chapter 2 would show the lines on which the testimony is to be carried on in the absence of Christ, and the passage in chapter 6 would indicate the lines on which we may ourselves go in for enlargement in the truth, and also the resource we have in the presence of the Spirit of God with us to the end to preserve the truth intact. 2 Kings 2 begins with the time when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, and says that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal, but after that the test three times over is whether Elisha is going to be with Elijah. That is, we get first of all the indication that the Lord is prepared to be with us, but then the conditions are indicated; it was said by the prophet to king Asa that the Lord is with us while we are with Him (2 Chronicles 15: 2); the test being as to whether we are going to be with the Lord in His movements right through to the end. I believe that is an important thing, that while the Lord is prepared to be with us, as He says in the end of Matthew, "behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age," chapter 28: 20, there are in fact certain conditions under which alone His presence and support will be known for the continuance of the testimony, and that is, that we are with Him. Gilgal is a right starting place; Elisha was there. It means that flesh is renounced, we have no confidence in the flesh, that is the starting place. Elijah goes with Elisha from that point, but then Elisha is tested three times over as to whether he is going to continue with Elijah and have Elijah's view of these three places that he visits, i.e., Bethel, Jericho and the Jordan. I have no doubt Elijah's proposal to Elisha to "abide here", said three times, is not that he wished him to remain there but just to bring out the answer that it did bring out, that Elisha was fully determined to continue with Elijah wherever he went; that is, he was prepared for continual movement and to be with Elijah so as to have Elijah's view of each aspect of the truth that he was pleased to bring under his notice.

RHG Would you say a little more as to what you have in mind as to his view of these three places?

AJG Elijah said, "Jehovah has sent me to Bethel," and "Jehovah has sent me to Jericho," and then, "Jehovah has sent me to the Jordan," and Elisha was determined to go to those places with Elijah at that time, and not to leave it till later. I have no doubt that it has in mind what these three places represent; we are to have them before us, so to speak, as the Lord would regard them.

LPM Would Timothy's relation to Paul have any parallel at all?

AJG I think it would. He followed closely Paul's doctrine and manner of life, and it is a remarkable thing that in Paul's first epistle to Timothy he makes a great deal of Bethel, the house of God, which he says is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth; so that the first thing that has to be in mind is the assembly.

GHMcK It is the assembly in that aspect, the house of God, the place where God is known, is it?

AJG Yes, but it is striking that that is the first thing. The gospel, for instance, is not the first thing; the first thing is the assembly. That is the order in which the truth was opened up after the Lord went on high; the Spirit came down at Pentecost and formed the house of God and from that the gospel could go out, and to that, those who believe through the gospel could be brought.

JNG In saying that Elisha did not go later on to these places, are you suggesting the importance of our having the current bearing of the truth upon ourselves?

AJG Exactly; that is what I had in mind. If the testimony is to be continued in freshness and power, we should be with the Lord in what He is calling attention to at the moment. We should be prepared for that, all the way through.

JSB Do we not see at the outset the full wholehearted committal of Elisha to Elijah? Three times Elisha says, "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee!" Paul looked for this whole-hearted committal on the part of Timothy, did he not?

AJG Yes, he did, and that is the first thing that comes into view, that Elisha is fully determined to be with Elijah, and it is, I suppose, as thus marked, that his ministry opens up, marked by the power and resourcefulness that characterised it. There are certain features of the truth that have to be continually gone over as long as we are here. We read of Samuel going round in a circuit and judging the people at Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and finally in Ramah. So there are certain things that have to be gone over from time to time, which the going round in a circuit every year would perhaps suggest, and judging takes place in relation to the truth thus brought out. I believe what is emphasised in the passage here, which has in mind the continuance of the testimony, is that we are with the Lord in what He is calling attention to at the moment.

CPP Would the Lord encourage us as He sees us prepared to renounce the flesh, as you said, taking up that position at Gilgal, by giving us a sense that He is with us before the movement begins?

AJG I think so, but I believe it is very significant that Bethel, the house of God, comes first; the first thing to have in mind is that God has His house here, and it is the pillar and base of the truth, the assembly of the living God. That is, things are living in the assembly and it becomes a standard of conduct that we know how to behave ourselves in the house of God, and it is the support of all the truth.

JWH Elisha says, "I will not leave *thee*!" I was wondering whether the eye being on the Lord Himself would not help us to see where He would move in relation to the testimony.

AJG I think so, but especially to have in mind that we will follow Him in His movements, because it is not only a question of having the eye fixed on Christ in glory, though normally the Spirit of God would keep us with our hearts in that direction, but it is a question of discerning the Lord's movements in the ministry that He gives, and in what He emphasises, and making up our mind that we will be with Him in it and not lag behind.

LPM Is there in Elisha a filial relation to Elijah; he says later, "My father"? Is he serving as under the lead of the ministry and not competing with it?

AJG Indeed, as a child with a father; that is what Paul says in regard of Timothy, and really that is the line on which things are to be continued; I believe that there is a respectful recognition of the authoritative ministry and a following it in that spirit.

AJW Do we learn from the fact that Elijah was sent to these places? Elisha was not sent but he followed, he went with the one who was sent.

AJG Quite so. Elijah saying, "Jehovah has sent me" would mean that His movements and ministry were authoritative, and it was therefore incumbent on Elisha that he should follow it.

EAK What is represented in the sons of the prophets in the light of the way you are speaking?

They seem to have a measure of intelligence, to have a mental understanding of things, but they are outside the current of what is going on between Elijah and Elisha.

AJG Yes, they seem to represent a stagnant state of things, a certain amount of understanding objectively, but Elisha says, "I also know it: be silent!" verse

3, that is, he was in the position feelingly that Elijah was about to be taken from him, and he was feeling what it would mean to be here in his absence. One challenges oneself how much one does feel the absence of Christ and how much the burden of having part in the maintenance of the truth in His absence is really felt. I believe that is what Elisha represents, he was feeling it, he says, "I also know it: be silent!" The sons of the prophets at this point were certainly not in movement, although as the book progresses there is a certain movement and advance with them under Elisha's influence.

LGL You would have in mind that when it refers to the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel, and the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho, and the sons of the prophets that viewed afar off, they were taking up fixed positions and were not in movement as Elisha was?

AJG Yes, they had a certain apprehension of the truth before them and knew objectively that Elijah was to be taken away that day, but that is all that could be said of them.

LGL Would Jacob in Genesis 35 indicate one who was making spiritual movements in relation to Bethel? He gets a word from God to arise and go up to Bethel and dwell there, and then he moves in relation to his household to put away strange gods.

AJG Exactly. The light of the house of God has a very sanctifying effect upon us, and is intended to do so more and more because we are always the house of God, God dwelling in us by the Spirit. We are always His house, we are not simply His house when convened, and that should weigh with us to affect us in our conduct, in our dress and in everything, because it is a question of our constituting, with the rest of the saints, the sphere where God dwells and where He is entitled to have things according to His own pleasure.

CPP In moving with Elijah in this way, that is, with the Lord, would you say we would catch of the spirit of Christ in relation to the house of God; His zeal was spoken of when He was here, was it not?

AJG Exactly. I believe that enters into it. He cast out those who were selling doves, for instance, and said, "make not my Father's house a house of merchandise," John 2: 16, so that every matter would be looked at as to how it concerns God and His name and His pleasure.

LPM You spoke a little earlier of the bearing of the authoritative ministry. Was it in your mind to expand that?

AJG Only that if the Lord is giving ministry, and there ought to be with us an ear and discernment to see where He is and what He is doing, it should have

that force with us that it is authoritative, and therefore there is no option as to whether we are going to pay attention to it and be governed by it, or not; it is authoritative, it is of the Lord.

LPM Had you in mind that what is apostolic is represented today; there is no successor to the apostles but there is apostolic representation?

AJG I think so, in that the mind of God as completed by the apostle Paul is being unfolded in the power of the Spirit in an authoritative way, having its bearing on the whole church, not limited to local conditions, but having its bearing on the whole church, and having in view that the testimony should be maintained in heavenly character, and that it should be superior to whatever influences may be directed by Satan against it.

GHMcK Is that why the first verse comes in, that Jehovah would take Elijah up into the heavens by a whirlwind; it was quite an extraordinary way of closing up the history of any person here, was it not?

AJG I think it is a question of bringing before Elisha that there was power connected with the testimony, and it was to be heavenly. A whirlwind is irresistible power; it is a prerogative of God to bring in a whirlwind that nothing can stand against. It represents almighty power, I think; and also he was to be taken up into heaven so that the testimony was to proceed from that standpoint and take on that character.

I suppose Jericho represents the Lord's view of the world. I think we need to be strengthened in the sense that the world as a system is a judged thing.

LPM And has been visited? The Lord has been here and entered into the judgment of it.

AJG Exactly. I think that is the whole point, that in John 16 the Lord speaking of the testimony of the Holy Spirit said that "he will bring demonstration to the world, of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe on me; of righteousness, because I go away to my Father, and ye behold me no longer; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged," verses 8 - 11, that is, the righteous One left the world deliberately. All this is to weigh in our minds and on our spirits; the world has been tested by the presence of Christ and exposed and morally judged, and therefore that judgment is to be in our souls in regard of it.

CPP Along with the judgment, is there to be a testimony to God as Saviour God, flowing out of the house, according to Timothy?

AJG Exactly. So we do not begin with Jericho but with Bethel; we begin with the assembly. When God has a sphere on earth where He can dwell and where

the truth is maintained, then, so to speak, He can set aside the world system.

It is important that saints everywhere should learn to understand the assembly and that God intends it to be the commanding interest of our lives, not a kind of appendage to our lives, but to be *the* thing that commands us.

LS So to understand anything rightly, I need to have that before me and to be livingly in it.

AJG Exactly, because it is the great interest of God here on earth and what the Lord is tending; it is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. The more the truth is departed from and given up in the world, the more important is the assembly, as the pillar and base of it. It is not merely a matter of having the truth of it as light, but as realising that we ourselves constitute it, and therefore that certain behaviour, certain dignity and so on, become it. Within the last two or three years the Lord has raised the exercise as to not letting the assembly be charged with certain things, and that enters into it. It is a question of the dignity of what represents God here on earth.

LPM You have in mind the sympathetic following up of the ministry, not in a slavish sense, but in an obedient and intelligent way, and working it out?

AJG Exactly, understanding that it is not in any sense promiscuous or haphazard, but there is a definite order in what the Lord gives in order to reach the end He has in mind, and we shall only reach His end if we follow it and follow it all the way through.

JNG Is there a danger, if we do not follow up the current ministry of the truth in relation to the assembly, of dropping down to resting in mere numbers?

I was thinking of the fifty sons of the prophets.

AJG Quite so. There were fifty of them at the Jordan.

RMY Do these places visited bring about a certain accumulation of the truth, are they leading up to a climax, and is that the way the ministry is going at the present time?

AJG Yes, I think so; I think Bethel comes first, the great interest of God at the present moment. Jericho is the world, which is the means Satan seeks to use to hinder the saints answering to the mind of God, and that is to be a judged matter as having the Lord's judgment about it. Then there is the Jordan which brings out in a peculiar way the glory of Christ as disposing of death and introducing us into heavenly things, so that the assembly is to take character from what is heavenly. The Lord in John 20 introduced His own into heavenly things and then sent them forth from that standpoint.

EGJ Does this movement on the part of Elisha with Elijah mean that Elisha is to become serviceable in the testimony, serving in the current of the distinctive ministry of the moment?

AJG That is distinctly what is in view, because Elijah is just about to be removed hence. Elisha's ministry is exactly what marks the present time. Christ has gone on high, but a ministry is being maintained here in the power of the Holy Spirit, and these are the lines, as I understand it, on which that will be carried through according to the mind of God and in the character proper to it.

LPM Not only does the mantle of Elijah fall upon him, but he takes it and uses it.

AJG Exactly, that is very important. When they had gone over Jordan and talked, Elisha sees Elijah taken up and the mantle falls from him, but he first of all rends his own garments into two pieces and then takes up the mantle of Elijah and henceforth uses that.

JSB What do we learn as to his own garments being rent, and the value of Elijah's mantle?

AJG His own garments being rent would indicate that he is now discarding any natural ability that he might have or anything that had previously marked him; he recognises that all that is out of place in a heavenly testimony, and that it can only be carried on in the power and grace of the One who has gone on high. The mantle of Elijah is not made to fit Elisha, he has to take it. He would feel he was a much smaller man than Elijah. The mantle would be Elijah's measure, but he would never have less than that measure before him.

LPM Would Timothy bringing Paul's cloak have a similar thought in mind?

AJG I think it has. I believe there is a close link between the two. Paul's cloak would remind Timothy what a wonderful measure Paul had, but he was to bring it with him, always to keep before him that there is no less a thought in the mind of God than conformity to Christ, not only in the future, but in the way the testimony of God is carried on now. We must feel our smallness in the presence of this, but at the same time we want to see that we have the measure before us and realise that the power is there.

EAK You were referring to the greatness of what is set forth in the mantle, and I was thinking of the way the greatness of Christ is set out in the epistle to the Colossians. But the great thought in it is holding the Head, and the thought of Jordan being introduced, and I thought this might be set out in

Elisha at this point as together they go over Jordan, because when we come to Jordan, is it not a matter of death?

AJG It is indeed. I am sure what you say is right, so that Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters and they were divided hither and thither. That is, the power of death has been overthrown by the power of the Person who entered into death, and in the power of His own life, life beyond death in which we have part, has been introduced. It says they go over and they talk, "it came to pass as they went on, and *talked*," verse 11. I thought it indicated that Elisha was at home on heavenly ground. They went on and talked; Elisha was communing with Elijah; it indicates, I think, that as passing over with Elijah, introduced you might say into a resurrection sphere, he is at home there.

LS Would you say a word to us as to Elijah's request, "let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me," verse 9?

AJG There is not only the recognition that if we are to fill the place in the testimony in Christ's absence it must be only in the power of His Spirit, but I think his request for a double portion showed that he had low thoughts of himself and felt that only in the power of a *double portion* of Elijah's spirit would there be any hope of his being able to fill the position. It only accentuates the idea of dependence with us, the importance of not taking things for granted, but of realising that it must be in the Spirit's power, as we move in dependence on Christ in the sense of our own nothingness, that things are continued.

RST Is it encouraging to us that there is an advance in each of these places? It says first of all they went down to Bethel, and then it says, "they two went on", and then "they went on, and talked". I was wondering whether, in moving, there was not spiritual increase.

AJG I am sure that is so.

EAK Would it bear the construction, in the light of your exercise, that as the ministry is pursued on the lines you have indicated, there is an increase of mutuality amongst the saints in the apprehension of the assembly, and a practical expression of "love amongst yourselves" according to the Lord's word?

AJG Yes, I think that is good.

LPM Does the use by Elisha of the mantle in a corresponding way, though not in an identical way to the use Elijah made of his mantle, maintain the authority

of the truth despite the fact that Elijah has gone? That is, what is connected with the testimony of the Christ is maintained here in that spirit and power.

AJG Yes, and it is maintained here on earth now in the power of what is heavenly. That is what is brought into view in John 20, that not only are we given a heavenly place with Christ, the Lord saying, "I ascend to my Father, and your Father and to my God and your God," verse 17, but we are then viewed as sent forth from that place in testimony here, the Lord saying, "As the Father sent me forth, I also send you." Elisha saw Elijah go up, so that as having been identified with him, walking and talking, he would understand that his portion was marked out where Elijah had gone, but then he was to come back, and to come back in the power of Elijah's spirit and to carry on the testimony here in that power, as understanding that his life was with Elijah, you might say, but that he was to continue down here in the spirit and power of that.

AJW The Lord spoke of greater things to be done after He ascended. Would the double portion be applicable to that?

AJG Yes. I daresay that would apply, "he shall do greater than these, because I go to the Father," John 14: 12. That shows what is possible in the Spirit, but the trouble (one feels it oneself) with most of us is that we are so little available to the Spirit, at least not nearly as much as we should be. So that Elisha says, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" 2 Kings 2: 12. The chariot of *Israel*. What led him to say that? If he had said the chariot of Elijah, we might have understood, but he said, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." It is to indicate, I think, that he has the impression that the power by which Elijah went up to heaven is now available for the people of God. Actually it was a chariot of *fire* and horses of *fire*, the is to say, it is power that is in keeping with what God is in His nature, and therefore the power is only available to us really in so far as we are in keeping with that, that is, as holiness is maintained.

AHS Does that come out in Ephesians, "the might of his strength, in which he wrought in the Christ in raising him from among the dead," chapter 1: 20?

AJG I was thinking of that, and then having spoken of that power by which He raised up Christ from the dead, Paul goes on to say, "he set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies," verse 20; possibly not exactly connecting it with the power, but I think, at the same time, that is the implication, that the power is also seen going to its full height in setting Him in glory, and then from that point He has given Him to be Head over all things to the assembly, which is His body.

RHG Does the facing of each of these exercises result in enlargement in our knowledge of God? In Bethel it is the living God; you referred to the assembly, the house of the living God. In Jericho the understanding of the judgment of the world would make room, would it not, for the knowledge of God as Father? All that is of the world, is set over against what is of the Father? In Jordan you come to the knowledge of God in resurrection, the mighty power of God you have spoken of. So he says on the return journey, "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?", 2 Kings 2: 14.

Is that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

AJG Yes, I think that would be right, for it seems to me that this goes right on to the thought of ascension, because Elijah was carried up into heaven and Elisha saw him, so that it is not only the God of resurrection, but it is the full thought of ascension and a heavenly position which is to enter into our testimony here.

WCB Does the ability of Elisha to smite the waters, and they part hither and thither, show that he was now able personally to take up a ministry that was something in line with the epistle to the Ephesians?

AJG Yes, I think it does. The whole position of Elisha's ministry stresses that the conditions externally are conditions of great weakness, corresponding with the position publicly in Christendom today, that is to say his ministry was among the ten tribes who had departed from God's centre and set up an idolatrous system (see 1 Kings 12: 26 - 33). It is stressing the possibilities of testimony in the Spirit, according to the full height of what is heavenly, in the presence of conditions of apostasy in the world.

JWH Is that why he says, "Thou hast asked a hard thing," verse 10, and he says, "if thou see me when I am taken from thee"?

AJG I think so.

LS Would the matter of the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof indicate the power that is available with the saints to maintain a pathway of separation and to deal with evil?

AJG I think that, certainly.

AHS Going back to the question of power, you spoke of the passage in Ephesians going on to say, "he set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies," chapter 1: 20. It also says, "and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly," verse 22. Does power enter into that too?

AJG I think it does; it seems to lead on from that thought of His mighty power, although I have no doubt that resurrection is the expression of the mighty power of God, but it is a remarkable thing that immediately following on that the Spirit of God engages us with the transcendently glorious position in which Christ now is.

RST Does all this bear on the great movements seen in Acts 20, the apostle speaking of finishing his course and holding back nothing of what is profitable that the testimony may go on on that line?

AJG I think so. The apostle there, as you will remember, goes over all that he has ministered, showing that he ministered in an orderly way commencing at the very bottom with repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and reaching up to the full thought of the counsel of God, and then showing that along with authoritative ministry it had been supported by love, love exemplified in the apostle, "these hands", he said, "have ministered to my wants, and to those who were with me. I have showed you all things... It is more blessed to give than to receive," Acts 20: 34, 35. It shows that it is important that the ministry in an orderly and systematic and authoritative way should be supported by love, the service of love.

I thought, when we come to 2 Kings 6, the sons of the prophets are seen in a more favourable light, in that they desire enlargement, "Behold now, the place where we dwell before thee is too strait for us. Let us go; we pray thee, to the Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell," verses 1, 2. It shows that there is a desire now to take on the truth. They go to the Jordan, which was the last place to which Elisha was directed;

they are not content with the point where they have been, they want to be enlarged. That, I believe, is a right thought, and is confirmed by the fact that when they say to Elisha, "Consent, I pray thee, to go with thy servants," he said, "I will go. And he went with them," verse 3. What follows, I think, is to emphasise that if we want enlargement we must be prepared to go according to our measure. Our measure will be enlarged as we are prepared not to attempt to go beyond our measure; that is, to see that there is concern as to there being in us an answer to what we apprehend objectively, and our power will only be in the measure that that is so.

LPM These expressions, the servants and master, are encouraging in that respect, are they not?

AJG Yes, they are indeed; but then one man is felling a beam and the iron fell into the water and he cried and said, "Alas, master, and it was borrowed!"

verse 5, that is, he acknowledges that he is working with something that is not his own, he has right desires and plenty of zeal, but the truth has not yet been made his own, not to that extent that he could really fell a beam. When he acknowledges it, the man of God says, "Where did it fall?" verse 6, and he showed him the place. Elisha then cuts down a stick, that is, he is showing the man his true measure; a stick is very much less than a beam, but it is something. He cut down a stick and cast it into the water and that made the iron swim. If one's true measure is acknowledged and recognised in the smallness of it, then you have something that is your own. It says, "Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand and took it," verse 7.

WE Why do you think that this occurred when felling the beam and not the tree?

AJG A beam would be what was necessary for building, i.e., the man had right thoughts, right ideas before him, but the point is, was he equal to it then?

We are equal to the greatest thoughts that we may apprehend objectively only in the measure in which we are taking them on subjectively.

LPM Evidently this was the more refined process. It says in the earlier verse they came to the Jordan and cut down the trees, but the beam would be the preparatory work for immediate building, would it not? I wondered whether we are more tested in the secondary stage of construction; we may have some understanding of what is elemental in the Roman sense, but assembly exercises test our measure, do they not?

AJG They do, and I think that is what the action signifies. It is of no use attempting to build with something that is not our own, but if there is the acknowledgment of the truth, the Lord will show us that we have something; it may be only a stick as compared with a beam, but it is something, and if that is acknowledged, then we have something that is our own. "And he put out his hand and took it," verse 7; now he has something he can use.

JNG Would that mean he was amenable to adjustment? Perhaps some of us do not get enlargement because we are not ready for adjustment.

AJG Exactly. If we are prepared for adjustment and are concerned (not that one wants to occupy brethren with themselves) that there should be a subjective answer to what we have apprehended objectively, the Lord will help us and give us enlargement on that line, I am sure.

LPM So that calamities are educative, whether personal or collective, are they not?

AJG Provided the truth is acknowledged. "Alas, master, and it was borrowed!"

LPM Exactly. And the recognition of the authority of Elisha greatly helps, does it not? "Alas, *master*."

CJN What is your thought in regard to the axe head swimming? Naturally an axe head would not swim. Is it that what is natural is usually opposite to what is spiritual?

AJG Yes. I suppose it is to indicate that divine power comes in where the truth is acknowledged and we are going on with what we really have.

EGJ It is not a matter of floating, but of ability to move in the circumstances, is it not.

AJG Yes, it is swimming. It is a power that is superior to what is adverse, it is divine power. I think it is all the working out of the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof, although in a very small measure. There is fulness of divine power available, the point is whether we are to learn to avail ourselves of it.

LPM Is there the thought of life in swimming as distinct from the negation or the counteraction of gravity?

AJG Yes, exactly. For an axe head to swim is an entirely unnatural thing. It does suggest the power of life, and that is what John's ministry stresses, there must be life, there must be reality in the things of God, and in the measure that there is, there will be enlargement. The more we are really in what we hold, and are exercised to be real, the more we shall find we are enlarged in it.

EAK Do we get anything made our own apart from the death of Christ? I was thinking, in connection with the thought of the stick being cut down: it would go back to Marah where Jehovah showed Moses wood, and the Lord being cut off in the midst of His days. Would there not be an indication there of the death of Christ, apart from which nothing is ever made our own?

AJG I think so. I think if there is any going on with what is borrowed we have to come in principle to the death of Christ and learn to judge every form of unreality in us, it may be a kind of sincere unreality and we do not discover that it is unreality at first, but we have to come to judge it and judge it in the light of the death of Christ.

LPM He could trace where the axe head fell; is there some point in that? He was able to show Elisha the point where it had fallen in.

AJG I think it all indicates wholesome exercise as to the matter. The fact that he could point out the place is very important.

In the last incident we have the power of what is opposed to the truth as represented in the king of Syria, horses and chariots and a great host against the truth for the moment, against the man of God. The man of God, through the Holy Spirit, was in possession of the secrets of the enemy. Paul says, "we are not ignorant of *his* thoughts," 2 Corinthians 2: 11. We ought not to be; the Spirit of God would give the saints understanding as to all that is working in relation to the testimony in opposition to it. Elisha was perfectly restful. I believe it is to teach us that in the presence of the Spirit of God here, we have divine power, the Spirit of truth, who will make manifest every movement of the enemy and ensure the saints going through.

LPM Is that why the expression, "man of God", comes into these incidents?

AJG Yes, exactly. It is a question of manhood, standing for the truth of God. It is a remarkable thing that when the young man's eyes are opened he sees the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha; he sees the position. It is divine power protecting the truth, but divine power in the character of fire. All the way through these incidents there is the insistence on the necessity for holiness if we are to go on to the end with what the Spirit is presenting.

RMY What would you say about the chariot of Israel, and the fact that these chariots are round about Elisha?

AJG Elisha refers to Israel because he has the people of God in mind, but actually it is the man of God who is being preserved. Of course he is being preserved in order that the truth may be there for the people of God, and he has nothing less than the whole of the people of God in his mind, but actually it is the man of God who is being preserved. It is those who are going on with the truth who are specially preserved in relation to all that is opposed.

JNG Does not this incident follow in that way, that as the power alluded to in the chariot is known in bringing our souls into the truth livingly, there will be this power outwardly maintaining us?

AJG I think so. I think it is to make us restful, to give us to understand the wonderful resource we have in the Spirit of truth being with us to the end, a divine Person, and we have divine power and divine perception so that there is no movement in opposition to the truth that the saints cannot be made aware of. The Spirit sees it all and understands its character and will give a ministry in relation to it as it may be needed, so that we can be perfectly restful, only we are to understand that it is horses of *fire* and chariots of *fire*, that is, God is maintaining His own nature as a consuming fire.

RHG Does it involve that not only is there the Spirit of truth, but there are vessels in which He can operate? He says, "they that are with us," verse 16.

AJG Yes, exactly, "they that are with us are more than they that are with them", and so John in his epistle says, "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world," 1 John 4: 4.

GHMcK Although Elisha told him this, Elisha actually prayed that his eyes might be opened. Is that a further thought?

AJG Quite so, because to be told something is one thing, but I am not fully assured until I see it, so to speak. The Lord opened his eyes that he saw. Elisha did not need to have his eyes opened; he was aware of it, he was restful.

HEIGHT AND DEPTH

Proverbs 25: 1 - 5; Ephesians 1: 3 - 11; end verse 20 - 23; Ephesians 4: 9, 10; Philippians 3: 13 - 15.

I desire, dear brethren, to indicate what it is that God is working for at the present time, that is, the end to which He is working. The passage I have read in Proverbs 25 is very applicable to the present time, for as you will notice, it says that "These are also proverbs of Solomon; which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah transcribed." The days of Solomon were Israel's brightest days. In Solomon's day the house of God was built, the ark was brought to rest, the service of God was set up and was functioning, and the glory of God filled the house. It really typifies what was no doubt reached at Ephesus under the apostle's ministry; that is, the full thoughts of God in blessing had been made known and there is no doubt that at one time the assembly there entered into them and responded to them, but then when we come to the days of Hezekiah, things are very different. Between the days of Solomon and the days of Hezekiah, a great departure had come in. Ten out of the twelve tribes were irremediably lost in captivity in Assyria, and even the remaining two tribes had very largely turned away from God. Ahaz the king who preceded Hezekiah was probably, up to that time, the most wicked king that Judah had ever had. But in Hezekiah's day, a measure of recovery was granted. The house was cleansed and the service of God was re-established, and the passover, the feast of unleavened bread, was kept for seven days, and then for a further seven days. And it says there was joy in Israel such as had not been since the days of Solomon. So that Hezekiah's days represent, in picture, a recovery to the greatest levels of truth that were ever ministered to God's people, and in that way answer very much to the days in which we find ourselves at the present time. For though it be in much outward weakness, as indeed the position under Hezekiah was as compared with that under Solomon, the fact remains that in the ways of God those of God's people who are available have been recovered and are being recovered to the most precious features of the truth that were ever made known by the apostles. And it was in the days of Hezekiah that these proverbs of Solomon were apparently brought to light and were transcribed so that they might be on permanent record, and hence they obviously have a particular application to us at the present time.

The first thing that is said in these proverbs which the men of Hezekiah transcribed is that "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." It is most important, beloved brethren, that we should understand that, that God take pleasure in concealing what He is doing, because then we are content even if

things outwardly appear to be very small and insignificant. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." We were having before us yesterday that the idea of mystery enters into Christianity in a very marked way, and this is in accord with that idea, that it is God's glory to conceal a thing. The object in that is that God intends to keep His holy and precious things outside the range of the natural man. And so when the incarnation took place, perhaps the most marvellous event that has ever occurred in the history of this world, when He who is God became Man, it is marvellous the way that God concealed it. When Jesus was born, He was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger: there was not room for Him and those that were with Him in the inn, and therefore He was laid in a manger. Very few had any idea of the immensity of what had taken place in that God had come into manhood. The immensity of that was entirely concealed from the knowledge of the natural man, and God works deliberately on those lines. You will remember that the angel notified what had taken place to the shepherds and the angel said, "today a Saviour has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign to you: ye shall find *a* babe" (it should not read *the* babe), that is, the angel was not specifically directing their attention to the Person of the Lord Jesus though of course that was involved, but he said, "ye shall find *a* babe." That was the nature of the sign God gave, "a babe, wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger." Luke 2: 11, 12. It was as though when God intimated the greatest possible thing, that a Saviour had been born who should be Christ the Lord, the sign by which they were to be assured of it was not a sign that would appear to man, or that to the natural man would convey any idea that something of transcendent significance had taken place, but the sign was to be "a babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger."

I only mention that, beloved brethren, to enforce this statement, for it is God's glory to conceal a thing, and I think as we follow His ways we shall see that that principle always operates, that He always conceals what He is doing. When the Lord Jesus died, to outward appearance it was defeat, but then God intervened and raised Him from the dead, but He did not make a public display of the resurrection. The Lord Jesus was never seen as risen from the dead save by chosen witnesses; He was never seen by the world; and then similarly He was taken up into heaven. God did not make a public matter of it. He did not display it. It was just to a chosen few that the privilege was given of witnessing the Lord Jesus taken up into heaven, not that God has left Himself without witness to these great things, for the Holy Spirit has come down from heaven and has testified to the great fact of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit has spread throughout the whole world. But at the same time, God works in that way, for it is His glory to

conceal a thing, and I venture to say without the least fear of it being inaccurate, that the world at large knows nothing whatever of what God is carrying on among the saints at the present time. But then, "the glory of kings is to search out a thing". Kings are the saints as marked by royal dignity, and it is our honour to search out a matter.

With that in mind, I seek to pursue this scripture in Proverbs and to link it up with the scriptures we have read in Ephesians and Philippians. As I was saying I wish to indicate by the Lord's help what it is that God is working to secure, and I think for the present purpose we may limit our consideration to what it says in verse 4, "there cometh forth a vessel for the refiner." God is working to secure a vessel, a vessel which is to be produced as the result of a refining process which He is carrying on at the present time, but the great thought before the mind of God at the moment is *a vessel*. You remember when Peter was in Joppa he saw a vessel; he fell into a trance and saw a vessel as a great sheet being let down from heaven, held by the four corners and let down to where Peter was, and taken into heaven. What he saw was *a vessel*. God was making known to him that He had in mind to secure a vessel. The vessel is nothing less, I need hardly say, than the assembly, the assembly too as the body of Christ, a vessel which is intended to be a vessel of praise to God at the present time and throughout eternity, as it says in Ephesians, "to him" (that is, to God) "be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages." I understand that means that the assembly is to be the vessel in which glory is to be ascribed to God unto the age of ages. That is to say, it is to be capable of unceasing praise to God throughout all generations of the age of ages. Now if it is to be capable of that, it is surely essential that we, as composing the assembly, should become instructed in the glory of God; it is not right that we should have limited thoughts as to God. We can never become fitted to ascribe glory to God worthy of His name if our thoughts as to God and His glory are limited. The glory of God, I understand, is the shining out of God in His love pre-eminently, for He is love, but also in His wisdom and in His power and in all that attaches to Him, if one might use the expression, which He uses as subservient to the working out of the thoughts of love. Our apprehension of this will enable us to ascribe glory to Him in a way that is worthy of His name.

With that in mind, Solomon in these Proverbs says, "The heavens for height, and the earth for depth." That is what I wanted by the Lord's help to enlarge upon a little, because the intention is that we should become familiar with heights, as we sometimes sing, 'Heights of glory thou hast given'. And then we are also to become familiar with depth because God is glorified in the heights to which He can go in blessing, and He is also glorified in the depths to which

His love can go in sacrifice in order to reach His end. We are to be balanced thus in the appreciation both of height and of depth.

The epistle to the Ephesians presents to us the thoughts both of height and of depth; it is largely occupied with the thought of height. It is written, as of course all the epistles are written, but in a sense I suppose the epistle to the Ephesians supremely so, from the standpoint of Christ being exalted. The apostle says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ," chapter 1: 3. He did not say that until Christ had already come and had accomplished redemption and had gone to the right hand of God and the Holy Spirit had come down. That having taken place, the apostle was able by the Spirit to say that God "*has* blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." That is, all that God had in His mind in the way of blessing for the saints is now set forth in Christ as a Man in His presence in glory, and the Holy Spirit given to us links us up inseparably with Christ where He is, giving us in the Spirit to partake in His life, and giving us understanding of what is involved in the position which Christ fills as a Man in the presence of God, and giving us the ability to respond to it worthily. And so the apostle in thus speaking in Ephesians traces things back to their source, that God has "marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself": He has done that. He has "chosen us" it says, "in him before the world's foundation". We are familiar with these things in the letter, beloved brethren, but I believe it is intended of God that we should sit down quietly in the presence of God and allow these thoughts to sink into our minds, just allow ourselves to become impressed with the fact that God did take account of us. He foreknew us before the foundation of the world: had us in mind personally before He founded the world. The thoughts of love were formed and then the founding of the world took place in due time in order that in the, world He might work out the thoughts of love that He had already formed. This had us in view, beloved brethren, as it had all the saints in view, not simply collectively but individually, everyone of us and all of us together, "chosen in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love." Then it says, "marked us out beforehand for adoption (or sonship) through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the *praise* of the glory of his grace." The point in view in all this is not that we should be complacent in our blessing but that we should be vocal in God's praise. It is "to the praise of the glory of his grace"; the *glory* of it! How glorious God's grace is! And the saints are to be vocal in the praise of it. We are not to be dumb, we are not to be silent. The saints are laid hold of in order that they may be the vehicle of praise to the blessed God as appreciating the glory in

which He is made known. And so it says, "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved." I know nothing more affecting than that, beloved brethren, that there is at this present moment in the presence of God, the Beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ, marked out by that wonderful description, *the Beloved*; beloved in a most absolute way; beloved in His Person as the Son, and beloved on account of His moral worth as Man, the true antitype of David and of Solomon. David was loved on account of what he was, his name means 'beloved', and he was a man after God's own heart, he was loved on account of the moral worth that was there. Solomon was loved in sonship, he was the one of whom God said, "he shall be my son, and I will be his father," 1 Chronicles 22: 10; (see also 1 Chronicles 17: 13, where the truth is stated in the reverse order). Both these types of Christ find their fulfilment in Christ as He is now in the presence of God as *the Beloved*. And God has taken us into favour in the Beloved. That is, there is a settled position of love that has come in in Christ according to God's purpose and in that position every one of the saints is set. Who could have conceived it, dear brethren, but God? And God having conceived it, who could have brought it to pass save by way of a divine Person having become Man, and brought into manhood an order of manhood such as is great enough morally to satisfy and rejoice the heart of God for ever, and in that position take up sonship in order that we might be brought into the affectionate position that sonship involves and that God might find His pleasure in us as sons?

Now these are some of the heights, dear brethren. It says, "The heavens for height." We are to take account of heaven, Jesus is there, and as we take account of Jesus in heaven we begin to get an impression of the height, the great height of blessing and glory which the blessed God is capable of. We cannot give any explanation of it save that He is pleased to do it. It is a question of the good pleasure of His will. Not one of these statements in the first chapter of Ephesians is without importance, and we are to allow each one of them its place in our hearts. "According to the good pleasure of his will," that is to say, we are to be impressed with the sense that God is what He is, that He is love in a most absolute way, love working in wisdom, love working in power with infinite resource to accomplish its own thoughts, in order, dear brethren, that we should form part of the vessel which is to ascribe glory to God in a way that is worthy of Him throughout eternity.

Then it goes on to say, "in whom (that is, in the Beloved) we have redemption *through his blood*". A wonderful thing that there should be an immediate reference to the blood of the Beloved, testifying how far in depth the Beloved has gone in order that God might give effect to the thoughts of love that He has formed. Apart from redemption, apart from the removing of all the

disabilities that lay upon us, these thoughts that God had formed before the foundation of the world could never have been brought to pass, and who was there great enough to accomplish redemption save the very same One who is marked out here as the Beloved? And hence as soon as the height has been brought in, "taken us into favour in the Beloved", the Spirit of God gives us a touch in regard of depth in order that there might be a certain depth added to us, that there might be balance with us, that we might be affected by the sense that the Beloved has had to go into death in order that all God's thoughts might be made good in Him as gloriously risen from the dead and ascended into the presence of God.

And so it says, "the earth for depth". I shall refer again in a moment to the earth, but if we get height set out before our eyes in Christ in glory, we get depth presented to us in the distance to which Christ has gone in order that divine love might reach its end. And as I say, it is the heights that set forth the glory of divine love, in the heights to which it will go. Depth sets forth the glory of divine love in another aspect as to the lengths of sacrifice and suffering to which divine love has been capable of going. And then as we go on in the epistle to the Ephesians we find that God has not only brought us into a place of remarkable blessing, but it says also that in His grace He has abounded toward us "in all wisdom and intelligence, having made known to us the mystery of his will." Now this is important, beloved brethren, because one feature of sonship (and sonship is for the pleasure of God; sonship is not primarily for us although we are brought into it and greatly blessed in it) is not only that the position should be filled out in the affections proper to sons but also that it should be filled out in the *intelligence* proper to sons. Every parent takes pleasure in children when they are young and in the simplicity and affection and attractiveness of children, but no parent wants his children to remain young. No parent would be satisfied to find his children grow up as regards years but not develop in intelligence. Every father would be disappointed if his son were not intelligent. And intelligence is a great feature in sonship, and hence we ought to be concerned to acquire understanding of the things of God. It is a feature of sonship to be intelligent. And so it says, "according to the riches of his grace; which he has caused to abound towards us in all wisdom and intelligence, having made known to us the mystery of his will." What does the world know of what is going to take place? The world knows absolutely nothing. God has a will in regard of the matter as to what is going to take place on the earth and what is going to take place in heaven. The world knows nothing of it, but God knows perfectly. But He has been pleased to retain it in mystery - "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." But He has made known to us the mystery of His will, and what is it? It says, "for

the administration of the fulness of times," that is, the world to come, which is now so imminent. It is just about to burst upon us, the world to come of which we speak. And that is the mystery of God's will, "for the administration of the fulness of times; to head up all things in the Christ." That is, Christ is going to have His place as Head of everything both in heaven and on earth. The world knows nothing of it, but the saints should know something of it, they should be intelligent as to it.

God gave witness to it by means of a dream to Nebuchadnezzar even as long ago as Daniel's day. Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image, the head of gold and the breast of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron and the feet partly iron and partly clay. He saw the whole thing, the whole course of things that would develop in this world in the way of Gentile domination. And then what did he see? He saw a stone cut out without hands, smite the image on the feet part of iron and part of clay, and the whole image was broken to pieces, not only the iron and the clay but the brass and the silver and the gold. The whole thing was scattered like the chaff of the summer threshing floor and there was no room found for it. And then it says that the stone cut out without hands became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. That is Christ. The stone cut out without hands is Christ displacing the world of man's glory and filling the whole scene Himself. The saints are intelligent about these things, or should be. And we should not only be intelligent but we should be greatly interested, because we Gentiles are heirs with Christ. That is another feature of divine grace and wonderful wisdom, that this vessel of which I am speaking, the assembly, composed of men and women from every nation under heaven is to inherit jointly with Christ; "in whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will."

I pass on to the end of chapter 1, it says, God has set Christ "at his right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come; and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all." I have been saying the assembly is to share with Christ, and here she is seen as having part with Him in His headship over all things. The headship of Christ over the world to come will be exercised by means of "the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all." The light of God and the influence of Christ will be diffused abroad through heaven and earth by means of the assembly, His body. I only ask you, dear brethren,

to take these things in that we might get an impression of the vastness of what God has before Him and the immensity of grace into which we ourselves are called, because as I said, God is calling out a vessel not only fitted for these great things, but in the appreciation of them, fitted to ascribe glory to the God who has thought of them, who has desired them and who has devised the means for carrying them into effect.

Before I speak on the passage read in chapter 4, I just want also to refer to the passage in Philippians because that is another aspect of the heavens for height, and it refers to us individually. So far, I have been referring largely to the assembly, although sonship of course is something we are brought into individually. It is those who compose the assembly who are brought into sonship, but sonship in the main is that which attaches to each of us individually. But when we come to the epistle to the Philippians there also we are on individual lines although it refers again to the saints who compose the assembly. The apostle Paul, nearing the end of his days as he wrote the epistle, shows us that the one thing that was governing his mind was his desire to have Christ as His gain. It is a marvellous thing to see the great apostle, endowed as he was with extraordinary knowledge and extraordinary gift and devoted in service I suppose above any other, that as he is nearing the end of his days it is not his service that is occupying him, it is not his gift that is engaging him, but his one desire is to have Christ as his possession. He apprehends that he himself has been apprehended to be found in Christ; he remembers well what he was once, a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious, an insolent overbearing man, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and all that. Paul would understand all that he had been, but he understands that divine grace had taken him up to be found in Christ, not only as a matter of status but in actual formation, perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, not only as regards bodily condition, but in moral features. Think of every one of us, dear brethren, being found perfectly in correspondence with Christ. The assembly is to correspond with Him, but every one of us individually (not that any one of us individually by himself can perfectly express Christ, the fulness of Christ) is to be found in the image of Christ, conformed to the image of God's Son. That is what we have been taken up for and if that is so, dear brethren, why do we retain features of the old man? Why do we cling to them? If we understand what God has taken us up for, why does it not rather promote in us a desire to go in for it and to allow the Spirit of God to carry on His work of moral conformation in us now? Why do we cling to things that after all are only a shame to us as we see them in the light of God's thoughts for us in Christ? If I cling to some element of natural pride or of family status or of some distinction that learning in this world can

give me, or of any position or reputation that wealth might give me or any reputation that I might even gain in the assembly - and then I see that God's thought for me is that I should be found in Christ - I say is there anything of those things in Christ? Why, beloved brethren, we see at once how entirely incompatible it is! Everything of that sort has to go because we have been apprehended to be found in Christ, and nothing less than that, for the pleasure of God. The more we apprehend the heights of divine grace as set out in God's calling on high in Christ Jesus, the more it will greatly affect us now, and I am sure will stimulate the process of self-judgment which always has to be going on with us, the process of displacement, the letting go of things that are not worthy of us as saints in order that we may take on what befits those who have been called with a heavenly calling.

Paul on that line says, "Brethren, I do not count to have got possession myself; but one thing - forgetting the things behind... I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." How did this *reaching forward to the things before* work out with the apostle? I believe the epistle to the Philippians gives us some idea as to how it worked out practically. God had ordered for the apostle that he should be found in prison, he was not there as a felon, he was there in fidelity to the truth, and then in the prison, dear brethren, God had ordered for him that he should be still further tested by certain brethren preaching Christ of contention, thinking to add tribulation to his bonds. Think of that, as though it was not enough to be in a Roman prison, and to be there unjustly, but God allowed that devoted servant to be still further tested by brethren preaching Christ of contention "supposing to arouse tribulation for my bonds." How did he meet it? Did he repine and murmur, did he complain indignantly of the brethren who were preaching Christ of contention? No, dear brethren, he did not, he had Christ in his soul and he apprehended that there was a moral excellence in obedience. The second chapter of this epistle shows us how greatly Paul appreciated the moral excellence of obedience as traced in the Man Christ Jesus, the mind that was in Christ Jesus, the One who was "obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him." Paul had Christ Jesus in His moral excellence in his heart and therefore every test that came upon him, however severe it was, Paul would accept in the spirit of obedience to God's will, and as accepting it in that spirit, as he says, "through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ... that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but in all boldness, as always, now also Christ shall be magnified in my body," Philippians 1: 19, 20; I say in the spirit of obedience he would take on more and more the features of Christ Jesus.

Well now, beloved brethren, God is working with us to that end. It is a question of whether we apprehend the heights. The calling on high of God in Christ Jesus is another feature of the height, "the heavens for height". We are to take account of what is in heaven, what is set out in Christ and to allow it to have its own moral affect upon us.

Then it says, "the earth for depth". In Ephesians 4 it says, "But that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" Think of that! The One who ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things, before He went to that exalted position, descended first into the lower parts of the earth, that means the grave, and He descended there for us, beloved brethren. If He had not descended into the lower parts of the earth, tasting death in all that it meant to Him, it would not have been possible for God's thoughts of love in regard of us to be effected. But God has been pleased in His wisdom to allow sin to come in and allow those who were in His purpose to become involved in it, in the guilty and lost condition and penalty of death that is involved, in order that it might become the occasion for us to learn not only height, but also depth. We should be lacking in our knowledge of God if we had not an apprehension of depth. We have to learn depth, the depth of which divine love has proved itself capable in order to effect its end, and that depth has been seen in Christ. He descended into the lower parts of the earth before He ascended up far above all heavens.

Well now, what is to be the moral effect upon us,

beloved brethren? In the light of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus, am I going to retain any features of the first man that cannot be carried up into heaven? Why not let them go now? But now I say again in the light of the depths, in the light of the death of Christ, am I going to retain that which necessitated the going into death of the Son of God? All these things are intended to have a present moral bearing upon us. It is one thing to say our old man has been crucified with Him, but have we really accepted it, and are we moving in the acceptance of it? The death of Christ is intended to have a moral effect upon us, and I say, dear brethren, there has not been a single trouble that has arisen in the assembly that could not be traced to our failure either to apprehend the gospel or to appreciate it. The gospel brings to us the light that Christ has died. Why did he die? And He has been buried. Why has He been buried? He died, not only to make propitiation for our sins, but in order that the man that sinned might be ended in death, and He was buried in order that that man might be taken out of God's sight in burial. And I say, dear brethren, that every trouble that arises amongst us in our relations individually or in the assembly, can be traced to the fact that either we have not

appreciated the import of the gospel or else we are not going on in the acceptance of it. If we really appreciate the death and burial of Christ (and we have the power in the Holy Spirit to maintain ourselves in accord with it) I say there will be no movement of the first man, of the flesh in one form or another. Whatever comes in in the way of trouble amongst the saints can always be traced to that, that the man God has ended we have brought back again by allowing him scope. So the depths are intended to affect us morally. It says, "The heavens for height, and the earth for depth," and then it says, "the heart of kings is unsearchable." God has given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts; we have in our hearts the Spirit of God, and the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the depths of God. There is no limit, so to speak, to what can be brought into our hearts in virtue of the Spirit of God whom we have received. There is no limit to what the saints can gain entrance to in their hearts in virtue of the earnest of the Spirit which God has given to us.

Then it says, "Take away the dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the refiner." We were referring yesterday to redemption and purchase, the vessel has not had to be redeemed but the persons who compose it have had to be redeemed. The silver refers to what the saints are now as having been redeemed and now the process is going on. God is carrying it on in secret, the world knows nothing of it, but we should be intelligent as to it. There is a refining process going on in view of a formation of the vessel, a vessel is to come forth for the refiner, a vessel in every way to be corresponding with Christ, corresponding with Him in moral features, corresponding with Him in nature, corresponding with Him in holy intelligence too. A vessel is to come forth for the refiner, but in order that that end may be reached, there is a refining process going on with every one of the saints. Are we conscious of it? If we are going on with God, we shall be conscious of it. Discipline may come in one way and another, it all has in mind that what will come forth is a vessel for the refiner. The more we go on with God, the more we are conscious that His hand is upon us in one way or another. We know what the refining process is, the refiner sits as it says in Malachi, "he shall sit as a refiner." It is a deliberate process, a process carried on patiently. We know that what the refiner looks for is to see his own image reflected in that which is the subject of the process, and that is going on now, God is carrying it on, Christ is carrying it on, carrying it on with each one of us, but then it comes forth as a vessel for the refiner. I believe the two great things which the refiner will use if we are subject to Him is the height on the one hand and the depth on the other. If we understand what God has called us to, it should have a very sanctifying effect upon us, and as we understand the depth to which Christ has been in love, into judgment and death on our behalf, that also is

intended to have a very sanctifying effect upon us. And it is, I believe, by bringing our hearts under the influence of the height on the one hand and the depth on the other, that the refiner carries on His refining process to give the result in a vessel that corresponds with Himself.

Then it says in verse 5, "take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness." That will be effected in a very brief moment when once the vessel is perfected. When once the Lord has secured the vessel, when once Christ has His assembly according to His own thoughts, it will take a very short time for the wicked to be taken away from before the king so that His throne may be established in righteousness. In principle, that is taking place in the assembly already; that is, in the assembly the rights of God and the rights of Christ have to be established and maintained already, and that is done on the principle of taking away the wicked. If any one in the assembly is guilty of wickedness, the saints have to separate themselves from him, he is taken away from their midst on the principle of withdrawing from such a one, in order that the rights of God and of Christ should be established in righteousness. That takes place already in the assembly. We cannot establish the rights of God and of Christ publicly, we have to await the coming of the Lord for that, but we can establish and maintain those rights in the assembly, and so, in the principle of it, what will take place in a moment when the Lord comes is already established in the assembly when evil has to be dealt with. What it has in mind is that the rights of Christ and the rights of God are established, His throne is established in righteousness. That will take place in a very brief moment in power from the Lord when once He has the vessel according to His own heart; then He will see that the wicked are taken away from before the king that His throne may be established in righteousness.

May the Lord help us to a clearer understanding of what it is God is working to secure at the present time, this vessel for the refiner. It is His glory to conceal a thing, but it is our honour to search out these matters, and the more we understand what God is working for, the more I am sure we shall be subject under His hand so that the refining process may go on to completion. May the Lord bless His word!

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IN THE WILDERNESS

Numbers 1:1-4; Numbers 2:1,2; Numbers 2:34; Numbers 5:1-3; Numbers 6:1-12; Numbers 10:33-36

I wish to speak of Christian fellowship in certain features of it as presented typically in these passages I have read. You will notice that the book commences with the first day of the second month in the second year after they were come out of Egypt. On the first day of the first month after they had come out of Egypt, the tabernacle was set up in all its parts and anointed, and the service of God in the tabernacle was commenced. God had said earlier through Moses to the people, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me a heave-offering," Exodus 25:2. They were to bring certain offerings of gold and silver and brass and byssus and other things, and He said, "they shall make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them," verse 8. And that sanctuary was completed, it was set up and anointed on the first day of the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt.

All this has an anti-typical meaning, dear brethren, because what God would convey to everyone of us is that if He has delivered us from this world, and I trust everyone here is delivered from the world, for the Lord Jesus gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world, and indeed, as it says in Titus, that he might "purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works," Titus 2:14. He has no intention of leaving us without an interest. He intends to furnish all His saints with an interest which is to command them the whole time that they are in this world. And that interest is His dwelling place, to be defended and to be maintained and to be carried, and in which He is to be served. I think, if you will give a moment's consideration to it, you will agree that it is a very great matter that God should look to us, His people, to provide the conditions suitable for Himself to dwell among us and walk among us. Then those conditions having been provided, He looks to us that we should defend the position, because it is sure to be attacked. Nothing that is of God in this world will escape being attacked, as long as we are here, for we are in the presence of hades' gates, we are in the presence of the power and wisdom of Satan, in opposition to what is of God. So you may rest assured that anything and everything that is of God in this world will be exposed to attack; but in view of that, the saints are called upon, not only to provide the conditions suited to God for Him to dwell among us, but to defend them, to maintain them. Then, further, that in His house, God is to be served according to instructions which are given to us in full in the book of Leviticus, a book which has in view our drawing near to God, and what is to mark those who do draw near to God. And as we shall see, I trust, in a

moment, this testimony to God, which consists in His dwelling among His people and being served among them, is to be *carried*, carried through the world, that is to say, it is to be characterised by movement. Now all this is what the first part of the book of Numbers has in view.

The book of Numbers is divided into three parts; the first ten chapters give us the people of God set together and moving together in the wilderness according to God's mind; it answers to the first epistle to the Corinthians, "the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours," chapter 1: 2. That is, the position in view is the people of God here in the presence of men as the assembly of God, and they are to maintain all that is due to God, and pleasing to Him in that position, and the first ten chapters of Numbers give us instruction in view of that position. Then Numbers 11 to 21 give us the exposure in one form or another of the flesh, in its incorrigibleness, in order that we should come to it that what we need is the Spirit of God, and that the only way to be here for the pleasure of God is by availing ourselves of the Spirit of God, and the only way to enter into the land to enjoy the things that God has prepared for them that love Him, is in the power of the Spirit of God. So the second section of the book of Numbers is intended to bring us to feel the need of the Spirit so that we yield ourselves wholly to Him. And then the final section of the book of Numbers, from chapter 21 onwards, has in view the entering into the land.

Well now, this afternoon we are dealing with the first section of the book of Numbers, and as I was saying, on the first day of the first month of the second year the tabernacle was set up in the midst of Israel; it was anointed, and the service of God in it was instituted. That typifies the assembly. We must recognise, dear brethren, that the truth of the assembly as it was set up by the apostles, has been at one time entirely lost, but we are living in days in which God has recovered the truth; He intends that every feature of the truth should be livingly in expression among God's people, and hence it is for us to pay great attention to the truth of the assembly, because the assembly is *the* interest which God has provided for His people to be thoroughly committed to, throughout the *whole* of their life down here. And so one month afterwards (the tabernacle having been established and set up in the midst of the people, they could take account of the position, and that is what God would have us do) God calls upon Moses to take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel; it was the males of twenty years old and upward that were to be numbered. That does not mean that these matters of which we are speaking are limited to brothers, nor does it mean that no brother or sister is to take them up until he or she is literally twenty years of age. Far from it! The

males in Scripture represent the side that speaks of responsibility and the readiness to accept responsibility, and the readiness, so to speak, to go to war, for what is contemplated in this chapter is a militant position, it is a question of the defence of the testimony, being ready to stand for it. Hence every sister as well as every brother is contemplated as ready to accept responsibility, to play her part, or play his part in the defence of the testimony; that is, in the maintenance, with the brethren, of conditions suited to God's dwelling place amongst us, being zealous to preserve it against every obtrusion of evil whatever form it might take. Twenty years old indicates just a certain measure of maturity, but not much so to speak; it is not an infantile age, obviously, nor is it exactly the age of full maturity. It means that God wants us from our earliest years. When we have passed the stage of babyhood, when we have passed the stage of childhood, God contemplates that we should be available to play our part in the defence and maintenance of the testimony here.

And so Moses was told to number them, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; it is a question of the defence of the testimony, and when I say the defence of the testimony, all that it really involves is maintaining what is due to the name of the Lord Jesus, what is pleasing to Him. If Satan gets in, if he seeks in some way to corrupt or mar the testimony, he does it by introducing among the saints something that is not according to the truth. It may be some false teaching, it may be some evil practice; but at any rate, it is something which is out of keeping with what is due to God, or what is due to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And hence the defence of the testimony is not to be regarded by those who are young amongst us as something that they cannot have part in. The Lord contemplates that they are to have part in it. He looks to them to have part in it. It is simply a question of being in divine things vitally, and being concerned that by the grace of God we will maintain, and with the brethren, what is due to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so, if you read the first part of the first chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, you will find constant references to "our Lord Jesus Christ." It says, "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord," verse 9. This position that the first chapter of Numbers contemplates is a fellowship, because all the children of Israel were to be drawn to have their part in it; one common interest was to command them all. And therefore it suggests the idea of fellowship, a fellowship, you might say, over which Moses presided. The fellowship to which we are called, beloved brethren, is a much more distinguished fellowship, it is the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, a fellowship over which no less an One than the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, presides. His name is called upon it, His name gives character to it, it is a question of what is due to Him that is to be

maintained by us. And hence the wonderful distinction and privilege of having part in true Christian fellowship, when we see that it is the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, they were to be numbered, it says, after their families. It is important to notice that, dear brethren, because the thought of families brings in *love*. The family side of matters is to predominate in all connected with the Christian fellowship. And so at the end of the first epistle to the Corinthians, an epistle which deals with what we call administrative matters; the apostle says, "Let all things ye do be done in love," 1 Corinthians 16: 14. The saints as set together in fellowship are intended to be together, truly together, in bonds of love. We are taught of God to love one another; it is innate in us to love one another as born of God, but then we are to be active in it. We are to abound in it more and more. There is nothing so calculated to exclude evil, as to be found going on together, united together in love. And the apostle was concerned about that in writing to the Corinthians. You might have thought that in speaking to them, he would have spoken at once of the terrible evil that was existent in their midst, but he does not. The first thing he addresses himself to is the state of disunity that existed amongst them, because if a state of disunity exists amongst the saints it is disruptive of fellowship and provides the easiest possible conditions for Satan to get in. Hence the family side of the matter is brought in first, that is to be in mind. Then, as I said, we are taught of God to love one another, but we are to be concerned to abound in it more and more. Then it says, "by the number of the names, every male, according to their polls," verse 2. Now I can understand that as the children of Israel came forward, one by one, to be numbered, God would say, There is another one upon whom I can rely; they would come personally under the eye of Jehovah as those upon whom He could rely to play their part in the maintenance and defence of the testimony. Is that not something for us to look to, dear brethren? If there are those who belong to the Lord Jesus and have the Holy Spirit, it is a question of being available to the Lord as one among many upon whom He relies to defend all that is due to His name in a world of evil. The opportunity for it will soon be gone. The truth of the assembly has been recovered to us, it has taken form in many places; it is here in expression in Melbourne and in many other places in a similar way. It is a great privilege to come forward and have part in the maintenance of what is due to God and due to the truth; it is a universal fellowship, it is a question of yielding oneself to it, and taking up one's part, in this grand fellowship, the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And then in the numbering of the people, Aaron was identified with Moses, and also a chief father of each tribe, "And with you there shall be a man for

every tribe, a man who is the head of his father's house," verse 4. All that is intended to encourage us, to make us realise that we shall find support as we yield ourselves to the claims of the Lord in these matters. Moses represents the lordship of Christ. There is the authority of the Lord over us, that must not be despised, it is a serious matter to despise the authority of the Lord. It says, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" 1 Corinthians 10: 22. The authority of the Lord is asserted for our salvation and our preservation. The commandments of the Lord are intended for our preservation, they are not to be disregarded. Sometimes we hear of persons abstaining from breaking bread; why do they do that? There is no authority for it; they may think that they prefer to be free, to do as they like. Is not that a matter to take account of seriously, is that proper to Christianity? Is any Christian free to do as he likes? Has the authority of the Lord no place with us? The Lord Jesus is established as Lord over us, so that we can be delivered from every form of self-will, from every form of lawlessness, and be held here for the pleasure of the blessed God. And so there is the authority of the Lord, and it says, "But let a man prove himself, and thus *eat* of the bread and *drink* of the cup," 1 Corinthians 11: 28. There must be no looseness about these matters, dear brethren, for we are dealing with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and He is Son over God's own house, and He is jealous for the pleasure of God; He is jealous for the holiness of God's house, and we must not provoke the Lord to jealousy; we are not stronger than He. We owe a debt to the Lord Jesus that can never be repaid, and the least thing we can do is to yield ourselves to the rights and authority of the Lord Jesus, and to be found here in the path that He calls His own saints into. But if Moses represents the authority of the Lord, Aaron represents the priestly support of Christ; he brings in the side of sympathy, grace and support. Both of these we shall find in the Lord Jesus, so that there is in that way abundant provision for every one to yield himself to the claims of the Lord, that we should have our part in the defence of the testimony of God in this scene. And then there is the head of every tribe. That is to say it brings in the element of sympathy and interest in the local company, and also the example, for those who are elders are intended to be examples to those who are younger. It is a matter for every brother, every sister, who is getting older in point of years, to face this matter, that the older ones among us are intended to be an example to the younger, and an encouragement to them, too. If we are not, we should get to God about it, because we are intended to be an example and an encouragement to those who are younger. And so all these things are provided in connection with this great matter of numbering.

Well then, in chapter 2 we find the divine ordering in relation to the fellowship; it says, "The children of Israel shall encamp every one by his standard, with the ensign of their father's house; round about the tent of meeting, afar off, opposite to it shall they encamp." And as you read down the chapter you find the twelve tribes all allotted their place in relation to the tabernacle, and they are set in their places by God in four camps of three tribes each. But each tribe is allotted his own place, that is to say, to put it simply, beloved brethren, the saints in Melbourne have their place in the testimony, the saints in London have their place in the testimony, the saints in New York have their place in the testimony, and the saints in the smallest country place where there is the truth of the assembly in living expression, the saints there have their place in the testimony. It is a universal testimony, but at the same time each one has his own allotted place in it, and hence fellowship is universal, but the responsibilities apply particularly to a locality in which we are set. We cannot disclaim responsibility in regard of anything that happens in any part of the world, the fellowship is one, the truth is one, and therefore if there is an attack on the truth in any part of the world, all the saints ought to be concerned about it; they may not be able to do much about it if they are far from it, but they can go to God about it in prayer, they can take up the burdens of the testimony in that way. Paul said that the burden of all the assemblies came upon him *every* day. Every day, as he gave himself to prayer, he would go round the different assemblies in his thoughts, and the particular conditions that were found in each, and the particular exercises that they were facing, and he would take them all up before God in prayer. I do not say that we are all equal to that; I doubt if any of us is equal to it in the same measure the apostle Paul was, only it shows what is open to us, and Paul in being marked by that kind of exercise was just the reflection of our Lord Jesus Christ on high, for our great High Priest on high bears on the breastplate all the local companies before God, in relation to the exercises that they are carrying. You remember it says that on the breastplate of the high priest there were four rows of three stones in each row, and the names of the tribes on the stones. I have no doubt it is an allusion to the four camps of three in which the tribes of Israel were set in relation to the tabernacle, and that speaks of the local companies, as identified with the universal testimony, and the Lord is bearing them all before God unceasingly, on the breastplate of judgment. That is, *He* has a judgment about the conditions that prevail in any locality. It may be we are not concerned about it; the Lord has a judgment about it, He would be concerned to bring us into accord with His own judgment about it. He is bearing the matter feelingly before God; but He looks to us to see that the conditions in the particular place where we are set in the sovereignty of God are in accordance with the truth. And as we set our faces in that direction, we

shall find that the power and grace and support of the Lord will be realised by us. The second chapter shows that each one was to take up his responsibility in the particular place that God had allotted to him. But as I say, it is a responsibility attaching to that place, but it is all part of the universal fellowship. So that the epistle to the Corinthians, which deals with matters connected with fellowship, is not only addressed to the assembly of God which is in Corinth, that particular place, but it says also, "with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours." That is, the principles laid down for the saints at Corinth are the principles that are to govern the saints in every place.

Well now, I pass on to Numbers 5, in order to speak very briefly of a most important matter, and that is that evil is not to be tolerated in the house of God, it is not to be tolerated in the local assembly. The word to Moses was, "Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by a dead person: both male and female shall ye put out; outside the camp shall ye put them, that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell." I have no intention, dear brethren, of going into detail, I am just calling attention to the principle that evil is not to be allowed in the assembly of God, and the reason given for it is this, "in the midst whereof I dwell". God says, That is an important matter, that God dwells among His people, that is why evil is not to be allowed, because God *dwells* there. And hence, dear brethren, if evil asserts itself among the people of God, and has to be dealt with, it has to be dealt with in the fear of God. The conscience of every brother or sister should be exercised in relation to it, and it should result in self-judgment, not only in the judgment of the evil in another, but in the recognition, in the presence of God, that one's own heart is capable of it, and it may be that the particular thing finds an answer in one's own heart, and hence the very presence of evil in our midst, and it having to be dealt with, assembly-wise, has in view that we should all be brought into the presence of God. And as facing the matter before God, and only as judging ourselves in relation to it, is there any power in the true sense, to exclude the evil from our midst.

I am not overlooking that in these days of brokenness, we have to move on the line of withdrawing from evil, as authorised by 2 Timothy 2: 19, rather than of putting away from our midst as indicated in 1 Corinthians 5, because 1 Corinthians 5 contemplates that the whole assembly is available for that, and that public power and authority remain as at the beginning. While, thank God, there may be saints moving together in a place as governed by the light of the assembly, we have to recognise that the state of things in Christendom is so complex, is so broken, that it would be assumption for any company to claim

to be the assembly, although we may be fully assured in our own minds that the ground upon which we are is the ground of the assembly, and the only ground on which the saints ought to be. We may be fully assured of that, and there is no assumption in saying so, because we ought not to be on any other ground than the ground on which all saints ought to be. But at the same time (as recognising, alas, that many of the saints of God are not available, are not walking in that path) we do not claim to be the assembly in that place; we have sorrowfully to admit that the assembly is not there, that the assembly, so to speak, cannot act judicially as the assembly, as they could at Corinth. Therefore, if evil asserts itself among us, while having in our souls the light of 1 Corinthians 5, and recognising that the person concerned ought to be dealt with on the line of 1 Corinthians 5, yet publicly we move according to 2 Timothy 2, and withdraw from evil, as befits the public position in which we find ourselves. The fact is that we retain both Scriptures in our minds. In the principle of it, we act according to 1 Corinthians 5, but in the public statement of what we are doing we move according to 2 Timothy 2. But then what I was saying is, dear brethren, that if evil arises, it is intended that the conscience of every brother and sister in the company should be specially exercised before God in relation to it. When Achan took of the forbidden spoils, and hid it, and the matter had to come up, you remember that God did not at once signify that it was Achan who was guilty. What he called upon Joshua to do was to bring *all* the tribes before God, and God was going to indicate by lot where the guilt lay, and so every tribe and every person in it had to feel the seriousness of being before God. God was going to indicate where the evil was.

Supposing God said, *Thou* art the man. Everyone would feel that. So the lot was cast and one tribe was taken, and the same process had to be gone through again, and they had to come family by family and then house by house, and then the household comes person by person and the man is taken. You can see that the divine intention is that when evil is found among the people of God *all* the saints should be before God in exercise as to it so that if that same principle of evil is in the heart of anyone it may be judged in the presence of God and thus the saints become morally clear of it.

The latter part of Numbers 5, which I did not read, indicates the position in Christendom. That is to say, there is that in Christendom around us which professes to stand related to the name of the Lord Jesus. We are not Jews, we are not Mohammedans, we are not heathen, we are nominally Christians, I am speaking now of so called Christian countries. There is a vast profession of which we ourselves form part which claims to stand related to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; we are Christians, the name of the Lord Jesus is called upon us. In Numbers 5 what is contemplated is that a man is taken with a spirit of

jealousy; he believes his wife is unfaithful and the test is applied and it may prove that she is unfaithful. The test *has* been applied in Christendom, Paul's doctrine has been applied in Christendom and the test has proved that in the main Christendom is unfaithful to Christ. The vast professing body is exposed as utterly unfaithful, and alas it has in it many of those who truly belong to the Lord but who still remain identified with that which is unfaithful to His name. That is what the latter part of Numbers 5 has in view. You remember how Paul at the end of 1 Corinthians says, "If any one love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha," 1 Corinthians 16: 22; that is, let him be accursed at the coming of the Lord; and the day is near when all that is mere profession will be accursed. Laodicea will be spued out of His mouth as utterly distasteful, utterly abhorrent to Him.

Well, that being the position in which we find ourselves publicly, on what line is the truth to be maintained? I believe that is what Numbers 6 raises. We have been speaking of the defence of the testimony, but in the conditions which prevail in the religious world around us, on what line is the testimony to be maintained and defended? I believe the answer to it is found in Numbers 6. It says, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If a man or a woman have vowed the special vow of a Nazarite, to consecrate themselves to Jehovah." It is a question now of every brother and every sister taking up in his or her own soul that his position is one of separation to the Lord. Some people do not like the word separation, they think it is too narrow, they think it stands for a hard legal principle, but separation *to the Lord* is the principle, dear brethren, and that makes all the difference. You bring in the Lord, and what is pleasing to the Lord, it is that which is to govern us in our actions and movements, and that alone is the principle upon which the truth of God will be maintained and carried through inviolate to the end. That is vowing a vow, so to speak, of separation to the Lord.

In 2 Timothy 2, to which I have already alluded, it says, "the firm foundation of God stands." Whatever confusion there is in the world around us, the religious world especially, the foundation of God stands sure; what is of God will never be moved; "the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those that are his," verse 19. That is His side of the matter. Our side of the matter is this, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity". That is, if the name of the Lord is named by us then it is due to the Lord that we should not connect that name with anything iniquitous. We see the religious systems around us are in principle iniquitous; for instance, they proceed on the lines that the epistle to the Corinthians is not authoritative, they are not entirely governed by it. Although Scripture says it is the commandment of the Lord, it is disregarded, and the Spirit of God in His

supremacy in the assembly is disregarded. If the one who is to minister is determined by man's choice and chosen according to his education and so on, that is entirely setting aside the sovereignty of the Spirit of God, and any principle that sets aside the sovereignty of the Spirit of God is iniquitous; it is the setting up of the will of man in the holy things of God. And hence you can easily see it is not a question of detail, but in the very principle of the system they are exposed as iniquitous because they do not recognise the authority of the Lord as given us in the epistles, and they do not submit to or recognise the sovereignty of the Spirit of God. And so everyone who names the name of the Lord is to withdraw from iniquity, and as having withdrawn from it he is to follow righteousness; that is, what is right in the sight of God. That is the governing principle, you follow what is right - "follow righteousness, faith". You must be prepared for a path of faith. Peter said, "Lord, if it be thou, command me to come to thee upon the waters. And he said, Come." Matthew 14: 28, 29, and Peter stepped out and walked on the water; it is a path of faith "Righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." That determines the lines upon which we may move in these days, and as moving with those who are calling on the Lord out of a pure heart we must govern ourselves by the truth of the assembly because if you have more than one going on together you have a company, and we are not righteous if we do not regulate ourselves by the truth of the assembly. It is thus on these lines of 2 Timothy 2 that the truth of the assembly has been recovered.

But there is another thing in 2 Timothy 2; we are not only authorised to separate from systems or anything that is iniquitous, but we are also authorised to separate from *persons*. It says, "But in a great house here are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honour, and some to dishonour," verse 20. In the great house, which is Christendom, there are vessels to dishonour, but on the other hand there is the possibility of being a vessel unto honour and so it says, "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these," (that is, from vessels to dishonour) "in separating himself from them he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work," verse 21. That answers to this vow of the Nazarite. It is a question of each brother and each sister taking up the ground in his own soul that by the grace of God he will be separated to the Lord to be serviceable to the Master and prepared for every good work. In order for that you must be separated from everything which in principle is iniquitous and you must also be prepared to separate yourself from persons who are vessels to dishonour.

So it says here that the Nazarite is to separate himself from wine and strong drink and so on, that is he is to guard against anything that would excite the flesh, natural excitement and all that kind of thing. It says in Ephesians 5: 18, "be not drunk with wine, in which is debauchery" (referring to what naturally tends to excite) "but be filled with the Spirit." In Numbers 6: 5 it says, "All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head;" that means that you surrender, you are prepared to surrender. I appeal to the young brothers here; it means we are prepared to surrender what men would regard as manliness, that is to say, in separation to the Lord we do not go in for the things of the world; we may be thought very strange, we may be thought poor in spirit, we may be thought to be not good mixers as people say. You are just prepared to accept the reproach of not being a man of the world, you are prepared to take on feminine features, you let your hair grow long so to speak. Instead of being self-assertive, you are characterised by subjection; you really take on a feminine attitude. You hold Christ in your heart as the One from whom you want to derive and to whom you desire to live, and in that way you take on what in the eyes of the world may seem to be weak feminine features, but it is precious in the sight of God. You remember how when David danced before Jehovah, he danced before the ark, how scathingly Michal Saul's daughter spoke to him. David said, "It was before Jehovah". She said he was making himself vile, and he said, "I will make myself yet more vile than thus," 2 Samuel 6: 22; "It was before Jehovah," verse 21. And that is what this involves; the testimony can only be maintained in the spirit of Nazariteship, of separation to the Lord and that involves that we are prepared to surrender all the world regards as manliness and all that kind of thing. We are prepared to take up an attitude that bespeaks that we are subject to Christ and our one desire is to take character from Him. I need not pursue that. At the end of this sixth chapter of Numbers it says, "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel: saying unto them, Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee; Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." That is,

these are the lines on which the blessing of God known as a present thing and identified with the testimony, is secured.

But I ought, before leaving this chapter, to call attention to the second part of it, not to go into the detail of it, but it suggests there is the possibility of a breakdown on the part of any one of us, not that I am in any way making allowance for it or putting it at a premium or anything of that sort. If there is a breakdown, are we to give up the position? In no wise! That is not

contemplated for a moment. The position is not to be given up. If there is a breakdown, there is a way to meet the matter. We can bring a sin offering and we can bring a burnt offering; we can acknowledge before God where we have broken down, and as we acknowledge it the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin, and the value of the burnt offering remains. Our acceptance with God is unchanged. The only thing that is needed is that we should acknowledge the breakdown and then understand that we are to start again. Under no circumstances is the position to be given up. There may, alas, be the breakdown, but if there has been there is the provision for it and we must avail ourselves of the provision for it; bring the sin offering, bring the burnt offering, and we will realise afresh that we stand in the unchanging favour of God in acceptance with Him in the value of Christ and His death, and the blood of Jesus Christ avails to cleanse from all sin. And then the person was to shave his head. The days that are before may be lost, but he is to start afresh: what is contemplated is that it is going to be carried through, "he shall again consecrate to Jehovah the days of his separation."

Now I wish to refer to the passage in chapter 10, for it is a most encouraging passage and in connection with it I would refer to the last verse of chapter 2 which I have not yet spoken of. I read that verse because it shows that there are two positions in connection with the maintenance of the testimony in the wilderness, one is that of pitching by their standards, there is the stationary position; and the other is of movement; "so they encamped according to their standards, and so they journeyed". It is an important thing to see that the testimony of God is characteristically in movement. There are times when it is stationary; that has in mind the consolidation of the truth, but characteristically it is in movement. They moved when the cloud moved; the cloud signifies the presence of God with His people, the presence of the Spirit of God. From time to time there is a movement of the cloud, that takes form in the Lord presenting some fresh aspect of the truth. Some fresh aspect of the truth is brought forward authoritatively in ministry and when that takes place, the whole of the saints are called upon to move in relation to it. When the cloud moved, the whole of the tabernacle had to be taken down, every bit of it had to be taken down, and then it had to be carried until the cloud stopped, and then when the cloud stopped the whole thing had to be set up again. It was the same tabernacle and had to be set up again in the same way, but it was in a new setting. So it is, dear brethren, that as the Lord gives fresh accession of light, drawing attention to some feature of the truth which previously had not been apprehended, the intention is that all the saints have their spiritual ears open to it and should be prepared to adjust their thoughts in relation to it. It has a bearing on the truth of the assembly and the truth

has to be taken up and if one may so say, rearranged in the light of the new position that has come about by the movement of the testimony. I trust, dear brethren, you will weigh this because there is nothing so sorrowful than to go to a place and find that the brethren there have not in any sense been moved by the ministry which the Lord may be giving. It is a most sorrowful matter, because if the cloud is in movement God intends that all the saints should move with it. The Lord will help us to understand the truth if we get to Him about it, and to understand how it affects the assembly position. All this is a matter of exercise and the Lord intends that we should be in exercise and the Lord intends, dear brethren, that we should show our fidelity to Him by our being committed to the testimony to which we are called.

Now I must close and refer briefly to the passage in Numbers 10 because this refers to the time when the testimony started in movement. It was the first journey from the mount of Sinai: they were just about to set forward in movement, that is to say, now the wilderness is coming into view as a place in which the testimony of God was to be carried notwithstanding any opposition they might encounter. It says "they set forward from the mountain of Jehovah and went three days' journey." I think that means it is a full testimony to what the wilderness is. Two days would be witness to the fact, three days is complete witness to the fact; that is to say as committed to the testimony of God it is a proving of what the wilderness is. It says, "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them," The ark moved of its own accord. If you read the earlier chapters of Numbers you will see that the normal position of the ark was not before the people, but in the midst of them. When the people moved, the normal position of the ark was to be in the midst of the people. The camp of Judah was to move first, and then the camp of Reuben and then the ark and then the camp of Ephraim and then the camp of Dan: that was the order; but here the ark moved forward of itself and went before the people. I believe it is to assure us that the Lord will go before and undertake everything that is necessary for His people as they on their part are prepared to commit themselves to God's testimony in this world. I have linked it in my own mind with what it says in John 13 where the Lord was contemplating leaving His own. "Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end," verse 1. He was going to depart out of the world; that is, the world would now become a wilderness. In the absence of Christ the world is a wilderness, and the Lord knows what the character of it is, and He knows that the saints, as committed to God's testimony in the world will be subject to all kinds of testing and opposition. That is inevitable. But now with that position

in view, it says He loved them right through to the end, as though He deliberately set Himself to love the saints. Whatever arises, one thing can be relied upon and that is the love of Christ, and I believe that is what this incident is intended to set before us that, as the wilderness position begins to open out before us, as committed to the testimony, the Lord would say, You can rely upon My love.

The ark went before them to search out a resting place for them and as it set forward Moses said, "Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thy face. And when it rested, he said, Return, Jehovah, unto the myriads of the thousands of Israel." I believe we often prove this on Lord's day morning. We come together to break bread in a wilderness setting and we find that, though we are still in the wilderness and have not reached our permanent resting place, the Lord has provided a resting place for us; it may be for a brief hour or an hour and a half, but there is a resting place which the Lord has provided in the midst of the wilderness. It is to strengthen us in our position in the testimony in the wilderness, that He has provided a resting place for us, and He has provided it in the power of a love that has met everything that stood in the way. So we are to be encouraged to commit ourselves to this position. The young and old alike can afford to commit themselves thoroughly to it, because one thing we can rely upon is that the love of Christ goes right through to the end.

THE GOVERNMENTAL WAYS OF GOD

Galatians 6: 7 - 9; 2 Chronicles 15: 1 - 9; 2 Chronicles 16: 7 - 10

It was in my mind to say a word in regard of the government of God, not only as against those who do evil, but more especially to emphasise that it is in favour of those who do well. Perhaps we do not always bear this in mind in speaking and thinking of the government of God. When we speak of the government of God, we have in mind that God is exercising control, although in an unseen way, over the earth, and has His eye upon every individual and particularly on His people as moving together, and even upon the nations. In Ezekiel 1 the prophet is given to see a vision, and a vision which conveys that in an indirect and unseen way God is exercising control over what is moving on the earth. The prophet sees, amongst other things, wheels within wheels; wheels whose rims are exceeding high and full of eyes, indicating that there is nothing that escapes the notice of God. Above that, he sees the expanse as a terrible crystal, as though to impress us with the thought that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," 1 John 1: 5. The heavenly city will come forth clear as crystal, but Ezekiel speaks of the terrible crystal indicating that there is no darkness with God, everything is as clear as possible in His sight. All that is being done, whether by nations or by His people as moving together, is perfectly clear before Him as to its true character. Then above all that, he sees a throne and the appearance of a man upon it. We are reminded that the Lord Jesus is in supreme control, however much things happening in the world or even amongst ourselves at times might suggest otherwise. Faith recognises that the Lord Jesus is in supreme control and considering always for God, although He is there as a Man who is sympathetic with His people.

The thought of the government of God is a very salutary and sobering thought but an encouraging one if we are prepared to go on with what is good. The apostle says, "God is not mocked; for whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap," Galatians 6: 7. That is, it is an invariable principle with God. It is part of His ways, and I would say that His ways do not interfere with His counsels of grace. He has indeed taken us up sovereignly in His love for the greatest conceivable thoughts of blessing, but the fact that we are blessed in Christ, and stand in the place of sons before Him, in no way exempts us from the operation of His governmental ways. We have to bear that in mind, and as doing so, we shall find we are helped, because that preserves us in the fear of God and preserves us from coming under influences that might otherwise prejudicially affect us. So it says, "whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap. For he that sows to his own flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh,"

but then it says, "he that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life," and that is rather the side which I wanted to stress. While there is the side of God's government which operates against what is evil, so that if I sow to my flesh I shall of the flesh reap corruption, what I desired to stress is that there is the side of God's government which is advantageous to me; if I sow to the Spirit I shall of the Spirit reap eternal life.

In 1 Timothy we have a similar thing where the apostle says, "Of some men the sins are manifest beforehand, going before to judgment, and some also they follow after," 1 Timothy 5: 24. The government of God is inexorable. Then it says, "In like manner good works also are manifest beforehand, and those that are otherwise cannot be hid," verse 25. That is a most encouraging word to go on with what is good in the sight of God whether it becomes manifest at once or not, for eventually the position is that it cannot be hid. Then in Luke 6 the Lord says, "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall be given into your bosom: for with the same measure with which ye mete it shall be measured to you again," verse 38. That is again an invariable principle in God's ways, that with what measure we mete it shall be measured to us again. So there is every encouragement to sow to the Spirit. It is a question of what we allow our minds to be engaged with, whether we recognise that we have dwelling in us the Holy Spirit of God who is ready to guide into all the truth. He has all the wealth of His Master in His hands (as in Genesis 24), and whether we are prepared to allow our minds to come under the power and control of the Spirit, more and more characteristically so. We shall thus find that of the Spirit we reap life everlasting, the things of God become increasingly real and satisfying to us. They really become our life, and a life that cannot be taken away from us by death.

I read the scripture in Galatians to draw attention to this great principle of God's government which is always operating in relation to each one of us individually, and it is well for us to face it, for we are either sowing to the flesh or sowing to the Spirit, and it is a question of the lines on which we are going to prosper spiritually. It says, "And Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year a hundredfold," Genesis 26: 12. That is how God operates in blessing towards those who pay respect to this principle upon which blessing is enjoyed.

Now I refer to the reign of Asa, as recorded for us in 2 Chronicles, as rather enforcing what I have in mind, and that too as relating to the people of God as going on together, because Asa was the king of Judah and really stood as representative of the people. The prophet Oded comes to him and says, "Hear

ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: Jehovah is with you while ye are with him; and if ye seek him he will be found of you, but if ye forsake him he will forsake you," 2 Chronicles 15: 2. We often ask that the Lord will be with us, but I believe it is important to bear this in mind that the Lord is with us if we are with Him; it is a question of whether we are with Him. It should always be our concern to be with Him in what He is doing, to be with Him in His own thoughts, in His own outlook. If He is giving ministry to the saints we are concerned to be with Him in it, not to be inattentive to it, not to think it is too hard for us to understand, but to be concerned to follow it up, to be with Him in it. The Lord ministers to the assembly constructively, not promiscuously, and if we would be led into all the truth, if we are to answer to all that God has in mind for His people, it must be our concern to be with the Lord. The Lord is with us if we are with Him. The same thing also applies, not only in regard to what the Lord is giving in ministry, but in relation to any matters that arise amongst us; our great concern is to be with Him, and He will be with us as we are with Him. That involves exercise as to a suited state of soul. For instance, it says, "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble," 1 Peter 5: 5, and it says, "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word," Isaiah 66: 2. That is the kind of man who can be with God, be with the Lord; one who is concerned to be suitable morally, judging immediately every working of pride and will, and maintained in the presence of God in a humble and contrite spirit. I believe that was what Elijah had in mind when he went with Elisha from Gilgal,

first to Bethel and then to Jericho and then to the Jordan, and at each point he said, "tarry here." He was testing Elisha as to whether he was prepared to be with him. Elisha responded to the test three times showing that he was concerned to be with Elijah, "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee!" and thus he was fitted to take Elijah's place in ministry here.

So the prophet Oded says, "Jehovah is with you while ye are with him; and if ye seek him he will be found of you, but if ye forsake him he will forsake you," 2 Chronicles 15: 2. Then he goes on to indicate what had for a long time marked Israel, they were "without the true God, and without a teaching priest" simply because of departure from God. God's government was working out and had been working out until they realised it, and when they in their trouble turned to Jehovah the God of Israel and sought Him, He was found of them. Then the prophet goes on to speak of what had marked those times, "no peace to him that went out nor to him that came in, but great disturbances were amongst all the inhabitants of the countries," verse 5. It was a question of the government of God working out among the people of God, but Asa had brought in recovery, and in the previous chapter their faith had been tested

when an army of one million Ethiopians had come against them and they were only about half as strong, but they were seeking Jehovah and He answered them and gave them the victory. The prophet says, "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded," verse 7. It says that when Asa heard these words he took courage and went forward removing all that was obnoxious to God among the people and it went right on to their taking an oath to serve Jehovah, and "Jehovah gave them rest round about," verse 15.

The second book of Chronicles is remarkable in this way that it does not only record history, but constantly gives us the moral bearing of it, and frequently shows us how the government of God follows us even to our burial, for there is no book like it for recording the kind of burial certain persons had, and it will always be found to be in keeping with the course they had pursued, showing that the government of God will follow us even to our burial. In 2 Chronicles 16 Asa is again threatened, and this time he does not turn to the Lord but turns to the king of Syria and at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa. This time it is a seer; in the previous chapter it is a prophet who came to him with the word of the Lord. The seer does not speak as having a word from the Lord to communicate to Asa but he speaks as one who sees things. We may see things as observing God's ways and understanding them, as it says at the end of Psalm 107, "Whoso is wise, let him observe these things, and let them understand the loving-kindnesses of Jehovah." Observation enters into spiritual things and ability, as observing God's ways, to bring home to people what the consequences are sure to be of a certain course they are on. The seer comes and says, "Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and hast not relied on Jehovah thy God, therefore has the army of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand," 2 Chronicles 16: 7. Then in verse 9, "For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him," a remarkable statement. The seer, though having to reprove the king on account of his defection, brings forward the operations of God's government in favour of those whose heart is perfect towards Him. That is what he would stress, what he would leave with Asa as if to encourage him to get away from everything that is in the nature of departure from God, and he would find, as going on with God, that he was not overlooked. What a word of encouragement for everyone of us in these days that are becoming increasingly difficult for the people of God, for those who desire to be true and faithful and not allow any compromise of the truth! What an encouragement to think that "the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him."

Alas, Asa was wroth and had the seer put in prison, and oppressed some of the people; a sorrowful ending of a man whose course in the main had been pleasing to God. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign he was diseased in his feet. After going on for many years with God, it is possible to get away at the end and become diseased in our feet so that our walk is no longer pleasing to God. The nature of Asa's burial is recorded, "And they buried him in his own sepulchre, which he had excavated for himself in the city of David," 2 Chronicles 16: 14. Maybe the secret of his defection was that he wanted a monument to his own greatness, that that had been in his mind, and the Spirit of God brings it out now at the end. He was buried with mixed spices, as though there was a certain mixture that entered into it. It is a sorrowful thing that while there is the recognition of all that there has been of God there is also the recognition that there has been something else.

How different is the case of Jehoiada the priest. He was not a king but a priest, but it says, "they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and toward his house," 2 Chronicles 24: 15. He had simply wrought good toward God and His house and having been marked by that throughout his long life of 130 years he died full of days, showing that he had gone on day by day with God. The secret of spiritual prosperity is to go on day by day with God. Today is the thing that is important, how we get through today, and to watch the beginnings of defection, because every defection begins on *one* day and if that day had been watched defection would not have set in.

I only wanted to say that for our encouragement. We have to face as long as we are here that the government of God goes on inexorably without partiality, affecting every one of us, but there is great encouragement in it for it is operating in the favour of those whose heart is perfect towards God, and the Lord is with those who go on with Him, "Jehovah is with you while ye are with him." May the Lord strengthen us to go on with Him to the end in that which is pleasing to Himself, for His name's sake.

(Word given at meeting for ministry.)

VALUING THE INHERITANCE

Judges 1:1-7; Judges 1:12-15; Judges 3:16-20; Judges 7:16-20; Judges 8:1-3; Judges 16:25-30

I believe the incidents we have read in the first chapter of Judges are intended to show us the lines upon which we may take possession of our inheritance, and when I speak of our inheritance I mean all that God has prepared according to His purpose and in His love for those whom He has called. Then I think in the subsequent passages we have certain features that are intended to characterise us with a view to meeting anything that Satan would endeavour to introduce that would hinder the enjoyment of the inheritance or rob the people of God of it. When Joshua had died, unlike the position when Moses died, there was no leader already on the scene to take his place. When Moses was about to die he appealed to God to "set a man over the assembly, who may go out before them, and who may come in before them," Numbers 27:16,17, and God indicated that Joshua, a man in whom was the Spirit, as He said, was to be leader in place of Moses. But when Joshua died no such leader was indicated, rather what God had in mind was that His people were to move together mutually. They ask who was to go up first, and Jehovah said, "Judah"; that is, the tribe of Judah, it was to be a collective movement, and then without any instruction from God Judah says to Simeon, "Come up with me into my lot... and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot," Judges 1:3. So there is at once brought under notice this great thought of brotherly love, of being together in the things of God, which is a most important matter if we are to take possession and to enjoy the inheritance, because God's thoughts involve His saints all together.

John the Baptist had said of the Lord Jesus that He would baptise with the Holy Spirit, and it says in Corinthians, "For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body," 1 Corinthians 12: 13. *One body* suggests being together in a most intimate way, for all the members of a body are interdependent and rightly move in relation to the good of the whole, and "if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it," 1 Corinthians 12: 26. And there is the further thought of our all being given to drink of one Spirit, which implies that we are happy in that position, contented and satisfied. That was seen on the day of Pentecost, all that believed were together. The Spirit of God never works in the way of disruption among the saints. He always works with a view to binding and holding the saints together, so the word *together* is to be continually in our minds and hearts. We were singing of the moment when the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven, and it says in 1 Thessalonians 4: 17,

"then we the living who remain, shall be caught up *together* with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord." So that the thought of *together* is characteristic of Christianity. There is no real enjoyment of the things that God has prepared for them who love Him, save as together. I do not mean, of course, that any who, in the ways of God, are isolated, may not have in the Spirit the enjoyment of the things belonging to the saints. I have no doubt John in Patmos had such enjoyment, "I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus," Revelation 1: 9. But no-one who puts himself in isolation in an independent way or is not governed by the will of God can expect to have much enjoyment of the inheritance of God's people because in the nature of things, things are to be enjoyed together and this principle of brotherliness, of drawing all into these things is to be cultivated by us. Judah set it in motion here and Simeon responded, and it says, "And Judah went up; and Jehovah delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand," Judges 1: 4. Then they found a man, Adoni-Bezek, who had moved in entirely different lines. No thought of brotherly love, no principle of bringing out all that was in the brethren, had marked him. "Seventy kings, with their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gleaned under my table," verse 7. He had evidently been a dominating personality who insisted on his own will and robbed the seventy kings of all power of action and movement. That kind of spirit is entirely inimical to the inheritance. If God finds such a spirit in any one of the local companies He greatly resents it. It is not derived from Christ and what has to be recognised is that God's government is all the time operating in a most infallible way among the saints. This man, Adoni-Bezek, recognised the fact that the government of God had overtaken him, "as I have done, so God has requited me." It says, "they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died," verse 7. If we can only bring souls into the good of the assembly, for Jerusalem represents the assembly in actual expression among the saints, "a city that is compact together," Psalm 122: 3, where brotherly love is, it will be the death blow to everything that marked Adoni-Bezek. "And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died." It was the end of that kind of clement when once he was brought to where the assembly was found in living expression. So the first feature that is so essential if we are to enter upon our inheritance is brotherly love in practical expression, and I of course include the sisters. Brotherly love simply means the love of the brethren, love of that character, love that belongs to the circle of those born of God.

Then we, come to the incident of Othniel and Achsah, and Caleb presents Achsah as attractive. He says, "He that smites Kirjath-sepher and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife," Judges 1: 12. That is, Achsah is

presented as someone who is attractive. If she had no attractions then no-one would be induced to take Kirjath-sepher in order to have her, so that Achsah represents the attractiveness of the assembly. What follows is that she represents the assembly as appreciating the inheritance, but here she represents the assembly as attractive. Othniel is attracted by Achsah. He says, I would like to have her, and in order to have her for a wife he is prepared to take Kirjath-sepher. Achsah represents the idea of the assembly, God's thoughts regarding the assembly presented objectively in their attractiveness, and there was one in this man Othniel who was concerned to have it for himself. We read and speak a lot about the assembly and it is of God that we should do so, but the point is to have it for ourselves in the good of it, to have it in power. What comes to light in Othniel is the energy of the Spirit, for Kirjath-sepher represents the city of the book and Othniel has to overcome it. He has to overcome any thought that these holy matters regarding the assembly can be entered upon merely by reading a book. Books are all right in their place. The Scriptures, of course, are invaluable, and the written ministry gives us light as to divine thoughts, and is most valuable, but these things by themselves will never put us in possession of the truth. They are there in order to induce in us the energy to go in for it, and the only energy by which divine things can be laid hold of and made our own is the power of the Holy Spirit. Othniel comes forward and takes Kirjath-sepher and the result is that he has Achsah as wife. He is one who is really concerned to apprehend divine thoughts regarding the assembly in its marital relations to Christ. Othniel represents the believer who has the light of the assembly presented in an attractive way and is determined to lay hold of it and that can only be as the Holy Spirit is made full room for.

Then Achsah goes further. It says, "she urged him to ask of her father the field," verse 14. Othniel is to go further, to be enlarged, and with a view to his being enlarged she urges him to ask of her father. I believe that is what we have suggested by the apostle Paul in the epistle to the Ephesians; as presenting the truth of the assembly in all its attractiveness, he sets us the example in chapter 3 of asking of the Father. "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, in order that he may give you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power by His Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts," chapter 3: 14 - 17. He tells us how he asks of the Father that the saints might have enlargement, might have the apprehension of the truth of the assembly, because in order for that we must have the Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. He speaks of the breadth and length and depth and height, and I believe if we want to lay hold

of these things we shall take to our knees and ask of the Father. I am sure the idea in Paul telling us how he bowed his knees is to induce us to do the same. These are the lines on which we shall really get the truth of the assembly into our souls as having power to move in it in liberty and spiritual intelligence.

Then Achsah goes further. She does not only urge him to ask of her father a field, but she herself is marked by spiritual energy, "she sprang down from the ass. And Caleb said to her, What wouldest thou?" *She* is asking. It may be that Othniel and Achsah suggest what may be taken up in individual exercise on the one hand, and in assembly exercise on the other hand. Let us see that we ask the Father on these lines, not only when together at the prayer meeting, but let us also see that each one makes it a matter of individual prayer to ask of the Father on these lines. Achsah says, "Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a southern land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs," verse 15. She recognised the need of the Spirit. She says, You have given me a good land. Who could improve upon the inheritance that God has given us? Let us read the epistle to the Ephesians and see what a goodly inheritance God has provided us, but then we want the springs of water; the upper and the nether springs. The inheritance is to be enjoyed in power and freshness. The upper springs refer to the Spirit of God in relation to all that is unfolded in the epistle to the Ephesians, and the lower springs the Spirit as we have it in Romans in relation to our responsible path here, because if there is any breakdown in practical righteousness there will be no power to enter upon divine things. The more precious the things the Lord opens up to us the more important it is for us to see to our foundations, and what is practical, and to see that the epistle to the Romans has as much place with us as the epistle to the Ephesians. I believe these features of brotherly love and mutuality and the energy of the Spirit, accompanied by continual prayer and supplication to the Father, indicate the lines upon which we may take up our inheritance.

In the passages that follow it is a question of certain features that should mark us in dealing with influences that the enemy might seek to introduce that are inimical to the inheritance and would rob the saints of it. I have not attempted to deal with all the judges, I have no doubt that each one represents some feature of importance in this matter of which we are speaking, but I have selected these incidents as sufficient for the present time. So we have this judge named Ehud brought before us. The enemy oppressing the people of God was Moab, which refers, I believe, to fleshly pride and self-indulgence, particularly the latter, for Eglon the king was a fat man and all his warriors were fat, so that he represents that feature of self-indulgence which may easily come in amongst us and is very detrimental to spiritual prosperity. The

Moabites had power over Israel and they cried unto God and He raised up a saviour, Ehud, and the power Ehud used for deliverance of the people was, I have no doubt, the word of God; that was what his weapon signified. The dagger or sword had two edges; it was a short dagger and he made it for himself. He made *him* a sword. If we want to be able to use the word of God in any effective way it is important that we should first see that it has had its effect with ourselves. It is only as the word of God has had its effect with ourselves that we are able to use it effectively towards others. It says in Hebrews, "For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is not a creature unapparent before him; but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do," chapter 4: 12, 13. It is a most important matter to read the word of God in that light. It brings us into the presence of God, and God is the One with whom we have to do, and the One before whom all things are naked and laid bare. Even though one might conceal things from others and even in measure succeed in concealing things from oneself, for "The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurable," Jeremiah 17: 9, the heart of the believer is deceitful above all things, not merely the heart of an unconverted person, our own hearts are naturally capable of any amount of deceit, we cannot conceal things from God, and our only safety lies in resorting to the word of God in its searching character. David wrote Psalm 139 as one who knew the searching character of the word of God. He says, "Jehovah, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising," verses 1, 2. David was made to feel that when he did such an ordinary thing as to sit down, and when he rose up. God knew what was in his mind, but then did it repel him? It did not; it attracted him. Everyone who desires to go on with the truth is really attracted by the thought of the word of God being capable of making everything known exactly as God sees it, so he says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any grievous way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting," verses 23, 24. That is the secret of safety. So that the passage from Jeremiah, where it says that the heart is deceitful, goes on to say, "I Jehovah search the heart, I try the reins." It is the answer to the felt need of a soul who wants to have to do with God and to be delivered from the subtle influences of the flesh. He who is wise and wants to go on with God, will continually seek the presence of God that his motives and thoughts may be searched, so that all that is displeasing to God may be made known to him, and we have power in the Spirit to renounce it and go on wholly with what is pleasing to God. If Ehud had been marked by any tendency to self-indulgence he had come to a judgment of it, and so he was

able to use the sword effectively in regard to the king. He said, "I have a secret word unto thee, O king," Judges 3: 19. It is the character of the word of God, a matter between the soul and God, and the king said, "Be silent!" "And Ehud said, I have a word from God unto thee," verse 20. It is the authority of the word of God and the way God looks at things, and that was brought to bear upon Eglon and he was slain. The true character in its obnoxiousness to God of that which had held the people in oppression is all exposed, and as exposed, the people of God become delivered from it.

I pass on to Gideon; his history is a very full and interesting one and I think it has in view the development of manhood, and links with the epistles to the Corinthians. At the end of the history, the kings Zebah and Zalmunna say, "As is the man, so is his strength," Judges 8: 21. It is a question of developing manhood according to God. The Corinthians, alas, had not developed in manhood. The apostle had to say that they were babes. At the end of the first epistle he says, "quit yourselves like men," 1 Corinthians 16: 13. To be marked by the features of the flesh is a mark of spiritual babyhood. It is not a feature of manhood at all. It shows that the gospel has not been properly apprehended and is not being cherished in the soul. It is an indication of stunted growth if we are marked by the features of the flesh, and the apostle puts it on the Corinthians, "quit yourselves like men; be strong." In Gideon's day the enemy was the Midianites and the Amalekites, and in the incident in the seventh chapter I want to draw attention to two things that go together in meeting any condition in a locality that is contrary to the truth. The two things that go together are involved in the words, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!" The sword of the Lord represents the authority of the word of the Lord so that the apostle said to the Corinthians, "If any one thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment," 1 Corinthians 14: 37. So it is imperative, it has authority, and those who are insubject to it come under the discipline of the assembly.

But then there is that which accompanies it to make it increasingly effective, and that is the great power of example. That is what Gideon represents for he says, "Look on me, and do likewise," Judges 7: 17. He would set out the great idea of exemplification and that has wonderful power. If we not only state what is right according to the Lord's commandments but also exemplify it, there is added power in a way that commends the truth and makes it attractive, and I believe that was what the apostle used in dealing with the state of things in Corinth. He not only wrote his epistle which was authoritative, the Lord's commandment, but he also sent Timothy among them, "who shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ, according

as I teach everywhere in every assembly," 1 Corinthians 4: 17. What the apostle wrote to the Corinthians was enforced in a tender, patient, attractive way by the movements of Timothy in their midst. There was the power of the truth set forth in Timothy as he brought to the mind of the Corinthians Paul's ways as they are in Christ. I have no doubt it was this two-edged weapon, "the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," which God, worked to effect the deliverance that came to pass in Corinth. It was the skill of the apostle in setting out what was authoritative, and yet staying away and enforcing the authoritative word by one who set it forth in his ways. You may rest assured that the Spirit of God is with those who are walking in the truth, those who set forth Paul's ways as they are in Christ "according as I teach everywhere in every assembly." Every assembly should be marked by the same features, and they are features that are learned from Christ, features of the heavenly One.

In the next, incident at the beginning of Judges 8 we have the spirit of Christ in Gideon, and that is another thing that will often save a situation, for this was a situation that arose very suddenly and unexpectedly, and really there was no reason for it at all. It only arose out of jealousy and self-importance of the men of Ephraim; Gideon had given no occasion for it, but the men of Ephraim said, "What is this thing thou hast done to us, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with Midian?" verse 1. God had determined who should fight against the Midianites. We know well that first of all Gideon had had thirty-two thousand men and then it was proclaimed that those who were faint-hearted were to go back home and the number was reduced to ten thousand, and then God said that was too many and He would bring them down to the river and try them there. In the end there were only three hundred men and God said, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and give Midian into thy hand," Judges 7: 7. Gideon would have been justified if he had reprimanded them for taking up such an unreasonable attitude, but he says, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Are not the gleanings of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?" chapter 8: 2, as though suggesting what God had effected by the Ephraimites was greater than what was effected by Gideon. He meets it in the spirit of going down. He was not there to stand for his own reputation. That was not marking him. If any thought of having or wanting a reputation among the saints begins to assert itself, what about the One of whom it says, "made himself of no reputation"? Who was entitled to a greater reputation than Christ Jesus? The Scripture says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men," Philippians 2: 6, 7, so the mind which was set

forth in Christ Jesus is to be found characterising us in our relations with one another. It will be seen from Philippians 2 that the setting of that passage is our relations to one another. The point is how is the flesh to be met, and Gideon shines at this juncture and takes account of what God had effected by the Ephraimites as much more than anything he had done. "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves," Philippians 2: 3. Well, you might say, Is that possible? It is possible, and only on one line and that is on the line indicated in Philippians, "regarding not each his own qualities but each those of others also," chapter 2: 4. You begin to look at the work of God in others, at the spiritual features that mark certain brothers or sisters and you say, They are greater than I am. You see how patient a brother or sister is under trial and you say, He is far more patient than I would be. You see another marked by faithfulness and you say, He is far more faithful than I am. It is not anything unreal at all. It is a question of whether your mind is in that direction, and if so the Lord will show you the value of the work of God in one another and it works out for peace among the saints.

Finally we come to Samson, and it seems that what we come to in Samson's history at the close is that he lays down his life for the brethren; that is, that love shines in Samson. There was no other way to meet the position now save that of complete sacrifice of himself for the sake of his brethren and he arrives at that. It is what is arrived at as a result of recovery. We know that Samson had failed and relinquished his Nazariteship. His long hair was the evidence of Nazariteship, being suggestive of a kind of feminine character taken on by the saints individually. They are not here now as moving and acting in their own ability or according to their own will, but they are deriving from the Head, they are holding Christ in their affections and seeking to be kept under His influence, so they take on feminine character. While in the sight of men they surrender their manliness as a true Nazarite does, they take on true power and true piety in the eyes of God, but Samson had surrendered that. He had allowed his hair to be cut, but then it says that the hairs of his head began to grow again, there began to be recovery. He began to be recovered to the true principle of Nazariteship, to be separate to the Lord, to have no one else before him but the Lord, to take character from Christ, and fear moving otherwise than under the influence of Christ. There was recovery. Then there came the time when he says to God, "Lord Jehovah, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may take one vengeance upon the Philistines for my two eyes... And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines!" Judges 16: 28 - 30. He lays down his life for the brethren. It is the strength of love, "love never fails". It was something infinitely greater than anything the Philistines could produce, for the Philistine

is never marked by love. Samson gives up his life in that way and he slew more at his death than those whom he had slain in his life. It seems to be what is finally arrived at that love is developed among the saints, love that expresses itself in laying down one's life for the brethren. God is labouring at that I believe. "Hereby we have known love, because he has laid down his life for us; and we ought for the brethren to lay down our lives," 1 John 3: 16, not the love of Christ but *love* as the divine nature, what is of God. So in the third epistle of John we read of one man Diotrephes who was the exact antithesis to love. There was no love in him and John the apostle says to Gaius, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good," verse 11. Then he brings forward a living example in Demetrius, "Demetrius has witness borne to him by all, and by the truth itself: and we also bear witness, and thou knowest that our witness is true," verse 12. That is all that John says, but it is a most striking testimony, "and by the truth itself," a most remarkable thing. I do not know anyone else in Scripture of whom that is said. It is as though John would say, If you take the truth abstractly as I have given it to you in the first epistle, "Hereby we have known love, because he has laid down his life for us," chapter 3: 16., and then you look at Demetrius, you find that the two exactly correspond. Measured by the truth itself there was Demetrius exactly corresponding with it. That is what the Spirit of God is seeking to develop among us in these last days, for love never fails, and love is of God. So we find that Samson has greater power when he lays down his life than ever before in his previous history.

May the Lord help us that we may claim the inheritance and make it our own in spiritual power, and also know how to meet anything Satan may seek to introduce to rob us of it.

THE SON OF MAN IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

John 1:50,51; John 3:13-15; John 6:27; John 6:61-63; John 12:23-33; John 13:31,32

I desire to speak of the Son of man as He is presented in these scriptures in John's gospel. They are not the only passages in the gospel in which He is thus presented. There is, for instance, one in chapter 5 where we are told that the Father "has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is Son of man," verse 27, a remarkable statement showing that God is infinitely fair and intends that His judgment should be seen to be so. So that men will be judged by a Man whose glory it is that He gave Himself a ransom for all, as the Lord says, "The Son of man did not come to be ministered to, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for many," Mark 10: 45. So that as men are judged, as it says in Revelation, according to their works, they will be judged by One who at all cost to Himself provided a means by which they might have been released from the guilt attaching to them and from the sinful condition in which they were, and hence the judgment will be manifested to be absolutely fair; not a single word will be able to be said against it, but I do not dwell on that, I wish to concentrate on these passages.

The Son of man is a subject with which Nathanael, who is introduced to us in the first passage I have read, would be familiar, for we have in Psalm 8, the well known reference to the Son of man. The Psalm starts with "Jehovah our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who has set thy majesty above the heavens." It was anticipatively directing the attention of faith to Him who has gone up far above all heavens; God has established His glory above the heavens, and the Psalm goes on to speak of the Son of man, saying, "What is man," (i.e. Enosh,

mortal man) "that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man," (i.e. the son of Adam, a more distinguished presentation) "that thou visitest him?" and then it proceeds to say, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and splendour. Thou hast made him to rule over the works of thy hands." That is the position that now obtains. Hebrews 2 brings it in, adding that we do not yet see all things put under Him, "but we see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." So the position is already established, although not yet in public display. Indeed Ephesians 1 also refers to the Son of man though the term is not used, but the end of that chapter quotes from Psalm 8, "and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over

all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all."

That brings in what is of greatest interest to us, dear brethren. The Son of man, as intended to have an exalted place over all the works of God's hands, was known in Old Testament times. Daniel 7: 13 says, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man, and he came up even to the Ancient of days, ...and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom..." But in those days, it was hidden that the One who was to fill that glorious place was to have His body, the assembly, a heavenly vessel capable of expressing all that He is, to be His fulness in the day in which He fills all things for the pleasure of God and for His own pleasure. That brings in ourselves, and that is why we should be so interested in all these matters connected with the Son of man, because the day of His glory is near, and all that is waited for is the completion of the vessel "which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all."

So the Lord in speaking to Nathanael, who had confessed Him as the Son of God, the King of Israel, basing his thoughts on Psalm 2, as much as says, Yes, but there is Psalm 8, which goes further than Psalm 2. "Thou shalt see greater things than these... henceforth ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man," John 1:50,51. The Lord was saying there are to be greater things than millennial glories and they are to come in now, "Henceforth"; that is, from this time, better things, greater things, heavenly things were to be opened up. So the Lord was intimating to Nathanael, while not yet introducing the thought of the assembly, which awaited Paul's ministry, that the present time was a time in which heavenly things, greater and better than millennial things, were to be introduced, and they were to be introduced in connection with One who was to be apprehended as supreme, One upon whom the angels of God ascended and descended.

In John 3 the Lord speaks of heavenly things, saying, "If I have said the earthly things to you, and ye believe not, how, if I say the heavenly things to you, will ye believe?" Then He proceeds to speak of Himself as One who has come down from heaven to bring the light of heavenly things, but He speaks of Himself as "the Son of man who *is in heaven*." That is a statement that must arouse our attention, for the Lord was speaking to Nicodemus as a Man who was actually there on earth and yet He says, "the Son of man who is in heaven." He does not say, who *was* in heaven, or who *will be* in heaven, but there He was as a Man on earth, speaking of Himself as the Son of man who is in heaven. I have no doubt that it is an expression that is indicative of the

truth of His Person; a divine Person was there in the Person of our Lord Jesus, a divine Person became Man, the second Person in the Godhead was there. These are truly heavenly things coming into evidence, wonderful things that a Man should appear under God's eye and before men, who could speak of Himself as "the Son of man who is in heaven." The very title, Son of man, refers to God's thoughts in relation to men which were to be taken up and made good in the Son of man. So we can see, dear brethren, that manhood of a supremely excellent order has now come into being in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. One who is in heaven, over all God blessed for ever, has taken up manhood condition, bringing into manhood the moral excellence of God as made known through Christ. It is a marvellous conception, that God should have in mind to have man before Him abidingly for His pleasure, not simply the Lord Jesus alone, but that others through redemption and the gift of the Spirit should have part in that heavenly order of manhood, and thus be suitable to be united to Christ, and to serve God eternally for His pleasure. This is the conception, and I am seeking to bring these things before us in order that we may dwell upon them, think about them and see the greatness of the things to which God has called us, in view of which indeed He has wrought in us, as those who have been born of God. These are some of the things which belong to us and which it is possible for us to enter into now in the power of the Holy Spirit whom we have received.

There is another thing and that is, that the Son of man must be lifted up. It was a divine necessity; without it, divine thoughts could not be effectuated. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up." You remember that in the incident to which He refers, the people of God had murmured. They had even despised the manna and loathed it, saying, "Our soul loathes this light bread." That is what flesh is capable of. It not only has no appreciation of Christ, but it is capable of loathing Christ. God sent fiery serpents amongst them, and the people were bitten and many died. What was God doing in that? What flesh was had come out, murmuring, entirely rebellious, and now God would bring home to the people what the root of that was. Things had to be traced to their root. Sin in the flesh had its origin in Satan, in the serpent, and they had to learn what the root of it was. The root of sin in ourselves, in the flesh, is nothing less than the serpent himself. We have to arrive at things at their roots, and thank God the Son of man has come in on behalf of man in order that things may be judged at their roots, and that we should be given life in Himself. There is no redemption for the serpent, but these things have been in mind for man, and the Son of man has been lifted up in order that sin might be exposed and judged and, thank God, the Son of man has done it; He has come into the position in which it

has been effected, the Son of man has been lifted up. What a glory attaches to our Lord Jesus Christ! Before He could bring in and establish these wonderful thoughts which God has in mind in regard to a heavenly order of manhood, He must first go under the judgment in order that we, as involved in sinful flesh, might be extricated from it and given life in God's Son; "that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal," Christ as thus lifted up becomes the Object of faith, and as we read in the epistle of John, "It is the Spirit that bears witness," 1 John 5: 6, "And this is the witness, that God has given to us eternal life: and this life is in his Son," verse 11. It is there that eternal life is.

I pass on to chapter 6. The Lord said "to those who followed Him, "Ye seek me not because ye have seen signs, but because ye have eaten of the loaves and been filled. Work not for the food which perishes, but for the food which abides unto life eternal, which the Son of man shall give to you; for him has the Father sealed, even God." God the Father has sealed the Son of man. There is a Man now in the presence of God upon whom God has placed the mark of His approval. The Son of man has been sealed and He is prepared to give food that endures unto eternal life. I need not enlarge upon this chapter. The food which the Son of man gives is Himself. He has come down from heaven for that express purpose that He might become food for the sustainment of spiritual life in His people, and the food He gives is His flesh and His blood. It is a great thing not to think of these things academically; there is a great danger of thinking of divine things in a merely academic way, speaking of the flesh and blood of the Son of man and forgetting that it means that the Son of man had to die. These things are real, they have cost something and have become the expression of the personal love of Christ and of God who gave Him. All these things are the expression of love, love coming into expression in an extensive way, having in mind that men, myriads in God's purpose, should be secured according to those thoughts, and that as passing through this world where we are to serve God, we should be sustained and not overcome by the influences of the world or of nature, but should find power to move over and find our life in spiritual and heavenly things. How are we to function in any measure of power in the assembly if we do not know individually what it is to find our life in spiritual and heavenly things? We shall be found empty when the time comes. You will remember when Jehovah required that the males should appear before Him three times a year, the word was, "They shall not appear before Jehovah empty," Deuteronomy 16: 16. God has no pleasure in our appearing before Him empty, and the Lord has no pleasure in having His saints devoid of spiritual intelligence and feelings when we come together in the assembly. If we are to be developed in spiritual

substance and in power in order to move over to what is beyond death, which is our privilege on Lord's day morning when the Lord makes Himself known to us, we must know what it is to feed on this food which is presented to us in John 6. It is the Person of Christ, the Son of man giving His life that He might become our food. Our minds and affections are to enter into this matter. We are to ask ourselves what has been the import of the death of Christ? Why has He come down from heaven? It was for the express purpose of taking up our condition. It was all for us, not for Himself, and therefore these things are to be taken up by us. We are to inquire about them and feed upon them.

Towards the end of chapter 6 the Lord says, "If then ye see the Son of man ascending up where he was before?" He has gone into heaven; He is the heavenly One; He has ascended up where He was before, but we are linked up with Him by the Spirit. "It is the Spirit which quickens, the flesh profits nothing." We are to understand that flesh profits nothing, but that the power for entrance into all these things is the Spirit. We see the Son of man ascended up where He was before. What a glorious way He has taken in order that God's will might be effected, and then ascended up where He was before, a heavenly Man in heaven! And we are linked up with Him by the Spirit; that is the position, "It is the Spirit which quickens." You remember on the morning of His resurrection when those who loved Him went to the sepulchre and found an angel there, the angel said, "He is not here, for he is risen," Matthew 28: 6. That is in the assembly gospel. That word is to ring in the ears of those who love Christ. "He is not here, for he is risen." If He is not here, how can we possibly find our life in things here? He has ascended up where He was before, and we are linked up with Him by the Spirit, and the Spirit will give us an entrance into heavenly things, for they are all ours, because they are Christ's; as it says in Corinthians, "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," 1 Corinthians 3: 22, 23. So the Spirit opens up spiritual and heavenly things to us for the reason that we are bound up with Christ and linked up with Him by the Spirit. So, as the Lord says, speaking of the Spirit, "*He* shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you. All things that the Father has are mine; on account of this I have said that he receives of mine and shall announce it to you," John 16: 14, 15. That is to say, first of all we understand that they are Christ's things and they are ours because of that, but then they are the Father's things. We become enlarged to understand that the Father has a system of glory and He is the Source of all. As we have learnt our portion in relation to Christ we shall also find our portion in relation to the Father's things. These are the lines on which we become fitted to enter upon our portion proper to the assembly.

I pass on to chapter 12, because that is a most important chapter as having its bearing on our public position in this world. The occasion of it is when certain Greeks come up to Philip and say, "Sir, we desire to see Jesus," and Jesus says, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." He is referring, I understand, to His actual glorification at the right hand of God. I say that now because in the next chapter where He speaks of the Son of man being glorified, it is a different thought. Here, the Lord is saying, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." He is referring to the fact that His death was just about to take place, the time had come for the Son of man to be glorified, for Him to take His place in heaven. Heavenly things which had begun to be opened out were about to come positively into view in the Son of man taking His place in heaven, but as I have been saying the thoughts of God are that a heavenly order of manhood is to appear. Those who partake in that order are to be brought to light, but that could not be apart from His death, so it says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it abides alone; but if it die, it bears much fruit." Here, the death of Christ is presented as His own act. His falling into the ground for the express purpose of bringing forth the much fruit according to the mind of God. Those who are of His own order of manhood are to be brought into view as the result of His falling into the ground and dying. It would be impossible apart from that, for redemption must be accomplished and the Spirit given. There could be no heavenly order of manhood apart from the Holy Spirit, that is the life of that Man being communicated, and the life of that Man could not be communicated until redemption was accomplished, and hence the corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die. But later on in this passage He presents His death from the standpoint of it being man's act. He says, "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me. But this he said signifying by what death he was about to die," John 12: 32. It was the death of the cross, and the cross was the expression of man's estimate of Christ. I know there are other thoughts connected with the cross as well, but it was the expression of man's estimate of Christ that He was cast out and crucified. It speaks eloquently of the personal attractiveness of Christ, that, notwithstanding He was presented in testimony as One who has been crucified. He becomes such a point of attraction and draws all to Himself; all those in whom God is working are drawn to Christ. In all the early preachings in the Acts, the apostles laboured to stress the fact that the One whom the world had crucified is the One whom God has raised from the dead, and all those who received the testimony and were baptised committed themselves to the One whom the world had crucified. On the day of Pentecost it was fresh in the minds of men, and the three thousand converted ones identified

themselves publicly with the One who had been crucified and the One exalted by God's right hand.

The death of Christ is presented thus to us in different lights. It is His own act in order that the much fruit might be brought to pass, but on the other hand when it is the manner of His death it is presented as man's act as expressing their contempt for the heavenly Man. One can understand it, because if God introduces a new order of man, it obviously involves the setting aside and displacement of the first man, it involves the displacement of his world, and you can easily understand that that entails rejection and reproach for those in whom God is working. Man does not readily accept the testimony that he is to be displaced or that the world is to be judged, and hence the rejection of Christ has been witnessed to in the manner of death which He died. All that is to enter as a kind of fibre into our spiritual understanding as still here for a moment. That is to say, on the one hand we have to accept death in the power of the Spirit in order to participate in spiritual life and blessings, but we have also to understand that the death of Christ involves the setting aside of the first man and the judging of his world, and those who are faithful to Christ will find themselves going against the current of things in this world. You cannot possibly maintain the two positions, but alas, there are Christians who try to maintain the two positions and try to find a little part in this world and a little part in divine things, but you cannot have the two. "He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal," John 12: 25. This is a most important matter, it is a question of understanding what has come to pass in the death and crucifixion of Christ. If we are to find our life in relation to life eternal, if we are to keep our life unto life eternal, it must be on the principle of hating our life here. The eunuch of whom we read in Acts 8 came to it quickly, he was reading about one who was led "as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb in presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth," verse 32. And he said to Philip, "I pray thee, concerning whom does the prophet say this? of himself or of some other?" Philip quickly told him it was about another Man, the other Man whom God had brought into view, "for his life is taken from the earth." So the eunuch quickly understood the position; he said, "Behold water; what hinders my being baptised?" He was prepared to lose his life here and I have no doubt he kept it unto life eternal.

In John 12, the Lord in His instruction goes further, saying, "If any one serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall be my servant," verse 26. It is futile to attempt to serve the Lord unless we are prepared to follow Him in His movements, follow Him as He leads us out of this world, but follow Him also in His movements as recognising the ministry He is giving. The two

go together; we must follow Him in His movements out of this world, and we must follow Him in what He is saying at the present time. If we would serve Him, we must be with Him, "where I am, there also shall be my servant."

Thank God it is true as to the future, those who serve Him will be with Him where He is, but we may give it a present application, it is a matter of where the Lord is at the moment, in relation to what He is stressing at the moment. It should be the concern of those who serve the Lord to be with the Lord where He is now. It involves that we are prepared to follow and to take up all the exercises that the truth entails, so that we are ready to move on as the Lord moves on, because as I said, Christianity is a system of movement, there is to be no stagnation in Christianity. There is such a thing as lodging, reaching a point and being detained there for a while in order that the position should be consolidated, but if you lodge, you lodge with a view to moving on further.

In John's gospel the Lord is seen in constant movement. He says, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But on account of this have I come to this hour," chapter 12: 27. It is a most touching word; I suppose this is the nearest approach to Gethsemane that we have in the gospel of John. I was speaking of the danger of our holding the truth academically, but here the Spirit of God records how the Lord says that His soul was troubled, the feelings of the Lord were troubled as He faced what death meant for Him; "Now is my soul troubled." It was for the Father's pleasure, but it was also for us, and the Lord as entering into death felt all that death meant for Him. All this is intended to be brought to bear upon us, in order that we should not hold back from accepting death, in the power of the Spirit, to find our life more fully in the things that are, above. "Father, glorify thy name." This present world is the scene of man's glory and it all ends in death, indeed its true character as having no glory is already exposed, God is seeing to that. It is being more and more exposed as devoid of all glory, but even if it has had any glory attaching to it, it all ends in death. However great a name man may have it all comes to an end in death, and at that point the Father brings in His glory, the Father operates in resurrection and brings in an order of life and blessing which is eternal. So the voice comes from heaven, "I both have glorified and will glorify it again." Referring to the resurrection of Lazarus, the Father had already glorified His name by means of the Son, and now He says, "I will glorify it again," referring to the resurrection of Christ. God gave an answer by raising Christ and glorifying Him, but that involves the judgment of this world. If God raises from the dead the One whom the world has cast out, obviously the world is judged; the execution of the judgment is deferred for a time, but the sentence has been passed. All this is to affect us as to the public position lest we should be captivated by this world. We are to

understand how the true character of the world is exposed in the judgment it has passed in putting Christ on the cross. The position is made absolutely clear. "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out: and I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me." The crucified One becomes the point of attraction to all those in whom God has wrought. It speaks volumes as to the personal attractiveness of Christ, that He is great enough to attract to Himself, and hold for Himself, all those whom the Father gives to Him.

The final passage read comes in at the point where Judas goes out. "When therefore he was gone out Jesus says, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him," John 13: 31. Here the glorifying of the Son of man does not refer to His actual glorification at the right hand of God; it refers to His being glorified in a moral sense in His death. What I mean is this; Judas Iscariot and the Son of man stand in contrast. Into Judas Iscariot Satan had entered. There was a man now fully possessed by Satan, and evil was about to be perpetrated by that man. Satan had one in whom he could fully express his own thoughts. Judas Iscariot was about to betray the Son of God into the hands of His enemies with a view to His being crucified; not that Judas had that in mind, I expect he had in mind that the Lord would save Himself, but he was simply moving under the influence of base gain, because he had the bag and was a thief, and was prepared to sell the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, but he was a tool in the hands of Satan. It was the culminating act of opposition to God that the Son of God should be cast out, and Judas was a man available to Satan for that. In contrast to that, in the Son of man God had a Man in whom all that God was should come into expression. The Son of man was to be glorified. It was His glory in contrast to all that was coming out in Judas. It was His glory that all that God was should he brought gloriously into expression in His death; it was the glory of the Son of man that He was prepared to offer Himself in order that that might be effected. So the Lord gave Himself up to death. It was the occasion when God was vindicated in His holiness, and the rights of God were established immutably, the occasion when the love of God shone out in redemption -

"Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail,
Redemption's glory shed." (235:4)

It was the Son of man who gave up Himself in order that that might come into display. Let us not have all these things academically. The cost to the Lord was great; His soul was troubled in the light of it, but it was to His glory to go the whole length and make a way in order that God might effectuate all His thoughts of glory and blessing. The Son of man was glorified in yielding

Himself up in order that God might be thus glorified, "God is glorified in him." I love to think of this. It means there are no moral issues remaining unsolved, no loose ends left untied: Everything that has come in through sin has been perfectly met and God is free to open up all that is in His purpose. In the next chapter the Lord speaks of the Father's house, opening up all that is in God's purpose. Every moral question raised by the introduction of sin has been settled to God's glory in the cross of Christ.

I believe if we contemplate the glories of the Son of man, it will increase our appreciation of Christ and our appreciation of the blessed God who has brought Christ in, the Son of man who is out of heaven and who has ascended up where He was before, in order to introduce a heavenly order of life and blessing in which we are to have part, through grace, with Christ.

THE GOSPEL WHICH WE HAVE RECEIVED

Galatians 1:6-9; Galatians 3:6-9. Galatians 4:1-7; Galatians 4:25,26; Galatians 5:1; Galatians 5:24,25; Genesis 15:6-14; Genesis 15:17

I wish, dear brethren, with the Lord's help, to present to you the gospel which we have received, and in order to make it clear, one had in mind to speak of the blessing of the gospel under four heads. First of all I wish to speak of the principle of it, secondly the character of the blessing, thirdly the substantiality of it; and fourthly, the liberating power of it; because I believe there are many who have but little sense of the wonderful character of the blessing that has come to us in the gospel. It is clear from the verses I read in Galatians 1 that the apostle was impressed with the distinctive character, the glorious character of the gospel; which had been entrusted to him, so that referring to what had been brought in among the Galatian assemblies which was of a perverting and subversive character, he says, "to a different, gospel, which is not another one," verses 6, 7. That is to say, it "was no gospel at all, there was no glad tidings in it at all, and so jealous was he in regard of the glorious character of the gospel which the Lord had entrusted to him to minister that he said that though he himself or anyone else or even an angel from heaven preached any other gospel let him be accursed. A most solemn thing, but that shows us how jealous God is, that the gospel as He has caused it to be proclaimed in this our day, and which we have received, should be apprehended by us, and maintained in its own glorious distinctiveness.

Now, first of all, as to the principle of it, the gospel announces blessing from God, there would be no glad tidings in it if it announced curse, and the apostle in this remarkable epistle works out the subject from the history of Abraham: We well know that what was at work in Galatia was a legal element seeking to bring the saints of God under the power of the law and requiring that they should be circumcised, and the apostle meeting it goes back to the history of Abraham. Abraham lived, as he says, 430 years before the law was given, and God's relations with Abraham were not on the basis of law but on the basis of what God was pleased sovereignly to promise. So the history of Abraham commences with God calling him to leave his kindred and his country and his father's house and to go to a land that He should show him. He called him to a path of faith; it was to blessing, but blessing which had not as yet been defined in its full character. He was to move out in obedience and the word to him was that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed; that is, God was establishing the principle that His thoughts of blessing to go out to all the nations would be on the principle of the obedience of faith, the blessing depending, not on those who were called, but on God Himself. So the apostle

laboured to establish this. He says in Galatians 3, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," verse 6; we have that in Genesis 15. God led out Abraham, who at that time had no seed, and directed his view to the stars of the heaven and said to him, "So shall thy seed be!" verse 5. It looked impossible so far as natural calculations were concerned, but "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now we have all commenced on that line, dear brethren, we have believed God. I am not referring, of course, to what precedes that, new birth, the work of God in us, but I am commencing from our own intelligent history in relation to these things, that we have begun there, we have believed God. We have believed on Him "who has raised from among the dead Jesus our Lord, who has been delivered for our offences and has been raised for our justification," Romans 4: 24, 25, and that has been imputed to us for righteousness. That is, our standing in relation to God is clearly established to be purely on the principle of grace, and it must be so in order that things should be assured, and that all the glory should belong to God. If there were any other ground of blessing there would be some glory attaching to ourselves and there would be the certainty of breakdown. But God establishes His thoughts of blessing on the principle of pure grace and establishes them himself through our Lord Jesus Christ, and in that way the position becomes absolutely immutable. Hence it says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Know then that they that are on the principle of faith, these are Abraham's sons." Well that is the great principle. I know these things are well known, but it is a question of the truth being established, and we need to be established with grace. The principle on which God has begun is the principle upon which He will continue and finish; He is called the God of all grace - "the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus," 1 Peter 5: 10. That is what He has called us to.

Before we proceed further, I would like to refer to the passage in Genesis that I read, because Abraham having believed God and it having been accounted to him for righteousness, and God having promised to give him the land to inherit it, Abraham wants to know how he shall know that he will possess it. Now that was not displeasing to God, that was not doubting His word. Abraham wanted to be assured in himself of the reality of the things which God had promised him, and God would have us all assured in ourselves. That is to say, on the one hand there is such a thing as the word of God which we believe, we commit ourselves to it; it is a question of believing God; but then there is such a thing also as being confirmed in the truth in our own souls, and that is what Abraham desired. He said, "How shall I know that I shall possess it?" verse 8. The Lord God told him to do a remarkable thing; .to take all these

animals and birds, a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old and a ram of three years old and a turtle dove and a young pigeon. We find in the epistle to the Romans that the principle of law is brought in in its bearing upon us, following upon our having been justified on the principle of faith, in order that by means of facing the exercises that that raises, we should be established in the grace of God. And so in Romans 7, as we know, the apostle traces the application of the principle of law to an exercised soul. He says that the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good and yet the experience of the soul which he is tracing was that by reason of the application of the law to his conscience, he was made conscious of being convicted and condemned by it. He says that he had not known lust if the law had not said thou shalt not covet, but as soon as the law, which was holy and the commandment holy and just and good, was applied to his conscience, he discovered that that which was insubject to the law and condemned by it asserted itself in his own case. And therefore that which, as he says, was intended for life was, in his case found unto death. Now all this, beloved brethren, while elementary, is very important. It is a question of facing every one of these exercises, if they have not already been faced; in order to be brought into the liberty of the blessing which God has in mind for us in the gospel. Abraham said, "how shall I know that I shall possess it?" He wanted to be fully assured, and so God told him to take account, in what has been described as an analytical way, of what he had in the way of substance. He had to go to his flock, he also had to look out a heifer and make sure it was a heifer of three years old; he also had to look out for a she-goat: and make sure that it was a she-goat of three years old; and so on. That is, he had to examine carefully what he had in the way of wealth. There had, to be a kind of analytical process gone through, and not only that, but when he had these things he had to divide them in two pieces and set one against the other. I believe all that is intended to be illustrative of the process which is depicted for us in the chapter in the epistle to the Romans which I have mentioned. A certain analysis goes on under the effect of the law as brought to bear upon the conscience. What is discovered on the one hand is that there is a total inability to answer to the requirement of the law and indeed a constant movement of will in opposition to it and of lusting after the things that the law condemned: and yet on the other hand there is a desire for what is right, a desire after what is of God, an acknowledgment of the law, that it is holy and just and good. And by means of facing all these exercises the soul arrives at this that there is an "I" - "I myself", as he says - an inner man, which he can take account of as the result of the work of God; there is a something there that is of God. He says that if he acknowledges the law that it is right; then he recognises that there is an 'I' there, an identity there that he can take account

of as being the result of the work of God in him, but he also discovers that flesh is in him and the true character of the flesh becomes exposed, so much so, that he says, 'I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell,' verse 18, it is not there. The flesh is discovered to be wholly corrupt and incapable of improvement, as indeed - it says in the next chapter, "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God for it is not subject to the law of God; for neither indeed can it be: and they that are in flesh cannot please God," verses 7, 8. But then over against that, the person comes to it, he says, "I myself with the mind serve God's law; but with the flesh sin's law," chapter 7: 25, and again he says, "I delight in the law of God according to the inward man," verse 22 - a remarkable statement - that is, he can take account of the inner man, and there is a remarkable correspondence between his inward man and Christ Himself, a most remarkable thing, for Christ as coming into the world said, "To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight, and thy law is within my heart," Psalm 40: 8, and the exercised soul comes to it that there is a something in him that is the result of the work of God that does not attach to his flesh by any means, but there is a something there, as the result of God's work in him, as to which he can say, "I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." That is, he learns to identify himself - "I myself" - with the work of God in him, and he learns to repudiate and judge the flesh as it is exposed by the law in its true character as utterly incapable of bringing forth anything that is pleasing to God. In that condition he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" verse 24. And that is what is alluded to, I believe, in this horror of great darkness that came upon Abraham, a horror of great darkness, and he is made to enter in his feelings into the bondage which was later to be the portion of his seed, he entered experimentally into the horror of this bondage of which God spoke that they shall afflict them 400 years. It says, "Know assuredly that thy seed will be a sojourner in a land that is not theirs, and they shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years," verse 13. God intimated that his seed must go through that experience of bondage if they were to come into His own thoughts in conscious enjoyment, they must go through it, and Abraham who is father of us all had to go through it to begin with, a horror of great darkness, this experience of bondage; but then it says, "that nation which they shall serve I will judge; and afterwards they shall come out," verse 14, that is to say, God gives the answer, He is to be the Deliverer. The person in Romans 7 says, "*who* shall deliver me?" and the answer is, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," verse 25. That is, God Himself is the Deliverer, and He is the Deliverer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ our Lord has come in on God's behalf and on our behalf too, and He has not in any sense suggested any attempt to improve the flesh, but He has sustained the condemnation of

sin in the flesh on our behalf; indeed, God sending His own Son has done it for us in order that that matter being disposed of and the judgment of flesh being established for us to take up in our own souls, we might walk henceforth in the power of the Holy Spirit in order that "the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit," chapter 8: 4. It is a question, dear brethren, of understanding what flesh is and how it has been condemned, God Himself entering into the matter in Christ, in order that we might be set up in the liberty and power of life, life in Christ Jesus by the Spirit. It says here that "when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces," verse 17. I believe the smoking furnace speaks of the severity of the judgment, condemnation of sin in flesh; and "a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (or a flame of fire) is a suggestion of God taking the matter up Himself for us, to be our Deliverer by means of Jesus Christ. I have gone into all that in the hope that it may stimulate exercise on the part of any who are younger or less established, in order that we should really know how we are to possess these things that God has for us in the glad tidings. "How shall I know that I shall possess it", Abraham said, and the answer was what I have been seeking to present to you.

When we come to the second point I had in mind, it is what is opened before us in the beginning of chapter 4 and that is, the character of blessing. The glad tidings is a gospel of blessing. "In thee" - that is, in Abraham, on the principle of faith, for Abraham stands for the principle of faith, that it might be by grace - "all the nations shall be blessed," Galatians 3: 8. But now, when we come to the character of the blessing, that brings in the thought of the son. You remember that as the history of Abraham developed, God promised him that he should have a son, and in due course, the son was born and he was named Isaac which means laughter; and Sarah said, "God has made me laugh," Genesis 21: 6, that is, it refers to exuberance of spiritual joy. The name Isaac conveys that it was not a laugh of unbelief. Sarah had laughed in unbelief before and God had rebuked her for it, but now the son was given, the son was born, and he is named Isaac, and Sarah said, "God has made me laugh." When he was weaned Abraham made a *great* feast. I believe it is possibly that incident to which the Lord refers when He said in John 8, "Abraham exulted in that he should see my day and he saw and rejoiced," verse 56. Abraham made a great feast, the son had now come into view and he was weaned, that is, he was standing out by himself, so to speak.. There he was, born according to promise; it was not anything that Abraham could produce, it was simply what God had brought in of His own free will. So we

have in chapter 4, "when the fulness of the time was come; God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law, that he might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship," verses 4, 5. That is what God has brought in, that is the character of the blessing. It is not a question of anything less, there is nothing less than this in His mind. The character of blessing God has in His mind in the gospel is set out in His Son, God sent forth His Son. The idea is before us objectively in Christ that nothing less than sonship as set out in Christ is what God has in mind in the glad tidings which we have believed. I wonder whether we all believe it. Sonship is for the pleasure of God, dear brethren; indeed Galatians I says, "Grace to you, and peace, from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, so that he should deliver us out of the present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father," verses 3, 4. It is a question of the will of our God and Father that we should be delivered from this present evil world in all its features, including the principle of legal religion, including that element of the world. He wants us delivered from the present evil world according to the will of God our Father. And the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins in order to become a personal Object of faith and affection. It does not say the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, but He *gave Himself* for our sins in order that He should become an object before our hearts, and an object, dear brethren, in sonship, for God sent forth His Son. The time of sonship has come, it is what God has indicated as in His mind even as long ago as the history of Abraham and Isaac, but now it has *come* - "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law, that he might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship," receive it as a gift. That is what I understand to be the character of the blessing, and as Isaac was weaned, and the son stood out before Abraham, standing out so to speak, in his own distinctiveness,

you can well understand that Abraham made a great feast, he rejoiced. But then it brought forth the mocking of Ishmael, the one born according to flesh. Ishmael represents the opposition of legality in the things of God, a kind of mixture, the bringing in of the principle of faith in Christ which Abraham stands for, but along with it the bondage which Hagar the mother represents, and that is what is characteristic of Christendom all round us. If we are to serve God, to enjoy liberty in the assembly, if we are to minister to the pleasure of God, it is important, dear brethren, that we should understand the character of the gospel which we have received. And as Ishmael mocked, Sarah says, "Cast out this handmaid and her son;" Genesis 21: 10. It was a matter of being drastic. There must be no allowance in our minds, in our

outlook, of anything less than the full thought that God has in the gospel - "Cast out this handmaid and her son".

That leads me to the third point I had in mind, and that is the substantiality of the blessing. That is a most important thing, and that lies in the Spirit. That is, these things are not only a matter of light, of what God has in mind for us, that is what is set out in the glad tidings, but the scripture goes on to say, "But because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father," Galatians 4: 6. That brings in the idea of substantiality; that is, things can be substantial, they can be real, they can be known in enjoyment in the power of the Holy Spirit which God has given us, the Spirit of His Son. It is a question of how to fill out the position. The Spirit of God's Son cries, "Abba, Father." Could there be anything more attractive, could there be anything more pleasing to the heart of God than that we should be able to speak to Him with the same holy feelings of affection as were expressed by our Lord Jesus Christ and that, too, at a time of deepest feeling? The only time we have it recorded in Scripture that the Lord Jesus used these words was when He was in the garden of Gethsemane. I do not mean to imply that that was in fact the only occasion He used them; I have no doubt these words were frequently on His lips, but I do not doubt that they express in a special way deep feelings on the part of One who knew God in the holy relationship of Son and enjoyed a Father's love in the most unclouded intimacy and confidence in Him. And now the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts cries, "Abba, Father." Do we allow the Spirit liberty for this? That is the great matter, dear brethren, that the holy and wonderful character of this blessing which God has given us in the gospel may be known in a substantial and real way in our souls, and God is concerned that it should be; the Holy Spirit is concerned that it should be. We often speak, and rightly so, of the assembly, and all that I am saying has the assembly in mind, and the service of God in the assembly, for the great feature of the service of God in the assembly is that it is in sonship and characterised by the affections and feelings of sons and by the intelligence of sons, too. Hence, when I say the substantiality of the blessing, I have in mind that all that was in God's heart in the glad tidings should take actual form in our hearts, and that what He desires in response from ourselves should find actual expression from our hearts in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now the last thing one has in mind to speak of is the liberating power of the gospel, and that flows out of what we have been speaking of, for the position of sons necessarily involves a position of liberty. There is no bondage connected with the thought of a son; you remember the Lord says in John 8, "the bondman abides not in the house for ever: the son abides for ever," verse 35. Servitude is not an abiding thought, it has come in in the ways of God just

to pave the way, so to speak, for sonship - "the bondman abides not in the house for ever: the son," he says, "abides for ever." That is not necessarily the son with a capital 'S'; it is true, of course, that the Son, Christ personally, does abide ever, but I believe the thought is the son with a small 's', the son in contrast to the servant. That is, the idea of sonship is an abiding thought, and he abides in the house for ever, he has the liberty of the house. And so the Lord says. "If therefore the son" (referring to Himself) "shall set you free, ye shall be really free," verse 36.

Well now, in the verse we read in chapter 5, the apostle brings in the thought of Hagar and mentions her in contrast to what we belong to. Hagar represents a system of religious bondage; he says it finds its counterpart in Jerusalem which now is, and I think there is no doubt, if the apostle were alive today, he would say it finds its counterpart in Christendom. I do not think there is any question about that. It found its counterpart in the apostle's day in the Jerusalem that then was, the earthly Jerusalem, which he says was in bondage with its children, and it certainly finds its counterpart today in all that is religious in Christendom around us. But, he says, "Jerusalem above is free; which is our mother," verse 26, that is, the assembly, Jerusalem, is our centre, the assembly is our centre, it is God's centre, too, and it is above; that does not mean in heaven, it means it is morally lifted above the level of all that is legal and all that marks earthly, worldly religion, it is entirely lifted above the level of it. The secret of that is that it is characterised by sonship, the assembly is composed of those who are sons and all those who compose it are sons, there is no other character of blessing, the glad tidings of today as preached since the day of Pentecost is bringing the assembly to light; and those who compose it are all sons, as it says, "ye have come to mount Zion; ...and to the assembly of the firstborn," Hebrews 12: 22, 23: Firstborn speaks of dignity, personal dignity. All those who belong to the assembly have this wonderful dignity conferred upon them by God, not of course to attach to the flesh; for flesh has no place in it, but it is a question of what God has been pleased to bring in for His own satisfaction and to give us freely through the glad tidings. So the apostle says, "Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother." Our liberty depends very much on the light that governs us, that is what I am seeking to bring before you, that these things lie in the very gospel we have received. That is what the apostle goes back to, and I would appeal to everyone who has believed the gospel (assuming that everyone in this room has received the gospel) to take account of the gospel that you have believed, the *principle* of it, the principle of grace; the *character* of it, that sonship and nothing less than sonship is in the mind of; God; the *substantiality* of it, the very power to enter into these things in the Spirit of God's Son whom God has

given to us; and then the *liberating* character of it. Jerusalem which is above is free, who is the mother of us all. If she is free, she begets those who are free and that is what the light is intended to beget. The light of the assembly in its true character, the assembly of the firstborn ones whose names are written in heaven, is intended to develop liberty in the saints. So that we are not marked by bondage and inability to draw near to God, but by liberty which He delights in. If we are not, dear brethren; let us get to God about it and find out what is the cause of it. There is a good deal of lack of liberty among the saints; I am not despising what there is in the way of liberty and spiritual intelligence and holy affections,

one thanks God for it and what one sees as to it, but one is conscious in oneself that there is a constant tendency to get away from liberty, to get away from the liberty wherewith Christ sets free. And there is a need among the saints for increased liberty of a true and holy character which is in keeping with the gospel which we have believed. So it says, "Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother."

In closing, I just refer to those two verses which I read at the end of chapter 5, because it may be that they point out what is the secret of any lack of liberty there may be with any one of us. The apostle says, "they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts," verse 24. It is a remarkable expression that we have *done* it. I wonder whether we understand what we have done, and whether we have really done it intelligently in our souls; whether we have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, because Christ on whom we have believed, who has been presented as an object of faith to us, is presented to us as One who has reached the position in which we have believed in Him by way of the cross. He could not be presented as an object of faith in the glad tidings until after the cross was an accomplished fact, and the cross means, as we were saying earlier, that sin in the flesh has been condemned and flesh has been crucified; the history of man in flesh has been ended judicially in a way that expressed God's abhorrence of it. His judgment of it was that it was only fit for condemnation in the most ignominious way. The cross was that, the expression of God's judgment of man in flesh. And now, as we believe in Christ, dear brethren, we have to believe in One who has been crucified, that is, we have to accept that truth that one order of man has been crucified, and we accept it, we take it home to ourselves that we have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. I ask again, have we done it, dear brethren? In one sense we have done it in believing in Christ, but it is a question of our becoming intelligent as to what we have done, and of doing it feelingly, intelligently, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit who is given to us is always faithful to Christ and always

faithful to His cross. So it says, "they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts. If we live by the Spirit, let us walk also by the Spirit." That is to say, we live in the Spirit, our life is life in Christ Jesus, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is what is to regulate us. Let us walk in the Spirit. If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in it. The Spirit is given us as power for life and for walk. You will find Romans is full of what the Holy Spirit is to those who have believed. It says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us walk also by the Spirit." I believe those two verses which I have just referred to may touch the secret of any lack of liberty there may be amongst us, and I urge upon one's brethren, as one would continually on oneself, to see to it that we are moving on the lines in which liberty in the Spirit may be enjoyed, so that we may be in the full possession of what God has given us in the glad tidings, and in result be fully for the pleasure of the blessed God.

SPIRITUAL JUDGMENT AS MAKING FOR OUR PRESERVATION

1 Samuel 7: 15 - 17

I desire to say a word as to the feature of spiritual judgment which is to be constantly in exercise amongst us both individually and collectively. It is intended to preserve us as going on in the things of God. The early part of this chapter takes account of a state of departure among God's people, but also of recovery, so that .it says they put away their idols and served Jehovah only, and then God came in for them, granting a signal deliverance. But now this paragraph I have read comes in following on that, as if the Spirit of God would emphasise that there is something needed if we are to be preserved in the gain of what God has graciously recovered to us. One great feature that makes for our spiritual preservation is the maintenance of this element of spiritual judgment, for judgment is the application of divine principles or the truth of God to particular matters. Righteousness and judgment, it says, are the foundation of God's throne (Psalm 89: 14); righteousness being the governing principle, that is, what is right before God, and judgment being the application of that principle to particular matters. And hence it is important that we should all cultivate the faculty of judgment. We often speak of self-judgment, which is a very necessary matter, but the element of judgment, of particular matters should always be in exercise by us, and having the Spirit of God we are capable of it, for He becomes in us a spirit of judgment.

It says that Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He maintained the exercise of this element all the days of his life, and in a systematic way, going round, as it says, in a circuit. He went from year to year in a circuit, to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah.

and judged Israel in all those places. That would convey that what those places stand for was brought to bear continually upon the people of God, in their own practical every-day matters. What Bethel stands for was brought to bear upon them, and what Gilgal stands for, and what Mizpah stands for, was brought to bear upon them. It is important that we should thus realise that the Spirit of God has given us some indication of means which we may employ in the exercise of the faculty of spiritual judgment.

Bethel is of course the house of God, where God dwells. We are ourselves the house of God. We are always the house of God, in virtue of the presence of the Holy Spirit with us and in us; that is not simply when we are convened, but at all times. Christians having the Holy Spirit constitute the dwelling place of God, and hence that is to be borne in mind by us as to what befits the

house of God. The Psalm so often quoted by us leaves us in no doubt as to that, "Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thy house, O Jehovah, for ever," Psalm 93: 5. Whatever form the house of God has taken down the ages, whether the tabernacle or the temple or now the assembly, holiness has become it. "Thy testimonies are very sure." Instances could be brought forward from the Scripture to show that God always insists on the maintenance of the holiness of His house, and hence that is a matter which we are to carry with us. The Spirit of God, God Himself dwelling by the Spirit in us, would constantly remind us of it. When thoughts arise in our hearts, contemplated actions, before the thought has been translated into action; let this element of judgment be brought to bear upon it, that God is dwelling in His house by the Spirit. Paul in writing to Timothy says, "These things I write to thee, hoping to come to thee more quickly; but if I delay, in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house," 1 Timothy 3: 14, 15. The house of God regulates our conduct, because God Himself dwells there. And not only is that so in regard to the assembly at large, but it is even so in regard to each one of us individually, for "your body", it says, "is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God," 1 Corinthians 6: 19. God Himself in grace has deigned to take up His dwelling place in us, the body of each believer being the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that is a matter to be borne in mind as something that is to regulate us constantly, and to enable us to arrive at a judgment of the suitability or unsuitability of anything that we may contemplate doing. Indeed, the great thing is that we should learn, and seek the Lord's help by the Spirit, to control our minds. It says, "he that sows to his *own* flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh," Galatians 6: 8. And I believe the way we sow to the flesh, our own flesh, is by allowing our minds to run riot, and not seeing to it that they are controlled by the Spirit of God. It is significant that the scripture says, "he that sows to his own flesh"; that is, not *the* flesh generally, but *his* flesh, one's own propensities, the particular form that the flesh in oneself tends to take. That is specially to be guarded against, that it is not sown to. The truth of the house of God will help us in these matters, and this is one feature of Samuel's service when he judged Israel from year to year at Bethel. Year after year the people of God found this element of the house of God was reiterated to them, brought to bear upon them by Samuel in the exercise of his judgment.

Then there was Gilgal. Gilgal is a reminder to us day by day of the circumcision of the Christ, and of our having been circumcised in the circumcision of the Christ. That is, it is a reminder to us of the death of Christ and of the only right answer to it in our own souls in the understanding that flesh must be cut off, that cutting off having actually taken place vicariously in

the death of Christ. He assumed in grace flesh and blood condition in order that by His death the condition of sinful flesh in which we were involved might be ended, and, as appropriating the truth, we have to make sharp knives as it says in Joshua. That is, we have to be drastic in the power of the Holy Spirit in applying the truth of circumcision to ourselves. As the people of God did so, Jehovah said, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you," Joshua 5: 9. As long as any features of the flesh are in evidence and allowed amongst us, it is a reproach to us. We are carrying with us a taint of the world, a taint of that out of which we have been redeemed for the pleasure of God. It is for us to take up in our minds how blessedly the truth has been established for the pleasure of God in Christ by means of His death, as it says in the epistle to the Corinthians, "these things were some of you; but ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus," 1 Corinthians 6: 11. That is the objective side of the truth that has come to pass for us in Christ, and we have appropriated it by faith, and it is accredited to us. But the scripture goes on to say, "And by the Spirit of our God." That is, God contemplates that there should be the power of the Holy Spirit. "Ye have been washed... and by the Spirit of our God"; it means in the power of the Spirit of our God, implying that, as the Spirit of God is given His place, there is a subjective answer in us to our position objectively, as having in Christ been washed and sanctified and justified. So, as I say, Samuel from year to year brought Gilgal to bear upon the people of God.

Then there was Mizpah, and the name Mizpah means "Watch tower", and a Scripture in Genesis will help as to the application of Mizpah. I refer to Genesis 31, the end of verse 48, "Therefore was the name of it called Galeed - and Mizpah; for he said, Let Jehovah watch between me and thee, when we shall be hidden one from another: if thou shouldest afflict my daughters, or if thou shouldest take wives besides my daughters - no man is with us; see, God is witness between me and thee!" That is the idea of Mizpah, that when we are separated from one another, when none of the brethren is present to see, God is seeing, God is a witness. Laban says; "When we shall be hidden one from another". When we are not in one another's company, when there is no human witness of anything that is being done, bear in mind that God is witness. And so Samuel brought that to bear upon, the people of God year after year as he went round in a circuit, and as matters that had arisen came under his notice, and were brought to him for judgment, he would say, Do not forget that God is witness, when we are parted from one another. When there is no one looking on, do not forget that God is a witness.

These are three important elements that come into this matter of spiritual judgment, as intended to be applied by us constantly with a view to our preservation, for, as was said in prayer, our God is a consuming fire. Everyone knows what his flesh is; as the Scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurable," Jeremiah 17: 9; anyone who knows anything of having to do with God understands that, but there is the power to move in superiority to the flesh, and to be preserved in superiority to it in the Holy Spirit. The spiritual meaning of these particular features of Bethel, of Gilgal and of Mizpah is intended to be remembered by us as a means by which, with the Spirit's help, we may be preserved.

It says, "his return was to Ramah; for there was his house, and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar: to Jehovah," 1 Samuel 7: 17. Now he is bringing in a fourth item, which can be used for our spiritual preservation. He is bringing in our private household relations with God. Samuel always returned to Ramah, for it says, "there was his house", and "there he built an altar to Jehovah". He was careful there to maintain his own personal links with the Lord, and he would remind us of the importance of maintaining our own personal links with the Lord day by day, seeing to it that the altar is availed of, not in a formal way, but in a real way, and as this is done it will be another feature that will serve to preserve us. That is what was impressed upon me to speak of this evening, the importance of everyone of us cultivating and maintaining this element of spiritual judgment in the fear of God, and the way the teaching relating to these four places, Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah is intended by God to serve as a help so that we should be preserved in His fear.

(Word given at meeting for ministry.)

THE HIGH PRIEST OF OUR CONFESSION

Hebrews 4: 14 - 16; Hebrews 5: 1 - 10; Hebrews 7: 26 - 28

We have been speaking together of the thought of sonship as the characteristic feature of Christianity according to God's mind, so that Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and then, when taken by the Lord Jesus on to the holy mount, the Father called Peter's attention to Christ, saying, "*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him," Matthew 17: 5. He would not allow any suggestion of something less to be put alongside of the thought of sonship. Peter had suggested three tabernacles, one for Christ and one for Moses and one for Elias, but as soon as the suggestion was made, the Father intervened in an adjusting way. Peter was to understand that there was no such thought in God's mind, He had brought in His best. Sonship, as set out to be learned in Christ, is God's thought for those whom He calls, and nothing secondary is to be put alongside of it. The Lord sought to establish Peter in the sense of it in saying, "Then are the sons free," and then telling him to take a piece of money and give to those who demanded it, saying, "take that and give it to them for me and thee," Matthew 17: 27. It is a most remarkable thing that the Lord should say, "for me and thee". We are to learn the truth in Christ, "for me", and then learn to identify ourselves with Him in that which is set forth in Himself.

I want, this evening, in calling attention to these scriptures, to show that on the side of our response our High Priest is the Son of God. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews at the beginning of chapter 3 says, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus." The Apostle is the One in whom God sets out His thoughts toward us, so in the first chapter God is speaking now in His Son. We learn what God's thoughts for us are in sonship in Christ. He has come in in order that they might be set out; He is thus the Apostle of Christianity, the authoritative exponent in Himself of what God's thoughts of blessing are for those whom He calls. He is also the High Priest of our confession; He is the One who in Himself sets out the answer to the way God is revealed, in perfect consistency with it, and He is equal to sustaining us in answer to the way in which God has come out. There is very little more said about the Apostle of our confession after the beginning of the epistle, but the greater part of it is taken up with the side of the High Priest, the One who represents God's people in His presence and who sustains them in moving in response to God. So, while in the first chapter Psalm 2 is quoted, "*Thou* art my Son: this day have *I* begotten thee," it is in connection with the Apostle; God brings in His Son and sets out His thoughts for us that they are nothing less than sonship.

In Hebrews 5 the same Psalm is quoted again, not now to bring in the thought of the Apostle, but in order to show that when God said, "*Thou art my Son, I have today begotten thee,*" He marked Him out for priesthood, "And no one takes the honour to himself but as called by God, even as Aaron also. Thus the Christ has not glorified himself to be made a high priest; but he who had said to him, *Thou art my Son, I have today begotten thee,*" verses 4, 5. I only bring that in in order to show the immensity of what is in view in this simple statement in Psalm 2, "Thou art my Son; *I this day have begotten thee.*" All Christianity is wrapped up in it. The Apostle of our confession is involved in it, the One who sets out God's thoughts in Christianity, and the High Priest of our confession is also involved in it. God takes up no less than His Son to represent the saints in their movements God-ward, to support them and to give character to their response.

Coming to the scripture with which we commenced reading, the writer says, "Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." Hebrews is characterised by the constant allusions to *Jesus*; that is, the writer would fix our attention on the Person of Christ not primarily in any official view of Him, but in His personal attractiveness, the name by which He is known. But then He immediately adds to His personal name Jesus "the Son of God", and then that He has passed through the heavens, gone right through; however many heavens there are He has gone through them all into the immediate presence of God. Hebrews has often been called the epistle of the opened heavens and that is exactly what it is. The Spirit of God attracts us to the glorious position that Jesus is filling now; He has passed through the heavens; that is, He has gone right into the immediate presence of God and He is there as the Son of God, and as representative of us. The Representative of the saints is not only in the immediate presence of God, but He is there as His Son in all the affection and nearness and suitability that that involves.

This is brought in in order that we should hold fast our confession. The word all through the epistle to the Hebrews rendered *profession* should be *confession*. There is a great deal of difference between profession and confession, because profession may be *merely* profession if a thing is professed but is not real, and that is the case in Christendom; there is a great profession of Christianity without anything vital in it. Confession is a very different matter; it is something that you commit yourself to and are prepared to stand by. It involves that you are in the presence of something adverse that calls it forth, that you take your stand by the Position, that you are a Christian, a partaker of the heavenly calling; your life is not bound up with this world, but by grace you have part in the service of God, not in any system of

bondage and distance but in the liberty that sonship contemplates. That is to be held fast. We all know that to go through a world such as this is, is testing to us; we know it is easy for us to be overtaken, and deflected, it may be, from that which is strictly righteous; it is easy for us to become defiled in our spirits and become deadened in our spiritual sensibilities, and Satan would make use of all that to try and get us to give up having to do with God, or perhaps what is even more subtle, going on having to do with God but in a formal way.

There are two things brought in in this chapter intended to save us from that. The first is the word of God. "For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart," Hebrews 4: 12. That is, the effect of the word of God, not necessarily the Scriptures in a literal way, though the Scriptures will convey to us the mind of God, but the word of God is what God is saying to us, and recognised by us as God's word; it has this character that it is living and operative and can make the finest divisions and gives us to feel there is nothing unapparent to Him "but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we, have to do." That is a most important preservative. One is seeking to be practical as conscious of our need, of it as having to do with the greatest and most holy and precious things. There is a great need of being practical and a great need to submit ourselves from day to day to the all-powerful effect of the word of God which is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, which can discern all the intents of the heart and make everything apparent before Him, "with whom we have to do." It is a sobering consideration, but the more we avail ourselves of it the more we shall welcome it. The one who wrote Psalm 139 knew something of this. How terrible is the searching character of the word of God! He says, "Jehovah, thou hast searched me, and known me. *Thou* knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off." What a striking thing that is! He could not sit down or get up without being conscious of God taking account of his movements and the motives that lay behind them; he was conscious of being in the presence of God, everything being made apparent in the eyes of Him with whom he had to do. As he proceeds, he takes account of the *work* of God, and he understands that the searching character of the *word* of God is intended to help the *work* of God. It is intended to help him to distinguish between the workings of the flesh and the work of God, so that the work of God might stand out in its own distinction. At the end of the Psalm he says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any grievous way in me; and lead me in the way

everlasting." That is, he positively asks to be searched; he has come to learn the great value that is attached to it. He desires to be practically freed from all that would hinder his having part in the service of God. The word of God in this living character, as bringing us into the presence of God, is one of the great preservatives available to us as having been called with this heavenly calling. We are partakers of the heavenly calling.

The other great provision is the High Priest who is in the presence of God. He is always maintaining in Himself the full standard of our position. We are never to be diverted from keeping our minds on Jesus the Son of God. He is there as our representative. That is the idea of the High Priest, and we are to fix our eyes on Him who has passed through the heavens and allow nothing to becloud the position of favour and nearness in which God has set us in Him, but in order that we should be kept morally in accord with that, we have the High Priest who is sympathetic, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He has been in this scene and has personally experienced the character of the scene, and He has known what it was to be approached by Satan and He has been tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart. So with a knowledge of that we are to come boldly to the throne of grace knowing that the High Priest is on our behalf, "Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace for seasonable help."

In the next chapter the writer of the epistle goes on to enlarge on the priesthood of Christ. As I have said, He is marked out Priest by reason of the fact that God has said, "*Thou art my Son, I have today begotten thee.*" God intends us to understand that we are represented in His presence by no less than His Son. Another thing comes in in Psalm 110 "Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec," verse 4. Melchisedec is a most interesting and mysterious personage. We read of him in Genesis 14 and then there is no more reference to him in Scripture for centuries until David's day, and then David by the Spirit writes Psalm 110 and says, "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Then there is no more reference to Melchisedec for centuries until Christ had come and died and risen again, and gone to the right hand of God and then the Spirit of God in writing the epistle to the Hebrews brings in again the history of Melchisedec and gives us to understand what the import of it is. Melchisedec was brought on the scene in a mysterious way. No mention is made of his birth or his death or his genealogy, in order that he might convey to us the idea of the Son of God. It is intended to convey that sonship and priesthood are now centred in the Person of. One who is divine, and it means that the Priesthood that is now exercised by our Lord Jesus Christ is intransmissible.

The old order of priesthood was transmissible; it was handed on from one to another because the priest died, but now the priesthood is established in One who never dies and that means we have now come to finality. The position of sonship which God has brought in in Christianity, and in which we are to respond to Him, is now set forth in Christ; our High Priest, and it will never be relinquished. That is in order to establish us. "Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec". Having brought that in, the writer goes on to show in a touching way how completely the Lord has entered into the circumstances and testings of human life here in order that He might become qualified to serve us as High Priest in a sympathetic and intelligent way.

So it brings in "the days of his flesh". How wonderful that is! What an expression! To think of Him who, as another scripture says, "is over all, God blessed for ever," to think that there should be a period of which it is said of Him "the days of his flesh". It shows how wonderfully near He has come, entering into conditions of human life, moving here in perfect faithfulness to God for the express purpose of qualifying as a sympathetic High Priest for God's people. "Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to save him *out of death,*" not save Him from death, but out of death. I have no doubt the reference is particularly to Gethsemane and no doubt also to the cross, but the "strong crying and tears" refers especially to Gethsemane. Matthew and Mark and Luke all give us Gethsemane, and all give us different glories as apprehended in connection with it. Matthew says that the Lord prayed and said, "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; but not as *I* will, but as *thou* wilt," Matthew 26: 39. And then it says, according to Matthew's account, that He prayed a second time, "My Father, if this cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done," verse 42. It is a most wonderful and deep expression to us of the holy feelings which passed through the mind of the Lord Jesus at that crucial moment, for death to Him meant death in a most solemn way as the judgment of God in an unsparing way. He who had walked in unbroken communion with God in a sense of His delight in Him, was now facing the awful reality of being abandoned by God, and as being made sin to face His displeasure, His wrath, and to bear it all. Hence, as feeling it with holy sensibilities, He first of all prays that if it is possible the cup might pass from Him, "but not as *I* will, but as *thou* wilt". Then He says, as though so to speak, He had come to it, "My Father, if this cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done." All through there had never been with Him any other will but His Father's will, but there were holy sensibilities of what that will involved, and when there was no other way of effectuating that will and as recognising that there was not, He says in complete submission, "thy will be done."

Mark tells us that He said, "Abba, Father," it is the only time it is recorded that He said it. I have no doubt that He said it on many other occasions, but it brings out the depth of feeling in the double use of the appellation of Father, and gives us the actual words the Lord used, and so we are to develop in ability to take it up as an evidence of the liberty of sonship, of the feelings that go along with sonship. Luke tells us that He knelt down and prayed, and that "his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth," Luke 22: 44, and also tells us that "he prayed more intently," a remarkable thing. I doubt if we should have ever dared to say that if Scripture had not recorded it. Although there was perfection in the Lord Jesus, there is in perfection such a thing as greater degrees of intensity of prayer. "He prayed more intently. And his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth." All this is intended to convey that the Lord has entered into exercises in the most touching way as to what was involved in going through to the end governed by the will of God. Whatever was involved, He would go through, but He has realised in an experimental way what was involved in obedience. It says, "though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered," Hebrews 5: 8. He did not learn to be obedient, but He learned obedience; that is, it was a new experience to Him. As in Godhead condition it did not apply to Him to obey; God has no one to obey. Obedience does not apply to God as such, but as become Man He entered into a condition to which obedience applied and a new experience was opened up. He was to tread a path in which obedience to the will of God was called for from beginning to end. He went through it in unqualified obedience proving to the full what obedience was, what it involved, how testing Satan could make it, for he was certain to make it as difficult as he could. Every testing only proved that the Lord Jesus was incorruptible and entirely set for God's will, but it is very touching that He should have learned obedience by the things He suffered.

Having been made perfect and taken His place on high as our High Priest, He has become to all them that obey him "author of eternal salvation". You see the moral link, it is those who obey Him who come into the gain of His priesthood. I do not think we ever get the gain of priesthood until our wills are subject and we ourselves are moving in the way of obedience, and then, as we discover the tests which obedience may involve, the Lord can draw near to us and show us that He has been supremely tested in it, but now is able to support us as governed by that principle. He has gone through and has been heard on account of His piety. So we are encouraged to go on in piety. Obedience is one of the first elements of piety, and piety brings God into circumstances here. Those who know God can bring Him in; we know God will

be true to those who move on the principle of obedience to His will, and the Lord Jesus was heard on account of His piety, He was heard from the horns of the unicorns. And now He is become "to all them that obey him, author of eternal salvation". I am sure of this that we do not get the gain of the priesthood of Christ unless we are subject. It is those who are prepared to obey who get the gain and support of the priesthood of Christ; the priesthood of Christ has in view that we should be supported and sustained in view of serving God. The service of God in sonship is not to break down. We were referring to the way the Lord speaks of "my assembly" and the joy it is to the heart of Christ to have that on earth which, in response to God in sonship, can be preserved right through in the presence of hades' gates. The priesthood of Christ comes in to sustain this.

After having gone through all this, the scripture speaks of Him as addressed by God as "high priest according to the order of Melchisedec." It is to assure us that the priesthood of Christ is an enduring, intransmissible one, that this character of priesthood set out in Christ as Son is the priesthood that abides. We know how Melchisedec came forth to support Abraham. Abraham is typically a partaker of the heavenly calling and he was concerned about his brother Lot. Lot had been carried away captive by the kings who had overcome the king of Sodom and Abraham moved to deliver his brother. He traversed a vast tract of country, for he went as far as from Hebron to near Damascus, and took with him three hundred and eighteen servants trained in his house. He was effective in delivering his brother, but alas, Lot did not profit by it. Lot's name means *veil*; that is, he is someone of whom you could never be sure, he is never distinctive. You cannot see a veiled person very well, you do not quite know what features mark them, and alas there are such among the people of God, they are never very definite but are always somewhat uncertain. The probability is that they have their interest outside the assembly and they are easily taken away captive. In the Song of Songs the speaker in chapter I, says, "For why should I be as one veiled," verse 7. That is a good exercise for young believers as to whether there is any reason why they should be as veiled, why the saints should have occasion to wonder what it is that is holding them back. We do not want to be like Lot, he had to be dragged out in the end. How much better to be like Abraham who was called the friend of God So Abraham recovers his brother and Melchisedec comes out to meet him with bread and wine and says, "Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heavens and earth. And blessed be the Most High God, who has delivered thine enemies into thy hand," Genesis 14: 19, 20. Abraham had gained a great victory and the danger was that he might attach it to himself. The king of Sodom said to Abraham, "Give me the souls, and take the

property for thyself," as if Abraham was intended to enrich himself. Abraham was being invited by the king of Sodom to take all the spoil but Melchisedec forestalls the king and says, "Blessed be the Most High God, who has delivered thine enemies into thy hand." Melchisedec would say, Do not forget that in anything you have achieved it is God who has done it, and you are blessed of the Most High God, and no glory that you might attach to yourself can be compared with the dignity that is yours, "Blessed be Abram of the Most High God." Abraham gives Melchisedec a tenth of all and is enabled completely to repudiate the suggestion of the king of Sodom. If there has been any gain it is God who is to be regarded as the One to whom the credit is due. How real is the support of Christ to those who are partakers of the heavenly calling in order that we should not become disqualified from serving as sons for the pleasure of God.

In Hebrews 7 the writer of the epistle is not now occupied with the side of the weakness that attaches to us as down here, and the testings of the Christian path, but with the greatness of the saints as sons of God and partakers of the heavenly calling, and so he says, "such a high priest became us," verse 26. That is, he is emphasising how great the saints are, that they are partakers of a heavenly calling, this calling that involves sonship. What kind of a High Priest becomes such a people so great as that? "For such a high priest became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and become higher than the heavens." He is not now occupying us with Christ in the days of His flesh, but Christ where He is in the presence of God. He would fix our eyes on Christ in the presence of God. The savour of the days of His flesh remains and, in the power of His having learned obedience, He is ready to succour as occasion requires in the path of obedience to God's will, but now our attention is directed to Jesus as He is and where He is, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and become higher than the heavens." That is what the writer is calling attention to. Then he goes on to say, "who has not day by day need, as the high priests, first to offer up sacrifices for his own sins, then for those of the people." The writer is contrasting the weakness and unprofitableness of the old system with the abiding character of Christianity, "For the law constitutes men high priests, having infirmity; but the word of the swearing of the oath which is after the law, a Son perfected for ever." He brings us back to this great thought, "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art priest forever after the order of Melchisedec," Psalm 110: 4. Not only has God said it, but He has confirmed it with an oath, so that we may be fully assured that that is the character of Christianity, and that is the One in whom we are represented in the presence of God.

I believe the contemplation of the priesthood of Christ, He Himself being identified as the Son, saluted as such, and marked out as High Priest, and coupled with that the word of the oath, showing that what has come in in Christ is established for evermore, is intended to make us stable in what is proper to Christianity, and to preserve us, as we avail ourselves of the word of God on the one hand and the priesthood of Christ on the other hand, so that we may serve the blessed God for ever in the liberty and intelligence proper to sons.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE BELIEVER

Romans 7: 22 - 25; Romans 8: 1 - 17

I have the desire, with the help of the Lord, to say something as to the Spirit of God, and the importance of the service of the Spirit of God to each one of us, to enable us to enter into the things which the love of God has given to us. There can be nothing more important, from that point of view, than the section of Scripture I have read, because I am sure that no mind or heart would be satisfied merely with the light of what God proposes, but would desire to have the blessing that He has in His heart for us. No one, getting the light of God's thoughts for us, would wish to stop short of actually entering upon them in enjoyment and power. Moreover, there is not only our side of the matter, but there is that which is more important, God's side of the matter. It must be grievous to the heart of God if He has those who are sons according to His thoughts and desires, and yet He fails to receive from them the response of sons. Sonship is properly for the pleasure of God; primarily it is for that purpose, and the pleasure of God is secured now spiritually by our filling out that position by the Holy Spirit who gives us ability to cry, "Abba, Father", not merely as taking up the words, but as having the spirit and feelings proper to those words.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of the epistle to the Romans are of the greatest interest. Chapter 6 brings the Father before us. He is presented as having raised up Jesus from among the dead by His glory. The result of that, as we apprehend it, is this, that recognising that all that has come to pass in Christ, in His death and resurrection, is for us, we appropriate it by faith, and being committed to it in baptism, we take it up, understanding with our minds that Jesus, having died, has died to sin, but in that He lives, He lives to God. In the light of this we take account of ourselves as dead to sin, but as being alive unto God in Christ Jesus. This is the first thing, we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin but alive to God, in the light of the fact that death has actually taken place in Christ. He has actually died out of this world of sin, and is actually living to God; what has come to pass in Christ is God's mind for us. So we are to reckon ourselves dead indeed to sin, but alive to God. You will understand that the world can have no claim upon a dead man, it can have no appeal to him. The man who dies, passes, by death, out of this world. He escapes its grip, and is by death entirely removed from its influences. That is exactly what is presented to us in the gospel; the Lord Jesus, having died to sin, is alive to God, and we appropriate that as God's mind for us. So that we reckon ourselves dead indeed to sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. When I say,

"dead to sin" I mean to the whole principle of pleasing ourselves, for the world around is a system which is built up on the principle of man doing his own will.

Chapter 6 is God's side of the matter. In chapter 7 we have Christ's side of the matter. We are delivered, by the death of Christ, from the principle of law as a means of life. It says, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death," Romans 8: 2. If a man who is under the law dies, by death he escapes from the demands of the law, and in the appropriation of the death of Christ for us, we escape from any idea of being subject to law, for law applies to man in the flesh. And so Christ, by His death, has delivered me from the principle of the law as a means by which I am to live, and in the place of it Christ Himself becomes the One by whom I am to be regulated. I become dead to the law by the body of Christ that I might be to Another, to Him who is raised from among the dead that I might bear fruit to God.

The death of Christ thus in chapter 6 makes clear my position in regard to the world, and His present position in the presence of God makes clear that I am alive unto God in Christ Jesus, and my whole life now is to be taken up on that principle, that I am living to God. In chapter 7 Christ is brought in as the One at whose disposal and under whose influence I hold myself.

In chapter 8 we come to a most important matter, and that is the subject of power, because although I might take up what is presented in chapters 6 and 7 in my mind, and have desires to move according to it, I find that there is no power for it outside of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God comes in in chapter 8 in order to give me the power for those things which the mind has taken up according to chapters 6 and 7. If we put the three chapters together, we come to this extraordinary and most impressive position, that the whole Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, are all engaged in the deliverance of the believer. How urgent is this matter of real deliverance for the Christian; that he should be in this world in the presence of sin and all its influences, in victory, and available for the pleasure and service of God! In view of that, the whole Godhead, so to speak, enters into the matter. Chapter 6 is God, chapter 7 Christ, and chapter 8 the Holy Spirit.

The exercises which are depicted in chapter 7 of this epistle have in mind to bring us to the recognition that we are, in fact, shut up to the power of God for deliverance from the power of sin working in the flesh. The apostle says of the law, "So that the law indeed is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good," Romans 7: 12. He says, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am fleshly, sold under sin," verse 14.

That is what he discovered. The more he sought to keep the law, the more he discovered the powerlessness that marked him. "The law had said, Thou shalt not lust," verse 7, and immediately lust sprang up in his innermost being. He felt the authority of the commandment, as it applied itself to his conscience, but immediately sin revived, and he died. And so as he moved, with the most sincere desires to do what was right, he found out his inability to fulfil those desires. He had desires to do what was right, but all the time he was doing what was wrong, condemning himself for it, but finding no deliverance from this hopeless position in which he was. And so one great result of it is that he begins to analyse what is really the position, and he comes to this; he says, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man," verse 22. He comes to recognise that there is a work of God in his soul which shows itself in having delight in the law of God, at any rate in an abstract way. This is a most encouraging thing, for no man naturally delights in the law of God, but the soul discovers that as the result of the work of God, there is in him that which is in affinity with Christ Himself. The language of Christ Himself, as coming into this world was, "Behold, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me - To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight, and thy law is within my heart." Psalm 40: 7, 8. And so, the apostle describing these experiences, comes to this point. He says, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring in opposition to the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which exists in my members," Romans 7: 22, 23. He had previously come to it that it was not himself, but sin that dwelt in him. He was beginning to distinguish between what he calls "I myself", and the flesh that was within him. "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell: for to will is there with me, but to do right I find not," verse 18. It is most important to come to that point, to learn to distinguish "I myself", what I am as a subject of the work of God, from my flesh which is sinful and will remain sinful right to the end of life here. You remember that when the people of God came out of Egypt, they thirsted for water. God told Moses to take the rod with which he had smitten the waters of Egypt, and God Himself would stand upon the rock, and Moses was, with that rod, to smite the rock upon which Jehovah was standing. A remarkable figure, that Jehovah was to stand upon the rock, and Moses was to smite the rock, and as he did so, the waters flowed. It is, as we have been seeing, that God would provide, by way of nothing less than the death of His own Son, the smiting of Christ, that the Spirit might be given to His people, that we might *receive* the Spirit. It was God's intention that all life, satisfaction and power should be found in the Spirit, and it is not to be found anywhere else.

So the result of this experience in chapter 7 is that he cries, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself with the mind serve God's law; but with the flesh sin's law," verses 24, 25. He turns away from himself to God. He understands that the only power for deliverance is in God, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." That is what we come to in chapter 8, for the Spirit is a divine Person. It is God come in in power to meet the position. It is through Jesus Christ, our Lord; that is to say, nothing can come to us save through Him. The rock had to be smitten before the waters could flow. Christ has had to go that way. Also we need to come under the authority of Christ.

for you remember that following on the smitten rock there was the conflict with Amalek. Amalek represents Satan working through the flesh, upon the flesh. Joshua is told to take men and go and fight against Amalek. Amalek was not to be surrendered to, nor were any terms to be made with him. He was to be fought against. And Moses said, "tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand... And it came to pass when Moses raised his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed," Exodus 17: 9 - 11. But when Moses' hands became heavy Aaron and Hur stayed up Moses' hands, and a complete victory was gained. Moses with the rod of God in his hands, represents Christ on high, but also as exerting the element of authority over our souls. There is no weakness in Christ, I need not say, but through lack of dependence the authority of Christ over our souls may become weak. And if the authority of Christ over our souls becomes weak, then Amalek gains an advantage. But if the authority of Christ in our souls is maintained, then victory is ours. So it is a question of the power of God, the Spirit of God, the only power by which victory can be secured, linked with the authority of Christ being maintained over our souls.

Now we return to chapter 8. It is to be noticed how many ways the Spirit of God is spoken of. He is spoken of as "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus", "God's Spirit", the "Spirit of Christ", the "Spirit of him that has raised up Jesus from among the dead", and then as the "Spirit of adoption". That is a very full presentation of the subject of the Spirit. And for our encouragement, I would again recall that it starts at the end of chapter 7, with the man who is feeling his utter powerlessness over the power of sin in his flesh. It leads right up to a man who is able to say, "Abba, Father". We can see what possibilities lie in this chapter - the utmost misery, as knowing nothing of deliverance in the beginning, and the utmost dignity in sonship at the end. Hence, it may well stimulate us to desire to know more of what it is to be fully yielded personally to the Spirit of God, so that we may be brought into the liberty and dignity proper to us as sons.

The apostle says, "There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus," Romans 8: 1. The words that follow, according to the authorised version, should not be in that verse. They come in at the end of the fourth verse, "who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit." "There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus." No condemnation can possibly attach to those in Christ Jesus. But the Spirit of God goes on to say, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death," verse 2. The apostle is beginning to show that in his experience, in the power of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, he was made entirely free from the law of sin and death. That means there would be no consciousness in his own soul of condemnation. Of course, objectively, the position is absolutely settled; there could be no possibility of condemnation, because it is "in Christ Jesus". That is where God has placed us, by His grace. If we have received the Spirit of God, that is where we are set, "in Christ Jesus." But the mind of God has in view that we should be conscious of "no condemnation." As we are clear in our minds, remembering to distinguish between the "I myself" and "the sin that dwelleth in me", one can thus divorce oneself from the latter and take account of oneself according to what I am, as in Christ Jesus. That is not law in a legal sense; it is simply the regulating principle of my life, that I am to be marked by the control of the Spirit, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; that is, I am now set up in another Man, the Man Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God will hold me true to that, and will hold me under the influence of that Man, the Man in whom God's pleasure is found in the fullest degree, a Man who has been here for the holy pleasure of God. The Spirit of God keeps one in the light of the position in which one is set in Christ Jesus. As under the influence of that Man, and the control of the Spirit, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, I am set free from the law of sin and death. There is the possibility of abiding in Christ, and in Christ we have One who is incapable of being corrupted. It is a most comforting thing, that in Christ Jesus we have a Man who is absolutely incorruptible. The Lord could say, "for the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing," John 14: 30. Thank God for that! The Spirit of God will hold our hearts, if we are prepared to have them held in relation to the Man Christ Jesus, and as held and formed under His influence, there is no reason why we should fall under the power of any corruption. It is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. And then Paul goes on to say, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh," verse 3. God is encouraging us to come to the same judgment of the flesh and sin in the flesh, as He has come to, so that we do not look for good from the flesh, or attempt to improve it, or expect it to improve or alter as we get older. God has condemned sin in the flesh. He

did it in the Person of Christ. He sent His own Son, the expression of His love, in order that, with that before our hearts, we should definitely come to the judgment of the flesh as He has come to it. It is intended to confirm us in the position that we can only now live according to God in the Spirit. He has condemned sin in the flesh, "in order that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit," verse 4. He goes on to say, "For they that are according to flesh mind the things of the flesh; and they that are according to Spirit, the things of the Spirit," verse 5.

What a wide expanse there is opened up to us when we think of the things of the Spirit! It is not only Christ, although Christ indeed is enough to fill any mind and heart, but then there are the things that stand connected with Christ, "for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God," 1 Corinthians 2: 10. It says of the servant whom Abraham sent forth to find Rebekah, that "all the treasure of his master was under his hand," Genesis 24: 10. The *whole* of the treasure of his master was in his hand. Think of the wealth the Lord has opened up in ministry during the last 100 years or more, and the more we come into it, the more we feel we are only touching the fringe of divine things. We may rest assured that there is inexhaustible satisfaction in the things of the Spirit.

It goes on, "For they that are according to flesh mind the things of the flesh," verse 5. The mind of the flesh is death, that is what it is morally. Which of us does not know from experience that the mind of the flesh is death? "But the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God; for neither indeed can it be: and they that are in flesh cannot please God," verse 6. 7. That is a most absolute statement and should entirely confirm us in the understanding that flesh never can be anything but corrupt and sinful, and that the only outlet from it lies in the Spirit of God, whom we have received. And so, having thus stressed it, the apostle goes on to say, "But ye are not in flesh but in Spirit, if indeed God's Spirit dwell in you; but if any one has not the Spirit of Christ he is not of him," verse 9. It has well been said that "in Christ" is a question of status, and is in contrast to being "in Adam"; but "in Spirit" is a question of power, and that is why the Spirit of God here stresses that it is God's spirit. It is divine power. The apostle says at the end of chapter 7, "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me out of this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." He realises that no one but God can deliver him. The Spirit, viewed as God's Spirit, stresses the idea of divine power. Then it says, "but if any one has not the Spirit of Christ he is not of him," verse 9. The Spirit of Christ stresses the idea of character. That is to say, it is Christ

who is seen in one who is controlled by the Spirit. The apostle says in a most challenging way, "if any one has not the Spirit of Christ." That is a most challenging thing for me to face. Am I marked by the Spirit of Christ? It is a challenging thing for every brother and sister to face. If one discovers one is not marked by it, one must get to God about it to discover why it is that the Spirit of Christ not coming out in expression; because, after all, God does not want to see the features of the first man characterising His sons. It is a question of the features of Christ that God looks for in His sons, in the assembly. And the apostle goes on to say, "but if Christ be in you, the body is dead on account of sin, but the Spirit life on account of righteousness," verse 10. Christ is in us by the Spirit, and the body being held in the acceptance of death becomes the vehicle for life in the Spirit to work out in practical righteousness. And the Spirit of God goes further. It says, "But if the Spirit of him that has raised up Jesus from among the dead dwell in you, he that has raised up Christ from among the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies also on account of his Spirit which dwells in you," verse 11. The Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead! I often think of that. Have you ever thought of the millions who lay in their graves when Jesus lay in His grave? Millions lay there, including many who had figured largely in this world's history, and in their day had been applauded as great men. Well, the Father, for His own glory, raised up from among all those millions, one Man, Jesus. He left the millions in their graves. Why was that? It was just to show the delight He has in Jesus, and that all that man accounts great, or important, or to be desired, is of no value in the sight of God, unless it is what has been learned of Christ and has taken character from Christ. God raised up Jesus from among the dead. He does not intend to have any other man before Him but Jesus, and those who take character from Jesus. And now the Spirit of Him who has done that dwells in us. That means that the more scope He is given by us, the more He will bring our hearts into line with what He has done. We shall increasingly learn to delight in Jesus, and to repudiate all that is not of Christ. Christ being in us, God takes account of us as those who are after Jesus. We are of His order. "But if the Spirit of him that has raised up Jesus from among the dead dwell in you, he that has raised up Christ from among the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies also on account of his Spirit which dwells in you." The Spirit has taken possession of our bodies, dwelling in us. We go on further still, "So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to flesh, for if ye live according to flesh, ye are about to die; but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live," verses 12, 13.

What a comfort it is to know that we are under no obligation to the flesh. We are under an obligation to God to keep the flesh in its place of death, but we

are under no obligation whatever to the flesh. We owe nothing to it. If it is allowed any place at all, it will rob us of our liberty, and God of His portion from us. Therefore, we are debtors not to the flesh. Let us have our minds definitely made up in that direction. "For if ye live according to flesh, ye are about to die," - that is, *die* in a moral sense - "but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live; for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God," verses 13, 14. Immediately we come to this point through the recognition of the Spirit, we are led right on, not in a fitful way, now and then, and then lapsing into periods of moral death and distance from God, and lack of liberty. There is no such thought in God's mind for us, but to come to this point, that our minds are fully in accord with God, and our desire, henceforth, is to recognise the Spirit of God. How great is the grace, that this divine Person, co-equal in the Deity with the Father and the Son, should deign to take up His dwelling in us. Think of the privilege of this! "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

"For ye have not received a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye have received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father," verse 15. That is the direction in which the Spirit of God moves. But here we come to it on experimental lines, that we have now come to the point that we recognise the sinful worthlessness and incurability of the flesh, but we rejoice in the fact that we are no longer in flesh, but in the Spirit, and, as led by the Spirit of God, we have become characteristically and consciously, sons of' God. What a privilege it is to have liberty with God, to be able to move into the presence of God any time of the day or night in the consciousness of complete acceptance and relationship! In the Spirit we have liberty, and, even greater still, are able to merge with the saints in assembly, and have part in the response of sonship, in the praise of God, which Christ Himself loves to give expression to in the assembly, response which takes character from the Son, and is filled out by the saints in the spirit of sonship. We have the consciousness in our hearts that we love the Father, not only that the Father loves us, but that we love Him, and we cry, "Abba, Father". Think of the privilege of that! All that is possible now. We are in touch, by these things, with the eternal day. It is specially important that these things can be known and enjoyed in the very scene where Satan's corrupting and defiling influences are getting worse and worse every day. But in the very presence of the flesh, and in spite of these things, we can have part in this great moral triumph, that in superiority to sin and the flesh, we can be here for the pleasure of God, as His sons.

While what I have been saying is mainly on individual lines, you can see how it issues in assembly privilege and service. Assembly response to God is characteristically the response of sons. It takes character from Him who is the

Son, and the language in which it is expressed is the language of the Son of God, "Abba, Father".

It is wonderful indeed that human hearts such as we have, should be capable, by the Spirit of God, to express themselves in the very same language, and the same, affections and feelings, as found expression in Christ as Man.

Then it goes on to something else. It says, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God," verse 16. We are sons of God, peculiarly for the pleasure of God, and sonship properly belongs to heaven. The condition of sonship is a glorified condition like Christ. This very chapter makes it clear that the condition of sonship is a glorified condition, for it says later on, "awaiting adoption, that is, the redemption of our body." Adoption is sonship. It is the same word, the same thought. Sonship is viewed in its completeness, and from that point of view, because we are still awaiting sonship in its fulness, it necessitates a glorified body. The place of sonship is heaven, and the condition of sonship is full conformity to Christ. But in the power of the Spirit of adoption, we may enjoy deliverance from the flesh, and liberty with God, and development in the holy feelings of affection that are proper to sons.

Then there is also the thought of *children*. "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God," verse 16. If we are conscious that we love God, the Spirit bears witness to us that that is evidence that we have been born of God. You remember what it says in the first chapter of John's gospel, "He was in the world, and the world had its being through him, and the world knew him not," verse 10. There is no power in the natural man to respond to the presentation of God to him. But there were those who received Him. "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to be children of God, to those that believe on his name; who have been born, not of blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God," verses 12, 13. That is a most striking statement. If we have believed on the name of the Son of God, it is evident that we have been born of God. So the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. John's epistle speaks of two generations as alive in this world, the children of God, and the children of the devil, and conditions in the world are rapidly becoming such, that the two generations are becoming more and more clearly marked out. It is a great thing to recognise that we are children of God, born of God. We are of God, and it is of the utmost importance that we should keep ourselves. It is urgent that we should be mindful of these things, because of the testimony's sake. It is a question of those who are born of God, being in the world in testimony to God, bearing the moral features of God, not marked by features of the wicked

one. Therefore, as the world becomes increasingly evil, there is all the more urgent need that everyone who is born of God should keep himself. We have the power to do so, so that the wicked one may touch us not.

Think of the immensity of the privilege attaching to us. Christ is God's appointed Heir of all things, and we, as children of God, are heirs of God. And not only heirs of God, but joint heirs with Christ. The assembly is going to take up everything of Christ's. "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God." That involves heirship of God, and joint heirship with Christ.

God would impress upon us the importance and value of the Spirit of God, first as power in order that we may be completely superior to the influences of sin working through the flesh, and then as witness; and, with the two combined, we become more and more conscious of the dignity attaching to us, and the wealth that belongs to us. We are sons of God and heirs of God. That places us in a greater position than the greatest person could ever be in in this world.

May the Lord help us to understand the service and support of the Spirit of God to a much greater degree, so that, as a result, the service of God in the assembly may be more enhanced, and we may be preserved in victory, as a testimony in this world.

SPIRITUAL FOOD

Exodus 12: 5 - 11; Exodus 16: 14 - 19; Deuteronomy 8: 3, 16; John 6: 54 - 57; John 14: 19, 20

In reading these scriptures I have in mind the matter of eating in a spiritual sense. For just as natural life is supported on the principle of eating, so spiritual life is also supported on that principle, and we shall suffer greatly as regards our spiritual life and enjoyment if we neglect the matter of eating spiritual food. Hence Scripture is full of the thought of eating. Eating in a spiritual sense is a matter of feeding our minds and our hearts; that is, the mind is to be occupied with what is worthy of its occupation and then the affections will follow suit.

I commenced with the passover because the passover lamb as eaten represents an apprehension and appropriation by us of Christ in His death, in His suffering love. Indeed, we may say, it is intended to mark us all through our Christian pathway. The passover comes in normally at the beginning of our pathway but it is also to characterise us all through. It was eaten in the land of Egypt and became the power by which the people moved out of Egypt, it became strength for them, but the passover had also to be celebrated in the wilderness and in the land. It is therefore not so much an elementary thought as a fundamental thought which goes right through.

As we know, the passover lamb was taken on the tenth day of the first month. The word was, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months... In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb," Exodus 12: 2, 3. The passover lamb was taken on the tenth day of the month and was kept until the fourteenth day and was then slain before their eyes, and the blood of the lamb was put on the doorposts and lintels and that became their salvation from judgment. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you," verse 13. It represents the value of the blood of Christ as that by means of which we, as Christians, have been redeemed, so that we have been saved from the judgment that otherwise must have fallen upon us, by means of the value in the sight of God of the blood of Christ. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God," 1 Peter 1: 18 - 21. But then what is also to be noticed is that the flesh of the lamb, whose blood provided them with safety from judgment, was to be eaten by those who were

thus saved from judgment. This is a matter that is sometimes neglected. The object in eating the flesh roast with fire is that we should soberly consider the fact that, if we were to be redeemed, it necessitated that Christ Himself should bear the judgment of God in a most unsparing form. The flesh was to be eaten roast with fire. There was to be no modification of the action of the fire. Christ is to be before our minds and hearts as having had to endure and exhaust the judgment of God against sin in a most absolute way if we were to be redeemed for the pleasure of God. As feeding our minds on Christ in that way we get a right sense in our souls of the seriousness of sin. It is not a matter to be treated lightly. If the only way that we could be saved was that Christ had to bear the judgment, then as we feed upon it, it gives us an increasing sense of the seriousness of sin. We come to it in our minds and our affections that by the grace of God we will not any longer go on with sin; that is, we will not live to ourselves.

We will not do our own wills; our own wills are exposed in the light of the death of Christ. It has in view our being delivered practically from the world and secured here for the present time as bondmen to God.

In the wilderness they still had to celebrate the passover and also when they were in the land. It is not that we need to be always dwelling on it, but that our affections are to be maintained by the love of Christ thus expressed so that we repudiate every working of our own will. "Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head and his legs, and with the purtenance thereof" (or inwards), Exodus 12: 9. His head refers to the glory of His Person, and the legs to the perfection of His walk, and the inwards to the perfection of His motives and inner feelings. We are to be impressed with the seriousness of sin and the greatness of the love of Christ, and as feeding upon it thus to be energised to refuse every working of sin in ourselves. They were to let nothing of it remain until the morning. "Thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste," verse 11. The feeding on the passover is intended to promote diligence with us to leave the world and its features behind. The world is just a system in which man lives to himself and pleases himself. The more we are characterised by feeding on the passover lamb, the more we will be exercised to leave that system behind. It was the power in their souls to move out of Egypt as a people redeemed for the pleasure of God, and it goes right through. Clearly we must be maintained in it, whether it is a question of being in the wilderness for the pleasure of God, or whether it is a question of entering into our greatest privileges. In whatever position we are viewed, there must be maintained with us the judgment of sin; there can be no allowance of sin.

So one had the thought just a few moments ago of king Uzziah, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 26). We read of how marvellously he was helped; he sought God and God made him to prosper. The chapter enlarges on his prosperity and the increase of power that marked him, and how successful he was in war against God's enemies. In that chapter there is no mention of any keeping of the passover. Then it says that his heart was lifted up and he transgressed and went into the house of God to burn incense. You see how it is possible for us to go on a long while and apparently prosper spiritually, and yet if the passover is neglected we shall find ourselves transgressing. He became a leper and remained so to the day of his death. We need the passover as food right through our spiritual history.

Exodus 16 brings us to the thought of the manna. That is another type of Christ as food. The food provided for us in a spiritual sense is nearly always Christ in one form or another. I do not say it is invariably Christ, for I think there is a sense in which we may feed on the work of God in the saints. David fed on the shewbread, which would refer to the saints as God views them, and it is important to feed our affections on the people of God thus. David no doubt would be greatly strengthened in meeting the persecutions which he endured for so long by having fed on the shewbread, having fed his mind and affections on the saints as God can take account of them. But as a general rule, spiritual food would be Christ in some aspect or another. The manna is found in the wilderness, and when I speak of the wilderness that is simply what the world has become to the Christian in the absence of Christ. It is the scene where Christ is not, and such a scene becomes a wilderness to the one who loves Christ. There is nothing in the scene which can minister to me spiritually. There is nothing in the world, or that is of the world that will contribute to the spiritual well-being of the saints. But we have to go through the world, and we have to go through it as redeemed, redeemed to God so as to be for the pleasure of God and governed by the will of God, and it is a question as to how we are sustained in that. It is a daily matter. It is a great help to recognise that the principle of a believer's life is day by day. We are to cultivate the idea of keeping short reckonings with God. Do not let a day go by without that day, so to speak, coming under review with God, and any matter not wholly suitable to God being judged and disposed of. It is a great matter to live day by day. If it is a question of food, it is a matter of day by day. Alas, when in their unbelief and lust the people asked for flesh, God gave enough quails to last a month, and they had to eat flesh for a month until it came out at their nostrils (Numbers 11: 19, 20). God's hand is not shortened. If it were His way to provide us with food to last us for a month, He could easily do so, but that is not His mind. He intends to deliver us from every form of

independence, and develop in us the spirit of dependence which has been seen in Christ. The wilderness is intended to develop in the people of God the attitude of dependence on God every day.

"When the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing as small as the hoar frost on the ground," Exodus 16: 14. The smallness of it is emphasised. We all naturally like bigness in some form. The smallness refers to the lowly grace in which the Lord Jesus has been found here, in the same circumstances of daily life as we ourselves have to go through. That is, we start as babes, and the Lord Jesus, who in wonderful grace became a Man, was found as a Babe. We have to go through the period of being children, placed in relation to parents, and our responsibility before God is to be obedient to our parents, and the Lord Jesus is brought before us as One who was placed in His boyhood in relation to parents and we are told that He was subject to them. As we grow up we have to submit ourselves to whatever may be the line of occupation that God has for us. In the case of the Lord Jesus it was that of a carpenter, nothing very attractive to the natural man. It was certainly nothing that would make Him appear great in the eyes of men. "Is not this the carpenter?" Mark 6: 3. He lived in Nazareth, not a very desirable place to live in, and in Capernaum, another undesirable place to live in. We are reminded that in wonderful grace the Lord Jesus has been down here in this world in similar circumstances to those in which the people of God find themselves in the ordering of God. And He filled out those circumstances in dependence on God, having His ear awakened morning by morning to hear what God would say to Him. He moved through on that principle, rejoicing in God's will and moving dependently. Psalm 16 gives us by the Spirit a delineation of the features of the Lord Jesus Christ as Man here, beginning with dependence and then lowliness, contentment and many other features which you can discern in that Psalm in which is set out the moral excellence which characterised the Lord Jesus in His path down here. I need not say that He was entirely without sin, but He moved through on a line which we ourselves can take up. We can take up the principle of obedience and dependence on God. The Lord Jesus took it up in order that He might set out the way in which God intends His people to move through this world, and as moving through on this principle, to be completely victorious over the world.

So the manna is a small thing. It will fit into anything. There is no circumstance in which we can find ourselves in our path here into which obedience to God's will does not fit. The principle of obedience as set out so gloriously in the Lord Jesus here is the governing principle of the believer's life, and as taken up and answered to by us we shall find we can go through this

world, not overcome by it. Indeed the feeding upon the manna develops what is typified in the acacia wood. The acacia wood represents the incorruptible order of manhood according to Jesus Christ, in which the saints are formed by the Spirit, which enables us to stand here in the wilderness as identified with the testimony of God. And as thus standing up, we are set together, in order to move together to provide a dwelling place for God and to serve Him in it. For that we need the power of endurance and the power of overcoming, and that is developed as we feed upon the manna. "A small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground". The word manna means 'What is it?' It is something that is entirely new. It is morally glorious. It says "Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord," Exodus 16: 6, 7. In the evening what did they see? They saw quails brought up, covering the camp. Here quails were brought up in the evening just to show what God could do if He pleased. There was no limit to the power of God. The Lord could quite easily take us out of testing conditions. He could alter things in our favour any time He pleased, but that is not God's way. His way is to develop in us features of dependence and obedience which were found perfectly in the Lord Jesus. Wilderness circumstances and testings have that in mind and the manna is provided accordingly. In the morning they saw the manna - the glory of the Lord, and what a glory it is! He Who is Creator of heaven and earth came down in grace into the humble circumstances of human life and adorned them! What a glory it is that He should have come so low in circumstances similar to our own in order to be food for us! So a child may understand that Jesus has been a child and has been subject to parents. The Spirit of God will remind that child that Jesus was subject to His parents. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says that in the ark was the manna in a *golden* pot (Hebrews 9: 4). You can understand how he would speak of it as a glorious matter.

The manna was to be gathered every morning, "every man according to his eating". That is, we are tested as to how much we can eat. Then it says that they were not to leave of it, "Let no man leave of it till the morning," that is, the idea of freshness in our appropriation of it is emphasized. "On the sixth day they gathered twice as much," in view of the rest, the holy sabbath on the following day. I am sure that will be found verified in the experience of the brethren; as we give ourselves to feeding on the manna it leads to restfulness of spirit. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matthew 11: 28. He gives it on certain lines - "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," verse 29. He is prepared to give us rest, but He gives it as the result of our taking His yoke upon us and learning from Him. It corresponds morally to feeding on the manna day by day and we find that it leads to a sabbath.

In Deuteronomy the Spirit of God, through Moses, commenting on the way they had been led, says, "who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end," chapter 8: 16. It is well for us to understand that, beloved brethren, that the manna is intended to prove us as to whether we are obedient or not, and as we are obedient, we shall find that God will do good to us in our latter end.

Now in John 6 we have another kind of food. We have spoken of the passover which is to characterise us all through our Christian course. There is also the manna which is food for the wilderness and the wilderness only; that is in our ordinary responsible life here in the world where Christ is not. This food spoken of in John 6 is living bread come down from heaven. When it comes to eating it we find that the Lord changes the figure and it is not spoken of as bread, but as His flesh and His blood; eating His flesh and drinking His blood. That is another aspect in which we should feed our minds and our hearts on Christ, on Christ as having died, for His flesh and His blood obviously allude to His death. It is the death of Christ as that by means of which He has vicariously brought to an end the condition of flesh and blood in which we are at the moment involved, with a view to bringing to light in Himself as Man beyond death, a new order of life in which we partake by the Spirit. The condition of flesh and blood is not the final thought of God, but that which is now set out in Christ as risen from the dead. As having received the Spirit of God we have the power to move in our thoughts and affections into another order of life where Christ is. We must bear in mind that Christian blessings are spiritual blessings in heavenly places. They are not natural things; they are not earthly things. The blessings that God in His grace has given us are spiritual blessings and in heavenly places, and God has given us the Holy Spirit, linking us with Christ who is in heaven, in order that in the Spirit we may find our life and satisfaction in the things that are above. We have to go through the world and in it we may glorify God and serve Him. There is the thought of our moving together in the wilderness as carrying the testimony of God. There is also this important matter of finding our life in the things that are above.

So Christ is presented to us as food, as having come down from heaven for the express purpose of dying and taking life again beyond death, a spiritual order of life in which we may have part already by the Holy Spirit whom we

have received. Naturally we all tend to live in natural things, and hence the lever by which we can be helped to move in our thoughts and affections away from what is natural to what is spiritual, is the death of Christ. Though we have to continue for the moment in a flesh and blood condition we may move in the power of the Spirit in relation to Christ in another condition. "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life," verse 54. That is life that cannot be touched by death. If I am living in natural affections, however right they may be according to God, however happy they may be, they can be touched by death. And if I live in natural affections and death comes, it is most solemn. My life, so to speak, is gone, and I am desolate. "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." The more we feed upon Christ in this light, the more our souls are sustained in appreciation of Christ where He is, and of all that stands in connection with Him, including the assembly. That is a character of life that is eternal. I am not despising natural affections,

but it is a question of what we find our life in. The Lord would encourage us to eat His flesh and drink His blood, in order to find our life in the circle of which He is the centre. It means that, more and more, we find our life in something that cannot be touched by death. If death invades our circle, it does not rob us of what is our life. That is indeed what the saints prove, they truly have part in eternal life; they have their life and joy in Christ and in the circle of the saints. They find when times of sorrow come they are supported above their sorrow. I do not say they do not feel it, but keen though the sorrow is, they have not been robbed of that in which they find their life. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him," verse 56. The more we feed upon Christ in His death in this way, the greater the place Christ has in our hearts' affections and we become more conscious of having a place in Him. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." The result is that Christ Himself where He is becomes, in the Spirit's power, more and more the occupation and satisfying portion of our hearts. This is presented in John 6 on individual lines, for after all we must feed individually, but it has in view what is collective. It may be that neglect of individual feeding on these lines, may explain in some measure any lack of substance and power that appears when we come together in assembly.

There is the collective feeding which, I suppose, is typified in the old corn of the land. When the people of God passed over Jordan they found the old corn there before them. They found that which belonged to the land: it was there before them and they were able to feed upon it. That is what is suggested in these words in John 14. The Lord speaks of going into the Father's presence before His disciples. He was speaking of what they would enjoy when He had

gone to the Father, by reason of the Holy Spirit being with them down here, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." What comes to pass is that, though the world sees Christ no longer, we see Him. The Spirit engages the hearts' affections of the saints with Christ where He is; the Spirit gives us the consciousness of our part as bound up with Christ where He is. Although for the moment we are down here and He is with the Father, our part is bound up with Him there. "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," John 17: 24. The Spirit gives us the consciousness that our portion is with Christ where He is. "Because I live ye live also," I believe that corresponds to our feeding on the old corn of the land. We feed our hearts' affections on Christ where He is as the One with whom the assembly is bound up in life, and we learn in Him our portion in the favour of the blessed God.

So the Lord goes on to say, "At that day," that is, the Spirit's day, "ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you," verse 20. It is what the Spirit's service results in, that we are made conscious of the place Christ has in the Father's affections, and that we have a place in His affections, and that He has a place in our affections. The assembly is bound up with Christ. We are in the full light that He is in His Father. It is opened up by the Spirit, and because He lives we live also. We come to enjoy it on the principle of feeding on the old corn of the land. The One who has gone there before us belongs to the scene, and we feed upon Him in our minds and affections, and it sustains us together in what is heavenly.

I trust this will impress us with the importance of spiritual food. I have not attempted to touch on another feature of food and that is the tree of life. You remember the promise to the overcomer in Ephesus, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," Revelation 2: 7. May the Lord help us to appropriate the food that is available to us.

KEEPING THE ENTRUSTED DEPOSIT

2 Timothy 1:1-10; 2 Timothy 2:3,4; 2 Timothy 2:19-22; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Timothy 4:11-13

I have in mind to speak of the great responsibility that rests upon us to keep what has been committed to us. In 2 Timothy 1: 14 we read, "Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted." The more the mind of God is being opened up to us, the greater our responsibility to keep it uncorrupted until the end. That is a most important matter, and it is well that we should be alive to the fact that we are in a world which is characterised by increasing evil of every kind. That is not merely incidental, but Satan uses it to endeavour to rob the saints of what God has given them in the way of light and privilege, and not only to rob the saints, but to overthrow if possible the testimony which God is set upon maintaining in this world. The testimony is a word which is often found in Scripture, and may be summed up in this, that God's will is going to prevail, and that what is of God is going to be established on the earth to the overthrow of all that is not of God. Conditions in the world would belie such a thought: there is nothing in the conditions in the world, either politically or socially or religiously, to suggest that any progress is being made in the overthrow of evil, and the establishment of what is of God. But the saints of God have light in their souls, given them by God, that Christ is already triumphant over all the powers of evil for He is risen from the dead and has gone to the right hand of God, and that He has gone to the dominant position which He is at present occupying in order to fill all things; the day of Christ, when that will be established and manifested, is about to come in. In the meantime, among the saints of God on earth and among them only,

there is, or is intended to be, maintained what is going to be established publicly in that day, and that, as I understand it, constitutes the testimony. It is a wide term for it involves the service of God in keeping with the light in which He is known, for that is part of His will, and it is therefore essential that God should be served amongst the saints in keeping with His holiness and with the blessedness of the Name by which He is known. But, as I say, the testimony goes further than the maintenance of that, for it necessitates that God's will is to prevail in every detail, and at the present time it is only amongst the saints who are walking in the truth that that testimony is maintained, and when I say maintained I mean maintained not merely as a matter of verbal confession, or announcement of the truth, but in an actual and substantial and living way. Now it is precisely that which the enemy is set against. If the testimony were merely verbal with no substance or light to support it, I believe the enemy would leave the saints alone, but in the

measure in which he sees, at the present time, the living expression of what God looks for and what is going to be established publicly in a coming day to the overthrow of Satan and all his activities, he is set to oppose it by every means in his power. If need be, he will use violence; he will also use corruption, seduction of every kind. The important thing for the saints is to understand, on the one hand, that if suffering is called for, and this epistle shows that it *is* called for, it is to be accepted in a spirit of fidelity to the truth and to the Lord in relation to whom we stand in testimony here. If, on the other hand, the enemy's effort is by means of corruption, whatever its character, there must be the most earnest determination on the part of the saints that through grace it will be refused and resisted.

That is very much the line of this second epistle to Timothy, and I would say here, too, that the apostle has in mind that what was entrusted to Timothy was to be committed by him to faithful men who should be competent to instruct others also. That is to say, he has in mind continuance, and continuance right through to the end. The power for this is the Holy Spirit whom we have received, but it is to be borne in mind that the truth committed to us is to be maintained livingly. Now in order to support us in this position, he brings in, in chapter 1, the thought that we have been called with a holy calling. Let us all, dear brethren, take that to heart, that the calling with which we have been called is a *holy* calling. The holiness of it, is stressed because it is a question of carrying the truth through inviolate in the midst of an unholy scene. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that our calling is a heavenly calling; that is to detach us from earthly religion and earthly hopes. The epistle to the Philippians tells us that our calling is a calling on high of God in Christ Jesus; that is to emphasise the dignified and elevated character of the calling in order to impart a certain dignity to us as the saints of God passing through this world. But this second epistle to Timothy emphasises that it is a *holy* calling, and moreover the apostle says that Christ has brought life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel. Incorruptibility is a most important matter. Do not think that that refers merely to the bodily condition, for it does not. Thank God we shall take on an incorruptible bodily condition, as it says. "For this corruptible must needs put on incorruptibility," 1 Corinthians 15: 53, but what has been brought to light in incorruptibility in a moral sense, in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, a Man who is incorruptible. God has brought in an incorruptible order of manhood. We partake in that order of manhood by the Holy Spirit, and it is most important to lay hold of that. The testimony of God in the holiness of its character is to be maintained in the presence of evil of every kind as the saints move in the power of what they are as partaking by the Spirit in an incorruptible order of manhood.

The apostle speaks in this epistle of being "apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, according to promise of life, the life which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Timothy 1: 1. Now *promise*, as I understand it, as distinct from purpose, is what God has brought forward to meet conditions which either had arisen or which would arise, and God's great provision for meeting the conditions of opposition to the truth which He knew would arise in these last days particularly, is *life*. That is to say, the saints are to be concerned as to being in life in a moral and spiritual sense. That is a most important matter, and the life which God has promised is the life which is in Christ Jesus. Where the expression "in Christ Jesus" is used in Scripture it nearly always implies a certain subjective correspondence with the truth in features that belong to the life which is in Christ Jesus. "In Christ" implies status; that is; we are in Christ as having received the Spirit in contrast to being in Adam. When the Lord Jesus came into this world there appeared on the earth what had never appeared before, a Man who was incapable of being corrupted. Thank God for that! God Himself is spoken of in 1 Timothy as the Incorruptible God; how thankful we can be for that! And now in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ He has introduced a Man who is incorruptible. The Lord says,, "the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing," John 14: 30. We know how in the wilderness the devil was permitted to bring to bear upon the Lord Jesus Christ every temptation. Three particular ones are recorded, but it says in Luke, "having completed every temptation, departed from him for a time," chapter 4: 13. *Every* temptation was brought to bear upon the Lord Jesus by the devil, and what was disclosed in it was that now Satan was faced by a Man who was incapable of being corrupted. That was true when Jesus was here, but now it says, "who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings," 2 Timothy 1: 10. That is, that life and incorruptibility have now become available to *us* through the gospel, incorruptibility in us lies in the Holy Spirit whom we receive, in whom we partake in the life of Christ, and by whom we are enabled to abide in Christ. If, dear brethren, we get away from the influence of Christ, we certainly are corrupted. As long as we are here, we carry with us the flesh upon which Satan very easily acts, and if it is not kept in the place of death that is proper to it. Satan can easily get access and get power over us in one way or another. So it is an important thing to realise, dear brethren, that there is no reason why we should succumb to any influence of evil, for we have the Holy Spirit of God, and He maintains our souls, or is prepared to maintain them, if we will allow Him to do so, in living touch with the Man who is incorruptible. As we abide in Him we do not sin. Scripture says so, "Whoever abides in him, does not sin," 1 John 3: 6, and indeed it says, "he that has been begotten of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him," chapter 5: 18. So that as affording full scope

to the Holy Spirit and through Him abiding in Christ, abiding under the holy influence of Christ, there is no reason why we should not go through an evil world, untarnished by it.

That is what is in mind, dear brethren, in this epistle, and in order to strengthen our hands and to stimulate us in relation to this matter, the apostle tells us that God has "called us with a holy calling,

not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time, but has been made manifest *now*," chapter 1: 9, 10. That is to say, the very fact that we have been called by the gospel shows that we have been in God's mind before the world began. He gave us His purpose and grace in Christ Jesus before the world began, and what dates back thus before the world began has now come into substantial being in that we have been reached by the gospel, as it says, "has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings," verse 10.

The epistle to the Ephesians gives us what was in God's mind before the foundation of the world, the great purpose of His love in which we, dear brethren, were involved. I know nothing more stimulating than to take account of the fact that we were in God's mind before the foundation of the world and that for the greatest conceivable thoughts of blessing which go right into eternity to come. There is nothing more stimulating than that. According to the epistle to the Ephesians, God is working simply from that standpoint, what His own love has conceived, with no other motive for it than what He is in Himself. From the time that He conceived it He has been working, founding the world with a view to working out His purpose and steadily going on, and now we are nearing the moment when all that He has purposed is to be brought into glorious and eternal establishment. But this epistle to Timothy, while bringing in a similar thought telling us of God's purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, brings it in in order to strengthen us and stimulate us in regard of the holy obligation imposed upon us to keep the truth that has been committed to us and to keep it *inviolate*. Every brother and every sister is to see to it that the enemy's attacks do not find us susceptible to them, do not find one with his armour off. It is a question of keeping our armour on and not putting it off in view of the urgent necessity, dear brethren, of carrying through the truth of God inviolate to the end. And so the apostle makes no secret of it that this is sure to entail suffering. What soldier goes to war without expecting suffering? Suffering is the order of the day while a war is on, and the apostle says, "Take thy share in suffering as a

good soldier of Jesus Christ," chapter 2: 3; and then he says, "No one going as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of life, that he may please him who has enlisted him as a soldier," verse 4. Within the last thirty years the Lord has given us two experiences of war. What is the object of it, dear brethren? Is it not to bring home to us what military service involves, that it is a question of the necessity for personal considerations and personal ease to be relinquished, because of the over-riding demands of the cause for which we are called to war? This is to be taken into account in a spiritual sense in relation to the testimony of our Lord; every one is to regard himself as a soldier of Jesus Christ, that is to say, the claims of the testimony, all that is due to the Lord, come first and every personal consideration has to be subordinated to it. Everyone is to regard himself as a soldier, a soldier of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ, dear brethren, not Christ Jesus; Christ Jesus looks upon our Lord Jesus in the present position of glory in which He is as the One who has been in God's mind from the very outset, but Jesus Christ contemplates our Lord Jesus as He was down here passing through the scene of testing, and proving absolutely faithful in it. We are now to range ourselves under Jesus Christ as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. These are some of the things that are necessary if we are to have part in the maintenance of the testimony right through to the end. So the apostle speaks also of tears, he says, "remembering thy tears." Timothy, as we know, was a feeling man, one who cared with genuine feeling how the saints were getting on. How important it is, dear brethren, to be concerned as to how the saints are getting on, but first of all to be concerned as to yourself, as to how you are getting on yourself; I do not mean with any idea, of course, of making anything of yourself or of finding any occasion for self-satisfaction, for if you go on with God you will never find any occasion for self-satisfaction. Never! You go on dependently, but the great thing is to keep one's own soul first, because there is nothing so potent for the help of the saints as a good influence. Every one of us exerts an influence of one kind or another; it may be a good influence or it may be a bad influence. Those who are themselves going on exert an influence for good over others, and if, through grace, we are concerned to go on well ourselves and keep near to the Lord, and learn to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit, then we shall also find that we shall be able to take account of how others are going on. Timothy was a feeling man, and the general defection that was setting in in the apostle's day, (for he says, "all who are in Asia, of whom is Phygellus and Hermogenes, have turned away from me," 2 Timothy 1: 15) was causing Timothy tears, and the apostle valued them as God values them. This matter of maintaining the truth of God to the end is a matter of hardship and of feeling and of relinquishment of personal rights and personal considerations; the over-riding

consideration being the maintenance of the truth, not merely in a verbal way but in the living character of it, and particularly in uncorruptedness.

And then the apostle refers also to the unfeigned faith which had been found with Timothy's grandmother, and then with his mother, and now he says, "in thee also," verse 5. This is a matter which many of us may take account of, for many of us in this room are in the privileged position of having had parents, and it may be grandparents, who have been marked by faith before us. We are not to be indifferent to these things. We have come into the line of the testimony, the responsibility devolves now upon us. Our grandparents preserved it in fidelity according to the light that they had in their day and passed on the truth that they held, and their own influence with it, to the succeeding generation, and they in their turn have passed it on to us, and now, dear brethren, what are we going to do with it? There is a trust imposed upon us, there is an obligation upon us. Are we going to pass it on to another generation if God is pleased to raise it up? Are we going to pass it on inviolate? That is what we are concerned about because the Lord is greatly recovering the truth and greatly stimulating the saints in relation to the holy character of it and the elevated character of it, too. Along with that, beloved brethren, there is the most urgent need that each one should set himself by God's grace to carry the matter through to completion, to let nothing be surrendered but to hold the truth in its holy character, and to hold it in life and in a substantial way.

In the passage in chapter 2 which I read, the apostle shows us how conditions in the religious world are to be met. It is a well known passage to which we often have occasion to allude, and I do not want to remain on it unduly, but it is such an important passage that any reference to the line of things of which we are now speaking would be incomplete if we did not refer to it. One of Satan's most potent

forms of attack has been, and is, by introducing corruption in the religious sphere; that is, instead of the pure mind of the Holy Spirit and the unquestioned authority of the Lord characterising Christendom, what is found in it is the corrupt mind of man working in the things of God and the complete disregard of the authority of the Lord. That being the position, how are things to be met by those who desire to be faithful? The apostle says, first of all referring to those who were by their false teaching overthrowing the faith of some, "the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those that are his," chapter 2: 19. Whatever God founds will stand, the soul can rest on that, there is no question about it; the foundation of God stands sure, and there is this seal to it, "The Lord knows those that are his." That is

an important matter because when it comes to the question of following the injunctions that we will speak of in a moment, some people say that things cannot be as evil as they are made out to be because there are certain ones of God's people linked with them. That is not our concern. "The Lord knows those that are his." That is *His* matter. Our concern is to be governed by principles that are according to the rights of the Lord's name and the holiness of God's house. The other side of the seal is this, "Let every one" - it is an individual matter - "who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity," verse 19. The name of the Lord must not be connected with iniquity. If I name the name of the Lord and am identified with iniquity I connect the Lord's name with iniquity, a most serious thing to do. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." You may say, What is iniquity? Iniquity is the working of the will of man in opposition to the will of God, and especially the will of man working in the things of God. That is iniquity. If I am identified with any religious body or system, the principle of whose existence denies the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit according to the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and denies, too, the authority of the Lord - if, for instance, certain parts of the Scriptures are discredited and it is said that they are not inspired or that they do not apply in this day, that there has been development since the apostle's day, or anything of that kind - anybody or system that is marked by these features is stamped thereby as iniquitous. It is of no use saying that there are many of God's people connected with them, that is not the point. The point is that everyone is to accept responsibility for himself if he names the name of the Lord, to *depart* from everything that is of the character of iniquity. But then there is also another matter. This scripture not only authorises, and indeed, requires, in fidelity to the Lord, those who name His name to withdraw from iniquity, but it also authorises and requires those who would be faithful to the Lord to depart from persons who are vessels to dishonour. There again it is not a question of whether they are true believers or not, it is a question of whether they are vessels to honour or vessels to dishonour, and a person is to purge himself from vessels to dishonour. It therefore contemplates, dear brethren, that we are available for service, for the service of God and to serve the Lord, but what is our service to, is it to honour or is it to dishonour? We are to separate from vessels to dishonour; it says, "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work," verse 21; *every* good work, a most remarkable and encouraging statement, that in such days of brokenness and confusion as exist in the religious world today, it is possible, as moving on these lines, to be available to the Lord for every good work. There is not a single good work proper to Christianity that may not be reached in days of brokenness and moral

confusion on these lines of withdrawing from iniquity and purging ourselves from vessels to dishonour. It is a question of being serviceable to the Master. Who would not wish to be serviceable to the Master? Who would not wish to be pleasing to the Lord? It is a question of proving serviceable to the Master. The Lord has carried through the testimony in His day inviolate, He did not let a single feature of the truth fall to the ground, not once did God's name suffer at His hands, not in a single particular was God's will in any way relinquished. And now, beloved brethren, in these days as we are nearing the end, when the truth is being recovered in such remarkable power and attractiveness; the Lord is looking to everyone of us to see to it that the truth is carried through inviolate to the end. There is to be correspondence with Himself. How are we to appear as pleasing to the Lord, marked by the features proper to the assembly such as He can present to himself glorious, if we are not concerned about moral correspondence with Himself in everything? Faithfulness to God in regard of the truth was, if I may speak of any feature of the Lord's life as outstanding in relation to any others, an outstanding feature of His pathway here.

The scripture goes on to say, "But youthful lusts flee." *Flee* them! Lusts are strong when we are young, they are lusts that show themselves in youth's days, but, dear brethren, they will become stronger as we get older if we are not maintained in the power of self-judgment by the Holy Spirit, and the apostle says, Flee them! That is, it is not a question of saying that they will drop off, it is a question of *fleeing* them. It is a question of running away from them, so to speak, of keeping as far away as possible from them and from anything that would in any way, prompt them or call them into exercise. We need to be drastic and energetic about it in the power of the Holy Spirit. These are urgent matters because of the truth being at stake, and everyone who comes under the power of evil is a victory for Satan. It is an overthrow of the truth in that one for the time being. And so we are to flee youthful lusts, and then we are to follow righteousness. The apostle is setting before us a positive line on which we are to move; we are to follow righteousness, pursue it. Righteousness is simply what is right in the sight of God in every particular, in religious matters and in personal matters. To do what is right in every particular in the sight of God is to be the first governing principle of our lives. Then as applying that to the condition in the religious world around us, we shall find that that involves a path of faith, and a path of faith, beloved brethren, in which we become strengthened, supported by the Lord the longer we continue in it in faith. Righteousness and faith come first and then love and then peace. There are some who would have us surrender divine principles on the ground of going on together in happy unity, who bring forward the idea of

love, but love comes third. It is an essential feature in its right place, but righteousness comes first, and faith comes second, and then love comes third, and then peace comes fourth. As held in their right order, beloved brethren, as we follow righteousness and faith we shall find that there is plenty of power to follow, love and peace also, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart," verse 22. And so these things are to be followed with those who are doing likewise. I just mention this in order that the younger ones here may understand the way this epistle links up with assembly truth, for this epistle is pre-eminently individual and the working out of it has to be taken up in exercise and faith by each one of us individually, but now what we come to here is that we are to follow these things "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." That is, there is no suggestion of an isolated path, but God will see to it that there are those who are calling on the Lord out of a pure heart and we are to follow with them. Well now, if we are to follow with others, if there is to be a moving together of the saints collectively, whatever the number may be, be it two or three or three hundred or three thousand, the only thing that can regulate them in their movements collectively is the truth of the assembly. Hence it is a matter of righteousness to govern ourselves as moving together on these principles, by the truth of the assembly, and it is in this way and on these lines that the truth of the assembly, which is so precious to us now in these days, has been arrived at, and it is on these lines and these lines alone that it may be continued right through to the end.

I read the verse at the end of chapter 3 in order to show the immense value of the Scriptures, another thing which is most important for us as having this holy trust committed to us. The apostle says that "Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work," verse 16, 17. Here again we have the idea of *all* good works, a most encouraging thing. The apostle speaking here of the man of God, is not referring to Timothy personally. In the first epistle he says to Timothy personally, "*thou*, O man of God," chapter 6: 11, but here he says, "*the* man of God," that is to say, it is the man of God characteristically. It is open to you and to me to be a man of God, that is to say, one who is standing in an evil day for what is of God, and the equipment for the man of God is the Scriptures, handled indeed in the power of the Holy Spirit, but they are all divinely inspired and they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. They are a veritable armoury, a divine armoury that is inexhaustible and invincible, as rightly applied. The longer we go on with assembly truth, with assembly exercises, the more we

discover that not a single position arises in which the testimony is threatened but what there is a Scripture that meets it, that exactly exposes what is at work and indicates what the saints are to do. And so, beloved brethren, we are thoroughly equipped. The Scriptures are indeed a veritable treasury too; all the wealth of divine thoughts is enshrined in the Scriptures. They are marvellously inexhaustible, but they are at the same time a wonderful armoury, so that they are the equipment of the man of God enabling him to be perfected unto every good work.

In closing, I refer to the verses read in chapter 4. The apostle says, "Luke alone is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thyself, for he is serviceable to me for ministry," verse 11. It is a question of Paul and of Paul's doctrine. To Paul was given the most exalted features of the truth to minister to the saints; it is he who gives us the ministry in relation to Christ and the assembly. It is he who sets out the truth in its most heavenly and elevated character; and it is Paul's doctrine that is particularly opposed in Christendom today. Now it is a question of who is going to be with Paul, of who is *capable* of being with Paul. He says, "Luke alone is with me," and then he says, "Take Mark, and bring him with thyself, for he is serviceable to me for ministry." Why should it be Luke and Mark? It is a remarkable thing that they are brought forward at this point.

Luke was with him and Mark was to be brought for he was serviceable to him. They were two men who wrote gospels; that is the secret of it, dear brethren. They had appreciated Christ; they had studied Christ in such a way that they were rendered capable in the hands of the Spirit of writing two gospels. Luke would understand the Person of Christ. It is Luke who is given by the Holy Spirit to tell us in a most holy way of the birth of Jesus, stressing His holiness, "the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God," chapter 1: 35. He is able to present the incorruptible Man, to trace His movements in testimony, to enlarge upon how He was characterised by constant prayer. These things are important for us if we would learn the secret of incorruptibility as it is in Christ Jesus. Luke can delineate it for us; the features of dependence that were found in Jesus, the features of going right through to the end, the testimony never suffering for a moment at His hands. See Him, dear brethren, at the very last, when He is opposed by His foes, and Peter, alas, denies Him; and in the midst of all that was going on the Lord had time and was free in spirit to turn and look on Peter. Think of the grace of it! In the very midst of all the Lord was enduring at that time, He turned and looked on Peter. And as He was being led away; He says; "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep over me, but weep over yourselves and over your children," Luke 23: 28. He carried the testimony of grace through entirely unimpaired notwithstanding the circumstances through which He was passing. Then on

the cross He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," chapter 23: 34, and then he ministered grace to the repentant malefactor. All that was in the presence of the greatest pressure. See how the Lord carried the testimony through, the testimony of divine grace, entirely inviolate, absolutely incorruptible.

Luke was one who had studied Jesus, and as studying Him, and as being affected by that, which he had appreciated of Him, he was found with Paul at the end. I believe that is the secret, dear brethren, if we are to go through, we need to study Christ. Then Mark wrote another gospel. It is a question of what is basic, the incorruptible order of manhood that is to be appreciated in Christ, and now Mark delineates for us the perfect Servant. He had himself been a failure but had been recovered by grace. I have no doubt the secret of his recovery was that he studied Jesus as the perfect Servant and he was able to write a gospel. Now Paul says that man who has his heart impressed with the features of incorruptible service as seen in Jesus, is profitable for me, "Take Mark, and bring him with thyself." Why should we not study Christ? I say it for myself as much as for you. Why should we not study Christ? It is the secret of going through uncorrupted.

Then he brings in another thing, he says, "The cloak which I left behind me in Troas at Carpus's, bring when thou comest," verse 13. Why should that be brought in here? It is a question not only of studying Christ, but of considering *Paul's* measure. Timothy was to bring Paul's cloak with him: Timothy would say to himself as he saw that cloak, That is Paul's measure, I am not equal to wearing Paul's cloak, but I am to bring it with me. I am to be constantly reminded what a man Paul was. So we, too, are to think of Paul's measure, for Paul was taken up by the Lord and wrought in by the Spirit of God in order that he might set forth Christianity, as worked out practically in a man of like passions with ourselves, not entirely free from failure, but there it was. What a measure was Paul's! So he says to Timothy, "The cloak which I left behind me in Troas at Carpus's, bring when thou comest." That is to say, keep Paul's measure in mind; Paul himself says, "Be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ," 1 Corinthians 11: 1. Finally he says, "and the books, especially the parchments," verse 13. The parchments would be, I suppose, that which was most recently given. The books are to be valued, the written ministry is to be valued, but especially that which is most recent, that which is current. Bring these things with you, see that they have place with you. All these things are recorded, dear brethren, as means which the Spirit of God intends that we make use of, so that we shall go through to the end preserving the truth inviolate. May the Lord help us for His Name's sake!

SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS ESSENTIAL IN LOCALITIES

1 Samuel 2:18,19; 1 Samuel 3:1-4; 1 Samuel 3:10-21; 1 Samuel 7:8-10; 1 Samuel 7:15-17; 1 Samuel 16:1-3; 1 Samuel 16:12,13

I believe, dear brethren, the history of Samuel presents certain spiritual elements which are essential in any locality for the prosperity of the testimony there, and shows how they may develop from small beginnings. The elements that I refer to are first what is priestly, then secondly the prophetic word, thirdly power with God in prayer and calling on His name, fourthly the element of spiritual judgment, and then finally the power to bring Christ in so that he acquires the place among God's people that He should have.

I think we can see that all these elements are of great value in any locality, and there is no reason why they should not be present, for the days in which Samuel is introduced were about as bad as they could be. Indeed, they are referred to at the end of Psalm 78 in terms that show that the conditions among God's people had at that time become as bad, as I have said, as they could be, but they afforded the background for God to intervene in His sovereignty to bring in David, and through him to establish all His thoughts concerning His people. But then, before he brought in David, there was this previous history having its rise in the exercises of a godly woman named Hannah. There is no reason why the spirit of Hannah should not be with us, for the conditions publicly in Christendom are morally the same as the conditions that obtained in Israel in Hannah's day. That is, that which claims publicly to be in the position of the priesthood is utterly corrupt, and so much evil and corruption of every kind are now connected with what claims to be divine service that it is utterly nauseous to Him, so that the Lord's word to Laodicea is, "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth," Revelation 3: 16 - a very strong expression showing how the Lord regards the state of indifference to what is due to Himself and His name that marks the Christian profession at the present time.

But it was in the presence of such conditions that Hannah had her exercises, her husband apparently satisfied to go on with what was formal; the yearly sacrifice was quite sufficient for him, so that he could hardly understand Hannah's exercise that she could be content with nothing less than a son. What God has in mind for His saints is that they should move before Him and serve Him in the character of sons, and Hannah desired a son. Elkanah said to Hannah, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" 1 Samuel 1: 8, but Hannah pursued her exercise and in due course God gave her the son that she had asked for, and he was named Samuel, which means, 'Asked for of God'. Now

this is a most important matter for us to bear in mind, beloved brethren, and it is always open to us to ask of God. Samuel represents what is brought in on the basis of asking of God, so that whatever needs may disclose themselves in a locality, whatever falling short there may be in the actual answer to the truth, there is always open to us this avenue of asking of God. God loves to give in answer to requests, as the Lord said, "how much rather shall the Father who is of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke 11: 13. Hence Samuel represents what is brought in on the principle of one exercised soul having asked of God, having had discernment of conditions, and intelligence of what was needed to meet those conditions. It says of Samuel that he ministered before the Lord being a boy girded with a linen ephod; that is, he morally displaced the priesthood that was so corrupt. Officially he was not a priest, for though a Levite he was not of the house of Aaron, but morally he *was* one. He ministered before the Lord girded with a linen ephod.

That is the first thing to be considered in any locality, what is priestly, what will minister to the pleasure of God, not doing it in a merely formal way, but as having the moral conditions that the service of God requires, because it says that Samuel was girded with an ephod of linen. That represents that the moral conditions suitable to the priesthood were found with Samuel, even though at this time he was but a boy. That is what God looks for in His people; it was being developed, though in but small measure as yet, and God could now set aside the official priesthood that was so corrupt and distasteful to Him. I believe it is always God's way that, if He is going to set something aside. He has already there in existence what is qualified to replace it. So you remember when the disciples spoke to the Lord about the temple and called His attention to the fine buildings, He told them, "not a stone shall be left upon a stone, which shall not be thrown down," Mark 13: 2. The Lord had there the widow who had cast in her two mites into the treasury, and therefore that which was only formal could be set aside; what was pleasing to God and devoted to His service was already there in the person of the widow. That is always a principle with God, and I would urge upon the young brothers and sisters to start young in considering what is pleasing to God so as to develop in what is priestly. We can only develop what is priestly by being in the presence of God and being attentive to the Holy Spirit. It is only thus that we shall develop in what is priestly, but that is what counts above everything else in His testimony, and everything that is pleasing to God develops out of what is priestly. What Samuel was as a great prophet, what he was as a great intercessor and one who had power with God as calling on His name, and what he was as a great judge, all flow out of his beginnings in priestly activities. He was not a priest officially but he was one morally, and it is exactly the same today with the

saints of God who give place to the Spirit of God; they are characteristically priestly, and displace all that is formal and official in the priesthood around us. God passes over all that, and will shortly set it aside completely, because He already has in its place that which pleases Him.

So it says that Samuel's mother made him a little coat and brought it to him from year to year. How important this maternal element is in any company, the element that, as having already considered for God, will watch the growth of that which is young in the company. The suggestion is that there was normal gradual growth, and each year a fresh coat was needed, and it was the mother that brought it. It is most important that there should be this maternal watchfulness as to the spiritual growth of those who are younger, that there may be a steady development of what is priestly in the local company, because, I say again, what is priestly underlies everything else. There can be no power in the prophetic word, or with God in intercession, or in the spirit of judgment - there can be no power in any of these directions, save as it finds its roots in what is priestly.

In 1 Samuel 3 we find that it says, "the boy Samuel ministered to Jehovah before Eli," verse 1. It is very interesting to notice how the Spirit of God presents Samuel in contrast to what was around. In chapter 2: 11 it says, "And the boy ministered to Jehovah in the presence of Eli the priest." And then we have a section which describes the evil and utter wickedness of the official priesthood. In verse 18 it says, "And Samuel ministered before Jehovah, a boy girded with a linen ephod," and in verses 22 and onwards we get the incapacity of Eli, his oldness and his lack of moral power, so that while he reproves his sons, he has no power with them. In verse 26 it says, "Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah and also with men." Then we get in the final section in that chapter the man of God coming to Eli and conveying to him God's judgment of his house. Chapter 3: 1 reads, "the boy Samuel ministered to Jehovah," that is, the Spirit of God is continually reverting to Samuel in contrast to all that is around, which is so displeasing and abhorrent to God. In chapter 3 the Lord honours Samuel and calls him by name, saying, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel was slow to understand who it was speaking to him, but eventually he says, "Speak, for thy servant heareth," verse 10. It says, "Jehovah came, and stood, and called as at the other times, Samuel, Samuel!" That is, the Lord is now definitely taking account of what was there. I am seeking to apply this to the conditions that may obtain in our localities, because as the truth that God has ministered among us is responded to by us, there is that which provides a full answer to Him notwithstanding the corrupt state of things around us. So God is honouring Samuel. The Lord came and stood, and *stood* means took up His stand deliberately. He was standing

in relation to Samuel. Judgment had already been pronounced on the system around, and the Lord was taking His stand in relation to Samuel. The point is, was Samuel going to fail Him, or not? That is the position now; the Lord has passed by that which is around us and has taken His stand in relation to what God has brought in vitally, though in smallness. The point is, are we going to fail Him, or are we going to answer fully to all that He looks for? He knows Samuel and calls him by name. He would give Samuel to know that He knows him by name, and Samuel says, "Speak, for thy servant heareth," and then the Lord says a most remarkable thing to Samuel. We do not know exactly what Samuel's age was at that time, but he was sufficiently young to be called a boy, and the Lord tells him what He was about to do in Israel, a thing, "at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle," verse 11. That is, the Lord does not hesitate to say to the boy that the conditions around him, in the midst of which he was, were so bad that He was coming in in the most drastic judgment. He would have the boy understand all this. So it is important for the young to face these things; it is a question of understanding what the privilege of our position is, that through grace we are found in separation from evil around and in a place where the truth is known; and the question is what are we going to do with it. Are we going to see that the conditions provided are maintained so that the service of God can go on to the end? The Lord did not hesitate to tell Samuel what He felt about these things, and about Eli, and Eli's house; the whole matter was laid out before Samuel. We can understand why Samuel would fear the Lord. We can understand how it would promote the spirit of fear in his heart, as he found himself in the presence of the Lord who spoke to him of doing such a thing in Israel.

The Lord was not sparing Samuel, so to speak; He was making him feel the seriousness of having to do with God, there is to be no trifling with the holiness of God. With a sense of that, Samuel is to speak, with spiritual power. It is a question of God, His house and His service, and the holiness that becomes it, and Samuel is to understand that God will maintain the holiness proper to His house. So Eli calls upon Samuel in the morning to tell him what Jehovah had said. Eli says, "I pray thee, keep it not back from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou keep back anything from me of all the word that he spoke to thee," verse 17. And it says, "Samuel told him all the words, and kept nothing back from him," verse 18. Samuel was faithful. In Jeremiah 23: 28 we read, "he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully." I believe it was this faithfulness on Samuel's part in telling Eli exactly what Jehovah had said, although extremely painful and difficult to do, that established him as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord would say, Now I have one I can rely on, someone who will not water down my word to make it popular,

someone who will convey my word faithfully. And it says, "Samuel grew," verse 19. How encouraging all these statements are in the early chapters, the Spirit of God taking account of the growth that was going on, starting with what was small. The Spirit of God watched it and recorded it as it grew in priestliness and faithfulness in regard to the word of the Lord. There was at any rate *someone* in Israel who would pay attention to what He said. His words would all fall on good ground. "Jehovah was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was established a prophet of Jehovah," verses 19, 20. So he is established a prophet, but what underlies it is priestliness, ministering to the Lord clothed with the linen ephod. What is needed is the prophetic word. It says in the prophet Hosea, "by a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved," chapter 12: 13. The prophetic word is intended to deliver the saints from the world, and to preserve them as they pass through the wilderness identified with the service and testimony of God; hence it is always needed; so the epistle to the Corinthians encourages us to desire the ability to prophesy. We have to see to it that we are following after love, and then we may desire earnestly the best gifts. All our desires for ability to prophesy should be prompted by desire to see the saints prosper and to promote the pleasure of God in His people. If that is the basis of our desires, we may desire earnestly that we may prophesy. It is a question of bringing in what is needed, and so we get instruction as to the gift of prophecy, and one may mention at this point, how Isaiah in the 6th chapter tells us of his own conversion, and how one of the seraphim flew to him with a live coal taken with tongs from off the altar, and touched his lips, and said, "Behold, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin expiated," verse 7; and then Isaiah heard a voice saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" verse 8. That is, someone is needed. Let us bear that in mind; someone is needed to convey the mind of God. It is a means by which the people of God are preserved. Isaiah says, "Here am I; *send* me." The idea of being sent is that you have a message. So Samuel starts his history as a prophet by having a message, and telling it faithfully. It is important to recognise the need, and to get to the Lord about it, as ready to be available, not wanting to be someone, equally pleased that it should be someone else, but at the same time not holding back, but accepting responsibility. "Here am I; *send* me." Now Scripture shows that sisters also may prophesy, and that they may have their part in conveying the mind of God. That is a feature that showed itself in the early days, it was there in Anna, it was there in the daughters of Philip, but we do not often see it now. It may be a question for sisters as to whether there is something lacking in this respect, whether that feature which ought to be found among the people of God is lacking, because

evidently it has a place. Sisters may exercise an influence in the way in which they may convey the mind of God as having received it themselves, and as being marked by moral power as those who have to do with God. So this element of prophesying was found with Samuel, and it says that "the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord," 1 Samuel 3: 21.

At the end of 1 Samuel 3, we find that the mind of God is now being manifested, and what is priestly having been secured and being maintained, this element of prophesy is greatly increased. So that when David flees from Saul to Samuel, and Saul hears that David is at Naioth by Ramah. Saul follows him there, and he finds a company of prophets prophesying and Samuel standing as president over them, and Saul is exposed, and he lies down naked. It shows what power there was, all springing from the early beginnings of which we have spoken.

In chapter 7 we find that what comes to light, is the power that Samuel had with God. In the beginning of the chapter he had told the people to apply their hearts to the Lord to serve Him only, and He would deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines. "And Samuel took a sucking-lamb, and offered it as a whole burnt-offering to Jehovah," verse 9; he does not disguise the true state of things. The sucking-lamb denotes smallness, it was just a sucking-lamb, not a bullock, but very small, indicating the smallness of their measure at that time. He does not pretend that things are better than they are, but it is the beginning of recovery, and the whole burnt offering speaks of what is for God. The completeness of our acceptance in Christ remains unchanged, though our measure be small, and we can be brought in in the unchanged acceptance of Christ Himself and the value of His death, as indicated in the sucking-lamb. The measure may be small, but that does not alter the acceptance in which we stand before God. "And Samuel cried to Jehovah for Israel, and Jehovah answered him."

He heard Samuel; the Spirit of God is stressing Samuel. If we are prepared to start with what is priestly, and go on growing in that, and seeking the pleasure of God in His people, what may not result from it? It says, "Jehovah answered him." In the Scriptures Samuel is remarkably honoured hundreds of years afterwards; according to the prophet Jeremiah, it is recorded: that the Lord said to Jeremiah, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my soul would not turn toward this people," chapter 15: 1, evidently alluding to the great power that Moses and Samuel had as intercessors, but the state in Judah was so bad that even they would not have availed to turn Jehovah toward His people. So God honours Samuel centuries afterwards.

In Psalm 99 he is mentioned also, "Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name," verse 6; so it is open to us to develop power with God. How valuable this can be in any local company, power to be able to call upon God; and to get an answer from God. We get other instances in Scripture of God taking account of what individuals are. He says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" Genesis 18: 17. He was taking account of Abraham, and what Abraham was as walking with Him, and as pleasing to Him. "I know him," he says, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice," verse 19. He knew Abraham and what he was in his house, and because of what he was in his house, it says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" And he is called the friend of God. Then we get Daniel too, he was greatly beloved. And so it is open to us, brothers or sisters, beginning with what is priestly, to cultivate power with God as considering for God's pleasure in His people, and who can tell what that may effect in any locality?

Then in the end of the chapter Samuel comes before us as marked by spiritual judgment, a most important feature in the assembly. We are to judge angels, and the world, and in view of our judging the world, God allows all sorts of matters to arise in the history of the assembly; they arise in localities, and have to be dealt with in localities according to the spirit of judgment, that is, right judgment. Judge not according to sight; but judge righteous judgment," John 7: 24. First of; all, before any judgment is pronounced on a matter, the correct facts have to be carefully ascertained and a thorough inquiry made as we see in Deuteronomy 13: 14 and Deuteronomy 17: 4: then it is a question of bringing to bear upon these facts principles that are according to God.

So it says that "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel", that is, the house of God, a most important element in judgment, for in the house of God, God requires that things should be suited to Himself. Paul says, "that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house." 1 Timothy 3: 15. We are always the house of God by virtue of the fact that God is dwelling in us by His Spirit, and that is a matter to bear in mind. You remember in Numbers that every leper and everyone that had an issue was to be put outside the camp, "that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell," chapter 5: 3, that is, the dwelling of God among His people was brought to bear upon them as the ground upon which they were to exclude everything that was not suitable to Himself. So Samuel went from year to year and judged Israel. He went to Gilgal: this place suggests the cutting off of the flesh, what God has effected in the death of Christ and what we are to maintain in the power of the Spirit;

Samuel would bring that to bear on matters as they arose. How drastically God has dealt with the flesh in the cross of Christ, and the Spirit of God has come in, in order that we may be maintained in what has been done for us! So Samuel would bring Gilgal to bear upon matters that arise. Then he judged also in Mizpah. The meaning of Mizpah is 'Witness', and in Genesis 31 Laban says, "when we shall be hidden one from another: ...no man is with us; see, God is witness between me and thee!" verse 49, 50. Mizpah brings that side of the truth before us. God is looking on, that even when we are by ourselves, God is witness. If, at your leisure, you turn to Genesis 31: 45 - 50, where the place acquired its name, you will see the force of it. Samuel brings that to bear upon matters. Then, finally, it says, "his return was to Ramah; for there was his house, and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar to Jehovah," 1 Samuel 7: 17. That was the place where he maintained his personal links with the Lord. It represents one of the elements of our maintenance, our personal links with God - a most important matter - and that also becomes the means of judging things that arise. If we cultivate personal links with God, we shall develop the power of spiritual judgment.

In chapter 16, I think Samuel represents another element. I do not go into the detail of that chapter, but it is particularly occupied with a locality, that is, Bethlehem. It is in view of conditions pleasing to God being found in Bethlehem, Saul (that is, the first man at his best) had been rejected by God, and speaking typically, the point is that Christ is to take his place. David was to be anointed, the man of God's choice; that is, to put it simply, the first man is not to be in evidence in our locality. Christ is to be everything and in all. That is what God has in mind, and that is, what we should have in mind; we may say we are a long way from it, but let us keep the divine thought before us. Paul will admit nothing short of the divine standard in his labours, he says that he laboured to present every man perfect in Christ.

Samuel was to go to Bethel to anoint to Jehovah a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, to anoint the king He had provided. Samuel understands that if Saul is to be set aside, there is sure to be conflict. He says, "How shall I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me," 1 Samuel 16: 2. If anything of the first man in any form has a place in any local company, and the Spirit of God is going to work with a view to displacing that and bringing Christ in, we may rest assured there will be conflict, and the point is how to go about it. It is like a general, considering the best mode of attack, how to achieve his end with the least possible loss; and Samuel said, "How shall I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me." God said to Samuel, "Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to Jehovah. And call Jesse to the sacrifice," chapter 16: 2, 3, and we find in verse 5 that when Samuel moves to Bethel, he says to the leaders that he has

come peaceably. "I am come to sacrifice to Jehovah. Hallow yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he hallowed Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice."

The idea of sacrifice to Jehovah was to be set before the elders of Bethlehem. Every true believer would respond to the idea of considering for God, and providing conditions pleasing to God in his locality, and so Samuel was to come to Bethlehem with the object of providing conditions that were pleasing to God, that which God could take pleasure in, and all were to be drawn into it. Samuel would bring the elders in too, and Jesse and his sons; all were to be drawn into this matter of considering for God with just one object in view, that conditions pleasing to God should be brought in. That necessitates that Christ should be brought in. But then Samuel was also to take a heifer with him; and a heifer being a female animal represents, I believe, a certain subjective formation. What I take it to mean is this, that if we would help the saints in any place, we must not only bring in the authoritative word, the mind of God in prophecy, but be the exemplification of the thing; so Samuel was to bring *with him* the heifer, that which represented the subjective element. That is to say, he was not simply to go as a formal minister, but he was himself to exemplify what should be the result of the ministry in God's people, a most important matter.

One has often referred in this connection to the way Paul moved in relation to the Corinthians, bringing in the commandment of the Lord to correct the conditions that were there, but also sending Timothy, who, he said, "shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ, according as I teach everywhere in every assembly," 1 Corinthians 4: 17. There was not only an authoritative message, but there was the idea of the exemplification of the ministry, by means of which they would be brought to the remembrance of Paul's ways as they were in Christ, as he taught everywhere in every assembly. The Spirit of God will always support what is of Christ, as expressed livingly in a place.

I think the history of Samuel is of great interest to us as showing what spiritual elements may be brought in for the help of the saints in any company, arising out of what is priestly. If what is priestly is brought in, and maintained, then there can be the development of the prophetic word, power with God in prayer, the spirit of judgment, and the power of exemplifying the truth as it is expressed in His saints.

May the Lord encourage us to go in for these things, for His name's sake!