

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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JOSEPH'S ADMINISTRATION

Genesis 41: 37-46; 1 Corinthians 1: 10; 2 Corinthians 3: 4

E.C.B. The brethren know well the context of Genesis 41 with Pharaoh putting Joseph in this place of administration. The dreams that Pharaoh had had foretold good times and bad times and Joseph is appointed to administer in all the land. It is notable how frequently the verses read refer to "all the land of Egypt", or the "whole land of Egypt". Joseph's administration has, I think, two aspects; one is what I suggest may correspond to 2 Corinthians 3, that is the great ministry of supply. In that chapter there is the ministry of the new covenant and of righteousness and of the Spirit, like the great ministry of supply which was committed to Joseph. The situation in Egypt was that if anyone wanted food there was but one source for it for the whole land. So that there was an administration under Joseph that bore on the whole of the land of Egypt and would therefore carry into all its parts equally, so that no part was apart from the ministration by way of supply that there was in Joseph. But then he was also appointed, I think in the other character of his ministry, for what we would call in the more general sense 'administration', so that there was no problem in Egypt that was not resolved by Joseph; and things being thus in the hands of one man, that is Joseph, the administration in the land would again be equal and would be the same, so that things would be done throughout Egypt in a way that reflected Joseph. It does not need to be said, of course, that we know that Joseph is a type of the Lord Jesus, in His dignities, in His place in the economy, in His titles and, I think, in His administration; but I wondered whether we did not see that character of ministry in Paul. In 2 Corinthians 3 there is the administration by way of supply which corresponds to Joseph's administration in supply, but then there is the other aspect of administration where, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul urges them to be "united in the same mind and in the same opinion". I think that would be the result of Joseph's administration in Egypt, that all were of the same mind and of the same opinion throughout the land. Other scriptures bear

on that. Paul's desire in Philippians that they should think the same thing and think one thing (see chap 2: 2) - Philippians corresponding a good deal to Joseph's history - suggests Paul working on the Philippians on the basis of Joseph going out over the whole land. And, as he says elsewhere, "thus I ordain in all the assemblies", 1 Cor 7: 17: I think that again is like Joseph going out over the whole land. I wondered whether there would be profit at the present time in looking at those characters of Joseph's administration as bearing on all parts of the sphere that was put under him by Pharaoh

C.R.B. I think it would be for help. Had you in that the wife coming into view before he goes out shows how the assembly would be sympathetically with Christ in all He is doing?

E.C.B. Yes: administration of either kind is characteristically seen in the assembly. That is where we would look to see administration. We cannot exactly look directly to Christ, although the Father "has given all things to be in his hand", John 3: 35. We cannot see Him, but the area where we see administration is the assembly; and I think Joseph's administration over all the whole land bears on the way in which the same characters of ministry and administration are seen in all the assemblies.

C.B. Would Psalm 133 be the result, in a way, of the administrations of Joseph?

E.C.B. You refer to the blessedness of brethren dwelling together in unity. I think we see in Genesis 50 and indeed earlier that that is the product of Joseph 's administration, that the brethren do dwell together in unity. If in chapter 50 impressions of doubt or questioning arise, what Joseph re-introduces is the brethren dwelling together in unity. I think that he administers in relation to all the land with a view to the maintenance of the unity of the Spirit.

C.R.B. In writing to Corinth, which particularly bore on one local assembly, the letter was addressed also to every place, so it has a direct bearing on each local assembly.

E.C.B. I think that; and then in Revelation 2 and 3 that have been referred to more than once lately the Lord says to each assembly

"He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies". I think you see the character of Joseph over all the land in that, so that things would not be different in one part from another, either by way of ministry or administration. Everything has the character of Joseph on it.

W.J.W. Would you say what you were referring to in chapter 50 please.

E.C.B. Joseph's brethren there come to him fearing that now that Jacob is dead perhaps Joseph will not treat them as they had been treated so far. They say "forgive, I pray thee, the transgression of thy brethren, and their sin! for they did evil to thee. And now, we pray thee, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spoke to him" (v 17). And they said "Behold, we are thy bondmen", but Joseph says "Fear not". He says "God meant it for good ... I will maintain you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spoke consolingly to them". I think Joseph shows the way to the maintenance of the unity of the Spirit when doubt as to it had come in, and he is diligent to maintain it.

W.J.W. History lay behind everything here: the relationships of the brethren to Joseph, what they had to come to; and he was made lord over all the land of Egypt. They had to come to the recognition of that first - an important matter. You referred to Paul; that same feature has to be recognised in what he writes. Unless we come under authority we do not come into the full gain of this administration. Chapter 50 would bear upon the relationships that had already been established between them, so that he is able to console them.

E.C.B. I think what you say about authority is important. No one will find his place properly in the testimony who does not confess Jesus as Lord, not just with the mouth but acknowledging that position of authority. Paul, of course, had apostolic authority and Joseph had the authority that was given to him by Pharaoh, and this bears distinctively on the place that Christ has in the economy. We

have not, as the Lord has provided for the saints in the past, that focus of leadership in one brother whom the Lord raises up distinctively, but the Lord is still in the position of authority and the authority of the Lord is "over all the land", there is no part that is not under His authority. It is interesting that both in regard to Joseph and in 2 Corinthians there is reference to the Spirit, bearing on the way in which the Spirit is here to give effect to the authority of Christ; and there is one Spirit.

E.P. Is this regulation in view of the blessing of all who come under it? It is not so much the correction of what is unsuitable but the bringing in of what is positively enriching. I am thinking of that expression, for example, in 1 Corinthians 1: "in everything ye have been enriched in him" (v 5).

E.C.B. I think that is the principal aspect of Joseph 's administration that comes before us in Genesis. The Lord is in a position where He has control over the whole supply of food and He is administering it for blessing. But Joseph also had the other authority in the kingdom - that no one would lift hand or foot without him, bearing on his ability to regulate things, as we say, administratively. So the whole of Egypt drew its supply and administration from this one source. I think in that was its blessing. Do you think that?

E.P. I do; and the purpose of this administration was that life might be maintained, - "to save", he says, "a great people alive"; as if there is nothing else but blessing in this administration.

E.C.B. I think that is so, and we are very greatly proving it at the present time. Wherever you go - I speak in a general way - you find that there is the liberty of the Spirit and an abundant supply from Christ as the great administrator, so that you have the feeling that Joseph has gone out over the whole land by way of supply.

C.R.B. Is it instructive that in John 17 the Lord says that the Father has given Him authority over all flesh? Among other things would that bear on what you were saying as to the feature of oneness? We can perhaps get sorrowfully accustomed to oneness not marking the saints universally, but the Lord's desire "that they may be one, as we

are one" (v 22) is something that remains as being the divine will and we should cling to that as being the normal thing as the result of Joseph's administration.

E.C.B. While its fulness is in the world to come and the world will then see it, we should not postpone the sense of all being one as if it is unobtainable at the present time and things had to be operated as if there was more than one administrator. In Joseph there was one administrator: no doubt he worked through a great system of administration but things flowed from one source and I think it should be manifested at the present time that that principle operates.

S.D.K.R. Would that be linked with the Lord's headship? I was thinking of what was said earlier as to Psalm 133. It is connected with the oil coming down from Aaron's head. I wondered whether what we have had to face lately really obscured the headship of Christ.

E.C.B. I think it did. One thing we trust we have learned through that is not to put our trust in princes (see Ps 118: 9) and not to seek to put any man in a place where the headship of Christ is in any way interfered with. Do you think we have yet become fully accustomed to the unifying operation of the headship of Christ in all the assemblies?

S.D.K.R. I think there is much to be learnt on that line.

C.B. In chapter 37 it was a question typically of the place Christ had among the brethren. Some said "let us kill him" (v 20), another said "let us... cast him into this pit", others said "let us sell him". Is the place He has the critical point in maintaining this unity?

E.C.B. Yes, all that enters into the formation of Joseph. While Psalm 105 refers to some of the circumstances through which Joseph went, the main thing is that "the word of Jehovah tried him" (v 19); that is what he was formed by. The brethren did different things with him and he was put into different circumstances, the pit and the prison; now he is elevated and in Pharaoh's house, but what was forming Joseph in order to exercise this authority, was the word of God; "Until the time when what he said came about: the word of

Jehovah tried him". You cannot exactly speak of the word of Jehovah forming Christ as the antitype, save of course that His ear was opened morning by morning to hear what God would say (see Isa 50: 4).

G.W.B. As to administration, is wisdom or spirituality needed to discern how any current matters are to be judged in the light of what has gone before? I am thinking of what has gone before in the way of ministry guiding us in administration but it does not mean that you can always find a precedent; spirituality is needed in discerning how what has come out in the past bears upon any matter.

E.C.B. I think that is important. While, of course, we value exceedingly the ministry that we have and the opportunities to look up what has been said on different matters, what relates to anything that is current is that ministry digested so that it forms a basis for approaching a thing at the present time. One of the services of Joseph in Psalm 105 was to "teach his elders wisdom" (v 22); that is not having something to look up but being able in the light of all that was known, both by way of teaching and fact, to apply what had been taught to the present situation in wisdom. People had to be taught it.

P.S.W. While the pre-eminence of Joseph and his personal greatness comes in, when he goes forth to administer he has already a suited companion. Do you think that bears on the way that administration proceeds at the present time in the light of the assembly? Would what has been said as to formation bear on the way the assembly has been formed as a suited companion?

E.C.B. I am sure that is right. The assembly now is the sphere in which administration, Joseph's administration in the antitype, is seen. If you want to see divine administration you would locate where saints are seeking to walk in the light of the assembly and there you would see, you trust, the way in which Joseph typically would do a thing. Mr Byng drew attention to Asnath earlier. I think we can hardly speak of these matters without speaking of the assembly, because for one thing the assembly is, in a sense, that

through which Christ administers, but we as of the assembly are subject to that administration.

P.S.W. Would it be right to think therefore that the moral character of the administration is illustrated in Asnath's characteristics as a daughter of a priest?

E.C.B. Yes, so that in the assembly you would characteristically look for things being done in a way that suited God and that left people free to approach Him.

C.C.I. Joseph coming home at noon might suggest that the mind of Christ is known by the assembly. He would use that time at noon to go over the administration of the day, do you think?

E.C.B. While we would not want to read more into the scripture than is there, I think it would suggest to us that Christ takes opportunities for communion with the assembly so that we can actually understand; "we have the mind of Christ", 1 Cor 2: 16.

V.H.B. That brings home to us again the importance of our relations with the Spirit, because we can commune with Christ, we can speak to Him as we speak to one another in communion with Him by the Spirit.

E.C.B. Yes, and the effect of communion with the Spirit is always unifying. The more the saints are in touch with the Spirit the more united they will be. Referring to what has just been said, we do not exactly find precedents for everything that arises at the present time, but in solutions of matters according to God you would expect to be able to trace the divine principles which bore on them. The actual application would relate to the precise circumstances, but you would expect to find the same principles underlying things. That is a manifestation of the unity of the Spirit.

R.T. Does Pharaoh suggest an easy administration when he speaks about the people regulating themselves? He does not seem to contemplate that there would be any rebellion or difficulties. Is there some affinity between Joseph and the people so that there is commandment and regulation in every place?

E.C.B. Yes, I think so. That is rather like the word "his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5: 3), but they are His commandments nevertheless. The effect of Joseph's administration would be that the same things were done all over Egypt and if you went to one place you would find things being done as they would be done in another place, because it all springs from the same administrator.

D.A.B. Is there any distinction between the thought of headship in relation to Christ and the assembly and, for example, the way headship is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 11: "Christ is the head of every man" (v 3)?

E.C.B. "Christ is the head of every man" refers to the position that He has in relation to the race and it is presented there in relation to things as they are in creation - God, Christ and the man and the woman, things proceed in that framework. That is something that is not generally publicly acknowledged, that Christ is every man's head. But the assembly knows His headship as united to Him; as the body is united to the Head, so the assembly is united to Christ and she knows His headship. So all her operations are carried out as a result of His will; the assembly is therefore a sphere in which headship is actually known.

D.A.B. I was wondering if the scripture in Ephesians 1 has any relation to Joseph. It refers to the good pleasure of God's will to head up the administration of the fulness of times: "to head up all things in the Christ" (v 10). Is that, in a sense, shown in Joseph's position here?

E.C.B. In one sense it is. I think there is just this distinction, that the Father is going to head up the things in heaven as well, whereas Joseph's administration is confined to what is earthly, but he does come before us very suggestively in many of the epistles, I think. You see Joseph with everything headed up in him because he was the one man that Pharaoh could designate for this office at this time: that is what the Father has found in Christ.

D.A.B. It goes on "in whom we have also obtained an inheritance" (v 11); and it was through Joseph that Jacob and the brethren came into the best part of the land of Egypt.

E.C.B. Yes, and everybody in Egypt was ultimately dependent on Joseph, even for their land.

V.H.B. Does it bring in Colossians: "that he might have the first place in all things", chap. 1: 1? Joseph had the first place in all things here, did he not?

E.C.B. Yes, and the more we give place to that, the more we shall find that Joseph typically is over the whole land; that is, as I have said, that there is no part of it which does not reflect exactly what Joseph would have done in the circumstances that exist. There is no place, referring to Psalm 19, which is, as it were, hidden from Christ's heat; He supplies everywhere.

C.R.B. Is it interesting in relation to Corinth that Paul says he had sent Timotheus to them "who shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ, according as I teach everywhere in every assembly", 1 Cor 4: 17? Is that the way that Joseph's administration takes substantial form in each local assembly?

E.C.B. Yes, exactly; I think "as I teach everywhere in every assembly" is Joseph over the whole land. I wonder whether in the history of the recovery that has ever been universally experienced. Maybe it has outwardly. But I think that the Lord might revive exercise amongst us so that that character of things might actually be known in the present day.

C.R.B. So that ministry, whether previous or current, is really to help us in our knowledge of God. The measure in which we are formed in that will take expression, will it not, in the same thing being done in every local assembly?

E.C.B. Yes; hence what was referred to as to authority is important. There is no need to say that we are not suggesting authority in men, but the authority of what comes from the Lord needs to be

recognised as that by which all the people regulate themselves. And that produces a manifestation of the unity of the Spirit.

G.W.B. Egypt was a kingdom. It would have its laws, no doubt. Certain principles connected with the kingdom have been brought out in the time of the Spirit and we individually should be acquainted with them, should we not?

E.C.B. Yes, I think we should. The occasions when the saints are together in the temple provide opportunity for rehearsing divine principles in relation to the present moment. Not that the principles change, not that they are exactly forced into readings; but if there is a desire to understand the principles of the kingdom working at the present time I am sure the Spirit will take opportunity so that every generation learns afresh what the divine principles and the laws of the kingdom actually are.

G.W.B. Negatively we all have heard of certain of our brethren in Christ who have given up a good many things that were principles of the kingdom that have come out and been established in the power of the Spirit, but they are not regarded now, which is something we should take warning about.

E.C.B. The saints walking in fellowship at the present time certainly desire to go on in the truth, but it is that tendency to give up certain of the laws of the kingdom which become, in a sense, inconvenient to maintain, that is in my mind in suggesting that we need to be sustained in the sense that Joseph was over all the land.

W.E.E. Would you link with that the word in 1 Corinthians 14: "If any one thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment" (v 37)? If there is ministry brought forward at the present time in the power of the Spirit, there should be the recognition on the part of the saints that it is the Lord's commandment.

E.C.B. Yes, and that it applies "over all the land", not only in the places where it is thought nice to take it on. If it is the Lord's commandment, He will see that it is administered over all the land. I think that it is important, especially in the light of the facts to which

Mr George Brown draws attention, that we should keep urgently before us that what is established as the truth and as principles apply over all the land.

W.J.W. We do not say that these are things that the brethren hold; we are governed by divine principles which are the Lord's commandments. Everything must be related to the Lord personally. The question is, What is the Lord saying and establishing? What are His commandments that govern me in the situation? The word in Genesis was a direct link with Joseph; "Go to Joseph", chap 41: 55.

E.C.B. Yes, and the antitype of Joseph is not a mere man; it is Christ. In the greatness of all that He is the Father has put all things in His hand because He loves Him. Hence we are to learn, as you say, to draw from Christ Himself in relation to every matter by which we are to be regulated. But then we have to see that the Lord makes His mind known through ministry, through those who are spiritual, through a variety of ways, but the question is whether we submit ourselves to the Lord's mind as it is made known to us.

C.R.B. So that we do not need a verse of scripture to confirm every matter. Wisdom comes into Ephesians 1, and wisdom has operated from Christ so that many matters have become established amongst the saints, as having the Spirit's authority and the Lord's will behind them, which we recognise as rightly binding on us.

E.C.B. Yes, I think that is right, although I am sure you would agree that to a mind that is steeped in Scripture there will be confirmation found for everything that has become spiritually a custom.

C.R.B. I am sure that what is rightly so regarded is always confirmed by the spirit of Scripture, but we can go astray by questioning something because there is not any particular verse that says we should do this or that. If it is within the spirit of Scripture, and the Spirit has confirmed it in experience amongst us, we recognise it as having the Lord's authority behind it, do we not?

E.C.B. Yes, we do and we should. What I am concerned about at the present time is that we should recognise that Joseph went out over the whole land. He did not just go to some cities, he went out

over the whole land, so that there was the same administration universally in regard to every matter.

C.B. Last evening we had a word on "I know". When Joseph's brethren were prepared to submit themselves to Joseph and they sat down with him, he was able to place them, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth and they marvelled (see Gen 43: 33). Would you think that as under his authority unity is maintained?

E.C.B. That is certainly the case: if all submit to the authority of Christ, then unity must necessarily follow; it would just be the nature of things if everyone was subject to Christ. But if one may refer to the scriptures in this way, if in the type Joseph's authority over all the land had been recognised in the seven assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord would have had no fault to find with any of them because His will would have been done in them all.

W.E.E. Would you say that there are many matters of truth which have been established during the period of the recovery and we should feel bound by those as being supported by Scripture and having been proved by experience?

E.C.B. Yes. There are matters on which there has been conflict about the truth which are well-known to the brethren. There were many such matters in Mr Darby's day, not all arising immediately within the circle of the saints, some arising outside it, and he took opportunity to make the truth clear. Then in the course of the recovery too, the Lord has made His mind known as to many matters of practice; and I think Joseph regulates matters as well as regulating what is by way of food.

C.C.I. Is righteousness very important? In 2 Corinthians 3 we first have the ministry of the covenant, then the ministry of the Spirit and then the ministry of righteousness. Mr Taylor sen often used to say, Where is righteousness?

E.C.B. Yes; I think that in 2 Corinthians 3 the ministry of righteousness is righteousness by way of supply. If God demands righteousness from us, most of us would have to recognise that we

fall short, but we should look for that supply. Perhaps we need to understand better what righteousness is. It is things being right in whatever relationship they exist; that is, righteousness towards God is that one is right in that relationship through the work of Christ; one is right in one's relationship with one's family, that is righteousness; righteousness is being right in the relationship in which one stands. I have some impression that the word 'righteousness' itself was damaged in the 1960s. When the Sun of righteousness arises it is with healing. I think we should see that the administration of the true Joseph is always righteous, but the righteousness is available in supply from Himself.

P.S.W. How can we distinguish between divine principles and what you have referred to as practice that has been established, and this other matter of precedents that we would not necessarily follow?

E.C.B. The question of precedents arises mainly when we think that the same thing has arisen again as arose once before and we go to the books and try and find out what was said; and, of course, they are very instructive as bearing on the application of principles in relation to circumstances. We then have to look at the present circumstances and see if they are the same. The principles that relate to practice are few; separation from evil is one, and separation from the world, insofar as it is not the same thing, is another. Those are things that bear on practice and righteousness but, as Mr Byng said, you do not have to look for a scripture to tell you precisely that you should not do this or that; as having a judgment of iniquity or of the world, you will know that you should have no part in certain things. Unequal yokes involve a clear divine principle, but other things relate to our judgment and as to the bearing of what we have learned of wisdom in them.

P.S.W. So that what was said earlier as to the word of Jehovah trying Joseph would be the divine education ground for us to find these di vine principles that apply in relation to our own walk and then as to our walk collectively in the local assembly.

E.C.B. Yes, I think so. God has given us conscience and the Spirit so that we may the better discern the application of principles to any circumstances with which we are tested. One danger at the present time is saints tending to admit small elements of the world. I think Joseph's administration as going out over all the land would ensure that this did not happen anywhere.

D.A.B. In connection with what Mr Ikin said, I was thinking of Romans 1 where Paul refers to the glad tidings, that "righteousness of God is revealed therein, on the principle of faith, to faith: according as it is written, But the just shall live by faith" (v 17). I was wondering if that principle that he enunciates there, "the just shall live by faith", helps in relation to what you are saying.

E.C.B. I think it does. That scripture is frequently quoted from the prophet, but to walk by faith necessitates that I am in communion with God as to anything that arises in my walk; hence a righteous man has no need continually to be praying about a thing, he is maintained in communion with God and thus has direction all the time.

D.A.B. "We walk by faith, not by sight", 2 Cor 5: 7. Does that also help?

E.C.B. Yes. If it were possible for us to walk by sight, the world would already be under the administration of Christ, and in the world to come what corresponds to Joseph's rule will be seen. At His word everybody will regulate themselves in the world to come: but that should be the pattern in Christianity, that everyone regulates themselves by the word of the same glorified Man.

R.T. Paul says that the Philippians had obeyed in his presence, and adds "but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation", Phil 2: 12. There would be something in a Christian apart from conscience that judged what was suitable to Christ, would there not?

E.C.B. I think that is very good. Insofar as the Christian is formed after Christ he will have Christ's sensibilities as to his way through the world.

S.D.K.R. Is the new man referred to in Colossians and Ephesians a kind of subjective answer to what you have in mind? Christ characteristically would be seen in every locality.

E.C.B. I think that is so. Then what has just been said would come out, that the sensibilities of Christ as to every matter would guide us in the way we reacted to them or handled them.

C.R.B. In the verse we read in 1 Corinthians 1 the point seems to be "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". Had you something in mind in reading that verse?

E.C.B. In a certain sense in Genesis things happened at the name of Joseph, but what I had in mind there, too, was "that ye all say the same thing, and that there be not among you divisions; but that ye be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same opinion". What I think that means in relation to Genesis 41 is that everyone must submit to Joseph going out over the whole land. Then they would all say the same thing, they would all be perfectly united in the same mind and the same opinion. Do you think that?

C.R.B. Yes. The basis of Paul's exhortation that we should be marked by that is the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you think we need to see that the glory of that Person enters into all these matters? So if we find that the Lord is supporting the brethren generally in a certain matter, we would have to be very slow in thinking we should do something different, because we may in fact not be acting in keeping with the glory of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

E.C.B. It does not in any way reduce the need for exercise with us, but it is always a help to any of us, I think, to see what the spiritual do or think in regard to a matter. The name of our Lord Jesus Christ, like Joseph in Genesis 41, is the name of the man that the king is delighted to honour, it is a Man selected, a Man who is glorified and Paul exhorts them by that Name that they be unified. I think it is Joseph going out over the whole land.

E.P. At the beginning of the reading you linked Joseph with Paul, and in the first epistle he expresses his opinion about certain things.

I suppose as far as we are concerned that opinion has been embraced by the Spirit in the canon of Scripture and has that authority.

E.C.B. Yes, I think that. While no one would assert his particular opinion, we might in the present day discern that the opinion of a spiritual man or woman became regulatory to us, not in any way setting aside exercise. "But I give my opinion" Paul says, 1 Cor 7: 25. What I was thinking about in regard to Paul is that he says "that ye be perfectly united", as we have in this verse; in Philippians he says much the same - "one thing" and "the same thing". Then there is the scripture already referred to: "everywhere, in every assembly" (1 Cor 4: 17) and "thus I ordain in all the assemblies " 1 Cor 7: 17. All those scriptures seem to me to reflect, in Paul, Joseph going out over all the land.

E.P. You are impressed with the two-fold reference that he makes to the authority that the Lord has given him "for building up, and not for overthrowing", 2 Cor 10: 8; 13:10. Regulation is positive, is it not?

E.C.B. I think that we should get hold of that. If the occasion for anything corrective arises, we should see that that is with a view to facilitating further building up.

V.H.B. Is not the name of our Lord Jesus Christ a very important matter these days, that which we would hold to steadfastly?

E.C.B. I am sure it is. It involves a great deal, it involves that we are acknowledging the glory of the Man that the world has rejected, but we are also acknowledging that to us He is Lord.

C.B. In Acts 20 the apostle committed the saints "to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up". Was that like being over the whole land?

E.C.B. Paul says that directly to the elders of a particular assembly; in a sense he was teaching the elders wisdom there. But Paul would have said that in every assembly. I think that is what Joseph's regulating administration was like.

F.P.A.S. So the word 'approved' still remains in the Scriptures. The spiritual would be in every local assembly. It was rather emphasised at one time in a wrong way.

E.C.B. Yes, that is so. I think it helps the brethren if they read some of the older ministry; Mr Stoney, for in stance, is very clear on what 'the approved' means in that verse: "there must also be sects among you, that the approved may become manifest", 1 Cor 11: 19.

LONDON

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Key to initials

C.B. C.Beale; C.R.B. C.R.Byng; D.A.B. D.A.Burr; E.C.B. E.C.Burr;
G.W.B. G.W.Brown Barnet; V.H.B. V.H.Browne; W.E.E. W.E.Ellis;
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(all local except where otherwise shown)

"TO HIS BONDMEN THE AUTHORITY"

E.C.Burr

Mark 13: 33-37

There is no doubt that this scripture bears on the present time. Jesus speaks of the similitude of a man gone out of the country having left his house, and that is paralleled by the way in which Jesus has, as He says in John's gospel, left the world and gone to the Father. Not that the world is His house; He has a house here but He has, in that sense, gone out of the country. In other scriptures similar to this it speaks of one going to receive a kingdom and to return, and in this scripture the Lord Jesus speaks also of the master of the house coming. He says it might be at any time and He counsels those who are hearing Him to watch. That, of course, bears on us very directly and often have we been spoken to about it. But in leaving the country, and seeking to make provision for the time in which He would be away, these three things are remarked on as being in His intention sufficient to care for what belonged to His own house while He was away; that is, He gave "to his bondmen the authority, and to each one his work, and commanded the doorkeeper that he should watch".

Now the responsibility of the doorkeeper would, of course, be significant and substantial. The doorkeeper would know what to exclude and what to let in, and we are very thankful that the exercise of door keeping that we have mainly been concerned with over recent times is with what to let in, what to see has again its own place in relation to the things that belong to the Master of the house. And I am sure all the brethren desire that the activity of the doorkeeper should be mainly in that direction; that is, what can be admitted to what seeks to maintain the responsibility of Christ's house in the time while He is away. The Lord has manifestly helped us in regard to door keeping responsibilities over recent years and He has helped us peculiarly in seeing how quickly brethren may be restored to their place in what belongs to the profession of Christ's name. It is very easy to be held by, in a sense, what is traditional

and to think that there must be a long interval before persons resume their place, but I think the Lord has helped us distinctively in seeing that that does not have to be so, and we pray that He may give us more opportunities, the door being open, of seeing those come through the door in order to take their place again. The Lord does allow instances to arise which are sufficient to counsel us that the responsibility of door keeping is not one to be taken lightly, and there are experiences currently among the saints in this country where it has been seen that individuals were, as it were, let past the doorkeeper in the other way again. The Lord allows these things in order that we might be the more responsible in what He has committed to us during the time while He has gone away. Mainly the Lord encourages us, but He gives us sufficient cases of exercise, not just locally but elsewhere within our knowledge, so that we may see that we are not to be superficial in any of these responsibilities. So He "commanded the doorkeeper that he should watch".

Then it says (going backwards) that He gave "to each one his work". Now that is something again that we are to take up responsibly. It may refer directly to the bondmen to whom He gave the authority, but "and to each one his work". I think that the Lord would tell us that He has given each one his work. It may be that sometimes one may feel that he has to, as it were, stretch himself into work that is not normally his own; sometimes the interpretations of the injunction to Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim 4: 5) would appear to have that in mind. Not that that is necessarily the right interpretation, because I think Paul was saying to Timothy that he is, as it were, to do the work of the evangelist properly and carry it as far as getting people into the assembly - see it through as a good workman would do. As Paul exhorts Timothy elsewhere, to be "a workman that has not to be ashamed", 2 Tim 2: 15. But sometimes we may feel that, while the Lord has given us work, yet we have to apply ourselves to work that we would not normally expect to be doing, save that the whole range of work is to be considered within our own responsibility. The Lord would therefore encourage us to identify what it is that He has given us each one to

do. It is easy to drift along and to think that things will go along as if the care of the Master's house could look after itself and one could pick up a job if one liked and that kind of thing. But the Lord's injunction is specific here; in view of His absence each one is given work. It says, indeed, in a very solemn scripture, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of Jehovah negligently", Jer 48: 10. We would take warning from scriptures like that, that if we are conscious of the Lord having given us specific work to do, then we would, as we might say, get on and do it and do it with our might. If we are not sure what work the Lord has given us to do, then seek Him in relation to it, for He is the Master of the house and He could tell us easily what job we were supposed to be doing. We are all familiar with that kind of thing from earlier times in our lives, even brothers who have been in the army would see people detailed for his, that and the other, and if they are not given anything they would say, What am I to do? That in a sense is the way with us all. But what is clear is that each one has work. In this scripture it appears to apply to men, although the scripture does not actually say so, but the sisters have work, too, and the Lord is very encouraging in relation to work that is taken up as given by Him and that is carried through effectively. He would encourage us positively to be seeking what work He has given us to do and then encourage us to apply ourselves so that it may be done for His satisfaction, for He may come at any time. Again, if one could refer to earlier experiences, and the army is quite illustrative, if the master came and found you sleeping when you should be doing your work, then there would be various consequences to face. And the Lord does not like to find persons sleeping when they should be doing the work that He has given them to do. So we would learn, beloved, to apply ourselves to the work the Lord has given us to do.

But then the first thing He says is that He has "given to his bondmen the authority", and that also remains in the present day. Of course, if we think of a great servant like Paul, he could speak of "the authority which the Lord has given me", 2 Cor 13: 10. He knew that the Master of the house having gone away was coming back, and he knew that *he* had been given authority. But this authority

remains in spite of gifts that were ornamental to the assembly not being so conspicuous in the present day, or in some cases not being available at all, certain gifts that were needed in the pristine days of the church in testimony not being publicly seen at the present time. And distinctiveness among the saints in the way in which we have known it may not be known either, but it does not say that the giving to His bondmen the authority depended on the conditions. The only thing it depended on was that the Master of the house was absent. And while we may be careful as to the way in which we apply the thought of bondmen, I think, beloved, that we work loss for ourselves if we neglect the fact that in going away He gave to His bondmen the authority. One thing that should be clear to us all is that gift is authority. We may not normally, as it were, put it that way, but gift is authority; that is, it is a distinctive manifestation of Christ given to one in relation to service; and since it comes from Christ, if nothing is put in its way, if the vessel does not hinder what the gift is, then gift is authority; and we do well, beloved, to have great regard for gift which the Lord has given in the present day. I am extremely thankful for brothers in whom you can see gift from the Lord. Some have gift in preaching, some have gift in teaching, some have gift in administration, some have gift, you might say, just in ordinary brotherliness that can help you and set you on the right road if you show any signs of wobbling off it. But gift is authority, and the grace that the Lord has given to each, according to Ephesians 4, is authoritative in itself. Therefore we do well to have great regard for gift which the Lord has placed among the saints; and as any serve in the manifestation of gift, to see that we are furthering what the Lord is giving through them, so that His authority is in no way complicated or distorted by impressions brought in that are not wholly in accord with what He is giving on the line of His own gift.

Then on the other hand the bondmen would recognise that they had authority from the Master of the house and as acting in the authority that the Lord had given them they themselves would speak with authority and when they acted it would be with authority. Of course, in relation to any matter outside, it would be representative

of the absent Master of the house that they acted. In any matter inside it would be recognised that they were speaking or acting with the authority of the Master of the house. But they themselves would recognise it; and therefore there is a clear responsibility on any who have gift, or any who take a lead among the brethren, or any who help in ministry or in showing the way, there is a clear need for the manifestation currently of authority. I do not speak any further as to the need for recognising it and being submissive to it, but there is a responsibility on those who have gift to minister with authority. There is a responsibility on those who preach to preach with authority. After all, the substance of the gospel is well-known to us all and, as believing in it, "we also believe, therefore also we speak", (2 Cor 4: 13); almost any one who preaches the gospel would be able to preach with authority. But there is a need for preaching with authority, and a need for teaching with authority, and for leading with authority, and for ministry with authority, because He gave "to his bondmen the authority". It is only natural to us, I suppose, that we draw back from implying that what we may say is authoritative. We do tend to draw back from that because of what we are. There is a certain kind of modesty innate in most people that makes them hesitate to say that what they are saying is authoritative. But if it is, there is no need to say that. If a man has something from the Lord he has a responsibility to act from the Lord in the manifestation of what the Lord has given to him. So that the bondmen having the authority of the Master would speak plainly about any matter that arose in the house. They would not turn away from any issue that arose, they would speak plainly about it. I was impressed on Lord's day morning at the Supper, in giving thanks for the emblems a brother referred to the occasions in John's gospel where it speaks of Jesus speaking plainly and of His speaking openly. One of the last things the Lord says publicly in John's gospel is "I spoke openly to the world", chap 18: 20. And the bondman having this authority would speak plainly as Jesus did, as Paul did; not setting any other that level, but bondmen with the Master's authority would speak plainly because they know their responsibility in relation to the authority that they have been given. You might say, Someone might

speak with authority and be wrong; and you might say, Have we not been through all that kind of thing earlier in our history? Well, beloved, perhaps we have, but we have also been through times when there was ministry with authority that was of the Lord and was right. Therefore there is no need to assume that anything said with authority will be wrong or have to be put straight afterwards, let alone revoked. When conditions among the saints are as nearly normal as they can be, what the Lord gives is presented with authority and therefore presented with clarity. My mind often goes to the scripture in 1 Corinthians 14: "if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for war?" (v 8). Therefore there is a need in any service for the authority which the Master of the house has given to His bondmen to be demonstrated and for those who act to take the responsibility of acting as on behalf of the Master whose authority it is.

I believe that if this is not regarded, just as if the door keeping is not regarded, or the work is not regarded, the house soon begins to bear signs of neglect and you find things there that you did not expect to find. You go in and you say, O, if the Master was here, I would not have seen that. That is because the door keeping is not right and the work is not right and the authority is not expressed; and authority cannot be submitted to unless it is expressed. If these things are neglected you soon find that the whole atmosphere of the place gets that feeling where almost anything will do. It creeps in and is very insidious, and once a bit of ground has been allowed to slip it is very easy to let a lot more slip. But the Lord has left an indication in this scripture of the way in which He Himself has provided for His absence. And I think, beloved, that He would encourage us to have regard to it and not only to submit to what the Lord has arranged, as His parable shows, but ourselves to take on responsibility in relation to it, so that if He comes He may not find anybody sleeping.

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"FOLLOW THOU ME"

A.J.E.Welch

John 21: 15, 19-22

I was impressed, as our brother was speaking, with the holy care which enters into the provision the Lord makes for this time in which we are. No detail escapes His eye; what love would furnish He delights to furnish abundantly. In this chapter He was about to leave the scene and He takes up with Peter this course of searching which begins with the verse we started with: "lovest thou me more than these?". The Lord initiates that searching; it is a matter which He from His side deliberately takes up in view of the time of the Spirit being furnished with such a man as Peter, secured in the fullest sense in relation to Christ Himself. How Peter shone in authority! When the Spirit came and the need was for the testimony to come into distinctive and powerful expression, Peter is ready with just the touch of authority that is needed. And John is with him, a fine demonstration of the wonderful effectiveness of the Lord's service as touching these two men that are in question in this chapter - Peter and John. But the Lord is preparing Peter that he might be ready for his place, the work that was given him to do. The Lord is doing that Himself and, in His tenderness and consideration for this wonderful time and what is to issue from it for God, He takes up matters Himself in His own skill and raises this challenge with Peter: "lovest thou me more than these?". He discerns with Peter, maybe, some tendency just to look around on others, as eventually, of course, he does in the question that he raises: "what of this man?". But the Lord is bringing Peter through to be in thorough relation with Jesus Himself, understanding the bearing of the Lord 's word; "If I will that he abide until I come". That is, speaking simply, the Lord has a will as to these things, He has a will right through the dispensation; right until the time that He comes His will is to be regarded, and especially in our relations with Him as to service, that what His will is is to govern us.

I did not read the detail of the passage which is well enough known, but He probes Peter, you might say, to the very root of his being, brings him to the point of appreciating Christ and the distinctive place that He is to have. He is brought through to see that the Lord has the most intimate knowledge possible of himself and of all, and he is brought to attach himself in his own affections to Christ as perhaps he had not been attached before. And he is not to be looking aside at another brother, close as the link might be with that brother, but he is to attend to what the will of the Lord is, to be in touch, in communion, in full relation personally, by the Spirit, with Jesus. So that, as we find our place in the work, as our brother has been saying, let our links with the Lord personally be strong; let us be undivided in our attachment and allegiance to Christ in whatever we may take up. How we are searched as to mixture of motive sometimes! The Lord would use this incident to instruct us that there is to be no mixture of motive in what relates to His interests, but that His interests are to go through in connection with His will. The Lord knows that He has a John and He reminds Peter that He does know that He has a John. The Lord would remind us of what He has in those whom He has taken up, in whom the work of God is, but He would attach every one of us in the strength of a living link with Himself to an understanding of what His will is. "If I will that he abide until I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me". That is the simple word, dear brethren, that I would seek to leave with all of us: "Follow thou me". It enters into what our dear brother has been saying to us, in the way in which the work is conducted, the way in which we may remain for a short season until the Lord comes. We may not remain very much longer, but how shall we remain? The word here is very clear, very simple, very pointed: "Follow thou me".

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THE CHILDREN'S CLOTHING

It will ever be a wonder to us that the Lord Jesus, as a babe, was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger - where men made no room for Him the beasts must do so. The swathing or winding with a cloth band showed the confined condition into which He had come. You will remember too that, in burial, His body was bound up in linen. Also during His lifetime He spoke of being "straightened", or 'pressed in spirit'. Although the Lord was never hindered in showing grace where it was needed, He always felt deeply the great sacrifice before Him. As a stranger in the world He had made, He spent the first night on earth in the outbuildings of an inn: in the last night He was in a "guestchamber", which is the same word as 'inn'.

In the Scriptures clothing is often used as an outward sign of what is true of persons in an unseen way. Cain and Abel when children must have heard about and probably seen the coats of skin made by God for their naked and frightened parents. Abel learned the need of being covered in a way that was pleasing to God as well as a protection from judgment. Thus when older he brought an offering from the firstlings of small cattle. The garments and the sacrifice were a type, at the dawn of human life, of the worth and work of Jesus - glorifying God and meeting the needs of sinners. The history of Cain is a warning because he ignored the very first lesson and thus started on the broad way which seemed pleasant but was really the path to eternal loss.

For forty years in the desert the garments and sandals of the Israelites never became old, nor their feet sore. As the children grew up and clothes were passed down the family there could be no grumbling since everything was always new! This was by a miracle of God's power but was also a sign of His purpose. He accepts us as believers "in the Beloved" and this keeps our eye on the true Christian standard. It is a little like a soldier saluting the flag to remind him to serve king and country with honour. The foot not swelling means that for the Christian there is always divine power in

the Holy Spirit to behave in a way pleasing to the Lord. Do you "walk in newness of life"?

J.C.Evershed