

*A*  
*WORD*  
*IN ITS*  
*SEASON*

1<sup>st</sup> Series

No. 146

May 1985

Contents

SONSHIP

MARRIAGE IN THE LORD

REMEMBRANCES

THE CHILDREN'S RICHES

## **SONSHIP**

### **Matthew 17: 22-27; Ephesians 1: 3-6; 3: 14-21**

R.W.F. I wondered if we might speak of, and perhaps enjoy together, the liberty of sonship. No doubt there has been an experience on the part of many, even today, of knowledge and enjoyment of that liberty in the Father's realm. That is, I suppose, the realm where the enjoyment of sonship's liberty is at its height, but the liberty of sonship should mark us at all times. There is a connection, if we wish to look for one, between what one has in mind now and what we were considering yesterday, in that God grants the liberty of His house to His sons. I think we find justification in Scripture for saying that, and even more justification for it in our experience.

I thought we might look at Matthew first, because the point reached at the end of chapter 17 seems significant in the gospel as a whole. I had in mind particularly verse 26: "Then are the sons free". There is what is established in man, in Christ Himself. At the beginning of the gospel, at the Lord's baptism the word is "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight", chap 3: 17. It is not as in the other synoptic gospels; "Thou art", but "This" - Object of our attention, to be the Object of our affection. God draws attention to His Son, and we find as we trace through the gospel that there is a reiteration of what God has established in Christ in sonship and, in amplification of it, there is what has been revealed to the Son. In chapter 12 there is the liberty that is found, and taken, by Christ here in the cornfields; "the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath" (v 8).

There is what is revealed to Peter in chapter 16: 16: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". Then in this chapter we have the extension of it: "Then are the sons free". There is what God has secured in manhood, and there is what He is working, if I might so say, to secure in manhood in us, in sonship. This bears on our behaviour in the testimony. John 17, scripture which we rightly regard as of an exalted kind, actually refers to sonship in testimony.

We do not find liberty as men might speak of it, in their presence;

but the liberty of sonship is to be proved in testimony, that is, a relationship with the Father known and enjoyed.

It occurs to me, in looking at that familiar scripture in Ephesians, that we can see the origin of it in God Himself in purpose. There is an initial reference to those who are "holy and blameless before him in love", then "having marked us out beforehand for adoption ... to himself". Then it occurred to me that in Ephesians 3 there is presented what is extensive. There is what we sing of as 'vast yet finite' in the many families and in the fulness of God, and in the breadth and length and depth and height, and in that sphere there may be enjoyed to the full the liberty of sonship.

Brethren can fill this out. I trust that they may be at liberty in this occasion.

E.C.B. Does the Lord's word to Peter suggest the side of liberty in what we are freed from, in order that we might come into the sphere which we are free in?

R.W.F. Yes, I think that is right. It is worth saying, and perhaps it needs to be said at the outset of a conversation of this kind, that liberty of sonship is in no sense liberty for the flesh. Liberty of sonship is known as we are free from the influence of the working of the flesh: we are to be delivered from it. It is also the case that the liberty we are given is in contrast to the bondage and servility which preceded sonship, which marked Israel formally and officially and which is characteristic of us naturally. Liberty from childishness: sonship has in view maturity. There is what we are delivered from in order that we might enjoy liberty.

E.P. Our experience just confirms the truth as it is set out in the Scriptures. The Spirit helps us into the reality of it. But confirming what you are saying, in Galatians the apostle speaks of "our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus", chap 2: 4. It is not in the flesh; certainly not! It is in another Man who is in another sphere. Our liberty belongs there.

R.W.F. Yes. So we have the light of sonship and the spirit of sonship in the epistle to the Galatians. The intelligence as to it, and

the affections that are proper to it are developed, we understand, in the epistle to the Ephesians; but in Galatians the scripture is "ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus", chap 3: 26. It is not simply by faith, not as if we generate the relationship or the enjoyment of liberty, but "by faith in Christ Jesus". The Son Himself gives character and pattern to the relationship: "the pattern of Isaac", chap 4: 28.

H.A.H. Does the Lord's word in John 8 set forward what you have in mind, the truth setting us free before we arrive at how the Son sets us really free?

R.W.F. Yes; "If therefore the Son shall set you free, ye shall be really free" (v 36). In the Authorised Version it is "free indeed". That is a fine thing to see. There could be no greater liberty. Only He could secure it, but having secured it He can make it good in us, so that there may be the full enjoyment of it.

E.O. We had an experience in the sphere of privilege this morning as to all you have been saying, but we had also a distinctive impression of the reality of the Father's pleasure and as to a foretaste of what we are to enjoy actually very soon. It is a wonderful occasion, is it not, the morning occasion?

R.W.F. Yes. I thought we might dwell a little on the Father's pleasure as we look at Ephesians; "the good pleasure of his will".

A.J.E.W. You referred to Peter's confession in chapter 16. It is very significant, is it not, that that is a matter of revelation? I thought it bore on what you said just now, that we are thinking of the Father's pleasure; the whole thought of sonship and all that belongs to it is so precious to the Father that the matter is revealed as in Christ to Peter by the Father.

R.W.F. That is a key, do you think, to the understanding of sonship? It is according to His will, according to His pleasure; it is that which is designed of Him and is the expression of the depth of His desire to which He will have an answer.

A.J.E.W. It has sometimes impressed me - you spoke of man and what man is intended to fill out - that all these relationships are divinely designed. They do not follow exactly from the bringing in of man as a creational being; they are really divinely-designed relationships of holy affection which are basic to the Father's satisfaction.

R.W.F. Yes, that is good.

C.B. It would be the Father's pleasure that we should be with Christ, not without Him: we were without Him, were we not?

R.W.F. Yes, that is right. It occurred to me, in suggesting this first section, that our affections (which are to be formed in sonship, because it is a relationship of affection) are to be touched and developed as we think of the way Christ has gone. "The Son of man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and the third day he shall be raised up"; the Son of man, One who was able to sustain all our liabilities and has sustained them and discharged them. He has gone that far; "they shall kill him"; that draws out our affections.

W.J.R.B. Is that peculiarly set out in type in Genesis 22, where Abraham says twice "My son"? There is a great deal lying behind that, is there not?

R.W.F. I am interested that you allude to that. "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest" is the first reference to love as such in Scripture. It typifies how the fulness of love is expressed in the feelings of the Father towards the Son.

J.C.E. Do you think that that is one of the first lessons of sonship, that "God will provide himself with the sheep for a burnt-offering", what He sought for His own pleasure?

R.W.F. Yes, that is very good.

J.C.E. Abraham said "My son, God will provide himself". Peculiarly in this scripture you have read, it is not only a privilege common to all those who have the Spirit, but what the Lord said later on - "for me

and thee" - brings it down to the individual. We are speaking about something that we enjoy individually.

R.W.F. It is good to bring that in. Sonship is generally presented in Scripture as that which is entered into collectively; there is the reference "but son; if son, heir also" (Gal 4: 7), but otherwise I think in Scripture the references are collective. What is known collectively which is to be known very fully as we are together in God's presence, can only be sustained as there is individual knowledge and experience of sonship.

J.C.E. There is also sonship in testimony here, because we are not to be an offence to others.

R.W.F. Yes, I had that in mind. Although we think of sonship in the sphere of privilege, and we are to enjoy it there and to understand that God enjoys it, it is to have its effect and to be in expression.

People may not discern it as such, but it is to be in expression in testimony and in our relations with one another. We often speak of brotherly relations with one another and we are to be concerned to sustain them, but in fact what works out in those relationships is the spirit of sonship.

G.A.P. "When he came into the house": is that significant? Would it link on with the liberty of the house, the son's experience? I thought that there was a sphere of things where the fullness of the liberty of sonship is seen in the way of receiving instruction and being able to enter into the enjoyment of the relationship.

R.W.F. Yes, I think that is good. Peter was ready to receive instruction. I think the enjoyment of sonship means that our hearts are open and receptive to take in and take on instruction. Those who were at Redbridge last year, when Mr Craig was serving, will recall that he referred to this scripture in connection with sonship and he likened "the first fish that comes up" to Paul. In Paul's mouth was the whole truth of sonship. Paul's instruction is recorded for us in Scripture and is good to this day.

E.C.B. In regard to sonship in testimony, do you think the reference in chapter 5 of Matthew to "your light" (v 16) would include sonship,

because the result is that men are to glorify the Father?

R.W.F. Yes, that is good. The light that we have is very great. We are to be concerned not to conceal it. It may not be apprehended but it is to be there, it is to shine. The light of sonship is part of the greatest light that we have. We have light as to Christ and the assembly. These truths are not exclusive of each other but mutually supportive. We have the "assembly of the firstborn" (Heb 12: 23), an interesting expression which brings together sonship and the assembly.

E.P. A question is raised in the Old Testament: "What sort of men were they", and the answer was "As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the sons of a king. And he said, They were my brethren", Judg 8: 18,19. That is a very telling scripture, because it means, does it not, that we are to conduct ourselves in such a manner that it becomes apparent that we are possessed of something that is evidently from God?

R.W.F. Yes, that is of the utmost importance. We are to have a bearing, wherever we are, which is indicative of the truth that God has secured us as sons by adoption to Himself. I think that we are to seize that and hold to it, and not, as we say, to allow the level to drop. You will recall that in Mr Taylor's Volume 1 of ministry - I suppose many of us have started reading Volume 1 with good intentions - we have comments about sonship which are to be recalled by us and treasured by us. Some of them are exceedingly trenchant. Who would think of returning to the scullery after enjoying the privileges of the drawing room? (see p.91). Who would think of it? And if I may refer to another, he speaks of sonship as that which comes down from God (p.93). That is what I had in mind in connection with Ephesians 1, that it is God's conception, it is God's thought, of His own heart, it comes down, and we are to see that it governs us as so perceived and enjoyed. We tend to attempt to work up to it. We are concerned about our state. Occupation with state is bondage. The liberty of sonship is that which comes down from God, and it is to be known and enjoyed, held and defended.

A.J.E.W. We do not graduate into sonship, do we? It is involved from the very beginning; the scripture you referred to in Ephesians 1 implies that, we are marked out. There is a tendency to think that sonship belongs to maturity and the older brethren but it is really in mind in the glad tidings from the start.

R.W.F. Yes, very good.

D.A.B. Is that implied in this word 'anticipated'? The thought was in God's mind before it entered Peter's. I was thinking that the scriptures you referred to yesterday all implied prior divine provision, and Galatians refers to the period fixed by the Father.

R.W.F. Where is our attention focused? We tend to look down at self and state, circumstances and environment. What comes down causes our eyes to be lifted up. What God has done according to His own purpose, and done in such a way that we are included, is all from the top, it is all from His own heart, it is all the best. One seeks for oneself to be occupied with the best. Christ has come down, the Spirit has been poured out, He is here indwelling. There is the anxious looking out of the creature in Romans 8; it awaits the revelation of the sons of God, that which comes down. There is what comes down in Revelation 21: 10, "having the glory of God". Let our eyes look up to the source.

E.C.B. The scripture in Romans 8 is really marvellous in connection with sonship, is it not? The whole creation is waiting until sonship is revealed in actuality. Should it not therefore form us the more now?

R.W.F. Yes. It is a scripture which when we are younger is hard to understand, but as we reflect we see the glory of it, the revelation of the sons of God. There is the anxious looking out of the creature; we know a little about that, but the glory of sonship is the answer to it.

E.C:B. Do you not think, in regard to your earlier comments on verse 22 and references that were made to Genesis 22, that the aspect of "has not spared his own Son" (Rom 8:32) - wonderful as it is - shows that God had sonship in mind even for those who would kill His Son? Do you not think that should touch us?

R.W.F. I do.

C.B. Strangers can be sons now?

R.W.F. Yes. Sonship extends beyond the boundaries of Israel. One has been impressed in reading the Pentateuch with the consideration that God has for the stranger. There was potential there for sonship. God had in mind sonship. There was what He was set on securing and will yet secure in Israel: "Let my son go", Exod 4: 23. What liberty! "That he may serve me". But there was always consideration for the stranger, and we as strangers come into the good of that now.

C.B. It would deepen our appreciation of the Father's love to secure us from the hopeless condition in which we were.

R.W.F. That is right.

J.A.B. Were Peter and John in the liberty of sonship in Acts 3, and also that man who was leaping and praising God?

R.W.F. Yes. He was at the entrance to the temple, the place where the knowledge of God and the liberty to be known in His presence should have been enjoyed. He was crippled and unable to enter into liberty himself but they were able to say "Look on us", chap 3: 4. They were apart from the trappings of the temple, the ornamentation and the ritual. There was with them the liberty that belongs to sonship, and I suppose we can understand from that scripture that it was transmitted.

D.J.H. "What I have" - that would include the liberty of sonship, would it not?

R.W.F. Yes; what do we know that we have? Mr Evershed often reminds us, in connection with our state of preparedness for the Lord's supper, that the word is "let a man prove himself", 1 Cor 11: 28. We speak of selfjudgment and it is right to do so, but proving oneself means the discovery afresh, one might say with joy, of that which one has as formed of God's own work. We tend to say, The Scripture also says at the end of 2 Corinthians: "Examine your own selves if ye be in the faith"; but then it says "prove your own selves;

do ye not recognise yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you", chap 13: 5. "Jesus Christ is in you"; what a conclusion! What a process! We perhaps grind under the weight of self-occupation that can come through selfexamination; we can do that, it is natural to us to do it; but the discovery that God's work is there, God's work in its fulness in sonship, is very great.

W.J.R.B. That may take place in the very youngest. The way this chapter develops into the next one is striking, is it not? "In that hour" brings in what was hindering sonship, desiring to be greatest; the Lord takes a little child.

R.W.F. We find there is reference to the little child in Matthew 18 and to little children in chapter 19. While maturity is looked for in sonship, it is open to the youngest to enter, and our enjoyment of it is to be childlike; not childish but childlike.

E.O. In your reference to the temple I was thinking of the end of Luke; it says "they ... were continually in the temple praising and blessing God", chap 24: 53. Is that the feature that is to be seen in the temple? That would be in sonship, would it not?

R.W.F. Yes, and the word was "do ye remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high" (v 49). We know in fact, and we find in practice, that the power to enjoy sonship is in the Spirit. There is no other means of enjoyment of it.

J.C.E. Peter was casting the hook when he looked on that man in Acts 3, and he hooked a good fish. He was associated with John and Peter. It is almost as if he was saying 'for me and thee' to them, that what they enjoyed was open to him, the same ground.

R.W.F. Yes, and he was secured as one who behaved as a son, "walking, and leaping, and praising God". That is the true function of sonship, is it not?

J.C.E. He did not have to graduate, as Mr Welch said.

E.P. In chapter 4 it says that that man stood with them. That was in the presence of opposition, but he stood with them in the dignity of sonship.

R.W.F. Yes, and there was with him, as Peter said, "complete soundness in the presence of you all". The man was not still looking for evidence of disability; he was entirely grateful to be relieved of it.

He was completely sound "in the presence of you all", and that is characteristic of sonship.

J.S.G. I was thinking about Peter's answer to the question here.

Was it the right answer? "Does your teacher not pay the didrachmas? He says, Yes." He did not ask the Lord first. Would that be a feature of sonship, the ability to bring out on one's own what is spiritually right for the moment?

R.W.F. Yes, that is good. You are thinking perhaps that sonship constitutes one able to act on behalf of the Lord, and to act as expressive of the Father's own feelings in grace.

J.S.G. Yes. I just was wondering whether in the present times we are to know how to act as with the Lord, without leaning on one another. Do you think that is right?

R.W.F. Without being self-confident we are to be self-sufficient, in the sense that what is provided and inwrought is of the maturity and quality that can stand. Paul spoke of that in other words, did he not, in writing to the Philippians: "satisfied in myself", chap 4: 11?

D.J.H. Is that similar to John 20: 21; "as the Father sent me forth, I also send you"? There was absolute, implicit confidence in the Father in sending the Son, and would that be so in the way that sonship can be relied upon in testimony?

R.W.F. Yes. John 17, the chapter which has been described as sonship in testimony, refers to men: "the men whom thou gavest me out of the world" (v 6), those in whom there was formation, maturity, integrity and reliability.

D.J.H. And does it flow out of the enjoyment of sonship in privilege in its own sphere? "Me and thee", the distinctiveness of Christ, the Son, is like "my Father and your Father ... my God and your God", that message conveyed, and then sending out in testimony.

R.W.F. Yes. There is a hint of communion in "me and thee", is there not?

E.C.B. Do you think the link between what you are saying in opening up what Mr Gray said and what you said earlier is a test to us, as to what we have? Sons know what they have. If I could add to what was said, Peter did not quote anything either; what he said was what was formed in himself, or given by the Spirit in that moment.

R.W.F. It is a test to us. Those who were sent out by the Lord, the twelve, were to be without scrip and so on. What resource have we? The absence of props and external resources casts us the more on the resource that there is in God, and we find that that is immense because it goes back to purpose.

E.C.B. Those practically in the gain of sonship could not appear before God empty, could they? "None shall appear before me empty" (Exod 34: 20); a son could not.

R.W.F. No, that is right. It brings forward the truth of consecration, that our hands are full.

J.S.G. I was touched as you were speaking just now by this question of Jesus to Simon, using his everyday name; "What dost thou think, Simon" . Do you think if we are in the Spirit (it is testing to me to speak about it), if we look for relationship with Jesus of that kind, we should know a little more about liberty?

R.W.F. I think that is very good, and we may be able to dispense with the formality that sometimes marks us (maybe I should confine that comment to myself) in our relations with one another. The liberty of sonship allows simplicity in conversation, it allows simplicity in the expression of concerns, and it rejoices in the simplicity of that which is brought by those who perhaps at other times are not vocal.

I rejoiced this morning in something that was said in a thanksgiving by a young brother, that we enter the presence of the Father peacefully. We are to carry that spirit as we continue now and through the week.

B.W.W. Does what you say as to the relations with one another stem from the recognition that he or she is a son and I also am? So that there is the dignity there which we need to recognise both ways.

R.W.F. Yes, I think that is most important. It is a matter that I hoped we would touch. If we look at Ephesians 1: "according as he has chosen us in him", the Father has chosen us in Christ, "before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself." Do we regard one another that way, as the objects of divine attention before we met or knew each other? Before we were here the Father conceived these thoughts, these relationships. One might say that He has looked forward to them, to the enjoyment of them Himself, from their conception in purpose.

B.W.W. You will remember how often Mr Gardiner used to say, when referring to that verse, 'Himself'; he always went to the conclusion of the verse, that it was the Father's own pleasure that He had in view.

R.W.F. Yes. There is a good deal of reference to the Father's will in this section, as we have often observed: "the good pleasure of his will" (v 11). Would we wish in any way to be opposed to the will of the Father? The will of the Father is that we might enter into and enjoy sonship. Do we raise any hindrance, any qualification to that?

B.W.W. The will of the Father was what governed the Lord Jesus all the time, and the fulfilling of that will underlay everything for God and for us.

R.W.F. Yes, and how much it cost Him!

D.N.S. What is the main object in God's heart in conferring sonship upon us?

R.W.F. Do you think there is an answer to that in what has been said, that we have been "marked ... out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself"? "To himself". He has so acted according to His purpose that there might be secured those who are holy and blameless before Him in love. Holiness has been

established and maintained through the work of Christ and the continuing operation of the Holy Spirit, and what is found in Ephesians is not only the light of sonship and (if I might say so without being misunderstood) not only the spirit of it, but the intelligence and the affection of it. God has, in sonship, an answer to His own affections, an answer which is precious to Him, beyond description.

E.P. Mr Browne used to remind us often as to that last verse in chapter 4 of the Revelation: "for thy will they were, and they have been created". In the Authorised Version it is His pleasure, "for thy pleasure", and that stayed with me. That really is the answer to what Mr Smith raised, is it not?

R.W.F. Yes it is.

E.C.B. The blessed system of relationships in nearness of which sonship speaks is something that distinguishes Christianity from every other religion, is it not?

R.W.F. I am sure it is, and we are to be aware of that and in the enjoyment of it, without in any sense being presumptuous. God gives us the grace and capacity to enjoy it. Faith in Christ with Him as object causes us to be aware of the truth of sonship at the very beginning of our soul history. Then He capacitates us and gives us the power in the gift of the Spirit so that we might say Abba Father. In Galatians the Spirit cries Abba, Father, but we are brought rapidly in the divine scheme in the power of the Spirit ourselves to say Abba, Father.

D.A.B. Is there an answer in sonship in the way God is revealed? Is it perhaps His thought, as you say, that there should be something intelligent and affectionate, because His wisdom and His love have been manifested in the revelation.

R.W.F. Yes.

A.J.E.W. I was thinking of the section in Galatians which you quoted because there is there a reference to what is individual: "So thou art no longer bondman, but son". I was thinking how the skill of the

apostle at that point meets every tendency on our side to elect ourselves out of that great matter. "Thou art no longer bondman" - that is what we were - "but son". It comes from the service of the Spirit and the cry that He brings: "Abba, Father".

R.W.F. It is sober to reflect, do you think, that having known it, we may drop from it? We may elect ourselves out of the knowledge and enjoyment of the best, through ignorance, but it is possible, having enjoyed it, to drop from the level of enjoyment which we once had.

That was what happened in Galatia. There was the turning on the part of the Galatians to the "weak and beggarly principles" of the law (see chap 4: 9), and that may be the direction in which we go at times. Even Peter, one secured by the Lord for a place of service in prominence, had to be withstood to the face. It was a set battle, one might say, that Paul had with Peter in order to establish the truth, the liberty and the glory of sonship. If Peter could drop from it how much more we ourselves? We with the light that we have could fall away from it, but occupation with what God has in purpose, if we can focus on it and be retained in the sense of it, is an antidote to the attempts of the enemy to weaken the truth, the knowledge and the enjoyment of the best.

H.A.H. One of the key words in Galatians is 'walk', is it not? The young man in Luke 15 not only had the seal of sonship but he had the sandals, the power to walk in the liberty that was accorded to him.

R.W.F. Yes, and how much there is to be enjoyed in the Father's house! Think of this range of blessings: "blessed ... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ"; then there is reference to "holy and blameless before him in love". Then there is immediately the reference to sonship: "marked us out beforehand for adoption ... to himself". That is the first and foremost of the blessings, first and foremost in God's mind in purpose for His own.

J.C.E. Those blessings are all the fatness of the house.

R.W.F. Yes, very good.

E.C.B . It is sadly salutary to see how far the fall from sonship can go, for it seems that the Galatians were biting and devouring one another.

R.W.F . Yes, I think there is a real danger of that. I think we need to be realistic and practical; there is a real danger of that. If we fall away from the best we are capable of stumbling into the worst in our relationships with one another.

A.J.E.W. That emphasises the beautiful description that Mr Taylor gave to this chapter: Love at home.

R.W.F. Yes. I had in mind in Ephesians 3 "the Father ... of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named". One just had in mind the extent of that. This is a realm which is vast, in which we are not lost, but in which we may find and enjoy liberty. The liberty of sonship comes to its full fruition in the realm of the Father, where there is the knowledge of the love of the Christ, where there is capacity to apprehend fully "with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height". Who can say what is the measurement of the dimensions? They are finite but who could describe the fulness of what' God has in mind, not only for our blessing but for His enjoyment?

W.J.R.B. Is that emphasised in "rooted and grounded"? I was thinking of Isaiah, taking root downward and bearing fruit upward (see chap 37:31).

R.W.F. Well, I should not speak of having favourite passages of Scripture, but I think that is most attractive. We sometimes think that is entirely moral, that we take root downward, we are to be morally grounded; well, we are, that is true, but are our roots perceived as having their place in and drawing their strength and nourishment from the purpose of God? We take root downward, into the purpose of God, and bear fruit upward in sonship.

**LONDON**

**16 December 1984**

## **Key to initials**

*(All local unless otherwise stated)*

C.B. C.Beale; D.A.B. D.A.Burr; E.C.B. E.C.Burr; J.A.B. J.A.Burnett;  
W.J.R.B. W.J.R.Brodie, Ealing; J.C.E. J.C.Evershed; R.W.F.  
R.W.Flowerdew; J.S.G. J.S.Gray; D.J.H. D.J.Hutson; H.A.H.  
H.A.Hutson; E.O. E.Oliver; E.P. E.Palmer; G.A.P. G.A.Palmer;  
D.N.S. D.N.Smith, Chelmsford; A.J.E.W. A.J.E.Welch; B.W.W.  
B.W.Ward

## **MARRIAGE IN THE LORD**

### **A.J.Gardiner**

It has been desired that a statement should be made, by the Lord's help, as to the principles that are at issue in connection with those amongst us marrying those not breaking bread. The case which was mentioned in detail in the meetings last night has given rise to this exercise, coupled with the knowledge that similar cases have occurred from time to time both in London and elsewhere in this country, and also abroad, and it is felt that the Lord would draw our

attention to the seriousness of this matter. I would like to read three short scriptures: 1 Corinthians 7: 39; Numbers 36: 5-7; Amos 3: 3.

On the matter of a believer marrying an unbeliever scripture is abundantly clear that it is not to be contemplated for a moment. The second epistle to the Corinthians says, What part has a believer with an unbeliever? what communion has light with darkness? When God first brought light into this scene, He said it was good, and He divided the light from the darkness, and called the light Day and the darkness Night. Believers are sons of light and sons of day, unbelievers are of night and of darkness. There cannot possibly be any community between the two. One not having the Spirit has no capacity to enter into the things of God. It is most important to recognise that a believer is the Lord's absolutely. Scripture says, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's (Rom 14: 8), and it is an affront to the Lord's rights over us that, for instance, a believing woman should enter into marriage with an unbeliever and thus place herself under the authority of an unbeliever, and it is unthinkable that a believing man, who is intended to hold himself and his house for the Lord, as having been baptised to the Lord's name, should enter into partnership with, and bring into the matter of influencing and ruling his house, one not subject to the Lord. Hence, there should be no question that for a believer to enter into marriage with an unbeliever is absolutely contrary to the mind of God. It brings in an unholy link which ought never to be contemplated by a Christian.

But the matter is sometimes more subtle when the thought is to enter into the marriage bond with a Christian who is not walking in the full light (as, through grace, we are), and it is in that connection I have read the three scriptures.

The first brings in the point of view of the rights of the Lord in the matter, the second how it affects the saints, and the third how it affects the two concerned. In the first passage the apostle is dealing with the case of a sister who has been widowed. In point of fact the case that had to come before us yesterday was such a case, but the

principle holds good whether for a sister who has been widowed, or a sister who has never been married, or a brother - they are free to be married to whom they will, "only in the Lord". He stresses that the matter must be regulated by this consideration: "only in the Lord".

"In the Lord" as I understand it involves more than being merely a believer, it means that there is the practical recognition in what is being done of the rights of the Lord. The Lord Jesus has a sphere here on earth where His name is owned and His rights are practically recognised, and that sphere is described in Scripture as "in the Lord". In these days in which we live the Lord has intervened sovereignly by the assertion of what is due to His name, saying to the saints, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. (A.V.) He has brought in by means of the assertion of what is due to His name a sphere of recovered truth, and maintains it by virtue of the authority of His name, and we, through grace, have part in it, to the end that God should not be robbed of what is due to Him from His assembly. How can it be said that a believer is marrying in the Lord if he deliberately links himself with one who, whether it be through ignorance or not, is not in fact practically moving in relation to what the Lord has brought in and established on earth? As we withdraw from iniquity and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart we find ourselves in a position where the truth has been recovered, and in the maintenance here on earth of all that God is looking for from the assembly, and the Lord is preserving that by means of the power and authority attaching to His name. How can it be said the marriage is in the Lord if one who is outwardly in that sphere, who by the position taken up has acknowledged that he recognises what is due to the Lord's name, links himself with one outside that position, one who identifies himself or herself with features of the religious world, which definitely flouts the rights of the Lord Jesus, and definitely displaces the Holy Spirit? We need to bear in mind that this injunction "only in the Lord" is part of the epistle at the end of which the apostle says the things he writes are "the commandments of the Lord". It is not an optional matter. In the verse following the one read the apostle gives something which does not rank as a

'commandment'; he gives his own judgment as a spiritual man, but in the verse read he is laying down the great principle that marriage must be "in the Lord".

When we come to the passage in Numbers, the point raised there was as to the marriage of certain sisters, daughters of Zelophehad, who belonged to the tribe of Manasseh, and the chief fathers of the tribe were concerned that they should not marry outside their tribe, because if they did so their inheritance would be lost to the tribe, it would become merged in the inheritance of another tribe, and I believe we need to take account of that fact also. There is in this position which we occupy an element of sovereignty. All the saints are not in it. Many of the saints of God have their own portion in the inheritance, they enjoy the knowledge of God in the way of piety, they have their interest in the gospel, there are certain features of the inheritance which they enjoy, but there are those to whom it has been given, in the grace of God, to enjoy the greatest privileges that belong to the assembly, and that is our inheritance to be prized, and if anyone having a part in that inheritance links himself or herself with one who has no part in that particular feature of the inheritance, you will find the inevitable result is that what they have that is distinctively theirs becomes merged in something less.

The truth cannot be maintained at its height and in purity where there is an unequal link, but what is greatest will tend to sink down to the level of what is lower, and the Lord does not want that. Moses said, "The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well ... Let them marry to whom they think best: only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry". That is to say, if we, through grace, have part in that which is the choicest feature of the truth and the greatest privileges of Christianity, let us see to it that we hold it dear and cherish it. If we enter into any link, especially marriage, with one who has not a part in these things, the inevitable tendency will be for that which is best to be hindered, and such a one to drop to the level of that which is inferior.

In the third passage the Spirit of God raises this important issue - Can two walk together except they be agreed? What is marriage

but a walking together of two? What is there in it for the two concerned if they are not really together in it? As Peter says, "heirs together of the grace of life". If a brother or sister who has all the light and privilege which, through grace, we have, enters into a link with one who has not this light, the only basis of agreement will be that of surrendering the truth. I would urge that brethren should bear this constantly in mind, and as opportunity occurs, seek to present these things to those younger, for it is impossible for two to be agreed and walk together in an unequal yoke of this sort, except on the serious basis of surrendering that which is most precious. Think what it would mean for one who was in the enjoyment of the fellowship as we know it, to enter into this link with a partner with little or no real interest in these things. It would result in the most precious things being excluded from the home as regards any joint participation in them; the prayers together could not possibly take account of the divine interests as we know them; the saints could not happily be received to the home, for there would be no basis of communion with them. Hence the Spirit of God would leave the word with us - Can two walk together except they be agreed?

It may be that someone here might think the 7th chapter of 1 Corinthians warrants unequal yokes, where it says "What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" That is not the case at all, the sixth chapter of the second epistle makes that clear. The scripture in the first epistle contemplates the case of those who were married before conversion, and one of the two gets converted, and then there is grace from the Lord to go on in the position if the one unconverted is content to remain with the one converted. It is brought in to urge the husband or the wife who has been converted after marriage not to leave the wife or husband, as the case may be, but in no way warrants a believer entering into an unequal yoke at any time.

**LONDON**

**3 January 1939**

## REMEMBRANCES

It was a saying of J.N.D's that he did not preach well on any subject until he had preached forty times on it. (p.33) How true what Mr.D. says with reference to the woman at Philippi (Acts 16) who gave testimony to Paul's work, "The devil wanted to have a finger in the pie". (p.39)

J.N.D. used to say, "The twelve had not fulfilled the great commission. Paul did". (p.42) As J.N.D. has said of John 17 - "He first sets us as Himself in the presence of the Father, and then sets us as Himself in the presence of the world". (p.54)

J.N.D. makes John 21 a millennial scene. Peter was out of the current of the Lord's mind when he went fishing. (p.69)

J.N.D. says, and I believe it to be true, that it is on the earth, where He is not, that you remember His death. (p.75) Eternal life is (as Mr.D. says) "outside the senses", an "out-of-the-world condition of things". (p.107)

As Mr.Darby has said, His springs were in God: our springs naturally are in ourselves. (p.125) A humanity, as J.N.D. writes, which had its spring of action in God. (p.132)

J.N.D. used to say that we should not only go to Scripture for thoughts but that we should think in Scripture. (p.133)

J.N.D. used to say that anyone who would try to define God manifest in the flesh would soon fall into error on one side or the other. (p.134)

You have evidently two duties. One to your family, and another as the Lord's servant, and as J.N.D. says, "You cannot have two objects at the same time". (p.140)

J.N.D. used to say that Paul (in Philippians 3) was reaching on to everything, not perfected in anything yet. (p.146)

I remember a line of dear J.N.D's: The more you are in God's righteousness, the higher order will be your own practical

righteousness, or words to this effect. (p.162)

As J.N.D. has said, we cannot die ourselves, but as we bear about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, God rolls in death to help us. (p.194)

J.N.D. says that he is careful not to present a new idea in Scripture unless he has seen it in all its bearings with other Scriptures, and how every truth would be affected by it. (p.242)

J.N.D. said of --- that he was trying to explain with his mind eternal life, which must first be understood in the soul. (p.259)

Mr Darby's great power has been that he was imbued with the Word of God - the Spirit of scripture: his mind was dyed by it, therefore he must see things in the light of it. (p.264)

**(Letters of J.B.Stoney, Vol.1)**

## **THE CHILDREN'S RICHES**

Solomon was already a king when he said in prayer to his God, "I am but a little child". Actually he was in his late teens at the time.

He knew how much God loved the people over whom he had just begun to reign. God had said to him "Ask what I shall give thee".

What a reminder this is to us who know the gospel, that Jesus said to a poor blind beggar. "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Solomon could have asked for riches and so, I suppose, could Bartimaeus. But David's son asked for an understanding heart because he thought of God's great people, whilst the blind man asked for opened eyes so as to see David's greater Son. Truly both of them were rich towards God.

Israel's treasure in the thousand-year reign of Jesus over the earth will be the fear of the Lord and it is our treasure also now. His fear means that we refer everything to Him and not of course, that we are afraid of a God who has proved His love by sacrificing His Son and sending the Holy Spirit. The cost of redemption of just one

child's undying soul cannot be compared to silver and gold. These products of the earth are indeed valuable, but the deep and inexhaustible mine from which precious faith comes is the word of God. The treasure is won by hearkening to the word so that we may put our faith to work and enjoy the result.

To be taunted at school or elsewhere for belonging to the Lord Jesus is hard to bear but it is great riches. You will remember that the man of God, Moses, esteemed the reproach of the Christ as "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense". Suppose for a moment that such reproach could be put into one pan of a great pair of scales and all the attractive treasures of the world in the other! Can you say which side would go down and which would go up like emptiness?

**J.C.Evershed**