

# Words of Help

from the Scripture of Truth

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No. 1

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# WORDS OF HELP

A Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## EDITORIAL

WITH this month's issue, WORDS OF HELP enters upon its fiftieth year of publication. It is therefore timely to place on record once again our indebtedness to the grace of God which has sustained the ministry for so many years.

Writers, editors, publishers and readers pass away, but He remains Who cares for the needs of His people in every age, and will continue to do so until He returns to take them to be with Himself for ever.

The good Samaritan of Luke x., coming to the wounded man "where he was," bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and *took care of him*. Having thus completed his own task, he handed responsibility over to the inn-keeper, giving him two pence, bidding him *take care* of the rescued man, and adding "whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

It is in the spirit of this that all who share in the preparation and distribution of WORDS OF HELP seek to care for the many varied spiritual needs of Christian folk, offering them instruction, exhortation and comfort.

Shall we complete the fifty years? Who can say? The coming of the Lord may decide the question. But failing this glorious climax, we shall seek grace and help from God to interpret faithfully the message of the gospel of Christ for our day and generation. To this end we earnestly request the prayerful support of all our readers.

## “LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED”

SOMETIMES the mountaineer, when climbing, pauses to rest for a moment in order to look back over the pathway he has travelled, and onward to the peak he desires to reach, so as to gain fresh strength for his endeavours. In some such frame of mind the writer approaches the end of another year and the opening of a new one. And the following words are penned in view of the experiences of recent months.

If there are two words which appear to sum up the world of today, they are “change” and “restlessness.” Men everywhere long for something better, and changes are taking place so that, as they fondly hope, this result may be achieved. Sad to say, however, the general desire is for a millennium without Christ: many of man’s efforts are positively anti-christian; in any case all are doomed to failure in the end.

This is the kind of world in which the Christian finds himself, and while he knows that his own future is not bound up with that of the world, it is difficult for him to be wholly unaffected by what is going on around him.

Thus to some extent must it have been with the prophet Isaiah when, at the close of a long and stable reign in Judah, King Uzziah died. At such a moment anything could happen. So, to protect him from anxiety and distraction, God granted to the young prophet a vision of Himself “high and lifted up,” supreme over all the happenings of earth, and still able to keep all things under His control. In the calm of heavenly courts, angelic beings are engaged in ceaseless contemplation of the Lord of hosts, and ascribe holiness to Him. Even as they gaze down upon the earth, they behold it as “full of His glory” (Read Isaiah vi.).

Although Isaiah had already commenced his ministry, God knew that such a vision as this was necessary to steady and fortify the prophet for a service which was to extend for a very long period afterward. It is well for us to see therefore what God intended His servant to learn.

First of all, he must realise that the God whom he served was the Lord of hosts. Immediately the mind goes back to the

vision given to the servant of Elisha in response to the prayer of that prophet, "Open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." So the believer today may know most surely that "God is still on the throne; and He will remember His own."

Secondly, in a world of change, the prophet must be reminded of the unchangeable basis of his own acceptance with God, and of the power of his ministry. He therefore sees the "live coal from off the altar," betokening the freshly offered sin-offering. The believer of the present day, with his far greater revelation, knows that the sacrifice of Christ is the ground of his own perfect acceptance before God, and that nothing can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, with the shadow of Calvary already across His holy mind, and with the knowledge of what His work would mean to His disciples, says to them, and to the disciples of all ages, "Let not your heart be troubled." It should be noted that these words were spoken by the Lord to Peter among the others, even though He had disclosed to that erring disciple His divine knowledge of what he would do despite his protestation of devotedness to his Master.

Let us therefore prepare ourselves afresh to face with untroubled hearts this world of change and turmoil, knowing that we too are accepted in the Beloved and are dear to God the Father for Christ's sake.

FRED T. PETTMAN



## CHRISTIAN UNITY

THE subject of Christian unity is one which is being brought increasingly to our notice of late. It is well, therefore, to ask what is the teaching of God's word about it. This enquiry carries us inevitably into the foundation truths of the church, so that we must ask what is the source and basis of Christian unity?

We find the first teaching on the subject in our Lord's own words. In Matthew xvi. He says "I will build My church." Pregnant words! The Church then, is the Church of *Christ*, and there is no other. It cannot have been in existence when He spoke thus in the future tense, but He Himself is the builder. The Church is a divine entity, not a human one.

Turning next to the Lord's words in John x., He says, after speaking of Himself as the Good Shepherd, laying down His life for the sheep, "And other sheep I have which are not of this (i.e. the Jewish) fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock (R.V.) and one Shepherd." Here again the unity is manifest. There is but one flock, and it is formed by the activity of the one Shepherd—His death has won them, His voice calls them. They are not enclosed by the walls of a fold, but are attached to the Shepherd, and to Him they *belong*. He knows them, and they know Him.

Moreover, just as in Matthew xvi., this unity was to be a new thing not hitherto known, so we read in John xi. "That Jesus should die, not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." That is to say, the unity was not *henceforth* to consist merely in their being all children of God, but they should be gathered together in a displayed unity.

Finally in the wonderful prayer of John xvii., we have a threefold unity. First in verse 11 He prays for the unity of the apostolic band. Then in verses 20, 21, the unity of all believers in the Father and the Son "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." And then the perfected unity in glory in verse 23, to be displayed before the eyes of a wondering world.

Now what the Lord Jesus thus spoke of began to take shape from the Day of Pentecost. A unity that could be seen in its practical working was evident in the newly formed Church, see Acts ii. 42-47. No doubt such a closely knit community was only possible while their numbers were comparatively small, but it was striking enough to draw the attention of the rest of the Jews. But what kept them together was their allegiance to their crucified and now risen and glorified Lord, with the love for one another which their subjection to His

word brought about, not any formal constitution or rules of membership.

The first recorded test of unity is told in Acts vi., and was occasioned by the increasing number of converts, which led to difficulties in the distribution to the widows. The Greek-speaking believers complained that the Hebrew-speaking widows got preferential treatment. The apostles dealt with the matter by appointing seven men, chosen by the believers, to be responsible for an orderly distribution. And the *Greek* names of those chosen surely indicate the spirit of grace in which the selection was made. The guidance of God's Spirit, and love and unselfishness not only prevented any break-up, but led to a great blessing (verse 7).

Through Saul's persecution believers in Jerusalem were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and some even further, but they took the opportunity of spreading the good news wherever they went. In the preaching of Philip to a city of Samaria many were converted and baptized, but the Holy Spirit was, in the wisdom of God, withheld. Perhaps this was a rebuke to Samaritan pride ("Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, but *ye* say etc."), but it does also show the care God took to preserve the unity of the enlarging Church. For when Jerusalem heard of the blessing in Samaria, they sent Peter and John who, having prayed for the Samaritan converts, laid their hands on them, and they received the Spirit. Thus they were firmly linked with the Church in Jerusalem.

We see the same care when the time came for opening the door of faith to the Gentiles. For God chose Peter, so prominent among the Jewish believers, to be His instrument, and in the 10th chapter of Acts we read of the irresistible proof the Holy Spirit furnished that his mission was of God. Cornelius' vision, Peter's vision, and the immediate message of the Spirit: "Behold, three men seek for thee. Arise . . . and go with them . . . for I have sent them,"—the recital of these things could not be gainsaid. And Peter's preaching, and the answering faith of Cornelius and his friends, were sealed by the immediate pouring out of the Spirit. For here there was no question of pride, and God would clearly show that salvation was by

faith alone (see Acts xv. 8,9). But Jewish-Gentile unity was thus firmly established from the very start.

It is very interesting and most instructive, to compare with this the preaching to Greeks (*not* Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews, as in the A.V.) or Gentiles in Antioch by some of those scattered by Saul's persecution (Acts xi. 19-26). For it evidently must have begun *before* Peter's mission to Cornelius. In that Syrian city the Holy Spirit could work freely, unhindered by Jewish prejudice emanating from Jerusalem. It shows servants of God, responsible only to the Lord Jesus, working in the energy of the Spirit in a new direction, in consequence of the grace that filled their hearts. Yet though begun without reference to man, the same care for unity was displayed as soon as Jerusalem heard of it. Barnabas was sent to them, and through his ministry the work was further blessed. How completely absent were the jealousy and petty pride that so often has marred Christian unity since those days! Nor was it only Jerusalem that sought to bind the developing Church together. For when Agabus came and foretold the great famine, the newly-formed church in Antioch forged a fresh link by their act of love in sending relief to the brethren in Judea.

The next great test of unity came with the controversy over circumcision. Without too much detail, we may notice the way the trouble was dealt with. First, as the trouble began with teachers from Jerusalem, it was taken to Jerusalem to be settled. Secondly, though there were apostles present with authority from the Lord Jesus to teach (Matt. xxviii.20), it is evident that lesser men were given liberty to speak freely! Then the mind of God was made clear by the recital, first by Peter, then by Barnabas and Paul, of His own manifest working. The conclusion, finally, was drawn by James by showing the accord between God's actings and His word. Thus unity was preserved, not by appeal to an over-ruling authority, still less by any kind of voting, but by the subjection of every soul to the teaching of God's Spirit.

Unity was thus an established fact, and its preservation actively sought, before the presentation of the doctrine of the Church as in Corinthians, and in Paul's prison epistles. The

diverse backgrounds of the believers—Judaic Jews, Hellenist Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles of many races, felt and acted as one body before Paul was led to write the words “There is one body, and one Spirit.” Though meeting in many “churches,” in many lands, the oneness is always taken for granted. The letter of Acts xv. is addressed to “The brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia,” that is, geographically they might be separate, but as brethren of the same family they were one.

The teaching of the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul went much farther in that he showed the Church to be an entity distinct from Israel on the one hand, and the Gentile nations on the other, and forming one body, of which the glorified Christ is the Head. He taught that individual believers were united to Christ and united together by the one Spirit—the Holy Spirit—who indwelt Him and them: “By one Spirit have we all been baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have all been made to drink of one Spirit;” “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (I Cor. xii. 13 and vi. 17).

A very important point here is that one becomes a member of Christ—a member of the Church which is His body, by the reception of the Spirit, and not by water baptism. This is not to decry water-baptism, which is most important as symbolizing death to the old Adam condition. But it is the reception of the Spirit (which follows faith: Eph. i. 13) that joins each soul to Christ. As with Cornelius, baptism is a privilege, as Peter said: “Can any one forbid water, that these should not be baptised, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (Acts x. 47).

Scripture always speaks of membership of the body, or membership of Christ—never of membership of a church or assembly. So in I Cor. vi. 15 “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?” and xii. 18 “God hath set the members every one in the body, as it hath pleased Him,” and xii. 27 “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” So also the gifts mentioned in the following verses are given to the Church as a whole, “God hath set some in the



church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

The same truth is set out in Ephesians iv., which has this remarkable picture of the body as a growing thing “The Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

No doubt any one gift will usually only be exercised locally, but these scriptures give no support to the idea of each church with its own minister, any more than to the confining of all ministry to the one humanly chosen man.

It is very plain, both from these scriptures and from what we have already considered of the manifest unity in the early days of the Church, that the doctrine of “one body” is intended by God to be carried out in practice—it is not just an ideal which will be realized in heaven. Of course, the Church will there be seen in perfect unity, like the merchantman’s one pearl of great price, but it is on earth that gifts must be exercised. It is on earth, too, that we need “all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

That this picture of a united Church is not what we see around us in Christendom scarcely needs saying, but to find the remedy is quite another matter. It is well known that a movement has been operating for some time to bring together at least the main branches of the professing church, with the purpose of ultimate union. Even Rome has consented to some discussion of the project. But this movement entirely overlooks the fact that the loss of unity is only a consequence of more fundamental evils. The Catholic-Protestant division, for example, was brought about because of Rome’s corrupt teachings and practices, and every division since, or nearly every one, was produced by the attempt of godly men to get away from some grave error. Yet each fresh division, regarded as an attempt to obey the teaching of scripture, was vitiated by the failure to obey the word of God in its entirety—by the

importation of some human device to provide for what were felt to be deficiencies, instead of complete reliance on the word of God and the power of His Spirit. Moreover the very formation of independent denominations, whether national or non-conformist, is a practical denial of the Church's unity. Consequently, an amalgamation of all these sections of the Church, without putting right the errors that produced them, would be a veritable Babel, as different as possible from the Church of God.

Now the movement that began in the early years of the last century (known as the "Brethren" movement) had for its object, not the casting out of some particular error, nor the emphasis of some particular truth, but the complete abandonment of everything that was not derived from the scriptures, and the gathering together in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ with simple reliance upon the Spirit of God for guidance and power in ministry. Be it noted, this was not a "back to Pentecost" movement, for it was keenly felt that the shame of eighteen centuries of departure from obedience to the truth could not be so lightly disposed of. So they met together, not to found a purer church, which would be merely a repetition of what had occurred so often, but simply as being already members of God's Church and nothing more, refusing to regard themselves as other than a remnant that sought to keep the Lord's word and not to deny His Name.

In this there was no restoration of the unity of the Church—that is impossible—but the reliance upon the Spirit of God, and the word of God enabled them to prove afresh the sufficiency of that resource to which the apostle Paul referred the elders of Ephesus as he contemplated the coming ruin "I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace."

If it is impossible to restore the original unity, there are many lessons to be learned from those scriptures already discussed in this article. The foremost is to avoid setting up a number of independent assemblies, for we have seen how carefully this was guarded against from the beginning. But unity must be maintained, not by man-made rules or an over-

riding authority, but by care for one another, and subjection to one another (I Peter v. 5) and to the word of the Lord. And just as the ministry of Peter and John (in Samaria) and of Barnabas (in Antioch) was used by God to knit together the expanding Church, so now the servants of God need to be active to this same end, regarding themselves as gifts to the whole Church. So also the ministry to the material needs of believers in other localities is always a means of strengthening the bonds of fellowship, just as in New Testament days (Acts xi. 29,30; Rom. xv. 25-27; 2 Cor. viii. ix.).

The fact that failure and division have come in makes the path more difficult, but does not absolve any one from obedience to the word of God. But is it not a fact that we have sometimes ceased to regard unity as of any value? Thus at times far from fundamental differences have been allowed to cause division, and to perpetuate it.

The tendency which is always present, for believers who are dissatisfied with conditions in their local assembly, to look round for another assembly more to their liking, is an implicit denial of the truth we are considering. For if we are gathered together as being simply members of Christ's Church, how can we leave except by abandoning that ground?

But this brings us to our final point, namely, that unity must first of all be maintained in each individual assembly. On this scripture is very insistent. But nothing confirms the rightness of the path of obedience like the discovery that scripture has anticipated the very needs and difficulties which we find arising. If we discover that "*All lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another in love*" is necessary to our endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, it is an indication that we are where God meant His children to be. By going off elsewhere we may hope to avoid the need for these things, but can such a desire be of God? To be "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (I Cor. i. 10) is a high standard, which can only be attained as we look at what is of Christ in each other, and are ready to judge ourselves rather than one another.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

## PSALM 36

PSALM xxxvi. shares with one other the special description, "A Psalm of David, the *servant* of the Lord." This significant title gives the key to the subject-matter which, upon examination, appears singularly suited to the needs of a servant of the Lord. There are three broad lines of character delineation given, each of which occupies one section of the three into which the psalm naturally divides itself. The character of the wicked or ungodly is set out with fulness and clearness in verses 1-4; then that of God Himself in verses 5,6; the rest of the psalm giving what characterises the godly. This furnishes the servant of the Lord with accurate knowledge of immense importance to him in service, enabling him to know the God whom he serves and those among whom he is called to serve.

The three plain character divisions of this psalm are each, under analysis, sub-divided into five clear characteristics that explain and illustrate the respective characters.

### I. The Character of the Ungodly

is marked by the following characteristic traits:—

1. **Absence of the fear of God (ver. 1).**
2. **Presence of great self-complacency (ver. 2).**
3. **Vain, harmful, deceitful thoughts and words (vers. 3, 4).**
4. **Determined opposition to good (ver. 4).**
5. **Lack of any real sense of sin (ver. 4).**

Here set out by the pen of inspiration is the true character and description of the ungodly among whom the servant of the Lord has to labour; and the advantage of understanding this is obvious. To attempt to educate and improve the old nature into the new is wasted effort; to expect spiritual understanding and approval of Christian service from the ungodly, however outwardly correct and moral, is a folly from which the servant of the Lord studying this psalm will be preserved.

### II. The Character of God

is also here set out by the Spirit through the psalmist in a five-fold manner:—

1. **Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens (ver. 5).**

2. **Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds (ver. 5).**
3. **Thy righteousness is like the great mountains (ver. 6).**
4. **Thy judgments are a great deep (ver. 6).**
5. **O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast—Thy providence (ver. 6).**

Here the glorious character of our great and gracious God, too wonderful for finite minds to grasp, is portrayed by figures of speech enabling us to apprehend something of His holy nature. It is true that believers now, by the indwelling Spirit consequent upon redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus, know God as Father, and address Him as Abba Father, the name once only befitting the lips of the incarnate Son. Yet there is need to beware, lest an easy assumption of advanced knowledge of God's fully revealed name in this dispensation, leads one to forget the marvellous revelation of His character in this psalm, which is not superseded, but fully illuminated, by the teaching of our blessed Lord and His apostles. Therefore the deeper our meditation upon these five characteristics of the divine character in the light of the final revelation in Christ, the fuller will be our knowledge of Him whose mercy meeting us in our sins we found to be high above our thoughts; whose faithfulness, spite of all our failure, we find to be so far-reaching and extensive in its scope that we are never out of the sphere where it is in operation; whose righteousness, witnessed to by the law and the prophets, we have seen completely manifested by faith of Jesus Christ; whose judgments, solemn and profound—a great deep—we know with wonder and awe by Calvary's dread transaction; whose comprehensive providence envelopes our lives. Consider the figures used here to describe God's character: *mercy in the heavens* (cf Isa. lv. 7-9); *faithfulness reaching to the clouds* (cf Isa. liv. 10); *righteousness like the great mountains*, everlasting, unchanging, stable and awe-inspiring. To climb a mountain path leads up to solitudes, clearer vision, awe-inspiring surroundings, filling the intelligent mind with a sense of the grandeur and majesty of nature, leading the believer to exclaim, "O Lord, how wonderful are Thy works, in wisdom hast Thou made them all."

But as we climb the hill of Calvary and amid its solitudes and solemnities contemplate the great sight when love and holiness, mercy and truth, righteousness and peace met together in the atoning death of the incarnate Son of God, the awe-inspiring sense of God's righteousness fills the believing soul with wonder, love and praise.

Thy judgments *are a great deep*; solemn and profound. The unsparing judgment meted out to the Saviour when all the waves of God's just wrath against sin passed over His holy suffering soul; and the certainty of eternal judgment for the wilful, impenitent and unbelieving, combine to invest the subject of "Thy judgments" with profoundest solemnity for saint and sinner alike. The *comprehensive providence* expressed by the inspired exclamation, "O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast," fitly completes the five characteristics used to set forth God's true character. Patriarch, psalmist and apostle are impressed by this trait of the divine character (cf Job vii. 20; Ps. xxxvi.6; I Tim. iv. 10).

### III. The Character of the Godly

also has five specially characteristic marks in this psalm:—

1. **They take refuge, and put their trust in God because of His excellent lovingkindness (mercy) (verse 7).**
2. **They find deep satisfaction in God (verse 8).**
3. **They see light in God's light (ver. 9).**
4. **They are conscious of their dependence upon God and of their need of being kept (vers. 10,11).**
5. **They are awake to the certain doom of the ungodly (ver. 12).**

This inspired pen-portrait should present the believer with a picture of himself. To take refuge from his sins in the mercy of God in the Lord Jesus by putting his trust in Him is surely the very first mark of a believer; and the second is like unto it, namely, the finding full satisfaction in God Himself. To see light in God's light is the getting of the true perspective of things. The world of ungodly sinners, the church of God, our brethren and fellow-servants, our circumstances, trials and

responsibilities; all these can only be seen aright in God's light, and His light always shines through the holy scripture of truth. Ponder in connection with the six matters referred to, 2 Peter iii. 9; Eph. v. 25-27; Rom. xiv. 15; I Cor. viii. 11; Rom. viii. 26-39; 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

The true servant of God will also find that, whatever measure of success in service, consistency of conduct, joy in communion may be experienced by him, he will possess an ever-deepening sense of the need of *being kept* by the power of God through faith.

“Tis only in Thee hiding  
I feel myself secure;  
Only in Thee abiding  
The conflict can endure.”

Finally, he will have such an awakening sense of the certainty of the impending doom of the wicked, that, “knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men” (2 Cor. v. 11).

May this *Psalm of the Servant of the Lord*, which was written for our learning, be read to our profit. W. G. TURNER

(Reprinted from *The Bible Monthly*, April, 1923)

### “CONSCIENCE” and “HEART”

As to the distinction between “conscience” and “heart”, the affections are in the heart, and conscience is my responsibility for right and wrong. You may have natural feelings moved like the women of Jerusalem beating their breasts because someone was going to be put to death; but what detects the work of God is when these two go together. You may meet with natural conscience alone, which is much like Judas, who went and hanged himself. God is light and love, and if He reveals Himself, you need have both. Where the light comes and deals with the conscience, the love attracts the heart, and both are moved. Thus Peter went to Christ and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Why did he go to Christ at all? So I say, “I am a guilty sinner,” when the light comes in; and where the work is of God, it is accompanied by the attraction of love.

J.N.D.

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# Words of Help

from the Scripture of Truth

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## EXTEMPORE PRAYER

EXTEMPORE prayer has its dangers and pitfalls. Those who pray are inclined to overlook the fact that while addressing God Himself, they are doing so on behalf of other auditors who are present to listen and to add their Amens to the petitions.

Some subdue the voice to a whisper so that they are barely audible a yard away. Some shout at the top of the voice, as if they were street-hawkers, and their success depended upon their loud speaking. Others speak in a peremptory tone like a well-to-do notability giving his orders to a petty tradesman over the telephone. No one addresses His Majesty the King in such a manner, nor indeed his own parents. A simple, grave, and earnest manner with a distinct, and audible, utterance is most becoming.

It is necessary that the listeners should understand what is the subject of the prayer by the speaker, but long explanations are unnecessary and tedious. A great deal of valuable time is often wasted by "vain repetitions" of words. To take an extreme instance, a person is desirous to pray that the ninefold fruit of the Spirit (Gal. v.22) may be produced in the children of God—a most desirable and scriptural petition. But to impress the company, he makes nine petitions of it: "O God, our gracious Father, grant us more *love*; O God, our gracious Father, grant us more *joy*;" and so on through the list. This does not help but hinders true and effective prayer in the prayer-meeting.

(W.J.H.—September, 1932).

## LORD'S DAY REFLECTIONS

## XXVII. Piety at Home

Recently, in a Lord's day morning gathering for worship, the following verses from Psalm xiv. were read:—

**“The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one.”**

(verses 2, 3).

Then followed some words from Matthew iii.:—

**“And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

(verses 16, 17).

Could contrast be greater? Could any of those present that morning miss the significance of these scriptures? The hearts of all were moved to worship the Father because of the excellence of His Son whom He sent, and to adore the Son for the perfection of His obedience to the Father's will. This is how it should be with us. As the apostle John declares in the opening verses of his first epistle: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Words spoken by one Person of the Godhead to, and concerning, Another must be inexhaustible in the depth of their meaning and significance. What follows is therefore written to suggest but one single line of thought with a view to a lesson for practical daily living.

The Father's good pleasure in His Son was expressed on the occasion of the baptising of Jesus by His forerunner John. In the case of those from Judaea and Jerusalem who went out to John in the wilderness of Jordan, their baptism was accompanied by confession of sins, and was “unto repentance.” Was it to be assumed that Jesus, in submitting to the rite of baptism, could properly be classed with the sinners of Israel, as though He were one of them?

The Baptist himself was unwilling to proceed. Perceiving the incomparable purity and humility of Jesus, he "forbad Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" Nevertheless, John was bidden to carry through with the rite, for, said Jesus, "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

Was then an opportunity for misunderstanding to be allowed? Certainly not. The Father Himself, and the Holy Spirit too, were present to guard the glory of the Son. The Spirit descended like a dove and abode on Him (John i. 33), and the Father's voice resounded from the opened heavens, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

So much for the immediate circumstances. It would seem however that this expression of the delight of the Father in His Son had in view all that had taken place in His life on earth hitherto. For some thirty years Jesus had lived in the seclusion of the home in Nazareth (not overlooking, of course, the sojourn in Egypt—Matt. ii. 14, 15). Only now was He emerging from that obscurity to begin His public ministry, and to manifest Himself openly by His works and preaching.

In the wisdom of God, apart from Luke's reference to an episode at Jerusalem when He was twelve years old, the details of our Lord's childhood and youth are not given to men. That does not mean they were unimportant to Him whose holy eyes were wont to search from heaven to see if they could discover anything on earth worthy of commendation. Perhaps the Father has purposely hidden these things from men, even believing men, while they remain on earth, because He will not permit what is infinitely lovely in His own sight to be soiled by human unbelief and misunderstanding. In any case, there must be much concerning the Son which only the Father can comprehend.

When we consider the compassion which Jesus had towards men, and the purpose of His coming to reveal the heart and grace of God to the world, is there not something striking and wonderful in the fact that for thirty long years He "kept the noiseless tenor of his way" in Nazareth? Was not this patient waiting for the Father's choice of the exact moment for His

ministry to begin, an achievement equal to all the others of His glorious life?

With crude misunderstanding and unbelief men may raise questions as to His apparent inactivity during those early years. Why had the world to be kept waiting until He was 30 years of age before tasting the sweet fruits of His ministry? Were not the early years of His life wasted? All such criticisms are silenced for ever by the Father's voice from heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Is there no lesson for us in all this? The pride and selfishness of our human nature goad us on to seek great things for ourselves. Love of self-display prompts us to steps that are premature according to God's plan for us. How much we need patience to *wait for Him*, and to learn obedience to God in the ordinary duties of everyday life.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was accustomed to ponder in her heart things she saw and heard (Luke ii. 19, 51). Was it her careful observation of the One for Whom she had been privileged to care in material things, that led her to exclaim confidently, when difficulties were mounting at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it"? Was she not offering to the servants a word of good advice born of her own practical experience of the One who in grace had deigned to come into her home?

May we seek to follow in the blessed footsteps of our Master, and so to conduct ourselves in the fulfilment of everyday and commonplace duties, that we may earn some measure of God's approval in the coming day of our manifestation before Him.

E. A. PETTMAN



## THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS

### III

(Read: I Thess. Chapter i. verses 5 to end)

IN the first article (see October, 1961, issue) we considered (from Acts xvii.) the *matter*, or substance, of Paul's preaching on his first visit to Thessalonica. In verse 5, the *manner* of both

the preaching and the preacher are referred to. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."

First the manner of the preaching: these believers had heard words, a verbal message. But the words were coherent and arresting, with meaning and point; not moreover a merely human message, but given by a divine Person, the Holy Spirit; therefore divine truth and known by the speaker to be such.

These hearers received and believed the message, the Gospel, and it produced the same effects in them. It had power in their souls; it brought their consciences into God's presence by the Spirit, and they *knew* it was truth—it gave them assurance.

Secondly, the manner of the preacher: he did not remain aloof and unknown, but came "among" the hearers so that they should become well acquainted with him, and see in him what a Christian should be and do. Let us not forget to pray for all who take the place of preaching the Gospel today, that they may be right in matter and manner, preaching Christ, speaking with conviction and producing it, not shunning the words "Thus saith the Lord"; and themselves setting an example by living a consistent Christian life.

"And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia."

The conversion of these Thessalonians was not for them a painless matter: Satan is loath to lose his prey, and will raise what trouble he can for them (as well as for those who are the means of their conversion). But God turns all for the good of His own, and gives here and now compensating joy, as well as the promise of glory to come. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians iv. 17).

The result of it all was that these converts were changed men, now followers (or imitators—"mimetai" in the original, and we know what the word *mime* means) of the unseen Lord as known through His faithful servants, and ensamples, or

patterns, for other believers. (The word translated "ensamples" is the same for "pattern" in Hebrews viii. 5—"See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.")

Let us not be secret disciples, saved through grace, but afraid to let it be known among our relatives and friends; nor backsliders, once going on well but now hiding our light and avoiding what would distinguish us from the world. There is no joy of the Holy Ghost for such.

The reality of the work of God at Thessalonica was so plain that wherever there were Christians it was talked about. All knew that in that city was now an assembly of believers to whom God was known by strong, simple faith, and who had a hope beyond this world—they were waiting for Jesus the Son of God to come from heaven.

"For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us (or, our Deliverer) from the wrath to come" (verses 8-10).

When a person believes the Gospel of Christ he receives three great blessings.

First, he is set right in the purpose and direction of his life. He is delivered from the false objects and aims which hitherto had governed his heart, and is brought both to know and to live for the one true Object of life. He is turned from idols to serve the living and true God. Until God has His right place with us, everything is in its wrong place. This must be so, for man being a creature can never be self-sufficient. God only is that. Christianity gives man a positive object, God Himself. And only the christian faith can do this today, because there only is God revealing Himself today.

Civilization may perhaps deliver men from the folly of bowing down to idols of wood and metal and stone, but it does

not set man free from himself and his self-will. One of the alarming features of human society today is the prevalence of self-will, self-love, self-centredness and self-indulgence, and this in young and old alike, unashamedly (see 2 Timothy iii. 1-2). In this state man cannot be happy, to say the least. Christians say "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans v. 11). Christians, however, need to watch their hearts lest Satan should draw them away from their blessed Centre. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (I John v. 21).

Second, there is the Christian knowledge of Jesus, the Son of God. He, coming from the glory of Godhead, passed angels by and condescended to become Man, to take up the cause of mankind fallen under the power of Satan. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He has thus come near to us in a wonderful and blessed way, "partaking of flesh and blood," living here a Man amongst men, entering into all the experiences of life here below, and bringing divine life, light and love to a lost world. He died for us, rose from among the dead, returned to heaven where He now is, and will come again.

So instead of the future being all dark, the Christian has this settling, peace-giving, joyful hope; he waits for God's Son from heaven.

Absent as yet, we rest in hope,  
And tread the desert path,  
Waiting for Him Who takes us up,  
Beyond the power of death.

Third, the believer has the assurance of deliverance from the wrath to come. God *is* God. He *must* maintain the truth of His purity and holiness and Godhead; He must therefore judge His responsible creatures; and where sin is found, there divine wrath must be inflicted. This is assumed in Romans iii. "Is God unrighteous-Who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man). God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?"

But Christ has Himself taken the sinner's place, and has suffered the wrath and judgment of God against sin. The believer in Him has therefore no fear of wrath, whether that of



Christ's judgment of the living at His coming, or of the judgment of the dead before the Great White Throne at the end of time. Jesus is his Deliverer from the wrath to come. The believer's conscience is thus at rest, and his heart is drawn out towards the Lord to Whom he owes so much.

W. H. L. GRAHAM

*(to be continued)*



## THE PROPHECY OF OLIVET

SHORTLY before His crucifixion the Lord Jesus delivered an important prophecy on the Mount of Olives with regard to the future of His kingdom. On another mountain He laid down the moral features of that kingdom, in what is called the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v.-vii.).

Records are given in each of the first three Gospels of the Lord's utterances on Mount Olivet. Each evangelist incorporates what is specially in accordance with the subject of his Gospel. Matthew in his record shows how the Lord's latest teaching by prophecy was the expansion of what He had previously taught in parables concerning the development of the kingdom (Matt. xiii.).

It is proposed now to look at the chapters in Matthew only (xxiv., xxv.), and to glance briefly at the great subjects they contain. We beg our readers to consult the verses themselves as we proceed.

The occasion of this prophecy is plainly stated in the beginning of the chapter. The disciples drew the attention of the Lord to the beautiful construction of the temple, and the Lord to their utter astonishment declared that the whole pile of buildings was to be desolated so utterly that not one stone would be left upon another (xxiv. 1, 2).

As the Lord sat upon Mount Olivet, His disciples being puzzled sought further explanation from Him. They put their difficulties in the form of a threefold question to the Master, saying, Tell us:—

1. When shall these things be?
2. What shall be the sign of Thy coming?
3. And of the end of the world (age)?

It is important to note that "world" here means "age", and not the physical system that God made, as is meant, for instance, in Acts xvii. 24. The disciples spoke of the end of the age then present in contrast with the age to come (Mark x.30; Luke xviii. 30).

The Lord in His reply to the disciples not only answered their questions but brought out of His treasure-house many things new and old to prepare them for a right understanding of the future.

It will be found that the Lord's discourse as it is here given may be divided into three main parts according to the subjects of which it treats. These three sections contain:—

- (I) Prophecies relating to Jewish believers (xxiv. 1-44);
- (II) Parables relating to Christendom (xxiv. 45-xxv. 30);
- (III) Prophecy relating to the judgment of Gentile nations (xxv. 31-46).

### **Jewish Prophecies**

(I) The last part of the query of the disciples referred to the end of the age, and the first part (xxiv. 4-14) of the first of the three sections concludes with the words, "then shall the end come." Before that end should come He warned them against being deceived by false Christs and false prophets, as the many, or the majority of Jews would be (xxiv. 11). There would be wars and providential inflictions, such as famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. The disciples would be persecuted and slain, and hated by all the nations, not for being Jews, but for Christ's sake (xxiv. 9). There would be treachery and desertion from their own ranks. On account of the prevalence of lawlessness, the love of the great mass would grow cold. But the end of the age would finally come, and he that endured to the end would be saved (x. 22; xxiv. 13).

But when would the end come? The Lord gives them an indication: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and THEN shall the END COME" (xxiv. 14, R.V.). Previously the Lord

when sending them to preach had said to the apostles, "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matt. x. 23, R.V.). From a comparison of the two passages we learn that a testimony to the coming kingdom will be rendered to all Israel and to all the nations before the end of the age and the coming of the Son of man. This testimony will therefore be resumed prior to Christ's public coming.

In the verses that follow (xxiv. 15-44) the Lord gives in greater detail the events that will immediately precede the coming of the end of the age.

The Lord first points out that which will be the signal for the instant flight of all who are in Judaea. This signal will be the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (Dan. xii. 11), and the terms of the announcement of this signal show that it will apply to the Jewish rather than Christian disciples (xxiv. 16, 20).

The appearance of the abomination of desolation will be the sure sign to those that heed the Lord's words that a great tribulation will immediately follow, such as the world had never seen before, nor will ever see again. Except those days be shortened, no flesh could endure to the end and be saved (xxiv. 21, 22).

Again, the Lord warned of false Christs and false prophets. They need not seek the Messiah in the desert, nor in secret chambers, for the coming of the Son of man cannot be concealed any more than a flash of lightning. Where the dead carcass (the apostate Jews) shall be, there the vultures of judgment will assemble (xxiv. 23-28).

Immediately after this unparalleled tribulation the Son of man will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and will gather together the elect of the twelve tribes of Israel from the four winds (xxiv. 29-31).

As surely as the young leaves of the fig-tree are a sign of coming summer, so all these things (from the false Christs of verse 5 to the appearing of the Son of man in verse 30) will indicate that the coming millennial age is at the doors. Then the generation of Christ-rejectors will have passed away, and the Lord's words fulfilled (xxiv. 32-35).

The day and hour of the Lord's return are unknown, and His coming will be unexpected, like the flood in the days of Noah. Of two persons one will be taken in judgment, and the other will be left in the ark of safety (xxiv. 36-41).

The conclusion of this part of the prophecy, relating as it does to Jewish disciples with earthly expectations, contains an exhortation to watch continuously because the day of the Lord's coming is unknown. The Lord enforces the necessity of cultivating the spirit of constant readiness by the reference to the master of a house taking precautions against the raid of a thief (xxiv. 42-44).

### **The Christian Profession**

(II) The second division of the Lord's discourse deals with certain aspects of the Christian profession (xxiv. 45-xxv. 30). The change of subject is marked by the absence of the Lord's title, "Son of man." This title occurs six times in xxiv. 27-44, but not once from xxiv. 45 to xxv. 30, the occurrence in xxv. 13 being omitted in the R.V. Then in xxv. 31 the title is resumed, indicating a further change of subject.

The last verse of the first section says, "In an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh" (xxiv. 44), while the first verse of the third section says what will happen when the Son of man does come and sit on the throne of His glory (xxv. 31). The intermediate verses (xxiv. 45 - xxv. 30) therefore form a distinct section, which is parenthetical.

Moreover, it will be seen that while the first section refers to Judaea, the temple, the Old Testament prophecies, and the sabbath, no Jewish references occur in the second section. The latter applies therefore to that state of things which began when the Lord went on high, and the Spirit of God came down at Pentecost.

Section two consists of three parables, all of which are connected with the Lord's coming after the period of His absence. They are:—

1. The parable of the household servant (xxiv. 45-51);
2. The parable of the ten virgins (xxv. 1-13);
3. The parable of the trading servants (xxv. 14-30).

Each of these parables contains a central moral feature, which the Lord impresses upon His hearers thereby. These may be summed up briefly as follows:—

1. Faithfulness: in the first parable;
2. Watchfulness: in the second parable;
3. Zealousness: in the third parable.

In the first parable, a bondman is said to be placed in a position where he is responsible to issue food to his lord's household during his absence. The faithful and prudent man is found doing just what he was told to do ("so doing") when his lord comes, and he receives a due reward. The evil servant takes advantage of his lord's absence to do what he would not think of doing if he thought his lord was near. He is therefore classed as a hypocrite when the lord comes, and he is judged accordingly (xxiv. 45-51).

In the second case, watchfulness is the central theme. There are ten virgins who all go out to meet or watch for the Bridegroom. This company is a figure of the Christian profession, who are set as lights in the world. They are not the Jewish remnant, for the wise are said to have oil in their vessels, a figure of the Holy Ghost, which could not be true of the Jewish remnant who will not receive the Holy Ghost until the Lord comes.

All the virgins sleep until midnight when they are roused by a special call, "Behold, the Bridegroom." Those possessing oil are ready to enter when the door is open, but the others are refused admittance though they seek it earnestly. "Watch therefore," the Lord says, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour."

This parable is described as a similitude of the kingdom of the heavens, and is therefore associated with those similarly described and found in Matthew xiii.

The third parable is of the traders. The master goes away and returns. On his departure, he entrusts a variety of gifts to his servants according to their several abilities. Some serve as if the master's eye was upon them and exhibit a spirit of diligence which is proved in the day of reckoning by the results they attain, one gaining five talents, and another two. Their proved diligence and zeal are duly rewarded.

One, however, was not only guilty of slothfulness, but he displayed an utter want of insight into his master's character, and had no works to show when the lord came. For him there was no reward like his fellow-servants. How could he, like them, enter into the joy of his lord? He was consigned to the place of darkness and of weeping.

### **The Judgment of the Living Nations**

(III) The third and final section of the Lord's prophecy relates to a session of judgment. Those judged are evidently living persons, since they are assembled before the throne of the Son of man as nations or Gentiles. In that category they would be separate from Israel, a distinction that is not found when the wicked dead are raised for judgment (Rev. xx. 11-15).

The nations are mentioned earlier in the prophecy (1) as those who hate the disciples of Christ (xxiv. 9), and (2) those to whom the disciples are to preach the gospel of the kingdom before the "end" comes (xxiv. 14).

The administration of judgment upon the nations is based upon the manner in which they received the messengers of the King, whom He describes as His "brethren". As the Shepherd of Israel, the King separates the nations before Him into two companies, the sheep and the goats. The act recalls the Lord's own words, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this (Jewish) fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John x. 16). The righteous Gentile sheep will share millennial blessing with restored Israel.

The sheep on the King's right hand believed the gospel of the kingdom, and the King's award is that they shall "inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world" (xxv. 34). This fact of the presence of the blessed distinguishes this judgment from that of the great white throne, where the whole assembly is of the raised dead only, and of the wicked only (Rev. xx. 11-15).

The goats placed on the King's left hand are those who have despised the preachers, and rejected their gospel concerning the kingdom. It is their sad portion to hear their irrevocable doom pronounced by the King: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into

everlasting fire." The judgment is final, but the place of their eternal abode was prepared, not for them as the kingdom was for the sheep, but for the devil and his angels (xxv. 41-46).

W. J. HOCKING

(Reprinted from *The Bible Monthly*, November, 1922)



“BY FAITH, MOSES . . .”

(Hebrews xi. 24)

THE writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews lays bare the secret of the marvels effected by the heroes of Hebrew story. Obedient to his summons, they range themselves in one great battalion, and with united breath, cry, Why marvel ye at these things? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had effected them? The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, made bare His holy arm and wrought by us. And His name, through faith in His name, hath done all these wonderful works.

We make a profound mistake in attributing to these men extraordinary qualities of courage, and strength of body or soul. To do so is to miss the whole point of the reiterated teaching of Scripture. They were not different from ordinary men, except in their faith. In many respects it is most likely that they were inferior to ourselves. We should probably be much surprised if we were to encounter them in the daily walks of modern life, and should find it almost impossible to believe that they wrought such prodigies of valour, endurance, and deliverance. Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthah, were rather of the type of the sturdy Borderers of olden days, whose wild doings kept our northern counties in constant agitation, than like our modern clerics or Christian philanthropists. But there was one characteristic common to them all, which lifted them above ordinary men, and secured for them a niche in the Temple of Scripture—that they had a marvellous faculty of faith; which, indeed, is but the capacity of the human heart for God. Four times over this is cited as the secret of all that Moses did for his people.

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# Words of Help

*from the Scripture of Truth*

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No. 3

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# WORDS OF HELP

A Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## EDITORIAL

We are glad to have for publication this month an article by Mr. E. H. Chamberlain entitled "God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility", dealing with a subject which many Christians today find perplexing.

In considering what is revealed in scripture in this connection, we would draw readers' attention to two sentences which occur in the preceding article "The Living Word" by Mr. Edward T. Wood, in which the author gives the following counsel: "The spirit of submission is not that of one who wishes to interpret for himself. There is One who reveals, and only One—a divine Person, "the Spirit of Truth". And again, "Guidance of the Spirit is the rich outcome of humble seeking". Such words are opportune, and it is helpful, and maybe significant also, that these two articles have become available at the same time so as to appear side by side in this issue of *Words of Help*.

Surely every believer may sing with truth, and rapture:

Why was I made to hear Thy voice,  
To enter while there's room,  
While thousands make the wretched choice,  
And rather starve than come?

'Twas the same love that spread the feast,  
That sweetly pressed me in;  
Else I had still refused to taste,  
And perished in my sin.

(I. Watts)

We are requesting our Publisher to reproduce "God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility" as a separate pamphlet, so that readers who wish to do so may have copies to hand to their friends who are interested in this subject. Please watch the advertisement page on the back of the cover for details.

## THE LIVING WORD

(Hebrews iv. 12)

THE BOOKS OF MEN — informative, instructive, entertaining, devotional and even spiritual, have the impress of human authorship. "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 discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews iv. 12, N.T.). This cannot be said of the books of man.

The collection of writings by "holy men of God" who "spake under the influence of the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter i. 21), which we know as the Bible, is read by students, historians, lovers of literature and many others including religionists who read as a matter of duty. The word is powerful to speak to such, but, without "newness of life," these have no indwelling Aid to reveal the truth and beauty of the Bible as the "living and operative" word of God.

When we were young, some of the good literature available from human authorship was explained to us. The divine literature calls for a divine Teacher: "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be IN YOU" (John xiv. 16, 17): "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance" (verse 26). Thus the believer, seeking to know more and more of God in the Person of His Son, finds he has the divine Aid in his search, and is able, like Jeremiah, to exclaim "Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jeremiah xv. 16).

The minister of the Candace of Ethiopia (Acts viii.) was an important functionary — undoubtedly an official of considerable executive ability. Yet, as he read Esaias the prophet, he was unable to find the answer to his question "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" (verse 34) The humbling effect of this upon him is evident

from his reply to the enquiry of Philip, "Understandest thou?" "And he said, How can I, except some man should *guide* me?" Guidance of the Spirit is the rich outcome of humble seeking. So Philip tells him of that "Other Man," and a new journey commences for the royal servant who, though in charge of all the queen's treasure, would soon be rejoicing in great treasure of his own.

The function of the LIVING WORD is to bring to us in a *living* way these divinely recorded activities of the past. They are historical events, but the infinite beauty of the character of God may be seen in relation to them. It is a privileged occupation, and one of the most rewarding, to allow this LIVING WORD to carry us into the scene it presents. We should never be content to read it as one exerting an energy — as a duty, or for mere information. If we go to it for solace it will never fail us, of course: but there is a sense in which it is possible to allow it to *come to us*. How is this brought about?

First is, I believe, the time factor. We are menaced on every side by this hurrying world. We have to fight for the quiet hour — the closed door — the approach to "the Father which seeth in secret" (Matthew vi. 6). If the word is to come to *us* as a revelation of divine Persons we must be willing to devote time to allow the inflow of this unfolding to reach us. "I waited patiently for the Lord" — this was the experience of a king, and he makes a song of the memory — and of the *fruits* of "waiting" (Psalm xl. 1).

Then there is the spirit of *submission*. Waiting is, in itself, submission. "Be still, my daughter" says the humbled Naomi to Ruth. The waiting Habakkuk cries "O Lord, how long? . . . and the Lord answered me, and said . . . the vision is yet for an appointed time . . . though it tarry, wait for it." When the Son of God said "Father, the hour is come," the *patience* of the years of waiting for that hour begins to emerge for us, as when we hear Him say "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke xii. 50). He waited the hour — the Father's hour — *in which to die*.

The spirit of submission is not that of one who wishes to interpret for himself. There is One who reveals, and only One—a divine Person, “the Spirit of Truth.” We may receive from others what He has shown to *them*, and be grateful, but His teaching is not restricted to one class of persons. The power and testimony of His indwelling is personal to each believer. So, if we will, we may allow the Spirit of God to illuminate the scenes which lie behind the written word. There are so many of them. They are the finest antidote to wandering thoughts that may stray unprofitably. Furthermore “the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness” (Romans viii. 26. N.Tr.)—not alone in our praying are we in need of His interceding. In “all things” there is a “working together for good to those who love God” (verse 28). Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son (verse 29), are we not in need of guidance as to what we shall meditate upon concerning His Son? The sincere seeker for this guidance is never left to wander: like the eunuch who had listened to Philip, he goes “on his way — rejoicing.”

So, as the living word speaks to us, we may pass into the scene depicted for us by the Spirit of Truth. In His company we may see the Son of Man among men, saddened by their sinful state, full of compassion for their condition; patient, even with their doubts, and ever seeking them with shepherd care until the hour when He will give His very life for the sake of the flock. It is an elementary thought, but, to observe Him, is to know Him better; to know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to keep His word — be like Him.

We do not go far enough in merely reading — or even learning. We should *walk* through the pages of this precious revelation of His ways, and be with Him in mind and spirit as He goes about His Father’s business. We should join with those who gather about Him as He teaches in the temple, and follow Him into the houses where death or disease are unable to withstand His presence. By the deep well at Sychar there is a note of weariness in His voice, but His words carry the power of eternal life. The fields are white already to harvest (John iv. 35), but first the Corn of Wheat must die. There

are solemn times when we follow Him to Gethsemane. He is withdrawn from us there "about a stone's cast"—the stones of death are for Him, alone. In spirit we are closer to Him as He goes on to "the place which is called Calvary"

To dwell upon His dying love,  
And taste its sweetness there.

But who may penetrate that gathering darkness where, alone,  
He tasted death for everyone (Hebrews ii. 9)!

EDWARD T. WOOD



## GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD is the law of the universe. Creation has no other function than to express the will of God: "For of Him, and through Him, and to (or for) Him are all things: to Whom be glory for ever." "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." And while the world is full of rebellion against God, He has declared what His purpose is, and this will surely come to pass. It is to head up all things in Christ, both heavenly and earthly things: all are to be brought into subjection to Him (Ephesians i. 10).

Meanwhile all that rebellious man or Satan can do will ultimately be found to further His purpose: nothing beyond this does God allow. The outstanding instance of this is of course the Cross itself. Whether covetous Judas or jealous scribes and priests: whether self-seeking Pilate or fickle multitude, or Satan who worked in them all, the only result was to lay the glorious foundation of redemption. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

The insistence on human responsibility in this scripture is noteworthy. Men doing their own will must give account of all to God, although their actions had accomplished His purpose. And scripture is full of such examples. We may instance

one more: the jealousy and hatred of Joseph's brothers were most obnoxious to God, but their wicked deed was among the means which God used to save Jacob and his family from the great famine, to bring the brothers themselves to repentance, and to further His purpose for Israel as a nation.

The distinction between God's will, expressed in His word, which men constantly flout; and His purposes, which are being fulfilled in spite of all, is worth stressing. That He works all things together for good to those that love Him is a matter of faith to God's children — faith that is often sorely tried. That He works in gracious testimony to those who believe not is also evident to the eye of faith, and very plain in His word. We may instance the Lord's testimony to Pilate, and Paul's imprisonments as bringing the gospel before Roman rulers and soldiers in Caesarea and Rome.

This brings us to the special aspect of our subject which concerns the salvation of men. It is important to realize that, apart from the work of the Cross, God's sovereignty was, to speak after a human fashion, limited by sin. For sin would have obliged God to judge the sinner, while it is the glory of the Cross that it makes God free to bless according to the dictates of His love. His grace is thus sovereign, and in perfect righteousness He can save whoever He will.

Has God made any limitation? On the contrary, He says "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." And again, "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." But as it is only in virtue of the Cross that God can forgive the sinner, so it is only by faith in the crucified, yea, risen and glorified Saviour, that man can receive salvation.

It is just at this point that fallen man's utter ruin becomes manifest. His rebellious heart refuses to bow to God, or to acknowledge his need of the Saviour; his distrust of God is so deep-rooted that he does not readily believe in so wonderful a love; he is spiritually "dead in trespasses and sins," and is incapable of understanding either his need or God's remedy.

Scripture shows us very clearly the means God uses to meet man's condition. First and foremost is the gospel mes-

sage itself, preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. "Faith comes by a report, and the report by God's word" (Romans x. 17). "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (I Thessalonians i. 5). It is the means by which life is imparted to the soul: "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth" (James i. 18). "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit . . . being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God" (I Peter i. 22, 23).

Sometimes God used a miracle to draw attention to the power of His word, as with Aeneas, whose healing by Peter caused the whole of Lydda and Sharon to turn to the Lord; the jailer in Philippi was awakened to a sense of need by the earthquake and the compassion of Paul and Silas; a heathen husband might be saved by the behaviour of a converted wife (I Peter iii. 2, 3), while now as in Job's day God uses suffering to arouse men (Job xxxiii. 19-24). But in all these it is by believing the word itself that the soul is saved.

A difficulty presents itself here over which believers have puzzled themselves in vain. How does one who is spiritually dead accomplish the act of faith by which he is born again? Or if, as some teach, God's Spirit first gives life and so enables a man to believe, what becomes of the scriptures which insist that new life comes *through* believing the word? We may get some help in this by considering the Lord's word to the paralytic, "Take up thy bed and walk." Till the Lord had healed him he had no power to walk, yet had he waited to be healed before obeying the command he would have remained a cripple. So while it is only by God's grace that a man can repent and believe and so obtain life, he who refuses to *obey* remains in his sins.

In face of men's refusal to believe, it is helpful to remember that the Lord Jesus Himself fell back then upon the sovereignty of God. When the cities where He had laboured so abundantly refused to repent, He said "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto



babes. Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." So again when some of His disciples forsook Him, He said "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me except it were given unto him of My Father."

We find that it is quite clearly, and repeatedly taught in the Bible that the heirs of salvation were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" Eph. i; Rev xiii. 8 (R.V.). It is important to remember, though not at all easy to understand, that this divine election does not mean any *limitation* of God's grace, which brings salvation for *all* men (Titus ii.11, R.V.). On the contrary, it is man who limits it by his unbelief. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not," the Lord Jesus said to Jerusalem.

It is here that we can so easily go astray, in seeking to reconcile God's love for all men as expressed, for instance, in John iii. 16, with the truth of election. Some even teach that His love is limited to the elect (else, they argue, all would be saved), and that the atonement is likewise of limited scope (in flat contradiction of I Timothy ii.6). Others in effect limit the reality of election, teaching that God has chosen those whom He knew beforehand would believe. The text "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Peter i.3) is interpreted so as to make the foreknowledge everything and the election mere approval on God's part. But it is unwise for us to limit any scripture. In this matter we must surely acknowledge the limitation of our own understanding. Again, it has been said that God's will (or desire) that all should be saved, is a question of His nature; while election belongs to the realm of His counsels. But this is not very helpful, for God's nature and His counsels must surely be consistent. Men may be inconsistent, but not God. And so it becomes a matter of trust in Him, whose love has been so fully displayed in the gift of His Son, until the day dawns and the shadows flee away. "Now I know in part; then shall I know even as also I am known." Nevertheless there are a number of scriptures bearing on the matter which we must examine.

When the apostle Paul was faced with the unbelief of Israel, he pointed out (Romans ix) that in their own history God had chosen who were to carry on the line of promise. First Isaac and not Ishmael; then Jacob rather than Esau. He showed that God's sovereignty in the matter was underlined by the fact that Rebekah was told before their birth that the elder of her sons should serve the younger, so that the choice did not depend on their works. How aptly this illustrates God's election of the heirs of salvation! For if we look at Esau and Jacob, we cannot but see how unworthy *both* were of that high calling.

Yet we must not suppose that because God's choice is sovereign, it is therefore arbitrary. For Esau proved himself in every way unfitted for the pilgrim's path, valuing nothing but the gratification of the moment. In marrying heathen women he completely rejected the principle on which Abraham had laid such emphasis in the case of Isaac.

Then later on, after the worship of the golden calf, it became clear that all of Israel were hopelessly lost apart from the mercy of God. So God said to Moses "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy." Yet scripture elsewhere shows that even in His sovereign prerogative of mercy, God does not act arbitrarily. Paul, chief of sinners, says of himself, "I obtained mercy *because* I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (I Timothy i.13).

We see the opposite in Pharaoh, whose heart was hardened, God saying to him, "Even for this very purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My Name might be declared throughout all the earth." What claim upon God's mercy could there be, from one who, choosing to forget God's goodness to Egypt through Joseph, replaced his predecessors' gratitude to Israel by bitter bondage, murdered their babes, and then insolently repudiated Jehovah's claim on His people's service? Yet how brightly God's mercy shone out to others in the destruction He brought upon Pharaoh! To nations who had forgotten His existence Jehovah caused His name to be made known,

and forty years later the people of Jericho still spoke of it, and Rahab was brought to repentance by it (Joshua ii.9-11).

But if the sovereignty of God is so clearly shown both in the bestowing of mercy and in the withholding it, it cannot be too often repeated that in every case man's responsibility is unimpaired by it. So we read that Pharaoh hardened his heart, as well as that God did so, but while scripture is plain that the blessing of believers is God's eternal purpose, the ruin of the unbeliever is never said to be so. To human logic, one seems to imply the other, but God's word speaks otherwise.

Apparently at variance with this principle is I Peter ii. 7, 8, where we read "they stumbled at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed." But a closer examination of the passage shows that the point is, not that they should be disobedient, but that their disobedience should show itself in this way, that they should stumble at Christ. He was the test, as Isaiah had long ago predicted, and the real state of men's hearts was not brought out till He came (Isaiah viii. 14, 15).

Again while Paul uses the figure of the potter and the clay to illustrate God's rights as Creator, he uses different expressions in the application of the figure. The potter *makes* vessels for different uses; God endures with must patience the vessels of wrath *fitted* to destruction (not made for it), and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy "*which He has afore prepared* unto glory" (Romans ix 19-23).

The word translated "fitted" does not ordinarily refer to the making of a vessel, but to a later adjusting of something already made. So what fits a man for destruction is his own sins and his own rejection of the gospel, but it is God who, purely from grace and mercy, has prepared from the beginning the salvation of believers. And not their salvation only, but that they should share the glory of His Son, that He might be "Firstborn among many brethren." Likewise, the patience and longsuffering of God toward the wicked are with a view to

their repentance (Romans ii. 4; 2 Peter iii. 9), which is therefore in no way prevented by God's sovereignty.

Moreover, God's prophecies of judgment are not like some remorseless fate, making repentance impossible. When Jonah preached, "Within forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown," the city's repentance caused God to turn from His wrath. True, the judgment came to pass many years after, but only because a later generation ignored the earlier lesson.

How long God's longsuffering lingered over the wicked peoples of Canaan, before the invading Israelites were commanded to destroy them! To Abraham He said "In the fourth generation they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Genesis xv. 16). Meanwhile Abraham's walk and witness testified to the truth of God, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah warned the surrounding nations.

Sometimes it may seem to us that some persons have had little chance, from their early days onward, of learning the right way. Yet we must beware of forming such a conclusion, for we do not know in what ways God may have spoken to a soul. The very wickedness of some parents sometimes serves as a warning to the children. So Hezekiah, son of one of Judah's worst kings, served God with all his heart. And do we not sometimes find that those whom we might think to be utterly ignorant of the gospel have attended one of our own Sunday schools?

God works out His purposes *through* men, but He is not dependent upon them. As Mordecai told Esther, if she would not fulfil what seemed to be God's purpose in making her queen, then deliverance for the Jews would arise in another quarter, but she would lose the blessing herself. To be used as God's instrument of blessing is a wonderful privilege, and in His people God looks for such understanding of His grace and love to man that He can use us in blessing to others. The results we must leave to His sovereign grace, but there is no doubt of His will for *us*.

Again, it is the parents' responsibility to pray for their children's salvation, to teach them God's truth, and to use

every means to bring them to the Saviour. Then they may confidently expect the Lord to bless them. They are not to say, "If they are elect they will be saved." Conversely, if souls perish in ignorance of the gospel, dare we invoke God's sovereignty to excuse our failure to tell them?

Finally, in proclaiming the gospel, let us believe implicitly the statements of scripture as to God's love for all and His provision for their salvation. The truth of God's sovereignty, as we have seen, does not belong to the proclamation of the gospel. And if God has *chosen* men to salvation, it is equally true that man is responsible to *choose* good rather than evil, and Christ rather than the world, as Moses did (Hebrews, xi. 24-26). Hence we may freely exhort men to believe, to repent, to choose Christ, to turn to God, just as though everything depended upon them, while praying to God that He would turn their hearts to Himself. These things are in no way inconsistent.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN



## WAYSIDE HEARERS

(Note on Mark iv. 15)

BOTH MARK AND LUKE refer to the various classes of hearers in the plural, but Matthew specifies the individual, "This is he which received seed by the wayside." The former lay down what is true generally, while the latter applies the truth particularly and personally to those who heard the word.

In this case the result of the sowing is purely negative. The seed falls upon a hard and unreceptive heart: it does not even germinate, but is removed immediately by the spiritual enemy of man. The cause of the failure is not in any degree ascribed to the Sower or to the seed. These, on the contrary, are perfect, without defect of any kind. But the ground was hard and beaten—unploughed, while the birds of the air were alert to steal the good seed.

The trodden pathway across the Galilean hillside is an apt simile of multitudes of mankind, then and now. Out of the heart of man are "the issues of life." It is the avenue of his being. Duty and enterprise as well as pleasure and pain, all

throng daily in ceaseless procession along the highway of the heart. The continual succession of these earthly objects, each claiming concern, if not concentration of mind, wears down the heart into the ruts of a dull routine. When truth from above falls in such a street, it lies unheeded, and is "trodden under foot," as Luke says in the parable.

Under these circumstances, the word being sown in a heart irresponsive to its claim, and oblivious of its value, a personal and active foe of the truth appears and snatches it away. This foe is named Satan in Mark; the devil in Luke; and the evil or wicked one in Matthew. And it is noticeable that in the threefold power which hinder the growth and fructification of the seed Satan is placed first. The Lord shews by the three classes that

- (1) the power of the devil removes the seed (the birds)
- (2) the power of the flesh prevents the seed rooting (the rocks)
- (3) the power of the world prevents the seed fruiting (thorns)

The Pharisees had blasphemously charged the Lord with being in alliance with Satan (iii. 22-30); the Lord here declared Satan to be the foremost enemy of the word of the kingdom, who "immediately," so energetic in his opposition is he, catches away the word. In Luke, where he is represented as the devil, the adversary of man, in contrast with the Saviour of men, his object in stealing the word is given — "lest they should believe and be saved." In Matthew it is as the *wicked* one that he snatches away the *good* seed. This expression seems to emphasise the moral contrast between the kingdoms of light, and of darkness, and their respective heads.

The wayside hearers then are the careless and indifferent persons, too absorbed in other things to receive the truth in the love of it. The Athenians seem to have been, among others, an example of this class (Acts xvii. 15-32). They had habituated themselves ever to be telling or hearing some new thing. The novelty of the gospel, therefore, awakened a passing superficial interest in the preaching of Paul, but no more. Heathen philosophy, like formal Judaism, was unreceptive of the gospel of Jesus.

W. J. HOCKING

(From 'The Bible Treasury', February, 1912)

## SOME THOUGHTS ON "LEAVEN"

(Read I Corinthians v. and Galatians v.)

THE THOUGHT wherever "leaven" is used as a symbol in the word of God, is "evil in progressive operation."

In I Corinthians the apostle expects those to whom he writes to be aware that the evil in their midst, if not judged and put away, will not remain isolated to "him that hath done this deed." The inherent nature of leaven is to proceed toward the permeation of the whole. The substance has a spreading and transforming influence when used for culinary and other purposes, and its characteristics were, and are, so well known that to liken the evil in an assembly of Christians to "leaven" was well calculated to present the danger of this corrupting influence.

The introduction of the legal system among believers in Galatia is emphatically condemned by the Holy Spirit, who uses the same figure "leaven" as is applied to moral evil in I Corinthians v. His severity in addressing the Galatians is more pronounced than in the first letter to Corinth. The "leaven" of legality struck at the very foundation of God's principle of grace, and though, to the outward observer, sexual immorality might appear the more blameworthy evil, the obnoxious teaching that man could satisfy the holy requirements of God, either for salvation or for practical sanctification, from his own contaminated human resources was, and is, the more pernicious.

Now in both cases the apostle *exposes* the "leaven" character of the evil brought into the assemblies, and it is evident that, though the subversive teaching was present, yet he is able to say "I have confidence as to you in the Lord" (Galatians v. 10) "that ye will have no other mind." He *distinguishes* between "he that is troubling you," who "shall bear the guilt of it," and those in whom he has confidence.

EDWARD T. WOOD

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# WORDS OF HELP

A Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## EDITORIAL

IN HIS article last month entitled "The Living Word," the author remarked: "The function of the LIVING WORD is to bring to us in a *living* way these divinely recorded activities of the past. They are historical events, but the infinite beauty of the character of God may be seen in relation to them. It is a privileged occupation, and one of the most rewarding, to allow this LIVING WORD to carry us into the scene it presents."

At the Editor's request, Mr. Wood has been good enough to illustrate the type of thing he had in mind, and we publish this month his unfolding of the incident of our Lord's life recorded in the opening verses of the eighth chapter of John. This he has supplied with the following further comment: "The thought is to allow oneself to be carried away into the scene and the circumstances of it. To be able to refer to books which tell of the land and its climate and people is also helpful."

Whether readers will glean from the scriptural account less, or more, than the article presents may depend upon individual capacity, but all will feel indebted to the writer for a valuable lesson in the ever-profitable art of reflection upon, and study of, the word of God.

Whilst the foregoing expresses what is admittedly the prime purpose of this particular article, readers will do well to ponder slowly and thoughtfully this choice meditation on the Lord's gracious and tender way with sinners. Well may we exclaim "Hallelujah! what a Saviour!"

**"All bear Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."**

**(Luke iv. 22)**

## THE LIVING WORD

(Hebrews iv. 12)

(Continued)

THAT the word of God is LIVING as well as powerful is gratefully accepted by us as believers. We have experienced its comfort as well as its correction. We have found strength in its promises and a profound joy in the knowledge of the love of God. As the divine Author, the Holy Spirit has presented us with a plenitude of precious things "written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Romans xv. 4. New Tr.). God is, Himself, the Source of endurance and encouragement as is evident from the words that follow (verse 5), and many were His servants of the past who went to that Source and were unfaillingly supplied.

The word "instruction" is intended to convey more than the mere presentation of an historical event, and it is not the laying down of a legal principle to be slavishly followed by a religious devotee. It holds the sense of building up—of strengthening—of implanting within the person that which will become *his own* for well-being. This "instruction" is, in reality, a mine of wealth—the means of endurance and encouragement are *there*.

Now, in the servants of the past, we may see endurance in operation to a remarkable degree, and, from the same Source they derived that encouragement without which they must have failed completely. These servants were, like ourselves, vulnerable to inherent weakness, but one of them (among others) was made aware of the true Servant: "Behold MY Servant, whom I uphold; *mine* Elect in whom MY soul delighteth; I have put MY Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Isaiah xlii. 1). Let us listen to the voice of long ago and "behold" that Servant. This is a spiritual exercise far removed from the ordinary reading of the printed word. I feel that Mrs. Luke knew of it when she wrote her hymn for children—

When Jesus was here among men,  
 How He called little children as lambs to His fold,  
 I should like to have been *with them* then.

Undoubtedly the Holy Spirit would bring before us in a *living* way the Person of the Lord Jesus as, in grace and truth, He displayed the character of God, for the LIVING WORD can never be just a cold correct record of the past.

If we read the opening verses of the eighth chapter of John (though they are, of course, a continuation of chapter seven) and seek to apply the thought of spiritual vision to the episode he records, it is not because it is one to be preferred above others. It is but one of the treasured events that he recalls—long after the departure of the One he loves. But the Spirit of Truth guides him to present it as an exposition of that grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.

We enter the temple in the early morning. The "Teacher" from Galilee is entering, and, with those who follow Him, we may follow too. Many people come; there are faces which portray curiosity, criticism, anxiety, suppressed excitement, misery. The word implies a very large company: "All the people came unto Him" (John viii. 2). He begins to teach them (would that we could *really* hear). The floor is dusty with the passage of many feet and, outside, the heat is mounting and the shade grows less. His earnest speech of simple words, His illustrations with homely things they all knew well; His voice—it had the purity of truth, and "Never man spake like this Man" (John vii. 46). One may see the faces change expression as He speaks. Could it have been other than the good news of that better kingdom available to sinners of repentant heart?

There is a stillness in that part of the temple—the people listen to One "greater than Solomon." But, being there in a spiritual awareness of the significance of the record, one may hear the "discords" of the world without—the footsteps and voices of those of another kingdom—"The scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery." Dragging footsteps in the dust—excited voices—thronging and pressing people coming; they interrupt our gathering.

The fierce voices of her "accusers" are in contrast with that voice we would prefer to hear. Hemmed in by the crowd, we may still behold the calm of that Holy One in the midst of the storm of His adversaries as they "set her in the midst." She is now in the presence of One by whom came grace and truth. Yet there is no question but that she had sinned. The one with whom they had found her should also have been arraigned with her (Leviticus xx. 10), but one doubts whether the correction of evil was as important in their eyes as the Law which they used to support their national pride.

Surrounded by vociferous ecclesiastics and terrified by the mounting excitement of the crowd, we see her thrust into the presence of Jesus, a prisoner of their evil purpose. "Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest Thou? This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him." But He stoops down to write on the ground—He who reads the secret hearts of them all.

It was all long ago, but, in our day, we may see the poor woman as a type of Israel, that "evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew xii. 39).

The accusing voices rise higher. Surely the poor creature must be feeling the deepening shadow of the death penalty all about her. There are hands: there are stones: and how shall the Roman overlords distinguish the author of death among so many who contribute to it! The finger of the Son of Man still writes in the dust.

Having entered more closely into the divine record we may sense the growing frustration and hatred of these "Leaders of the people." They have "taken counsel together" to place Jesus in a position from which there is no escape. Will He uphold the law given by Moses against the authority of Rome or show openly that Moses is to be disregarded? How they hated His message of grace to penitent sinners! We may hear the excited voices rising to a crescendo of demand for His reply.

The writing ceases, and the divine Writer "lifted up Himself." May we not reverently behold Him as He looks into the minds of these men? And is there not a sudden silence—

ominous with judgment? If He does not look at the woman it is not because He is unaware of her distress. She may well have felt a sense of crisis and of fear. Her accusers were powerful, and they were demanding judgment—her executioners would be at hand. The false shepherds of Israel were ready to dispose of her life as a pawn in their hateful game. The silence is broken as Jesus speaks. It is no more than one sentence—but the divine Source of Solomon's wisdom speaks it: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." The sin is there, and not alone in the poor woman: but who, save a sinless one, is entitled to punish the sinner? There are still many stones, but which, among the many hands, has right to cast one?

The Writer writes again in the dust—some have thought He wrote the names and sins of these men for all to see—we may not read the writing, but from our place we may see the faces change expression. Hands reach out, and are withdrawn again, as the solemn and searching proviso challenges the would-be throwers. Then there is a movement in the silent crowd. The broad-hemmed garments are drawn close about the person of the eldest Pharisee as he makes his way out. Others, in their turn, creep away as though to hide from that inner scrutiny of the One who still writes in the dust.

It would have been easy for the woman also to steal away. Why does she not leave the scene of her humiliation? The crowd remains, and her accusers are gone: her distress diminishes with the fading footsteps of her routed foes. Her head is bowed—but thus she can see the bowed form of Jesus, still writing on the page of earth. His stooping form portrays to us a nearness to the earthly needs of sinful man—a reaching down to us all, in our low estate. It is the very negation of that pharisaical aloofness which condemns the sinner and despises the grace that seeks his salvation. How good it is to behold Him!

And now He lifts Himself up. The woman is aware of His eyes upon her. His lips speak the words of two questions vital to her. "Woman, where are those thine accusers?" We wonder, does she begin to understand? For the vehement voices have

ceased, and there are *no* unfriendly restraining hands upon her. There is no one to press the charge. "Hath no man condemned thee?" The second question is closely linked with the first, for the accusers are silenced, and thus condemnation by them is impossible. It would seem that He wishes the full significance of this position to be impressed upon her consciousness. "Where are those thine accusers?" as though He would say "Seek them! but they are no longer to be found." He could have said simply "Thine accusers are gone"—but this might imply they could return! So, Paul writes assurance to the Romans: "Who shall bring an accusation against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is he that condemns?" (Romans viii. 33, 34).

We listen for her answer—for she *must* reply. It comes with that relief and amazement which takes us all back to that moment when first we realised that there was none who had right to condemn, save One, and He would not condemn—He came to save! "No man, Lord." Her lips breathed the word for the first time, in the presence of her Deliverer. Can we not be aware of the upsurge of relief and gratitude which are the beginnings of worship? She had heard the voice of mercy under the very shadow of Sinai. The gates of newness of life were opening to her. "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." The path of liberty to the captive was free—where "sin shall not have dominion" over her. "Sin no more."

Slowly she turns, as one who fain would stay to worship. The scene of her shame had become a sanctuary. She had met her Saviour there and called Him "Lord."

EDWARD T. WOOD.

## THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS

### IV. What manner of men

(Read: I Thess. ii. verses 1-12)

IN A previous article, we considered faith, love and hope (mentioned in chapter i., verse 3 of this epistle), and the principles or qualities of the new life and nature of every true Christian. It is emphasised that in each case Christ is the object, and not self. The Holy Spirit does not normally occupy us

with His own work in us, necessary though that work is. Further, the work of Christ for us at Calvary, which is the ground of our peace and the theme of our constant remembrance and praise, this is not our object; we do not carry about a crucifix. The Christian's true object is Christ Himself, now risen from the dead. Christ is the object upon which our faith rests, the object of the heart's love, and He is our hope, our eternal goal.

Now coming to chapter ii., verses 1-12, we may read this section as a development of the words in the first chapter, verse 5, "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." The Thessalonian believers needed to be reminded, and we need to learn, of the character and conduct of the apostles in their work for the Lord. Here the particulars are furnished with the exactness of inspiration.

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: but even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention" (verses 1 and 2).

The immediate reason for the giving of these details and those that follow was undoubtedly to meet the slanderous attacks made upon the apostles by the enemies of the Gospel. Some may have held the Thessalonians up to ridicule for running after men of doubtful character with a prison record. That Paul and Silas had suffered physical violence, and been exposed to public shame by the authorities at Philippi was undeniable. But, having nothing to be ashamed of, this neither shut their mouths, nor changed their message, nor abated in the least their devotion to Christ and His service. Hence their visit to Thessalonica which followed was not in vain, but effective in the turning of many to Christ. The lesson is one of perseverance, especially when, as happens at times, there is constant difficulty in the daily path, and a succession of obstacles and set-backs.

Verses 3-5: "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be



put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness." This answers another possible charge against the apostles, namely, that they were actuated by impure and selfish motives, that they preached the gospel merely for material gain.

When troubles are allowed to come, it is well for the conscience to be exercised to know whether there is some fault, perhaps unsuspected, which needs to be dealt with. Paul and Silas had met much trouble on this second missionary journey, but their consciences were clear. They looked back over those strenuous but fruitful days in Thessalonica, and reviewing their motives and conduct there, could claim that having been allowed the privilege of carrying the gospel to Gentiles, they had through grace consistently endeavoured to please God and to keep faithful to Him in their service, so that they should not be found wanting when tried in heart by the tests which God applies to all His own.

Paul mentions six particular evils from which he and his fellow-workers were by grace entirely clear. They are deceit, uncleanness, guile, pleasing men, flattering words and covetousness. These things all belong to fallen human nature, and abound in the world from which the believer is delivered and separated.

The word in the original for deceit is often translated "error" in the New Testament, and indicates a wandering from the truth, as we have in I John iv. 6—"the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Uncleanness is one effect of sin in its aspect of corruption; it often assails the ear and the eye; it had no place with the apostles. Guile here means deceit, that is, a wilful misleading.

It has been said that the words, error, uncleanness and deceit, indicate a wrong source, a wrong motive, and a wrong method.

To please men is to forget that God comes first and that the true aim must be to please Him. Flattery is a tempting expedient, easy to slip into; it is certainly not speaking the

truth in love. Proverbs xxvi. 28 declares "A flattering mouth worketh ruin." The sixth evil is covetousness—allowing the heart to go out in strong eager desire for more. The word is different in the original for "covet" in relation to spiritual gifts and prophesying, in I Corinthians xii. and xiv.

Paul adds a seventh point in verse 6—"Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ." It may well be that he had been accused of extorting gifts, whether of money or goods, from his hearers in return for his service. In fact, the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel (I Corinthians ix. 14), but Paul would not here use this right of being "burdensome." This was in order to avoid giving an opportunity to enemies to charge him with evil. "Neither of men sought we glory" we must read as meaning that the apostles did not seek from their converts the material support to which they were entitled in following their exalted service.

Verses 7-9: "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." God's grace had wrought wonderfully in Paul. Before his conversation he was "a persecutor and injurious" (I Timothy i. 13), or as the New Translation reads, "a persecutor and an insolent overbearing man;" the sort of person we should avoid by all means. Now he is gentle, affectionate, ready to sacrifice himself to the utmost for the good of others, as he tells us in turning to the positive side of his work at Thessalonica.

The tender, loving, intelligent care of a mother nursing her own children is wonderful. It is referred to in the Old Testament (Isaiah xlix. 15). Thus Paul conducted himself among these believing Gentiles—"even as a nurse cherisheth her children."

Paul's duty was to preach the Gospel. In his love to Christ and to souls he goes beyond his duty, great as it was, and is willing to give his own soul, his very life, his time, strength and ability, for the good of others, and to benefit them at whatever cost to himself. Many will give of their possessions to those in need, but would not dream of giving themselves. Paul will give his own soul, and evidence of this is that he supported himself by his own labour while at Thessalonica, so as not to be an expense to the converts. "Labouring night and day" are his words. Again in the second epistle, chapter iii., verse 8, "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you." No doubt Silas and Timothy did the same, energized by the example of Paul. With this immense effort, they yet remained "gentle," loving, self-denying, spending and being spent for others' good. This is walking in the steps of the Lord Jesus, Who gave Himself entirely to the service of God and man, and pleased not Himself.

"Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, Who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory" (verses 10-12). Here we have another side of the character and service of the apostles. Earlier, the emphasis was on gentle affection, and the illustration was a mother nursing her children. Now it is the rightness of the apostles' behaviour, holy, and just or righteous, and unblameable, while the illustration is that of a father who exhorts, that is, gives advice with warning and possibly some rebuke; not without comfort or kind speaking; and charges his children how they should conduct themselves.

This reminder of the uprightness of the apostles would no doubt healthily exercise the consciences of the converts, and strengthen them against temptation. They would also be impelled onward in the Christian path by the bringing afresh to their minds what was now their aim in life, put in one simple

lofty word, to walk worthy of God Who had called them into that path.

In this epistle we see how near the believer is brought to God, with no one and nothing between, a plain and very great Christian blessing. The Thessalonian Christians knew that it was by God they were elected (chosen), that it was to God they had turned (from idols) to serve Him, and that the whole manner of their walk, their life in this world, was to be worthy of God, the God Who was calling them now to have a place in His kingdom and in the future to dwell in His glory. How blessed to be called out of darkness into His marvellous light (I Peter ii. 9)!

W. H. L. GRAHAM.

*(To be continued)*

### THE DUMB PRIEST

*“And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words.”*

(Luke i. 20)

SPEECH is the audible means of “fellowship one with another.” To lose the power of speech amounts to a form of solitary confinement. Zacharias the priest was stricken dumb for nine months. He was no longer an unblemished son of Aaron, and might no longer “go in unto the vail, nor come nigh unto the altar” (Lev. xxi. 16-23). It became public knowledge that the hand of God was upon him. And the blow fell while he was offering priestly worship at the golden altar\*. **He did not believe the angelic message.**

The unbelief of Zacharias in God’s word was lamentable sin on the part of a pious man, “well stricken in years.” The “fine gold” of a life “righteous before God,” and blameless in all the commandments of the Lord, was dimmed at its eventide by the doubts which arose within him. God’s immediate sentence was: **“Thou believest not”—“thou shalt be dumb.”** Consequently, Zacharias could no longer act as a “teaching priest,” and instruct the people in “the statutes of Moses,”

\* Zacharias did not leave Jerusalem to go to his own house until “the days of his ministration were accomplished” (ver. 23), but other priests would no doubt be deputed to undertake the special services in the sanctuary when he was disqualified.

because of this sudden calamity of dumbness. And all that knew him at Jerusalem and at his home in the hill country of Judea would "esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."

### **The Angel and the Priest**

Zacharias went into the holy place alone to minister at the altar of incense, while the whole multitude waited without, praying, in order that their petitions might ascend to Jehovah, fragrant with the appointed incense (Psalm cxli. 2; Rev. v. 8). But the Lord had a special word of favour for the priest, to speak "in his ear," as of old He had spoken privately to young Samuel in Shiloh. The angel Gabriel brought the message to the aged priest in Jerusalem, as he previously had brought a personal communication to Daniel by the river of Ulai (Dan. viii. 16; ix. 21).

Standing by the right side of the altar, Gabriel announced an immediate outpouring of joy and gladness for Zacharias and for many others. The old man's many prayers that he might not go childless to the grave had been heard. He should have a son. To mark this special favour of Jehovah to him in his old age, the child should be named John. Moreover, this promised son of Zacharias and Elisabeth should be "great," a Nazarite, filled with the Holy Ghost, the forerunner of the Lord, to prepare His ways. This was good tidings indeed, both for Zacharias and the whole nation; too good to be believed, it seems, by Zacharias!

### **The Long Prophetic Blank Ended**

After four hundred years of divine silence, Malachi's prophecy of hope concerning the Messiah and His messenger was re-iterated by the angel Gabriel in the temple at the very time of its fulfilment. Now "the prophet of the Highest" was about to be born in the house of Zacharias. But the heart that should have leapt with delight at the news sank within him, heavy with doubt. Forgetful of the shining faith of Abraham, of Hannah, of Manoah and his wife in similar promises, the old man, looking at himself and Elisabeth instead of God, said

dubiously to the heavenly messenger, "Whereby shall I know this?"

Poor man, the bare word of God was not sufficient to assure him! He wanted something else, "whereby" he might *know* it! Full of misgivings, he sought after a sign; and a sign was given him. The lips that doubted whether God would give him a son should be sealed until they were opened to praise God because the son had been given (verse 64), according to the word by the angel.

After a long interval, the priest came forth from the holy place to the people waiting impatiently without. But to the astonishment of all, there was not "a word in his tongue" to bless the expectant multitude. Neither could he tell them his heavenly vision, but could only seek to convey to them by awkward, unaccustomed signs that he had been suddenly stricken speechless.

### The Tongue of the Dumb Sings

In due time, John was born; the father's mouth was opened; his tongue was loosed; he broke forth in a prophetic song of praise to the Lord God of Israel (verses 67-79). Alas, that a **priest should be so behindhand with his hymn of worship!** How happy and fitting if it had been uttered when he was offering the incense at the altar! But then he "hung his harp upon the willows" in unbelief. Now he has "seen and believed," and now he sings in faith.

Mary sang her Magnificat (verses 46-55) before her promise was fulfilled; but Zacharias was dumb till the fulfilment of his promise. It was the lowly maiden, not the godly priest, who believed that "with God nothing shall be impossible" (verse 37). Accordingly, as Elisabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, said of Mary, "Blessed is she that believed" (verse 45).

### Faith's Part in Worship

Now, let us ask why there is so much dumbness among priests today in the gatherings for worship. Is not the answer so often there is **a lack of simple faith** accompanying our service of praise? According to the word of God, we have

boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; and we have a great priest over the house of God. But, unless we draw near to God with a true heart and **in full assurance of faith**, there can be no acceptable sacrifice of praise (Hebrews x. 19-22). Faith without a single inward misgiving must be in active exercise as we worship at the incense altar.

When faith is active, it perceives in the most holy place "the Person of the Christ, enfolding every grace," and beholds the promised "manifestation," unknown to the world (John xiv. 21-26). Faith forgets the meagre company and the mean room. Then, in the hush of the sanctuary of the Divine Presence, the tongue of the inner man is loosed, and the voice of melody is heard in the heart. Then, the soul is moved to its inmost depths by the grace and glory of her Beloved. Then, the inner harmonies of the Holy Spirit rise like incense fumes from the altar. Oh, for the full assurance of faith when we worship, that it may not "be in vain."

In this dispensation of grace, all in the company of believers are priests to God (I Peter ii. 4-10), so that the failure of Zacharias in faith is a lesson for all who are worshippers of the Father in spirit and in truth. If any one does not lay hold by faith upon the unseen things of God, that one fails in his priestly office, and as a worshipper of God, he is dumb. If unbelief is in the heart, the high praises of God cannot be in the mouth. Let us therefore remember that in our worship, as at all times, "without faith it is impossible to please Him (God)."

W. J. HOCKING.

(Reprinted from "*The Bible Monthly*," May, 1933)

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# WORDS OF HELP

A Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## EDITORIAL

WE have been aware for some time of widespread concern with regard to the recent translation of the New Testament known as the NEW ENGLISH BIBLE, and we believe many of our readers will look to us for some guidance as to the use they should make of it.

At the Editor's request, Mr. Chamberlain has submitted the "Comments" appearing in this issue, and we trust these will assist readers in coming to a right judgment in this important matter.

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*(Continued from inside back cover)*

them: not for the world do I request, but for those whom Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine (and all My things are Thine, and Thy things Mine), and I am glorified in them" (John xvii. 9, 10, W.K.).

## THE WARNING, "KISS THE SON"

There is given in the concluding stanza (verses 10-12) a general warning to kings and judges of the earth in respect to Jehovah and His Anointed, Whose authority they have despised (verses 1-3). They are admonished to "serve Jehovah with fear," and to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry." To "kiss" is to do homage to the Son as the King of kings and Lord of lords; so Samuel kissed Saul when he was anointed king of Israel (I Samuel x. 1); though himself a prophet Samuel thus formally acknowledged the sovereignty conferred upon the son of Kish.

We find then in this Psalm a testimony by Jehovah to the Absolute Sonship of Him Who was begotten in time that He might as the Son of man inherit the earth, ruling the riotous peoples with a rod of iron and blessing all those that put their trust in Him.

*(From The Son of His love, by W. J. HOCKING)*

## SOME COMMENTS ON THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

NOTE: If the virtues of this new translation are not alluded to in the following article, it is mainly because of limitations of space.

It is with deep disappointment that one has to say that this version can never replace the Authorized Version. It is undoubtedly true that, to those who come new to its study, the A.V. presents difficulties on account of its three-centuries-old diction. In time they learn to surmount the difficulties, but a version in modern speech must possess great advantages. Nevertheless the faults of the New English Bible are such that the A.V. is still vastly preferable.

Some of the outstanding defects, in the writer's view, are briefly outlined below.

### I. IN MANY PLACES THE TRANSLATION IS NOT MERELY LOOSE, BUT POSITIVELY UNFAITHFUL.

It is certainly true that at times a free translation gives the sense more accurately than a more literal one could do—it is not mere freeness that is objectionable. But in many instances the translators have quite deliberately altered the sense, for reasons only to be guessed at.

I Peter iv. 8. N.E.B. reads **“Love cancels innumerable sins.”**

But the word is *cover*, not cancel. We cannot cancel another's sins, but in love we can cover them, rather than expose them.

Matthew xix. 4,5. N.E.B. reads, **“Have you never read that the Creator made them from the beginning male and female?”**; and he added, **‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother . . . What God has joined together, man must not separate.’** ”

Now by their punctuation, and by altering the word “said” to “added,” the following words are all made to appear as a comment by the Lord Jesus, whereas only the last sentence, beginning “What God has joined etc.” is; the other being the words of the Creator, as Genesis shows clearly. Ecclesiastical leaders of to-day quote the Lord's teaching on marriage and

divorce, but possibly have no wish to emphasize the fact that He based it on the actual words of the scorned book of Genesis.

Matthew xix. 29. N.E.B. reads "**many times over,**" instead of "an hundredfold," as though they considered the Lord's words an exaggeration.

Luke xix. 31. The disciples when loosing the colt are made to say (N.E.B.) "**Our Master needs it,**" instead of "**The Lord needs it.**"

The insertion of "our" has the effect of confining the confession of Jesus as Master to the disciples, whereas it is evident that the owners let the colt go because He was "Lord" to them also.

Galatians vi. 16. N.E.B. reads "**Whoever they are who take this principle for their guide, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the whole Israel of God!**"

The insertion of "whole", for which there is no authority whatever, alters the entire sense, for the "Israel of God" is *believing* Israel, not the whole of Israel. Can we trust translators who act thus?

John iii. 16. N.E.B. reads ". . . **that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life.**"

Does "perish" then, mean the same as "die"?

There are many other instances, but these must suffice.

## II. THEY OFTEN GIVE INTERPRETATIONS INSTEAD OF TRANSLATIONS.

This is closely connected with I., but deserves separate treatment.

In Acts xiii. 33. N.E.B. reads "**by raising Jesus from the dead,**"

adding the last three words as their interpretation of Paul's meaning. But it is evident that the resurrection is brought in in the next verse, *not* in verse 33. Had they confined themselves to translation, it would be "by raising up Jesus," allowing the reader to do the needed interpretation. The N.E.B. thus deprives

the reader of the possibility of a correct understanding. The A.V. is also at fault here; but where is the improvement?

Rom. i. 17. **“Therein is the righteousness of God revealed”** (A.V.) becomes **“because here is revealed God’s way of righting wrong, a way that starts from faith and ends in faith.”**

This is interpretation with a vengeance.

II Cor. i. 22. N.E.B. says **“God . . . has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts.”**

Here the word “earnest” is left out, and the word “dwell” is added. No doubt this was done in sincerity, but the effect is to force an erroneous interpretation on the reader. For here it is not the Spirit Himself that is meant, but that foretaste of the coming blessing which the Spirit gives us to enjoy. Hence, as being a matter of experience, it is in our *hearts*. The Spirit Himself dwells in our bodies. The modernist, alas, has no time for, or understanding of, the accuracy of scriptural language.

I Timothy v. 22. N.E.B. says **“Do not be over-hasty in laying on hands in ordination.”**

The last two words are added as interpretation of the words “laying on hands.” But seeing that they have to use these words anyway, why not stop there, as the Greek does, and allow the reader to judge whether “ordination” is or is not meant?

Matthew xxiv. 35. N.E.B. says **“The present generation will live to see it all.”**

This is one of the verses on which the modernist relies for his “kenosis” theory, that the Lord Jesus so emptied Himself of what is divine that He was capable of error. The true version of the above text is “This generation shall not pass away till all these things come to pass,” using the word “generation” in a moral sense of that unbelieving generation of Israel which abides even to this day. But the N.E.B. *interpretation* forces a different meaning on the Lord’s words.

### III. THEY ARE GROSSLY NEGLIGENT, IF NOT WORSE, IN THAT WHICH AFFECTS THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

The Greek word *KYRIOS*, translated sometimes "Lord" and sometimes merely "Sir", is invariably given this latter, lower meaning in the Gospels when used by those who came to the Lord Jesus, except in the case of the twelve apostles. This is to imply that His Messiahship was not recognised, e.g. by Mary and Martha, by the centurion of such great faith, by the blind beggars who addressed Him as "Son of David," and others who came to Him in faith. Why rob the Lord of the honour thus paid to Him? Did not others besides the twelve own Him as Lord?

The Greek word *PROSKYNEO*, translated "Worship" or "Do homage to," or by some phrase indicating deep respect, as "Bowed low before," in the N.E.B. is *never* translated "worship" when it is offered to the Lord Jesus, but almost always "worship" when offered to God, and also "worship" when offered to the beast, the dragon and the beast's image in Revelation. Now while it is true that the degree of reverence intended can only be judged from the context, what are we to think of translators who will not even use the word "worship" when the angels of God are commanded to render it to Christ? (Hebrews i. 6). In fact, that much more than a low bow is always intended is evident from the case of Cornelius, where we read that Peter raised him to his feet and said "Stand up; I am a man like anyone else" (Acts x. 25-26). It is also likely that when John in Rev. xxii. fell down to worship before the angel, he did so because it seemed to him that the Lord Jesus was appearing to him in angelic form.

The word "*son*" is several times spelled with a small initial letter, when the Lord Jesus is intended. Thus, for example, in John x. 36 "I am God's son"; Acts xiii. 33 "You are my son"; Hebrews v. 8 "son though he was." It seems that the translators considered these to be special cases, as these are not their general practice; but even so it is most objectionable.

John xii. 27 N.E.B. reads "**Now my soul is in turmoil**" implying an uncertainty in the Lord's mind which we do not

believe was ever there. Why translate it thus, when the usual translation of the word is "troubled," or "deeply moved," as the N.E.B. itself gives in John xi. 33?

**"Of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."**

Thus is the A.V. (Romans ix. 5), but the N.E.B. translates—  
**"from them, in natural descent, sprang the Messiah. May God, supreme over all, be blessed for ever! Amen."**

For a full and scholarly discussion of this verse the reader is referred to "Notes on Romans" by W. Kelly, where it is shown conclusively that there is no ground whatever for the N.E.B. or similar attempts to take the application of the words "God blessed for ever" away from Christ.

II Cor. v. 21. N.E.B. says **"Christ was innocent of sin."**

Certainly the *literal* meaning of "innocent" is "not knowing," but how inadequate such a word is to express the fact that sin was utterly foreign to Him!

I Peter iii. 18. N.E.B. says **"In the body he was put to death; in the spirit he was brought to life."**

This is a thoroughly mischievous translation, which in effect denies the Lord's bodily resurrection, as well as almost suggesting that His spirit suffered death. "Spirit" here undoubtedly refers to the Holy Spirit, by Whose power the Lord was raised. This is not the only passage, by the way, in which the translators put a small "s" where the Holy Spirit is certainly meant: see for instance Luke iv. 18, John iii. 5. To translate thus, apparently because the definite article is not used, whether a good sense is obtained or not, does no credit to their spiritual perception.

Matthew iii. 17 (and five other occurrences) N.E.B. reads—

**"This is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favour rests"** instead of the A.V. "in whom I am well-pleased."

It should be noted that the other sixteen uses of the word in the New Testament are translated quite differently, and the *completely parallel* passage in Hebrews x. 38 reads "I take no

*pleasure* in him," which is similar to the A.V. of Matthew iii. 17. It is strange, then, that in the N.E.B. Matthew iii. 17 should be rendered in a way which substitutes the Father's favour resting upon Him for the Father's pleasure in Him. If the A.V. needs improvement, Moffat's "In whom is my delight" is surely preferable.

After these, it is a relief to draw attention to the translation of Titus ii. 13: "Looking forward to the happy fulfilment of our hopes when the splendour of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus will appear." Here the divine glory of the Lord Jesus is made more clear than in the A.V.

#### IV. THE TRANSLATION IS FREQUENTLY COLOURED BY ECCLESIASTICAL PREJUDICE.

The fact that the New Testament calls all believers "saints" is hidden, by always translating this expression "God's people." But the word "saints" is used in its false, Romish meaning of holy men, in Matthew xiii. 17. and xxiii. 29.

The formal "saying prayers" is attributed to the Lord Jesus in Matthew xiv. 19 and wherever the same word occurs. Cornelius also is made to be "saying the afternoon prayers."

A flagrant example is in Matthew xvi. 18, translated by the N.E.B. "You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my church." Now the sole justification for *interpolating* the words "the Rock" is the meaning of the name "Peter", though this, as is well-known, is "stone" rather than "rock." That the Lord makes an allusion to the meaning of "Peter" is plain, but to insert the words "*the Rock*" in this way can only be intended as a sop to Rome. A footnote was the place for pointing out the allusion, or at most it should be in brackets. A fuller treatment of this text must be reserved for a later article, if the Lord will.

In I Corinthians x. 16, 17, the Lord's Supper is made out to be, not an *expression* of the fellowship which believers have in the death of the Lord, but a *means of sharing* in the blood, and in the body, of Christ. This is good Anglo-Catholic doctrine, but it is not what the scripture says.



Other instances are I Timothy iii. 2 “*Our* leader, therefore, or bishop,” where Paul wrote merely “the overseer”; verses 12, 13, “deacons . . . may claim the right to speak openly on matters of the Christian faith”—a *right* which one had imagined to be an *obligation* for every Christian.

## V. SOME OF THE CLEAREST NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIAN BLESSINGS ARE BLURRED.

The fact that every believer in the Lord Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit is obscured by calling the “natural man” (A.V.) of I Corinthians ii. 14 “unspiritual,” and “he that is spiritual” in verse 15 “a man gifted with the Spirit.”

Consequently in chapter iii. “the carnal man” becomes “a man on the merely natural plane,” and he, along with the babe in Christ, is one who has not the Spirit! This is thoroughly to confound the possession of the Spirit, which we received by faith in the Saviour, with our walk as Christians. A similar confusion is found in Romans viii. 9. For “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit,” is an expression of the believer’s new standing, but the N.E.B. translates thus “But that is *not how* you live,” making it a question of his walk.

Again, in Galatians vi. 1 the restoration of an erring brother is to be done by “you who are endowed with the Spirit,” thus making this fundamental privilege to be true of some Christians only.

The basic Christian blessing of having peace with God is taken away in the N.E.B., for they alter “Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. v. 1.) to an exhortation. Even then it should be “let us have peace,” but as this does not seem right they make it “let us continue at peace.” The hortatory form of the word is, it is true, in accord with the majority of the manuscripts; but exactly the same manuscript evidence is rejected in I Corinthians xv. 49, for to translate “let us wear the likeness of the heavenly man” is obviously impossible. But careful study of the structure of Romans shows that exhortation begins in chapter vi., after the firm foundation of blessing in Christ has been laid.

In addition to those considered under these five headings, there are *many other* instances of translations so unsatisfactory that the reader should be warned that here is a version which, however good in parts, is in many respects thoroughly untrustworthy.

If the A.V. is to be replaced, it must be replaced by something better. This can only be if the translation is done by men who are as firmly convinced of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures as the A.V. translators themselves were.

Finally, let us compare the versions from the literary point of view. These quotations may speak for themselves:—

Luke ii. 10.

A.V. **“for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”**

N.E.B. **“I have good news for you: there is great joy coming to the whole people.”**

Matthew x. 8.

A.V. **“Freely ye have received, freely give.”**

N.E.B. **“You received without cost; give without charge.”**

Does this even make sense?

Philippians iv. 15.

A.V. **“No church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.”**

N.E.B. **“You were the only congregation that were my partners in payments and receipts.”**

Thus the Philippians' generosity is spoken of as though it were a commercial transaction.

I Timothy vi. 10.

A.V. **“The love of money is the root of all evil: which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”**

N.E.B. for the final clause, reads:—

**“and spiked themselves on many thorny griefs.”**

Acts viii. 20.

A.V. **Thy money perish with thee.”**

N.E.B. **“May you come to a bad end.”**

If only the N.E.B. translators had been willing to adopt some time-honoured phrases from the old version, which have become part and parcel of our language!

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN.

## JEHOVAH SALUTING HIS SON

(Read: Psalm ii.)

IN the New Testament we read of the Son of the Father, and in the Old Testament of the Son of Jehovah. The Father is the divine Name associated with God's love displayed in His family, and Jehovah is the Name associated with God's government of the world through the nation of Israel. Let us dwell a little on the reference to this latter theme in Psalm ii.

This Psalm is readily divisible, according to its subject, into four stanzas of three verses each, as follows:—

- (1) The world's counsels against Jehovah (1-3);
- (2) Adonai's derision of man's plotting (4-6);
- (3) Jehovah's decree of universal rule for His Son (7-9);
- (4) Warning to kiss the Son before judgment comes (10-12).

## THE WORLD ALLIANCE

(1) The first stanza (verses 1-3) predicts the coalition of Israel\* and the nations in defiant resistance to the claims of Jehovah and His Anointed. The united counsel of the earthly powers is to break Their bands and cast away Their cords. This prediction had its fulfilment in the union of Jews and Gentiles to crucify the Messiah, Jehovah's Anointed, and was so quoted in the apostles' prayer to the Lord (Acts iv. 24-28). The evil alliance against Jehovah and His Christ foretold in this Psalm will have a further fulfilment in the future agreement between the apostate Jews and the head of the resuscitated fourth Gentile empire (Rev. xiii.).

\* It is to be noted that in this Psalm, Israel is viewed as submerged among the other nations, and not in the separateness Jehovah had given her. The conditions are those of utter moral disorder. The chosen nation is regarded as "Lo-ammi" (Hos. i. 9). Jehovah no longer says "Israel is My son" (Exod. iv. 22; Hos. xi. 1; Matt. ii. 15). The Eternal Son takes Israel's place in the earth both as Son and as Servant (Isa. xlii.).

## THE KING ON ZION'S HILL

(2) This confederation of worldly powers to renounce all allegiance to Jehovah and His Christ is regarded with contempt (verses 4-6) by Adonai (Jehovah's title as "Lord of all the earth"). He will speak unto them in His wrath from heaven (*see* Heb. xii. 25, 26), and in face of their organized hostility to Jehovah and His Anointed He will establish His King upon Zion, His mountain of holiness. Thus the "counsel" of man's might and wisdom comes to naught; and "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts ii. 23) in the face of man's concerted insurrection against Him and His Christ has its fulfilment in both the humiliation and the exaltation of Jehovah's King.

## SONSHIP AND BEGETTING

(3) In the third stanza (verses 7-9), the Holy Spirit makes us privy to the deliberations of the divine council-chamber in respect of world-wide human evil. The Son declares the "decree" made for quelling the insurgents. No date is affixed to this solemn edict. Nor need we enquire When? and Where? The finite factors of time and locality do not apply to the decrees of God, which are formulated in eternity, whenever He may be pleased to reveal them to men: "known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Does any scripture *deny* that this utterance *came to the Son* "before the foundation of the world"? Did it not come to the Son before it came to David by the prophetic Spirit?

But whenever this decree was enunciated, the Son sets forth its terms in the words of Jehovah addressed to Himself. **FIRST**, the dignity and competency of the Person to Whom the decree is committed are expressed in His Name; "THOU ART MY SON." The Son is the Name of Him appointed to execute judgment in the earth. It is ever the primary concern of the Holy Spirit that the essential glory of the Son should not seem to be diminished by the service He voluntarily undertakes.

In like manner, when the Lord Jesus is seen in New Testament vision about to "judge and make war," it is recorded by the Spirit amid the recital of His many governmental

glories that "His Name is called The Word of God" (Rev. xix. 13). What He becomes mediatorially is not allowed to conceal what He is essentially; unexpectedly, as it were, the Holy Spirit in the vision recalls our hearts to remember the personal glory of the Son, when He shall tread the winepress of the fury and wrath of God Almighty.

At the forefront of the "decree", then, is the solemn affirmation of Sonship made by Jehovah to the Son Himself—the recognition of the Son as the absolute Interpreter of Jehovah's counsel and the consummate Doer of His will in the government of the earth.

**SECONDLY.** We pass in the next sentence from eternity to time, for "day" is a measure of time, not of eternity: "THIS DAY HAVE I BEGOTTEN THEE." Now we undoubtedly have the incarnation of the Son of Jehovah. It is the Old Testament description corresponding with the New Testament ones; "The Word became flesh"; the "Son made of a woman": "that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Taking the two sentences in their sequence ("Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee"), their joint import seems to be that He Whom Jehovah, in timeless eternity, called His Son abode in that Filial relationship when begotten of Him in time: the Son then became incarnate, but maintained all that He had ever been as Son in the Godhead. If the truth had been otherwise, would not the order of the sentence have been inverted? Would not the act of begetting have *preceded* the salutation as Son, if he Had become the Son by His incarnation? The order as it stands is highly significant.

Indeed, the full truth and beauty of the Son's own communication of this celestial purpose for the tumultuous earth will be entirely missed unless we mark its ordered steps.

(A) First, we must notice the sublime satisfaction of Jehovah beholding the Son in His changeless fullness: "Thou art My Son": He was His ineffable delight, His efficient resource, His eternal Fellow (Zec. xiii. 7). This expression of complacent

regard by Jehovah for His Son is the *basis* of what follows in the next stanza concerning the divine government of the world.

The construction in verse 7 seems to be analogous to many other verses in the Psalms, though usually the speaker in those parallel cases is a pious saint. For example, the psalmist exclaims, "Thou art my God"; by faith he recognizes the power and goodness of God. Encouraged by the sight, he then resolves, "early will I seek Thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 1). His purpose to seek God was formed on the *basis* of what God was to him already.

(B) Here, too, in verse 7, the order of thought is that the second clause (His begetting) arises out of, or on the *basis* of the first (His Sonship). Because He was the Son, He was able to subdue the evil of man and establish the glory of Jehovah; therefore, to this end, He was, in the appointed day or season, "begotten" among men: "this day have I begotten Thee." Moreover, when become flesh, the Blessed One was still the Son, as the voice from heaven declared, not only once but twice (Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5). This voice at Jordan and on the Mount was witness of His *Sonship after incarnation*, as the Psalm gives the divine testimony of His *Sonship before incarnation*. Jehovah speaks to His Son in Psalm ii, as He also does to His Servant in Isaiah xlix.

The denial of the pre-incarnate Sonship of our beloved Lord is an effort to place shutters upon the windows of revelation, which look on His glory in the eternal past. But "no prophecy of scripture is of its own interpretation" (2 Peter i. 20, W.K.), and having in mind the revelation of the Absolute Deity of the Son made in other parts of scripture, we believe that the concurrent truth conveyed in this stanza of the Psalm is that the Speaker did not *begin* to be the Son at His incarnation, but that *His Sonship was unimpaired by His humiliation*. The Eternal Sonship, blessed be God, was true in the beginning, is now, and ever will be. The Son is the revealed Name expressive of His essential nature in the Deity and not only of His mediatorial office between God and man.

Begetting or generation is associated in scripture with incarnation of the Son, but is never attributed to the Holy Spirit,

Who did not "become flesh." The much-used term, "eternal generation," applied to the Son is without scriptural warrant, for how could the Deity of the Son be *derived* from Another? or, how could the Eternal Sonship be *bestowed* by generation? But being the Son from all eternity, when born of the Virgin Mary, He could be called the Son of the Highest (Luke i. 32)

Begetting in this Psalm is descriptive of the manner of the introduction into this world of Jehovah's Son Who came as the legitimate King in Zion to possess the ends of the earth. Jehovah's Anointed One would be David's Son and David's Lord. Yet when Jesus asked the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He?" (Matt. xxii. 42) not one of them had faith to refer back to Jehovah's words to Him, "Thou art My Son," recorded in this Psalm. His Sonship and His lowliness awakened their hatred, not their homage, and in consequence, their eyes were blinded (John xii. 37-41).

(C) Jehovah invites His Son to ask for the heirship of the world: "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for an inheritance, and for Thy possession the ends of the earth" (verse 8).

This invitation contains a description of the decreed office of universal supremacy assigned to Him as Jehovah's Anointed in answer to the tumultuous raging of mankind against His claims when He comes into the world (verses 1-3). Jehovah would give His Son all nations and all lands.

A comparison of this verse with the Lord's words to the Father (in John xvii. 9) shows the difference already noted between the two dispensations of love and of righteousness in connection with the Son. In the Psalm the world is in view; in the Gospel, those whom the Father has given to the Son "out of the world"; and the ways of God in government with the world were to be set aside for a while, and after the crucifixion of Christ and His ascension, the heavenly calling was to be proclaimed by the apostles, especially by Paul.

Consequently, at that point the Son does not prefer the request of Psalm ii. His heart is now set upon those to whom He will make known the Father's love. He says, "I request for

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# WORDS OF HELP

A Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## THE TOUCH OF JESUS

(Note on Mark i. 30, 31)

COMING into the house, a shadow lay upon it. Simon's wife's mother was there, sick of a great fever, as Luke the physician states. With simple directness and with growing confidence in the love and sympathy and power of their Master they unite to tell Him of their trouble. They had seen His power in the physical world—over the fish of the sea. They had seen His power in the realm of darkness—over the unclean demon. But could He—would He—consider a private sorrow, a domestic affliction? The compassionate Lord dissipated once for all any uncertainty on this score. He had come to heal the diseases of Israel, and He vouchsafed a ready answer to their request.

Jesus came to the bedside. He stood over the patient and rebuked the fever. Taking her by the hand He raised her. The fever left her, and she immediately arose, the recovery being instantaneous and complete, so that she was able to wait upon them.

The touch of Jesus is significant, indicating His personal contact with sorrowing humanity. He did not touch the demoniacs, but He touched the leper, the eyes of the blind, the tongue of the dumb, and the ear of Malchus. He also touched the bier of the dead, and the terrified disciples on the mount of Transfiguration. The hand of Omnipotence was laid on the infirmities of man. He proved Himself a God near at hand, and not afar off. The principle is true now to faith, but will have a direct application when Messiah visits His enfeebled people, raising them up by His strong right hand.

W. J. HOCKING.

## BOUNDARIES OF CHRISTIANITY

(Read: Titus i. 1-4)

*“In this epistle the great boundaries of Christianity are set forth at the outset. The faith of the elect, the truth which is according to godliness, the promise before the world began of eternal life, and the manifestation of the word of God through preaching, are the subjects of the introduction”*—J.N.D.

WHILE the epistles to Timothy and Titus have much in common, the personal directives given by Paul to his two fellow-labourers indicate an important difference. The apostle left Timothy in Ephesus “that thou mightest enjoin some not to teach other doctrines,” whilst Titus was left in Crete “that thou mightest go on to set right what remained unordered” (New Tr.), or “shouldst set in order the things that are wanting” (R.V.). Thus in Timothy the Holy Spirit’s emphasis is on sound teaching, whilst in Titus it is rather on correct and worthy conduct.

Bearing this in mind, let us examine the opening phrases of Titus i., in which the apostle delineates certain outstanding features of Christianity.

### I. THE FAITH OF GOD’S ELECT

Probably the best way to understand the force of this expression is to contrast the Christian order of things with that of the previous dispensation. Under the legal system appertaining to Israel, Aaron was the appointed High Priest. It might be said that Aaron was God’s high priest according to the law of Israel. Paul declares that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God’s elect. Faith, or the faith order of things, has superseded the legal, and God’s elect have replaced Israel.

This difference is fundamental, for under the law the people of God were dependent upon their own obedience and good works for blessing. In Christianity, it is no longer a question of what man can do, but of *what God has done*—what He has

purposed and provided through Christ. The requirement on man's side is therefore FAITH. Christianity is essentially an order of faith.

Furthermore, the law applied exclusively to Israel: its privileges were the birthright of anyone and everyone who was fortunate enough to be born into that nation. The Christian order of things does not recognise any advantages arising from natural birth or material circumstances: to enter the Kingdom of God a man must be born again. So that the vital blessings of the Christian faith are the exclusive possession of those in whom God has been pleased to work sovereignly.

Why does the apostle say the faith "of God's elect"? Why not simply the faith of those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour? This may well be because the Holy Spirit wishes to emphasise in the strongest possible way that salvation is wholly outside either of man's entitlement or capacity to obtain by his own efforts. Christian blessings are the outcome of God's sovereign grace.

One practical consequence of this is that those who do not know God have no portion with true believers. Many so-called Christian fellowships admit to membership those who do not as yet believe, in the hope that they will be converted once they are inside the church. In the meantime, before that takes place, such persons may take an active part in what purports to be the worship and service of God. Paul recognises nothing of this sort; only the faith of God's elect—those in whom there has been implanted the divine gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

## II. THE TRUTH WHICH IS AFTER GODLINESS

While it is true that conduct, to be acceptable to God, must conform to the truth, the point of view here appears to be the opposite of that: the truth itself is attested by the godliness, or practical piety, which it produces in the lives of those who embrace it. As the Lord Jesus said on one occasion, the tree is known by its fruit (Matthew xii. 33).

Now that is a far-reaching principle. Paul here relates his apostleship to the truth which is after godliness. In other words, the only truth he will recognise is that which produces the fruit of genuine piety.

Here again it will help to recall what happened in the case of Israel. That nation was given the law: they possessed the lively oracles of God: they clung tenaciously to their privileges, and were proud of their exclusive position. But what kind of conduct had been the outcome? These very people, in whose synagogues the law was read every Sabbath day, hated and murdered the Son of God! Their profession to serve God was thus exposed as an empty sham, utterly valueless in His sight. Not, of course, that God's holy law itself was in any way to blame; the fault lay entirely with man, because of the inveterate hostility of the human heart to God and His Anointed.

Most of us discover in day-to-day contact with unbelievers that disparity between belief and behaviour is disastrous to effective witness for Christ. The world cares little whether we are orthodox in doctrine and ecclesiastical profession: but it looks for and recognises practical holiness of life even if it dislikes it. Paul insists here that the truth must bring men into living touch with God, and bear the fruit of genuine piety, or it cannot be acknowledged. This is a very searching word.

The apostle uses this line of reasoning when addressing the Galatians. In that epistle the apostle is combating the Judaism of certain false teachers who were reintroducing the law as a means of sanctification in daily life, if not of salvation itself. One of the arguments he uses (chap. v. 13-26) is the fact that the legalism of these evil men was producing such ungodly results: the Galatians were biting and devouring one another. That kind of thing was not the fruit of the Spirit, but the working of the flesh. By the reprehensible behaviour of the taught, both the teachers and their teachings were discredited.

There is good reason why those who profess to hold the truth today should challenge themselves in this matter. Do some insist that "we are on the right ground"; that we hold the truth in greater measure than others? If so, we need to

take care lest these claims are shown to be pretentious, if not completely ridiculous, by failure to learn the elementary lessons of how to live together in love in our assemblies, forbearing one another, receiving one another to the glory of God, and keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Is the truth we profess to hold manifestly according to godliness?

### III. IN HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE, WHICH GOD, THAT CANNOT LIE, PROMISED BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN

This phrase introduces us to the purpose and sovereign working of God in which there is no scope for human failure.

While the New Testament asserts that eternal life is the present possession of the believer, Paul uses the expression in the passage under review (as in Romans vi. 22) to denote something hoped for—something the believer looks forward to, and will realise and enjoy in its fulness in heavenly surroundings.

Once again we may note a contrast with the inheritance promised to Israel, viz:—material and earthly blessing—blessing, by the way, for which that nation still waits, but which will surely come to it when prophetic scriptures such as Psalm lxxii. and Isaiah lx. have their complete fulfilment.

What then is the Christian portion referred to here in Titus? First of all, we are directed to consider something which took place before the world began, before time was. In eternity past, God made this promise of eternal life. Note the contrast. On the one hand, earthly blessing, such as was promised to Israel (see Deut. vii. 12-15 etc.); such as also the “sheep” in the parable of Matthew xxv. will be invited to enter upon, the Lord saying “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you *from* the foundation of the world” (verse 34). On the other, the heavenly blessing of the church, covered here by the expression “eternal life”, is something which springs from a promise made by God *before* the world began. These distinctions, even if they appear small, are never-

theless important because they make it quite clear that Christian privileges are different in kind to those of God's earthly people.

But we need to enquire: To whom was God's promise before the world began made? Mankind had not begun to exist. So can we doubt that this was a promise of the Godhead to Christ? No believer will question the worthiness of the Lord Jesus to receive something altogether special for Himself. Furthermore, we may learn from Proverbs viii that His delights were with the sons of men, for whom indeed He would in due time give Himself. It would appear therefore that one of the secrets of the past eternity is here disclosed for our faith—that eternal life was the promise of God before the world began. What a sublime revelation!

Notice, too, that Paul speaks of God as the One that cannot lie. Why does he do this? Later in the epistle (Ch. i. 12) we learn that lying was a characteristic sin of the Cretans, even as it is a besetting sin of mankind generally today. Wicked leaders have boasted of what can be achieved by deliberate and persistent lying. Says Paul, "eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." What confidence, what assurance, what certainty this gives! God's promises are sure: *He cannot lie.*

Here is divine comfort for the simplest believer in this day of unrelieved failure and frustration. What God has promised will surely come to pass because *God has said it.* Moreover, the fact that what He has purposed is for the glory of His beloved Son puts fulfilment beyond all possibility of doubt.

#### IV. THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S WORD THROUGH PREACHING.

In considering the previous phrase attention was directed back to the past eternity when God's promise of eternal life was made, and forward to the future when the promise will be fulfilled. In this last expression there is something for the present time—the manifestation of God's word through preaching.

One last contrast with Old Testament history will aid our understanding. Moses was the mediator through whom God spoke to Israel. The book of Deuteronomy records some of the powerful addresses and pleadings by which he sought to prepare the people for entry into the promised land. But the days of preparation came to an end: Moses died, and Joshua assumed the leadership while the people entered upon their inheritance. Anticipation gave place most definitely to realisation.

Does anything comparable with this take place during the lifetime on earth of the believer today? Definitely, No; save in a spiritual way as, by faith, and by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, he enjoys the earnest in his heart of good things to come. For the Christian realisation of the hope has to await the coming of Christ to take the complete company of God's elect to heaven. In the meantime the revelation of all that God has in mind has come to men through the preaching that was committed to Paul by the commandment of God our Saviour.

How important then the preaching of the apostle was! We know he did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God as it had been revealed to him, and the believer today should value every word of it, and in his measure endeavour to pass the good news on to others.

E. A. PETTMAN

*(The above are notes of an address given at Wildfell Hall, Catford, London, 2nd December, 1961).*

## THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS

### V. 1st Epistle, chapter ii., verses 13-20

IN this section, Paul and the two fellow-workers linked with him in writing the epistle give added reason for their thankfulness to God for the believers in Thessalonica, refer to the persecution which those believers were experiencing, and for the second time mention the truth of the Lord's coming again.



God is above all, and His thoughts and ways are lofty and exalted far above those of men, and the very opposite of Satan's; "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah lv. 8-9).

For instance, a man will care for his servant while there is profitable service to be obtained, but not afterwards. The world will be friendly in fair weather, but very indifferent when things are adverse, as the prodigal son proved in the far country (Luke xv.). Satan twice entered into Judas (Luke xxii. 3; John xiii. 27) in order to bring about the terrible deed of destroying Jesus, but he abandoned him to his solemn fate of suicide as soon as the Lord was betrayed into the hands of His enemies.

These are not God's ways. His faithfulness is unto all generations, and His mercy endureth for ever. He watched over the Thessalonian believers in their troubles, and moved His servant Paul to send Timothy to them to show them they were not forgotten; afterwards He caused this letter to be written to them for their lasting support and blessing.

The eight verses now before us are full of just the strengthening and encouragement those believers needed (and ourselves also), and contain four main points. First, the Thessalonians had not been misled by Paul in his visit to their city—his message to them was the word of God. Second, the persecution they were suffering was not a strange unusual thing, but only what had already happened to other (Jewish) Christians. Third, the apostle had not forgotten or abandoned them, but had the strongest desire to be with them again, for they were his great joy. Fourth, the full truth of God's gracious working and blessing would soon be entirely known at the Lord's second coming.

Verse 13: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

There could not be "the word of God" unless God had spoken. And He has spoken, a truth which Satan would deny or nullify, but without success for those who hearing the word simply believe it. At sundry times and in divers manners He spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, and hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. Those who heard have passed on the message verbally and in the inspired writings of the Bible, and so God speaks today through His written completed word, the Holy Scriptures.

We know that the Bible is the word of God by its effect upon us as we receive it as such and believe it. It effectually works in those that believe. How the divine message worked in the Thessalonians we are told in the first chapter of this epistle; here the solid ground of their faith and blessing is pointed out. Let us ever value and hold fast to the Scriptures, for many do not today. Thus in a book published within the last two years in a popular paper-back edition, the writer dares to say, "God is the Author not of the Bible, but of the life in which the authors of the Bible partake, and of which they tell in such imperfect human words as they could command . . . The words of a man, assuming that they are the deliberate expression of his meaning, command just the measure of authority which we recognise in the man himself. Thus the words of the epistle to the Romans carry just as much weight as we are prepared to allow to Paul as a religious teacher."

The writer of these words is no doubt a highly intellectual and learned man, but in them he merely shows his unbelief. He has evidently no real faith that the Scriptures are God-breathed and have God's authority. The authority *he* finds in the Bible is "the authority of religious genius," and of the prophets he declares, "it is not their words that are inspired—as one might say perhaps of "automatic writing"—it is the men who are inspired," and he adds, "in the Bible we must acknowledge the authority which belongs intrinsically to genius." \*

\* "The authority of the Bible," pages 27, 39, 40, by Professor G. H. Dodd, General Director of the new translation of the Bible now proceeding.

All this is just unbelief, and the human pride which excludes God in order to exalt man. It is a modern form of Rationalism, concerning which it has been said, "Nothing is proved by the system so denominated but the total absence of all divine intelligence, a poverty associated with intellectual pretension, an absence of moral judgment, a pettiness of observation on what is external, with a blindness to divine and infinite fulness in the substance, which would be contemptible through its false pretensions, if it were not a subject of pity, because of those in whom these pretensions are found . . . The haughtiness which excludes God, because it is incompetent to discover Him, and then talks of His work, and meddles with His weapons . . . can prove nothing but its own contemptible folly . . . The writer must be forgiven for speaking plainly in these days on this point. The pretensions of infidel reason infect even Christians.†

Such Rationalism is in fact irrational, for it amounts to denying that God is able to do what is well within man's power to do. A human father can cause a letter to be written to his son in such a way that the son, on receiving it, is certain from its contents that his father and no one else is the author, and on submitting to its authority he gains the profit of his father's loving wisdom and knowledge. Yet the rationalists will not accept that God can give the Bible a power in the conscience of the reader which proves to him that it *is* the writing of God, bringing untold blessing to those who submit to its, to His authority.

As to other writings which claim to be sacred, none can compare in any way with Scripture. Take for instance the closing words of the Apocrypha (II Maccabees xv. 38)—"And here will I make an end. And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto." To put such writing on a level with Holy Scripture is just blasphemous.

† "Synopsis of the Books of the Bible," Preface, pages xi.-xii., by J. N. Darby.

It is quite clear that had the Thessalonians given to Paul's preaching "just as much weight" as they were "prepared to allow to Paul as a religious teacher," our verse 13 could never have been written. Instead, they received the message as being in truth the word of God.

Verses 14-16: "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

It is settling to know that the troubles which come upon us come to others also. Here the Gentile believers are reminded that those Jews who had become Christians before them, had also suffered persecution, while Peter writing to suffering Jewish believers reminds them that the same afflictions were accomplished in their brethren that are in the world. The fact of persecution showed that these Thessalonians had not been misled, but were truly on right lines: they were not secret disciples, but were known as Christians who gathered together as such, forming the Christian church or assembly in the place, just as did the assemblies of God in Judaea in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit gives a solemn description of the unbelieving Jewish nation, guilty of breaking the law as we know, killing the prophets God had sent to them, and now responsible for the most fearful sin of killing the Lord Jesus come to them in grace. We know too that as a nation they refused the choice blessings of the Gospel made known by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and had stoned Stephen and persecuted the apostles, endeavouring to hinder Gentiles getting the blessing they themselves rejected. Thus they put themselves in the position where there only remained wrath for the nation, wrath which was poured out upon them nearly twenty years later when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70.

We do well to remember that a greater day of wrath is to come, when Christendom itself becomes apostate. Let us continue in the fear of God, steadfast in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the four remaining verses of our present portion, Paul shows himself full of the Spirit's affections and desires towards these converts. "But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

He had been driven from them by persecution but not separated in heart, and had made more than one effort to visit them again for their mutual joy, but Satan had been allowed to hinder him. However, God turns all for the good of His own, and the hindrance no doubt ensured that Paul should preach elsewhere, besides providing the occasion for the writing of this epistle ready for its place in Scripture.

When the Lord comes again, Satan's power will be finally set aside for Christians; there will be no more separations then, but glory, joy and crowns of rejoicing. Let us be greatly encouraged in our service for the Lord while waiting for Him.

W. H. L. GRAHAM

## THE CHOICE OF A PRINCE

THE Old Testament is silent as to the interval between the time when Pharaoh's daughter returned Moses to his mother to be nursed and his visit to his brethren to look upon their burdens. Nevertheless the Holy Spirit has not left us in ignorance of what this servant of God felt in his heart before publicly choosing the side of his brethren. Hebrews xi. 24-27 tells us of the conflict which took place in Moses' mind, and of the considerations which led him to make the decision which shaped the remainder of his life.

## THE REFUSAL

Had Moses been guided by merely human thinking, he would have had every reason to say: How wonderful that God should give me the opportunity to help my people by bringing me into the court of Pharaoh: my position will enable me to ease their lot. It is probable that Pharaoh had no son: we only read of his daughter. That being so, Moses, as adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, would stand a good chance of becoming ruler of Egypt. What a fine opportunity that would afford for the deliverance of his fellow-countrymen from their slavery! Not by his own exertions, but by the providence of God surely, he was in the position which offered such possibilities.

But when Moses had become great, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Undoubtedly courage was required to say "No" to such an attractive offer. Besides, was he not showing base ingratitude to his benefactress who had rescued him in infancy from the very jaws of death? Was there any harm in occupying such a high position in the royal household? Could he not serve in Egypt? These, and perhaps other considerations, must have besieged the heart of the young prince. Perhaps they caused him sleepless nights!

Moses' refusal was the outcome of his faith. Thrusting aside all natural reasonings, he exercised faith—that faith which is the substantiation of things hoped for, the conviction as to things his natural eye could not see.

How far have we progressed in the pathway of faith? How often do our own reasonings tip the scale when we are faced with an important decision! Are we able, in the strength of faith, to eliminate from our consideration those things which are seen? Moses did; and he dares to say "No".

When the ruler of this world (John xiv. 30) approaches us through one of his satellites with seductive offers, let us answer him, as Moses did, with a decisive "No". Let us say "No" when our own flesh, or some other person, would endeavour to seduce us, as was the case with Joseph (Genesis xxxix.). Satan knows how to flavour his temptations to suit our taste. To overcome him, faith needs to be much in exercise.

## THE CHOICE

To refuse is in itself a negative thing. Moses took a very positive decision, though this was in fact implicit in his refusal. Saying "No" to the world must entail saying "Yes" to God. Moses chose (as Paul records) the reproach of Christ, though this was not specifically in his mind. His choice was not a frivolous one, the result of a sudden impulse. The word "esteeming" in verse 26 shows clearly that he weighed the consequences. In one scale of the balance, so to speak, he laid the treasures of Egypt and the pleasures of sin for a season; in the other, the reproach of Christ. The balance turned in favour of the latter, for he had respect unto the recompense. Not that reward is the object before the children of God, but it is important support and encouragement.

It is most important and instructive to note the emphatic statement of scripture that Moses thoroughly considered his decision, and that the action he took was BY FAITH.

## THE RECOMPENSE

Following with care the history of Moses, we shall find he met with little else than disappointment. A rebellious and contradictory people made the utmost demands upon him, yet, so far as can be gleaned from the record, there was no question of recompense during his lifetime. Nevertheless he was not dismayed either by adversity or lack of response on the part of the people. He had taken up his work for God in faith without considering what might befall him, or any benefit he would reap for himself. That faith which had been the motive of his resolution provided the strength for him to persevere "as seeing Him who is invisible." As for recompense, God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews xi. 6). May it suffice us all to await such commendation as the Lord shall Himself give when we appear before Him!

It is wise and necessary to notice that Moses clung to the promises of God which he knew, and had learned maybe from his parents. Scripture tells us that faith is "by a report, but the report by God's word" (Romans x. 17 New Tr.). Faith is impossible apart from the word of God.

(Adapted from translation of an article in the Dutch  
*Messenger of Peace*, by J. MOL Senr.)

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# Words of Help

from the Scripture of Truth

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# WORDS OF HELP

A Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## CORRESPONDENCE

*St. Leonards-on-Sea, May, 1962*

Dear Mr. Editor,

Mr. Chamberlain's article about the N.E.B. (see May issue) is most timely, and will, I trust, show the true character of the new translation to many who have been attracted to it.

May I add one point? In all the criticisms which have been published I have not seen any mention of the serious alteration of I John ii.2. The well-known A.V. "propitiation for our sins" reads in the N.E.B. "remedy for the defilement of our sins." This is not a translation of the Greek, and gives an entirely different meaning to the passage. Propitiation supposes a wrong to have been committed for which recompense is made, but defilement may be accidental and not involve guilt. Dust may be removed with a clothes brush, but a stain needs drastic treatment. Only the precious blood of Christ could remove the guilt of our sins.

Yours in Christ, J. E. Mayo

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*(Concluded from inside back cover)*

of John the Baptist "for a season" (John v.35). Many put their hands to the plough, but quickly looked back, proving their unfitness to produce fruit. And the Lord, in the interpretation of this parable, unveiled the cause of this failure. The hindrance was within—the unbroken spirit, the adamant heart. "To this man will I look," saith Jehovah, "even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah lxvi.2).

(From *The Bible Treasury*, February 1912  
W. J. Hocking)

## ON WHAT ROCK?

(Read: Matthew xvi.1—xvii.8,

but especially Chapter xvi.13-20)

IF we would find the meaning of some difficult or disputed passage of scripture, it is most necessary that we should begin by examining carefully the context in which it is found, and the particular truth or aspect of truth on which the Holy Spirit lays emphasis. For the word of God is not a conglomeration of disjointed "texts" to be used as missiles for controversy; it is a living whole, God's message to us by which He seeks to bring us into closer fellowship with Himself.

If we approach the above passage in this way, we at once discover that the all-important matter, the central theme, is that wonderful confession of Peter's "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

This confession stands in sharp contrast with the insolent demand of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who combined their forces to put the Lord to the test. "Show us a sign from heaven" they said, in obstinate rejection of all that He had done to show Who He was. And if the leaders rejected Him utterly, the common people had equally failed to understand that He was Israel's long-desired Messiah. They saw in Him merely a wonder-worker, such as a resurrected prophet might be expected to be, and even so their opinions were conflicting. So that Peter's confession, unhesitating and definite as it was, stood out like a rock amid the shifting sands of men's thoughts. For it was not just Peter's opinion, but the revelation of the Father to him, as the Lord Jesus told him.

But in passing we should observe that this revelation was a fulfilment of the Lord's word "Unto him that hath shall more be given." Peter had believed the simple testimony of his brother Andrew (John i.41), he had followed on to know the saving power of Jesus in his own life (Luke v.8), and so was able to receive that which was hidden from the wise and prudent (Matthew xi.25), the revelation of Jesus as the Son of the living God.

## THE NEW TESTIMONY

In consequence of Israel's refusal of Him as the Christ, the Lord commands His disciples not to speak of Him in that way, and He turns to something more important than the testimony to Israel—His own sufferings and death and resurrection. From this time onwards this was to be His theme. But His sufferings were to be the prelude to His glory, and so we have next the Transfiguration scene, the foretaste of the coming glory. And though Peter had confessed Him to be the Son of God, yet even he had not grasped the truth that He must in all things have the pre-eminence, far above the greatest names of old time. Peter's proposal then, to build three tabernacles for the three glorious figures was at once brushed aside by the Father's testimony: "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye *Him*."

This then is the central theme; this is what the Holy Spirit would underline for us: **who is He?** Not a prophet, not even the greatest of the prophets; not the promised Elijah—He is infinitely greater even than Elijah glorified. He is the Son of the living God, the Father's Beloved, in Whom His soul delights.

## PETER PRONOUNCED BLESSED

No wonder the Lord Jesus pronounced Peter blessed, to have learned such a tremendous fact! "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven."

But if Simon Bar-Jona was his natural name—his name as an Israelite, the Lord Jesus had also given him a new name: "Thou shalt be called Cephas" (John i.42), meaning a stone, or a rock. "Peter" is the Greek name corresponding to this Aramaic name "Cephas". Just as the Lord turned from the testimony to Israel to a new and far greater work, so, after blessing His disciple in his natural Israelite name "Simon Bar-Jona," He passes at once to the new name He Himself had bestowed. And as Peter had been blessed in the Father's revelation to him, the Lord Jesus now adds something else: "And *I* (the "I" is emphatic) say unto thee, that thou art Peter,

and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it."

Can we possibly doubt, then, that by "this rock" the Lord means that wonderful truth to which Peter had just given utterance?

Israel, the nation to whom as Messiah He had been sent, to fulfil the promises made to the fathers (Romans xv.8), was for the time to be put aside in favour of a new work, a building of the Lord's own, which He calls "My church." We think of His warning against building a house upon the sand, and His commendation of the man who built upon rock, or, if you will, upon the rock—that ground which has this character—and we see how needful it was that this great building which He would raise should have an unshakeable foundation. Not men's thoughts or opinions; not man's tradition or teaching; not anything of man at all, whose breath is in his nostrils, could possibly be a suitable foundation upon which to erect this grand new work. Upon a divine foundation, a divine revelation, the revelation of the Son of God Himself, the Church could be stably founded. Only thus could it possibly endure all the onslaughts of "the gates of hades"—of Satan, who had the power of death, but who through the death and resurrection of the Son of God is a defeated foe.

If we examine the context then, we find that this is what the Holy Spirit directs our minds to—Peter's tremendous confession, followed by the announcement first of the new building itself, and then of Christ's death and resurrection—the essential prelude to the founding of the Church.

For until, through the Cross, redemption was an accomplished fact, the Lord Jesus could not enter into His glory; and until He was glorified the Holy Spirit could not come (John vii.39).

And what of Peter, whose confession led the Lord to unfold His own purpose? He was, along with the other apostles, the Father's gift to His Son (John xvii.6). Can we not see how gratifying it was to the ears of the blessed Saviour to hear His apostle owning the truth that the Father had taught him? And hence He associates His apostle in a most remarkable

way with the work He was going to carry out, and with the foundation upon which it must rest. "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." "Peter", as we have seen, means rock or stone, and the play upon the word must for ever bring to mind, when we think of the Church's divine foundation, the man who first made that grand confession.

The strange notion that by the expression "this rock" the Lord means Peter himself is contrary to the whole tenor of the passage. And surely if the Lord had meant that, it was simple enough to have said "On thee I will build My Church."

### BUILDING THE CHURCH

It is certainly true that Peter played a most prominent part in the *building* of the Church, but even in this he was probably surpassed by Paul, who could say "I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Cor.xv.10).

Again, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul writes of the Church being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph.ii.20). Here it is the labour and teaching of the apostles and (New Testament) prophets that is referred to, but any special mention of Peter is noticeably absent. Indeed it may be said without possibility of contradiction that not one sentence in the New Testament gives any support whatever to this forced interpretation that the Church is founded on Peter, or to the deduction from it that he was to be its earthly head.

In the council in Acts xv. he played a valuable part, but the summing up of the matter was undertaken, not by Peter, but by James. Moreover, although on that occasion Peter maintained the liberty of the Gentile converts quite firmly, yet on a different occasion he himself had to be rebuked by Paul for giving way to the Judaizers on this very matter (Galatians ii.14). Such is man!

A scripture often advanced as showing the headship of Peter is Luke xxii.31, 32: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter needed the Lord's special intercession, because he was in special danger, after his denial,

of giving up entirely, as Judas did. Thus his special experience of the Lord's grace to him made him specially fitted to strengthen the other apostles. This quite obviously refers to the time immediately after the resurrection, when Peter, to whom the Lord appeared, was able to assure his brethren that He had indeed risen, and to confirm their wavering faith. But to drag in this scripture to support the supposed primacy of Peter shows how really foreign to the truth this teaching is.

## THE LORD'S PROMISE TO PETER

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

What does “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” mean?

It is perhaps unnecessary to say that it is not the keys of *heaven*. The idea of Peter holding the keys of heaven is a mere medieval superstition. No, the *kingdom* of heaven is upon earth. It is the sphere of heaven's rule here.

First John the Baptist, then the Lord Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. When Israel refused to repent the Lord began to clothe His message in parabolic form, unfolding “the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven.” One of those mysteries (that is, secrets hitherto unrevealed) was the absence of the King and the presence and tolerance of evil in the kingdom, as shown in the parable of the tares. That was quite different from the Old Testament picture, and was a thing “kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matthew xiii.35).

Thus the kingdom of heaven in this sense is not future, but is already in being. Its subjects are those who acknowledge, or profess to acknowledge, the authority of the absent King.

The keys speak of power to open the door into the kingdom, and this power the Lord promised to bestow upon Peter. Accordingly we find Peter privileged to open the door by his proclamation of the gospel, first to Jews on the day of Pentecost, and then again to Gentiles, in the case of Cornelius and his friends.

That door, once opened, remains open till the Lord Himself rises to shut it (Luke xiii.25-30). We may profitably compare with this the Lord's denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, whose teaching shut the kingdom of heaven against men, both themselves and others (Matthew xxiii.13).

## BINDING AND LOOSING

In order to understand this second half of the promise, we must notice that it is not confined to Peter, but is repeated in Matthew xviii.18 to any local assembly or church which had the faith and obedience necessary to act in His Name. In that scripture the importance of the context once more is paramount. The whole chapter breathes the spirit of humility and forgiveness, of seeking the lost or erring, so that "loosing" clearly has the sense of forgiving, where there was repentance, and "binding" of the reverse. How different is this from the ecclesiastical pretension which has been attached to this phrase!

Not that one would deny apostolic authority, such as we see Peter exercising, for example, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, where the divine ratification of Peter's "binding" of their sin upon them was seen in their death. Similarly Paul speaks of delivering some to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme (I Timothy i.20). Again in I Corinthians v., the wicked person was to be put out from their midst, i.e., his sin "bound"; while in 2 Corinthians ii.6-10 they are exhorted to forgive him, i.e., to "loose" his sin. The action, however, in each case was the assembly's, though the apostle joins his authority to the first and approves the second. So that neither here nor in Matthew xviii. was apostolic authority essential: hence the idea of "apostolic succession" can be dispensed with.

Alternative meanings of "binding and loosing" are adopted in the New English Bible, namely, those of "forbidding" and "allowing". Certainly the word translated "loose" is used by the Lord in Matthew v. 19 in the sense of relaxing the force of a commandment: "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, etc." Similarly in John v.18, using the same



word, the Jews accused Him of breaking the Sabbath, i.e., of acting as though the command was not binding. The word "binding" was also used in the sense of enforcing a command, though not in the Bible.

However, this cannot be the meaning in the scriptures we are examining; first, because it in no way suits Matthew xviii.18; and secondly, because in the Lord's parting charge to the apostles in Matthew xxviii, He gave no hint of bestowing on them any such power to decide what should be forbidden or allowed. On the contrary, His words are "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." So also in I Corinthians xiv.37 Paul disowns any such power: "The things which I write are the commandments of the Lord" he says.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

## ELIJAH AND ELISHA

Elijah and Elisha were prophets at the time when the house of Ahab was reigning in Israel. Ahab was the king of whom scripture records: "Ahab the son of Omri did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him" (I Kings xvi. 30). In his day Hiel the Beth-elite built Jericho. This was a direct challenge to the pronouncement of God by the mouth of Joshua, and was after the fashion of those referred to in the prophecy of Malachi (Ch. ii. 17): "Where is the God of judgment?"

In a day characterised by rejection of the word of God and apostasy, the Lord raised up two prophets, who appear to have been detached from the order of worship at Jerusalem. As such they typified the service of the Lord Jesus. When God's people are failing in their responsibility, the Lord often works apart from the institutions which He gave them.

Furthermore, this failure on the part of man provided the opportunity for God to display His own resources. In Elijah and his service there shone forth God's majesty and justice; in Elisha, His grace and compassion. Thus was displayed in a spiritual way that which took place when the five thousand were fed: the place which for man was a desert became one for the abundance of Christ.

Though the two prophets had much in common, there was a characteristic difference between their ministries. The witness of Elijah was *against* the evil of his day. The result for him was rejection and suffering. In this way he prefigured John the Baptist as well as the Lord Jesus in one aspect of His service, namely, His exposure of the sins of God's people, particularly of the Pharisees by whom He was despised and rejected. On the contrary the service of Elisha was marked by power used in grace on behalf of others. He was a type of the Lord Jesus as the One who stooped in grace to meet the needs of all who sought His help, exercising His power on their behalf. He went about everywhere "doing good" (Acts x. 38).

The sufferings of Elijah and his rejection by the people finished with his ascension. On the contrary, Elisha broke down all resistance by the power of the Lord, and was honoured continually by the poor as well as the rich. In this respect the one is a type of the Lord Jesus in His heavenly position; the other typifies His earthly appointment as King of Israel.

Elijah means "the Lord is Jehovah." Because the people had been unfaithful to Jehovah, his service was connected with a series of judgments —

- (a) there shall not be dew nor rain on the earth  
(I Kings xvii. 1);
- (b) the prophets of Baal are slain (Ch. xviii. 40);
- (c) the judgment of Ahab and Jezebel is announced  
(Ch. xxi. 20-24);
- (d) on two occasions captains and their fifties are consumed by fire (II Kings 1. 9-12);
- (e) the death of Ahaziah is predicted as a punishment from God (Ch. 1. 16).

Elijah seldom appeared in public. Only once do we read that he brought blessing to an individual—the widow of Zarephath (I Kings xvii.23). Elisha means "God is a Saviour." He gave assistance and deliverance to wood-cutters, the sons of the prophets: also to kings. Nearly all the miracles he performed were for blessing, as much for the individual as for the multitude. Only three times did he act in judgment; (a) the

children of Bethel (2 Kings ii.24); (b) the leprosy of Gehazi (Ch.v.27); and (c) the lord in the gate of Samaria (Ch.vii.2).

Elisha companied with persons of every rank in life. Though poor himself, he made others rich. He carried on, by a service in which grace and victory over death were prominent, the witness which Elijah had begun in righteousness. Both acted with a view to recovering the people from idolatry to God.

(Adapted from a translation from the Dutch

*Messenger of Peace*, by J. Mol, Senr. of Baarn)

### JUDGMENT IN A DAY OF GRACE

Elsewhere in this magazine (see article on Elijah and Elisha) attention is drawn to three occasions during the ministry of Elisha when grace gave place to judgment. Unlike that of his distinguished predecessor, whose service in a different way was nevertheless acceptable to God, Elisha's ministry was essentially one of grace, and it is against this bright background that the severity of God's judgment of what was offensive to Him should be considered.

### THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BETH-EL CHILDREN

(See 2 Kings ii.23-25)

Elisha had donned Elijah's mantle, and had smitten the waters of Jordan so that they parted hither and thither for him to cross over in full view of the sons of the prophets, who thereupon acknowledged that "The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha." Moreover he had demonstrated, in type, his power over death by the healing of the waters of Jericho, so that "the waters were healed unto this day, *according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.*" There could be no question therefore that Elisha was now God's spokesman on the earth, and as such was entitled to the respect which his position and authority commanded.

On his way to Bethel, however, a number of little children from the city mocked him, saying, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head," in sarcastic disbelief of Elijah's ascension, thus belittling God's chosen representative. So Elisha

cursed them in the name of the Lord, and "there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." Thus their rejection of Elisha was requited.

This incident has a lesson for our day. Whilst there are no bounds to God's grace, He will not suffer men to despise and reject His Son with impunity. The nation of Israel crucified the Messiah, and, in consequence, their city was destroyed. His blood was, and has been ever since, upon them and upon their children.

The severity of the judgment in Elisha's day is underlined by the fact that the victims were children. This, however, serves to emphasize the seriousness with which God regards *disrespect for those He sends to speak for Him*. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God . . ."

Human sympathy for those who oppose the will of God for the glory of His Son is out of place. When Ishmael mocked Isaac, the child of God's promise, Abraham was instructed by God to hearken to the voice of Sarah and to send him away with his mother, though it grieved him to do so. Again, when the lame and the blind sought to impede David's entry into Jerusalem, no sympathy could be shown them (2 Samuel v.6-8).

## THE LEPROSY OF GEHAZI

(See 2 Kings v.20-27)

In the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian there had been a striking witness to the power of the God of Israel to heal, and the Lord Jesus Himself draws attention to the fact that this had been exercised on behalf of one who was outside the chosen nation and had accordingly no claim upon Jehovah. It was therefore a sovereign act of God's mercy for the glory of His own Name.

Naaman's pride had already been offended by Elisha's use of a messenger to convey his instructions, and by the command to wash himself in Jordan rather than in the superior

rivers of Damascus. He was to be still further humbled after his cleansing—for pride is an abomination to God—by Elisha's refusal to accept any gift or reward at his hand. Naaman was being made to understand that God's salvation is a gift, and cannot be purchased by anything that man can offer. God can bestow upon the needy whatever they need, but there is nothing by which man can requite his great Benefactor.

How truly this sets forth the divine way of salvation. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" says Paul. And again, "The wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Gehazi's covetous behaviour however was designed to put a different complexion on the matter, and to leave Naaman with the impression that there was, after all, a contribution he could make. But Elisha discerns the evil way of his servant, and passes severe judgment upon him. In this we are reminded of the stricture upon Simon the sorcerer by the apostle Peter (see Acts viii. 20, 21), "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

Woe betide any servant of the Lord who fails, by word or gesture, to make clear to men that salvation depends wholly upon the grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! It is not of works, lest any man should boast.

## THE CRUSHING OF THE NOBLEMAN IN THE GATE OF SAMARIA

(see 2 Kings vii.1, 2 and 17-20)

Once again God's grace was about to be dispensed through the medium of the word of Elisha. Samaria was besieged; the city faced death by famine or the sword of their enemies. The situation was beyond the wit or strength of Israel to retrieve; the outlook was hopeless. Yet Elisha declares: "Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, *in the gate of Samaria.*"

The judgment which had come upon the people for their disloyalty to Jehovah was an exact fulfilment of the word of God by Moses (compare 2 Kings vi.24-29 with Deuteronomy xxviii.53-55), and they should have recognised the power of God's word and repented. Yet that stubborn unbelief which led them to prefer idols to the living God refused to recognise His grace when He promised them relief from their suffering. Thus we read: "Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof."

But the word Elisha had spoken was the word of the Lord, and the thing which the prophet foretold came to pass. There is nothing too hard for the Lord, and the story unfolds how deliverance came from the most unexpected quarter, concluding with the statement "It came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king." Then fell the judgment upon the lord on whose hand the king leaned: "And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died." Thus was the word of the Lord vindicated once again, and unbelief judged.

The lesson of these incidents in the life of Elisha is one to which all men should pay heed. Whilst God is rich in mercy, and "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy ii.4), He will judge unsparingly those who despise the PERSON, or the ATONING WORK, or the WORD of His Son. E. A. Pettman

### STONY GROUND HEARERS

(Note on: Mark iv. 16, 17)

The main difference between this class of hearers and the preceding (Wayside hearers—see March, 1962 issue *Words of Help*), with which it is coupled by the adverbial phrase, "in like manner," is that in the former instance the hardness and impenetrability were found on the surface, but in this case the density occurred at a little distance beneath. In outward appearance the exterior of the soil was actually more promising, but the resistance by the rocky subsoil to the

growth of the seed was none the less effectual. Under normal conditions the sun's rays should have caused the seed to root more firmly and deeply as it struck downwards in search of moisture. But under these circumstances the heart exercised a withering influence, hastening the total destruction of the growth.

These persons are characterised by superficiality. When they hear the word, immediately (Matthew, Mark) they receive it with joy (Matthew, Mark, Luke). The conscience, that fierce self-accuser within the heart, is clearly not awakened. Repentance does not rejoice, as these are said to do, but sits in sackcloth and ashes. Confession of sins is made in tears, not with joy. Peter's audience, when they heard the word on the day of Pentecost, were "sawn asunder" in their hearts. (The word "gladly"—Acts ii.41—is an acknowledged interpolation. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, but not prior to repentance—Gal.v.22—for examples of rejoicing following faith, see Acts viii.8; xvi.34) These in the parable, however, receive the word because of the pleasure it affords by its novelty, or its beauty, or the like. The result is a rapid growth which by its fair promise may deceive some, but such profession, as soon as tribulation or persecution on account of the word arises, quickly withers away.

In Matthew and Mark they are said to be stumbled by affliction and persecution; while Luke, giving the side of individual responsibility, says they fall away or depart. It may be noted that this is an early intimation by the Lord of the persecution for the word's sake which would be the lot of His disciples.

There were many such shallow, fickle hearers in our Lord's days; there have been many such since. It is written that the common people heard Him gladly, but the priests soon persuaded them to ask Pilate to spare Barabbas and to crucify Jesus. A sign in Jerusalem, and many crowded to follow Him! A "hard saying," and many turned back to walk no more with Him (John ii.23; vi.60, 66)! They "endured for a while," but it is a little while only, even as they rejoiced in the testimony

*(Continued at foot of inside front cover)*

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# Words of Help

*from the Scripture of Truth*

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# WORDS OF HELP

A Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## MANY CALLED . . . FEW CHOSEN

(Matthew xx. 16; xxii. 14)

The calling is the general invitation which God issues in His own authority and love; His choice is the exercise of His absolute sovereignty as the Supreme Ruler of all. In the former of these passages, all the labourers called to work in the vineyard were given the full day's wages of a penny. This equality of treatment the lord of the vineyard defends because it was his own right to place the last first, and the first last. The sovereign right that chose a few out of many to work in his vineyard, had an equal right to reward them as he would.

In the second instance (xxii. 14) the phrase is used at the conclusion of the parable of the marriage feast made for the king's son. It is the divine comment upon the widespread refusals of the royal invitation, and the daring slight upon the wedding garment. The invitation was to the many, but the chosen guests at the feast were few comparatively. In spite, however, of man's wilfulness God exercises His sovereign choice, and in the end His will is done, for only few were chosen.

We suggest that our readers would find some profit in studying the various passages of scripture which refer to the subject of the calling of God. In some cases it will be found to signify those who are invited of God, but who do not all respond, while in other cases it refers only to those who respond, that is, to those who are called and chosen (I Cor. i. 24; Rev. xvii. 14).

W.J.H

## THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS

### VI. Chapter iii.

“Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: that no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.”

It will be noticed that this chapter records in some detail Paul's exercise of heart for the Thessalonians, and the measures he took to succour them, as if to emphasise his positive approach to the problems which confronted him. In similar circumstances we might have said: “All we can do is to pray for them,” and been content to leave it at that. The apostle, however, was intensely purposeful and practical, and his prayers doubtless had the same character. He would go to them himself if he could, but the way was not yet clear for him to do so (see Chapter ii, verse 18). In the meantime the Lord sanctioned his sending Timothy, who was available and willing to undertake the risks involved.

Even so it should be observed that Paul does not assume authority over the younger man, ordering him about as a subordinate. He refers to Timothy in endearing and courteous terms as “our brother and fellow-worker under God in the glad tidings of Christ” (New Tr.). Thus the supreme authority of God to dispose of His servants as He will, and the direct answerability of each labourer to God, are preserved. Another occasion will be remembered when the apostle desired Apollos to undertake a special mission, but the latter could not see his way to accept it (see I Corinthians xvi.12). And there apparently the matter was left, with no attempt by the apostle to compel, or override the judgment of, his co-worker.

What was now the apostle's particular concern for the Thessalonians? In the Lord's explanation of the well-known

parable of the sower (Matthew xiii), He said, "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." Now these converts had received the word with joy (chapter i. verse 6), and very soon tribulation and persecution arose (Acts xvii, I Thess. ii, 14, 2 Thess. i, 4). The danger then was that they might lack root in themselves and become "offended", and this it was that pressed so much upon the apostle.

The natural thought might be that if I turn from idols to serve the living and true God, I must have God's approval, and therefore may expect peace and ease for the rest of my time in this world. The truth is just the opposite. While they remain on earth, believers are in the enemy's territory and are subject to his attacks; they are "appointed" unto afflictions; and the knowledge of this beforehand is very strengthening when troubles come. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. So Peter wrote, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Today it is the peace and security of Christians which is "strange", and we should be prepared for a change at any time, but assured that the same Lord will care for us as He did for those of long ago, and will bless us through His word.

Verses 5-8. "For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you; therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

Three times in these four verses we have the words "your faith." Here is the essential thing, that we believe; that our faith is in Christ and none else, a faith that endures through

life with all life's changes and testings. The tempter is Satan, and his aim is to turn souls away from the source of blessing. "Give up" he would say: "this faith of yours in someone you have never seen, which has brought on you such trouble; go back to the former days when you were ordinary sensible folk." Here was the apostle's concern. If they gave up, all was lost for them, and all his labour on their behalf was wasted. We may well sing, "Keep us, Lord, Oh keep us cleaving to Thyself, and *still believing*, till the hour of our receiving promised joys with Thee."

So Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, and to his relief and joy, Timothy returned to him with good news. The converts were maintaining their faith, showing that the word had truly taken root in them all. There was love between themselves, and how strengthening Christian love is in times of trial! We may also take it that they still had love towards the apostle. Instead of regretting the day he crossed their pathway, and hoping they might never set eyes on the man again, they treasured all they could remember of his visit to their city, and longed to see him once more. They were standing fast and firm in the Lord. This meant life to Paul. The Lord's work meant so much to him; it was so truly his life, that he declares, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

Let us remember that our faith matters. We may seem to ourselves insignificant, isolated units, of no importance to anyone. But we mean much to the Lord, and we little know how much to others, so that the individual stand in and for the faith matters a great deal. Let us hold on.

Verses 9-11. "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? Now God Himself and our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you."

Note the spirit of the apostle. These Christians caused him joy, joy for their sakes that their faith was standing the test of persecution, and joy for his own sake that his labour among them and since was not in vain. But he brings God in emphati-

cally. His joy was "before our God," which only a man keeping himself habitually in God's presence could say. He also takes the joy as from God, and gives thanks to Him for it. One aim of his in writing this was no doubt to make God more real to these converts. This surely is the Spirit's desire for us. As one writer of the last century put it: "Seek that, not the freshness of a soul just out of prison, but the deep and living power of a soul in constancy of communion with God, may be found in you, and pray for me and for fellow-saints that it may be so."

Note also, that as Paul felt the urge to visit these dear believers again, because of his love for them and joy over them, and to impart to them some further blessing, his procedure is not to attempt to force circumstances so as to make it possible, not to plot and plan and "pull the strings" to gain his purpose. Instead, he brings his longing to God, and prays or beseeches exceedingly night and day that God would so arrange it. This is emphasised in the next verse which can be read, "Now may Himself Who is our God and Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our way unto you."

In this connection it may be helpful to refer to Acts xvi. 6-10. On first reading these verses one might be tempted to regard the historical details given as somewhat laboured and irrelevant to the record of Paul's achievements. Nevertheless they are important as confirming how sensitive the apostle was to the varied means the Lord uses to direct His servants when they are on the alert for His guidance. Would that we knew a little more of this today! There might be rather less running hither and thither with scant evidence of divine approval.

Actually it appears that some years elapsed before Paul visited Thessalonica again (Acts xx.), but meanwhile here we have his desire and prayer for the assembly there, in the last two verses of the chapter before us. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

This inspired desire is worthy of much thought. If we had to choose one thing which would ensure holiness, we might well name separation from evil, for that is essential in an evil world, and in John xvii. the Lord Himself prayed "that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Here, however, is something positive, namely the exercise of love. Christian love is the activity of the Christian's new nature as born of God. God is love. Love is of God. Everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another. Faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

These words are very wonderful, and we are humbled as we realise how far short we come in answering to them in practice. It has been said that in essence, sin is selfishness, and love is the very opposite, the unselfishness of the believer set free from self and possessing Christ as a new centre and object. We are then to love the children of God; difficult if we look at one another's faults and imperfections; easier when we think that they have trusted in the same Saviour Whom we have trusted in, and that as we belong to Him we belong also to one another.

Then we are to abound in love toward all. What about those who make themselves our enemies, such as the unbelievers who persecuted the Thessalonian believers, and those who despise our faith and show hostility to us because we are the Lord's? "Love ye your enemies," He said, "and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke vi.35).

Walking in this spirit will keep us near to God and deliver from self-indulgence and the allowance of sin in our lives; in other words, will produce holiness. Thus the heart is untroubled because free from blame. And if we are misunderstood now, and our love despised or little reciprocated, yet all will be shown in its true colours in the day of manifestation,

when the Lord Jesus comes in glory with all His saints.

W. H. L. Graham

## ELISHA, THE MAN OF GOD

The instruction to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his place was the last of the three intimations which Elijah received from God in Mount Horeb. It is very remarkable that this was the first he carried out. How and where did he find Elisha? I Kings xix.19 records: "So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth." Elisha had lived a secluded life on his father's farm. But God knew him and wished to use him in His service.

The Lord does not confine His calling and gifts to learned men, or to kings and priests. He called a farmer's son to perform an important spiritual task. That this was in no way unique is shown by His calling similarly Amos from among the herdsmen of Tekoa to be a prophet of the Lord. The eleven apostles of the Lord also were not chosen to be ambassadors of Christ in this world because of their education and social training (see I Corinthians i.26). Nevertheless it is important that a person called to special service should have shown himself diligent in performance of the duties of everyday life, doing them "as unto the Lord." Such an one can be given a task in God's service with confidence.

### *Not an easy decision*

When Elijah passed by, he cast his mantle on Elisha with the view, it would seem, that Elisha should take it and wear it, thus becoming the servant and successor of Elijah (see 2 Kings ii.12, 13). Elisha understood the meaning of this action, and immediately left the oxen, ran after Elijah and said, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." The answer of Elijah was, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?"

It was not an easy decision that Elisha was asked to make. From the fact that he was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen



we may deduce that his father was a well-to-do farmer. Probably Elisha was heir to his father's possessions. But Elijah crossed his pathway and called him to link himself with the rejected prophet of the Lord. On the one hand a parental heritage, a care-free future, a good income: on the other, an uncertain existence in the company of a man who roamed the countryside as an exile. Would Elisha leave his native surroundings and his father's home to be the companion and assistant of Elijah?

Little wonder there was a struggle within Elisha! Though ready, by the constraint of God, to follow Elijah, there was, nevertheless, some hesitation to leave those dear to him by natural ties. In any case Elijah quietly waited for him to decide, and he did not take long over the matter. And when he gave his decision, it was in the affirmative. By killing the team of oxen with which he was ploughing, he, as the saying is, "burnt his boats behind him." Having thus finished with his secular occupation, he rose and followed Elijah.

### *Successor of Elijah*

We hear nothing of the service of Elisha until the day that Elijah ascended to heaven. That is logical enough, for Elisha was to be prophet *in the place of* Elijah. Their respective ministries could not be simultaneous. While Elijah was on earth, Elisha served him in the lowliest of duties. Not until Elijah was removed from the scene did Elisha's own proper ministry begin.

In the meantime, Elisha was being educated in the school of God, as were Joseph, Moses, David and many others before him. He who would be a power for God in public must first gather strength in quiet privacy. Why is there so much spiritual weakness with believers today? Is it not because they permit themselves so little time for private prayer and consideration of the word of God? For years Elisha was silent, but when he comes to the fore, it is evident that he has profited by his retirement.

*Three tests*

On his last journey with Elijah, Elisha was put to the test by three things:

- a By the word of Elijah, as he set out from Gilgal for Bethel: "Tarry here, I pray thee." This Elisha answered with firm resolve: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."
- b By the remark of the prophets of Bethel: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?" This was a temptation to indulge in self-pity in view of the personal loss he was about to suffer. From this trial he emerged successful.
- c By the question of Elijah: "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." From the response he made it is clear that Elisha understood his calling. For he asks the double portion of the firstborn son (see Deut. xxi.17). Wishing to follow in the footsteps of Elijah, Elisha felt he needed twice as much of his master's spirit.

In connection with this request of Elisha, Elijah answered: "Thou hast asked a hard thing." A natural man may be able to confer material riches on another, but he cannot convey spiritual power. The fulfilment of Elisha's wish was made dependent upon "if thou see me." The secret of spiritual power for a believer lies in beholding Christ in His ascended glory. An example of this will be found in Stephen (Acts vii.55): see also Hebrews xii.2, 3 and 2 Corinthians iii.18.

*The mantle of Elijah*

After the ascension of Elijah, Elisha's first action was to take hold of his own clothes and rend them in two pieces. An epoch of his life had closed. As earlier, on the important occasion of his calling, he had slaughtered the oxen, so now he rends his clothes: he regards former things as having passed away (see 2 Corinthians v.17). A new uniform, the mantle of Elijah, would be the symbol of his service henceforward. Beginning from the time of his master's ascension,

Elisha would serve in the place where the curse and death reigned, taking away the curse and bestowing life (2 Kings ii. 19-22). But heavenly glory was his starting-point.

With the mantle of Elijah in his hand, and calling upon the God of Elijah, Elisha smote the waters of Jordan so that he could pass over on dry ground. Jordan signifies the death of Christ, and the separation from the world this involves for the believer. Though these truths, as we know them today, were unknown to Elisha, yet, by his act of faith, he testified to victory over death and the grave as Elijah had done before him. Thus the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha, as the prophets of Jericho witnessed and declared (compare Acts iv.13).

These prophets recognised that the spirit of Elijah had passed to another, though they themselves had no share of it. From a long distance they had beheld what Elisha as well as Elijah had done by the power of God with the waters of Jordan. Their own faith was, however, inadequate. Perhaps we value and benefit from the ministry of others who show by word and deed that *they* are in communion with the Lord. But do we ourselves walk thus? Do we fix our eye upon the glorified Saviour in Heaven?

Lack of spiritual power was not the only thing that marked the young men of Jericho. They were slow to understand, and unbelieving, displaying much natural energy. For three days fifty strong men searched for the body of Elijah, despite Elisha's deprecation of their efforts. Their thoughts did not rise beyond the valleys and mountains of the earth: they could only think of death and a grave. They failed to understand that the power of God could remove a man from earth to heaven.

(Adapted from a translation from the Dutch  
"Messenger of Peace" by J. Mol, Senr., of Baarn)

## STEPHEN—OR, LIKENESS TO CHRIST

In the preceding article—"Elisha, the man of God"—the case of Stephen is referred to as showing how spiritual strength may be derived from looking upwards to Christ in glory. This example is worth further examination.

When "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" were required to deal with the difficulty which arose in the early Church over the distribution of bounty (see Acts vi.1-6), Stephen is the first named of the seven who were chosen for the work of administration. Subsequently he became a valiant defender of the Christian faith, and the first martyr named in the book of Acts.

It may well be that the apostle Paul had Stephen in mind when he wrote to Timothy (1st Epistle, iii.13) "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." Whether this was so or not, "great boldness" marked the witness of Stephen before the High Priest and council.

What was the secret of this power? Was it not first of all that the eye of his faith was directed heavenwards, so that his face was seen "as it had been the face of an angel," even as later he was to see with the natural eye and exclaim "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God"?

Bearing in mind, too, what Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2nd Epistle, iii, 18) "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord," let us notice certain ways in which Stephen reflected the character of his Master as recorded in Acts vii.55-60.

First in the record was Stephen's supplication "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Can we fail to recognise in this an echo of the Lord's own confident cry upon the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit"? Stephen's request was granted as the stones fell thickly upon him, battering out the life from his body. As his Master before him passed into Paradise, with the converted thief joining Him there the same day, so Stephen "fell asleep" in the safe keeping of his Lord.

Following this was his prayer for his enemies, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is possible, though there is no positive statement in scripture to this effect, that Stephen had been amongst the company who were present at the Lord's

crucifixion, in which event he could have heard the marvellous intercession of his Master, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The fact, however, that Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost is sufficient to account for an utterance bearing such close resemblance to the cry of the Lord Himself.

But the comparison goes further. The prayer of the Lord began to be answered when, on the day of Pentecost, full and free forgiveness was preached in Jerusalem to those whose hands were still red with the blood of the One they had crucified. By the grace of God, it was particularly ordained (Luke xxiv.47) "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem.*" Thus in a single day no fewer than three thousand obeyed the word that was spoken, and were baptised.

In the case of Stephen, there was likewise a notable answer to his prayer. Not without reason it is stated in verse 58 that "the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul," mentioned here for the first time. As he himself recounted many years later, as though he could never forgive himself for what he had done, Saul consented to Stephen's death: "And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him" (Acts xxii.20). Could such a callous man ever be forgiven?

Acts ix. supplies the answer. Still breathing out his enmity against the disciples of the Lord, and on his way to Damascus to imprison any of them he could find, Saul is arrested in his mad career. From the selfsame heavens through which Stephen beheld "Jesus standing on the right hand of God," there shone the light which struck Saul to the ground, and there came the voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? . . . I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest." And from the stricken man there came the cry of penitence and submission, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Surely there is great joy in reserve for Stephen when he learns how wonderfully his prayer was answered in the forgiveness of the man who had so shamelessly looked on while

he was stoned to death, and yet more fully, in the years which followed, by the salvation of an innumerable company who heard and received the gospel from that convert's lips.

Oh, fix our earnest gaze  
 So wholly, Lord, on Thee,  
 That with Thy beauty occupied  
 We may transformèd be!

P. White

## THORNY GROUND HEARERS

(Note on Mark iv.18, 19)

This would appear to be a more promising class than either of the former. The seed germinates, and grows and develops to a certain degree. But it is nevertheless unfruitful, on account of a powerful external influence. The thorns grow more vigorously than the good seed, and eventually suffocate it.

The Lord explained what the thorns signify. They set forth the adverse influence which present things may exercise upon eternal things—a possible influence so great as to extinguish and exclude the latter entirely from the human heart. This influence is not manifestly hostile like that of affliction and persecution in the previous class; but it is none the less deadly, and much more dangerous because of its insidious nature. The thorns were growing *too near* the seed; a mile away it would not have mattered; and consequently they were able secretly, but effectually, to rob the good seed of its necessary light, air, moisture, and nutrition from the soil. Similarly, the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life, if allowed the supremacy in the heart, choke the good seed, and unfruitfulness is the dire result.

Thorns are emblematical of the world outside of Eden. The thorns introduced through the fall of the first Adam formed the insignia awarded by his children to the last Adam. The kingdoms of man and of God are in a state of irreconcilable enmity. And here the Lord shows that the employments, the successes, and the enjoyments of this present age may have a blighting and destructive effect upon the work of the word of God within a man.

Mark records the fullest description of these worldly forces. Luke summarises them as the “cares and riches and pleasures of this life.” Matthew mentions only two of these three, which, however, he amplifies—“the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.” The second Evangelist has a yet ampler category, adding, moreover, that the mischief is wrought through their entering into the heart, where the word of God should be hidden (Psalm cxix.11)—“the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in choke the word.”

These hearers lack singleness of eye and heart. The attention becomes absorbed by the incessant occupations of a busy world, by the distracting anxieties of everyday life and by the excitements of a restless and reckless age. Such divided efforts to serve God and mammon invariably result in luxuriant thorns and withered wheat.

The “cares” have a particular reference to the “poor man’s toil how to live at all, to keep the wolf from the door, the struggle for a daily subsistence, the ‘cares of this life,’ which, if not met in faith, hinders the thriving of the spiritual word in the heart.” The affluent are specially susceptible to the “deceitfulness of riches,” particularly when the love of money accompanies its possession (I Timothy vi.9, 10). The “lusts of other things” cover all the ambitious strivings after temporal objects, however innocent the objects may be in themselves, to which all conditions of men are liable, and which may fill the heart to the consequent exclusion of what is divine.

(From “The Bible Treasury”, February, 1912—by W.J.H.)

O Lord, the way, the truth, the life,  
Henceforth let sorrow, doubt, and strife  
Drop off like autumn leaves;  
Henceforth, as privileged by Thee,  
Simple and undistracted be  
The soul which to Thee cleaves.

(J. Gambold, 1711-71)

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# Words of Help

*from the Scripture of Truth*

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# WORDS OF HELP

Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## EDITORIAL

IF one theme can be said to predominate in this issue of **WORDS OF HELP**, it is undoubtedly the obligation which rests upon believers in the living God in every age to be loyal to His word, as preserved for them in Holy Scripture.

I Kings xiii is the sad story of one described as a man of God who was cut off from further service because he disobeyed a precise instruction which it is evident he fully understood. Ezra viii is the delightful and stimulating account of the way in which God's good hand prospered those who sought to guard the sacred treasure committed to their trust, relying wholly upon divine protection. The third article entitled "Verbal Inspiration" is a timely reminder that the writers of scripture were guided by the Holy Spirit, not only as to the subjects about which they wrote, but in their "choice of fitting and adequate words and phrases" for what they record.

We make no apology for permitting so many Bible references (usually within brackets) to be given, since these enable readers to check the authority for statements made. It is probably wise to pass over these when reading an article right through the first time, since it is important to discover and understand the writer's general line of thought. When this has been done, particular remarks can be considered in their proper context, and their accuracy examined.

May we remind our readers once again how essential it is to approach the Scriptures with a reverent mind, and sincere dependence upon the Holy Spirit for the enlightenment which only He can give.

"Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts :

So shall I talk of Thy wondrous works."

(Psalm cxix. 27)

## THE YOUNG PROPHET AND THE OLD

(Read: I Kings xiii.)

THE time was a very critical one in Israel. As a divine punishment for Solomon's introduction of idolatry (to please his foreign wives), Jeroboam the son of Nebat was raised up as an adversary to Solomon. God promised through His prophet Ahijah that Jeroboam should reign over ten of the tribes of Israel, and the success of his rebellion was made possible by the folly of Solomon's own son Rehoboam. Moreover God undertook to make Jeroboam the founder of a secure dynasty if only he would be faithful to His commands. But alas! instead of keeping in mind that his kingship was intended as a standing rebuke to idolatry in Israel, he ignored the divine purpose and proceeded to establish a new idolatrous system of his own.

### **Without Faith it is Impossible to Please God**

Had not God promised to build Jeroboam a sure house, if only he obeyed His commands? Yet when everything had come to pass as God's prophet had foretold, Jeroboam began to carry out his own plans for establishing his power. He reasoned that if his subjects went to worship God in the temple at Jerusalem, they would return to their former allegiance to the house of David. To prevent this he set up golden calves, one at Bethel in the south of his kingdom and one at Dan in the north, with altars and a priesthood of his own creation for their worship. Then he set about persuading Israel how much more convenient this worship was than the divinely appointed one, and succeeded only too well.

At this juncture God intervened to save His people from this ruinous system, by the testimony of a second prophet, whom we may call the young prophet by contrast with another whom the scripture calls old. He comes from Judah, and proclaims the ruin of that system by which Jeroboam sought to strengthen his rule. "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee."

These words indicated also that it would be a king of David's line who would accomplish this, thus showing the utter futility of Jeroboam's unbelieving scheming. We may notice in passing how untrue is the modernist notion that prophets never prophesied the future! Three centuries later these things came to pass, as we may read in II Kings xxiii.16.

When the king stretched out his hand to say "Lay hold upon him," his hand was dried up, and the sign which the prophet had given of the altar being rent came to pass. How wonderful is the mercy of God to this man who had behaved so disgracefully! For God's rebuke was meant to produce repentance in the king, as well as in the people. At his entreaty the prophet prays for him and his hand is restored—a further proof that the living God was at work, the God of mercy and grace. The healing of his hand was a clear indication also of the possibility of repentance and blessing, if only there had been the smallest spark of faith.

### **God's Instructions to his Messenger**

The king's response, inviting the prophet to come home and partake of refreshment, and promising a reward, betrays an astounding lack of comprehension of the seriousness of the course he was pursuing. There is not the smallest suggestion of turning from his evil way. This leads the prophet to reveal his own instructions: "If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.'" Thus the obedient prophet proclaimed by his actions, as he had already proclaimed by his words, that Bethel was a defiled and defiling place, where the servant of Jehovah could not rest or take refreshment. How needful it is for the Lord's servants to walk consistently with their words!

Why was he commanded to return by a different route? The writer would be glad of suggestions as to the meaning of this, but one thing may be said with certainty. The word of God leaves no one in the same position as it found him. If we heed

it we are blessed, and if we heed it not we must give an account of our ignoring it. In Chronicles we read that many of Israel did leave the idolatrous kingdom and join that of Rehoboam, no doubt in many cases as a result of this prophetic testimony. But Jeroboam himself paid no heed, nor did the majority of the ten tribes, and so when God later gave him another message, it was of unsparing judgment for his own house and those whom he had led astray (I Kings xiv. 7-16).

Was the prophet wise even to tarry in the neighbourhood of Bethel? It would seem that, had he not rested under the oak, the calamity that followed would have been avoided. Had he pondered more on the *meaning* of the stringent command he had received, he would perhaps have hastened to get away from that evil place.

### The Old Prophet Rebuked

What of the old prophet who dwelt in Bethel (verse 11)? Why did not God use him to testify to the king? Does it not seem that a kind of spiritual torpor had descended upon him, like that which so enfeebled Eli's protests to his sons about their evil ways (I Samuel ii. 23-25)? How important to preserve the spiritual vigour of our early days!

It is distressing to read of how he followed the younger prophet and persuaded him by a lie to disobey the plain command of God to which he had hitherto been faithful. "I am a prophet as thou art," he said, "and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" Through lack of communion with God, he failed to understand the necessity of the younger prophet's separateness, which was a rebuke to himself. Or worse, did he seek to quieten an uneasy conscience by associating the faithful prophet with himself? Are there any depths to which a servant of the Lord cannot sink if he gets away from his Master?

Then he is compelled to announce to the man he had seduced the penalty for his disobedience (vers. 21, 22), and that at his own table where the disobedience was consummated. He cries "Thus saith the Lord, forasmuch as thou has disobeyed the

mouth of the Lord, and has not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which the Lord did say to thee, 'Eat no bread, and drink no water'; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." Thus was the old prophet rebuked, in an indirect way which exactly suited the state of his own heart at the time. God's *direct* message in his mouth was for another.

The word of God lays much emphasis on the direct accountability of the servant of the Lord to his own Master (see Romans xiv. 7-9). To persuade another believer to do what his own conscience is not clear about is fraught with grave spiritual peril for him. "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."

When the younger prophet was slain by a lion, the old man brought back his body and buried it in his own grave, mourning for him as for a brother. Some revival of his own prophetic insight is perhaps indicated by his request to his sons to bury him in the same tomb, "For the saying which he cried by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass."

We can say with certainty, also, that the action of the lion was not merely the fruit of its natural instincts, else it would have carried off and devoured the body. Its obedience to a divine command laid upon it is startlingly clear: nor did it exceed its commission. What a contrast to the failure of intelligent men!

We might seek to excuse the younger prophet's action on the ground that he was deceived. Yet his instructions were plain, as his own account of them proved. Did he imagine that God had changed His mind, after the manner of men? And is it not important for us to remember that He means just what His word says? As Balaam was compelled to say, "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" What a sure basis for our faith is this! What a claim upon our obedience!

The severity of God's sentence upon him can be understood if we bear in mind the testimony entrusted to him. To deliver a message of judgment on the disobedience of others made it imperative that the prophet himself should be obedient. The lesson is obvious for all those who speak the message of God to others. Yet, lest there should be any misunderstanding, it may be well to say that there is no question here of the *eternal* destiny of the prophet. God's government of His children in this world must in every age be according to His own righteousness; but the eternal blessing of His people has always depended upon their faith, not their works: "The just shall live by faith." Even in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts v.) the question of their soul's salvation does not arise.

Finally, God's grace is surely seen in this, that though the sentence that he should not be buried with his fathers was carried out to the letter, yet his tomb was the only one left untouched when the judgment against the high places was carried out, three hundred years after, by King Josiah.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

## FAITHFUL OVER A FEW THINGS

(Read: Ezra viii. 21-34; Rev. iii. 11)

THE Lord's message to the church in Philadelphia was, "I come quickly: hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown." Those who in the last days by grace have "kept His word" and not "denied His name" are privileged to hear from their Lord these words, which should thrill with fresh hope and courage the hearts of all who love him. He measures the little power they have and strengthens them with the thought that the conflict will soon end at His coming, when responsibility will cease and the reward of faithfulness be won.

But it is well for us to be reminded of our responsibility to God to "hold fast" the truths He has revealed to us. Scripture teaches plainly enough that responsibility to God has not ceased because there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; but it is no longer a burdensome thing, for the Christian is urged to faithfulness by the assurance of "praise

from God" (I Cor. iv. 5), and not by the fear of judgment. While the truths he is taught rejoice his heart, at the same time the thought that the "true riches" have been entrusted to him increases his appreciation of them and gives gravity and sobriety to his walk.

### **The Convoy of Sacred Treasure**

In the book of Ezra (viii. 21-34) we find what may well be taken as an illustration of this important principle in the ways of God with us.

In the sixth year of Darius the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem was completed, but it was not until the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign (nearly sixty years later) that Ezra and his company left Babylon for the land of their fathers. The great treasure which they carried with them was not therefore in connection with the founding of the temple, but, as it is said, for its "beautifying" (vii. 27). It is significant that the passage which reminds us of our responsibility to build upon the foundation, Jesus Christ, specifies only what is wrought with gold, silver and precious stones as work which will abide the test of fire (I Cor. iii. 10-15). It is divine beauty and preciousness alone which is acceptable, viz:—that which speaks of Christ and is the outcome of our knowledge of Him. All that God has taught us of Christ is "treasure," to be held not as mere doctrine but with a sense of its value to God and of the beauty it brings to that building at which we are all working.

### **Perils of Robbers**

It was no light undertaking for Ezra to face the long desert journey of five hundred miles from the river Ahava to Jerusalem with so much gold and silver. He fully realised the danger to themselves, their little ones and all their substance (verse 21) from their enemy and those that lay in wait for the rich booty (verse 31). It was the treasure they carried with them that made the journey doubly perilous. Satan's power and subtlety are very real, and he is ever seeking to rob those who hold the truth, and are therefore the special objects of his hatred.



The steps taken by Ezra in view of the menace he foresaw are very fine. The whole company fasted and besought God, and, it is beautifully added, "He was entreated of us" (verse 23). It was the action of living faith, for they were not brought to such a pass that they could look nowhere else for help. Artaxerxes had promised every assistance, and a band of soldiers and horsemen to secure a safe passage would have been forthcoming for the asking. But they had proudly boasted to the king of their God's goodness to all those who sought Him, and now, in the hour of their need, they would not withdraw from the stand they had taken. Ezra was "ashamed" to ask for help, he nobly confesses (verse 22). But if they boasted before the king they humbled themselves before God, and because they dared to trust in Him alone, they made the journey unmolested.

There is much here of profit for our souls. If we make any pretension to faith God will surely put it to the test. May we always be "ashamed" to withdraw one step from any stand we have made for God! If we have no spirit of self-confidence, but humble ourselves before God, He will enable us to stand. It was here that Peter failed, for he protested that he was ready for a path in which only God-given strength could sustain him, and he sought to tread it alone. It is this humbling of ourselves which is the real source of strength. "We kneel, how weak! We rise—how full of power!"

### **Trust in God Alone**

Then it is worthy of notice that Ezra and his company refused all earthly aid for the guarding of the treasure, and they set forth without fear in the face of apparent peril. This example of courageous faith should rebuke the anxiety that comes to believers when they see false doctrines actively and zealously spread, and the champions of the truth seem to be feeble and few. At such times there is a tendency to wish that more wise, mighty and noble were called, and to feel that greater numbers would give increased confidence. But all such thoughts are faithless. Christ is watching over His church, and no power shall prevail against it. The Holy Spirit is here, and the truth needs no other champion.

The happy sense of security that comes from living faith does not, however, relieve from personal responsibility to God; and this we see set forth in Ezra's action in committing the treasure they were conveying to Jerusalem to the care of chosen men (verses 24, 25). Twelve of the chief of the priests were "separated" for this purpose, the silver and gold was weighed into their hands, and Ezra addressed them with the words, "Ye are holy unto Jehovah; the vessels also are holy; and the silver and the gold is a voluntary offering to Jehovah the God of your fathers. Watch and keep them until ye weigh them . . . in the chambers of the house of Jehovah" (verses 28, 29).

It was a solemn charge. "Ye are holy unto Jehovah": the men were chosen because they were priests, and could therefore appreciate the sacred character of what was entrusted to them. "The vessels also are holy"; they were dedicated to the service of God in the temple, and therefore had a preciousness in the sight of priests far greater than their intrinsic worth. "The silver and gold is a voluntary offering to Jehovah": they were not to be insensible of the fact that those who had contributed the silver and gold had done so of their own free will, and from their own substance. The gifts involved sacrifice and self-denial to the donors, and the remembrance of this fact gave its own peculiar value to this treasure.

Much of this detail has its parallel in the responsibility of the believer today. The faith has been "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), and the Lord looks for faithfulness in stewards; that is, that they will not give up one jot or tittle of the truth which has been revealed. The saints of God are urged to stand steadfast for the whole truth by the very fact that they are saints, and therefore have a direct relationship with God himself, no less than by the thought of the sacred character of the truth, even to its minutest details. But amid such powerful considerations, we should not forget at what cost the truths we hold have been maintained in times past by men of God, the fruit of whose faithfulness we are privileged to enjoy. For the sake of their faith men have spent their lives and ended them in a martyr's death. Some have cut themselves off from the fellowship of those they love, or walked an isolated path, because they

desired above all things to be faithful to the truth revealed to them. We should not be unmindful of the fact that truth which has come to us from the teachings of the servants of God may have cost them deep exercise of soul. May we ever value as we should the good things which God has made known to our hearts.

### **Watch and Ward**

In view of the three considerations he mentions, Ezra exhorted the priests to watch and keep what was entrusted to them until they were able to deliver it to the priests and Levites in the temple at Jerusalem. We can well imagine the thoughtfulness and diligence which would mark the carrying out of such a charge, the watchfulness against enemies without and against carelessness within which they must not relinquish for a moment until the day of testing came. The thought of the journey's end, when the account was to be taken in the temple, linked them during their journey with the place to which they were travelling.

The people of Israel in their wilderness wanderings were constantly contrasting their surroundings with what they had left behind; their thoughts were too often of Egypt, and thus arose murmuring and dissatisfaction. It must have been far otherwise with the company of released captives who accompanied Ezra, for the discomforts of their journey would be forgotten in the thought of the journey's end—their first sight of the land of their fathers and the temple of their God. Similar thoughts may cheer our hearts, and solemnize us too when we remember that at the journey's end we must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ. There is no terror in the thought, but a mighty urge to faithfulness that we may earn His approval in that day.

It is of deep interest to find that when the day of reckoning came, not a single item had been lost on the journey (verses 33, 34). It was all carefully weighed in the house of God to prove beyond all question that everything was intact. There had been no attempt to counterfeit brass for gold; all was as it had been delivered to the faithful band of priests at the river Ahava.

The story comes to us in these days imperishably recorded in the word of God for our comfort and encouragement.

### What to Hold Fast

The truths which have been committed to us are many and varied. The inspiration of the scriptures, the truth of the Lord's Supper, His coming for His own, the assembly and the action of the Holy Ghost there, to mention but a few, are holy treasures which we desire, in the face of much contradiction, to maintain faithfully to the end. In a number of passages Paul speaks of his having been entrusted with the gospel, and of the great effect which the realisation of this sacred trust had upon him (I Cor. ix. 17; Gal. ii. 7; I Tim. i. 11; I Thess. ii. 4; Titus i. 3). He urges Timothy to "keep the entrusted deposit" (I Tim. vi. 20).

In addition to these things, the Holy Spirit works in each believer to bring the soul to increasing knowledge of Christ Himself, and every such revelation is treasure indeed to be watched and kept. The company of saints form a kingly priesthood, that they may set forth the excellencies of Him Who has called them out of darkness into His wonderful light (I Peter ii. 9). Each has his part in forming the bride of the Lamb, who will be beautiful with the excellencies of her Lord. But it is ours even now to reflect the light that shines upon us from Him, and everything formed in our souls by the contemplation of the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. iii. 18) we shall carry into eternity; for all that is of Christ, but only this, will abide the day of trial.

The glory and beauty of the holy city, heavenly Jerusalem, will be Christ Himself and what is reflected of Him in His saints. No counterfeits will pass the holy balances; nothing that is of self will stand the test. No place will be found for lofty reasoning, idle speculation, daring guesswork, strained interpretation. May we seek grace not to be cumbered with such things now, but to treasure in our hearts and minds only what God has revealed to us in the power of the Holy Ghost!

## Two Precious Copper Vessels

All that is of Christ has divine beauty and value, and the simplest believer can treasure thoughts of Him to the journey's end. For our encouragement it is interesting to notice the mention of two shining copper vessels in the record of the holy vessels which were carried to Jerusalem (verse 27). They might appear an insignificant item beside such weight of silver and gold, but the Holy Spirit has carefully noted them and has added to their description the words, "precious as gold." Some may be tempted to belittle the poverty of their understanding of the truth, but nothing rightly learned of Christ is insignificant in God's eyes. Whatever it be, therefore, whether a "copper vessel" or a "bason of gold," "hold fast *what thou hast*, that no one take thy crown." LEONARD C. HOCKING  
(Reprinted from THE BIBLE MONTHLY, February, 1925)

## VERBAL INSPIRATION

The term "verbal inspiration," when used of the Bible, means that the words of Holy Scripture are inspired ("breathed") of God, that is, the words employed are the result of the breathing of God through the human writers. The term properly implies, not only that the underlying truths or ideas were communicated by God to the writers, but also that the transmission of those truths to others was so controlled by the Holy Spirit that the expression of them in written words was exact, and preserved from all error and imperfect statement.

Verbal inspiration is also predicated of spoken words communicated by the Holy Spirit to men chosen for the purpose of delivering the divine message. Thus "holy men of God spake under the power of (the) Holy Ghost" (2 Peter i. 21, N.Tr.). See also I Peter i. 11, 12. The prophets were accustomed to preface their words by the formula, "Thus saith the Lord."

Scripture by a brief but definite declaration affirms the fact of verbal inspiration for every written communication included in the Bible. This short and simple statement settles the question absolutely for all those who believe God. Writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul asserts that "every scripture is God-

breathed" (2 Tim. iii. 16, W.K.). J.N.D. translates it, "Every scripture is divinely inspired." Both these critical renderings are even more emphatic than the A.V., which reads, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Thus "all" is to be replaced by "every," a change to be noted carefully. It is true that the whole of the written word of God is inspired, but in the face of modern doubt, it is well to be assured by such a clear statement that every part of that whole is inspired, down to the veriest jot or tittle (Matt. v. 18).

The "verbal inspiration" of the scriptures is apt to be understood in a derogatory sense of the term, unless it is clearly recognised that their inspiration proceeds directly from God. In a literary essay, it might be said that a poet or painter was inspired by the sight of a beautiful landscape bathed in brilliant sunshine. But the inspiration of Ezekiel and Daniel and John is of another order altogether. The inspiration of any part of scripture by the Holy Spirit implies that, besides being supernaturally provided with a subject for his pen, the writer was guided in his choice of fitting and adequate words and phrases for the record of that subject.

This fact concerning the nature of divine inspiration is conveyed to us by the apostle Paul when treating of the opposition that exists between the wisdom of men and the wisdom of God, now communicated through the teachers of the church. The Spirit wrought in these teachers in two stages; He first made known the truth to them, and, secondly, He enabled them to impart the same truth to the assembly without any departure from the mind of the Spirit (I Cor. ii. 12, 13).

The whole passage illuminates the connected subjects of revelation and inspiration. Paul first speaks of the reception by the apostles of the revealed truths of Christianity by "the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given us of God." Then he proceeds to declare that, as those things were received and known by the apostles through the Spirit, even so their utterance of these truths to others was in words given them by that same Spirit: "which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but

which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (I Cor. ii. 13). Thus their communications were verbally inspired, the authority of the Holy Spirit attaching to their *words*. And, consequently, the things written by the apostles were "the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. xiv. 37). Such is verbal inspiration as taught in scripture itself.

W. J. HOCKING

(From THE BIBLE MONTHLY, April, 1931)

## QUESTION AND ANSWER

### *Question*

Is there any support in the New Testament for the statement that there comes a time when God ceases to strive with man?

### *Answer*

While no one can limit the patience and long-suffering of God, scripture does indicate that in some cases He may cease to speak to a man. In the New Testament we have only to consider the case of King Herod, the murderer of John the Baptist, in order to show this.

John bore witness to him of his sin in marrying his brother Philip's wife, and the king imprisoned John. Mark tells us that Herod "did many things, and heard him gladly", but for all John's testimony he refused to repent, and finally murdered the prophet (Mark vi. 17-28).

Now when the Lord Jesus was before Herod, He answered none of his questions, whereas He dealt graciously with Pilate. Both were wicked men, but Herod in addition had silenced the testimony of God, and to him the Saviour Himself refused to speak.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

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# Words of Help

*from the Scripture of Truth*

Vol. L

OCTOBER 1962

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# WORDS OF HELP

Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## WASHING OF REGENERATION

(Note on Titus iii. 5)

The apostle is speaking of the blessings of the Christian position which are ours in this day in which the kindness and love of God our Saviour have appeared. Our standing is in accordance with the mercy of God: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." This Paul follows up immediately with the words, "by the washing of regeneration."

"Regeneration" only occurs in one other place in the New Testament, viz., Matthew xix. 28. In both instances it is the translation of a term which is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Its use in Matthew shows that it cannot mean the new birth. The Lord said to the twelve apostles, "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The Lord referred to the time when the renewed earth in millennial days will be under the rule of the Son of man. The regeneration will be a state in which the world will be cleansed from outward evil, and in that sense it will be made new as Christ's kingdom.

The believer in advance of those days is brought into a spiritual state which is also new, and is here also described as "regeneration." This new state is associated with thorough purification or cleansing. This is the washing mentioned. The thought in the phrase is not that of a vessel in which a person is washed, but the act of removing defilement. Thus God has saved us by purifying us and bringing us into the new state called regeneration. Compare the new creation which is true even now of those "in Christ" (2 Corinthians v. 16, 17).

W. J. HOCKING

(From "The Bible Monthly"—November, 1922)

**LORD'S DAY REFLECTIONS****XXVIII. The Contemplation of Infinity**

(Read: John xxi. 25)

Even the most casual reader must surely be impressed by the temperate and restrained language of scripture, particularly when recording the life and death of the Lord Jesus.

When reporters of this world's news wish to arouse the interest of their readers they use words which excite the imagination. They dress the drab in colourful phrase, and employ superlatives to describe things that are trivial and unimportant. But such is not the practice of the New Testament historians. Their language is simple and matter-of-fact even when recording the poignant scenes of Calvary. For more vivid and emotional expressions we have to turn back to the poetry of the Psalms or the plaintive utterances of the prophets.

Now this last verse of the gospel of John may appear to be an exception to the rule, for the writer declares: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Consider for a moment how vast the world is, how many books it could contain, and how much could be recorded in a single book! Surely John has, for once, overstepped the bounds of moderation?

Leaving aside considerations arising from the Holy Spirit's inspiration of those who wrote the scriptures, interesting as these are, does not the spiritual mind discern a singular appropriateness in this remark with which John closes his gospel? The key to it will be found if we contemplate the immeasurable glory of the One of Whom he has been writing.

Many books may well be written about the great men of this world in order to present their character and achievements from various points of view. But to use the terms of John xxi. 25 about a mere human, however exalted by comparison

with his fellows, would surely be ludicrous, to put it mildly. Are we then to condemn John for extravagance?

Consider for a moment the particular theme of his gospel—the portrayal of the Son of God. His opening words stretch back into past eternity: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Matthew and Luke in their genealogies of Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of Man go back to points of time within the history of mankind, and these we can readily understand. But John’s “In the beginning” is no measure of time at all. The expression carries the mind back to that which is beyond its grasp. Clearly John was touching upon the infinite.

From that magnificent exordium John goes on to set forth Jesus, the Son of God, in the glory of His omniscience and omnipotence, and then to unfold the transcending grace and wonder of His death at Calvary. Such themes we may contemplate but not comprehend.

And when we come to the end of the gospel, how do we feel about what we have read? Are we impressed with what the evangelist has achieved? Can we scarce restrain our admiration of John for so great an accomplishment? Is that how John felt about his task? Nay, he worships at the feet of the One of Whom he has been privileged to write, and humbly confesses his limitations. His great finale is no mere exuberance of spirit, or excuse for not continuing, but a reverent acknowledgment that the glory and grace of Jesus, the Son of God, are beyond the capacity of human lips or pen to express fully, however many the words and books that might be put together. How fitting indeed that John should end his gospel, as he began it, with the contemplation of infinity.

Did not that other great apostle, Paul, breathe the same spirit of humility when, finding himself completely at a loss for words, he exclaimed: “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!”

May we too abase ourselves before Him, and adore!

E. A. PETTMAN

**THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS****VII. Chapter iv. verses 1-12**

This fourth chapter deals with three main points as to which we may well think that Timothy, returned from visiting the Thessalonians, reported to Paul that they needed guidance. The points are—practical sanctification; brotherly love to increase, but under proper control; and the Lord's coming as it affects those who have died in the faith. Paul writes upon these themes by the Holy Spirit's inspiration, and in doing so shows tact and a care for the feelings of others, as well as faithfulness.

Verse 1. "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, even as ye also do walk, so ye would abound more and more." The words "even as ye also do walk" are not in our Authorized Version, but appear in the New Translation (J.N.D.) and other versions, and would help the readers not to stumble at the serious warnings about to follow.

The apostle here avoids any hint that Timothy had reported their shortcomings, and instead reminds these converts of what he had taught them upon their conversion. Having been clean delivered from idolatry with its degrading practices, and brought to God through Christ, they were now to live a changed life of holiness and so please God, Who is holy. This they joyfully did, as Paul now acknowledges. But Paul had left them, and as the days passed, the power of former habits tended to reassert itself, strengthened by all the evil which still surrounded them. Old urges and appetites were threatening to return. Hence they needed to be reminded of the earlier teaching with increased force.

Verses 2-5. "For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God."

The words "his vessel" doubtless refer to the believer's body, as in 2 Corinthians iv. 7, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels," and not to his wife as appears for example in Weymouth's translation. It is true that in I Peter iii. 7, there are the words "giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, but the word "weaker" does not appear in our verse 4, which clearly is to apply to each and every Christian. "The lust of concupiscence" should read "the passion of lust," and "Gentiles" should be "nations."

The Christian is delivered from his original state of sinfulness and belongs to God, and in his life here is to be separate from evil, to be sanctified or holy, and is to do the will of God. God wills our sanctification, as a mother wills her child's cleanliness, and the path of God's will, no other, is the way of our well-being and happiness, whatever appearances may be.

In these verses we have both the negative side, abstaining from fornication and not allowing the body to possess the believer in the passion of lust; and also the positive side, the knowing how to possess his body in sanctification and honour. How elevating is this purity and self-control! What superiority to the sad low level of fallen humanity ignorant of God!

Verses 6-8. "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit." It seems that these words take up a particular aspect of Christian conduct, that is, the social relations of Christians amongst themselves. In the enjoyment of Christian fellowship, believers are brought into close contact with one another, both in the home where hospitality is exercised, and elsewhere in friendship and service together. This circle of divine light and affection may well attract the evil attentions of Satan whose kingdom is so utterly different, and he will mar it if he can by working upon the flesh and tempting individuals to an interest and intimacy which infringe the proper rights of a husband, who has the

Holy Spirit. Conduct of this kind is obnoxious to the Lord, Who will not overlook such wrong but will sooner or later intervene to avenge it unless it is repented of and turned from in time.

The due observance of the rights of others is the essence of righteousness, and there is the possibility of failing in this, even if only through lack of care and thought. The words "that no man go beyond and defraud his brother" may be read "not overstepping the rights of and wronging his brother," and "despiseth" in verse 8 can read "disregards." May the Lord help us to have regard always to His will and to what is owing to others.

The principle can apply to the Lord's work amongst young people, and in trying to win their confidence and to get to know them and their needs, we should remember the claims of the parents, and avoid anything that would tend to weaken the children's love and loyalty to them and to their own homes.

Before leaving this section, let us mark the studied carefulness of the language used in dealing with such delicate matters. Serious moral evil is in question, but the wording is proper and restrained. In the present day there is an increasing laxity of expression, and we meet with words in the newspaper, for example, which years ago would never have appeared in print. We regret to find this invading even Christian journals. No corrupt communication is to proceed out of our mouth, and there are things which should not be named among us, as becometh saints (Ephesians iv. and v.). May the Lord help us to purify ourselves even as He is pure, and may He keep us, while we are still in this evil world, pure in thought, word and deed, for His Name's sake.

Verses 9-12. "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with

your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."

Love amongst Christians is of God, and the enjoyment of it is a foretaste of the joy of heaven. In this world the general atmosphere is not at all congenial to such a heavenly plant, and love can weaken through the passing of time in this changing life, and in the discovery of unsuspected faults in one another, which accounts for it being sometimes easier to love at a distance than in nearness. So we need the divine injunction to "increase more and more."

Love can also suffer by extravagance in feeling and expression, which afterwards induces an unfavourable reaction. So Peter, after writing of love and rejoicing with joy unspeakable, later adds "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober" (I Peter i. 13). A proper balance needs to be maintained. The flesh may intrude in another way. At the beginning of church history (Acts ii.), "all that believed were together and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." This was lovely, but some might be tempted to say, "We are on a good thing; there is no lack of money; why work any more? Let us spend all our time in the meetings and let ourselves go. Hallelujah!" In such ways, Satan can pull or push us into what is inconsistent and displeasing to God. We need then these sober words, exhorting us to study to be quiet and to do our own business (or, mind our own affairs), and to work with our own hands (not the hands of others), that we may walk honestly or reputably towards non-Christians around, and may have lack of nothing or no one.

There is a similar but blunter warning in the second epistle, chapter iii, verses 11-12, "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they



work, and eat their own bread." This has been summed up by another as, "Stop fussing, stop idling, and stop sponging."

W. H. L. GRAHAM

### WHAT IS FAITH?

It is one of the glories of God's way of salvation that it is suited equally to high and low, rich and poor, young and old, learned and unlearned. Its message also comes to man expressed in terms that even a child can understand. Invariably the Lord Jesus used the simplest words to convey His meaning, and the apostles followed His example in this. Likewise the illustrations which the Lord used were taken from the everyday things of nature or of human life.

It is quite otherwise with the religions of man's invention, which have often had a secret literature, accessible only to the initiated, and understood only by them. Of the Hindu religion a modern writer, a most intelligent and learned man, has used the expression "So far as I can understand it."

It is well for us to keep this in mind when we seek to interpret the Gospel message. Of course, simplicity of language does not imply a lack of depth in the teaching, but the profundity is not like that, for instance, of a scientific treatise, where special training is needed to understand the vocabulary of the writer. The gospel message has no technical terms which need definition in order that there may be no mistake about the meaning.

It follows then that in interpreting the truths of the gospel we must understand the words in their ordinary meaning. God has not made a special language in which to convey His revelation to man.

In examining the scripture teaching on the subject of *faith*, a good opportunity presents itself of seeing whether the above remarks are justified. And first of all it is necessary to point out that though in English the words "believe" and "faith" are derived from different roots, the corresponding Greek words ("pisteuo" and "pistis") are merely the verb and noun derived from the same root, so that *faith* is the result of

*believing*—a most obvious statement, but necessary because of human perversity in making simple things involved.

In I John v. we read “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.” Here is the *faith* of which the gospel speaks—it consists in *believing* the testimony of God. If I do not believe what a man says, I in effect accuse him of lying. Thus the word “believe” is used in this scripture in its ordinary sense. The noun “faith” does not indeed occur here; John uses it only *once* throughout his gospel and epistles, namely in verse 4 of this chapter, but will anyone deny that his writings present faith in the Son of God as the essential for obtaining eternal life? If confirmation were needed of this simple view of faith, we have it in verses 4 and 5: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” So faith is in effect only another word for belief.

The apostle Paul’s teaching is just the same, but is somewhat obscured in our version. He says “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. x. 17). This is better rendered “Faith cometh by a report, and the report by God’s word,” and it is a comment on Isaiah liii. 1 “Who hath believed our report?” The simple meaning is that God’s word is proclaimed (whether in the gospel, or by the prophet in the Old Testament) and faith comes in the belief or acceptance of the message, acceptance, that is, *as of a communication from God Himself*.

### **What Faith is not**

Viewed thus in its scriptural setting, the subject of faith becomes stripped of some of the false ideas with which it is sometimes associated. It is not just believing that a certain *doctrine* is true, as one might accept the truth of a mathematical theorem. For in this case the reliability of the person who demonstrated the theorem is not in question—you “see

it for yourself." But the gospel message does involve, as John shows us, the reliability of God Himself, the preacher or teacher being but an intermediary. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe" (I Thess. ii. 13).

It is equally clear that faith is not a quality or merit of the *believer*. For the gospel testimony invariably directs the attention towards the Son of God. Faith, in the New Testament, is the acceptance of God's testimony concerning His Son. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth (or obeyeth) not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John iii. 36).

Also, what must go along with faith, namely, the *repentance* of a sinner, is the acceptance of God's testimony concerning himself. Thus it is idle to ask whether faith or repentance comes first, for both are really different aspects of the same thing—the belief of God's word which declares the man himself a sinner deserving wrath, and the blessed Saviour the answer to his need. Certainly either faith or repentance may be more prominent in an individual's experience, but without some sense of need the Lord Jesus cannot be apprehended as Saviour. That a man may repent yet not even for a long time enjoy deliverance and peace, does not mean that repentance has preceded faith, but only that faith has not gone far enough.

At the risk of repetition, the fact that faith is not something in ourselves needs emphasizing. The old story of the troubled soul who said to the preacher "Sir, I can't believe," illustrates this point very well. She was looking within to find this faith that was necessary, and could not find it! Wisely, he answered, "Indeed, who is it that you can't believe?" And her perplexity vanished.

Faith then is not some mysterious or mystical entity to be acquired; it is simply a matter of taking God at His word,

as One to be trusted when He speaks. That which makes faith wonderful is the wonderful Person in Whom it rests, Whose aid it invokes.

### The Power of Faith

Herein lies the answer to the difficulty sometimes felt as to why the sinner's faith is so important, and its blessing so far-reaching. For in itself it is a confession of need and helplessness, a turning to the God with whom he has been at war, an abandonment of the proud independence which shuts God out. It glorifies God by acknowledging His grace and truth and sufficiency. It has been compared to the hand which a drowning man stretches out for help, and as such is no more than a point by which he may be grasped and pulled by almighty power from his desperate position.

It is the *initial* act of faith which we are considering, of course, and such a faith, if fed on the sincere milk of the word, grows into an understanding of what Christ's work means until we can say with assurance, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

A scripture which seems to be somewhat misunderstood is Eph. ii. 8-10, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

The question is, to what does the word "that" in "and that not of yourselves" refer?

It is important to notice that the two phrases "not of yourselves" and "not of works" are completely parallel, and so refer back to the same antecedent. Now this antecedent could not be *faith*, for it would be nonsense to speak of faith not being of works, the statement being obvious. It is equally difficult to refer it to *grace*, for the same reason. But refer it back to the whole clause "By grace are ye saved through faith," and all is clear. This salvation is not of man in any sense, it is not of his deserving, nor of his seeking—it is God's

gift. And it is received by faith, as all scripture declares. Any other ground would imply some merit in the recipient.

Can we make a distinction between believing "in Christ" and believing "on Christ"? Does one imply a more real faith than the other? For instance, in John ii. 23 it is stated that Jesus would not commit Himself to certain who believed *in* His Name, when they saw the miracles which He did. On the other hand, in John i. 12 we are told that those who believe *on* His Name are born of God.

This comparison is a quite misleading one, for the same Greek word is used in both scriptures, so that the *reality* of the faith spoken of must be judged on quite different grounds. Of course, a *profession* of faith tells us nothing of what goes on in a man's heart, and we are concerned with a real faith. God surely knows whether a man *really* believes His word!

However, in regard to the words "in" and "on", the A.V. is a most uncertain guide, sometimes translating the Greek "in" with "on" and vice-versa. It seems that Paul usually uses "on" and John "in", as for example in John iii. 16 and Acts xvi. 31. But few would care to speak of a difference in the faith spoken of in these familiar verses, and certainly the faith in each case is equally real. Hence the English reader is wise to regard the expressions "believe in" and "believe on" as completely equivalent to one another.

### Faith in Hebrews XI

What relation does faith as we have considered it bear to the faith spoken of in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, seeing that that scripture does not in general speak in terms of a sinner coming to a Saviour-God?

First we must remember that the entire ruin of fallen man is only gradually unfolded in the Old Testament, as his trial under the succeeding dispensations runs its course. True, it is recorded in Genesis vi. that *God* saw his ruin (verse 5); but a much longer trial was needed before man himself could learn it. It was not finally brought out till the Son of Man had come, and was rejected and crucified. Indeed, we may

say that it was chiefly because His enemies had failed to learn the Old Testament's lesson of man's ruin that they opposed Him, instead of welcoming Him as the "friend of sinners."

It is therefore in the New Testament that we learn the full meaning of the faith that saves the soul. But seeing that the last verse of Hebrews x. speaks of faith in these very words: "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that *believe to the saving of the soul,*" we may be assured that it is the *same faith* at bottom in the chapter that follows.

Now there we read of faith in operation in the lives of those who came to God and sought to serve Him, that is, faith in His promises. But what is this but faith in the word of One Who was worthy to be believed? The fruit of faith might be different, but the faith itself is the same. And the saying "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (R.S.V.) tells us of what faith does for the believer—it is not exactly a statement of what faith itself is.

If in conclusion we glance at the faith of Rahab, we get a remarkable illustration of the truth we have been considering. It is the more striking because the testimony which she believed was of God's mighty power, and it was borne to her by those in whom it produced no faith. "We have heard" she said "how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua ii. 10, 11). She "heard" what the rest in Jericho heard, but only Rahab received it *as a message from the living God*, the God of heaven and earth. It told her that He was coming to destroy her city, and she feared His judgment, and bowed to it, and sought to befriend the spies as His messengers. Men may call it a poor thing to be afraid of God, but He does not disdain to use even this to awaken and

save a soul. Thus "by faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews xi. 31).

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

## **CHRIST AS INTERCESSOR, HIGH PRIEST, ADVOCATE**

### **Intercessor** (Romans viii. 34)

The Lord Jesus Christ as Intercessor pleads our cause at the right hand of God, while the Holy Spirit within us also intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Romans viii. 26, 27).

### **High Priest** (Hebrews iv. 14)

As High Priest the Lord Jesus knows the infirmities to which we are subject as frail mortals, passing on to the rest of God, and He supplies the mercy and grace we require in order to be maintained to the end. The function of the High Priest includes intercession, for we find that He is spoken of as ever living to make intercession for those who come unto God by Him (Hebrews vii. 25).

### **Advocate** (I John ii. 1)

The advocacy of Christ contemplates the most serious case of need in a believer. Sin is more serious than infirmity, but even so a child of God is not forsaken, for "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Thus, our Lord prayed for the apostle who denied Him that his faith might not fail, and that he might be converted (Luke xxii. 31, 32).

W. J. HOCKING

(From "The Bible Monthly"—September, 1924)

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# Words of Help

from the Scripture of Truth

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Vol. L

NOVEMBER 1962

No. 11

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# WORDS OF HELP

Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## EDITORIAL

As most of our readers will have learned by now, Mr. John Weston, of Lewisham, London, was called home to be with the Lord on the 21st September last.

Wildfell Hall, Catford, was the centre of his labours over a period of fifty years, and early this summer a week of special meetings was held to commemorate the jubilee of its opening. We propose to devote the January, 1963, issue of *Words of Help* to notes of the mid-week addresses given on that occasion, and hope to include an appreciation of Mr. Weston's life and work by a very close friend.

This issue should prove particularly helpful to young Christians, and additional copies will be available. Since the supply must necessarily be limited however, those wishing to participate are advised to notify the Publishers *at once* of their requirements.

. . . . .

As regular readers of *Words of Help* will be aware, we endeavour to provide "things new and old" for the comfort, edification and admonition of those in this day who are seeking to walk well-pleasing to the Lord.

We reprint this month an article entitled "The Days when the Judges ruled," which was written more than forty years ago by one whose ministry is widely remembered and cherished to this day. It is heart-searching and challenging, and has most surely a message for the present time. We commend the piece to our readers' special consideration.

**LORD'S DAY REFLECTIONS**  
**XXIX. Your Count for the Lamb**  
(Read: Exodus xii. 4)

The Passover was the foundation Feast of the Jewish calendar, and was appointed by Jehovah in order that Israel should remember for ever the fact and the manner of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt.

On the never-to-be-forgotten night when God brought salvation to His people, the killing of the passover lamb took place throughout the dwellings of Israel. Because there were many households, a great number of lambs had perforce to be slain. Yet the plurality of the victims in no way detracted from the corporateness of what Jehovah intended should be a single act by the whole nation.

The Passover looked forward to the unique sacrifice of our Saviour at Calvary, which we commemorate this first day of the week in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine. This too is a corporate act. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The cup of blessing which *we* bless, is it not the *communion* of the blood of Christ? The bread which *we* break, is it not the *communion* of the body of Christ?" (I Cor. x. 16). And he goes on to say, "For we being many are one bread."

We may recall at this moment that the fellowship of this memorial service is world-wide. While most of us were still asleep this morning, our brethren in the Far East were remembering the Lord; when we were rising or having our breakfast, those in the Middle East were doing so; and as our day here draws to its close, there will be those in Western lands carrying on the remembrance. There is no actual synchronisation of time. Yet in a sense it is true—and a delightful thought you will find it—on this first day of another week the universal Church on earth is engaged in the remembrance of her Lord. In many places, under many varied circumstances, and in differing degrees, believers on earth are meeting together "to eat the bread, and drink the wine, in memory, Lord, of Thee."

At such a time, we are privileged in these days to read the Scriptures in our own tongue, reminding ourselves of what took place up to and at Calvary, and after. So we are moved to give praise and thanks to the Lord, also in our own tongue, and believers in many lands and languages speak with understanding in their own tongues the wonderful works of God (Acts ii. 11). Yet it is the same identical theme of worship throughout the earth. Very far short of this falls man's poor effort at unity by using Latin everywhere, with the result that the majority understand nothing at all of what is said. May God deliver us from having anything to do with such foolishness.

But there is another side to this. Moses said to the people, "Every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb." So that responsibility was laid upon each individual to take his own personal share—"according to his eating"—in the proceedings of that momentous night. It was not sufficient that Israel as a whole should observe Jehovah's instructions: each individual must make his own count for the lamb, and partake of it in the appointed manner.

There is a challenge to each of us in this. Let the matter be put in a very personal way.

As I go to the Lord's table this day—should I be privileged to do so: the Lord Himself will know whether there is lawful reason for my absence—shall I go in quietness of spirit, and with purpose of heart to meet the Lord, counting upon His undertaking to be in the midst of those who gather to His name? Shall I join in the hymns with due appreciation of the meaning of the words I utter, so that I shall be able truthfully to say I sang with the spirit and with the understanding? Shall I open my lips in praise to God on behalf of all present if the Holy Spirit prompts me to do so? If not, shall I add my Amen to those who will, and do so with sincere conviction and spiritual fervour? When the bread is broken and the wine passed round, shall I partake of these symbols with my heart bowed in worship and overflowing with thanksgiving? And lastly, with what resolves shall I leave the sacred tryst

to serve the One whose love I have recalled, and to face the everyday duties of another week?

You will note that each man was to make his count for the lamb "*according to his eating.*" Capacities vary for what we are able to appreciate of the glory of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, as well as for what we can render of praise and thanksgiving in return. The Lord's perfect knowledge of each one will ensure His just appraisal of individual response. "She hath done what she could," was His comment on the action of a woman, misunderstood and criticised by selfish onlookers who regarded her zeal as being misdirected. The Master praises: what are men?

The communion of the Lord's supper is one of the choicest foretastes of heaven that believers are permitted to enjoy here on earth. May we value it more, and may each of us take his full individual share in the fulfilment of the Lord's desire for His own—until He come.

E. A. PETTMAN

## THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS

### VIII. 1st Epistle, chapter iv., verses 13-18

On the last page of the Bible, in the last verse but one of this precious book of God, we read: "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." The final word of the Lord to His own is thus His sure promise to come again, and their response is the welcome of the whole heart. His coming is now the true hope of all who are Christ's. That and only that will really satisfy them. How will that coming take place? We are told this in the verses now before us, verses which are the joy of countless believers, and the particular comfort of the many who feel the sorrow of the temporary parting when those they have known and loved "sleep in Jesus."

Verse 13. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." The unbeliever with no faith in Christ or the word of God, can have no

certain hope beyond death, because the future is hidden from the natural eye and is beyond the reach of the living. Hence, to such, bereavement is unrelieved sorrow, proportionate to the extent of the natural feelings of love and affection. Were Christians to be in a similar state of ignorance, they would have the same grief in the gloom of the grave. This is not the Holy Spirit's desire for the Lord's people. "I would not have you ignorant . . . that ye sorrow not."

Verse 14. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Here is the bright light of the truth, which dispels ignorance and its sorrow.

We have seen that the Thessalonian Christians were waiting for God's Son from heaven. They believed that Jesus had died, risen again, and returned to heaven, and they were expecting Him to come from heaven, when they would see and be with the glorious Saviour Who was the treasured Object of their faith. Such then was the simple hope of these converts, and they were right, and so are we, in constantly expecting the Lord to come. Nothing in this epistle makes any suggestion to the contrary. But the Lord tarried, the days passed, one believer and then another were removed from their midst by death, and those remaining were grieved, evidently supposing that the departed could not be on the scene when the Lord did come, and so would not have part in the joy and blessing of His presence.

Now says the apostle, you are mistaken. We believe that Jesus died, being thus lost to view in this world, but we believe also that He rose again bodily; and so believers in Him who die will rise again bodily, and, note it well, at the Lord's coming God will bring them with Him.

Let us keep firm hold of this truth of resurrection, whatever the unbelief around us, remembering Paul's dramatic question before King Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts xxvi.), and not questioning with the foolish, "How are the dead raised up?" (I Corinthians xv.). Like Abraham, let us

be fully persuaded that what God promises, He is able also to perform (Romans iv.). However, if we have followed and believed His word thus far, God will give us further details for the strengthening of faith and the joy and comfort of our souls. Thus Paul is led to impart a distinct revelation to them in the verses that follow.

Verses 15-18. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

The word "prevent" in verse 15 has today the meaning of hinder or stop, but originally it meant come before, anticipate, precede. So here it is stated that the first effect of the Lord's coming will not apply to the living saints before the sleeping ones, and it is emphatic—we the living shall in no wise anticipate the sleeping. The dead in Christ shall rise first. After that, all, both the living and those just raised from the dead, shall be caught up to meet the coming Lord in the air, to be from that moment for ever with Him.

The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven." This is a personal coming down of the Lord from where He now is in heaven, the first movement of the divine intervention in the world's history which will issue in the judgment of the living and the binding of Satan, and the commencement of Christ's personal millennial reign of peace.

"With a shout." We may take this to be the Lord's own call to His own to meet Him. John v. 28-29 declares that the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves *shall hear His voice*, and shall come forth. In John xi. we read that Jesus "cried with a *loud voice*, Lazarus come forth. And he that was dead came forth." In Revelation iv. 1, John

writes, "After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard as of a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here" (J.N.D. translation). So the Lord's shout will call up both the dead and the living believers.

"With the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God." In I Corinthians xv. we read of "the last trump," and in this connection another has written, "The last trump, among the Romans, was the signal for all to start from the camp. . . . It is the same idea in I Thessalonians iv.; it is there the military technical shout when they were all called into the rank again from standing at ease (originally it was the sound given to the rowers to pull together). We have three there: the Lord first; then the archangel carrying it on; and then the trump of God that completes all." (Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Volume XXVI, page 447.)

Satan is already a defeated foe, but the full effects of Christ's victory over him are still in the future, and in I Corinthians xv. 54 it is said of the resurrection of the saints, "*Then* shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

"The dead in Christ shall rise first." This includes no doubt all who have believed throughout the Old Testament times and onward to the moment of the Lord's coming. It is the first resurrection, that of the just, of those who are Christ's, and it will be completed at the commencement of the millennium (Revelation xx. 4-7). The resurrection of the unjust is at the end of the millennium, and is the resurrection of judgment (Rev. xx. 11-15). To confuse these two in the idea of a "general resurrection" is contrary to Scripture and works to deprive believers of their enjoyment of present salvation and the present possession of eternal life, and is harmful for unbelievers as lulling them into a vague false hope of escaping judgment at some far distant future.

The sleeping saints having been raised, they and the believers who are alive at the moment of the Lord's coming will then be caught up together in the clouds of the earth's



atmosphere to meet the Lord in the air to be for ever with Him. "Caught up" could be read as snatched or seized away: the Latin word is *rapere*, and from this is derived our word rapture which is often used in speaking of this event. In this glorious manner we shall see and meet and be with Him Who loves us and gave Himself for us and has washed us from our sins in His own blood, never to be separated from Him. Blessed hope indeed! Let us constantly remind one another of this our hope for our mutual comfort in the waiting time.

W. H. L. GRAHAM

## THE COMFORTER

(John xiv.—xvi.)

In the well-loved fourteenth chapter of John's gospel the children of God may read the words of the Son of God concerning His Father's house. The Lord Jesus was about to leave His disciples, but told them not to be troubled on that account since He would return to take them to the place He was going to prepare for them. His going there Himself was in the character of forerunner, and would ensure a place for all His followers, when their number should be complete, whose title to be there would be secured by His death and resurrection.

In addition however to this assurance that they should follow Him to enjoy what He would make ready *in heaven*, the Lord told them of the special provision that would be made for their needs so long as they remained *on earth*, viz: the coming of the Comforter, designated as such four times in the chapters mentioned at the head of this article. Let us examine these references.

### I. "Another" Comforter — Ch. xiv. 16, 17

The disciples were undoubtedly to set great value on this word "another," for it was meant to assure them that the grace, patience and love shown them by their Master would be continued by the One who would take His place. The Son Himself had been given by the Father; the Holy Ghost would

be given to those who received the Son, and thus became children of God (John i. 12, R.V. and New Tr.).

Furthermore, the Comforter would abide with them *for ever*; a truth which should be as comforting for us today as it was intended to be for those who first heard the glad announcement. The Lord's physical presence with His disciples was only temporary: He would leave them as soon as His work on earth had been accomplished. But the Holy Spirit would remain both "with" them and "in" them for ever. The truth is simply stated here, but it is enlarged upon in the ministry of Paul—see I Corinthians ii. 9–14; vi. 19.

## II. Sent by the Father in the Name of the Son

(Ch. xiv. 26)

This suggests that the Comforter was to be sent in furtherance of the Father's purpose for the honour and glory of His Son; to magnify the Name of the Son in the world. The Father had already testified to the glory of the Son (John xii. 28). The Son, too, had manifested His own glory (John ii. 11), and taught His disciples many things concerning Himself which they would need to remember. Henceforward, His place as Teacher would be taken by the Holy Spirit, Who would be the power to enable them accurately to recall and record the things they had been taught, and which they were to have the responsibility of committing to writing for the benefit of believers coming after them.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit would show them "things to come" (xvi. 13), and would supply the necessary words for the apostles to set down unerringly such additional things as He would in due course reveal to them (I. Cor. ii. 13).

## III. The Spirit of Truth — Ch. xv. 26, 27

By the divine power of the Comforter, the truth would be established in a world that was under the influence of Satan, the father of lies as the Lord Jesus described him (John viii. 44). It is an edifying consideration that He Who moved upon the face of the waters (Gen. i. 2) would be active in the world to testify of the One by Whom all things were made (John i. 3).

In grace it is added "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." Combined with the witness of the Holy Spirit there would be that of the apostles—two testimonies blended into one. This accounts for the phenomenal achievements of the early Church as recorded in the book of Acts, in fulfilment of the Lord's promise, "Ye shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts i. 8). Wonderful indeed were the days that followed Pentecost.

#### IV. The Holy Spirit's Witness to the World

(Ch. xvi. 7-15)

If the Lord's use of the word "another" in chapter xiv. 16 was designed to reassure the disciples, His declaration "It is expedient for you that I go away" must surely have surprised them. How *could* His absence be better than His all-satisfying presence? Yet they must have learned by now that their Master never spoke a meaningless word! And it was their own beloved Lord—not another—who was declaring that the Spirit's abiding presence on earth would be an experience so rich in blessing for them that it was positively expedient He Himself should go away in order that they should have it. Can we imagine language more pregnant with encouragement for the disciples themselves, and for all believers, everywhere, ever since?

The very presence of the Holy Spirit on earth would in itself be a declaration of the truth in three ways—"He will bring demonstration to the world, of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (verse 8, New Tr.). A footnote to the word "demonstration" reads: "I use it in the sense that His presence and all He does affords the demonstration."

The fact that one Divine Person leaves the world for Another to take His place, should convince men of their sinful unbelief and rejection of Christ. For it was God who would take His Son to heaven, and from thence send the Holy Spirit to testify of Him.

Then the righteousness of God is to be seen in His receiving back to Himself the One who was unrighteously cast out by

the world—as we read in verse 10, “of righteousness, because I go away to My Father, and ye behold Me no longer.”

Lastly, the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth would demonstrate that the prince of this world was already judged—all his plans and scheming overthrown, since the Victim of man’s wickedness would be vindicated by God in His resurrection and ascension, and by the descent of the Holy Spirit to lead the apostles in their successful assaults on the enemy’s kingdom.

How unspeakably gracious of the Comforter to make His dwelling with us!

P. WHITE

### THE DAYS WHEN THE JUDGES RULED

Let us briefly examine a typical instance of the general condition of things in the days when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” In Judges iv. v, we find a period of almost incredible failure and feebleness set out in prose and poetry. Twenty years of galling and disgraceful servitude had brought about the extraordinary condition of confusion and panic that is disclosed in chapter v. 6–8. The highways deserted; the by-ways only used by the venturesome passers-by to neighbouring towns; the villages destroyed; the danger of lurking ambushed archers at the many wells and fountains to which necessity forced the people; and, to complete the grim picture, on the moral and spiritual plane, a woman is the mouthpiece of God to the conscience of the nation, for they had chosen other gods.

So the hope of the testimony to God’s name in Israel is bound up with the faith and intelligence of one woman; for all the men have failed in their testimony to the name of the Lord God of the whole earth, in Whose name their fathers had taken possession of this very land. True, there was one man, Barak—but what a man! A man who leaned upon the faith of another, instead of exercising personal faith and responsibility towards the living God. What an indication of a low moral and spiritual condition is afforded by this! (Cf. Isaiah xxix. 13).

Noble Deborah, but most ignoble Israelites, whose lamentable failure is here written for our warning and guidance. For is it a quite unknown thing to discover something uncommonly like this condition of things in our own times? One has even heard of an assembly of saints where the leading "brother" was a sister; where a man has so leaned upon his wife's faith that at her death the testimony to Christ's name has been abandoned; and, yet again, where the outward local testimony has only been maintained by the prayers and faith of a few humble sisters. It is important always to remember that the state of heart of the individual reacts upon the assembly, and loss of power through lack of the energy of faith resulting from internal spiritual weakness personally, of necessity leads to outward, and also corporate failure too. But God's purpose abides; and although His thought of deliverance for Israel appeared to be openly grasped by one woman, and the stern discipline of war, with its attendant horrors, was needed to recover the nation to a sense of its condition and position, yet there were some who were led to come to "the help of the Lord against the mighty."

Some who could handle the pen came; some also offered themselves willingly to handle the sword; some, too, we read, jeopardized their *lives*, not their money or their time merely; these remind us of the valiant men in Acts xv. 26, "that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The result of this hearty response to the call of God by Deborah was seen in the fact that "the land had rest forty years," with the recovery of God's plan for His people in service and testimony. To this must also be added the establishment thereby of opportunity for national and individual development, while a deepened sense of responsibility would be acquired through the experience of past failure, and would serve to steady them, as in humility they once again bore testimony to the God who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.

But we notice in verses 15-17 that, while some responded so heartily, others who were greatly exercised at the feeble, broken condition of the nation, stayed behind and failed to

be in the line of God's mind about His people in that evil day. Why?

Was it undue occupation with other interests, deemed practically by them of more importance than the honour of God and the welfare of His people? Was it from a love of talking and debating? For we note they had great resolves, great deliberations of heart, much debating, all of which, however, came to nothing, ending in discussion. Some, too, refused to come to the help of the Lord, and were therefore bitterly cursed by the angel of Jehovah. In the hour of opportunity they sulked and failed; or was it that they despaired of God and the future of His people?

Did they refuse to do their duty because there were no great leaders, no gifted men, and the whole affair seemed like a forlorn hope? Or was it because the extraordinary men, Moses and Joshua, had passed away, leaving no successors? Did they in unbelief forget that the Captain of the Lord's host never dies, but ever lives to lead onward to the full accomplishment of the divine purpose?

We cannot tell, but there are some pertinent questions suggested by the story to which we shall be wise to demand plain answers from our own hearts in God's presence.

1. **Are the highways of practical holiness deserted?**
2. **Do the by-ways of crooked compromise afford us our common paths?**
3. **Have the friendly villages of simplicity, sincerity and brotherly kindness been destroyed among us?**
4. **Are we still exposed to sharp arrows of criticism, slander, evil speaking and contempt at our places of drawing water?**

Then an enemy hath done this, and we must cry to God, while we seek to co-operate with His present workings.

Do we enjoy our portion in Christ? Have we grasped His purpose in our salvation? Do we care for God's testimony to Christ, and realise our place in it?

To answer these questions satisfactorily we must "yield ourselves to God," "cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart," and "walk in the Spirit."

In a day so marked by failure and feebleness, may writer and reader co-operate with God's present purpose with a whole-hearted devotion.

W. G. TURNER

(The above article is reprinted from "The Bible Monthly" for April, 1921. Written more than forty years ago, has it no message for us today?—Ed. *Words of Help*.)

### GRACE ABOUNDING

What is the measure and the proof of love?  
The Love of God to men cannot be spanned!  
Behold what Calvary has wrought above  
In making heaven's gates to open stand!  
The guiltiest of Adam's race can find  
Those everlasting doors, uplifted high  
For Christ to enter, now withal designed  
By that same blood, all such to be brought nigh.  
The Lord of Glory by His own blood passed  
Within those opened doors, and claimed the right  
For whosoever will to find at last  
By Grace Divine, Eternal Life in sight  
For every sinner who believes, until—  
Where sin abounded, Grace abounds far more;  
And reigning thus, all saved ones it can fill,  
All who accepting Christ as Lord, adore  
The glory of God's Grace in Him displayed.  
How wonderful the God of Grace appears!  
Of terrors and of wonders unafraid,  
We see the throne of God, and Christ Who clears  
The way of Grace, which judgment waits upon!  
Now Grace can triumph where sin erst has reigned,  
And death its victories boasted anon!  
God's glory thus is by His Grace maintained!

G. S. PURNELL

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*from the Scripture of Truth*

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# WORDS OF HELP

Monthly Magazine for Believers

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## EDITORIAL

This month's issue completes fifty years of the publication of WORDS OF HELP, and it is appropriate to give thanks to God for His goodness in permitting the ministry to be maintained for so long.

Editors and Publishers have succeeded one another; writers and readers have come and gone; but that for which the Magazine has always stood continues — even “the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

Written ministry is a valuable supplement to the spoken word. It is frequently difficult to remember all that has been said, or to recall precisely a line of reasoning. What is committed to writing can be read and re-read until the theme is mastered. Furthermore, there are many who by circumstances or infirmity are precluded from hearing much or any oral ministry. By means of the Magazine such folk are able to share the good things which the Head of the Church dispenses still through His servants for the edification and comfort of all His own in every place.

As we look forward to the opening of another year, should the Lord tarry, we count upon our readers world-wide to unite with us in prayer for God's blessing on this ministry. Pray that new writers may be prompted of the Holy Spirit to offer their help; pray that the Editor may have wisdom in 'electing suitable articles; pray that those who publish and distribute the Magazine may be encouraged in this very necessary work for the Lord; pray that new readers may share in the benefit; and, above all, pray that in this day of departure from the truth the word of God may be ministered in purity and faithfulness, so that in all things the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be honoured.

**NOW UNTO THE KING ETERNAL,  
IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, THE ONLY WISE GOD,  
BE HONOUR AND GLORY FOR EVER AND EVER  
AMEN.**

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

THE gospels of Matthew and Luke record the birth of Christ in considerable detail: John (Ch.i.14) refers to it in a single sentence, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us;" Mark makes no direct reference to it at all. Comments on this fundamental truth are made in the epistle to the Galatians (iv.4) and the first epistle of John (iv.1-3); though the fact is of course often implied. Historically, therefore, Matthew and Luke supply all that God in His wisdom has thought it necessary for men to know concerning the incarnation.

Matthew, in eight verses (Ch.i.18-25), addressing himself particularly to Jews, explains the legal connection of Jesus with the house of David through Joseph, while making clear the important fact that He was begotten, not of Joseph, but by the Holy Ghost's overshadowing of Mary. To all who would enquire into the Christian Faith he seems to say, "This is the way of faith, walk ye in it:" for revelation precedes faith. Furthermore he introduces the profound truth that the promised Saviour is God and man in one Person. He quotes the Old Testament frequently, and declares that Isaiah vii.14 was fulfilled at the birth of Christ.

The prophecy declared that He should be called Emmanuel, God with us. Joseph was instructed to call His name Jesus, "for He shall save His people from their sins." All that He did while on earth confirmed His title to the former name; His death and resurrection proved Him to be worthy of the latter.

While Matthew i. teaches that Jesus' birth was miraculous, and of the virgin, the narrative in chapter ii. insists that the child is greater than the mother. Invariably when the two are spoken of together the order is "the young child and His mother" (see verses 11, 14, 20 and 21).

Luke i. and ii. record the births, first of John the Baptist, then of Him whose way the Baptist was to prepare. John's birth was of the same order as that of Isaac. When Abraham and Sarah were told they should have a son, they laughed incredulously. But a gracious Jehovah bore with this, saying "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis xvii. 15-17; xviii. 9-15). Zacharias

also was unbelieving, with less excuse, seeing that he had the case of Isaac to recall. Nevertheless both patriarch and priest received the promised sons.

The birth of Christ was unique; a miracle which stands alone even in a book of wonders. In Luke i. and ii., things which lie on the surface are of deep interest and highly significant.

Notice in connection with the birth of John the Baptist the prominent place given to his father Zacharias. It was to *him* Gabriel made the announcement, declaring that John was to be his name. To *him* also was revealed the course of his son's life (Ch. i. 13-17). Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, pronounced Mary to be blessed among women and to be the mother of her Lord (verses 42, 43), though Zacharias uttered the larger prophecy (verses 67-79).

In contrast to all this, when the time came to announce the birth of Christ, Gabriel spoke to Mary, and, referring to the two births, assured her that "with God nothing shall be impossible" (verses 26-37). Moreover, before the birth of her son, Mary prophesied, not Joseph (verses 46-55). We owe a great deal of the understanding given to us of the miracle of the birth of Jesus to Gabriel's message and Mary's song.

Luke ii. is devoted to the birth of Christ, and gives many details, civil and religious, to confirm its importance. In verse 7 the great fact is stated in dignified simplicity, the full inn and the manger telling their own story. The angel of the Lord and the angelic host proclaim His glory; the shepherds learn, by hearing and seeing, how lowly His entrance was into the world He had made.

A little later, when He was brought into the temple to fulfil the requirements of the law of Moses, the offering made by Joseph and His mother was of the class prescribed for those of humble means (Leviticus xii. 8; Luke ii. 24). Simeon, led there by the Holy Spirit, spoke of Him as "God's salvation"; this He is "unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah xlix. 6). Furthermore he declares that He would be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel," indicating the course events were about to take (as now we see historically fulfilled), and

will yet take at Israel's future restoration (Isaiah xlix. 5, 6; 22, 23).

Then, as illuminating the whole of this wonderful story, we are given the incident of Jesus' presence in Jerusalem at the Passover when twelve years of age. His words "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" reveal that which had always been true of Him, and speak beforehand of the pathway of obedience which led on to the cross.

His glory—not only God's Son,  
 In manhood He had His full part;  
 And the union of both joined in one,  
 Forms the fountain of love in His heart.

R. HAWKER

In addition to specific prophecy regarding the virgin birth of our Lord, there is an offering described in Leviticus ii. which is designed to help our faith and understanding. In the main, the offerings were typical of Christ's death, but the meat, or meal offering suggests chiefly His Person and perfect life. The materials used in it were fine flour, oil and frankincense. After a handful had been consumed on the altar, resulting in a sweet smelling savour to the LORD, the remainder was given to the priests for their own portion as a thing most holy.

The way in which this offering was prepared, the fine flour, mingled with the oil, is a type of the overshadowing power of the Highest (Lev. ii. 4; Luke i. 35). Note particularly the reference in Luke to the Holy Ghost. The unleavened cakes and wafers anointed with oil prefigure the anointing of the Lord Jesus with the Holy Ghost at the river Jordan (Luke iii. 21, 22).

In the Levitical offering, part was for God and part for the priests. When the disciples heard the Father testify to His delight in His Beloved Son, were they not permitted to share in the divine pleasure? Surely this communion would increase day by day as they followed the Lord.

In the religious life of Israel, the lamb offered morning and evening was the principal feature. But this burnt offering was

always accompanied by a meal offering (see Exodus xxix. 38-46). The spotless life of Jesus was a necessary preliminary to His atoning death.

P. WHITE

## THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST AND THEIR TREASURES

(Read: Matthew ii. 1-12)

THE Magi had made a long journey to see the newly-born King and to do Him homage. On their arrival at Jerusalem they asked: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him." There appeared to be no doubt in their minds as to the truth and significance of what they had seen. Before setting out on their long journey they had selected the treasures which their convictions led them to believe would be a suitable and acceptable offering. They wished to celebrate the birth of the King by a present that was worthy of Him. The gold, the frankincense and the myrrh were precious things, and pleasing to God because they were taken to His Son, born in Bethlehem. The givers sought to offer what He was worthy to receive—a good principle, and one that was according to the will of God.

### The Glory of Christ

There lies in this a practical lesson for us. Have we the desire to offer praise and thanks to Him? We are in a much closer relationship to the Lord than the Magi were. They had seen only "His star" in the East. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews ii. 9). We know He went into death that we should possess eternal life. We take our worship to the One who has been exalted and glorified at the right hand of God. We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might become rich.

It is true that the Lord Jesus will reign as King in Sion, but first He had to suffer in order to be able to enter into the glory

of His earthly kingdom. On earth He wore not a crown, but endured the cross: He sat not on a throne, but lay in a sepulchre. Instead of receiving honour and glory He suffered scorn and contempt. But by His sufferings and death on the cross pardon becomes possible for sinners on the ground of faith.

The object of our worship is the Lord Jesus as our Saviour—the Son of God who fulfilled the will of God. The Magi did not know anything of the truth of salvation. Yet they undertook a long journey in order to worship the person of the King, and to present to Him their gifts. Are we, who know His grace and glory so much better than they, as serious, diligent and persevering in our worship as they were? Are we prepared to make a long journey for no other purpose than to adore Him and to lay our treasures at His feet?

### **To Worship is to Give and Not to Take**

The purpose of the Magi in their visit to the new-born King was not to obtain some benefit either for themselves or for the country from which they had come. It was just the reverse. They took their treasures *to Him*. What attracted them was the glory of the royal Personage who had been born. For *His* sake they had crossed the desert. It was *He* who prompted them to worship and offer their gifts. These worshippers from afar were forerunners of those who will yet come to do homage to Christ, as saith the prophet Isaiah (Ch. ix. 3): “And the Gentiles shall come to Thy light, and kings to the brightness of Thy rising.” Again in Psalm lxxii. 10, 11: “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him.” Lastly, Zechariah xiv. 16: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts.” These Magi however were the first heathen who, without any pressure from outside, came voluntarily to worship the Lord.

In the house where they found the child, they did not see a large company of people, nor men of high standing. According

to Matthew ii. 11, they found only the child with Mary His mother. That however was sufficient for them: all they came for was to see the new-born King. Their thoughts were directed to Him and not towards themselves. They had come to give and not to get. In the truest sense, an odour of worship pervaded the house.

### Forgetting Themselves

In the day to come, the adoration of heaven will centre upon the Lord Himself. What the saints have become will be in the background. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders will fall down before the Lamb, and cry: "Thou art worthy . . . because Thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed to God, by Thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests" (Rev. v. 9, 10). It is the Lord Himself, in their midst as the Lamb that had been slain, rather than the result of His work, that the heavenly worshippers will have before them. Their song will be, not of their redemption, but of the Redeemer whose work has been accomplished.

Should not our worship today partake more of this character? The Magi from the East show us the way, and the elders in heaven are the perfect example of the manner of true worship.

(Adapted from a translation from the Dutch  
*Messenger of Peace*, by J. MOL SENR.)

### NEW BIRTH

"YE must be born again" is not, as an old hymn puts it, a divine decree. It is however utterly indispensable for man's blessing. Because his original nature is so completely corrupted, a *new life* is essential. This we can understand, and it is familiar truth; but familiarity should not make us lose sight of what a stupendous thing it is that the believer is not merely born again, but is *born of God* (I John v. 1). A man—born of God!

Adam was created by God, and the bestowal of a spiritual nature distinct from that of the beasts is indicated by the ex-



pression "*God breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." For the animal creation became living souls (or beings) without this divine action.

But we can see that something far higher still than this must be conveyed by the words "born of God." By creation we are the "offspring" of God, an expression which Paul quotes from a heathen poet when speaking in the Areopagus (Acts xvii. 28, 29). He argues from it that God cannot be like any idol, but does not go on to point out any privilege or blessing resulting from it today, as people sometimes do. No, on that ground all is lost, and man is called upon to repent because of coming judgment (verses 30, 31). So in speaking to Nicodemus the Lord Jesus insisted that without new birth it was impossible for a man either to see or enter the kingdom of God (John iii.).

That "born of God" is not a mere poetical or rhetorical expression is shown by the fact that John argues from it that "everyone that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him"—in other words, to love the Father truly implies love for any child of His. Thus by the new birth we really become God's children, members of His family, partakers of the divine nature (II Peter i. 4). This new nature is incapable of sin (I John iii. 9), so if only we do not give room for the old, corrupt nature to work, we shall indeed not commit sin.

### **Born of Water and of the Spirit**

In answering Nicodemus' unbelieving reply "How can a man be born when he is old?" the Lord enlarged His first statement to show him that, far from being a repetition of natural birth, a man must be "born of water and of the Spirit." What does this mean?

First of all the Lord emphasized the difference between natural and spiritual birth: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Then He compared it with the invisible, untraceable movements of the wind: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Here is the divine operation in the soul, mysterious and unknowable—this new birth through the activity of God's Spirit whereby the new life, the life of Christ is imparted to us, an operation which we cannot expect to understand. But what of the water? What does "born of water" mean?

### **Not Baptism**

Some understand it as referring to baptism, either John's or Christian baptism. But whereas the Lord stated most solemnly without exception, that a man (i.e. any and every man) could not enter the kingdom of God unless he were born of water and of the Spirit, we know that men have most definitely been born again without baptism, e.g. the thief on the cross, and Cornelius and his friends. Or do those who teach this doctrine suppose that the Lord made a mistake, and meant to say "Born of the Spirit and of water"? Certainly whatever large sections of Christendom may do, it was New Testament practice to baptize those who had given evidence of being already born again.

The truth is, of course, that John's baptism was confined to a special period in Israel, and Christian baptisms peaks of identification with Christ in death (Rom. vi. 3), while new birth, as the Lord's word shows, is a necessity for all men in all ages, if they are to be delivered from the ruin of sin. Closer examination of the passage in John iii. tells us that Nicodemus ought to have known the truth the Lord enunciated, as verse 10 proves. It was not a new revelation, but what he should have gathered from the Old Testament, as for example in Ezekiel xxxvi. 24-32, where Israel's future re-birth is plainly declared. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them."

### **Moral Cleansing**

It will be noticed that it is Jehovah Himself who will cleanse them equally with giving them a new heart and a new spirit. Thus it is plain that literal water is not meant; it is the cleansing action of God's word that is intended—see Ephesians v.26.

This interpretation is supported by other scriptures that speak of new birth, as I Peter i. 22, 23, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." We observe that Peter underlines the same things which the Lord Jesus spoke of—the moral cleansing of the soul through submission to God's word, and the power of the Spirit giving effect to it, while he adds that on which the Lord later laid such stress, the necessity of loving one another. See also James i. 18.

This matter of moral cleansing is important because it is possible to over-emphasize the parallel between the new birth and the old. Because we had no part, or no active part, in our natural birth, it is sometimes argued that the soul is entirely passive in the new birth. Now even though it is true that the imparting of new life is described as new creation (2 Cor. v. 17; Eph. ii. 10), it is not the creation of a new personality. A man is the same person before and after his conversion. To quicken one dead in trespasses and sins God speaks through His word; His voice is heard in the innermost recesses of the soul through the Spirit, and in believing the message and submitting to the One who speaks, the man is lifted out of the corruption in which he has lived—he is born of water, and of the Spirit. He is a changed man morally, not by an outward conformity, but renewed by the mighty power of God's Spirit in his inmost being, possessed of a new life from which new desires and instincts will spring.

### **Eternal Life Bestowed**

Life is the gift of God, and the Son of God exercises this sovereign prerogative, and always in obedience to the Father's

will (John xvii. 2). And the means by which life is imparted is invariably through a divine testimony to the soul. The Lord declared "*He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live*" (John v. 24, 25). "*This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day*" (John vi. 40).

Most often God speaks through the proclamation of the gospel, but we know that He can make very many things convey His message to the soul. The vital thing is that His voice is heard, His testimony believed and obeyed.

### Gradual Conversion

The comparison of natural and spiritual birth also raises the question as to whether the latter has anything corresponding to the gradual development of the unborn child. We know indeed that the new life is often slow in showing itself, and many Christians were never conscious of the day when their new life began. However, scripture gives no indication of a gradually developing divine life before the new birth. Rather, it says "passed from death unto life." Again, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, we were quickened together with Christ (Eph. ii.). And if the raising of Lazarus be a type of this, there was nothing gradual about that. However, he came forth "bound hand and foot with grave clothes," like a new-born soul encumbered by old habits and ways of thought. From the start the new nature is in conflict with the old, for scripture, in conformity with our own experience, shows that the new life does not drive out the old (which the Bible calls the flesh) but exists side by side with it.

This *experience* of gradual awakening is most often found among young people of Christian upbringing. Now with the young, natural life is itself undergoing rapid and vigorous development, and it may well be that in these cases the new

birth has taken place very early, the two natures thus developing side by side. Hence a distinct "conversion" is not readily experienced.

It is also important to remember that the possession of divine life is not the same thing as the knowledge of peace with God and the enjoyment of liberty of soul. These are dependent on apprehending by faith all that Christ has wrought for us. Without this, the new life may produce misery instead of joy, as Romans vii. shows. While it is the same blessed Saviour that gives us both new life and cleansing from sin, it is by no means always the case that our faith realises all at once how completely He has met our need.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

## THE WORD MADE FLESH

*"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth"* (John i. 14).

THE Lord Jesus had no sin. Although perfectly man, every thought, feeling, and inward motion was holy in Jesus; not only not a flaw in His ways was ever seen, but not a stain was in His nature.

Whatever men reason or dream, He was as pure humanly as divinely; and this may serve to show us the all-importance of holding fast what men call orthodoxy as to His person. I shall yield to none in jealousy for it, and loyally maintain that it is of the substance and essence of the faith of God's elect that we should confess the immaculate purity of His humanity, just as much as the reality of His assumption of our nature.

Assuredly He did take the proper manhood of His mother, but He never took manhood in the state of His mother, but in the body prepared for Him by the Holy Ghost, who expelled every taint of otherwise transmitted evil. In His mother that

nature was under the taint of sin; she was fallen, as were all others naturally begotten and born in Adam's line.

In Him it was not so; and, in order that it should not be so, we learn in God's word that He was not begotten in a merely natural generation, which would have perpetuated the corruption of the nature and have linked the Lord Jesus with the fall; but by the power of the Holy Ghost He and He alone was born of a woman without a human father.

Consequently, as the Son was necessarily pure, as pure as the Father, in His own proper divine nature, so also was He in the nature which He thus received from His mother; both the divine and the human were found for ever afterwards joined in that one and the same person—the Word made flesh.

Thus, we may take here occasion to observe, Jesus is the true pattern of the union of man with God, God and man in one person. It is a common mistake to speak of union with God in the case of us, His children. Scripture never uses language of this kind; it is the error of theology.

The Christian never has union with God, which would really be, and only is, in the Incarnation. We are in Scripture said to be one with Christ, "one spirit with the Lord," "one body," one again as the Father and the Son; but these are evidently and totally different truths.

Oneness would suppose identification of relationship, which is true of us as the members and body of our exalted Head. But we could not be said to be one with God as such without confounding the Creator and the creature, and insinuating a kind of Buddhistic absorption into deity, which is contrary to all truth or even sense.

The phrase, "union with God", therefore, is a great blunder, which not only has got nothing whatever to warrant it from the Spirit, but there is the most careful exclusion of the thought in every part of the divine word.

W. KELLY

## THE SILENCES OF GOD

“In the beginning God”—no grander words  
Could head the record of the march of time.  
In the beginning, 'ere time was, O God!  
Thou *wast*, and as its mighty aeons roll  
On and still on, Thou *art*, the unchangeable,  
And Thou *wilt be*, when time shall be no more.

“In the beginning God.” These verdant vales,  
These lofty fir clad mountains were not there;  
Yon rugged rocks rearing proud heads on high;  
These rushing rivers clear and musical;  
Yon mighty rolling sea, whose thund'ring voice  
Mocketh man's puny tones; yon heaven's expanse  
Of stainless blue; cloud masses whose vast forms  
Of everchanging hue roll and unroll,  
As driven by the breath of God's strong winds—  
None of these were—nought was save God alone—  
God, Father, Son and Spirit—God triune—  
God self-sufficing.

C. H. VON POSECK (Miss)  
(*Supplied by MISS MARJORIE S. SMITH, of Herne Bay.*)

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