

A
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Contents

GENEROSITY

THE CHILDREN'S OPPORTUNITIES

GENEROSITY

John 16: 26,27; 17: 7,8; 6: 16-20

E.C.B. I wondered whether in this reading we might get some impressions about the generosity with which the Lord and the evangelist view the disciples. I do not of course speak of generosity which is in any way unreal or sentimental, but we have something exemplified to us in the verses that we have read where the disciples, perhaps to our surprise, are credited in the mind of Jesus, and also in the record of the evangelist, with characteristics and even the development of characteristics which have their own bearing upon us. In the verses read in chapter 16 the Lord is, I think, generous with the disciples as to their love; in chapter 17 He is generous with them as to their learning; and in chapter 6 the evangelist is generous with them as to their progress. We are in a day when things may appear to have slipped a good deal and where we are not without exercise as to the degree to which things might yet slip as individuals. But the Lord in the close of His ministry in this gospel credits the disciples with as much as He possibly can, and as we know, what is secured through the work of Jesus in the gospels becomes the foundation on which the assembly is ultimately built in the Acts. It might help us now to have some impression as to the possibility that there is more in the saints than we may have thought. Do you think that would be useful?

A.B.P. I think it is a very profitable line to consider because there is a tendency with us to think about the failures of one another. Even at the time of the passover the disciples were questioning who would be greatest among them, but the Lord brings in what is positive about them: "But ye are they who have persevered with me in my temptations", Luke 22: 28. Would that be another example of it?

E.C.B. Yes, it would. That is an important scripture, especially in the context in which it occurs, because in one sense that is one of the last things that Jesus says about the disciples, certainly in the synoptic gospels. In a sense at the end of the gospels, especially in

John, things are threatened but Jesus nevertheless views the disciples as substantial, and substantial in affection. The affection in chapter 16 is what might be called emotive affection, that is, it springs from something. These two words for love puzzle us more than they should; it helps us to see that the word that is not used here, that is '*agapao*', means a settled disposition, and I think it would not be difficult to say that the other word - '*phileo*' - means a stirredup emotion. I believe that we need more of that. Jesus credits the disciples with "because ye have had affection for me", and also, "and have believed that that I came out from God". I think that the Lord would look to us as to our love for Him, but He would credit us and lead us to credit one another with more than we might be inclined to do.

B.T. If you think good things about the brethren you find that they take them on.

E.C.B. I think that is right. Therefore it behoves us to have a positive view of one another. Brethren do not think enough that, few though we are, we are all we have, and we should therefore become more precious to one another, and we should be disposed to giving one another this generous kind of credit for what there is. It is to be noted that the Lord, if my memory of this gospel is correct, does not exactly speak in this way of them before chapter 6, and those that are now spoken of have really been through the severe sifting of the last part of that chapter: "Will ye also go away?" (v 67), and they say "to whom shall we go?" It is persons of that kind, who have not gone away, to whom Jesus attributes this generous measure of love.

L.MacF. In the light of what you have said, why do you think Peter is challenged at the end of this gospel as to his love?

E.C.B. There are elements in that that are personal because Peter had boasted in his love: if all deny thee I will not deny thee (see Matt: 26: 33,35); he had asserted something as to which his capacity to fulfil it was tested. But I think it is to bring out that, as an example to us, Jesus in chapter 21 demonstrates the kind of fibre that is going to be needed in the persons to whom He can commit things. We speak

a lot about the different ways in which love is spoken of there, but it may lead us to diminish in our minds this love of friendship, because I feel myself that it is important that we should be developed in this love of friendship for Jesus. It is one thing to speak about a settled disposition but it is another thing to have your emotions stirred about Him because of what He is.

A.B.P. Does John 21 also indicate how the Lord is ready to turn failure into profit?

E.C.B. That is very helpful because He turns a night of failure - as Mr Lyon used to say, Night, nakedness and nothing in chapter 21 - into one hundred and fifty-three great fishes. The Lord brings out of the departure of the seven wealth that we cannot in a sense penetrate into. We can say a lot about numbers like twelve and three and four, but what can you say about one hundred and fifty three? Yet it is something that Jesus did to show that what He brought in was immeasurable.

G.D.W. One of the interesting things said about Philadelphia was "thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name", Rev 3: 8. Would the generosity of making the overcomer "a pillar in the temple of my God" be along the line of what you are saying?

E.C.B. Yes that is right; but that is said to a local assembly. It might therefore be applied to any local assembly in which those characteristics are and should be applicable to all who seek to walk in the light of the assembly. What I was wondering about the scriptures we have read was more the individual side. What you draw attention to as to the collective side is very important but this is on the individual side; we shall not experience much that is collective unless we learn to esteem one another.

J.A.P. We are left with a better impression of Martha in this gospel than perhaps of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea. That would support what you are saying, that it is right to put the saints in the best light we can.

E.C.B. Yes. In this gospel, as you know, Jesus does most things Himself, and you might think that that was because there was not too much in the disciples; He would do the things and fit them into it, but as you come to the end of the gospel you discover what esteem He had for them and He credits them with things the inwardness of which perhaps we ourselves cannot fully grasp. What can we say about "have believed that I came out from God"? And yet He says of the disciples that that is true of them.

J.A.P. What do you see in that, "that I came out from God"?

E.C.B. It brings in the whole truth of the incarnation. In John's gospel we do not have so much the presentation of the King, or the Servant, or the Son of man, as you have in the first three gospels, but you have God. That is who Jesus is. It will be important for the brethren in view of public controversy to be fully established in the fact that Jesus is God. It is not for us to enter into all the troubles that characterise other gatherings of believers or churches, but, the deity of Christ, is the fundamental controversy in the Roman Catholic church at the present time: men are vigorously standing for the truth of it and we should be thankful for it, because modernism is diminishing truths that are cardinal in Christianity.

C.C.G. Peter says "having fervent love among yourselves, because love covers a multitude of sins; hospitable one to another, without murmuring; each according as he has received a gift, ministering it to one another, as good stewards of the various grace of God", 1 Pet 4: 8-10. Would you say a word on being stewards of the grace of God.

E.C.B. That scripture, as in many parts of the epistles, raises the question of our responsibility consequent upon divine formation in us. Peter raises the question, What sort of persons ought you to be? That is one of the things that persons ought to be, good stewards of the grace of God, and that is here among us, and it touches the responsible side. But Jesus here in the scriptures we have read credits the disciples with things that in a sense go beyond the responsible side to what is sovereign and developed in them according to divine workmanship.

A.R.S. Is it in that light that the apostle said "each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves", Phil 2: 3?

E.C.B. That again is another very important scripture for us on the responsible side of working out into practice what is from the divine side seen to be true of us. Jesus credits the disciples generously here with "ye have had affection for me". It is a very interesting detail that in the Scriptures we do not get many references to loving Jesus. We speak about it a lot, and we talk to the children about it, and we repeat what the children say about it, but it is very little in scripture. We have "If any one love not the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 16: 22) and one or two other scriptures, but the question of our loving Him is not generally raised in the teaching epistles. But from His point of view He is able to take account of what is formed in disciples that He can have full regard for and appreciate, because I am sure the Lord is looking for this formed kind of love.

E.E.H. Last Lord's day we were speaking about Ittai in relation to David as tested by David and what the test brought out. Would that fit into what you are saying? The test is individual in a certain sense.

E.C.B. Yes, Ittai is tested; David said to him "Thou didst come yesterday" (2 Sam 15: 20) and David tests him as to his committal and he finds so much integrity in committal that about two chapters later Ittai is in charge of a third of David's army. That is very remarkable, that David was able to recognise the reality of what was in the man. It is as if he took a coin and rang it and he said, That is a good coin.

E.E.H. That helps a good deal.

A.S.H. I wanted to ask about what it says here, "because ye have had affection for me". Why is it written that way and not 'ye have'?

E.C.B. I think because Jesus is looking back over the whole of the three and a half years in which they had been attached to Him in His service. This is not as in Jeremiah: "the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals", (chap 2: 2); this is something that had continued through a period of three and a half years. I think the Lord might be finding this kind of love for Himself amongst us to a greater

degree than we reckon, because we speak about it very little. It might promote an increased vigour in life among us if we had more to do with one another in the area of our love for the Lord.

T.E.D. Does not Paul bring in this line of things to Philemon? He speaks of "thy love and the faith which thou hast towards the Lord Jesus, and towards all the saints", and then goes on "in such sort that thy participation in the faith should become operative" (vv 5,6). Is that what the Lord is seeking among us, the working of it in view of togetherness?

E.C.B. I think that. In Philemon Paul says, I know you will do more than I say (v 21). It shows that he knew that there was something in Philemon which was capable of filling out the demands of the testimony at that time. You almost feel that if Paul had put on Philemon the care of all the assemblies, Philemon would have addressed himself to them.

C.F.D. You referred to our having more to do with each other in the area of our love for the Lord what is in your mind?

E.C.B. I think our relations together are a good deal as the Exclusive Brethren. We say, I am in fellowship and he is in fellowship, and we think just in that area of what relates to responsibility. Fellowship is a question of responsibility. But the development of our links in relation to "affection for me" touches something in which we can actually be knit together organically. If you have a company which is dominated by "ye have had affection for me" I think you will find that that company is closely knit together and enjoys fellowship and the responsible side in a way that is not enjoyed when it is that side of things that is mainly emphasised. Not that questions of fellowship are not of the greatest importance, but if we just take them up as was done in the 1960s we find that we can get into a legal kind of harshness, whereas if you work things out from the level of affection for Christ you will not do what displeases Him and your links with one another will be more profound. What do you think?

C.F.D. I think what you are saying is very challenging. You referred in prayer to the opening verses of the thirteenth chapter: "having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end". What follows in chapters 13 to 17 is really an opening up of things where it is not only a question of His love but He brings things over to the side of the disciples' love for Him, in chapter 14 peculiarly so: "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me", and then "He that loves me shall be loved by my Father", as if there is now an area of things that He is putting out in teaching in the enclosure of love, you might say, to His disciples. But now in chapter 16 He seems to say, You qualify for all of this.

E.C.B. I think that is very important, and the link with chapter 14 opens this up. As you say, if any one love Me My Father will love him, but then in chapter 16 Jesus, as it were, says, This is not all future, it is actually true that, before I depart out of the world to the Father, here is a company in which the things I said to the Father are demonstrated. He says "the Father himself has affection for you, because ye have had affection for me". I think this should help in drawing us closer to Christ and closer to one another. How much do you know about the quality of the love for Christ of all your local brethren? It is a real question, is it not? I ask myself about it in London. You know a lot about them in different ways, but how much do you know of them in relation to their love for Christ.

C.F.D. It is a real challenge to me. What we said earlier in the meeting applies, that our minds run so easily on certain lines. Carrying this through, do you think it reflects the way the Lord came into the midst in John 20? We often speak about the setting there and things being according to divine thoughts, but I was thinking of the restful way in which the Lord comes in amongst them happily and freely and says "Peace be to you" and shows them His hands and His side. Would this link not only with His love for the saints but with the saints' love for Him?

E.C.B. Yes I think so. So in John 20 it is clear that the title 'the Lord' is not so much a question of His dominion or even directly of His deity but title of affection: "We have seen the Lord". We have been

looking at that chapter in London and have been impressed with the way in which each time Jesus speaks He says "Peace". I think we might listen for that more in our meetings, that He comes in and says "Peace".

G.D.W. We often pray in our prayer meetings that the Lord would add; would our being linked together in affection organically, as you say, make us more accessible to attract souls for this kind of addition?

E.C.B. It certainly would in that there would be a circle in which persons found love was demonstrated and they would be drawn to it. Then we all have to play our part in it; the expression of what there is in a locality is concretely in the brethren who are there. Therefore we work this out in relation to one another who are there and we find that affection for Christ is really the dominating thing. Affection for Christ is not the basis for fellowship - we know the teaching on that - but it is what anchors the saints to one another.

C.F.D. You say that this is to be demonstrated: how would it be demonstrated locally?

E.C.B. I think you can soon tell in a company where affection for Christ dominates. Of course there is love for the Father as well, and love for God, "those who love God" (Rom 8: 28) and that side of things - the extended side of things has to be there - but it forms character, and as Mr Greenidge quoted earlier, "love covers a multitude of sins", and thus we are not constantly engaged with one another's faults and that kind of thing. I sometimes think that the degree to which we talk about one another's faults is like giving a brother forty stripes save one. We just say a bit about him, and a bit more about him, and a bit more, and a bit more, and you get up to thirty-eight and thirty-nine and then you have to stop because it is against the law. We do tend verbally to give forty stripes save one, whereas if we were held together by the common centre of Christ and "ye have had affection for me", we would so regard one another. That is the teaching of Romans, which is said to be elementary.

B.T. The Father loves the Son, but the Lord also gave the Father a cause for loving Him - "because I lay down my life", He says (John 10: 17) - and He says "because" here too. Do you think something of that enters into this, that a line of activity is involved, the brethren are laying down their lives for the brethren, and you see that and you therefore know that affection is active? Does that enter into how you would know the love of the saints?

E.C.B. Yes, very much so. These things therefore work; you cannot define in advance how they will work but you know when this character of things is there; and it all rests in our availability to one another and the resource we have in one another. The expression in one of the gospels, "because ye are Christ's" (Mark 9: 41) should bear upon us in relation to affection; we look on one another "because ye are Christ's".

G.D.P. David could say of Jonathan that his love was greater than that of women (see 2 Sam 1: 26). Even though Jonathan was not prepared to go into rejection with him he would give him credit for great love, would he not?

E.C.B. Indeed. Therefore I think that we do well to prepare ourselves to view one another in relation to the love that each has for the Lord Jesus. It surprises me when I think about some of these things, how little place that kind of conversation has among us, as to our ability to know one another in connection with our love for the Lord. We know one another in relation to the conditions of fellowship, and we could soon say when someone is stepping over the bounds, but to now one another in relation to our love for Christ is I think a cement among the saints. Is that right?

A.B.P. I am quite sure that the Spirit would use this occasion to give us longings for greater participation in that.

E.C.B. It is a stated fact here: "ye have had affection for me". I know there is weakness and that there is sometimes concern about one another, sometimes concern about the young people, concern about the older people too, but would any one be here now if they did not love the Lord? Do we just look on one another as survivors

of conflict or that we all came on broken pieces of the ship? Or do we look on one another as having come through because we loved the Lord?

E.E.H. Peter remarks to the Lord "Thou knowest" (John 21: 5); we do not have that ability to say we know; the Lord knows, and that is what I have in my mind in relation to the brethren.

E.C.B. That is right; but then you can recognise love for the Lord in one another. We often speak of a brother or sister and say that he or she has great love for the Lord, but we speak of it as if, well, at least you can say that about him; a lot more might be desired but at least you can say that. But that is a great thing to say, that they love the Lord. I repeat because I do not want to be misunderstood, love for the Lord is not the basis of fellowship but love for the Lord is a very great strength to the enjoyment of fellowship, and fellowship is enjoyed among persons who do love the Lord.

A.B.P. One has the feeling that our locality here is being sustained by an unseen element or state, possibly brought about through the Lord's arrangement that in this city there should be as many widows as there are, to bring about an inward trust in God and a knowledge of the love of Christ which is foundational to the stability of the locality, and we do not tap it as much as we should.

E.C.B. I expect that is right. I know the saints here very well; I do not need to come here and speak well of them - certainly I do not need to patronise the brethren - but I know them well and they know me well; but then do you work at that underlying stream in the brethren or do we work at what is on the surface? If we worked at what runs deeply in the brethren we would find that it expanded until it began to affect what we can outwardly observe.

E.E.H. That is excellent.

C.S.E. I would like you to say a little more about love for Christ not being the basis for fellowship.

E.C.B. I think it is well known, not only in teaching but in experience, that if you make love for Christ the basis of fellowship you will have

an open meeting before tomorrow, because all believers love the Lord; but then alongside that there is required the obedience which springs from recognising Him as Lord. Confessing Him as Lord introduces requirements of responsibility which have to be fulfilled, but love for the Lord in itself is not the basis of fellowship. The question of fellowship which lies in the area of responsibility rests in aspects of the Person of Christ which raise the question of responsibility; that is, the experimental knowledge that He is Lord which requires obedience to Him and consistency with what He is as Lord.

S.E.H. Would not loving the Lord result in our keeping His commandments?

E.C.B. Exactly. That is chapter 14: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (v 15) and that really shows as it were the second step for the basis of fellowship. If any one love Me he will keep My commandments, and it is the keeping of the commandments which provides the basis for fellowship.

A.B.P. Do you think that the Lord there is not questioning their love for Him but using it as a leverage to stimulate fidelity?

E.C.B. Yes, I think that is right. Not every time the word 'if' is used is it a condition; sometimes it is part of an argument, using 'argument' in its technical sense.

In chapter 17 the Lord credits the disciples generously in relation to their learning. He says "Now they have known that all things that thou hast given me are of thee; for the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them". There has been much more learning among us than we often think, in fact the very smallness of the present time has brought out how much learning there has been in brothers who habitually kept quiet, and for that matter who still habitually keep quiet; but there is much among them by way of learning that the exigency of the time has brought to light. If I may just look around this locality, there are brothers who ten years or so ago you would hardly hear speak in the meeting; now they are acting in responsibility in the meeting and

they take their full part, and you are impressed with what the Lord has placed in them. I think it helps us to see that the Lord is generous about our learning: "the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them". What a thing it is for it to be said that we have received the words that the Father gave the Son; and yet Jesus says it not as something to be established but as a matter of fact.

C.S.E. I am sorry to take you back, but is the Lord in saying "the Father himself has affection for you" just opening the eyes of the disciples to a wider area which involves the Father, but which begins with love for Himself? And would the Lord help us into that area?

E.C.B. That is so. You will probably remember that it has been said about chapter 17 that Jesus first sets His own as He is before the Father and then He sets them as He is before the world; but chapter 16 is preliminary to that and demonstrates the culmination of the ministry of Christ in the disciples. The culmination of the ministry of Christ in regard to the world is in chapter 12 where the world is threatened with darkness, and the darkness has come; the culmination of the ministry of Christ in regard to the disciples is in chapter 16 where they have "believed that I came out from God". They could not get further than that; that is the end of the Lord's ministry in regard to the disciples, and He says "the Father himself has affection for you". That is borne out further in chapter 17: "the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them" (v 26), that is Jesus expressing to the Father what He had said about the disciples in chapter 16.

A.B.P. Is there the indication that John must have received a very real impression of "and have believed that I came out from God"? When he refers to John the baptist he uses that word 'from with God' as though it enlarged in his soul in the meantime.

E.C.B. That is an indication of what I am suggesting as to chapter 17, that the Lord is generous with the disciples as to their learning. Perhaps we could be generous with one another about our learning; it would be a poor thing to say about a brother that he does not know

much, because he may know a lot and the trouble may be that I have never found out what he does know. Jesus says "the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them". I suppose every brother and sister has received some of the words that the Father gave the Son.

J.A.P. John's own remarks in his epistle show that he had learned; he said "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes; that which we contemplated, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life;... and report to you... that which we have seen and heard we report to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us"; and then he says "And these things write we to you that your joy may be full", 1 John 1: 1-4. So all that the Lord commended them for here was really true in John.

E.C.B. I think it was. Jesus is not just saying things out of kindness here; He is speaking about what He knows to be substantial. Chapter 17 also gives me this impression, that "the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them" is really a matter of listening to Jesus speak rather than listening to Him teach. Now in chapter 13 He teaches: "I... the Lord and the Teacher" (v 14), and it may often be that the Lord has to teach us; we have all been to school, we know what it is to be taught, the teacher tells you something, and goes over it again and puts it another way, and so on, until eventually penetrates us, sometimes slowly; but "the words" is a matter of listening to what Jesus says from the Father. That connects with chapter 14; it is just a matter of listening to His words, listening to what He says: He may have to teach but there is a great deal to be gained by just listening.

C.S.E. So the concrete evidence of the measure in which the disciples took on the Lord's words is seen in the Acts where we see the type of persons who stood up and witnessed in the absence of Christ.

E.C.B. Yes, they were the product of His own ministry. We do get in the beginning of Acts "the things which Jesus began both to do and

to teach" (chap 1: 1) and we all have to come under teaching because we need to be disciplined. But on the whole, fathers do not teach their children, unless it becomes clear that the child has not learned something properly another way. So you take your child aside and say, Look, you do not do it like that, you do not speak like that, you do it this way or you speak that way. But the way most children grow is by listening in the environments in which they are, and that is why I think there is a certain distinction between listening to His word and being taught. I think most of us would like to receive His words just by absorbing what He says.

C.C.G. What would you say about the significance of the ear being awakened to learn? In Isaiah 50: 4 it says "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed", and the note says 'learned' or 'taught'. There must be some significance in the hearing. Would it be the receptivity of the hearer?

E.C.B. That is right, and that scripture is blessedly prophetic of Jesus and the lowliness of the circumstances into which He came. One who Himself was the Teacher takes the ground of being taught, even almost takes the ground of being a disciple Himself. But Mary sat at His feet and was listening to His word (see Luke 10: 39): He did not teach Mary, He just spoke in her hearing. That is what I think is in mind in John 17, that He had spoken in their hearing about the things that the Father was engaged with.

C.F.D. I was thinking of that reference to Mary in Luke, sitting at His feet and listening to His word, because what is produced is remarkable spirituality, not only affection for Christ, which came out obviously, but an entering into the understanding and the feeling of what related to Christ in His own ministry and what He was going into; she had as a result an affinity with the Lord and she was sympathetic with Him. The Lord looks for that from us, do you not think? And in her case it was the product of just absorbing what He said.

E.C.B. I think that is the line of things in chapter 14. In chapter 13 He is the Teacher; in chapter 14 He is just the Speaker and it is a

question of His word and His words, and it may be His commandments. But it is just a question of our receiving what He says. Now the reception may result in a process in us which is akin to the results of teaching. What did Mary do? She sat at His feet and was listening to His word. In Luke Martha had to be taught but Mary listened. I think the Lord is generous with us. I have said as to myself, because I can still remember when I was young, how much one learned in the meeting when one never thought one was listening, and perhaps in a sense almost deliberately was not listening. Yet these old brothers kept on and on about the types; they could explain the tabernacle, and so on, and teach about every element in it, and one scarcely listened, but then one day one suddenly realised one knew a lot about the tabernacle and one learned it from these men when one was not listening to it, because what they said was being received even somewhat unconsciously. Of course it is much better to receive it consciously by listening.

C.G. "Do ye let these words sink into your ears", Luke 9: 44.

E.C.B. That is good.

G.H. The Lord delights to take account of a receptive state. It says in one place "as they were listening to these things, he added and spake a parable", Luke 19: 11.

E.C.B. That is just on the line; I think the Lord is generous there because I do not suppose any of the disciples could have interpreted the first parable, but when they were listening they were receiving His words. I think the Lord is generous with us about what we are receiving as communications from Himself. Of course in one sense we are thankful that He is because we are conscious of knowing so little, but the Lord is generous. He says, They have received My words, as if there was a company there in which nothing that He had said had fallen to the ground.

A.B.P. You feel that David 's words to Abigail would fit in relation to Mary: "Blessed be thy discernment, and blessed be thou", 1 Sam 25: 33. The feelings of the Lord must have been like that in John 12, do you not think?

E.C.B. Yes I do. And the Lord found a company that was receptive. Now how much can we say about "the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them"? Now what are the words that the Father has given to the Son? Nothing that Jesus said was other than what the Father said to Him.

B.T. Paul could speak about what he had received from the Lord Jesus (see 1 Cor 11: 23; 15: 3) and the Lord opened Lydia's heart to attend to the things spoken by Paul. We miss a lot by being inattentive, do you think?

E.C.B. Yes I do. Of course we miss even more if we are not there. That is what Mr Taylor said about Thomas in John 20, that on the first first day of the week the others had an experience which Thomas could never have because he was not there. That is true of us, if we are not there we miss what the Lord would say. But the Lord is speaking to us and He is generous about what we have received. Hence, just as an illustration, we would not readily or hastily charge one another with error. There is scarcely any error among us; there may be faulty understanding of things here and there and some of us, according to the way God has dealt with us, have better minds than others, and all that kind of thing, but we would not hastily charge one another with error. We would assume that the brother was assimilating what he had, and then teaching might be needed; it is clear there are things on which teaching is needed at the present time in order to help brethren through problems which are very large and one can see that teaching would help. But the normal thing is that we are receiving His words, and this comes by listening.

P.L.D. Do you look at the prayer here as listened to by the writer of the gospel, or how did he record this?

E.C.B. We cannot say how he recorded it but one assumes that he was there. One thing we do know is that the Spirit had in view that this should be recorded and He found means of it being recorded. The things that Jesus credits the disciples with in this chapter are, I think, wholly apart from failure. He does not contemplate any failure

in the testimony in this chapter - a very remarkable thing. I am impressed with this, that He is generous about us as learners, and it may be if we in a sense relaxed into the enjoyment of His generosity we would find, as Mr Hesterman said, that He adds another parable.

P.L.D. Why does He even credit the world with being able to take in things in this chapter?

E.C.B. That in a sense is prophetic, and had the church remained publicly united, the world might then have believed that the Father sent the Son. But the world will not now see it until the assembly comes out in its glory and unity in view of the millennial day; then there will be a testimony to the world that the Father sent the Son. So it has become prophetic when it should have been actual.

G.D.P. In regard to what you said about charging a person with error, Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside and expounded the truth to him; they did not charge him with error (see Acts 18: 26).

E.C.B. It is a very serious thing to charge a brother with error, and one always has to be humble about it because one may not know oneself. Mr Darby says in one of his early letters that he was not going to quarrel with a brother over a different interpretation of a verse in Revelation. This is not to promote any idea that we can be loose as to the truth, but the impression I have as to being with the brethren now is as to the generous way the Lord regards them, and especially here in this chapter as to their learning.

In chapter 6 I thought the evangelist - because we must attribute it there to the evangelist because it is not directly the words of Jesus - is generous with the brethren as to their progress. Things were very, very difficult, in fact you might have thought that they could hardly become more difficult. It is already dark and Jesus has not come to them, and the sea is agitated, and things are difficult; then the evangelist says "Having rowed then about twenty-five or thirty stadia"; perhaps the brethren have got on further than we thought they had. Is that not so.

A.B.P. I would like to have the Lord's judgment of it.

E.C.B. Yes. It seems to me as if the Spirit has entered into the evangelist's measure here; he says, Well, perhaps the brethren have got on further than we thought. That is always a good view to take of the brethren. I repeat again, I am not speaking about what is sentimental or unreal, but it is a good view to have of the brethren that their progress has been greater than we thought.

J.A.P. Mr Taylor on the basis of this scripture said to a sister going through tribulation, Keep rowing. Things may be difficult and dark but we do know what is right and keep on with that. The Lord would honour that. Perhaps we have to be adjusted, as the next verse shows, but they are commended for this.

E.C.B. Where is the adjustment here?

J.A.P. They were frightened.

E.C.B. Well, have you been adjusted for being frightened? Or did you find it was consolation through hope that you had?

J.A.P. You are being generous. I suppose frightened would not be the ordinary state of the believer; we get that way sometimes and I thought perhaps the Lord did adjust them there.

E.C.B. Well, the Lord says "It is I: be not afraid". This is really John 20 again; He comes in and says "Peace be to you". He does say "be not afraid" but the correction is very small. That is often the way with Jesus, that He can correct something so that everybody gets the benefit of it, although only the person corrected knows what He was doing. In John 20, where He is correcting Thomas, He opened the door for the whole of what has come in for our own benefit; "blessed they who have not seen and have believed" (v 29).

A.B.P. Is this the way John opens up that word in the beginning of this gospel, "grace upon grace", chap 1: 16?

E.C.B. That is good; say more about that.

A.B.P. I have often thought about that expression; it is left there. You do not have the idea of grace so much in John's gospel as you do possibly in Luke. But it has come over me that the subject of our

conversation today is the expression of that verse, "grace upon grace".

E.C.B. Yes, I think this spirit that I speak of as generosity is a manifestation of grace upon grace. The Lord in John does everything Himself. If the disciples do something they nearly always do it wrong. I mean, they go shopping when Jesus is preaching the gospel; here the disciples went down to the sea with no command; in John 21 they went fishing with no command. Each time He comes in, as you say, with grace upon grace, and everything is better as a result of His coming in. I just thought it was something to have an impression that the evangelist credits the disciples with as much progress as he can: perhaps they have got further than I thought they had. I think that is a good view to take of the brethren.

E.E.H. It seems to me that that was the evangelist's appreciation of what was in the teaching of the Lord, and he arrived at that himself; it had a great effect upon him.

E.C.B. John is manifestly formed in what he writes. It just seemed to me that in this chapter the brethren are given as much credit as possible for the progress they have made. Do you not think that is what we should be thinking of? A lot of us at the present time are very much concerned with what I might speak of as the weather, and we can tell you a great deal about the sea being agitated and the strong wind. There are many experts on the current prevailing weather amongst the saints. Yet the evangelist is concerned with the progress the brethren have made. Would you say that?

C.F.D. I think that is a prophetic word for us; it is for me. If we can get our eyes on to that side of things and see the glory of it coming into expression at the breaking of bread and what flows out of it, what comes to light is something that is beautiful to Christ and possibly much further on than I thought the brethren had gone.

E.C.B. I think that; and it helps us to take account of what progress the saints have made. If we knew that the rapture was in five minutes time we would find that all the saints were ready for it, they would be bound to be, and perhaps they have made more progress

than we thought. Yet in the responsible area there is a good deal of concern, not to say deficiency; but from the viewpoint of the evangelist here the brethren have made more progress than perhaps one had thought.

C.F.D. It is interesting that Israel did not feed on the sinew of the thigh (see Gen 32: 32), and you feel that the weaknesses of the brethren sometimes take far too much of our time, whereas if we could get over to what you are suggesting we would possibly be on a different level with each other.

E.C.B. I have a very strong impression that it is time the brethren were engaged with heavenly things. I believe that earthly things - and I do not mean earthly in the sense of worldly but things that relate to the earth (and that bears a good deal on the testimony and on administration) - are occupying us too much and that it is time that men who have the capacity to teach the brethren about heaven started doing it so that we get some sense of the reality of what we are actually here in relation to. That is John's line; he brings what is in heaven down here and his line is final. Paul of course is final in his way too, taking what is here into heaven, but I think it is time that the brethren began to be occupied with a heavenly order of things.

G.D.W. Is not the answer in what the Lord says; "It is I"? There is a lot of fear among some because of certain conditions that exist. I know what being frightened is, but when the Lord comes into the matter do we not take courage?

E.C.B. Of course you would have to face the challenge as to why you had gone anywhere without the Lord. That challenge underlies this. What Mr Petersen said about correction is right; you have to face the challenge why did you go anywhere without the Lord, because the fact that you welcome the Lord coming in shows that you should not have been where you were. But He came in and everything was right.

A.B.P. Do you think that expression "It is I" is in itself an indication of His confidence in the progress that they had made? The answer to that in each heart would be how well He knew the person.

E.C.B. Yes, this is John 20 really: "he shewed to them his hands and his side" (v 20). Luke 24 is really "It is I"; and in chapter 20 of John, "We have seen the Lord" (v 25) and in chapter 21 "It is the Lord" (v 7), and there persons recognised that He had come in.

A.B.P. Peter seems to have this attitude too when he says "such a voice", 2 Pet 1: 17. You may say, Well, Peter, that does not really describe it; but it awakens in us something that helps us to understand it.

E.C.B. A very simple thing for us to test ourselves by is this: what do we think our reaction would be if the Lord stood corporeally amongst us? What would we then talk about? Yet the Lord is amongst us by the Spirit now and what do we then talk about?

A.B.P. I have often thought of that at the Supper, if instead of Him coming by the Spirit giving us the impression of His nearness He actually stood in our midst, what would we say? It is a challenge.

E.C.B. It is. Mr Stoney says of a brother who was wandering away a bit, If the Lord was amongst us corporeally I am sure that Mr So-and-so would gather up his garments soon enough. That shows that if we had a real impression of the Lord amongst us a lot of things would be put right quickly. But then what would we talk about if Jesus Himself stood in our midst?

T.E.D. The conclusion of the journey is consequent upon their receiving Him.

E.C.B. Yes, and it is immediately. Do you have more to say about that?

T.E.D. One was impressed at the Supper on Lord's day with Simeon receiving the Lord and his speaking was beautiful as the result of his impressions.

E.C.B. Then do you not think we could apply this in relation to the way the saints go through all the problems that there are, that when we thought it was time to give up, in fact the brethren were nearly there. As soon as He came in, immediately they were at the land to

which they went; they could not have been far away. We tend to give up in relation to the brethren, but in fact they are nearly there.

C.C.G. Do you think that "It is I" brings in the top note of the ministry that is going on? He is over everything, every situation as regards the testimony.

E.C.B. That is right, and I think we should be more believing about that. It says "This is already the third time that Jesus had been manifested", John 21: 14. Well, He goes on manifesting Himself; as you say, "It is I". But if we knew the Lord was here we would be very different in many respects from what we are.

A.S.H. "It is I" is to set us at ease amidst all the agitation and whatever there is around. Jesus would come in and bring comfort to our souls by saying "It is I: be not afraid".

E.C.B. That is exactly so. I think I am right in saying that in John the storm is not stilled, things just go on. He does not say, Peace, be still, as He does in the synoptic gospels. The trouble goes on and the external difficulties go on but there is the ability to go through, and the saints have made more progress than you might have thought. I just wondered whether some impression about the generosity with which John views things in what we might call the closing gospel might be of help to us.

A.B.P. It emphasises to me the importance of what Mr Darby said, that in following Paul do not neglect John. We need this side of things very much.

G.D.P. Am I brought into accord with what I am accredited with when I become willing? They were willing to receive Him.

E.C.B. That is very important. Jesus would not just credit us with things, as we say, abstractly; He looks for us to arrive in responsibility at the generous view He takes of us, but the generous view was true.

P.L.D. In your opening prayer you referred to "until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God", Eph 4: 13. Is responsibility connected with that?

E.C.B. That is the product of the operation of the gifts which Christ has given as ascended and is the culmination of the service of the gifts. The gifts in Ephesians 4 are not really looked at as corrective in any way; they are all looked at as positive and productive and furthering growth, and all the gifts mentioned are characteristic of Christ and can be found in the gospels. I think that the beginning of Ephesians 4 is to show us the normal development as we submit to gift which Christ as ascended has given.

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Key to initials

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THE CHILDREN'S OPPORTUNITIES

The wealth of the early rulers of India has always seemed like a made-up story. Perhaps you have seen pictures of processions in that country showing princes with brilliant jewels and riding on gaily decked elephants with their attendant servants. One wealthy prince used to wear a magnificent diamond which hung down from his crown and rested on his forehead. The reason for this was not so much to display the beauty of the diamond; it was to hide the ugliness of a disease - one which is a type of the working of sin. With all his wealth he was a leper! We do not know if he was ever

cured but we do know that the Lord Jesus who healed lepers when He was here on earth can heal the sin-stricken now.

This incident reminds us of the Bible story of Naaman who, even though used of God to deliver a whole nation, was the unhappy victim of this disease. Scripture calls him a "great man" and it was the word of a "little maid" that led to his own deliverance. She knew that there was one man through whom her master could be cured, just as we know one Man, Jesus Christ, by whom healing is open to every sinner now. The word of God was spoken by faith on the part of the bondmaid and it had to be acted on by faith on the part of the master. There were other links in the chain of blessing of Naaman but the chain would not have been begun if the maiden had not taken her opportunity of telling the glad tidings. It may be of course that God would have used someone else, as He is able to do, but the little maid would have lost a golden opportunity.

Another girl - this time we are given her name, Rhoda - had the privilege of making a way for no less a person than the great apostle Peter. She had the opportunity of opening the door to the man who had the keys of the kingdom of the heavens! Evidently he could not let himself into the house of Mary, mother of John Mark! After being kept waiting for a little while however he was received in with the same joy that every one experiences who is ready to make way for his ministry. He wrote seven times each about such important matters as faith, the calling of God, things that are 'precious' and also about the sufferings of Christ. Can you trace some of these in his epistles?

J.C.Evershed

