

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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ENQUIRY

THE CHILDREN'S LIFE-STREAM

ENERGY

1 Corinthians 12: 1-31

A.J.E.W. I am thinking of the assembly as the great area of activity in life and power. We know on the one hand that the walk and way of the Lord Jesus were marked by intense activity, so that John speaks with very manifest feeling of the things that Jesus did: not only that He spoke or was to be seen of men but He did things, a great variety of things in the infinite perfectness of His manhood and the glory of His Person. And when He went into heaven and the Spirit came we have an immediate course of energetic and committed activity bringing evidence of life in the disciples, and as the history unfolds in the Acts and Paul comes on to view in a prominent way we have the Lord intimating to him that he was to be ready at once for active labour. The course of the Pauline service which is before us in the history in the Acts and is then evident in his epistles is full of the energetic pursuit and application of the truth. It struck me that this chapter gives us certain active ideas which are related to the assembly, especially the local assembly. Various matters are touched on from the eighth verse onwards, and we have the gifts touched on from the twenty-eighth verse onwards, and a great basis for the whole active function of matters in the assembly to proceed through the Spirit so that the divine ends in His beloved saints are reached. I get an impression that the Lord is looking to us for the energetic application of His mind which is really the character of what is Pauline. We often speak of the revival, as we may refer to it, being very distinctly connected with the Pauline truths but we would see it related I believe not only to the Pauline teaching but to the Pauline energy in love for Christ which he continually manifested. The great scope of his untiring service touched on in different places is to bear upon us in a peculiarly stimulating manner that at the end, as the Lord is about to come, there may be the energetic pursuit in the Spirit of what is yielding in its preciousness for Himself. It is of deep interest that this chapter begins by its reference to the divine operations, what God is doing, reminding us that He is the author of

what is carried through, and yet He uses His servants, He fits them to be employed as He may please; everything is of Him, and it may stimulate us to get some little impression of the operations of God proceeding quickly and decisively at the end.

A.B.P. They are sufficiently diversified so that we need not get in one another's way. I was thinking of the list of things; but then the working out of it in body activity is also diversified.

A.J.E.W. Hence the body is brought in not so much by reference to its head - I suppose there is a certain reference to Christ as the Head in the twelfth verse "so also is the Christ" referring to the whole anointed order of things in the assembly - but the body is presented as the wonderful organism in which the Spirit of God is active. It reminds us of our links with one another and our labour in relation to one another and as you say, we do not get in one another's way.

The sensitiveness to the one Spirit and a due sensitiveness to what is going on in a wider setting is implied in what is set out here, that we have this remarkable entity, the body, in view.

A.B.P. Do we have a suggestion in John 12 of how it works out? We may be tested because of being few in numbers and much to be done, but each seemed to be in the proper setting in the body in John 12 that just provided what was needed for the whole occasion but without any interference one with an other.

A.J.E.W. Which part of John 12 are you referring to?

A.B.P. I was thinking of how Mary was at the feet of Jesus and that Martha served and that Lazarus was one of those who sat at table with Him. These were three distinctive areas of feeling and function.

A.J.E.W. They are indeed; and of course the relations between them would be very close, very affectionate and feeling relations because they had richly experienced the compassion and activity and power of Jesus. Well, as we gather, brothers and sisters, we are all in that position, we are brought into sensitive inter-relationships with one another, having been secured on the ground of His finished work and having proved the surpassing blessedness of the gift of the Spirit. I thought the sensitive side of things in life in the body becomes very

attractive and a basis for every activity, and there are many activities that are necessary that love for Christ would energetically undertake, but all is under control, every part is in its due place because the body is in view.

G.D.W. Would it be of interest that in Paul's great chapter on serviceability where energy is necessary (I am referring to the second chapter of 2 Timothy), we need to have a judgment of the great house of Christendom so that there is a separating of the vessels to honour in view of service? Then the great amount of energy; "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (v 22). Would this not give a basis in these days of breakdown so that we can act in the light of what we have in this chapter in Corinthians?

A.J.E.W. I think that is so. The very idea of pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace is an indication that this is not just a set of governing principles but it is something that is being pursued as a definite, vital object in the maintenance of what is precious to Christ. The later verses in that epistle, in chapter 4, are very appropriate to what you are saying; "be urgent in season and out of season, convict, rebuke, encourage, with all longsuffering" (v 2). Then he goes on to speak of combating the good combat and having finished the race. These are all suggestions which are stimulating to energetic application of things. I believe there is a need of this, a realising among us of the greatness of that to which we stand committed. I could not help being struck today, to refer to it in passing; with the word that Nehemiah used in chapter 6 of his book when Sanballat and Tobijah and the others came to spoil the building of the wall; he replies "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you?" (v 3), showing how in days that correspond with the chapter you quote in 2 Timothy there was the unswerving pursuit of what we might speak of as the main point of the moment, and a readiness to resist every effort to divert it in view of spoiling what is for God.

G.D.W. One thing necessary in pursuit physically is for the body to be functioning and we must have the right objective - the four things

that are mentioned. Otherwise we might tend to shy away from the combat that is mentioned in the fourth chapter of that epistle.

C.S.E. At the Supper the loaf brings very forcefully before us the thought of one body. We sometimes sing, 'The bread reminds us we are one, One body there is seen' (hymn 430). Would you help us in the development of appreciation of the thought of the body.

A.J.E.W. Chapter 12 following the reference to the Lord's supper in chapter 11 is very suggestive, as if, as the Supper has its bearing upon us and its effect in love in us, we are rendered ready for the course of needed activity which chapter 12 involves, but not without the idea of the body being brought in. In reading through the chapter as a whole the remarkable emphasis that the writer gives to the functioning of things body-wise is very noticeable, the emphasis on the presence of the different members and the service and function that is distinctive to each, and the necessity for each and all to be in function. So that the body, as Mr Ware was suggesting, is thriving in what you could speak of as a healthy state; there is nothing disjointed but a movement together in life and in power.

C.S.E. It says "if one member suffer"; if one member is impaired, then the entire organism is somewhat affected, and until the process of repair, so to speak, is set in motion and the member is brought back into function there would be something of the body thought missing.

A.J.E.W. Yes. Of course the place that the Holy Spirit has, emphasised in the beginning of the chapter, is to be taken great note of: "no one, speaking in the power of the Spirit of God, says, Curse on Jesus; and no one can say, Lord Jesus, unless in the power of the Holy Spirit". It is as if the basic necessity for recognition of the Spirit is emphasised, and that comes into the different functions that are mentioned. "There are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of services, and the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God who operates all things in all"; that is, we are not working at our own matters, the body is not seeking exactly its own increase; the question is what is going

forward for the divine pleasure and that in which God in His wonderfully active operations is proceeding. It becomes a challenge whether we can locate the operations of God in their blessedness at any time. Do we have some grasp through the Spirit's direction of what God is doing, speaking simply, at this present moment?

C.S.E. Would the Spirit be the power by which the connection between the members is maintained?

A.J.E.W. It is most attractive. We see how that is spelled out in detail for us in verse 8; "For to one, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; and to a different one faith, in the power of the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healing in the power of the same Spirit". The strong emphasis on these points in the chapter is particularly to be noticed, and the necessity for the blessed Spirit of God to have His place in every functioning of things that goes on for God's pleasure.

A.M. I was wondering if that is vital so that nothing is damaged. We were noticing in Samuel how there were those who did great damage because they were not under control.

A.J.E.W. I think that is a very vital point. It is a very challenging point too. But the challenge that the Spirit of God brings in a scripture like this is never to quench the resolve of devotion to Christ to answer to what the chapter presents. I believe the stimulating touch of this chapter is to affect us tonight; so that, as you say, nothing is damaged. There is a sensitiveness in God's work, especially, speaking simply, in young persons and it is not difficult to damage them, and we long that we may never damage them, that there may be nothing afoot that would damage them, but rather the right coordinated functioning of everything in the Spirit. So that the activity that marks the assembly takes on a distinctive character which is according to God. It is not just so many persons together all speaking at once or with different objectives or with different means of reaching the objectives, but something that is united into one by

this emphasis on the same Spirit, which I believe would greatly stimulate and affect us.

G.D.W. By the assembly you mean of course what is mentioned in some translations as the church. It is the assembly of Christ on earth as it is today; we do not know every member of it and it is obscure to some degree but then we can act in the light of it.

A.J.E.W. It is important to get that point, that we seek, as helped of God - we could never do it without that help - to move in the light of what the assembly, the church, is according to the divine thoughts and according to the very extensive teaching that the Spirit of God has given us especially in the Pauline instruction.

G.D.W. Does that give us body feeling and affection for every member of the body?

A.J.E.W. Quite so. And it also would raise the question of the unflinching, vigorous pursuit of the divine objectives, which was the feature of Pauline service referred to in a number of ways in a number of places. I fear a certain slipping back into what we could speak of - I do not say that to reflect upon anything or anyone - as an easy Christianity, when the Spirit of God would really stir us up to something which is to match the glory of the end of this time of the Spirit even as there was something of like glory as this time of the Spirit began.

A.B.P. So if there is any feeling with us that these things are too great for us it would stimulate us to desire gift.

A.J.E.W. I am glad you bring that in because we do not desire gift to make anything of ourselves. It would be a very poor thing if we sought gift to make something of ourselves. But if we desire gift for the sake of what God is effecting among those who love Him, what God is effecting among men as the word is preached, and every aspect of His work, if we desire the greater gifts in view of prospering that, how pleasing it is to Him to answer the desire.

A.B.P. It would seem that Paul has prophecy as the top-stone of that, which, speaking simply, would be to be near enough to the

divine presence to be able to get God's mind as to conditions, would it?

A.J.E.W. Yes, I am sure. And in getting God's mind as to the conditions, to find from Him the grace to apply one's self to the conditions in a positive sense. We would recall, as you speak of such things, the way in which a man like Elisha applied himself in prophetic power to the case of the dead boy. He got into the closest contact with him and imparted something to him in the sense of life and vigour. It is often that which tests us; we may find grace to get up and give a word, and it is right that a word be given in the meeting appropriate to it, but have we the power to carry things through, to make effective what the mind of God is disclosed to be? It is that that becomes the deep challenge, and yet it is a challenge the Spirit of God would give us grace to face and to come through.

G.D.W. Some of the gifts are not what you might call spectacular; a shepherd is moving in an area where only heaven may know what he is doing. But there is a need of carrying, and it is not always the most pleasant kind of work, but you are working with a soul trying to bring them back into the fold into the sense of the one flock. Is that not one of the offsets to this easy-going Christianity which is really just a way of coasting without really functioning?

A.J.E.W. I believe that is so. Of course the tenderness of the shepherd is greatly to be coveted. A shepherd is tender without in any sense sacrificing his charge. He would be vigorous in repelling the attack on the sheep or the lamb that he tends, and yet the tenderness of his tending is there all the time.

G.D.W. He can deal with the lion and the bear but he can lift the lamb on his shoulders.

A.J.E.W. Precisely. In the setting of these things in the body - you get first what God set there and then what God has set in the assembly: setting certain in the assembly - we are made to see that it is His matter and yet it has in view an immense area of activity which is of Him, which is linked with His own operations; indeed it expresses and carries through His own operations. It is wonderful to

think of the body as divinely usable in such a variety of ways to a variety of ends which glorify the God who has set everything there that is in function.

B.T. I was thinking of the energy that marks these cults and results in damage. It might link with verse 2, "led away to dumb idols, in whatever way ye might be led", and there is the demon behind the idol. The Corinthians were probably glad to be delivered from that but at the same time there was a tendency to drop into lethargy as you were saying, not active in the body as we should be.

A.J.E.W. I believe it is good to see that. You cannot but think of the general scope and character of this letter, the conditions that the apostle actually faced in Corinth as he wrote, but he went right through with the whole matter, bringing forward teaching of the most searching and yet of the most positive kind to reach an end among them that would be according to God. You marvel at the patience and resoluteness of a beloved servant who could write two letters like these, faced as he was with very dark conditions in that locality, and yet he went through with the matter. It is just to remind us of the necessity for energetic application of the truth when we are in the presence of departure of any kind as we are in these days in which we live, where the departure is general and where the thoughts of God are going through on the basis of the energetic maintenance and application of the truth; under control, not in any free-lance manner but under the wonderful regulating touch of the Spirit of God and in the sensitiveness of relations which mark the body.

L.MacF. So the spirit of fatherhood in a locality is very important. Paul said "not many fathers", 1 Cor 4: 15. So the promotion of liberty and brethren taking on their responsibility would be enhanced, do you think?

A.J.E.W. I do indeed. That is a feeling touch: "not many fathers". What a father he was among his brethren, among the people of God! What a fatherly touch there always was with Paul! Not that he would shrink from faithfulness as to any element of evil or of the world that was there; he would not shrink from having to say to that in the most

definite terms, but what a father he was! And we need the fathers. Some of us are getting a little bit up in years and we are feeling the challenge of the need of fathers in our time, whether we can take on fatherhood in reference to these things.

G.D.W. Does not the father want every member of the family to be functioning and happy, whatever service or office the other members of the family have? It is not the idea of what is sometimes spoken of as clericalism, where everything is left just to one man, but the principle of getting every member of the body functioning. It is not as in verse 17: "if the whole body were an eye"; that would be a rather limited view of things; but to be able to sit down as brethren with every one functioning under the leadership of the Spirit.

A.J.E.W. That is right. And of course the leadership of the Spirit is the prime point in what you are saying, because it is not that a man is directing this or that or something else; it calls into play the felt need on our side of continual relation with the Spirit to get His mind about things and to speak and to serve and to act in His power.

G.D.P. So it says in verse 11, as the Spirit pleases, and then we are baptised by one Spirit into one body. I was thinking about what you said as to our relations with the Spirit and being kept in that relationship consciously.

A.J.E.W. We are not arranging things. These are not our activities. It is a question of what God is doing, what the Spirit of God is doing and the place that in grace and yet in power He may give to those with whom He is in liberty to take on the things that need to be done. There is a great deal that needs to be done and a great deal of the precious truths unfolded and established from Scripture and set out for us in a form which helps us to assimilate it. What an immense volume of the mind of God in the truth is available to us and we need to apply ourselves to it. To have it in the bookcase is not enough in these days; we need to apply ourselves to these things. It takes time, it takes sacrifice, it takes resolve, how we use our time and so forth, and that we do not fritter it away on things which have no real positive relation to the divine interests.

A.S.H. Would verse 7 - "But to each the manifestation of the Spirit is given for profit" - signify that anything that may be manifested to us by the Spirit, and we go in for it wholeheartedly, would yield profit and gain not only for ourselves but also for others?

A.J.E.W. The great end in mind in God's assembly is always profit. It is never loss, it is never damage; if damage comes in - and the word damage was used earlier - it is because man has had a place somewhere; the whole activity of the Spirit of God is for profit. Christianity is a glorious positive matter from start to finish. The dispensation in which we are, this time of the Spirit, is full of the most positive possibilities of power and strengthening and the developing of what is according to God for the satisfaction of His heart. We need sometimes just to get a sense of the immense positiveness of that to which our God has called us and to watch that nothing allows our minds to be running continually in negative channels, because we can get over - occupied with negative things.

C.S.E. I was affected by the word 'set' in verse 28: "God has set certain in the assembly"; I thought there is great power in that word. It is God's doing. Do I have the sense that God has placed me in the assembly for a purpose? If I have that sense, then I will seek to guard my place rightly because He has a purpose in putting me there. Do you think it is in view that He might get greater glory?

A.J.E.W. The word 'set', you mean, involves, as the note explains, that He has set for Himself; that is, the return is to be to Him, the glory is to be to Him. You feel that the chapter is intended in that way to help us to cherish the divine thoughts for His own satisfaction. We are not here for our own pleasure - how much God does give us which is delightful to a heart true to Christ! what blessing we experience! what times of profit and refreshment and enlargement! - yet the glory of it all is to be His.

C.S.E. It makes us think of God's infinite skill and wisdom in taking up one and another and setting us among nobles and princes, dignifying persons, giving them the Holy Spirit and causing them to

act comelily. There would be a right co-ordination as the members of the body function in that comely way. Do you think that is normal?

A.J.E.W. God has, if I could use a simple word, immense investment in the assembly. You will remember how Mr Taylor used to remind us of the gifts as being an element of adornment so that something should appear in peculiarly choice and distinct character. What is in view here is nothing ordinary or commonplace but what is adorned and according to God for His own satisfaction. A true lover would cherish that, that God has what answers in this sense to His own heart.

S.E.H. In Nehemiah, where persons are repairing the wall, it says several times "next to them repaired"; and then there are persons who have responsibility for different gates, each person, as Mr Elliott says, is set and has a responsibility for repairing or building some part of the wall.

A.J.E.W. The wall was successfully completed against the opposition and ridicule that it occasioned; it is of great moment to bring that in because it was a time of recovery within a recovery; that is to say, the main process of things under Ezra had shown, alas, a certain loss of momentum, but Nehemiah coming into the scene restores momentum to the great matter that was proceeding. I believe there is an element of need of that at the present time; God has done much in His faithfulness to His saints and to His own thoughts by way of recovery and yet there is always the tendency, which is frequently seen in scriptural history, for the momentum to be lost. God would stimulate us by His word that there may be no loss of momentum; we are to move on. There is much to be done and it may be that there are few available to do it; therefore it is the more urgent that every one be available to do it and to pursue what is necessary with the energy that God delights to supply and to support.

C.C.G. "God has tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to the part that lacked". What do you say about that?

A.J.E.W. The sovereign touch is there. He may give what seems a more prominent place to certain ones, and yet every one is needed, He has tempered it together. He has entered feelingly into the constitution of it. There is nothing formal or automatic about this; God has entered into the matter so that all that relates to the body is such as He can find pleasure in. To have some sense of an active place and part in such an organism is to stimulate us increasingly. Of course the glorious Head is Christ. The anointed order of things that is spoken of, "so also is the Christ", is the whole matter of Christ the glorious Head related to His assembly as the body. To get a view of that will often transform our objectives, clarify them to get us to see what the Spirit of God would have us to do.

C.C.G. Is our place to be subject to His teaching?

A.J.E.W. Quite so.

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Key to initials

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A.Macdonald, Plainfield; MacFarlane; A.B.Parker; G.D.Pfingst;
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(All local except where otherwise stated)

SINGING TOGETHER

P.van den Berg

Job 38: 1-7; 1 Peter 2: 1-7; Ephesians 2: 19-22

What God has in mind, beloved brethren, in the way He operates in the present time is the service of God. We have been speaking together of the way it pleased God to reveal Himself. What God desires in relation to the way He has come out so gloriously is a response that is equal to the revelation, and for that conditions are needed in which God can be served. Hence the importance of an order of things - a spiritual house as Peter speaks of it - where the service of God can proceed; and the need in our day is to come to the foundation, for the sure foundation stands in spite of the day in which we are. What governs us in arriving at it is the word of God. It is by the word of God that the worlds were framed (see Heb 11: 3), and God operates in *speaking*: "He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast", Ps 33: 9.

Much enters into the book of Job but the great point that it leads up to is that God cannot be hindered in any of His thoughts and He is bound to have an answer to them. So Job came to an end in himself when God Himself came in and spoke. There was not much help in the speaking of the friends that preceded but help came in through what Elihu sets out and that ministry made way for God Himself to come into the matter. God is able to come into matters Himself but it pleases Him to use ministry. He prepared a way through the ministry of John the baptist, who was His messenger to prepare the way for Christ. So God answered Job out of the whirlwind and said "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?". We need to be careful in the way we speak and the way we think, that we do not darken counsel. There is infinite wisdom in the counsels of God in the way that His purpose of love is brought about according to the way that He is pleased to take - Jehovah possessed wisdom in the beginning of His way (see Prov 8: 22) - and God is not going to be hindered in any of His

thoughts. In the wisdom of His way He is bringing about an answer to Himself. The point that God raises with Job is, Where was Job when these things took place - "Where wast thou when I founded the earth?" God spoke, and it was done and if there is anything that comes into being through this occasion, beloved brethren, it is by the word of God, coming from Him in the Spirit's power. What it leads to is the *foundations* and the *cornerstone*. God says "Whereupon were the foundations thereof sunken? or who laid its corner-stone...?"

It is particularly these two points I would like to speak about; the foundations and the corner-stone. Christ is the corner-stone. In the original ways of God in creation you get an indication of the manner in which God operates. The way He operated in creation is typical of what He does in a spiritual way now and what is in mind is the service of praise and there cannot be singing according to God in any locality if the foundations are not established and the cornerstone is not in its place. It is of great importance to be on a foundation that cannot be moved. "For other foundation can no man lay", Paul says, "besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3: 11) and that cannot be overcome. God has laid it. In the assembly things work out in local companies. Corinth was a local assembly and the foundation was laid. "Other foundation can no man lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ". Paul's ministry brought that in; the preaching was the Son of God, the 'Yea' being in Him - that was the foundation. There was no room for man's wisdom; man's wisdom sought to come in at Corinth. They were seeking to darken counsel but God brings in His own word authoritatively.

So we have this great matter of the morning stars singing *together*. What a wonderful thing that is, beloved brethren! There is a world around us in which almost everything is shaken, and in the public state of things in Christendom everything is shaken too, but the sure foundation stands and the service of God proceeds in relation to it. Now we want to be in this. We want to see to it that the foundation is there in the locality and that we are established and strengthened in relation to it so that Christ has His rightful place as

the corner-stone. Men cannot fit Him into what they are building and the world cannot fit Him into their structure; "the stone which the builders cast away as worthless, this is become head of the corner". Man could not fit Christ in, the world cannot fit Him into their system and the question in Christendom today is whether He *could* be fitted in where man has had his way, where man's mind is working. There is only one ground of gathering, one ground where the truth is able to have its way. The assembly is the pillar and base of the truth, and the truth, as Mr Raven said, is our bond in the fellowship. The great thing is to be related to the foundations and the corner-stone and then there will be the singing. When the foundations were laid and the corner-stone brought in there was a basis for singing together. The service of God is just that; it proceeds where the foundations are laid and the corner-stone has its rightful place.

Singing means that we are together, that we say the same thing and are in tune, that we are in harmony with the mind of heaven: 'All the mind in heav'n is one' (hymn 14). How wonderful to arrive at such conditions in the assembly, to be in accord with the mind of heaven as set together for the service of song. The Lord Jesus suffered and died in view of it. "Thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel", Ps 22: 3. He went through suffering and death with this great matter in view; "I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises", Heb 2: 12. How He loves to have us in the joy that He has, in the joy that was set before Him, and He sings in the midst of the assembly where His Father's name is declared and where He has His own in association with Himself in sonship in the presence of the Father. "The sons of God shouted for joy"! What a place is ours, beloved brethren! How wonderful is the way the Lord has moved, particularly in the recovery, to bring us back to that, in order that He might have a practical answer at the end of the dispensation to His own thoughts as from the beginning; thoughts indeed that He had before the world was that are finding an answer in the present time. It may be in but a few but it is not a question of numbers; it is a question of what is for God, what He can take account of at any time

in the history of the assembly, what He can measure, as we see in the book of Revelation; "measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship in it", chap 11: 1. That is something that God delights to take account of as available for His service.

So when we come to Peter we find how he was drawn out to Christ. Peter had learned the foundation in Matthew 16 when he had that revelation; "flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens; *thou* art Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it", vv 17, 18. That was the foundation Peter arrived at and he had to learn that it was not related to flesh and blood. If there is deviation we can generally relate it to flesh and blood in which the natural mind has its way, and when Peter was on that line the Lord had to say "get away behind me, Satan", Matt 16: 23. With the best of motives, with the best of intentions, we may do the wrong thing, as Peter did at that particular point. Evil powers are operating to silence the praises but God is able to meet it. The Holy Spirit is here and He is greater than he that is in the world. When the Holy Spirit came, Peter came to things substantially that he learned when here with the Lord. One thing he was commissioned to do was to confirm his brethren. What experiences Peter had to go through in view of strengthening his brethren! He denied the Lord and failure came in but Peter was brought back to the corner-stone - "I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not; and thou, when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren", Luke 22: 32. In John 21 Peter deviated again and the Lord recovered the position. He said "Children, have ye anything to eat?". We naturally tend to go a way in which we lose the Lord's presence but He is ever faithful to recover us as he did Peter and those with him. So Peter learned what it was to come to the Lord Jesus as we see in his epistle. He speaks of "laying aside therefore all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings". We want to put aside these things, we want to get through to the foundations, we want to get through to the rock, to what cannot be moved. There is much current that is disturbing the saints and it is not related to the rock. The great thing that sets us

together is what is of God, and if we come to Christ as the Living Stone we shall find ourselves on a basis on which we can sing *together*.

We need to hold Christ as Head of the assembly, and the living relations we have, one with another, can only be realised if you hold the Head and I hold the Head. Then we will find the body functioning. So Peter brings in this point as to coming: "To whom coming, a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious, yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". The service of God is in view, the service of song. Things in the world around us are being shaken and men will come to a point when they will no longer know what to do, but the saints know and the great thing is to be related to the foundation and to the corner-stone. Paul and Silas were in prison at Philippi and the prison shook; the service of song had come into Europe. There had been divine guidance; the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to continue in Asia; there was a distinct movement; the Macedonian man appeared and Paul moved into Macedonia; the enemy directed his forces against it, and Paul and Silas were cast in prison, their feet secured to the stocks. But they were related to the foundations and the corner-stone as they praised God with singing and the prison shook. The service of praise was there and the prisoners listened. Oh, beloved brethren, how we would long for many of our brethren held in prison at the present time in a state of things in which the service of God is not able to proceed!

Singing according to God is on a moral basis; it raises the question of what is there in spiritual substance expressing praise to God. I remember Mr Wellershaus using the illustration of the Lord going to one meeting where they were experts in singing and He thought very little of it and He went to another meeting and the brethren did not seem to sing so well but He said it was beautiful. It is a question of what is related to the foundations and the corner stone - Christ - having the chief place, and that is precious to God. So it says "Because it is contained in the scripture: Behold, I lay in

Zion a corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believes on him shall not be put to shame. To you therefore who believe is the preciousness; but to the disobedient, the stone which the builders cast away as worthless, this is become head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling and rock of offence; who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they have been appointed. But ye are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light". Oh, think of it, dear brethren, how we have been delivered from this prison - the authority of darkness - to be set in liberty and find our place in the service of God!

In Paul's ministry we get the height of things at Ephesus. We have been speaking about the way God has been pleased to come out in revelation and the way He has come out is the way we approach. God came out in Jesus and the Lord's supper is the introduction into the service of God. It is through the Lord's supper that we enter upon our eternal relations in response. You could not have the Lord's supper on your own terms. The Lord's supper is where we relate ourselves to the Lord and it determines where the fellowship is. There are not two tables, there are not two different fellowships. There is only one fellowship, and it cannot be in two companies that are not in agreement as to the truth. It is a question of finding where the foundations are and the place the corner-stone has. Paul brings in the way that God has acted from His own side in effecting reconciliation: we are reconciled to God in one body, set in spiritual relations together and the distance has been removed.

You could not think of a bigger wall of enclosure than the one between Jew and gentile but it has been broken down. It was big because originally God had put it there Himself; He built a vineyard and made a fence around it (see Mark 12: 1) and Israel was in that position among the nations; but now we are in a different dispensation and what God has effected does not give any more distinction to a Jew than to a gentile, and He has annulled the enmity. All that there is in the way of enmity has been dealt with in

the cross of Christ. Reconciliation is a matter, beloved brethren, that is much needed; it involves that the distance has been removed. As has been said, Where the distance was, there is now complacency. "Go to my brethren"; how that would rally us together. "I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises", Heb 2: 12. Think of the way we have been set together in these precious relations and the way God has come out securing an answer, "For through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father". It is in the order in which God has come out, first in Christ and then in the blessed Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable free gift! When we come together for the Lord's supper the Lord has His own unique place and then we have by one Spirit access to the Father. The Lord takes us on in the service of God. He delights to sing His praise in the midst of the assembly.

So the apostle brings in the way we are set together as fellow-citizens and of the household of God, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord". How wonderful that is! that God dwells here by the Spirit. Here in this section of Ephesians neither hammer nor axe are heard. You hear plenty of it in the epistle to the Romans, where you are in the process of being fitted for your place in the habitation of God, and God has provided for our being fitted together in order that the morning stars might be singing *together*. It is of all importance that the brethren should be together on no other basis than the foundation which God has laid and Christ Himself being the corner-stone. May it be so for His Name's sake.

VANCOUVER

27 May 1978

ENQUIRY

R.D.Plant

Genesis 25: 21-23; 2 Samuel 5: 17-25; Psalm 27: 4

I want to speak a Little as to the thought of enquiry, following on what we had at the end of the reading, when something came before us as to prayer. I wondered if we might consider these scriptures which refer to persons who enquired. We are accustomed to going to God to *ask* for things, and maybe we know something about being before God to *thank* Him for things, but I think enquiry suggests something further than that. Enquiry is not really asking with a view to a simple need being met, or thanking for something that has been done, or even asking for grace for the way, but it is a desire to know more of God's mind at the moment. I think what we said at the end of the reading as to prayer, dear brethren, finds an answer in every one of us. We are tested as to how and how much we pray. We are thankful to be together in occasions like this, but how often do we kneel down before God, not that a need may be met, not even as before a meeting like this, or before the preaching, great and needful as such prayers are, but how often do we simply get down before God to enquire of Him? I think many of our problems are related to that; we would rather enquire of some other brother as to matters, we would rather find those that we know think similarly to us, enquiring of them as to how we should move and what we should do, when I believe that spirituality would involve more enquiring of God. I think it was Mr Raven who said that if he could have his time again he would pray more. Well, let it not be until the end of our lives that we come to that. Let us see that for every step of the day we are dependent, every step of the day we are under God 's mighty hand; there is no time that we are at our own charges or capable of being able to do things ourselves. If we are here at all in relation to God's way through the wilderness scene, we need to be dependent upon Him and that means that we need constantly to be in communion with Him.

So I think this matter of enquiry bears a few words. As I say, it is more than asking and it is more than thanking; it involves that you go before God to find out more of His present mind. Whatever the circumstances that are a concern, it is more than asking for grace. We need grace; Paul beseeches God that that thorn might be removed, and His answer after three times was "My grace suffices for thee", 2 Cor 12: 9. There are things, maybe physical, which the brethren have upon them at the present time, maybe matters in their families, maybe things in their bodies which they have to bear that we need grace for; how much there is amongst the saints that is being carried at the moment! How much depth amongst the saints is being wrought as a result of the way we have come! I love to look at the saints and see the triumph of God's work, and see that He has brought through in persons to this day some tribute to His own blessed operations. How you beseech God, do you not? that what there is at the moment that is here in relation to Himself might be kept until the end! I wonder if all of us are before God in our localities that what there is there might be increased in a subjective way, so that when the Lord comes, as the scripture says, "But when the Son of man comes, shall he indeed find faith on the earth?", Luke 18: 8. May it be so in all our places! May every one of us be persons who spend more of our time as before God in relation to the furtherance of His interests; for this we need to enquire. We know that there are some things we cannot change. Sometimes we have to wait in relation to matters but we can always enquire, dear brethren. There is never a time when we cannot enquire of God; there is an avenue to His presence that is always available; let us make use of it more.

So I read three scriptures, although there are many others as to enquiry, and the first one is Rebecca. We know her history in Genesis 24 when she shines in a wonderful light. I would encourage the young people here to read these scriptures and to read them carefully, and to look for some fresh touch that will lighten them up. You can read the ministry as to a scripture and say it is very wholesome, and yet if you are before God He will give you some

touch that will illuminate every page of that ministry or that scripture or that teaching, and will bring it livingly to life for you. It is an important thing to take advantage of what there is, but it is a most important thing that we get the present, living, you may say three-dimensional, character of it. The Holy Spirit is present here today to give a living touch that we might be kept in the brightness of what is proper to our gatherings at the present time. Rebecca had shone in chapter 24 where she is typical, as we know, of the assembly coming to Christ, and there is wonderful instruction for us as to the movements of the Holy Spirit. There is instruction for us as to the position of Isaac, but here we have moved on a chapter and you find the same Rebecca who is anxious as to what she finds within herself, the struggle within her. We need to remember, especially when we get older, that the struggle within is something that is very real especially in relation to those of us who are younger, and maybe those of us who are older. You do not know anything about a struggle within until you set yourself for God's things. If you have committed yourself and desire to be here for the Lord and His people, and you go to do one tangible thing in relation to that, you will immediately find the enemy will attack you. If you have not been conscious of any way in which there is a struggle, any way in which there is a pull within you which tells you to give everything up and another pull which tells you what is right, if you have never known these feelings, I would urge you to be urgent with God because I think the beginnings of spiritual movement begin very largely with a struggle in the sense that you want to do what is right, and yet you find the tendency to do what is not right is there too. Here Rebecca is one who was very largely alone and she is conscious of this struggle within her. Dear brethren, how many persons here today are conscious of two forces pulling at them at the present time? How many young persons are like that? How many persons feel the pull of the world, and the pull of the flesh, and the pull of the first man acting upon them today?

How many persons have come here this morning but another pull would have taken them to somewhere else? These are very real

things, times when you can almost get beside yourself as to what you shall do. Paul speaks about it, does he not, in chapter 7 of Romans? Let us be sympathetic; let us remember as we come together that these things operate, especially in those that are younger, and let us thank God all the time for those who have committed themselves this far, and let us remember that this struggle goes on, maybe in older ones too. When there is a struggle within you enquire of Jehovah; do not let it go; if you do not enquire you become depressed. If you let these things continue in your experience without enquiring you will find depression sets in. How many persons get depressed! yet I think if we were before God some of that depression would be avoided.

So it says "And she went to inquire of Jehovah". O, dear brethren, that is a wonderful thing to do. She wanted to know why she was thus. She might have thought, I know about Abraham, the heavenly man characteristically, I know that Isaac represents Christ as the One who has gone up on high, risen; she could say I know I have all this. And you may say, I know I have this wealth of ministry and teaching, I know I have brethren around me and a long line behind me, and that in one way I should be going on in power. Yet she says there is a struggle within me, and she goes to enquire of Jehovah, why it was thus. Do not stop short of that; do not let the enemy come in to cut short what is promising by way of committal, because if you set yourself for God there will be a struggle, let us make no mistake about it. In one sense if you find two things pulling within you that is an encouraging feature because it means that God is working; it also means of course that Satan is set to take it away. Well, dear brethren, let us not stop short of enquiring. God said to her "Two nations are in thy womb, And two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; And one people shall be stronger than the other people". It must have been a great comfort to Rebecca as time went on that she had that promise from God that one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger. It is a very important thing to get hold of early in our experience that the elder shall serve the younger. Let us be

promoting the line of the younger. We know that the history of Jacob involved much in the ways of God, we know it involved much by way of what was devious and it took him a long time to come to God's end that the elder shall serve the younger. Think of what our brother said as to the flesh and the Spirit; these are very real things and they are, without any change, in any one of us. There is no way that in any one of us the younger will serve the elder, dear brethren, however refined and spiritual it may seem to be. I think that Rebecca got great comfort at this time from enquiring from Jehovah. Let us do it dear brethren, let us enquire in our personal circumstances. I know that there is far more struggle within many of the saints than we would care to tell each other about. It is in the quietness of times when we are apart that things test us and seem almost to overwhelm us. What a wonderful thing to be able to get before God and to enquire of Jehovah! I would urge everyone of us to do it.

In Samuel you come to conflict and David, and I think I am right in saying that there is more said of David as being an enquirer than anyone else in Scripture. If you look through the Scriptures you will find constant references to David as enquiring. It involves more than just asking in view of a specific need to be met at this moment; enquiring means that there is a desire for some understanding of the way God is moving. David here is one who constantly enquires. The Philistines were the traditional enemy of the people of God, representing, I suppose, the feature we mostly have to contend with, the mind of man operating in the things of God. Under David the Philistine is constantly subdued; it is not like Saul, and other men as in the Judges, who spasmodically defeat the Philistines; with David they are continually and constantly subdued. That is a wonderful feature to have amongst us, that the Philistine is constantly subdued. More than that, you find David in conflict retains his attractiveness. How many times do you read of David that he was ruddy and beautiful, of a beautiful countenance and lovely appearance? What a wonderful thing that a man of war, a man of conflict, should be so constantly identified with what was beautiful and attractive! Why

should the facing of conflict, dear brethren, bring to light that certain persons seem to love conflict; they become depressing. Why should not the features of beauty that shone out in David as a man of war be maintained upon us? Why was David able to remain so attractive to the people and yet, as God has to say to him, the sword would never depart from his house? Why should these things be? I think you have to go to the underlying man that David was to find out; he was a man who typically loved Christ and who constantly enquired as to what he should do. Dear brethren, if conflict is to be faced - and after all we know not to what extent conflict may yet have to be faced - it would be a wonderful thing if the features of David and his attractiveness could be retained amongst the saints, so that while there are things and matters to be dealt with, the attractive features of David remain all the way through, David has slain his ten thousands (see 1 Sam 29: 5). What a man David was! How personally attractive he was! How attractive his men were! We were speaking about that honours list at the end of Samuel; I would encourage the young people here to read it, read the last words of David and learn something of the springs of the man and what it was that saw him through life, even through his disappointments; you find David the man underneath David the king. He was a man who could lead the people out and bring them in. How skilful David was! a man of integrity who could say at one time, What have these sheep done? This was the character of man that David was, and he was dependent.

So here you get the conflict; and I do not think that there is ever any time in conflict that we can say it is obvious what has to be done. It is very rare in Scripture that you find things going by precedent in conflict. If you look through the Scriptures you will find that there is the most unusual means that have been taken in conflict to achieve God's end. There were times when the numbers of the army were reduced - in Gideon 's time to very little. There were times when the means that they had to use was a light hidden in a pitcher. You will find sundry other things, the way God has moved in conflict; and I do not think that in any conflict amongst the saints - and there are

current difficulties among the saints - you could ever exactly go by precedent and say it is obvious what has to be done. I do not think what is obvious, in a certain sense, is a word that is in a Christian's vocabulary. I think what we need in every instance, in every day, however obvious it may seem, is that we enquire of God as to how we should move. This is a most important thing because sometimes you may say there is the enemy before us and the thing to do is to smite him, we have the power, we have God on our side, we can just go forward and do it; but even in a situation like that it says that David enquired of Jehovah saying "Shall I go up?". Dear brethren, I wonder how much we know of this line of things, to enquire of Jehovah as to how we should move. God says "Go up" and he went up to a great victory. Then within a few verses you get the same situation, the same enemy, the same valley, the same spreading; you might say, Go up again David. But he enquires of Jehovah, and the answer is "Thou shalt not go up". I wonder if these things find any answer in our experience. There may be times when as enquiring of Jehovah there is an immediate going up in conflict to take things, but there may be a time when God says thou shalt not go up. It is a very interesting section of Scripture which I could not say much about, but instead of facing them in a frontal way David was to go round behind them and was to wait until he heard the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees. The young ones would know what mulberry-trees are; I can remember a brother saying that it would mean the march of the humble people. Well, dear brethren, maybe sometimes in conflict we have to go round the back, as it were, and wait for the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees. Maybe we have to wait for something moving subjectively amongst the saints before the enemy can be overthrown. Perhaps the enemy that was overthrown previously, you may say by direct confrontation when God came in to give the victory, at this time has to be dealt with in a different way. It may be that some matters cannot be resolved, as David finds out through his enquiry, until there is some subjective answer in the saints to it. So he is to wait until he hears the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees. I do not think it will be some group of brethren deciding what to do. The

mulberry-trees would involve great humility; and the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees: maybe we are hearing it. Maybe the time is come when the marching is being heard. It is military, it is not walking exactly, it is the idea that the saints are with God in the movement, and I think it is a lowly people. There is never any time in conflict that we can afford to be lofty. We shall never be any use in the conflict unless we are conscious that that same failure or that same thing to be met is within our own heart. I think we would have made far greater progress, quicker progress, and perhaps less of the sorrow we did have, if after 1970 we had judged things deeper in our own hearts instead of in others, if we had found what was within, that everything that has come out in opposition to God and to His ways has its root within me and needs to be dealt with there. Well, David had to wait, and he had to go round the back, turn round behind them and come upon them opposite the mulberry trees, "And it shall be, when thou hearest a sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself; for then will Jehovah have gone forth before thee, to smite the army of the Philistines". I think it is a very searching thing, that the Lord may be waiting at the present time for the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees in relation to His interests and His way. You will notice that it says earlier "David heard of it"; that is how he came into this point of conflict here. Let us have our ears open as to where things are today. It is not all peace. There are things which have to be met, and I think it is a most important thing at this time that they are met.

Finally I wanted to finish in the Psalm: "One thing have I asked of Jehovah". We were speaking about David, of his personal attractiveness and beauty, and the Psalms bring out something of what the man as. Here he says "One thing have I asked of Jehovah that will I seek after". Are you like that in your life: dear brother - one thing? You think of David and all that he had before him, all the kingdom of Israel and Judah, all the mighty men that he had, all the victories that he secured, all the booty and the wealth that he took; he had several wives, he had many children, he had many

disappointments and many joys, but he says here "One thing have I asked of Jehovah, that will I seek after". What was the over-riding thing that David sought after? Was it to kill Goliath, was that the peak of his life? I do not think so. The great thing that he sought after in his secret feelings was that he wanted to build a house for Jehovah. If you read the Psalms further you will find that he would not give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids until he had found out a resting-place for Jehovah, habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob (see Ps 132: 4,5). I wonder if there is one thing in the life of all of us. He knew something of the state of the testimony. I do not know when this Psalm was written, but think of what came in during David's time; the ark of God was in an unsuitable place in the house of Abinadab. David had concern about it; he said he had heard about it at Ephratah, he found it in the fields of the wood. There are young people here today, and may be older ones, who have heard from their very earliest years, you may say, about the ark. Dear brethren, is everyone here attracted to Christ? Is everyone here attracted to the testimony at the present time? Are the meetings to you just a kind of church that you come to? Or is Christ the very heart of everything for you? David says, I heard of it at Ephratah and found it in the fields of the wood. It is a wonderful thing, dear young brother and sister, when you find Christ; not exactly when you can repeat the terms of the gospel but when you know in your own affections what it is to find Christ. Is Christ everything to you? Is Christ everything to you beloved older one? Is He the very centre of your life? David says, I heard of it, and he never rested through all his life; he said he would not give rest to his eyes until he find out a place for Jehovah. Is that how you are in your local place? Is that how you are amongst the saints? Are you operating to make a name for yourself or a more comfortable place for yourself? Or are you seeking to improve the conditions for the Lord in the place where you are? You may say, I enjoy the meetings, I have a very comfortable life and things look set fair. David said he would not sleep until he found it, I will not rest in my victories, I will not triumph, you may say, in the lineage we have, I will not rest upon the achievements of the brethren and the fact that all the teaching is

available, not only in the recovery of the truth; I will not rest until there is some answer, some response, something improved for God in my place. "One thing have I asked of Jehovah, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life". Well, eternally it will be so, we shall know what it is to dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of our life. We shall know what it is to enjoy in unclouded bliss the presence of Christ, to know what it is without alloy, what the blessing of God's presence is. We shall know what it is to come into the fulness, as the hymn writer says:

'What will the sunshine of His glory prove!
What the unmingled fulness of His love!
What hallelujahs will His presence raise!
What but one loud eternal burst of praise! '
(No.213)

We shall then know it in fulness. There is no problem as to eternity, it is settled and established in Jesus in the preciousness of His work and His Person; but, dear brethren, I wonder if in relation to that one thing we are set to improve the conditions for divine Persons, not only generally but particularly in the place where we are. You may say, There are only a few of us. I know that, that is one of the most testing things, and yet it is one of the most blessed things, that we can work things out in small conditions; as David says, "all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Jehovah". Let not conflict be everything, let not even learning the terms of the truth be everything to us, let us always ever have before us that we are concerned to see the beauty of Jehovah; not only His ways with men, not only the way in which the testimony has come through, is going through and will yet go through, but to learn something of the beauty of Jehovah. At one point David sits before Jehovah and says "is this the manner of man, Lord Jehovah?", 2 Sam 7: 19. He admires and wonders at the manner of man in which God was going to establish everything.

Well, the beauty of Jehovah is to be known; I think the Spirit would help us as to it. I have said before that we are accustomed to the Spirit in relation to leading through the wilderness, but how much do we know of the Holy Spirit in taking of the things of Christ and

showing them to us? How much are we before God to enquire about that area of things? David finally says here "and to inquire of him in his temple". We can enquire about things personally, we can enquire about what affects us personally, about the way that the enemy would seek to sift us and take us away from the testimony. You can enquire, and we need to enquire, about God's way in conflict, but we can enquire in relation to His beauty and it is our privilege to do so today. Let enquiry mark us more. Let us not be moving so much on the line of what is obvious; a truly dependent man would be enquiring. May it be so for His Name's sake.

MAIDSTONE

26 November 1977

THE CHILDREN'S LIFE-STREAM

Few children who read this will have travelled as far as to Egypt. If, however, you were able to climb the Great Pyramid there and view the surroundings, you would be struck by the sharp division between the green, fertile valley of the river Nile and the barren desert around. The dividing line does not, of course, show from ground level or from the little rises and falls of the desert's edge, but once the height has been reached all is strikingly seen. A Bible map or an atlas gives a clear diagram of this.

As in this case of river and desert, there is a clearly marked dividing line between the saved and the unsaved; between those alive and responsive to a Saviour God and those yet unconverted. From the low level of mere human thought this distinction may not be clearly seen but when once we take heaven's view - as revealed in the word of God we can, sadly, see the desert of unbelief stretching away to the horizon. But, thank God, the great flowing river is a picture of His grace bringing with it life, peace and joy to the multitudes of men, women and children who dwell on its banks.

The source of the river Nile, about 4,000 miles from its mouth, was discovered by much toilsome exploring: happy those who by faith know the source of God's river, which is His own heart. He "is not far from each one of us: for in him we live and move and exist". In the course of Egypt's river there are a number of 'cataracts', or places where obstacles, often hidden, try to stem the flow of the waters. These are dangerous places to be in, just as it is perilous to hinder the righteous flow of God's grace. Nevertheless, just as the cataracts of the Nile do but prove the overcoming power of the stream, so the gospel triumphs over the ways, both hidden and manifest, of the enemy of God and man.

As you would expect, the river Nile is fed in its upper reaches by the plenteous rains of heaven and then these waters flow down to the thirsty lands below. At a certain season they bring down with them a deposit of rich soil. This, with the benefit of bright sunshine,

helps the inhabitants to grow valuable crops and fruits - but they have to be diligent and not miss their golden opportunity! For each of us "now is the well-accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation". God's grace brings with it all that is needed to bring forth choice fruits to Him. Are you doing so?

J.C.Evershed