

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

"IT SHALL NOT REND"

CHASTENING AND DISCIPLINE

THE CHILDREN LONGED FOR

"IT SHALL NOT REND"

John 19: 23,24; Exodus 28: 31-35; John 21: 1-14

G.A.B. The connection between these scriptures will be evident to the brethren - each refers to what does not rend. I think, dear brethren, this is a vital side of the truth that we should lay hold of.

We live in a time of breakdown; not only breakdown around us, but I think we have to accept - especially those of us in middle years and older - that we have contributed in a very significant manner to the breakdown. It is a responsibility which does not lie quite so heavily on our younger brethren perhaps, but I think there is enough to keep most of us humble for the rest of our lives. However we live not only in times of breakdown but in times of recovery, and what we are recovered to is something which has not broken down, and it never can. There is that side of things in Christianity which is inviolate. I thought it might be of some profit to look at these three passages in that connection. First of all there is the Lord's body-coat. We might enquire together, reverently, what that might mean, and also as to where it might be found today. The garment of the high priest is similar in some ways but is perhaps more official as relating to the Lord's movements as Minister of the sanctuary in service Godward.

In John 21 we are back on familiar ground; there is breakdown again, and departure, but the Lord comes into the situation.

Immediately the Lord's directions are paid attention to and obeyed, there comes about this great blessing - Simon Peter went up and drew the net to the land full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty-three; and though there were so many the net was not rent".

R.D.P. I remember it being suggested once that the parting of His garments - four parts - was perhaps like the different sects of Christendom, but the body-coat was seamless; it was woven through the whole. It is a very fine suggestion. Is there something mysterious in the body-coat?

G.A.B. Yes, there is undoubtedly something mysterious, and, as I said, we need to be reverent in speaking of something so close to

the Lord's person, but this was not a random happening; it was not just something that the soldiers did, it was something foreordained.

It is the fulfilment of prophecy: it was prophesied in Psalm 22 that this would happen. God evidently intended it to happen in this way to convey something to us. As you say, there has been a certain separating, a parting of other items connected with the Lord, but this is something which God sovereignly prevented these soldiers from doing, from rending this body-coat, because of its significance.

D.J.W. Would it give us a sense of the whole truth as it is found in Him?

G.A.B. Yes, that is right. It is what is related closely to His Person - "woven through the whole from the top". I think there is some significance in that. What would you say about that, "from the top"?

N.T.M. I do not know. Is there some touch of His deity in it?

G.A.B. Yes, I am sure there is. There is a hymn we often sing which charms me: 'Lord, Thy glories brightly shine - Blessed Man, and yet divine.' (No.147) - think you have here the perfection of His manhood, yet His deity is involved in it in some mysterious way which baffles the human mind to explain.

D.J.W. Does it take us back to chapter 1, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (v 14), and then it goes on, "grace and truth subsists through Jesus Christ" (v 17). It is what has come within our range, is it not?

G.A.B. Quite so; it has come within our range in that this garment was actually handled by men. Alas, it fell into the hands of wicked men, but that only brings out the beauty of it, does it not, that wherever it went, into whatever hands it may have fallen, it was inviolate?

D.J.W. That is why I thought the word "subsists" might bear on it.

G.A.B. It is a very interesting word. As you know, there is a very extensive footnote on it, pointing out how grace and truth unite in Him. For proper English grammar you would want a plural verb, but the verb is singular. These features stand united in Christ; they are

woven through. Is that your thought, grace and truth are woven through?

D.J.W. Yes, I think Mr Darby said that if any feature of the truth stood out more than another in Christ it was grace, but every feature was woven through in that way in perfection in Him, was it not, and that has come within our range and subsists?

G.A.B. Yes, quite so. It subsists outside of ourselves. This does not depend on us; it has nothing to do with our behaviour, either our good behaviour or our bad behaviour. It has nothing to do with us at all; it is what relates to the blessed Person of our Lord Jesus.

D.J.W. It is not the outward garments - they were shared out - it is what is inward. It is not the public aspect of the testimony, it is what is private, it can be enjoyed in the inside, is that right?

G.A.B. That is right. It is what was - I say again, we speak with reverence - closest to the Lord's own Person.

J.McK. If we think of Joseph's coat of many colours, it was actually made by his father. Does that link with "from the top"?

G.A.B. Yes, that is beautiful; I think that is a very fine suggestion. No human mind had part in this, there is mystery in it. You can hardly do anything but bow in worship at the thought of such a Person as this - "woven through from the top". In the Song the loved one speaks of her head, her glorious lover, and she begins from the top. We were noticing in our local readings that it says of Absalom, who had a sort of counterfeit beauty, "there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him" (2 Sam 14: 25): it proceeded from beneath, it is a counterfeit idea, but as to Christ, His head is as the finest gold, it comes from above.

R.D.P. There is no reference to who took the body-coat here - "to each soldier a part", referring to His clothes. Though there is a reference to casting lots, there is no reference to where it went.

Would it be right for any company today to claim possession, you may say, of what this precious garment suggests?

G.A.B. No, that was one thing I hoped we might get some help about. There is a very great professing body which does claim it, as you well know: it claims to be the church on earth. (I am not referring to anything that has happened in recent years, I am referring to the great public body which asserts its right in every country of the world as being the universal church), but that is not where the body-coat is. Where do you think it is?

R.D.P. I would like some help on it, but it certainly does not seem to be identified with any person or any group of persons; for instance, it might have said, 'the soldiers took it', but it does not. I was thinking of David when he fled from Absalom; he took the ark with him, but then his heart smote him and he sent the ark back. He said, if Jehovah delight in me He will bring me again to see it and its habitation (see 2 Sam 15: 25); the ark did not belong exactly to David, it belonged in Jerusalem.

G.A.B. Yes, very good, the ark remained in its own environment. I think that is right.

W.S. Whilst this is unique to the Person of the Lord, would there be in any sense; a moral carrying forward of this with Paul when he speaks of "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4: 10); I am only thinking of the moral characteristics?

G.A.B. I think we might see that in our scripture in Exodus, where there is a hem to the garment. I like to think of this setting in John 19 as being distinctive and relating wholly to Christ.

N.T.M. There are some who say in these days that everything has gone. Is this the answer to it?

G.A.B. Yes, that is my exercise in suggesting this line of things. There is much which remains, and the reason it remains is because it does not depend on us at all; if it had depended on us it would have gone too, but this is something which God in His own sovereignty has guarded.

A.K.T. Does it relate in any sense to the headship of Christ? I was thinking of the two references in Colossians, "for in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell", (chap 1: 19), and then, "For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (chap 2: 9), and then the emphasis on headship in that chapter.

G.A.B. Yes, I think that would be right. What we have here relates to the cross; but the setting of it is not as important as the thing itself. Whether we think of the Lord in His pathway here, or whether we think of Him where He is now as exalted, His blessed Person remains the same; it is inviolate, and let us guard that. It says in the Song of Songs that three score mighty men surround Solomon's couch; let us be like that - alert to guard what belongs to Christ.

J.A.T. John writes from a unique standpoint. He really starts from the top, but in the Word becoming flesh is there a certain inseparableness about His divinity and yet His humanity? Man has tried to separate these things, we might say to put Him at a disadvantage, but it is impossible, is it not?

G.A.B. Yes. That is theology, to try and separate these things, to try and divide up, to discuss, as though the human mind could ever cope with anything like this, that is theology, and what a poor occupation it is for a child of God. What we are occupied with is Christ, the Person of Christ in all His uniqueness, and as you suggest, John's approach is so delightful, beginning from the top.

D.J.W. Is there a suggestion in the fact that it says the soldiers did these things, that no external power can break down this vesture? You were speaking of that side earlier.

G.A.B. Yes, that is right. Whatever they may have intended to do, what their motives were, is quite irrelevant.

N.T.M. There was a time when the ark went into Philistine land and they could not understand it; it cared for itself, it has been said. Is there anything of that here?

G.A.B. I would think that. I would just like to know how we can get at this today. No person or company can lay claim to it - that would

be a dreadful thing to do - nevertheless, it exists and is to be enjoyed by us, so there must be some way of laying hold of it.

G.A.K. Joseph's garment went back to the father dipped in blood, did it not?

G.A.B. Yes, quite so; it added yet another glory; 'Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail, Redemption's glory shed' (Hymn 235). The blood was added to it in that sense. But there was no harm done to this garment; it was not defiled, it was not rent, it seems that it is something that just cannot be rent, and it exists today in its spiritual meaning.

J.McK. So, following what you said that we would not claim it exclusively, is it not also important to realise that it does form a vital part of our fellowship, what we are committed to? That is we are committed to something in which the whole truth of the Person of Christ is treasured. There are areas of Christendom in which part of His glory is made much of; this is the whole thing, is it not?

G.A.B. Yes, exactly, and it would be fair to say that where one part of the glory of Christ is emphasised at the expense of others it leads to error; that has happened in certain sections of Christendom which we do not need to refer to in detail, but the brethren would be aware of that; certain companies make everything of one particular feature, and they fall into error. This is everything, woven through; it is a beautiful thought; there was not a seam, there was not a stitch out of place.

R.D.P. Would there be some link in our day with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit? I was thinking of the scripture, "who by the eternal Spirit offered himself" (Heb 9: 14). Would there in a certain sense be something of "himself" here? The Spirit, you might say, intimately connected with that offering of "himself", and then the Spirit having a certain charge in this day in relation to what is suited to Christ.

G.A.B. I think the Spirit would lead us to an appreciation of this and would help us to get into the detail of this woven work.

D.J.W. Is there a suggestion in the casting of lots that divine sovereignty enters into it? The next time is in relation to the making up of the twelve, is it not? There is completeness to be seen there too; is that the other side of it, the testimonial side of this coat?

G.A.B. Yes, I had not thought of that, but it sounds quite right to me. The great feature I see about it is that this stands inviolate irrespective of what men may do. I did just wonder about the next verse, "And by the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and the sister of his mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala" (v 25), and of course John is there as well, I was wondering, (the brethren can tell me whether I am right or not,) whether there is the nucleus of something there, a spiritual element which is capable of receiving the body-coat. Do you think that is right?

D.B. That is really the assembly, is it not?

G.A.B. These are the elements of the assembly. Obviously you do not have the whole assembly, or anything public, such as was set up at Pentecost, but you have the kind of material which is sympathetic to Christ.

D.J.W. The scripture that the assembly is the pillar and base of the truth would support that, would it not? That again is in a way an abstract idea, and yet it is to be found where it is found.

G.A.B. Yes, quite so, it is to be found somewhere. I think we have long finished with making claims; I trust we have anyway.

N.T.M. I think I can see perhaps more clearly what our brother meant when he connected it with headship. We do not have to make the Scriptures fit, we do not have to cobble them together with a seam of our own, but where the Lord's headship is known the truth will come out.

G.A.B. Yes, so our opening hymn was very appropriate when you think back on it in that light. 'Lord Jesus Christ; our living Head' (No.199): everything flows from Him. But if you make a garment such as you are wearing now, it has seams, and the pattern inevitably fails to match, but this was woven through from the top,

the whole was woven through, there was no flaw, there was no discrepancy in that garment. It is beautiful, and if we relate ourselves to the headship of Christ our gatherings will flow with a beauty which can only come from a divine source; you speak of cobbling things together - that is our natural minds beginning to intervene and that only spoils everything.

R.D.P. John writes his gospel as an admirer of Christ. He looks at Him in every phase of His service - all the things that He said, he looks at Him as the Sufferer here, and at the end he says, there are many other things that Jesus did. Is that something of its being woven through the whole from the top? He says the world would not contain the books written.

G.A.B. Yes, that is right. I think that is a lovely touch . Time goes on and we had better look at the next scripture. There are certain similarities between the cloak of the ephod and the body-coat, but this is worn by the high priest when he goes in to serve before God; it might have a more official bearing. "Its opening for the head shall be in the midst thereof" - I was looking at the footnote to "head", it says, or 'the opening above'; perhaps there is a Colossian touch there.

R.D.P. It is almost as if the opening for the head was its strongest point. It says "as the opening of a coat of mail, it shall be in it - it shall not rend", as if this thought of headship that has been brought in, in a certain sense in the priest, this priestly garment, is its strongest point.

G.A.8. Yes, it almost seems incongruous that something in a priestly garment should be referred to as a coat of mail; "as the opening of a coat of mail". A spiritual mind can grasp that this is something which has to be resolutely defended and held to.

A.K.T. Do you get the feeling that headship can never break down? I mean that in what is down here, there may be failure, breakdown - there has been - ruin, but what is up there cannot be changed can it?

G.A.B. There is tremendous comfort for us in that I think. You look back over your own history, the history of your local meeting, the

company that we have been with, what a history it has been! We might tend to become overwhelmed - that is what concerns me at times, the tendency to become overwhelmed with all the failures and disasters that we have had a part in - but here is something which cannot and never will break down because it relates to the Person of Christ and does not depend on our experience at all. It has something to do with our experience I suppose in a positive sense, because we can experience, as we are experiencing now something of the headship of Christ as we enquire together, but it has nothing to do with our failures.

D.B. Would you say something about its being "all of blue"?

G.A.B. You say something about it, we are enquiring together; this is where the headship of Christ is operating, is it not?

D.B. Well, would it be what is heavenly "all of blue"; we sometimes try and mix what is earthly and what is heavenly; but do we not need our eyes lifting constantly to what is "all of blue", all heavenly?

G.A.B. Yes, I think that is fine. The Israelites were to wear a ribbon of blue but when you come to Christ, it is "all of blue". We have natural responsibilities, we have many matters to work out in our lives which are to be carried out in righteousness, but they are not in themselves heavenly - what relates to our families and so on, but that is not heavenly; but you turn to Christ and you see there a Man who was altogether what He said He was; "all of blue", that is beautiful.

R.D.P. "And it shall be on Aaron for service ... when he goeth into the sanctuary ... and when he cometh out". Would you help us as to the setting of this cloak of the ephod?

G.A.B. I need help, but this, of course, is a type. I think our great High Priest has gone in: that for this present time in which we are, He is in there, do you think?

R.D.P. Yes, I was thinking of it in application really. There is a sound associated with His movements; in other words there is a certainty about His movements and I suppose that even when he

was in the sanctuary when you may say he could not be seen, He could be heard, the bell would make a sound.

G.A.B. Yes that is what it says, specifically, that this sound may be heard.

N.T.M. It links with Pentecost, does it?

G.A.B. Yes, that brings us back to the earlier remark - the hem, would involve the saints, would it? You had something to say about that.

W.S. I wondered, as I said earlier, if the moral features are seen in the saints, seen in Paul. You referred to the footnote in John 1, as to grace and truth going together, and Mr Darby says further on in the note 'but in revelation and actual existence down here. But its so taking place supposes its continuance'. If there is what is unique in Christ there is to be some continuance in the saints; do you think that?

G.A.B. Exactly, so that just as surely as the High Priest is in the sanctuary, there will be the sound of these golden bells down here.

D.J.W. Is there a suggestion that this ephod maintains the pomegranate and the bell? The golden bell would suggest a heavenly testimony, would it not, and the pomegranate the unity of the saints? Is this the way in which what is down here is maintained with what is in keeping with what is up there?

G.A.B. Exactly, and it says, "a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate". There is one bell for one pomegranate, no more and no less.

W.S. Very simply it is again Colossians, is it not, Christ on high as Head, and the body down here?

G.A.B. Yes, I think that is what it is.

G.R. Do you think Paul would have had this in mind when he said "Yet the firm foundation of God stands", 2 Tim 2: 19?

G.A.B. Yes, I think that is right; that fits into the background of breakdown and disaster. There is something which is inviolate; I

think that helps.

J.McK. This passage in Exodus seems to strengthen your point about what is inviolate. The end of verse 32 says, "it shall not rend". In John 19 they say to one another, "let us not rend it", as if that body-coat was, speaking very carefully, in an area of danger but here it is the priest and it is the inside view and the strength seems to be inherent in the garment - "it shall not rend".

G.A.B. That is very interesting. This is really the high priest in the presence of God; that is where He is now, and there is no danger.

But the beauty of it is that there is no danger to the bells and the pomegranates in the hem either; they are down here. I think I am saying what is right; it has been applied in this way before. What is down here is related to what is in the presence of God in Christ, and as surely as He moves there, the sound will be heard down here.

R.D.P. You made a point that there was a bell to a pomegranate. What had you in mind as to that?

G.A.B. I was just wondering about Peter and John, two men found quite often together in the testimony. Peter was something like a bell do you think, and John might be like a pomegranate. These two features need to be held together in balance - Peter is the active side, the preacher, minister, servant, the leader, and how much that is needed! It involves the heavenly testimony going out, and as has been said, it was heard first at Pentecost; but then John is more the family man and the pomegranate involves all these different units. I suppose we all know that a pomegranate is a fruit which is really just full of seeds, packed full of seeds, and they are all closely bound together in one entity, and that is something like John's side. I hope I am not being too imaginative, but that is how it seems to me.

R.D.P. It seems from the scriptures that the bell - if you like, the sound today - is particularly related to what is collective, what the Spirit says to the assemblies and so on.

G.A.B. I would think so. When you stand up to preach you are doing so as an individual, but you do it with the backing of your brethren. Peter stood up with the eleven, did he not?

R.D.P. Yes, and the preaching proceeds out from the house too, you have that behind you and before you.

G.A.B. Exactly. There could be no preaching, there was no preaching until the house was established; that is what you have in mind presumably.

N.T.M. We must not rend the bell from the pomegranate, neither must we rend the pomegranate from the bell; we must keep these two things together.

G.A.B. Yes, and Paul might come into it later too. You remember when Peter had gone off a bit and Paul had to put him right he speaks of our beloved brother Paul. There is no rent to be permitted between servants; if that happens, and it has happened, it is disaster.

A.K.T. Would the Spirit come into this? You mentioned Pentecost: I was thinking of John 16; "the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth" (v 13), the full thought, and then "but whatsoever he shall hear he shall speak; and he will announce to you what is coming". Is there some connection therefore between the clear sound and the bell?

G.A.B. Yes, I am sure of that. There could be no sound going out without the Spirit. As has been pointed out there was no preaching, there was no ministry before the house was established down here and the Spirit came. So the Spirit gives a beautiful oneness and blend to everything.

J.S.P. I was wondering, in the light of what was said as to the bell and the pomegranate in the testimony, whether some thought of the service of God does not enter into it too - the other side, the priest going into the tabernacle. Is there the thought of fruitfulness for God on the part of those of us who can contribute to the service? Then there is the sound of the golden bell which is pleasurable to the heart of God as well as fruitfulness. Do you think that is right?

G.A.B. Yes, that is right. I have said this before - it is the nearest thing we have to music in the Mosaic system, the golden bell; there

is something very mellow about it.

J.S.P. Something for the divine pleasure, is there not, gold suggesting what is divine?

G.A.B. Yes, I think this might help us to hold everything in proportion, because in days past in the history of the testimony there has been a division of thought amongst the brethren; that happened before the Glanton trouble you will remember, there were the assembly men and there were the gospel men, and it led to a rift.

There should be no division surely, it is all one thing; it is Christ moving where He is in the presence of God that causes these bells to give forth their sound, so that the servant should be able to preach, and he should be able to help the saints in the service of God, it is all one thing, is it not? The gifts are complementary to each other.

K.M. The word that Pharaoh gave to the Egyptians was, Go to Joseph. It was the same thing that Jacob saw, that there was grain in Egypt, it was the same message; it was a certain sound, Go to Joseph.

G.A.B. I think that is helpful. At our peril we try to divide things up. The servant's objective is to draw attention to Christ always, and that can have only one result.

T.F. Could you say something about "And its opening for the head shall be in the midst thereof"?

G.A.B. Well, what would you say?

T.F. I was just thinking about what was said as to what is for God, whether there is some link with Hebrews "in the midst of the assembly". Perhaps you would say.

G.A.B. I think that is right. Christ is the centre and everything flows from His headship "in the midst" - I think that is good.

R.D.P. The sound of the bell would depend on the movements of the priest, would it not? Christ's movements, you may say, have not had to change because of the years of break down; even in a day to come it says He shall not make haste. I was thinking of the

measured tread of Jesus when he was here; His movements in the sanctuary, even though you may say, the church publicly is broken and torn by schisms everywhere, but in His movements there is no panic, no rush. There would be an evenness about the sound.

G.A.B. Yes - looking on Jesus as He walked - that is beautiful.

P.J.H. What has been said about the pomegranates and the golden bells, is striking. Is there a sense of "The Spirit and the bride say, Come"? It is the sound of the bell, and again the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land; there is the unity with what is above, is there, it is our land?

G.A.B. Yes, I think that is lovely. There is a delightful oneness about it all, a blending together.

The detail of this next passage is known to the brethren. Peter, leader that he was, led the other disciples on a line which, though it was not evil was not the way that the Lord had indicated, and, of course, it was all fruitless. Then the Lord appears, "And early morn already breaking, Jesus stood on the shore".

D.B. Does this line come in as we get disappointed with the breakdown?

G.A.B. Yes, I believe that; you turn away from yourself, do you not, in a certain sense? But have you something more in mind about that.

D.B. I was thinking of the failure that had come in with Peter and he had obviously got thoroughly down with it, and so he goes back to what had occupied him before, but the Lord in His gracious service brings him back because He had need of him. Is that not a great comfort?

G.A.B. Yes. I do not suppose there is any servant, in the New Testament at least, of whom more failure is recorded than Peter. I have wondered why it should be, that one man should be singled out for the recording of so many failures. After all, you would not like all your failures to be written down for everybody to read, would you? But I conclude that the Lord knew His man and He knew that Peter

could take it. Peter is a man of such sterling worth that the Lord takes him up and records all this for our benefit, and Peter of course, comes through.

T.W. Does he get adjusted when he girds himself with his overcoat?

G.A.B. He is making a move in the right direction. It is John of course who says, "It is the Lord". John is the one who is nearest the Lord. That happened before, you remember - Peter had to make a sign to John to ask; John was nearest. But then Peter is the active one always; when he gets the indication that it is the Lord he moves, and recovery is of course quick. It was not a serious departure in the sense of any evil coming in, but rather a reverting to a line of human expediency.

T.W. We have been speaking about the garments. This was another garment, was it not? It usually distinguishes the person, as it did with Christ.

G.A.B. Yes, this was for protection I suppose in a difficult time, but the great thing is that Peter makes the move and the Lord's commandments are obeyed, and then there is this great result, one hundred and fifty-three great fishes.

R.D.P. What is your impression of what the net would speak of?

G.A.B. I was wondering if you have one here in this locality. If you got one hundred and fifty-three great fishes, would you be able to handle them?

R.D.P. I was wondering that; it is a great result at the end I think (there is something said in ministry about that). The net is a series of threads joined together and it is not rent. I would just like you to say how you apply the net today.

G.A.B. I could only say something for enquiry, but there must be something in our local meetings which answers to this.

R.D.P. It seems to me that the strength of the net is in the whole; it is not in any one of its cords particularly but in its constitution is the strength of the net. I wondered if it is what there is down here and bears upon the fellowship perhaps, but certainly in John's way of

writing it would involve what is joined together in a bond that will not break, which must be affection, it must involve love; but you say, please?

G.A.B. I think that is good and going back to John 19, in these persons gathered round the cross there would be something of that character; they come right through without a break.

P.H.H. Peter tried to act independently of the net; I am going to fish, whether any one is coming with me, I am going to fish. Certain ones did go with him, but it is a big temptation for men of gift and ability to act independently, would you say?

G.A.B. Yes, Peter was what we might call a born leader, that is why the Lord gave him that place. He was the kind of man who has the ability to lead, and he is first of the apostles. How great the danger is! It brings out, I think, the need for being constantly related to Christ as Head; this has come up already, the headship of Christ; the need particularly for servants to relate themselves to that. If a servant relates himself to Christ as Head, then his relations with other servants will be clear.

D.J.W. Is it significant that it says "drew the net to the land"? Does it look to our day, the end of the dispensation, great fishes; not necessary quantity but quality?

G.A.B. Yes, that is right, and yet it was a fair number too, because it says, "and though there were so many, the net was not rent". You would be glad to see one hundred and fifty-three coming in here, would you not?

D.B. It does not say what sort they were, they were glad of every one.

G.A.B. Yes, very good, they were all great, as you say, you are not told in any detail as to it, and every saint of God is different, they have all had their own dealings with God and with Christ, and they have all come different ways - perhaps through much sorrow - but every one is great in the sense of being the product of the work of God and the work of Christ personally.

W.S. Without our being imaginative, Peter must have thought back to the earlier occasion when his net broke, "And their net broke" Luke 5: 6.

G.A.B. Yes, exactly, that happens on the responsible side; if we have anything to do with it, it is sure to break down.

R.D.P. They had been using the net in a fruitless way, because the Lord's word to them was to cast it on the right side of the ship. I wondered in a certain sense whether we might be - certainly in our thinking - using what the net would speak of perhaps in a fruitless way, and yet its capacity is under the Lord's direction; in a certain sense it is almost limit less, the ship would sink before the net would break?

G.A.B. Yes, I think that is the whole point; it is His commandment. After all, the abundance of the seas is in His hand and He can bring in any number, but the question is whether we would be able to cope with it.

R.D.P. Sometimes persons say they get nothing from the meetings; we have had it recently, nearby here, and there is nothing more disheartening, you may say, than drawing the net and bringing up nothing. And yet it is so near, at the other side of the ship there was this great haul of fishes. I wondered whether we might be encouraged to be under His touch and His hand as to what there is by way of being able to bring in this tremendous capacity.

G.A.B. Yes, that is right. The Lord could have sent the fish round to the other side of the ship to where they were fishing if He had wanted to, but the point is His direction; they had to learn that their activities must be under His direction if they were going to achieve anything.

R.D.P. Yes, we must not think that the fellowship is just an automatic thing. It involves exercise, it involves being in relation to Him; persons you may say have trawled with the fellowship, drawn nothing and gone away, and yet it is capable of holding what is of God at the present time.

J.A.T. Anything that is resultful must be connected with divine persons, and the divine nature. That underlies everything; does it not, not necessarily what we do? Do you think we need to be more governed by love - even to brotherly love you need to add love?

G.A.B. Yes, quite so. You have pretty well summed up what my exercise was in this reading, it is more what there is on the divine side that we can draw on rather than exert our own activities however well meant they may be. All that we are asked to do is to relate ourselves to what the Lord is doing and then the blessing will come; and though there were so many, it says, the net was not rent.

D.J.W. This number seems to suggest that the two sides are held together, one hundred and fifty-three being the three threes and the twelve twelves. The three refers to the Trinity, does it not, and the twelve is perfection in administration; the answer down here in perfection referring to the holy city.

G.A.B. Well, I suppose there is a great deal in that, though it is beyond me. But it is a substantial number, as was said earlier, though it is not a huge number. It is not like Pentecost where you have three thousand at once. Those days will never come back, but one hundred and fifty-three is a substantial number of substantial fish and the great thing is that the net was not rent.

N.T.M. Is there any sense in which, perhaps, we should be more aware of what God may be doing?

G.A.B. I am sure you are right and perhaps you could help us as to how we could be more aware.

N.T.M. I do not know unless it is by the sound that comes from the sanctuary?

G.A.B. Very good, that is right, being related to Him in His movements and His activities. That is what happened in John 21 after the departure; they related themselves to what the Lord was doing and then they were in line for blessing.

J.McK. We often pray for recovery; the question may be as to how much the Lord can trust us with it.

G.A.B. That is just what I am feeling, whether we have a net of this quality in our localities. I am not saying to the brethren that they do not, but it is a question we might well ask ourselves.

BIRMINGHAM

10 May 1986

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CHASTENING AND DISCIPLINE

W.Chesterfield

**Hebrews 12: 5-11; Revelation 3: 14,19,20; Malachi 3: 1-4;
Hebrews 11: 5**

It is evident, dear brethren, that the thought of chastening and discipline is in mind in these passages we have read. I think if we take account of the condition among the saints at the present time we shall be impressed with the amount of discipline there is. So many things are current which we should say are naturally adverse, such as sickness and bereavement and disappointment and other things, including church sorrows and some under assembly discipline. We think of all these matters as coming alongside the rich ministry that we are receiving, wonderful ministry, as rich perhaps as ever the saints have known, and alongside of it these testing matters which it is divinely intended that we should all feel and feel together, because body feelings are promoted as these things are rightly felt.

It says "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it", (1 Corinthians 12: 26). So these three passages have been read as referring to the discipline of God, perhaps the Father in the first one and the Son in the second and the Holy Spirit in the third. God may help in saying a word on these passages.

The first is something that is general among the saints as we come to the knowledge of God as Father through the gospel, because He deals with sons. It says "Who is the son that the father chastens not?" It is a great matter to come to sonship in that way in the gospel. "Ye are all God's sons" it says in Galatians "by faith in Christ Jesus", (Galatians 3: 26). God is pleased in the gospel to set forth His thought for man that he should be brought into the relationship of a son with God. That is the idea of the Father in grace. Not only meeting all our need in the way of our sins and guilt and condition in the precious death of Christ, but bestowing upon us this place of privilege and relationship as sons. So that this scripture contemplates what might be called the early experience of

chastening. And so it says "Who is the son that the father chastens not?". We must look for chastening, which is the confirmation of the relationship, God confirming His love to us, because it is not only the relationship He has in mind to bring us into and in His grace bestows upon us as a matter of light in our souls, but He has in mind a state of holiness so that He can have pleasure in His sons.

So chastening comes in and it says "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when reproved by him; for who the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives". This is quoted from the book of Proverbs (chap 3: 11) but the idea of scourging is added, something severe, showing the intensity of the love that would bring about conditions that are pleasurable to God and suitable to Him. "In order to the partaking of his holiness" it says. So that when we come to the New Testament there is this additional thought of love's severity - which we may say indicates love's intensity. The Father has not only come out in grace, that is God has come out in grace as Father to secure us and give us a place of sonship, but that we might be in accord with Himself and be partakers of His holiness - a wonderful thought and a great substantial thought. The note says 'the quality itself', what God is Himself in His nature in holiness, He is set to secure in each of His saints. But then the scripture indicates the matter of how we may regard His dealings. We may faint under them or we may despise them. There seem to be three things in the passage, firstly that we might despise them, that is we are indifferent. God may be bringing things in upon us to test us and discipline us but we may despise them, or ignore them and go on in our own self-will. That is one danger. The second is that we may faint, may be crushed under things, attempting to bear them in our own strength and not connecting them with the love that would chasten. We find that if we attempt to bear things ourselves and fail to get to God about them, we get crushed and faint, ready to give up. But the third and the profitable attitude is that we are in subjection to the Father of spirits and are exercised, for it says "No chastening at the time seems to be matter of joy, but of grief; but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of

righteousness to those exercised by it". So that these great matters of holiness and righteousness are to mark the saints, and the blessed God as Father in His consideration for us in the intensity of His love, would secure them in us - those great qualities that characterise Himself so that we might not only be pleasurable to Him but rightly represent Him as His sons. So what an appeal it is to us.

"Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" It is all in view of our living spiritually and also being intelligent. The Father of spirits, I take it, would suggest to us that God would have us understanding His ways so that we are not despising, we are not fainting but we are understanding, being intelligent in what He is doing and are with Him in it. As we are in communion we shall realise the need of the discipline that comes, the particular discipline that we need in view of the end that He has before Him so that we should be understanding and that in result we might be characterised by righteousness and holiness and truth - the traits of the new man. (Eph 4: 24).

Then in the passage in Revelation the Lord Jesus is the speaker, speaking to His assembly "These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness". It is remarkable that the discipline of the Lord comes in in the closing phase of the church's history. As we well know the last four churches go on together, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. We know that Laodicea means indifference. It is the view of the assembly in carelessness and indifference, especially to the Lord. He says "I would thou wert cold or hot". It is a question as to His feelings, as to whether we are really with Him in warm affection. The Lord speaks here of what is lukewarm, of what is nauseous to Himself in the responsible body, but He is concerned with each individual each one in the midst of the profession. The Lord knows His own and so He says "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love". I understand the word used for love here is the word '*phileo*'. It means a certain attractiveness in the one loved and how touching that is and beautiful, that there is something in each saint, though mixed up with this condition of the assembly that is distressing to the Lord, (and which He will eventually spue out

of His mouth) that has at some time or other responded to Him. So He takes such a one in hand for discipline so that they might be zealous and repent, get warm in their affections, judge themselves and get clear of this system of indifference.

He presents Himself as standing at the door knocking. "If any one hear my voice" He says "and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me". There seems to be a suggestion of the Lord's supper. How the Lord would nourish our affections and draw us to Himself as we partake of the Lord's supper. How wonderfully it has been recovered in its true character and conditions in our day. So that He would bring us into what is positive and stir us up, and as being zealous and repenting He would draw us into His own company. I believe it is that He would recover us to the position of witness. He presents Himself to that assembly as the faithful and true witness. What a need there is at the present time of faithful and true witness when we think of the state of Christendom, the indifference there is to Christ; His name taken in profession and with this world, but the witness is first of all a separate person and the Lord would bring us into separation from all that is contrary to His name, so that as revived and nourished by His grace we might be able to stand with Him as the faithful and true Witness, standing by every feature of the truth. A wonderful position the Lord takes up! If the assembly has failed, He Himself maintains everything at its full standard, every item of the truth is maintained in His blessed Person, as Paul says "as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4: 21). He is not only the faithful and true Witness but another scene and order of things altogether has its beginning in Him; He is the "beginning of the creation of God". So that He would secure us to stand with Him and to witness for Him in the time of His absence and His chastening service in love is to help us in this way. What precious words! "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love". So let us be encouraged for chastening is an evidence of the Lord's love, as it is also an evidence of the Father's love and an evidence of the love of the blessed Spirit.

In Malachi we have very testing conditions described. There is divine activity in chastening. One ventures to connect this with the blessed Spirit, "the Angel of the covenant", it says, "will suddenly come to his temple". It is a matter of the service of God here and the Spirit's discipline in order that the service of God might be recovered and maintained in its purity. It is a searching matter and the very language used shows how very searching a matter it is. The idea of fire is brought in first of all. "He will be like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' lye. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he will purify the children of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver; and they shall offer unto Jehovah an oblation in righteousness". It is obvious that the saints here are viewed as in the service of God, the tribe of Levi was especially entrusted with the outward service, they were given to the priests to carry out the outward side of the service. And so it is with the saints as such that the Holy Spirit is engaged in this matter of refining and purification. What great and precious thoughts are in mind in the Spirit's service to us on the line of chastening. We are made to feel how much there is to be removed from us. You get the value of the saints - their value is there, the gold and the silver - but there are conditions that call for cleansing, call for refining and purification, two great and precious thoughts that we believe the Holy Spirit is really bringing about among the saints, a pure and refined condition of things among the Lord's people, the children of Levi, in view of the service of God being recovered and maintained. The very end conditions are depicted in this book. We have had it much before us in ministry but see how far things have departed, God being robbed and so on, but think of the Spirit's service, how He has come into view come in amongst us and made Himself know a peculiar way universally, but His coming in has brought in much in the way of discipline, the refining process, the process of purification, but how we should welcome it because it is an evidence of the intensity of divine love to bring about these refined and purified conditions among the saints so that the service of God might be pleasing to Him. Think of God being able to say the oblation of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant to Him. It points to the recovery of features of Pentecostal and Pauline days, Think of

the service of a divine Person to bring this about so that God might have His pleasure. I believe all these instances of chastening are in view of in divine pleasure, God is set to bring about what is pleasing to Himself in the saints.

This links up with the passage in Hebrews 11 which we read as to Enoch. It says of him that "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he has the testimony that he had pleased God". We think of Enoch, his name means 'disciplined' or 'chastened'. What a man he was, standing out in that list in Genesis 5 of the descendants of Seth, a man of another order. How pleased God was with him! The idea of divine pleasure and God appropriating, so to speak, the man that could walk with Him and enter into all His thoughts. What adjustments and discipline there must have been for Enoch. He represents one who walked with God in the ordinary circumstances of his life and pathway, a family man, yet walking with God and I believe he represents one who was fully disciplined, indeed his name means that, 'disciplined' or 'chastened' 'taught', because there is divine teaching in the chastening. God would teach us, He would have us fully educated in His own thoughts and in the truth and the idea of walking involves communion. Enoch was one who walked with God and as the passage in Hebrews tells us "Before his translation he has the testimony that he had pleased God".

Well, dear brethren, if the present discipline is an indication that God is working quickly at the end to translate the saints, it is a stimulating and encouraging thought for us, by way of the many sorrows and trials, church sorrows especially. Think of all the chastening and discipline that comes in into such places as we have recently heard of, what distress for the saints! how great the tendency to faint in or despise it. We all want to get the gain of it, to take it home each to ourselves, to get the good of the chastening and teaching so that we might learn how to take things up in the power of the Spirit of God, whether it be in our own pathways or circumstances or households, or whether it be in the service of the

blessed God, so that we might qualify for the Spirit's commendation before translation that we have been pleasing to God. May the Lord help us to have this before us, to accept the discipline, to understand, to come into the gain of it so that the blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit may have His pleasure in us and in all His saints.

LONDON

4 September 1956

THE CHILDREN LONGED FOR

Older children who are diligent in reading both the Old and New Testaments may remember the solemn verse in the prophet Hosea, "Ephraim is joined to idols: leave him alone". How thankful those people, young and old, whom Ephraim represents should feel that God did not say, 'I will leave him alone'! In fact whilst Ephraim was unfaithful his God still yearned for him. He is able to do what no one else could ever do, and at length in God's ways Ephraim said, "What have I any more to do with idols?" He also said that he was like a green fir-tree. This is interesting because fir-trees from Lebanon helped to build God's house, the Temple. His house now is a spiritual one made up of believers who have the Holy Spirit.

In the types of Scripture Ephraim stands for all those people who make up their minds to do just those things that please themselves and despise God's rights over them and indeed their own blessings too. As to actual idol worshippers, of whom there must be in the world many millions, we have to leave them to God's mercies which are unknown to us and are spoken of as 'uncovenanted'. Suffice it for ourselves as believers on the Lord Jesus that He, in love for us was 'alone' when the Sin-bearer and forsaken by a righteous God. Even the soldier who offered Him drink upon a sponge said "Let alone".

Some hundreds of years ago, at a time when there was in Europe a fresh interest in the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus, many people were prepared thankfully to confess that salvation was to be known by faith in Him alone. However some other persons required that the believer must provide some work of his own towards his salvation. There were even amongst rulers of countries public discussions of the matter. To one of these a prince sent his ambassadors with this message, 'See that you bring back the little word 'alone'; do not dare to return without it'. They at least should maintain that Christ's work was - and is - sufficient! Maybe the prince had in mind the verse of Scripture, "but to him who does not

work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness". Is it reckoned to you?

J.C.Evershed