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THE DIVINE CURRENT IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

Luke 1: 38-48; 2: 8-14, 25-32

S.McC. In suggesting this section of Luke's gospel one is thinking of the divine current as manifest in it, and persons who were moving in that current that God had set on and was moving in Himself in view of the effectuation of His great thoughts which have men for their centre and of His own glory. We are all challenged as to whether we are moving in it or whether we are out of it. One man in this section of the gospel was out of it for a while, Zacharias, but he came back into it in great power with prophetic utterance, We have Mary and Elizabeth, we have the shepherds and we have Simeon, persons of great quality who are moving in full accord with God's mind and in this current, fully sympathetic with what God is proceeding in consequent on the incarnation. It is a great thing that we all should be affected by the spiritual and divine current that God is in; and it is very important that we should be in it and not out of it. The fact that we are assembled here shows some evidence of desire to be in it. Alas! there is much around us that is not in it, but God is moving in this current in relation to the greatest thoughts that fill His mind and heart in regard to men.

I thought we might see first in Mary the thought of subjection, one of the most important features to characterise persons who are moving in the divine current. We live in a day when there is so much lawlessness and independence but Mary exemplifies in a remarkable way the comely spirit of subjection. What a vessel she was!

Elizabeth brings out a remarkable expression of a vessel filled with the Spirit in full sympathy with this current in which God is moving.

Her relations with Mary are very affecting, as our relations with one another should be. Every locality should be marked by the relations that are expressed in Mary and Elizabeth. And I thought we might see in the shepherds the feature of watchful care, a thing that is greatly needed today in the midst of all the conditions around that beset the testimony, greatly needed to prevent the enemy's interruptions; how he would hinder the flow and the divine current

which exists today just as it existed then. Watchful care, unselfish interest in regard to communications from heaven, appears in all these passages. It is a great thing to be in the environment where these communications come. Then Simeon is "a man in Jerusalem" who afforded scope for the Spirit. The Spirit seemed to be on very definite relations with Simeon as Simeon was with the Spirit, and prosperity in our localities has a great deal to do with affording the Spirit scope as moving in this current in which such great things are being worked out.

C.M. These were all, in the sight of men, obscure individuals, and yet what is working in them and through them is the greatest power on earth.

S.McC. That is very striking. We may wonder at the obscurity; things are very obscure in a certain sense today - small gatherings, long distances between them - yet there is a current in which God is moving which is very affecting and stimulating and comforting.

A.A.B. In the prophet Malachi the Spirit of God anticipates what we have read about. Jehovah says "they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure", chap 3: 17. Would that link with the high level of things that you have in mind, what the saints are to God?

S.McC. Exactly, and Luke brings us very near to heaven, although the Lord has come on to the earth as Son of Man on the side of the human race identifying Himself with all the sorrows of the race and having in mind the emancipation of men in view of their being for God and His pleasure. It is very affecting to see how the environment of Luke is never very far from heaven, from the beginning of the gospel through to the end.

R.E.T. The angel said "Fear not, Mary". I wondered whether the subjective side would bring out faith in operation.

S.McC. Just so; therefore we are always challenged as to whether faith is active with us. We see how the Lord is affected by faith in

individuals in the gospels. Is our faith such that it would affect divine Persons? This is important. Luke deals with the smallness of things. Our brother has referred to the obscurity linked with these persons, Mary referring to the low estate of His bondmaid; she was an honoured vessel but the spirit in which she speaks of herself in Elizabeth's presence is very affecting.

D.E.R. Is it in your mind that these conditions should be found amongst us in view of the nearness of the Lord's return? These were the conditions prevailing at His first advent.

S.McC. Yes, and quality in these persons is something to be affected by, spiritual quality, we may say assembly quality, because Luke's ministry has in mind the local assembly as we move and act in the light of it in a day of brokenness, and specially to support Paul's ministry which has in mind in a particular way the assembly in localities.

E.C.M. Mary seems to be distinguished in the beginning of Acts. There is the reference to "several women" in the upper room "and Mary the mother of Jesus", chap 1: 14. Would you say something about that.

S.McC. We have to be impressed with what a vessel she was. Think of the treasure that was in that vessel but always maintaining the spirit of lowliness. We can afford, dear brethren, to maintain the spirit of lowliness; what gets us into difficulties is the lack of it. Peter exhorts all of us to "bind on humility towards one another", 1 Pet 5: 5. It is very important that we should be humble and marked by the spirit of lowliness.

C.M. So the greatest responsibility can be committed to her. In chapter 2 "a multitude of the heavenly host" is not far away but the care of the Babe is not committed to them but to Mary.

S.McC. She was a trustworthy vessel in a unique way and was marked by purity. Many things that we have had to face in recent years have not been marked by the spirit of lowliness or the feature of purity. It is a great thing that in being drawn into this divine current

we should be marked by these features because it is to such persons that divine communications come.

F.N.S. Would it be right to think of Saul of Tarsus getting into this current very quickly? When he recapitulates his own conversion he says "What shall I do, Lord", Acts 22: 10. That is subjection; and his name was changed to Paul - 'little'.

S.McC. That is quite an interesting link. Well, are we content with the day of small things? It may chafe some of us that things are so small and in a certain sense so obscure, but we want to see that this is the way the divine current is moving. There is no room for the Lord in the inn, He was born in the manger; surely that would affect us in regard to how Luke presents things in his gospel. There are no magi in Luke, that is Matthew, the kingly gospel; Luke presents the Lord coming in on the side of men and taking on and discharging their liabilities. We need to see how the grace of the gospel opens up in Luke as humanity is in mind, and we should have humanity in mind especially in this day of such disturbed conditions.

D.E.B. There seems to be a certain feature of astonishment with Mary that she should have been selected for this position. Should that be with us, a certain wonder that the Lord has taken any one of us up that would keep up in the pathway?

S.McC. I think it is very important. We were having in Glasgow the Father's sovereign operations and the economy introduced in that relation as in Luke 9 and 10 and Matthew 11. How we should be affected by the Father's sovereign operations over against the wise and prudent from whom things are hid! Things are not hid from the babes. We want to be amongst the persons that things are not hid from; and that is linked with the impressionable state referred to in the babes. It is a great thing to be in an impressionable state because we know even in our day how things have been hid from the wise and prudent.

E.P. Is what is characteristic a test to us? We may be subject when something is presented to us but to be marked by subjection characteristically is something that we would desire.

S.McC. It is very important that we should be characterised by subjection because the whole bearing of things in the world is the overthrow of government, men marked by independence and lawlessness. That should be offset in the cities in which our lot is cast; we should be characteristically subject persons - subject to God, subject to Christ, subject to the Holy Spirit subject to one another. How many upsets there have been through insubjection in persons!

J.C.E. Was not Mary really already in the current of divine movement by being a bondmaid? It is not necessarily in great outward things that subjection and being in the current is shown, but by bondmanship or bondmaidship.

S.McC. God looks on all our localities for these qualities that enter into these persons that are moving in the divine current. We do not want to be out of it. Alas, there are persons that are out of the divine current and things are hid from them; we want to be in it. The enemy is always operating to offset what God is doing. As it says in the book of Job: "He maketh the deep to boil like a pot", chap 41: 31. In the last few years we have seen something of that, how the enemy has been and is still active to make the deep boil like a pot.

D.E.R. Is it significant that what seems to be emphasised with each of these persons is the service of God? Mary magnifies the Lord; "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour"; then with the shepherds there is this acclamation of praise to God; and then Simeon comes into the temple and blesses God.

S.McC. Very fine that, how the line of the service of God runs through in relation to the qualities in these persons that are moving in the current in which God is moving. We have been taught in the good teaching how this gospel sets out the service of God. Who has not read 'The praises of Israel' (J.T. N.S. Vol. 34, p.292), the remarkable way the service of God is set out in the gospel according to Luke? The amazing thing is that Luke was not an apostle.

A.A.B. Would the many references throughout the gospel to God being glorified link with Paul's epistle to the Ephesians?

S.McC. Exactly; there is a distinct link between Luke and the Ephesian epistle because of the way that nearness to heaven and what is heavenly is stressed. Then the wonderful way in which the glad tidings parallels the line of the service of God in this gospel is very fine. There is no immediate distance in the setting out of these two lines; the service of God and the glad tidings. It is very affecting how in chapter 15 God in the Trinity is engaged in the salvation of men; and, as you say, how in miracles that were wrought through the Lord's service they glorified God. There was a real representation of God in the Lord 's service.

A.A.B. Referring to the attenuated conditions publicly, would there be great compensation as we come into the liberty which marks these women in a spiritual way, the babe leaping in Elizabeth and then the doxology of Mary? In small meetings we find what is akin to that sometimes. It is a great compensation for the tremendous reduction in the public sense.

S.McC. It is very fine to think of that because Elizabeth is a type of what is seen in some ways in small meetings. Mary is more a type of what is of long standing, the remarkable way in which she gives expression to what Hannah had given expression to is very affecting; but Elizabeth is a vessel immediately of the Spirit of God, she is filled with the Spirit.

C.M. Does it appear that those who are in this current are quick to recognise others who are in it and to link on with them?

S.McC. It is good to notice that, it is a great help in our localities. Disturbed conditions arise in persons that are not getting on well together. That is not a Mary and Elizabeth quality; they get on without any disturbed feeling between them. There might have been jealous feelings if the natural side had prevailed, the fact that Mary was so honoured, but Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary and responds to it.

E.J.J. It is amazing how this salutation affects Elizabeth. We might just meet one another and shake hands but a salutation affects us.

S.McC. It brings in the thought of respect for one another. It is very humbling if disrespect comes in. We have been delivered from that, disrespect for older brethren and for brethren generally. It is very humbling as we think of all that we have come through but, having been emancipated from it, how we should regard one another in the bonds of love and make the most of our relations with one another!

C.J.S. Is that why Paul ends the Corinthian epistle on the line of salutation: "Salute one another with a holy kiss", 2 Cor 13: 12?

S.McC. He did not end the epistle to the Galatians, where there was legal error like that. In Corinthians, where there was the carnal actions of the flesh, it is remarkable that he should give that salutation at the end.

C.M. Here the Holy Spirit links on with the salutation; "as Elizabeth heard the salutation".

S.McC. Just so; it says "the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit". That is a remarkable statement as to what happened inwardly in Elizabeth, no doubt a reference to what may happen inwardly with us in the local assembly, that is the formation that is here referred to.

A.A.B. The psalmist says "all that is within me, bless his holy name!", Ps 103: 1. Would that be seen here?

S.McC. Yes, indeed.

A.A.B. In what he says in that psalm he draws upon the formation in him. I was thinking of the contrast between Rebecca and these women. When the struggle was proceeding in her she enquired of Jehovah; but these women are beyond the struggle, are they not? What marks them is the work of God.

S.McC. The sovereign work of God enters into this section and we ought to be affected that we are the subjects of it, and we would desire in each of us and in the younger brethren to see the liberation of it in expression.

C.H.S. In this current is there not a delightful informality, a lack of conformity to any set order of things?

S.McC. Well there is, but everything is comely. You may have a lack of formality which may not be comely. The remarkable way that the Scriptures and the knowledge of God are referred to, the utterance of Elizabeth and then the utterances of Mary, are very affecting.

R.E.T. Is there something in the way that "Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill country"? Is the initiative spirit to be with us, in that sense, and the liberty of the household? I suppose it is an important matter today that household conditions should be right for brethren to come at any time.

S.McC. The hill country of Judah is very affecting, because Luke maintains all the way through his gospel the elevated line of thinking that should mark us. Now when we come to the shepherds what quality there is in them. It says "there were shepherds in that country abiding without, and keeping watch by night over their flock". This chapter opens with a reference to government. One thing we are confronted with today is government unable to cope with things; but God is showing how He can move behind the scenes, and other scenes are enacted in which God's thoughts are appearing despite the failure of men in responsibility.

A.A.B. Allied to the governmental side is subjection to it in Joseph and Mary, at such a time as this moving up in order to be inscribed. Is it important that we should be in subjection to the powers that be: "Let every soul be subject", Rom 13: 1?

S.McC. Very important, and at the same time recognising that, whatever fails in government in the hands of man in responsibility, God has a system of operation by which He will carry through His thoughts despite man's failure (see Ezekiel 1).

A.A.B. That is really part of the current in which God is moving at the present time.

S.McC. And we need to see that so that we are steadied and established in the light of God's throne; while the glory may be removed from Jerusalem, God is showing in Ezekiel 1 how He can carry on and go straight forward in His system of operation.

E.C.M. Is that why David is brought in so much in the early chapters of Luke - the family of David, the city of David, and He shall have the throne of David? God is going through with His system of things.

S.McC. Very good. These references to David are interesting because, in the records regarding the kings, the standard for God and what is pleasing to Him is always David: he was really a king and he reigned.

D.E.B. The shepherds were abiding without. There was this governmental sphere of things operating to which they would be subject but that was not their life: they were abiding without.

S.McC. It fits in with our position today as to whether we are marked in this light and in this environment by watchful care. We all have a responsibility, young and old, to be marked by watchful care in relation to the interests of God in our localities.

R.E.T. Would this exercise us too to be watchful in regard to seeing where the Spirit of God is leading through the ministry?

S.McC. That is right. There is no worldliness in this environment of the shepherds. What marks them is self-sacrificing care; whatever their interests at large might be they were concentrating on the care of the flock, and to them the glory appears. We have the return of the glory here in this section.

F.N.S. Did not Mr Taylor sen say that "Let every soul be subject to the authorities that are above him" included the authority in the assembly?

S.McC. One of the most dangerous things that the enemy would work through is the overthrow of government in the local assembly. Deliverance from the hackneyed word that we used, 'system' , does not mean that we are to be without government or rule. The assembly is the vessel of government and rule, according to Matthew.

F.N.S. God is a God of order. What you have been encouraging us in would help - the characteristic principle of subjection marking us and the recognition of sovereignty.

S.McC. It is remarkable as you look at conditions in the last two or three years, in connection with lawlessness, most of it has proceeded from places of learning. I know in the United States it has, radical elements want to set aside any kind of government or rule so as to break up what they call the establishment; but we do not want to be linked with that spirit of things. The young people need to be encouraged; they are living in days not only of lawlessness but of corruption, and this line of things in Luke attending the incarnation and manifesting the current in which God is moving ought to help our young people to see the advantages of being in an environment where what is of God is appreciated and honoured.

C.M. In the assembly, authority and shepherding are very closely connected, are they not?

S.McC. Yes, it is very remarkable in the book of the Revelation how shepherding is linked with government and rule; "he shall shepherd them (the nations) with an iron rod" (chap 2: 27), that is of course in a coming day; but even God Himself enters into the matter of searching out His flock in the dark and difficult day. Luke would help us as to care for souls; care for one another but care for persons who may be convicted and persons who may be exercised, Luke would help us as to the great principle of unselfish care.

J.C.E. Is it a further point with the shepherds that they were prepared to follow up the things that were revealed to them. Psalm 48 says "As we have heard, so have we seen" (v.8), and goes on to speak of God's praise being as His name.

S.McC. That is an important feature. God helps us as we follow up things, as we follow up and act on light as it comes in.

S.D.K.R. Would you say another word as to the return of the glory.

S.McC. Well, the glory had departed as Ezekiel draws attention to it; the return of the glory is linked with the coming in of Christ, and what a thing that is as Luke would impress us with it and that there are in these remnant conditions persons of moral and spiritual quality that are in keeping with the return of the glory, because the return of the

glory involves that conditions amongst men are to be met. Now Simeon is one who is moving in the divine current in sympathy with God and consistent with all that that current involves, "a man in Jerusalem" marked by maturity. It is a great thing that we should be delivered from immaturity and marked by maturity which is one of the great objectives in divine operations. It says "this man was just and pious". We are living in a day when there is a great challenge to justness and piety, it marks the last days. We want to think of these qualities as features to emulate and be marked by in the testimony in such difficult times.

Ques. Would you say how this maturity is reached.

S.McC. I think maturity and the development of the work of God are linked with the Spirit and our relations with Him.

A.A.B. Would there be anything in the fact that the communication he received was in this environment? It says of him "there was a man in Jerusalem". In Acts 13 we have a similar thought: "Now there were in Antioch, in the assembly which was there" (v 1). There is a certain environment in which these communications come from the Spirit who is the source of them.

S.McC. I think that is an important thing to refer to because what saddens your heart is that many who have been deflected by the condition of things that developed have gone on in isolation and are still going on in isolation, forgetting that there is an area in which the Spirit of God is and where communications according to God can be received.

E.P. Is what Mr Bellamy is saying confirmed in Psalm 46 in the reference to what is flowing? "There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God"; then it says "God is in the midst of her".

S.McC. Yes; the last verse of Ezekiel, after going over the distributions in the city and the name of the city, is "Jehovah is there".

R.E.T. Would it take us back to Genesis: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness", chap.1: 26? Spirituality comes through

desire, does it not, and manhood would be something that would be seen, would it not?

S.McC. This gospel sets out humanity and manhood in Jesus so attractive to God; the pattern of manhood is there in Jesus. We should be affected by that because God's primary and His eternal thought is that He is going to be with men and it will be men formed after the pattern seen in Jesus.

D.E.R. In this section there is no pretension; in fact the conditions outwardly are so weak that there could not be. Nevertheless there is no gainsaying the fact that there are persons there who are moving in the Spirit's current, and that is what we would desire, would we not?

S.McC. Very important. We perhaps might fail in the current moment by preoccupation with smallness and no ostentation, but the great thing is to see from the section we have read how the Lord can come into these lowly conditions; and, in these lowly conditions which mark His pathway all the way through, serve men in view of their liberation in connection with their relations with God and in view of their being established in God's salvation.

C.M. Divine communications are not intended to be rare things. Has not man been created so as to be a receiver of divine communications?

S.McC. Just so, the Scriptures open early in Genesis with God communicating with man.

G.A.P. Is the feature of overcoming essential in our day if we are to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies? Does that come out in those last four addresses to the churches?

S.McC. Yes, the overcomer precedes the hearing of the voice of the Spirit. Well, I thought these passages would bring out, and be helpful especially in the current time, that whatever the failure and breakdown have been (because Luke follows on Malachi where God refers to the failure) there is a divine current in which God Himself is

moving and in which He would have us moving in the qualities that marked these persons.

St. Albans

29 June 1974

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DIVINE AFFECTIONS

S.McCallum

John 17: 25,26; Ephesians 3: 14-19; Romans 15: 30-33

It is on one's heart, as the Spirit may help, to say something about divine affections. I want to refer to the love of the Father, then the love of the Christ and then the love of the Spirit. There are references to these various features of divine affections in the passages we have read. It is a very attractive matter to be drawn into the circle of divine affections, especially in a day such as that in which we live where there has been much to test and try the saints.

It is important that we see the value of repairing into the conscious enjoyment of that 'circle of affections all divine' (hymn 207) where nothing fails. How many things have failed, but love, as we have been instructed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, never fails; and this reference to the Father's love and our becoming the vessels of it is a very affecting matter. There is only one reference in this chapter to failure and breakdown and that is in the son of perdition. The Lord clothes the disciples with wonderful thoughts in this chapter. He gives us a remarkable example for our education as to knowing how to regard the saints and how to clothe them in the dignity proper to them. There has been much that we have experienced that has belittled the saints and reduced them far below the level of what is proper to their dignity as related to the eternal counsels of divine love. So it is always a comfort to retire into John 17 to such a fine reference to the steadiness of outlook that belongs to the sanctuary. You are amazed that John the evangelist, who lay in the bosom and on the breast of Jesus, could give us such a recording as we have in this chapter. One thing that stands out in it is the Lord's crediting His own with capacity. Spiritual capacity is a very testing matter but it is a very great matter, for we belong to a family that will have the greatest capacity spiritually of any family that is named of the Father in the universe of God. What determines its capacity is its formation. No other family, while having its own degree of formation, has the capacity that the assembly has; it is a creature vessel, next to Deity

but a creature vessel, and as Mr Taylor sen once said, 'What a vessel!'. In the millennial world, the world to come of which we speak, and in the eternal state, what capacity will mark that vessel as having increased to a holy temple in the Lord and becoming the library of the universe, manifested as it will be as the fulness of Christ. Anything to be known of Christ and of God in that day will come through the assembly as associated with Christ. So this chapter brings out the capacity of His own. He says "the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them"; what a touch that is! There are times when we talk of the failures of the disciples but in this chapter the Lord is referring to their capacity.

In the typical scriptures dealing with the tabernacle and the temple we find vessels of varying capacity. If God has taken us on it is not to be as empty vessels. He fills empty vessels of course, but in the light of this chapter He takes us on in relation to a capacity that can receive the greatest communications that relate to God and the purposes and counsels of His love. He says in another place in this chapter, "the glory which thou hast given me I have given them".

Think of the dignity and greatness of this, dear brethren. May the Spirit carry us into the greatness of these statements of our Lord, as in the light of the sanctuary He speaks to the Father, and of this that I have read: "Righteous Father, - and the world has not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known; that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them", not with them but in them - capacity, "and I in them". It is as if nothing delights the heart of Christ more than to be in the assembly, to be in the midst of His own contemplating the capacity that there is by divine working to hold these great thoughts. Think of the love with which Christ was loved, the way He gave cause for the Father to love Him: "On this account the Father loves me" (John 10: 17), think of the Lord speaking in that way. Of course He reciprocated the love of the Father. At the end of chapter 14 He makes a statement that is not mentioned elsewhere although there are the

indications of it; on the eve of His departure out of the world He says "but that the world may know that I love the Father... Rise up, let us go hence". It is the only place in which we have the Lord's statement literally of His love for the Father. He gave evidence of it, of course, in the things He did, but what it must have been for His own, as they were with Him, to hear Him to speak of His love for the Father. From chapters 14 to 17 He is speaking on the eve of His departure out of the world; and what light floods the soul as we think of what He is saying, and of this expression as to the Father's love; "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them". Think of being vessels of the Father's love, the love with which He loved Christ, and of the outgoings there would be in relation to this thought. John the evangelist speaks of divine affections in the most rich and wonderful way as none of the other gospels do, and he carries it through right into his epistles, especially the first epistle. You would remember how he refers to the contrast between the world and the Father; he is doing that all the way through from chapter 13. He would draw us into the Father's world to know the sense of the wonderful effect of grace and the actings of God that we should know Him who has this place in the economy of love into which God has come. He says in regard to the young men in his first epistle; "If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him", chap. 2: 15. What a positive statement that is! Do you love the world or the things of the world? This is a check. John's epistles are like the American type of government, a system of checks and balances. The President in the government is executive, Congress is legislative and the Supreme Court is judicial; that is the U.S. system of government, and John's epistles are like that - checks and balances. So it is good to get soundings from John's epistles and discover where we are. He says in very plain words "if any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him". Let us not love the world or the things in the world, the world which has been judged in Christ's moral exit from it. We must remember what He said about the world as He faced the actuality of death; "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out: and I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me", John 12: 31,32. What a statement that was! We may say

He was taken by wicked hands and crucified, and so He was; we may say that the rulers of this world ordered the matter of His crucifixion; but never let us forget that in His departure out of the world our Lord went out judicially, He judged the world and every principle of it; He could not fit into the world's system. Can we fit into the world's system? If we do we are a denial of what we partake of every first day of the week. Partaking of the Lord's supper involves our judgment of the world; we show forth the Lord's death until He comes, that is the judgment of the world. The Spirit of God has come to maintain us in keeping with what Christ said: "Now is the judgment of this world", and as we put our hands to the loaf and to the cup we are nominally at least testifying to our correspondence to the Lord's judgment of the world and His moral exit from it. I believe as we are on the eve of the Lord's coming, so imminent as it seems to be, the Spirit of God would have us go out of the world as overcomers and as having in our souls a judgment of the world and every principle of it. So it says "if any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"; but think of the love of the Father being in us. "And I in them"; what a statement that is! It is like Hebrews 2 as to the Lord's presence in the assembly leading the praises. He loves that environment; He loves to be there in us watching the responsive movements in the praise of God and appreciation of the Father's love which we are the depositaries of in this sense. Oh! how we need to think of the Father's love and be comforted in the sense that it can take up a dwelling place within our hearts, helping us in the sense of how He loved Christ and how we are to love Christ on that level, on that standard.

Now I want to say a word about "the love of the Christ as it is referred to in Ephesians 3. What a feature of the circle of affections all divine the love of Christ is! You remember how Paul said to the Corinthians "the love of the Christ constrains us", 2 Cor 5: 14. Have you ever felt the constraining power of the love of Christ? It is a wonderful thing. You think of how He loved the assembly and gave Himself for it, delivered Himself up for it. What an expression of His love that was! Think of how He loved the assembly typically in

Genesis 24 as Isaac led Rebecca "into his mother Sarah 's tent... and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted after the death of his mother", (v 67). The current love of Christ which that refers to in a testimonial position is a wonderful comfort, dear brethren, amidst the defection publicly and the sorrows publicly of distance from Him.

Isaac is a type of the heavenly Man in testimony here, and the assembly typified in Rebecca is identified with Him in it. Paul is speaking here of his knowledge; there is no egotism in this; he is soberly giving an assessment of his own impressions of his ministry as "prisoner of the Christ Jesus for you nations". What substance there is in this chapter; it moves you as you go through it and think of it. Then how he resorts to priestly service in prayer; "that he may give you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man", referring to the Father's activities. Think of the Father strengthening us "by his Spirit in the inner man", *the inner man*. There is a lot that is outward that the Scriptures refer to in relation to us, even to the outward man, but think of the inward man referring to formation in manhood, strengthened by the Father's Spirit. Our young people have so much to contend with in all the temptations by the way. The Spirit of the Father is needed to strengthen us in the inner man in holy care for that which becomes the objects of that care, especially with the outlook in this chapter where we are not on the outside looking in but on the inside looking out. We are at the very centre of things with Christ; as it says, "that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love in order that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saint s what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge". What a leverage the love of Christ is in this area that is so grand and so glorious in relation to divine thoughts, the place that we will have in the spiritual universe at the very centre of things with Christ. Think of Paul's desire that we might "know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge". What a statement that is, referring to infinitude as to the love of Christ. Our own place in it is finite, "the breadth and length and depth and height" are finite measurements; but we are in the midst of what is infinite; "the love of

the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that yes may be filled even to all the fulness of God". Think of the love of the Christ preceding being "filled even to all the fulness of God". Dear brethren, let our souls be lifted up and our hearts be stimulated by these holy references of Paul in the presence of the substance of his ministry which he has outlined in this chapter, as he says in verse 7 as to the glad tidings, "of which I am become minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me, according to the working of his power. To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ". Think of these expressions as to what is infinite, "the unsearchable riches of the Christ"; that all entered into and affected Paul's ministry in the substance that marked it. No wonder that in Acts 19 they could take handkerchiefs from Paul's body. What a body Paul had! We had a word on it in Glasgow the other night in regard to 1 Corinthians 9 (v 27): "I buffet my body, and lead it captive", and in Galatians (chap 6: 17): "I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus". There is no question of ownership with Paul as to his body, the brands of the Lord Jesus spoke of whose he was, and we want to be affected by that.. What a vessel Paul was; and he refers to the love of Christ in relation to this circle of divine affections and his desires for the saints that they might be filled to all the fulness of God.

Now I want to say a word as to the love of the Spirit. This is a most touching reference in a chapter where Paul is referring to his missionary journeys. It is almost like the anti-typical setting of Jacob fleeing into Syria, Israel serving for a wife and for a wife keeping sheep; what journeyings Jacob's were, but the object of his affections was before him, "Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep", Hosea 12: 12. Think of the journeyings of Paul here, even Spain coming on to view; how he laboured! If Jacob knew exposure in his matters relating to service for a wife ("in the day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night", he said to Laban, Gen 31: 40), think of what Paul describes in Corinthians as to what entered into his journeyings and service in the ministry. He is saying

here, "I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit". Think of the nearness of that servant to the Spirit, that he could beseech them by the love of the Spirit. You read Genesis 24 and feel in a typical sense the love of the Spirit - the love for his master Abraham, the love for his master Isaac, the love that he had in the fulfilment of his mission in securing Rebecca, type of the assembly, and conducting her to the heavenly man, to Isaac.

What matters these are, dear brethren, how God in Trinity has not only come in as in Luke 15 in view of the salvation of men, but into the expression of divine affections in the securing of His own great thoughts in keeping with the counsels of His love. Paul says "I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in prayers for me to God; that I may be saved from those that do not believe in Judaea". We speak about those who do not believe today but Paul had it in his day, persons that did not believe in Judaea, and how he wanted to be saved from them. But with what persistence, with what energy, he pursued with the Spirit! of Christ his love for the assembly which was the chief note in his ministry, reaching its crown at Ephesus. What delight the Lord had in His servant!

Well, dear brethren, may the Lord help us and the Spirit help us to know the blessedness of the Father 's love being in us, and may we be constrained by the love of Christ overcoming all obstacles to secure the assembly, and to give us a sense of His active abiding love, "Jesus... having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end" (John 13: 1) ; and the love of the Spirit in watching over the ministry, in watching over the results of the work of God in bringing about formation in relation to the great thoughts of God.

May we be affected by this wonderful circle of affections all divine, and be found steadied in those affections, going onward until our Lord returns.

St.Albans

29 June 1974

"IN THE LORD"

F.C.Mutton

Colossians 3: 16-25 ; 4: 1, 17; Romans 16: 1, 2; 11 -13

I feel led, dear brethren, to seek to speak of this sphere of things which is spoken of in the scriptures we have read as "in the Lord". It is a very blessed sphere, no doubt linking with what is said in the first chapter of Colossians: "Giving thanks to the Father... who has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (v 13). What we are seeking to speak of - what is "in the Lord" - would relate to that kingdom.

Clearly it is an exceedingly blessed and attractive place to be in, and manifestly a blessed kind of authority to be under - "the kingdom of the Son of his love". It is very attractive to reflect on this in a day such as that in which we live, when responsible men are profoundly concerned about the whole trend of things in the world - anarchy, lawlessness, greed, selfishness, the defiance of authority in almost every sense of the word. Thinking men are increasingly concerned as to whether this tide of lawlessness and evil can be contained, whether the present system can cope with it. How wonderful to turn from that (though we need constantly to pray for government and authority and for its maintenance) and to think of the kingdom of the Son of His love and that there is such an area where things are under control and regulation. It is not the legal authoritarian thing of which we have had experience. It is divine authority, in that sense inflexible authority, for divine principles do not change, cannot be modified; but this authority is wielded by, and vested in, the Son of His love. God places us in this sphere for our protection and for our benefit so that we might be protected from what is around us and what is in us, and thus be free to be engaged with Christ of whom this first chapter speaks in so wonderful a way.

There were dangers at Colosse, dangers of philosophy and vain deceit, and so Paul brings in, as the epistle proceeds, many admonitions, and then comes to these two verses where we began

in chapter 3. They show the richness which is normal in Christian experience. The word, received in faith, dwells in us richly and produces this happy, contented, prosperous condition of things described here - a system of mutual encouragement, help and admonition: "Teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God". I think singing people are safe people. I know there are many and constant pressures, but I think if you find people singing with grace in their hearts to God they are those who are going along in the path of faith and who, despite the difficulties, discouragements, opposition and sorrows, have their own inward, happy, responsible link with God. And, though we would often have to confess that we are not normal, this is normal Christianity, and there is no reason on the divine side why I should not be in the experience of it. Then Paul adds this remarkable word: "And everything, whatever ye may do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him". We might say this is a simple regulator of everything we say or do. Maybe a good many words would not find utterance if we always remembered this, and perhaps there are deeds that would not be done if we remembered this.

What cannot be said or done in the name of the Lord Jesus is best not said or done because it would be outside the range of that expression "the kingdom of the Son of his love". So it is a position of regulation and control, but manifestly a region of very great joy and of communion and of singing. Now this must extend to every sphere in which we move. One feels tested and sobered in seeking to speak of this but, dear brethren, there manifestly can be no department of our lives and no relationship excluded from what relates to the rights of the Lord. Every part of the believer's life is to be "in the Lord"; the literal expression is "in Lord".

So Paul is led by the Lord, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to touch in some detail on specific relationships. The very fact that he does so shows that Paul's ministry in this regard is needed. It is preservative for us, and I think every one of us who has part in these relationships would have to say that we need this ministry of Paul's.

He begins with wives - "Be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord". So that relationship relates to the authority of the Lord Jesus, and a wife can only rightly be in it as she relates it to the Lord. The Lord has been over the establishment of that relationship. We remember Paul's word as to marriage: "She is free to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord", 1 Cor 7: 39. Thank God, I do not think there is much need to speak of the danger and the evil of mixed marriages, a matter which greatly burdened beloved Mr Taylor sen, though it is a matter that is not entirely unknown. This is one of the greatest matters in our lives, the matter of marriage, one of the greatest questions that faces young people. Paul would say "only in the Lord". That is, His rights, His name, are to govern every such matter. Where human feelings and affections at their strongest might take charge, the rights of the Lord are to take charge. A union not "in the Lord" can only lead to disaster but a union "in the Lord" will lead to blessing, divine confirmation and prosperity. The Lord would have His own reward for those who accept limitation, who say no to natural inclinations in these matters because of His supreme claims and rights.

So here subjection is related to wives: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord". Again, it is not a legal or arbitrary relation; it is a state of subjection, because headship as under the Lord will be represented in the husband. Then there is a word to husbands: "Husbands, love your wives". That is, the whole thing is made workable in an atmosphere, in an environment, of love. It is not an arbitrary, harsh assertion of authority but headship exercised in love. Paul adds "and be not bitter against them". Paul was not married but he had great insight into these matters. And it is an extraordinary thing - perhaps it is not extraordinary as we know our own hearts - that a man who would not show bitterness against his neighbour or his brother may in his secret relations with his wife be bitter; that is not to be. If there was not a danger of it Paul would not have been led to say "and be not bitter against them". How much, dear brethren, depends and hinges on these relations. Paul is going on to speak of children, and we often speak of households

as the bulwark of the assembly. Clearly if they are to be bulwarks, if they are to be a source of strength and not of weakness, and if the children are to be rightly held and to grow up in a right environment, these relationships between husband and wife "in the Lord" must be maintained rightly.

Then Paul has a word for the children: "Children, obey your parents in all things". He does not stop there; that would have been right, that would have been the truth, but he adds "for this is well-pleasing in the Lord". So we find that this relationship, too, is in the Lord. I think this is something that needs to enter into our minds when we are young, that parental authority is a department of the Lord's authority. My parents, if I am a child, are an arrangement under the Lord's hand for my protection, for my training, for my discipline. Obedience, I suppose, is the very hardest thing naturally. We can all look back to childhood and find plenty of disobedience, but I think this would help us to be obedient as children, to know that the authority our parents have over us is "in the Lord". It is a basic arrangement in the divine ordering of our lives from our earliest days; and what a privilege this is, that we are under the control and influence and discipline of godly parents. Paul immediately goes on to say, "Fathers, do not vex your children, to the end that they be not disheartened". Again, what an insight Paul had, I was going to say, into human nature, and I do not think any of us who have been fathers could escape the edge of this word. For me as a father to exercise my discipline other than in the Lord means that I am giving way to my own natural feelings; and how easily that is done. How easy it is to explode, to lose control. So not only is there the part of the children "obey your parents... for this is well-pleasing in the Lord", but children are to see in their fathers an expression of the kind of dignified authority, restrained authority, which will be recognised, at least in measure, as flowing from the supreme authority of the Lord Himself. So in all these relationships and departments of life the authority of the Lord, may I say, is filtering through, and everything in the Christian home is thus deriving from Him, regulated by Him and held for Him.

Then Paul comes down to our employment, to bondmen, and these bondmen I suppose would largely be slaves - about the most difficult kind of employment that anyone could possibly be in, a position where it would be easy to labour under a sense of resentment in justice and frustration. "Bondmen, obey in all things your masters according to flesh; not with eyeservice, as men pleasers, but in simplicity of heart, fearing the Lord". Now this is a very different situation because the master would probably not be converted at all; but my exercise as a bondman would be to hold myself, in that position in which in the ways of God I am, as in relation to the Lord. This would apply to all our employments. Paul says "Whatsoever ye do, labour at it heartily, as doing it to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance". I think I can see the importance of this because a very large part of our lives is spent in our vocations, and that part is not to be wasted nor to be unfruitful. It is quite definite that it is not part of the ways of God that those hours from nine to five, whatever it may be, should be wasted, without result and without yield; they are an essential part of Christian experience and an essential part of what is working out in the lives of believers for divine pleasure. "Whatsoever ye do, labour at it heartily, as doing it to the Lord". What a simple statement. I think it throws some light and cheer on what the poet called 'The daily round, the common task'. It may be humdrum. I remember thinking of this in the fire service, when it was a matter of clearing brass on fire engines and scrubbing floors, that the most menial task can be done as to the Lord. It puts a certain glory and a lustre on the most menial and perhaps the most uncongenial work or occupation; it can be done to the Lord. Thus those hours from nine to five can yield something.

When your mind is on your responsibilities, and rightly so, all the time the Lord can be receiving something out of it as you are labouring at it heartily, not to men but as to Him. So we can be serving Him day by day even though doing our responsible duties which we might think merely relate to men or to school. It would apply to school. I must admit very freely I did not always observe this at school. But here it is: "Whatsoever ye do, labour at it heartily,

as doing it to the Lord" - even the subject you like least, and the master or mistress you find it hardest to put up with. Paul adds, "knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance"; and then this fine phrase "ye serve the Lord Christ".

Whatever other people are doing ye "serve the Lord Christ". What a dignity it puts on the believer's life! It makes the day complete; those are not wasted hours, in them we serve the Lord Christ.

Then there is a word to masters: "Masters, give to bondmen what is just and fair". A Christian master, a Christian who has men or women under him, is not to be unjust; he is not to be a tyrant; he is to be just and fair, "knowing that ye also have a Master in the heavens".

Then in the verse that we read at the end of the chapter we have another aspect of what is in the Lord: "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, to the end that thou fulfil it". The footnote indicates that the word "fulfil" relates to what is complete, an important word in Colossians. Now we come to another aspect of responsibility, the ministry we receive. This was a special word to Archippus. You just wonder about the reaction of Archippus when this letter was being read. So many words of injunction and counsel, references to one and another, commendations of some, salutations, he might have seen that the reader was almost at the very end of the epistle, and then Archippus would sit up as he heard his name mentioned: "Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry".

So this would come to you and me. We have received certain ministry in the Lord. It comes with attractiveness but it comes with authority. It is the word of the Lord and the voice of the Lord. I do not know what we can say about Archippus; evidently he needed a little stimulation, a word of counsel, almost maybe a word of warning. Let us receive such a word, dear brethren, because ministry is not haphazard; it is divinely timed, divinely directed, and comes with divine authority. "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received". Is what I have received working out, am I subject to it, or does it leave me unaffected? What I heard last week - have I taken

it to the Lord? You cannot retain everything, none of us can; but I think in every meeting something would register that I know is for me, and that is to be taken to the Lord. The Lord said that word, said it because I needed it, said it for my blessing and benefit. Have I heeded it? The ministry has come and it has been received in the sense of having been heard, but now it is to be fulfilled, worked out to a complete result. May we heed this Pauline injunction: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received". The Lord directs ministry to localities and to individuals; directs it with care and with love and with skill, to meet us where we are, to adjust us to warn us. Am I taking heed to the end that I fulfil it? Is it working out to a result? Is it running off me, as we say, like water off a duck's back? What is the benefit? What is the gain? What object is reached? It is to be received; but then it is to be fulfilled, worked out to a result. Light comes, faith receives it, and in the obedience of faith we would go over it in the presence of God and find grace that it might be worked out to the intended result, it may be in adjustment, formation, direction, or acceleration in the steps of faith.

When we come to Romans 16 it relates largely to service, holy activity in the Lord. This is not feverish, uncontrolled, competitive activity; it is a lovely suggestion of controlled variety in personality and activity which you would expect at the end of Romans which is such a subduing epistle. Lawless elements have been subdued and persons secured, their bodies presented, the Spirit indwelling, and thus they are available for the will and the service of God. So chapter 16 begins with a distinguished sister. We love to speak of Phoebe. What a fine commendation! "I commend to you Phoebe, our sister". Paul loved her and valued her, "who is minister of the assembly which is in Cenchrea". That was her dignity. She was available to do what needed to be done and she was related to the assembly. I think this would be an encouragement to us, and a particular encouragement to sisters, that this sister heads the list of commendations and salutations. Then she was to be received "in the Lord worthily of saints, and that ye may assist her in whatever matter she has need of you; for she also has been a helper of

many". The footnote to the word "helper" indicates that it is an expression of great distinction – Mr Darby speaks of a 'complimentary touch of heart in which the apostle never fails'.

These are 'in Lord' relationships and we are to be generous in our appreciation of one another. Paul was generous in his outlook on the brethren as these commendations show. So let us be appreciative, dear brethren, of every feature of the work of God and His service. There is room for all; I think that is one lesson that this chapter teaches, the need of all, and here are many persons active and committed in love to the service of the assembly and the service of the Lord. This expression "that ye may receive her in the Lord" indicates the dignity with which we are to receive one another. She was not a freelance, she was not a busybody, all her activities were "in the Lord", and therefore she could be commended to Rome to be received "worthily of saints". She was such a person that she was worthy to be assisted "in whatever matter she has need of you". What confidence Paul reposed in her!

Then we come to other names. Very interesting is the variety and the gradation. "Salute those who belong to Narcissus who are in the Lord". Nothing more; just that. Perhaps they had not developed so far as others but they were "in the Lord". That is, they were persons secured by the gospel, subject to the Lord and available to Him. They were not insubject, they were not lawless, they would not be a trouble in the local meeting; they were subdued persons and therefore available, I am assured, for every good work, to do whatever needed to be done and to take on whatever the Lord would commit to them. Then "Salute Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord". I think these are feminine names and it is not just 'in the Lord' but "who labour in the Lord". 'Labourers' is a term that perhaps used to be much more current than it is now, but let us all be labourers. We can labour in prayer, we can take on responsibility; there is much work to be done, not casual work, not stop-go work, but consistent acceptance of responsibility for the maintenance of all that relates to the name of the Lord. These two sisters were labouring in the Lord. You wonder what they were

doing. We do not know. It might have been practical care and comfort; but whatever it was they were labouring in the Lord. The Lord could trust them to do things on His behalf, and to do them as He would have them done, for the strengthening, upbuilding and encouragement of His beloved people.

Then Paul says "Salute Persis, the beloved, who has laboured much in the Lord". I think the very fact that these salutations are so varied shows what a healthy state there would be in Rome. I do not think that after the meeting at which this letter was read someone would say 'Well, Paul only said I was in the Lord but Persis was described as the beloved', or, 'Paul only said I laboured in the Lord but Persis was described as labouring much in the Lord'. I am sure nobody would complain; there would be the thankful acceptance of the different measures and the different capacities, all happily working together in the local company. How great the advantages are, dear brethren, of this sphere "in the Lord", where natural feelings such as rivalry are outside and where there is simple joy in seeing the varying measure of the work of the Lord in one another all working toward s one common end. So Persis is spoken of as "the beloved, who has laboured much in the Lord". Has laboured much; perhaps she was old, perhaps not physically capable of much more, I do not know; but it is put in the past tense as a tribute to this beloved woman's past service.

Well, dear brethren, may we be labourers, may we devote ourselves to the work; that is our first priority, transcending every other matter. Our supreme responsibility is the work of the Lord and to see that what needs to be done is done, and that there are those available to do it as "in the Lord". I trust the Lord may be pleased to confirm these thoughts to us. One feels tested in speaking of them but I believe they are of basic importance. So many disturbances that have come in in assembly history trace back to our lack of subjection in relation to the Lord; relate to defects on the line of the kingdom. I believe that subjection to the Lord in every relationship and every setting provides what is subdued, controlled and available, so that we can proceed together into what is spiritual, what relates to

the excellence of all that expands in the light and experience of the assembly. May the Lord help us in these things for His Name's sake.

Maidstone

29 June 1974

THE CHILDREN'S DUTIES

It was in the island-country of Crete that Paul expected Titus to find households where there were "believing children". This is the more remarkable because most of the inhabitants were evil people and liars. One of their own prophets admitted this. God was, however, already working amongst those very people and many would learn to be "ready for every good work". In the epistle to Titus these words follow immediately the rule of obedience without which, therefore, good cannot result.

Obedience to parents was the first commandment to which God added a promise. The children in Ephesus listening to Paul's epistle being read out would learn this and be taught to obey their parents "in the Lord". This makes it greater than a commandment and by being obedient out of love they would not only honour father and mother, but would also please their Lord. We must always remember that Jesus Himself learned what it was to be obedient - even unto the death of the cross. He has been highly exalted and therefore all our blessing flows from His obedience and its glorious consequences.

It is interesting that the chapter in the epistle to the Ephesians which begins with obeying parents is the one that describes the whole armour of God. When young we know little about the war against wickedness, but it is believers who have learned to be obedient who become the recruits who wear this armour and stand for the truth.

If we do not know the will of our Father who is in the heavens we are able to find out by communion with Him just as a child can ask a parent. Even among animals some learn to obey by watching their owners. In fact, a farmer's dog is not fully trained until he will look to his master's eye *before* chasing a rabbit, and not *after*! With other animals a bridle or a stick is necessary to lead them in the right way and God's merciful providence to us is often like that. But would

you not prefer, as is possible and right, to be guided by His eye upon you?

J.C.Evershed