

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 118

January 1983

Contents

"THE OBEDIENCE OF THE CHRIST"

"FIRST LOVE"

THE CHILDREN'S RANSOM

“THE OBEDIENCE OF THE CHRIST”

Hebrews 5: 5-14; 2 Corinthians 10: 3-7

P.M. The reference in Corinthians to the obedience of the Christ is much in mind as coming to this occasion - a reference which were it not in Scripture we might hardly say much as to it. We think of the greatness of who He is, and yet such a One coming into manhood and becoming obedient, or as we have in Hebrews 5: "he learned obedience from the things which he suffered". The writer in Hebrews brings it in as, you might say reverently, part of the moral qualification for His priesthood. We might see how that priesthood is to form and sustain what is suited to Himself morally. He has become to them that obey Him "author of eternal salvation". The writer has much to say as to their state, and no doubt the Lord often has much to say as to ours.

I wondered if we could begin with our feeding on Christ personally. There is nothing to affect us more than that, and to see that in His service He is forming what is suited to Himself. The reference in Corinthians shows us what is in view. There is the overthrowing, but then it says "leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ". Every thought is to be brought into that standard, that quality. I think it could have been translated 'obedience to the Christ' but the translator has kept it as it is: "obedience of". I wondered whether, as we proceed worshipfully and dependently, we might receive some help together.

E.C.M. Does teaching enter into it? I was thinking of Romans 6: 17 where the apostle says ye "have obeyed from the heart the form of teaching into which ye were instructed". Do you think the teaching would help us in relation to it, coming into line with the thoughts of God as to the truth, and so on?

P.M. I am sure that is right. How thankful we can be for the teaching. The writer brings out first the word of God: "For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword", chap 4: 12. As presented in that way it is to have its bearing

upon us, both for our obedience and for moral adjustment and formation, so that we cannot overlook the teaching. If we do so it is to our peril.

S.D.K.R. Would obedience carry the thought of hearkening submissively? You were referring to chapter 4: there it is "not hearkening to the word".

P.M. That would come out perfectly in Jesus, would it not? "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear", Isa 50: 4.

The word of God was what controlled Him in every movement. How we need that! The word of God is always greater than my word and is the expression of His mind. Who could stand against it? What you say is affecting if we think of Jesus personally, that He hearkened to it; in fact you might say He waited for it.

E.C.B. Does the expression in Romans 5: 19, "the obedience of the one", project Christ in peculiar distinctiveness?

P.M. It sets Him alone, does it not? We have all been on the line of disobedience. "By the obedience of the one": it is affecting to weigh that.

E.C.B. In that chapter we have "the one man Jesus Christ" (v 15), "the one Jesus Christ" (v 17), then "the obedience of the one", as if He is distinguished from every other.

P.M. I am sure that is true, and may He remain distinguished in our affections! I thought the Lord might help us to feed our affections on this kind of man of whom it could be said He was "heard because of his piety" and "he learned obedience".

J.M. The Spirit, through the writer, brings in a contrast, does He not? It says "though he were Son", and bringing out in the learning obedience that obedience was not something that was proper to Himself, but nevertheless He took on that feature. Does that not magnify Him in our sight?

P.M. It does. Christ has not glorified Himself. "He who had said to him, Thou art my Son"; it brings out the greatness of His Person first. But then, as you say, "though he were Son, he learned obedience".

That did not attach to Him prior to His entrance into manhood. "He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast", Ps 33: 9. But as coming into a condition of dependence He displayed what God found so pleasurable and looked for in every man.

C.C.I. Was God's great thought in manhood that the features of obedience and dependence would be man's glory? I was thinking of how Adam fell through disobedience. Would this bring out morally the sufferings of Christ relative to this great matter?

P.M. It would. Where the weakness of man was seen first and at its greatest, the glory of Christ came in completely over against that, but to meet that condition as it existed in the human race. "Though he were Son, he learned obedience". How affecting that should be to us! God had in one Man what He had ever looked for in men. I think the entrance of God Himself into the garden to commune with man would give us some sense of how, right in that early moment, God had looked for man not only to hearken to but to be governed by His word, but He had it here in this glorious Man.

E.F.W. It is affecting that He became obedient (see Phil 2: 8). It was something (we need to speak guardedly) that He had not had to be before, but He became obedient. That characterised Him all the way through His pathway here. He could never be anything else than that.

P.M. I think it is important to see that. As you say, He could never be anything else. It was seen early, was it not? Of glimpses of His early path we have little, but "Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business", Luke 2: 49. It is all indicating His perfect obedience to His Father in the fulfilling of His Father's will and business.

E.M.W. So that "he learned obedience" in no sense implies that He was ever disobedient. With us we have to learn to be obedient, having been disobedient. Is that how you see it?

P.M. I think that needs guarding, that it was a different kind of man altogether that came in here. He learned it because He had never before been in manhood's condition to which obedience belonged,

not that there was ever any trace of disobedience marking Him.

Often there is in our thinking, even if it does not come out in our actions, but in Jesus there never was in His thinking.

J.M. It was not proper to what He was, but as coming into the condition of manhood He learned it. As was said just now, it was not that He was disobedient, but He was in a condition to which obedience never attached.

C.G.H. Does it imply that in being obedient the Lord learned what the cost of obedience was?

P.M. I think that would be implied in the reference to the things which He suffered, although of course obedience to Him was always pleasurable; yet we might say reverently, in the pleasure that He found in being obedient what suffering was involved. It led Him through a path which none of us could ever fathom or compass.

R.T. It has been helpfully said that the one who said, in Exodus 21: 5, "I love", was morally the same as the one who wore the garments of beauty in Exodus 28. In His love the Lord took a position that He did not need to take, and God clothed Him with those garments of beauty to sustain the whole system.

P.M. That is what was in mind, that He came into certain conditions, and by entering into them and glorifying them He is now there sustaining a system which is morally in keeping with what He entered into Himself.

S.D.K.R. Does it confirm what was just said as to Exodus 21, that his ear was bored to the doorpost?

P.M. You mean His hearing was involved in that?

S.D.K.R. Yes, I was thinking that it involves His implicit obedience; He was committed to that.

P.M. And as such committing Himself to His Master, as in the type, committing Himself to His Master's word. How different I find Him to be to what I am. Hence the need to proceed worshipfully in an occasion when speaking of the glory of such a Man.

F.N.S. Is it right to say that becoming obedient even unto death is synonymous with becoming flesh? It was not a process with Him, was it? It was experience, of course; I always thought that learning obedience (not learning to obey) was the experience of it, but is it right to think that coming into manhood He took up a condition to which obedience was properly attached, and filled it out in all perfection?

P.M. And filled it out from the commencement, as you suggest. How we need to guard in every way the Person who was here, but right from the beginning, and in every relationship, obedience was seen.

E.C.B. Does "Lo, I come... to do, O God, thy will" (Heb 10: 7) foreshadow His coming into the condition in which He would be obedient? Purpose is in that expression; but when it was, if I might use the word, implemented was the point at which He came into the condition in which obedience would mark Him.

P.M. You mean He committed Himself to that path of obedience by committing Himself to God's will.

E.C.B. Yes, there seems to be a definitive statement there anticipating His coming into a position where He would do God's will, which was the perfection of His obedience. Is that right?

P.M. I would like to ponder that a bit. Think of Him knowing, from that point of view, what was involved as committing Himself to it! It would cause us to worship in the light of such down-stooping movements: "Lo, I come... to do, O God, thy will". No one else had ever had God's will in mind in coming into the scene, but He came in with nothing less than God's will fully in view and in every motive and instinct (we would speak reverently of Jesus) filled it out.

E.C.M. It is interesting that in John 10: 18, when the Lord speaks of laying down His life and taking it again, He says "I have received this commandment of my Father". I was thinking of how it brought out the perfection of the Lord and His moral glory in manhood, and specially of your reference earlier to the Father, thinking of the Lord in His obedience to the commandment of the Father, as He received

it. He said "I do always the things that are pleasing to him", John 8: 29.

P.M. It would suggest that in everything that He put His hands to it was at the Father's word. How affecting that is! How often I act upon impulse, or act and regret afterwards, but everything that Jesus did He did as the result of the Father's word. As you say, it should affect us, and particularly in the laying down of His life: "I have received this commandment of my Father".

A.L.F. Would it be right to distinguish in some way His obedience in the personal relationship He had with the Father, and then His obedience as setting on a new order of things which involves us? You could not think that there was ever a time when the Lord was not in peculiar obedience to His Father, as coming into the relationship of Son, but here it is to set something on, and is He not demonstrating the way we would have to come into obedience? I think it is very touching that that divine Person should go that way to demonstrate for us how we should come into it.

P.M. And to give character to what He would sustain for God's pleasure, do you think?

A.L.F. Yes, so He becomes Author of eternal salvation which involves us. How wonderful that He should set on for us, as if it were a model, how we are going to come into it!

P.M. I am glad you refer to that, because unless we see what was there fully and perfectly in Jesus, and the way in which He is operating now, how will we come into it? But He is operating in His high-priestly service, as this chapter would suggest, that He might become author of eternal salvation to those that obey Him. It would stir our affections that the One who was always obedient is now looking for that obedience to Himself from man.

A.L.F. It only adds to the wonder that He would first demonstrate it Himself, does it not?

P.M. That is why I thought that we should begin with Him personally and worshipfully.

T.B. Would Luke 22 be an example of His groanings and holy feelings? The disciples were let into something of the secrets of the Lord's inward feeling in what was immediately before Him.

P.M. I thought that was what was in view in these verses. His strong crying and tears: one feels slow to speak much of it, but let us ponder it. This was the extent to which the obedience of Jesus led Him.

A.L.F. Your thought of taking something on ourselves, as contemplating Jesus, is something we could well be helped about, because we very often take things on according to our intelligence, according to what we have learned mentally. I think there is something for us in following it in a moral way as set out in Jesus.

P.M. We recently had the question in our local reading as to whether God's standard will be secured, but God's standard has been reached; He has reached His standard in Christ. What God is seeking now is that standard extended in men, and sustained in man; and therefore the service of Christ on high is that we might be kept in the gain of the standard that God has already secured in Christ.

A.L.F. And that standard is beyond human intelligence. We need more than teaching, do we not, important as teaching is? We need contemplation.

P.M. I am sure that is right, and we need to feed upon that Man, "Them that obey him"; it is not just those who have obeyed the teaching, but those who obey Him. It is the Person who is to captivate our affections. If Christ has not the place that He should have, if it is just the doctrine that I am resting in, eventually I will give something of that up, but Christ is to become everything, is He not?

A.L.F. So "obey him" brings us back to the word of the Hebrew bondman: "I love my master, my wife, and my children", Exod 21: 5. In other words, there is a personal relationship.

P.M. Just so, without which the testimony will never go through in power.

P.J.H. Would it encourage us in that it says "learned obedience"? With us we learn through mistakes many a time, but He never made a mistake. Would the learning be used to emphasise His dependence, as a Man in perfection, upon His God and Father, not a man in independence? A man in holiness, really, is it not?

P.M. I think we need to keep that clear, that He never knew disobedience, and in the learning of obedience it was not to meet, as it is with us, disobedience. He never knew it. But what you say as to His dependence comes in here attractively; He was heard because of His piety, and His strong crying and tears would all suggest the sense of His dependence at a point of extremity, which man naturally could never have entered into.

E.P. Do you think that the position He took served to bring out the excellence of the Man who was in that position? When the pressure was there, what came out was the excellence of manhood according to God. I was noticing with regard to the matter of faith, "the leader and completer of faith" (Heb 12: 2), Mr Darby uses a word which was strange to me. He speaks about His career, and I thought that would be from the beginning right through to the end and in every circumstance. What a variety of circumstances there were, but they only served to bring out the excellence of this kind of manhood.

P.M. So we might say reverently that God tested that Man. He was tested in every situation. As was said earlier, man was tested in one situation and failed immediately, but God brought out His Man who was tested in every circumstance, but in those circumstances, as you suggest, the perfection and the glory shone out the more.

E.P. Crying and tears are the result of deeply-stirred emotions, naturally, I mean, for us; but for Him unique. Deeply stirred emotions: no small thing!

P.M. We need to ponder what it meant to Jesus firstly to face death, contemplating His entrance into it, One to whom death did not attach, and who was there because of man's disobedience; but then to go into it itself. We can understand the reference to strong crying and tears. Let us ponder these things.

C.C.I. Do you think that Peter, James and John were unable to take in this great matter of obedience because they slumbered in the garden and the Lord put the matter before them three times, as if it was an essential, most important lesson. Would you think that now, in the days of the Spirit, the great thought of obedience in man is being fulfilled? It is God's great thought; in our day the matter takes practical shape and can be understood.

P.M. I am sure that is right. Obedience to Him: I would like just to dwell on that: "having been perfected, became to all them that obey him, author of eternal salvation". Christianity is not a take it or leave it matter; we are in a world where Christendom has become like that, conventions to talk over whether a certain aspect of doctrine could be left aside; but Christianity is not that. It is "obey him". It is obedience to the One who was ever obedient.

A.L.F. Could obedience ever be so easy, so desirable, as to obey that One? You were speaking of Him as Priest, and He had to learn it in order that He might be able to succour me in it. Now, if I find a thing difficult to obey, is He not there, waiting for me to come to Him to show me how to learn it, and to be obedient to Him, such a One who learned it, the same as I would have to learn it?

P.M. I think we prove that. He brings us to a situation where it is only His own grace and service as Priest that will bring us through it. How we need, therefore, to be more dependent upon Him!

A.L.F. Well, what we need to learn, and what has been a weakness with brethren over a long period in the past, is that we have not kept our relations with Christ. If we keep our relations with Him, contemplating Him, learning to commune with Him and speak to Him in a simple way, if I find obedience difficult, here is One whom I am to obey, but He knows all the difficulty in it, He has learnt it in manhood; no that He had to learn it, but learnt it so that He could succour me in it. What a system of help there is in Him for me!

P.M. Yes, and as there for me He is there for all of us, that we might all come into the gain of what we sang in our hymn, the great things

that God has prepared for us, not only objectively, but substantially as alongside of Christ.

C.R.B. Does the reference to His piety stand morally related to obeying Him and the order of Melchisedec? There is a certain moral glory about the reference to His piety, or fearing (see note), is there not? As being occupied with Him by the Spirit, will not that help us to understand the moral glory entering into dependent obedience with us? But the features of righteousness and peace connected with Melchisedec must enter into all this; that is what is in view, is it not, what is for God?

P.M. Yes. Righteousness and peace come out later in what is to be sustained in man: "senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil". As Priest of that order He is sustaining what is morally in keeping with Himself. The order of Melchisedec would again cause us to worship in His presence; it is an order to which death does not attach: "without father, without mother... nor end of days", Heb 7: 3. He comes in mysteriously in Genesis, but the writer takes it up here beautifully, as being for God, unrelated to what man is according to flesh.

E.F.W. I wondered if it was very encouraging that we get to know the One we obey by being obedient to Him. In this scripture it says He "became to all them that obey him, author of eternal salvation", but in a greater way He becomes so much more to us that we would never know unless there was that obedience to Him.

P.M. And as our brother suggests, in Himself there is nothing to make that obedience to Him difficult. The difficulty lies in me; as the apostle goes on: "ye are become dull in hearing". The dullness was in them, not in the speaking. Often I find that in myself.

J.C.E. He learned obedience through the things which He suffered. I think it has been said earlier in the reading that it cost the Lord something to obey, although there was always the joy in the obedience. I was wondering too whether you would say a word as to how we recognise what the Lord's mind is in practical ways, so as to be obedient.

P.M. That is a big question. Must it not come back to my own personal links with Himself and the allowance of His will in my own soul, so that there is formed in me moral conformity to Him, and also the nearness that would hold us in the enjoyment of His own love. I have often asked myself that sort of question and perhaps we like to have an easy answer, but the answer is easy, is it not? - keeping near to Christ. Do you think John would show that for us?

J.C.E. Yes; I think we have to start with the fact that the Lord has a positive will for us, not only as to the things that are wrong, not according to His mind, but He has a positive will for us, and as you say it is only by acquaintance with Him that we can learn what it is.

P.M. I think it is one of the greatest needs at the moment, if I might say so for myself, to be kept near to Christ. We may become swayed by many things, either among us or around us, but nearness to Christ in living relationship by the Spirit's power will preserve and hold us, as not governed by what may pass around us but governed by Himself. So it is obedience to Him.

E.C.M. Do you think the man in John 9 would help us in the way he quickly came into this? The Lord says to him "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam... He went therefore and washed, and came seeing" (v 7). He was tested as to his suffering but he came into something in nearness to Christ and arrived at the glory of His Person as the Son of God, that his links were outside of the whole realm of death and the order of things in relation to the flesh. I just wondered whether he was an example of one who learned obedience in that way.

P.M. It is very attractive to think of that man, that through the Lord's own dealings with him and his own simple obedience (I say simple; he never questioned, he just did what he was told), he comes into the gain of that which the whole system around him knew nothing. He is not swayed by it, he is not perturbed by it, he has a link with a Man, the centre of another world, and everything for him is in that Man. The whole world was passing by as far as he was concerned, but he had his link with Christ. Would that we were more like that!

J.M. Do you think the Spirit of God would serve us that we might really get a view of a Man for God - Christ? We know, maybe, something about a Man for us, but a Man for God! That should be in our affections and thus through His present service and the office that He now fills we should become like Him, do you think?

P.M. So the Priest would be that. Do you think that primarily His service is Godward?

J.M. Yes, I thought that it might help to link up the passage, "the obedience of the Christ". The thought of "the Christ" is an exceedingly beautiful one is it not? Think of a Man who is wholly and perfectly and gloriously for God in every detail. I wondered if the Spirit, if we set ourselves for it, would engage our affections with that Man in that way, and that might help us to be like Him.

P.M. I am sure, and let us all commit ourselves to that, increased affection for Christ. There is nothing else that will give power to the testimony like it and will secure what is for God in the present time.

S.D.K.R. In connection with the collective side, a limb obeys the movement from the head; if we were sensitive to the Head the body would be marked by obedience, would it not? Does that come in in relation to assembly exercises?

P.M. It does. Am I drawing everything from Christ? Often what I say and do reflects otherwise. It is not in any sense to accuse any, but I would take the question to myself. What was referred to as to manhood for God would all be involved in that. Chapter 5 of Hebrews goes on to men being set up here "having their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil" (v 14); not, as it says, "ye have again need that one should teach you", but established here as having God as their object and in view of being maintained and maintaining what is due to God in the assembly.

R.T. He was addressed by God: does that bring out what He is to God and how this Man gives colour and character to the whole office?

P.M. Yes; I thought that was attractive, to think of Christ as ascending into glory and addressed by God as "Thou art a priest for ever". We often think of His reception; perhaps we sometimes do not think of this aspect of it, that as entering into glory God could say "Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedec".

What a triumph, that where every man had spurned God's rights, here was a Man who in His own person had, and was going to, maintain them for God's pleasure.

D.E.R. The experiences of Romans lead the believer to lay down his body as a living sacrifice, really accepting that God's will must prevail, but as we do that so we prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God(see chap 12: 2).

P.M. The moral exercises must always be faced; if not, we shall never be able to discern between good and evil. There will be nothing maintained finally for God in me if I do not have my senses exercised for discernment; otherwise I will just drift into what is of man, eventually what is corrupt.

D.E.R. But as our wills are subdued we prove the priesthood of Christ who will support us and see us through.

P.M. Yes, and it is not hard, is it? It is not to be irksome for us. Authority is there in the most attractive Person possible. Would that we knew more the attractiveness of Jesus as priest. That would sustain us when perhaps exercises are being gone through in our souls, and it is He that places us through exercise. We need it, but when it is being gone through He not only places us through it but sustains us in it in view of a result which is pleasing to Himself and is like Himself.

E.C.B. Does the teaching of chapter 2 as to the world to come help us in this? He has put all things under His feet. "We see not yet all things subjected to him, but we see Jesus" (v 9). Is not "them that obey him" an aspect of those who are subjected to Him now? I was thinking of the well-known remark, that unless we understand the world to come we do not understand Christianity. The world to come will be entirely obedient to Christ.

P.M. That helps, that Man's will will be seen everywhere. If you walk down the street, it will be the will of Christ in expression. What a day it will be! As you say, that is to be seen now in the believer and would reflect what was said earlier as to the way in which Jesus drew every impulse, every action, from His obedience to God.

E.C.B. So it says "we see not yet all things subjected to him", but perhaps that does leave room for us to see something subjected to Him, even in ourselves.

P.M. Well, could we not say, may that area of subjection, subjection to Him, be increased? What a Man He is! Those first two chapters bring out the greatness and the attractiveness of His Person, One able to sustain the world to come, able to sustain us now in relation to God's thoughts, I was going to say, at the highest level.

E.C.B. You referred to chapter 10; the writer says "Lo, I come to do thy will. He takes away the first that he may establish the second" (v 9). Is it only as apprehending that it is in the second that we can obey Him} Man in the flesh will not do that.

P.M. I find how long it takes me to come to that, that the first man has been removed in the death of Christ. It is wonderful to see that objectively, but has he been removed practically for me? Often, perhaps because I do not look out to see the glory of the Person who would sustain us in His own power, I resort to my own will and it will let me down, will it not?

E.M.W. Parallel with what was just said would be John's statement that "his commandments are not grievous", 1 John 5: 3. That is because we have a nature suited to them. Do we need to be exercised to conform in our practice to the work of God in us?

P.M. Just say a little more as to conforming in our practice.

E.M.W. I do not want to divert into John's epistles, but what was said reminded me of it; there is so much that is abstract in those epistles but having in mind to exercise us that we should correspond in our practice in Christianity with God's work in us.

P.M. I am sure that is essential. We cannot do lip service to the truth and behave out of accord with it, but as wrought on by the Spirit we can take up easily, can we not, the things that God has in view for us? The battle of my will should not always be in evidence against the things of God. As the Spirit comes into control in the believer, do you think it becomes easy to accept God's word, and His will? It depends on the room that I give to the Spirit, does it not?

E.C.M. Do you think the intrusion of the natural mind of man has brought in so much confusion? The line you are bringing out I feel is so important, because we want to be simple as to this matter of obedience. I think the great fear Mr Raven had, the intrusion of the natural mind of man, is something we need to be exercised about. I noticed you prayed at the beginning as to that.

P.M. Well, I feel it for myself. We do not need to be brilliant for the mind of man to come into the things of God. I find the danger of what I am naturally, and natural thinking coming into divine things, which if allowed will eventually lead to this dullness of hearing. I will not have an ear for what God is saying in the Spirit's power; whereas we should be in the enjoyment of, and expressing the truth. There will be need again that someone should teach us; what a sobering thing that is, is it not?

E.C.M. Indeed, and thus it is delightful just in simplicity to do what the Lord tells us to do. I referred to the man in John 9; he just did what Jesus told him to do. It would shut out all the reasoning of the human mind, the natural mind of man.

P.M. That brings us to 2 Corinthians, "the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God".

A.L.F. I do not want to hinder you from going on to Corinthians, but I was just thinking how often we spend a lot of energy, a lot of labour, on trying to make things work. We have objectively the good of obedience in Christ; no doubt we all want to display that and will try to make it work, but we often find great difficulty on that line, do we not? Do you think if those features are attractive to us, if we learn to

love them in Christ and contemplate them there, it does not then become a matter of effort with us but the Spirit forms them; He sees what attracts us and forms it in us, in His own work, do you think?

P.M. I do, and do you think the man in Romans tried to make everything work, and eventually he came to it that he needed a power outside of his own.

A.L.F. If we try to make things work, nothing works, but I think the idea we have in this epistle, "looking... on Jesus" (Heb 12: 2), and we have the features of that Man in our affections and they attract us, it is a fertile ground where the Spirit can work to form them.

P.M. I am sure that is how we arrive at it morally, but how often we try to approach things from the viewpoint of our effort. We are in flesh, as the apostle says in chapter 10 of 2 Corinthians, "walking in flesh", but "we do not war according to flesh". God has provided the power whereby Christianity can work in every relationship. It is as we cling to what we think we can do in our own strength that we lose the gain of what God has for us. So it says "the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God", or 'through God' (see note). That is that God is in them, I judge.

E.P. We were looking at that chapter in Joshua at home this morning where there is still a lot of land to possess; God says to Joshua, the first is the Philistines (see chap 13: 1,2). We thought about this scripture in Corinthians, but God says to Joshua "I will dispossess them" (v 6). Is not that the secret?

P.M. Yes, God was going on before them. It was not that they were to sit back and watch it happen, as no doubt you would have touched this morning, but the power was God's.

E.P. It says "the arms of our warfare are... mighty through God" (A.V.).

P.M. That is a good emphasis you make. It is our warfare, that is that we are involved in it, but the power for it is in God Himself. As you say, there was much to possess. I feel there is much to possess today. The spies had brought back a good report, and maybe we

can just sit and rest in the good report, but have I made it my own? Is the land entered into and experienced by me? I just raise the question. I feel the need of it myself. We so easily just settle in the report of the land, but what do I know of the entrance into it and the enjoyment of it, which as you say would involve both the dispossessing and the possessing.

C.R.B. Does the priestly intercession of Christ enter into the overthrow of strongholds? The Lord, as acting to secure everything for God, would understand the danger of any stronghold far more than we can. Do we not depend upon His priestly intercession so that we may be brought into accord with His own thoughts and know how to act ?

P.M. We need that constantly, to know what to do and how to do it; and in what we do and the way we do it, to glorify Him. That often is a test, I find. I may have right desires, but in the way I put them into action have I glorified Him? Have the saints been left with an impression of Christ and His power and His majesty? I feel the need of that for myself. We are only small locally, but the great exercise in small meetings is the maintenance of the dignity of what is of God in the assembly. No doubt it is an exercise too in the larger ones. How we need to rest our souls on this, that the arms of our warfare are not fleshly but they are powerful according to God! We might ask what the arms of our warfare are. We want to get help together; the Spirit is here to help us.

A.L.F. Is not that just the answer, that the arms of our warfare are not according to what we might have naturally in the way of learning or discernment, or personality or anything like that, but what comes from the Spirit. I think we have to learn to exercise war in a spiritual way, not a fleshly way.

P.M. I am glad you say that, and even the way we take up the Scriptures: am I taking them up in the Spirit's power?

A.L.F. Well, I can be quite right about a thing that I take up; it may be something needs to be taken up, and maybe I am quite right in

raising a matter, but am I doing it with the arms of the flesh or in the power of the Spirit?

P.M. I call to mind a remark of Mr Darby's which went something like this, that the truth in the hands of a natural man is like a sword in the hands of a drunkard. What damage I can do merely by the mental appropriation even of the Scriptures themselves.

A.L.F. I often wonder at the skill of the apostle in these epistles, because it would be very rarely we had a condition to deal with like he had in Corinth, and yet he did not lose anybody. The very man in whom things centred and came to light, while he had to face discipline, was saved. That is skill, is it not?

P.M. And the brethren were saved as having had set before them a new object entirely, not just the smallness of their thoughts in Corinth but a chaste virgin for Christ; and the brethren at Corinth, you might say, were saved in relation to that object that the apostle works to.

A L.F. Do you not think, as to Paul's jealous desire to present the saints a chaste virgin to Christ, that therein lies his power in the Spirit? Paul sought to gain nothing for himself in Corinth; everything that he put in there in the way of labour was for Christ.

P.M. That is searching, is it not? What am I like in my local meeting? Do I like to carve out a place? I say it is only a little place, but do I like to carve out a place anyway? Paul was prepared to be nothing that Christ might become everything. Is Christ the object of my affections undividedly, whatever I take up and do in the local company? If He is, conditions will arise, out of whatever may prevail, that are for His own glory.

E.C.B. While Ephesians 6 suggests the panoply of God and may suggest some of the arms of our warfare, are not the arms of our warfare in this chapter the meekness and gentleness of the Christ? There is nothing that will overthrow strongholds like that. We can maintain strongholds, and all that kind of thing, passiveness and all that sort of thing, but the meekness and gentleness of Christ takes us through it all, does it not? It was the ark going round that brought Jericho down.

P.M. It is in our spirits that we are very tested when matters arise. It is the man who can keep his spirit who gains a city. What is my spirit like? Often I show that I am resorting to what is fleshly.

J.M. The verse just quoted first says "But I myself Paul". Is there not something in that in relation to the arms of our warfare?

P.M. Do you mean that he located the work of God in himself and employs it to touch the affections of the Corinthians?

J.M. Yes. If you go back to the beginning of the first epistle there is a strong link with this when he is concerned that their faith should not stand in man's wisdom but in God's power. That line of things seems to go right through the two epistles, does it not?

P.M. It does, because there was so much that was carnal at Corinth, and there is so much I find that is carnal in myself, to which the word of the cross needs to be applied in its fulness, meeting all that is according to the mind of man, so that what is according to God, "powerful according to God", might be seen to be operating in each local company. How we would long to see it! We can be thankful that we do see something of it, but how we long to see it more, that there should be conditions in which what is done is the evidence of divine power.

E.M.W. Is it not the praying man that is available to God for the use of this power. Argument in the assembly is definitely not included in the arms of our warfare; it is only an affront to the presence of the Spirit.

P.M. It is, and it is sobering to think that even the spirit of argument might arise. It is that to which the cross has to be applied, is it not? But as you say, prayer is essential; prayer before we come together, prayer too after we have departed. Do we get into the presence of God over what has happened in our gatherings together? Even what proceeds normally in the assembly, let us get to God to get the gain of it. How often the meeting stops as we walk out of the door, but do I get into the presence of God in relation to the working out of it? Am I sustained there? As you say, a praying man is that characteristically.

E.C.M. In Philippians 4 the apostle says "I have strength for all things in him that gives me power" (v 13). Do you think we need to know where our strength lies, where it comes from, the source of it? That would link very much with the reference to prayer, do you think?

P.M. It would. How God loves a dependent man! "To this man will I look" (Isa 66: 2), a dependent man, a man who trembleth at His word. It would link with what we had in Hebrews as to a hearing man, a man who would let the word of God run through him and search him, form him, so that coming out into testimony there would be the features that in themselves would be the witness to God's power.

C.C.I. Do you think that Paul learned this power from the heavenly vision, from Jesus? He says "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision", Acts 26: 19. "Enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9: 6), and Ananias says "Arise and get baptised", chap 22: 15. Are all these features of manhood seen potentially in Paul? In a certain sense he is a delineation of all who believe (see 1 Tim 1: 16). That kind of man will get things worked out assembly-wise.

P.M. That is instructive. His obedience to Christ personally, "Rise up and enter into the city", and his obedience to those that the Lord was using: "it shall be told thee what thou must do"; then Ananias coming in, leading him by the hand. During those days in which he neither ate nor drank, in which he was shut up to the presence of Christ, what was formed in that man, the breaking down of what he was naturally, but the coming into expression of a man that was completely dependent upon the Man in glory: "straightway he preached Jesus that he is the Sons of God". Is that what was in your mind?

C.C I. "Behold, he is praying" (v 11). That character of man, I suppose, is going to take shape in the assemblies which would be the result of his ministry.

P.M. I am sure of that, and Paul was a man who strove to look not on what was outward or on what was by way of appearance but on

what was according to God. How we need to get through what is mere outward appearance that we might touch the vital reality of what Christianity fully is for God's pleasure!

E.C.M. We had a very powerful preaching here the other week by a brother on that verse in Isaiah 1: 19; "If ye be willing and hearken, ye shall eat the good of the land". That is what is really in mind, is it not?

P.M. God has nothing less than the good of the land. If only I could see that, that if the Lord brings me up to face an exercise or exercises in my own soul, He has nothing less than the good of the land being enjoyed.

CROYDON

25 September 1982

Key to initials

C.R.Byng London; E.C.Burr, London; T.Broughton, Richmond; J.C.Evershed, London; A.L.Forest, Auckland; C.G.Hitchcock, London; P.J.Herbert, Cardiff; C.C.Ikin, Southend; E.C.Muggleton, Croydon; J.Mitchell, Bexley; P.Martin, Colchester; E.Palmer, London; D.E.Remington, St Albans; S.D.K.Roberts, Croydon; F.N.Stickland, Redbridge; R.Taylor, Barnet; E.F.Woodford, Dorking; E.M.Walkinshaw, Gillingham

"FIRST LOVE"

P.Martin

Revelation 2: 1-7; 3: 7-13

In reading these passages, beloved, I trust the Lord may give grace to say a little as to first love. We had reference in the reading to our affection for Christ which has confirmed me to read these passages. Often we are tested in matters that may come in privately,

individually or collectively, as to what is our affection for Christ. The Lord, in addressing these seven assemblies, addresses the state that is present. I think it would be true to say that the Lord would do that on every occasion; coming in, as He does, He addresses the state that is present. If any of us in any sense in our local companies take responsibility, I believe it is an urgent need to be before God as to the state that is present in the place in which the Lord has set us. It is *that*, I think, that the Lord addresses. He knows everything perfectly, as He says in the beginning of each of these addresses. Let us never forget that, dear brethren. Things may happen in Colchester, and Croydon never hears of it, but the Lord knows and it is He who would address us in any occasion in which we come together.

I trust that the Lord will give grace as we proceed. I feel the need of it. As He comes in at any time what does He find? What did He find at Ephesus? And in the area of my immediate responsibility, what does He find in Colchester, or Croydon? What does the Lord find? You may say things are pretty good, there is nothing that we know of that is evil, and that was so at Ephesus too. The Lord commends them on a good bit, and the Lord is like that; He loves to commend His own work where it is. He loves to come in to encourage, and He would encourage at every step that He can. His priestly service is like that. He pours in often - we might say always - far beyond what we ever thought we deserved, far beyond what we ever thought we could receive. The Lord pours it in. What a Priest He is! And He does that as He writes to the assembly at Ephesus.

The whole of these addresses are gathered up in one book as we have often been reminded, I believe in view of the carrying in our affections the Lord's own longings in relation to every facet of the testimony as it proceeds through the dispensation; also in view of maintaining the unity of what is here for the pleasure of Christ; keeping it, we might say, through His priestly service in its oneness in representation. How we need to be conscious of that ! It would preserve us from any sense of independence, which alas the enemy would use so often if he could.

The Lord says "I know thy works". He knows our works, beloved. That is not intended to frighten us, but it is intended to sober us, that whatever has happened in the place in which I am set, the Lord knows it. He says "and thy labour, and thine endurance".

Think of what had gone on at Ephesus. It was there that Paul had fought with wild beasts. Think of what had come out of such conditions in a local company. He says "I know... thy labour, and thine endurance... and thou hast tried" certain things and certain persons, "but I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love". It is not sufficient, dear brethren, to be outwardly correct. I feel that for myself. There may be two brothers, maybe twenty two brothers in the local company, and we come along week after week and outwardly everything looks all right, but what is underneath? What goes deeper than the appearance that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 10? The Lord is looking at that. How sobering it is! He says "thou hast left thy first love". The question has often been asked, what is first love? I would not pretend to be able to give the answer to that, but I believe involved in it is what our brother touched on in the reading; first love involves that Christ is everything. It is not necessarily the first impression I had of Him, although that may be involved in it, but it is maturity of affection for Christ: maturity. It is what is, we might say carefully, true of the assembly. It is *that* kind of affection for Christ, where everything that is done is done with Him in view, with His glory in view; where everything that is done is done out of affection for Himself where everything that is said is said with the glory of Christ in view. Beloved, I feel searched as I speak, and the Lord knows this. The Lord will search us, and no doubt will continue to search us, but is there first love? Is Christ everything? We would remember what Mr Stoney said in his day, when he asked, What is our motive in going to the meeting? He used the expression, Behold the Bridegroom, go forth to the meeting. Is that the object in view as we come together? Is it to behold the Bridegroom? I would have to say for myself that oftentimes it has not been, which maybe has resulted in things that I have said not being out of first love for Christ. Let us examine ourselves, beloved. It says that: "examine your own selves if ye be in the faith", 2 Cor 13: 5. Is this not so? I

believe we would have to say it was. Maybe we have proceeded with an objective view of Christ, and let us not despise the objective view. We need it, and we need it constantly, but let us not stop at that. I believe it would be true to say that if I find myself content with the objective view only, I have already departed from first love. I could illustrate that perhaps. On my desk in my office I have a photograph of my wife and children but that photograph does not stop me coming home at night. In fact I might say it helps me sometimes to come home more quickly. Let us not stop at the mere objective view of Christ, necessary as it is; let us cling to it, we need it, but if I stop at that I have already departed from first love. Let us go on to the enjoyment of relationships in the Spirit's power, where Christ is everything and where communion with Him self becomes indispensable because of who He is. Is He not worthy, beloved? Indeed He is, and as we enter into a depth of communion with Himself what power it would give to the testimony and to our gatherings together. How often we come together and feel the lack of power that there may be. One feels it for oneself. I do not speak in any sense as criticising any or accusing any, either individually or any company, but let us bring the word home, just where we are. Do we not often feel the lack of power? I believe we do. Why is it? I believe the Lord would draw attention to this feature, where He Himself is everything. Let us search our motives: is Christ everything? Everything that I have done in the local company this week: has Christ been everything? Oh beloved, He is worthy of it. He died to secure the assembly for Himself, and in His assembly He is worthy of the first place in affection. Let us, all of us commit ourselves to Him freshly today.

The Lord says here "Remember therefore whence thou art fallen": remember. "And repent": repent. Oh, you say, we have done nothing wrong, we do not need to repent. Beloved, repentance, as Mr Darby showed somewhere in his writings, relates to our state and not just to our actions. How important it is to lay hold of that. Oftentimes I find myself, if I have done something wrong, thinking that I must repent because of my action; the action

only brings to light the state, but if there was depth of repentance in view of our state the Lord would come in in His power. Let us repent. I would call upon the brethren generally as together. If we feel our weakness we may say we will have to do better. The Lord does not say that here. He does not say you must commit yourself to what you once enjoyed. He says "repent". Beloved, let each of us not look at another but take to ourselves the need for repentance that there might be a state with us that the Lord might come in in His blessing, and may add to us in His power, and that there may be power in the testimony for His own pleasure and glory. Those of us who may in any sense take responsibility are responsible for the state that exists amongst the saints. How sobering that is! If, as we may have to confess before the Lord, it is not as it should be, let us repent. In Zechariah, in a sober day, it says "And the land shall mourn, every family apart: the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart", chap 12 12-14. Beloved, let us get before God ourselves, just ourselves, apart from anyone else or anything else. Let us take on the responsibility ourselves and repent as before our God. Is it not due from us? I believe it is, that we should feel things as God feels them. How will we have a judgment of things that is in keeping with God's judgment unless we relinquish every judgment of our own and stand in the presence of God to get His judgment of every matter? That is what repentance is I believe; I come out with God's judgment of every situation and not my own. How we need it! I trust I am not being too negative in what I am saying, but let us look on the object that is in view, that there might be, not exactly the restoration of what was there at the beginning in Pentecostal days, but that there might be the restoration of full and fervent affection for Christ that would stand here in the place of His own rejection and be for His pleasure. Is not that the desire? I believe it is the desire of every one here, that there should be that which is entirely for Christ in undivided affection, that the chaste virgin character that our brother referred to in the

reading should be seen here, and it is as we take on the responsibility for the state that may exist, whether in the place in which I am or, if we are able, in a wider sense, and get before God just on our own, husbands apart and wives apart, and feel it before God, I believe the Lord will come in in blessing.

The Lord says "but if not, I am coming to thee", and I will remove thy lamp". How sobering that is! You might say, But that will never happen where I am local. Will it not, dear brethren? Has not the Lord the right to remove the candlestick in Colchester? He has. I cannot say that He must not, but what I would desire is that there might be conditions here which, rather than His removing the lamp, He might be pleased to add His own blessing to what already exists. Is that not our desire? Beloved, let it be so. Let us face things as they are before God. Let us not rest in what is of mere outward appearance but face things as they are before God, that there may not be this word: "but if not... I will remove thy lamp out of its place". He says "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him that overcomes, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God". The Lord is looking for an overcomer today. What makes an overcomer? It is affection for Christ. What gives power to an overcomer? It is nothing but affection for Christ and reliance on the blessed Spirit.

When we come to Philadelphia it is not the restoration of what was there at Ephesus, but there is there the moral features that the Lord looks for. The Lord does not touch on anything official at Philadelphia. How we love to rest naturally in what is official, but the Lord does not touch on it at all. He says "These things saith the holy, the true". Let us never lose the sense of His holiness. If matters are to be maintained for Him, if Christ's rights are to be maintained, it is to be in keeping with *His* holiness. "These things saith the holy, the true... he who opens and no one shall shut, and shuts and no one shall open". Beloved, what great things the Lord has in view for each one of us, for each local company, you might say for the assembly as a whole. He would open and no one could shut; He shuts certain things and no one can open them. There are

certain things that are fixed and we cannot alter them. We are having to do with the Lord, the holy and the true. But He says "I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an opened door, which no one can shut, because thou hast a little power". We have often been reminded that the emphasis is not on the 'little', but there is a little power there. I believe we can say simply that the desire of every heart here would be that there might be a little power here in the scene in which we are: a little power. Matters arise beloved - I speak soberly and I trust affectionately - and often we feel the lack of power to bring them to a conclusion, but here the Lord says "thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name". The emphasis in Philadelphia is on Himself: "my word... my name", His love. Beloved, for the Philadelphian saint Christ becomes everything - His word, His name, His love, becomes everything. May He become everything to us! What is our Christianity worth if Christ is not everything? In Laodicea conditions were neither hot nor cold. The Lord says "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth". Christ was not everything. Beloved, let Christ become everything, whether it is individually or in our gatherings together; let us be governed by His will, as we had in the reading, let His will be the regulating motive in every local company, that we might know what it is to come under His sway. "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name". How the Philadelphian would cling to that! He would say simply, That is the Lord's word, I cannot let go of that. That is His name, I cannot deny that; it is the name of the One I love. Oh beloved, let us see the truth as it stands in Jesus, that it is Himself personally. We go out into the world and the truth is often called into question by persons we meet. The attack is on Jesus personally. You may say it is just questioning the doctrine. Beloved, the attack is on Jesus personally. Any question as to the truth is really a question as to what is in Jesus personally. "Thou... hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name". Let us therefore go on, let us be here in the full affection that belongs to the present moment because it is due to the One whom we love. That is really all one had to say, but may the Lord help us just to get into His presence and to face things as they are, that what may come to light

may be the springing up of first love for Christ, and that He may have the first place in all things, for His name's sake.

CROYDON

25 September 1982

THE CHILDREN'S RANSOM

Redemption and ransom have almost the same meaning especially as they both cause our souls to rest on the Lord Jesus and His work. In the types of Scripture the boards of the tabernacle each had two bases of silver which were solid enough to keep them upright in a howling desert. These boards represent Christian believers each and all enjoying the benefit of both redemption and ransom. Each silver base was very valuable and was too heavy for a man to carry in the wilderness so that ox-waggon were used. Thus no mere man could redeem or ransom one precious soul. Also none of the boards ever actually touched the earth just as the believer is "not of the world" but is a pilgrim.

Perhaps we more easily understand redemption which means that God has bought us for Himself by causing the burden of our sins to be taken away at the cost of the precious blood of Jesus. In this way we belong to Him as our Creator and also our Redeemer. The word 'ransom' was used by Paul as describing the way in which "the man Christ Jesus" stood between a holy God and fallen, sinful men, women and children. It was not that God needed someone to plead with Him for mercy on His creatures. His full and free love had already been shown in the wondrous fact that He sent His Son into the world as Saviour. But to have His creature in happy communion with Himself it required that righteousness be satisfied by an acceptable sacrifice. This in grace Jesus provided and as Mediator between God and man He "gave himself a ransom for all". The Lord had also spoken to His disciples of giving His life "a ransom for many" which looked forward to the hosts of those who by faith would enjoy the blessings available to them.

A young Roman had been called before the judges on account of proved treason to his country. However, as sentence of death was rightly passed on him his elder brother who had been wounded in his country's wars pleaded for the young man's life to be spared.

In doing so he held up the stumps of his arms which had been cut off in warfare. He confessed that his brother was guilty and was

worthy of death but he presented to the judges the value of what he himself had done for his country. The guilty man was mercifully spared because of the merits of another. Surely none would have been more faithful than he henceforth! Thus the believer on the Lord Jesus is spared on account of the work of One who gave Himself a ransom for him or her personally. Can you do other than be faithful to Him?

J.C.Evershed