

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 48

March 1977

Contents

STRAITS

"MY OWN AFFAIRS"

It having been suggested that these addresses should be made available in advance of the remainder of the notes of the meetings at which they were given they are issued as a supplement to this periodical.

STRAITS

E.C.Burr

2 Corinthians 6: 1-7 (to "power of God"); 12: 9,10; 1 Samuel 13: 1-15;

2 Samuel 24: 1, 10-18

Second Corinthians 6 is like other references in the epistles in which Paul delineates for us things that he had suffered on account of the testimony: in chapter 11 of this epistle he goes through a whole series of things that he had suffered. A remarkable preface to his speaking of being caught up to the third heaven is that the chamberlain of the city shut the city up with a guard but he escaped his hands. What Paul brings before us in this way are some of the things that, as the Lord said to him, "I will shew to him how much he must suffer for my name", Acts 9: 16. Paul does not go over these things just in order to interest the Corinthians in anecdotes but to bring out what being here for Christ had meant to him. There is a difference in the way he speaks of things in chapter 6 and in chapter 12. I suppose in chapter 6 his presentation is somewhat defensive in the face of Corinthian questioning as to his status as an apostle. He sets things out there describing what had befallen one who could describe himself as a fellow-workman of the Corinthians, and what had happened in the course of the testimony, exposing, I suppose, to them that, while he had been in this way of suffering and deprivation, they had been comfortably at home, no doubt in the profession of the truth as far as they were committed to it, but comfortably at home while Paul, in this vast variety of circumstances, had been suffering. In chapter 12 the presentation is different; he is telling us that he takes pleasure in certain things, It is obvious that in that chapter, while Paul was not yet at the end of his life as he was in 2 Timothy, the view of a man who is finishing the race is there and he is viewing things from the standpoint that as to himself he was weak but through Christ he was powerful; and he says "I take pleasure" in these things, "for Christ". It is like the primary stages of the truth presented to us in Romans; we learn that tribulation works

experience and "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us", chap 5: 5. Paul tells us these things, as I say, not to occupy us with himself or with what the way of suffering service had meant to him, but to bring out something by which we may get gain in the present day.

The brethren will have noticed that the scriptures which I have read all refer to straits. In both 2 Corinthians 6 and 12 Paul refers to having been in straits. Now, of course, if we think in normal language, a strait is a narrow passage between one sea and another, But when the expression is used metaphorically (and I am sure that that is the way in which Paul uses it - he is not just giving us here an account of various sea journeys), what he is bringing before us is that he had been in certain circumstances out of which he saw no apparent issue; as he says elsewhere, "seeing no apparent issue, but our way not entirely shut up", 2 Cor 4: 8. We may wonder as we go over the history of Paul, and indeed if we think of our own history, How does a believer get into straits? How does a believer ever get into a situation where he is not sure what he ought to do and from which he sees no apparent issue? God may sometimes bring us into it in order that we may the more prove what He will be to us in circumstances from which we see no apparent issue. When, as it says in Psalm 107, we are at our "wits' end" (v 27), even then God brings them to their desired haven; and God may sometimes bring us into those circumstances in order that we may prove Him. But as far as there have been straits in the lives of most of us, if God has allowed us to get into them because we were not leaving things entirely to Him, something of ourselves having entered into them, God then says, Now you will have to prove the difficulty of where mixing your will and mine has taken you. And one can think of Paul's history in that regard. In Acts 19 he purposed in his heart to go to Jerusalem, and he said, And when I have been there I will go to Rome (see v 21). We might say, What a path of service, how things will open up! and we would have gloried in the sense of a man committing himself to preaching the gospel at the centre of one of the greatest empires the world has ever known. But Paul says when

I have been to Jerusalem I will go to Rome, and in chapter 21 a prophet comes and tells him that by that means he has got into a strait: "taking the girdle of Paul, and having bound his own hands and feet, said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, The man whose this girdle is shall the Jews thus bind in Jerusalem" (v 11). Paul had got into a strait because he had allowed his own desires, and what might well have appeared right in substance, to enter into the direction of his service; and God says, Paul, you can make that voyage but in it there will be a strait. Beloved, it is a warning to us that we do not in any way, or at any time, seek to mix what we would wish to do, and our own will, with the will of God, because it is almost certain that God will bring us into a strait, and we may be puzzled as to how we will ever get out. That is the great trouble in straits, in the sense in which we use the word: How can we ever get out of the strait in which we are? Of course, God is able to make a way out, as I have quoted already, "our way not entirely shut up", and therefore there is always a way out with God: but it may come after very much painful experience. We do not exactly get straits referred to in the shipwreck in Acts 27, but the whole circumstance is really of a vessel in a strait. I know that sometimes physically it was actually in the open sea, but it was driven and had no control over itself, it could not get out of the path where the winds and the waves drove it, and if it was near the rocks they had to fear the rocks, it was near the sandbank they had to fear the sandbank. There was nothing they could do that was effective; they did all they could; they even threw the cargo overboard in the hope that that would get them out of the strait, and eventually they said, We will kill the prisoners, and they hoped that would get them out of the strait. The only way out of that strait was ultimately by bringing in God, and God bringing to shipwreck that in which they had trusted and which had led them into the position in which they were. Paul does not dwell on the straits in either chapter 6 or chapter 12 but he mentions them, and I believe that he mentions them out of profound experience in which he had learned that in the end the only way to conduct oneself was, as David said, to fall into the hand of God. And beloved we need that lesson. All of us at some time have got into a strait of some kind or

another; we look back and we say, I had no one to blame but myself - we say that - and the strait is there, and how are you going to get out? The only way out of it is with God.

Now I have referred to these two incidents in the history of Israel because they bear very directly on this. In 1 Samuel 13 Saul was king; he was already appearing to be not a very good king but he was king. He was already under the injunctions and instruction of Samuel, and in chapter 13 Saul took up an issue which at first sight was manifestly right. The Philistines were making incursions into the land and Saul was king. You might say, It is up to the king to give a lead. He said, I can cope with this with three thousand men, and he took two thousand himself and gave Jonathan one thousand, and they took an outpost of the Philistines; and you might say that they entered into a necessary conflict. Who of us is going to say that to fight the Philistines is not always right? You say, Here is the mind of man coming out. We say in assembly matters, Here is the mind of man intruding itself into assembly matters and we must take issue with it. We say, Here is something that is clear and plain; as Saul might say, You know these are Philistines, do you not? You know they are the enemies of God, you know this is a matter in which we must take issue; and you would say, Yes I understand all that. But in this case, beloved, the result of Saul's activity in doing something that was ostensibly right was that Israel within a few verses was in a strait. And Saul had led them there. He was king, he had taken up the issue; whatever fighting against the Philistines in this chapter may speak to us of, Saul had taken issue with what appeared to be something that issue should be taken with, and within a few verses the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait. What a situation! What is Israel to do? Their authority, the king, has led them into this position and they are trembling, fearful, scattered, hiding wherever they can, seeing no escape from the strait into which they have been brought, and it had all appeared to be right. The issue that Saul had taken up appeared to be a right issue and, as we would say in everyday language today, he led the brethren into a blind alley, and it was far easier to get them into it than to get them out of it. What a

lesson for us, beloved! I do not take up Saul as attributing any moral characteristics to the saints in these days; I take it up as an illustration in the Scripture of a man taking up a matter in which he appeared to be right and could easily have defended in the care meeting or the assembly meeting, and the result was that the brethren were led into a strait and were frightened as a result. They did not know what the outcome would be; they did not know how they could get out of the situation into which they had been led.

Mercifully there was a prophet still; Samuel still has many years of life before him at this point. Samuel would not die until typically the assembly is ready to come into view. What a great service Samuel's prophecy is! Would that all our prophetic service led to the manifestation of assembly characteristics in their beauty and of such a quality that can typically commune with David. But, the prophet had given a word. Samuel is not referred to in the earlier part of this history, but somehow he must have known and must have brought in a prophetic word. Samuel's word was, Wait; that is his prophetic word on this occasion: Wait, Wait; and for a time the prophetic word was heeded. For one day it was heeded, you would say. Here are the people trembling, scattered, hiding, trembling and afraid, led into a situation that they could not see the way out of, and you might say, Well, that was very creditable of Saul, he waited a day - whatever a day may speak of - he waited. It would have been difficult to hold the situation but he waited, and the second day he waited; again it would become more difficult to hold the situation as the brethren, typically, are puzzled in the situation into which they had been led; but nevertheless Saul waited, and the third day, and the fourth day, and the fifth day, and the sixth day, and he nearly fulfilled the prophetic word, but in the end his patience gave way, and he said, Well, I must do something about this myself. It says "he waited seven days, according to the set time ... but Samuel did not come". It is like John 11, is it not? If the Lord does not come into the matter on the day we expect Him, what will we do? If God has given prophetic ministry in regard to any situation He is capable of giving prophetic ministry in regard to any extension of that situation. Let us

wait seven days. Saul says "Bring hither to me the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings"; that is to say, I can deal with this. I suppose in a certain sense he might be the kind of brother who says, Well, I got the brethren into this situation, I suppose I must get them out of it. Oh, but it did not require the king, it required the prophet. It required the word of God, it required not only the burnt offering but the peace-offering. It is very remarkable that Samuel appears to come into this situation before the peace-offerings were offered; that is to say, he is not going to let Saul establish the principles of fellowship in regard to this issue when he has led the brethren wrong, he comes when the burnt offering has been offered, as if that was enough. The prophet comes back in the power of God and challenges Saul as to what he has done. "What hast thou done?", he says. Saul comes out to meet him, plausibly, greeting him as if he was going to honour Samuel; as he says elsewhere, in regard to himself, "I have sinned; honour me now", 1 Sam 15:30. Think of the way in which a man would speak like that; he comes out ostensibly to greet Samuel and to honour him in the place that he had but Samuel will not be honoured in these circumstances. He says, What have you done? You could not wait long enough. And Saul says, I saw the situation that existed, I saw the brethren were all scattered, I saw them hiding in pits and in strongholds and in thickets and I had to do something. Samuel says, You did not have to do anything, you acted foolishly. Think of that word from the prophet. In both of these scriptures in Samuel people act foolishly. Samuel says, - "Thou hast done foolishly". David says "I have done very foolishly". "Thou hast done foolishly"; that is to say, a man intervened before the prophetic time had elapsed. I think it is most important, beloved, that the peace-offering should not have been taken on this occasion. It speaks of fellowship among the brethren, and who would have fellowship in Saul's action in this case? Who would have fellowship with Saul's intervention before God's time? Saul, we might say, could have stilled the people; he could have said, only wait and God will speak, God has spoken once and God will speak again, just wait for God. He might have said that, but he *nearly* did it, and just before the time when God was going to act, Saul acted himself. It is a great

thing, in any matters that move among the saints and in any sense disturb them or are problems among them, to observe the signs of the times. The sound of marching in the mulberry trees can easily be heard by the spiritual; the discernment that God is actually moving in a matter because there is progress in this direction or progress in that direction is the sound in the top of the mulberry trees, and it is a sign that the Philistines are going to be completely defeated by God. Beloved, let us not move until God moves. Saul moved too soon. What is the result? Samuel says that the kingdom will not be yours; it might have been yours for ever. It is as if God had said, If you had waited something would have been established out of this matter that would have served as one of the principles of the kingdom as long as the kingdom lasted. That might have happened; and what happened instead is that the whole thing is in catastrophe because Saul could not wait until the prophet came back. Beloved, God will intervene in every matter that arises among the saints, not necessarily administratively; He will intervene prophetically. Let us beware lest we go before God, let us beware lest between the burnt-offering and the peace-offering God has to intervene. You can see that in that great and solemn division of 1846, the prophet came between the burnt-offering and the peace-offering; God said He was not going to have principles of fellowship established on that basis. Mr Darby, as he says in his letters in regard to Plymouth, waited and waited and waited, as if he waited as long as he could, and then he went there. He had rights there because of his long links with the work of God in the place, having his distinctive place in the testimony, acting outside the range of what we would expect of what you might speak of as a visiting brother in the present day. But he waited and waited and waited, and they went on with things. They carried on the service of God, and you might have said that the burnt-offering went on, but eventually God says, I am not going to have the peace-offering in those circumstances. He will not have the principles of fellowship established like that, and God intervened and, in the judgment of anyone who seeks to walk rightly, overthrew everything that is opposed to Him in what is open. Beloved, God will not allow the

peace-offering to be taken before His time. He will not in any crisis that arises allow principles to be established or fellowship to be established that in any way are contrary to His own movements and the timing of His own speaking. Let us therefore beware lest the impatience of Saul should mark us in any way. He nearly succeeded, I suppose. Not to be imaginative, but it may be if he had waited another five minutes Samuel might have been there; if he had waited until tomorrow - even tomorrow, Jehovah will show (see Num 16: 5). If he had waited another seven days Samuel would have come, and the word of God would have come, and the resolution of the matter would have come out. What is the result? When Saul numbers the people he has not three thousand people, he has six hundred. Think of that. Two thousand four hundred of Israel lost because a man could not wait for the prophetic word. He could take up administration but he could not wait for the prophetic word. Then, what happens next? Saul and Jonathan are in this little fortress that they have captured; this outpost of the Philistines remains a monument to their triumph in that administrative matter, that they did take issue with the Philistines and they have this little town of Geba left to them. And what happened? Ravagers come out of the Philistines. You see what the results are; the saints are ravaged because victory was not complete, because somebody could not wait on God.

Now that is one result of being led into a strait. It says, in verse 6, "And the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait". Let us all beware lest at any time we lead the brethren into a strait. I say that soberly because I believe it is needed: let me beware that any action of mine might lead the brethren into a strait. The way by which it will be avoided is by heeding the prophetic word. It is always tempting to act - there is a letter of Mr Darby's in Volume 3 that says, We do love to take hold of the reins. Saul loved to take hold of the reins; and after all he was king, but he loved to take hold of the reins. In that same letter Mr Darby says, We lean to our intelligence rather than to the Spirit. The Spirit will always wait on the incoming of the prophetic word.

Now in chapter 24 of the second book, again we have a strait, and again it appeared that things must have been right. It says that "the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel", and then it says "he moved David" to number the people. Well, 'I have done this, the Lord told me to do it; I have a word from the Lord in this matter'. One hears that sometimes in assembly crises; we felt that we had the Lord's word, or perhaps even more categorically, 'I had the word of the Lord in this matter'; it appeared right. But, if one may use the expression, God had His own motives in so moving David. The numbering of the people was an incident in the ways of God, because God was using it for another purpose. You might say 'I have a word from God'; but if you have a word from God, have you that word in relation to what God actually intends to do or have you hastily come to the conclusion that because God says, Do this, it must be done in such and such a way, pursued to such and such complete results and you believe that God is with you, but you have missed God's objective in what was done? But again, as in 1 Samuel 13, it appears at first sight that what was done was right - to fight the Philistines, that must be right, it cannot be anything else, can it? To act on the word of God must be right, must it not? It cannot be anything else. You would think that; but unless you are with God in regard to both the fighting against the Philistines and hearing the word of God you will end up in a strait. So David numbered the people; even Joab knew it was not right. Joab says, Whatever are you going to do this for? Then, as it were, David got the message, that God had said, Do it; but God had something in view in it, and what David had missed was what God had in view in the purpose for which he had said, Number the people. And the prophet again comes to him, Gad comes to him, and he is the king's seer, and he has three possibilities. It says, seven years, three months, or three days; what will you have, David? I suppose that the sense of the weight of God's judgment is the more concentrated the shorter the period. And what does David say? He says "I am in a great strait". If you asked David, How are you there, David? he would have to say, It is nobody's fault but my own; I am in a great strait, I thought I knew the mind of God but I understood it superficially, I never really

understood just what God was doing. Gad says, Well, will you have seven years, or three months, or three days? David does not choose; David has the key that gets people out of the strait. He says "let us fall, I pray thee, into the hand of Jehovah". Now, beloved, you will always get out of the strait if you take that ground, it is the exit door from every strait. Therefore we wait for God, as we sung in the hymn , 'We wait His time' (No.55); "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah". Everything is in His hands, He has a way, 'through waves, through clouds and storms'. He may for a moment keep us bottled up in a strait because we got there through our own fault. He may keep us there because He has things to work out in us but He does not want to keep saints in a strait for seven years or for three months or for three days. What God wants is someone quickly to say, We are in a strait, we have got into something and do not know how to get out of it. The only thing for us to do is to get into the hand of God; that is the way out of every strait that the saints may get in at any time: "Let us fall, I pray thee, into the hand of Jehovah; for his mercies are great; but let me not fall into the hand of man". If you tried to get out of David's strait by the hand of man you might easily land up in Saul's strait, and the last end would be worse than the first; let us fall into the hand of Jehovah. And beloved, as matters arise amongst us, as they do sometimes, and the brethren feel that they are in a strait - they have got into something which they thought was right and they do not know how to get out of it - there is one way out of it, and there is only one way out of it, and it does not come from advice. Gad gives David no advice. In this case Gad is not exactly the prophet, he is the seer, and the function of the seer was to keep the king in line with the truth. Gad does not give any advice, he just says, This is what God offers; and what is spiritual in David comes to the surface and he says. Let us fall into God's hand. Beloved, the way out of every crisis is when somebody will say: "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah: for his mercies are great". Does God want to see seventy thousand men killed? Does he want to see two thousand four hundred killed, as under Saul? His mercies are great; God wants to see the saints out of the strait with nobody lost at all. He does not desire that seventy thousand people should die,

that is not God's objective. In some sense these men die as a token of God's wrath in the situation. God is not acting like that in the present day, in this the Spirit's day; His mercies are great, and His objective is to get all the saints out of the strait with no loss of life at all. Think of that. This is what God is working for and, beloved, it will be arrived at as soon as somebody says "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah". Outside advice ceases, prophetic advice ceases and the seer gives no advice. He does not say to David, There is this course and it has these advantages and those disadvantages, and there is a second course and likewise, and a third course and likewise. Oh no; all that God does is to bring a word with authority from God. And the result? - David does not choose; he says "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah". Beloved, once that position has been arrived at the strait is cleared, there is no more trouble, no more difficulty, you have the open sea as soon as somebody says that, you have the expanse of what God is able to bring His saints into, and what His purpose was in allowing the situation to arise. The first word that God does bring in by way of advice is, Go and build an altar to Jehovah. What a result! What fruit from this crisis, what fruit out of a strait! Did anyone ever build an altar in a strait? There is nothing to prevent you from giving thanks for food in a strait, as you find in Acts 27. Has anyone ever tried to build an altar in a strait? No, it is when you get out of a strait that you build an altar to Jehovah, and the way out is "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah". Every person who is subject to God will say Amen, once that has been said in relation to a strait. The way out is by the hand of God. The way in which He brings us out we shall perhaps in some sense never actually understand. We may never penetrate the way God resolves this matter or that matter. Think of crises that have arisen in the history of the testimony; think of the 'open' division, the way God resolved that, well known to us, well documented; and we can read the way in which God came into that matter. Think of the great crisis in London in 1920, a dispute as to 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Timothy 2, and what did God do? Did He allow the arguments on one side to be set against the arguments on the other? Brothers from a wide area came together and, after much discussion, a

brother said, Even tomorrow Jehovah will show. How does God get the saints out of a strait? Once you have dropped into His hand the solution is with Him. 'We leave it to Himself', as we sang; and what it calls for is *that* dependence on God which is ready to admit that *now* the solution can *only* be with Him. We have got ourselves into a situation that we do not know how to get out of and as soon as somebody says "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah" the way out is clear, and God 'gently clears the way'; in a moment a threshing-floor has been purchased and an altar is being built. Only comparatively few chapters on in the history you will find that on this threshing-floor there is a house which is more magnificent than any other that has ever been built. That, beloved, is the way that God gets His people out of the strait, that is the way; it is as simple as that. But no one leans to their own understanding; no one will only wait six days, twenty-three hours and fifty-nine minutes. No one will wait only as long as that; someone is ready to go on waiting until the Lord actually manifests Himself in regard to the situation, and when somebody says "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah" the matter is resolved to glory for God on the highest level that was touched in the Old Testament; that is the result of getting the brethren out of the strait. Well, beloved, may we reflect on these things, see how they bear on us; may we be such as in every circumstance will say "let us fall ... into the hand of Jehovah", for His Name's sake.

TORONTO

25 September 1976

"MY OWN AFFAIRS"

E.C.Burr

Matthew 20: 15 (to 'affairs')

While, although it is often helpful to us, we do not (I think wisely) categorise the presentation of the Lord Jesus in the gospels too strictly so that we come almost to isolating the incarnation in one

gospel from that in another, it will be well known to the brethren that the presentation of Jesus in Matthew's gospel is peculiarly to the Jews as His people, and in chapter 11 His ministry as such is in effect rejected. John the baptist from whom He might have expected the most long-continuing support appears to lose confidence, the cities in which His mighty works were done are unbelieving and thereafter Jesus turns to the wider area which has come to embrace us. One of the many things which I can remember learning from my father as to the interpretation of the Scriptures was in relation to the transition between Matthew 11 and 12 and 13, that after the rejection of Jesus by the Jews in chapter 11, Jesus goes out with His disciples and they move through the cornfields and in chapter 13 He sits down by the sea: that is to say, immediately His mind turns to wider dimensions. But insofar as he is presented as the Messiah to the Jews in this gospel we would remember what also is said in regard to the Messiah, that He is cut off and has nothing (see Dan 9: 26); a sorrowful expression which we have to take account of in regard to that service to His own nation. Yet, as we read this gospel, we shall find that He does not quite have nothing. He has "My Father" (chap 26: 39); He has "my Father who is in the heavens" (chap 7: 21); He has "my heavenly Father" (chap 15: 13); He has "my brother, and sister, and mother" (chap 12: 50); "my brethren" (chap 28: 10); "my assembly" (chap 16: 18) and "my own affairs". Think of that! He was cut off and had nothing and yet for Himself He has all those things.

I do not wish to speak this afternoon in relation to this range of things but about "my own affairs". I believe this is directly connected with "my assembly" of which He speaks directly in chapter 16: "on this rock I will build my assembly". In chapter 20 where we have read He speaks in a parable of "my own affairs". I believe, beloved, that the Lord has something to say to us as to "my own affairs". "My own affairs" bears on many exercises among the brethren at the present time, some of which have been reflected in the reading which we have just had together. We have to remember this: "is it not lawful for me to do what I will in my own affairs?" The tendency

with us is to acknowledge the Lord's rights and then to think that something else needs to be done about them; or alternatively, to consider that things belong to the Lord and are His and yet we may express an opinion about them, sound as it may seem.

The parable here is well known. The lord went out and brought in people at the first hour, and then he went out again and brought in more people to work, and he went out again and again and brought in more people, and about the eleventh hour he finally brought in more. When the settling time came He gave them all the same, and one of them, with great reason - everything was right that he said - protested. These last have worked one hour and we have borne the burden and the heat of the day, do we not get more than they? All that he said was perfectly justifiable in itself, and yet immediately the lord said "is it not lawful for me to do what I will in my own affairs?". It is a word to us: we may have much to say that in itself is substantiable and justifiable and would take a great deal of argument to set aside, but a sentence from the lord of these husbandmen silenced them all. And after that who could speak? "What shall the man do that cometh after the king?", Eccles 2: 12. He says "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will in my own affairs". Therefore we have to learn that the Lord has His own affairs. He graciously gives us part in them; what grace it is that we in any sense have been given to have part in the Lord's affairs! What grace it is that we have been given to have any part in His Father's business, or that we should have been taken up to be given the privilege of handling "the things of Jesus Christ", Phil 2: 21. But they are His own affairs.

The widest sphere in which He has His own affairs is the world, the whole world; "The earth is Jehovah's, and the fulness thereof", Ps 24: 1. There is not a saint here, young or old, who would not say that the Lord has a right to everything here. More than that, He has a right to enjoy His rights as to everything that is His in the present order of things. Beloved, has He done it? How long has He waited, to your knowledge? How long did the Lord wait to secure His rights over you, to secure you in complete submission for His own affairs? With some of our beloved young people it is clear that He did not

wait long. We see the beloved children here and know that already they have a real link with the Lord Jesus; He has not had to wait long to secure them in relation to His own affairs. But with some of us He waited much longer. Some of us first of all acknowledged His own affairs because we confessed Him as Lord and then we turned away from them, we turned as Israel will say in the day of their return, "every one to his own way", Isa 53: 6.

And how long did He wait for us? Beloved brother and sister, how long did He wait for you? How long does He wait to secure His rights? You think of the world, and the Lord has a right to everything and though He has the right to assert His rights, He has even delivered that to the Father. He will not move to secure His own rights in the world, He waits on the Father: "It is not yours to know times or seasons, which the Father has placed in his own authority", Acts 1: 7. He waits yet. Mr Darby says in that hymn (No 411)

'We well can wait! Thou waitest yet
The word of that dread hour,
Which shall Thy foes for ever set
As footstool of Thy power'.

Beloved, if He waits, we well can wait. What would it be if Christ asserted His rights in the world? How would you feel about your neighbours, or the people you work with, or people that you might have spoke to about salvation and about God, if He asserted His rights this afternoon? The longsuffering of the Lord is salvation, and He waits and waits for His rights in order that at the present time they might be increasingly acknowledged amongst more and more people.

Beloved, let us learn what the patience of Jesus is. Mr Darby says in another hymn, 'we learn from His path, and the words He spoke, What that patience of Jesus is' (No 85). We have learnt far more about His patience since He was glorified because, for just three and a half years of activity amongst men, His patience in the midst of evil was manifested, and now for nearly two thousand years His patience in waiting for His rights has been manifested to us all.

Are we not to learn from that? Will we not wait as He waits? 'Thou waitest yet'; beloved, will we not wait? Can we not wait? In the scripture that was referred to in the reading, Saul could not wait; he could nearly wait. Samuel said, You wait till I come, and Saul nearly succeeded he nearly waited, but the fact that he only nearly waited was just as if he had taken things into his own hands on the first day. It did not matter, he had not the patience just to wait that little longer (see 1 Sam 13). Christ waits for His rights in the sphere in which He is entitled to them and in which He will soon be displayed - He waits not only as entitled to them but as exercising for the moment the longsuffering of the Lord which is salvation. We have not to do with that wider sphere and the establishing of Christ's rights in the world. Our position in regard to Christ's rights in the world is first of all to keep the Supper, to go on taking the Supper. May I encourage any of the younger brethren here who are not yet breaking bread to start thinking about it. That is, in a sense, the most we can do in regard to Christ's rights at the present time, to break bread, to show forth His death until He come.

You and I can manifest His rights in ourselves, as persons who are here subject to the Lord, with whom the confession of Jesus as Lord is not just a formula taken from Romans 10, but something that that scripture expresses, as it were, on my behalf; that is, it is something that I would be saying. Paul does not say you are to confess; he says "if thou shalt confess" (v 9), and he points out the consequences of confessing Jesus as Lord: "confess ... Jesus as Lord ... thou shalt be saved". That is something that you and I could do in relation to the rights of Christ, in relation to His own affairs. You and I as believers are areas now in which His own affairs are lawfully exercised by Him and not by ourselves. Once you have submitted to Jesus as Lord you come into the area of His own affairs where it is lawful for Him to do as He will and no longer for you or me to do so. The scripture proposes to us that we should no longer live to ourselves but to Him that died for us and has been raised (see 2 Cor 5: 15).

Then the wider area in which we are privileged to touch His own affairs is the local assembly; I say the *local* assembly. *The* assembly in its widest sense is beyond the administration of any individual. The only individual, if I may use the word, who may administer in *the* assembly directly is Christ. What I do or what a local assembly does bears on all the assemblies, but the One who can do something in them all at once is Christ. The area that is given to us is local and we are entrusted with His own affairs "my own affairs" in "my assembly"; not with 'your affairs' in 'my assembly' and certainly not with 'my affairs' in 'your assembly'; we are entrusted with "my own affairs" in "my assembly". That will keep us in subjection to Christ in everything that is done in the local assembly. Nothing can then be done which strays outside the range of what He will describe as 'lawful' in His affairs.

The Lord allows matters to arise that test us. As we said in the reading, it is by no means the service of any of us here to take up specific local issues and yet, as matters become known, principles that are involved in them naturally come to mind; it cannot be otherwise. What, for instance, was referred to as to association outside the fellowship, links with unbelievers, and all that line of things, as to which the truth is clear and the brethren are clear; all that bears on "my own affairs". If we are not careful in what is, if I may use the word, delegated to us in relation to His affairs it may be that the Lord will have to come Himself and speak to us directly as to whether we will do what is lawful, or what is not lawful, not in our affairs but in His. One does not use language like 'wickedness' and 'evil' but I believe that Mr Taylor once said that every association which has not its foundation in the gospel is not of God. Hence if matters like this arise, the brethren have to deal with them because they are handling Christ's affairs. He will take up issues in relation to His own affairs. If we will not do for Him as instructed by Him what is right in His own affairs He will take matters up Himself, either by specifically entering into them and showing us that they must be dealt with, or perhaps allowing us a diminished sense of His own liberty among us, which will rouse the spiritual to be concerned about

the conditions which make the Lord less free than He habitually is. Therefore, beloved, let us be careful with His affairs, let us be careful with these questions of association, as to which there was a major division in 1972. It is only just over four years ago, it cannot all that quickly be forgotten.

Then let us also be careful - let the older brethren have the courage to instruct the younger brethren - as to matters that bear on the unsuitability of worldliness and of earthliness amongst the young people. Let us be quite simple about these things: let us go back to the old questions that used to be asked when we were young: Very well, go to where you want to go, but can you take the Lord there, and can you take the Lord's name there? Suppose you go to such and such an event, or such and such a place, start by speaking about the Lord Jesus and see what happens, and then you will know whether you can rightly go or not. Insofar as we have grown up to partake at all of meat in spiritual things these things were the means by which we were weaned from milk to stronger food; but we were given simple tests: Could you take Christ, could you go there and confess Christ in simplicity? Beloved young people - of whom we are glad to see so many here today, it is one of the greatest encouragements to us older brethren that there are so many young people here - be true to Christ. Make sure that whatever you do can rightly be embraced as one of His affairs as well as one of your own. Do not shilly-shally about these things, or wobble and wander, and do not say to yourself, There is no harm in it; say, Is Christ in it? Test it like that. One believes that there is in some parts the necessity of exercise as to the things with which we connect ourselves, and the Lord would help us, He would assert the right He has in relation to His own affairs, not in order to chastise and reprove, but to give us the experience of deliverance into an area of things where we are wholly for His pleasure. One does not claim in any way that in oneself one never offends in any detail against these things, save that I trust as we grow older we learn to judge ourselves against things that enter into the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life; but let us, as we said, have a climate in which care

for the Lord's own affairs will maintain an atmosphere in which things that belong to the world and earth, and things that are not of the Lord Jesus Christ, and things that are not of the Father but of the world, are turned away from and rejected. And, beloved brethren, please – support one another in doing so. Do not undermine those who wish to be separate from evil, do not laugh at them, do not call them super-spiritual and that kind of thing; stand by them and reinforce them in order that Christ may have an area in which His own affairs are lawfully dealt with as by Himself. These things are simple to learn . If exercises about them occur in one part, it is in order that they might be learnt by us all. We were saying elsewhere that if the Lord wants to speak about a matter that will affect every assembly, He has to do it in a place. The Lord does not broadcast to the world, He comes in in ministry in a place and speaks so that the gain of it may affect all. "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies", Rev 2: 7. The Lord will speak in a place, but let us all understand that if the Lord raises exercise somewhere, there must be the power to deal with it in order that the right that He has in relation to His own affairs may be maintained.

We have been tested by accusations of sectarianism, and there is a tendency to think that links with other believers can be looked at apart from the truth of Scripture. These tests are among the most sorrowful things but that is not true. You cannot look at links with other believers outside the light and direction which Scripture gives in relation to them. Mr Darby said many years ago that if a brother comes to a meeting sometimes (that is a meeting in fellowship) and goes to another place of worship at another time, he cannot be honest in going to either; he has not a pure heart in that act (see Letters, Vol 2, p.12). And the basis for fellowship in 2 Timothy 2: 22 is "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". Let us remember that. Another thing he said is that if a person comes and breaks bread once, he is as susceptible to assembly discipline as someone who has broken bread for many years (see Letters, Vol.2, p.110). Let us remember these things, beloved; they are in the foundations of the recovery and they relate to the lawfulness of

Christ doing what He will in His own affairs, that He will insist on the protection of the fellowship that He has established as defining an area in which assembly truth may be experienced. Nothing affects us more in the present day than even the possibility of having to withdraw from somebody with whom we break bread. I think I know almost everybody in this room today and I would feel it personally if I had to withdraw from any of them, but I trust that I would find that courage in assembly discipline to think more highly of the rights of Christ than the rights of any individual. It may be that those we speak of as our nearest and dearest are the greatest test to us, but if there is a mixture as to fellowship, the only thing that can be done is for assembly action to be taken in order to define where assembly ground is.

Reference was made in the reading to the word 'interference' in relation to localities and that is a sober matter. If we acknowledge that localities are the place where the Lord is lawfully doing what He will in His own affairs, then how can man, any man, interfere in them? Let me use a word that is less controversial than 'interfere'; how can a man intervene in them? how can he intervene in a local assembly where the Lord is dealing with His own affairs? It is part of the basic instruction of the recovery that the Lord has equipped every locality with the capacity to deal with its own affairs. Brethren will remember that beloved Mr Taylor even contemplated that two sisters in a place alone could exercise assembly discipline (see N.S. Vol 62, p.181). Let us remember that if the Spirit of God dwells in a place, there is the capacity under the Lord to deal with every matter. Let us therefore, beloved, beware of intervening. I do not speak in any way against ministry that bears on the principles in question, that sheds light on the situation, that makes clear to some who are not clear what is involved; but ministry is not judgment, ministry is ministry. We usefully use the word 'light' in relation to ministry: ministry is light on the situation. Let us not only hesitate about intervening; let us recall where there has been intervention and what disasters have occurred from it. Let us recall, even in these islands, what loss there has been in localities through outside

intervention. I do not go back to describe the detail, brethren can recall instances from their own memories, but remember what disasters there have been because there was outside intervention in other localities. Beloved, that is not of God. It is interfering with the Lord's right to do what is lawful in His own affairs. It may be that the Lord was working something out over time in a place; it may be He had exercises to raise with certain of the brethren there; it may be that they were slow, even obstinate, maybe behind the times, or whatever, but it was "my own affairs" and anybody that intervened from outside was not acting with God. We need to be clear about that, not only in repudiating the intervention, but we need to examine ourselves that if we joined in the intervention or acquiesced in it or supported it we should judge ourselves because we have been handling affairs which the Lord was dealing with lawfully as His own. One knows that disasters need still to be repaired where there has been intervention in the Lord's handling of His own affairs.

Let us think about these things. It is not for me to go round any country and point out localities where I think exercises ought to be raised. All I can do in seeking to serve the brethren is to raise matters which rest in my own soul as exercise and see what correspondence this finds in those who can identify the circumstances in their own history. The Lord would have us repudiate the whole idea of intervention in other localities and in doing that each of us would repudiate occasions on which we may have gone along with it, welcomed it, supported it, even still maintain it even though others of our brethren may have a judgment of it. Let us bear these things in mind. It is lawful for Him to do what He will in His own affairs. It is not lawful either for us to leave bones sticking up; there is no bone that was left sticking up after a conflict that did not trip somebody up. And what happens then? A brother is blamed for tripping over the bone: It was his fault, he should have seen the bone. But, beloved, someone ought to have buried the bone. There may yet be bones that need to be buried in order that the liberty that belongs to saints who desire to walk in the truth may be fully restored and understood and worked out by them. I do not point the

finger at any place; I have one locality where I can humbly operate with the brethren in relation to administration and that is this very place. Outside here I have not that administrative capacity. And, beloved, outside your locality you have not that administrative capacity, you have it where the Lord has put you and my experience is that that is quite enough. In addition one may carry exercise. Let us carry exercise and let us enter into combat in relation to those exercises, but let us as we enter into the combat remember that in the end He will do what is lawful in His own affairs. Let us think of localities in this way as areas where the Lord has His own administrative rights. These matters are current with the brethren. As I say again, it is not for us here, not for me certainly, to debate the issues in other local assemblies, but the Lord has the area of His own affairs, it corresponds to "my assembly", and we do best to let Him work things out in His own time in that area and to be with Him; and if we have not been with Him, to get back with Him: a very simple matter. It is not a day now when people are going to be humiliated for acknowledging they were not quite with the Lord in this or that thing that was done. There would be rejoicing and progress among the brethren and no question of probation, let alone shutting up; there should be liberty among the saints because it was fully acknowledged that the Lord had His own way in His own affairs.

Other matters bear on us, affect us very profoundly, some matters a very long way from us and we carry these with sorrow and with burden, all the brethren do; but these things test us. We are often confronted with a situation where we weigh things over a long time and we are perfectly clear about the principles right from the beginning. I think I could probably see a principle a good way off, I think most brethren could, certainly any brother that takes responsibility could see the principle that governs a matter a very long way off. What am I to do? Go and try and put the principle that I have identified into action? Am I to tell the brethren to put what I have identified as the principle into action? Am I to take some action which shows where I stand in the matter? I think it is better to let the Lord do what He will in His own affairs: because, beloved, one of the

most tender ways the Lord has of rebuking us is to show us that what we were doing may have been quite justifiable, but justifiable as it was, it was not the way He was doing it. The most penetrating rebukes come from the Lord when He does not say anything to us to tell us we were wrong, but He just does it another way. He may not immediately proceed to do something another way, but He may, as it were, just lift the curtain for a moment and show us that He is doing something another way. He would say, Just wait. 'We well can wait', beloved. I believe that it is one of the Lord's tenderest rebukes to us. I am quite free to say I have been rebuked by it myself, even in administration in my own city, when urgent to do something, perfectly clear about what ought to be done, ready to do it next week, but a brother says, Had we not better wait? It shows you that the Lord is lawfully doing things in His own way in His own affairs. And what do you say? Do you argue with the brother? No you accept the rebuke from the Lord that you were trying, not to do what was wrong, but to do things differently from the way He would do it and it is a rebuke. It would be so with one of you; children, would it not? You say, Go and do so and so, or they say to themselves, Father will want this done and they go and start doing it in such and such a way. And father comes along and says, That is not the way I would have done it, and he does it entirely a different way and he never says a word of rebuke, but you feel that you were not quite in your father's pleasure in what you were doing. One of the tenderest rebukes the Lord has for any of us is to show us that what we were doing may have been intended to be right, but it was not quite what He would have done. The Lord is tender with us, He does not wound, He binds up, He does not chastise; He may chasten but He does not chastise, and if He chastens it is because He loves. He will take care of His saints, He knows if the general disposition of the brethren is towards giving Him liberty in His own affairs. The Lord is not severe if something is done that goes differently from what He would have done, but He will just show us in a moment, I would have done it this way or I am doing it this way. The nearer you are to the Lord the more you feel rebuked by seeing Him do something differently. Let us remember that He must do

what He will in His own affairs. He is over all. We do not speak of Him as Lord in relation to the assembly but He is Lord; He is Lord to each of us and He has the rights of the Lord; He has rights as Head, He has rights as Christ, He has rights on God's behalf, He has rights in matters which are His own. We will learn most and make most progress as we learn to go with Him in what He is doing; because in the end He will manifest that everything that happened was ultimately for His glory. Nothing took place that was not. Someone was reminding me of those verses:

'Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly;
Will God unroll the canvas, and explain the reason why'.

When the Lord comes into a matter Himself and acts and settles it, then it is clear what every preceding stage meant in relation to the Lord's conclusion and not till then. He will do what is lawful in His own affairs. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will in my own affairs?" The Lord would insist on that. He will rally us to it. As I say, the Lord may in the tenderness of the way He acts rebuke us from time to time, not publicly. But if we receive what the Lord says to us it affects our subsequent actions. The Lord will speak to us in His kindness and His goodness, but what He will say is that they are my own affairs and He would almost say, Please leave them with me, I will use you when I am ready to use you. You will remember the man in David's history who said "Let me run", 2 Sam 18: 19, 20, please let me run, he says; and eventually Joab says "Run". And what happened? When he got there he did not know what to say. He was so flustered with the excitement that he was having part in the action that he did not know what to say, did not know what had happened even. Beloved, let us refrain from saying, Let me run. Let us wait on the prophet, let us wait on the Lord; they are His affairs.

Well, beloved, that is all I have to say. I have not sought in any specific way to take up matters that belong in localities. I have sought to touch on things that I carry in my own spirit in relation to matters of which I am aware. I think that one of the great issues at the present moment is how what is priestly in a wide way can be brought to bear on local issues. Maybe there is insufficient

priestliness amongst us to sustain it; then let there be more. But how is priesthood, which is universal, to be brought to bear on local issues which are not universal but local? The Lord would help us in that. I just add this word: I am very chary of the expression 'the universal priesthood'. I think it would be very much better if that expression were not used. Priesthood is universal, but the expression 'the universal priesthood' creates the impression that there is a certain group of brothers who may be referred to in regard to matters, and that is not so. Let us, beloved, be before the Lord as to how He would bring that priesthood that is universal, that cares for His own affairs, to have its influence on local matters without ever intervening in them, but by way of what is priestly bringing things round to the mind of God. May He help us for His Name's sake.

LONDON

16 October 1976