

A
WORD
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SEASON

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MAINTAINING THE LEVEL

1 Corinthians 6: 11; 19; 2 Corinthians 1: 9-22; 1 Corinthians 1: 26

R.T. In the way we so often speak of the Corinthians, it may be somewhat of a surprise that Paul writes to them these verses that we read, seeking as he does in the midst of difficult conditions to help the saints to rise to the true standing and place that divine love has placed them in. He says to them elsewhere, “do ye not recognise yourselves”, 2 Cor 13: 5. There is a danger of working and operating at a level lower than what divine grace has called us into the enjoyment of. It says, “Do ye not know?”; these are gentle rebukes, and I feel that the day we are in calls for us to be somewhat alerted as to the divine mind about us. There is no doubt that the enemy’s strong attack today is to undermine the truth and distinctiveness of Christianity, and the truth that has been recovered as to the assembly as a heavenly vessel. Very insidiously Satan is working and the danger is that we operate at a level lower than what is proper to us as partakers of the heavenly calling.

I wondered whether we might look at these verses to encourage our hearts as to how Paul in the first part we read reminds them that they have been washed. God has operated sovereignly and powerfully from His own side to clear us from a line of things that is downward all the time and to bring us into an area where we are in liberty to enjoy divine favour. He speaks in the second passage of establishing them. God does that, irrespective of our condition and the conditions we are in, God has operated to establish us in Christ and He has given us the resources that we may be so maintained. Christ has been made to us. There is not only what we have been called into but God has provided the resources and power that we may be maintained in darkening days in the joy, and expression too among us, of what God’s thoughts are.

He begins here with, “ye have been washed”. He takes them back to divine operations in us. God in His own mercy intervened to separate us from a line of things that was going on to perdition, but

he says, “ye have been”. At times the Lord has to take us back to certain beginnings with us. We may get into a routine that is not truly proper to the dignity of our calling, but he says some of you were such, but you should not be that now. Every resource came in from God’s side to separate us from a line of things that was described in those previous verses. We are still in these bodies, still in the condition as in flesh, tempted in these things, but he says, “ye have been washed”. I think we should be affected by the way divine favour and blessing have come in to separate us and call us into another order of things and to be in the enjoyment of it. I trust the Lord will strengthen our hearts and encourage our affections as we proceed into this area of heavenly blessing and enjoyment to be among us now.

E.C.B. Do you think there is a danger of our acquiescing in a lower level because it requires application to maintain it?

R.T. I think it is a very real danger at the moment and I feel for our younger brethren. Maybe they see things that are happening that should not be happening. Paul takes the Corinthians back here – “ye have been washed”, that was at great cost. God operated in His love to wash us from one line, and he says, “ye have been sanctified”. He did not wash you to leave you to become defiled again, but he says, “ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified”. These are steps of majesty, God operated and did these from His own side and He would strengthen us today in an area of things into which He has called us that we may prove the resources and power of His grace for our own blessing, but I think also “for glory to God by us”. There are persons here in these conditions who are so different that there is glory to God by them.

D.J.H. Mr. Darby gives a note as to “washed”. It is emphatic, ‘washed from’ – so that we need not, in that sense, be concerned as to what it is we are washed from, or occupied with that, but it has been completely met at such infinite cost.

R.T. I think that is to encourage our hearts and as emphasised in the second scripture, God did it! He operated from His own side. It is somewhat of a rebuke and yet a great encouragement to these Corinthians and would be to us that we have been washed. I think if we appreciated that and all that was meant in it we would be careful as to our conduct. If you have been washed you are refreshed, you are clean and you are at liberty.

D.J.H. So this “washed” and “sanctified” would be that God might be glorified in our bodies.

R.T. I think so. He has set us apart. The very word sanctified means set apart for holy purposes. Think of divine grace coming in to set us apart from a course of things that has been dealt with, but it may be that we settle for a lower level. Sanctification involves that we do not settle for a lower level but we are in the enjoyment of what we have been set apart to.

W.L. Paul starts that way, a very high and dignified level, “the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints”, 1 Co. 1: 2.

R.T. Do you think that about your local meeting? There are a few there and we are few in many places and we may get to know each other at a lower level of things, and think about others after the flesh. We know of things that we should forget, but Paul is addressing them from the divine side. First of all we need to enjoy it for ourselves. If we do not enjoy, for ourselves, some sense of the divine calling and the place that grace has set us in we will not do it for our brethren. It is very individual, you have been washed individually and sanctified and justified. These are all individual matters that we need to enjoy experimentally so that we are able to regard our local company and brethren as acting in the light and walking in the grace of the assembly of God in the place.

E.C.B. These things in verse 11 are all included in the preaching of the gospel: therefore the maintenance of the quality of the preaching amongst us would help to sustain us in what you have in mind.

R.T. So the need for younger brethren, brothers especially, being grounded in these things. There is a need for quality in the preaching. The preaching is not only for the forgiveness of our sins. That is basic and must always be there, and I think the blood of Jesus Christ and all that has been effected by it needs to be in all our preachings, but the teaching of what we are speaking of needs to come into it also, that the gospel was to separate us. The gospel came to them in Egypt but it was in view of movement into the promises and thoughts of divine purpose.

D.A.B. I have been struck by the way that Paul speaks about the individuals in Corinth. We sometimes refer to those he names, but there are some he does not name as well, like the brother who sanctifies an unbelieving wife and whose children are holy (see 1 Cor 7: 14), and the brother for whom Christ died (see 1 Cor 8: 11). It would reflect what the Lord had spoken to him about as to the much people in the city. It gave him a value for the individuals known and unknown.

R.T. I have often thought of that, Paul must have said to the Lord a few times, Where are they? Are these them? He saw them in other circumstances, but he held to what God said. But we have to enjoy it ourselves. Paul was in the enjoyment of it himself, he knew what it was to be “in Christ Jesus” for himself, and so he is able in difficult circumstances to bear with his brethren, but too to identify it where he sees it and make the most of it.

D.A.B. The company were newly called out of a corrupt pagan system and they must have had all manner of difficult exercises to work out and Paul was alert for the evidences of what you are speaking of coming to light in known and unknown brethren in the place.

R.T. We need to be watchful that we do not get ‘bogged down’ with certain matters which may arise. If we know our brethren in Christ we need to work from this standpoint of how God has operated – “ye have been washed”. Paul is urging them that there is to be no going back to these other things. He is bringing them into a line to enjoy,

“ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified”. These are matters that stand and Paul in going through Corinth and these exercises is falling back on this, he ministers in faith and in the Spirit of Christ that they may rise to the blessedness of what divine grace has called them to.

H.A.H. I was impressed as the scriptures were read as to the references to the Holy Spirit in each of them. Is that the essential power to know and enjoy what you are saying? I felt the challenge of it. I thought it was touching that he refers to the name of the Lord Jesus and by (which is in power of) the Holy Spirit and then the Holy Spirit dwelling in us – the wonder of that and how much we really take it in and honour it.

R.T. I think it is all to elevate our thoughts; to bring us to rest upon and prove the resources. He has not washed us to get defiled again. I think in the conscious making room for, “the Spirit of our God”, we are helped to walk amidst the declining circumstances that we are in, and are maintained in the enjoyment of our heavenly portion, because in the Spirit we have some foretaste of what it will be. I think that needs to be especially proved in our gatherings together, some enjoyment and foretaste of the true position we have been brought into so that our hearts and our faith are strengthened.

W.L. In chapter 12 he draws attention to their past history, as he does here, but that would not be normal, would it? We are not going to dwell on one and another’s past history nor bring it up continually.

R.T. Their past history will finish in death, but this is to help us that it is finished with us now. There is something here that is going through, “ye have been washed ... sanctified ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus”. It brings in in a very feeling and affectionate way how God has moved to draw us out of these other circumstances into the blessedness of all that His thoughts are for us.

R.W.F. Is the objective here inheritance of the kingdom of God?

R.T. That is where it is worked out. He has not left us as freelances, but He has brought us into the kingdom of God and the local

company where this is to be enjoyed as we enjoy for ourselves, and we regard our brethren, as washed, sanctified and justified.

R.H.B. The apostle refers in Titus to, “according to his own mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3: 5), and the note refers to a change of position, not simply being cleaned but a change of position. Is that what you had in mind?

R.T. I think if we have some sense of the grace that washed us, we would not want to be defiled again. The Person who operated like this to bring us into the change of position had an end in view. Think of these things all from God’s side. He washed, sanctified and justified, to bring us into a change of position, and then He gives the authority for it, “in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”. Think of the economy of divine grace operating on our behalf to bring us into the changed circumstances to which you referred and to be in liberty in them.

E.C.B. How can we be further helped that these things do not just remain objective?

R.T. The first thing is by it being shown in somebody. I think we ought to conduct ourselves like assembly persons so that we know how to avoid things that would defile again. You “have been washed”. Sanctification is in view of being in liberty with God, entering into the grandeur of His thoughts. There is a lower level tempting and raising its head that would draw us away, but there is need for an example. We should all be an example of having been washed, sanctified and justified.

E.C.B. In the day in which he wrote to Timothy, Paul encourages them to be an example. We acquiesce in a lower level because it is too much trouble to work on a higher level.

R.T. Because we do not prove, “in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”, the wonderful resources that have come in. We are tested, we may think it is too much trouble, but I think Paul would be attracting these persons; there is an attractiveness about God having justified us. If we enjoy it in our souls there must be some reflection in our ways – for example, matters come up and

somebody is criticised, how does he respond? In the joy of being justified you leave that with God.

D.A.B. Paul, although he could not go himself, was careful to send brothers with this letter, people they could take account of, and he says, “be my imitators” (1 Cor 4: 16), not obviously as an apostle, but they could be in the good of these things as he was.

R.T. This applied to every believer in Corinth and it applies to every believer today. There is not a set class of persons who have been washed and these other things, but this applies to every believer.

Think of the divine grace coming into our young hearts that God washed us. What love enters into that! It is not an academic thing or a ritual, it is a love matter that He had so much in mind for us and these are the steps to bring us into the house where divine love and favour is enjoyed.

D.A.B. It is very personal from God’s side. Washing involves hand contact, and it is like God wiping tears. We speak about getting a touch, but do we apprehend the Person whose touch it is?

R.T. I think that is why he brings in ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God’, the economy of love is operating to help the saints that we do not acquiesce to lower circumstances. What a sense it is to come into the joy of justification! Things that are past and have been met in divine grace and met through repentance, through faith in our Lord Jesus, are settled and gone for ever so that persons can move in the enjoyment of a place before God in divine favour.

E.C.B. You do not wonder that Paul immediately says, “All things are lawful to me, but all things do not profit” (v 12). We are apt to think that if we can describe a thing as permissible it is all right, but Paul says what you look for is the profit.

R.T. That is what he comes to in the second scripture; “glory to God by us”, is the great end, that there are persons who, through apprehending the place Christ has as the promises are all secured in Him, there is “glory to God by us”. That is persons in the joy of justification and in the joy of having been washed. You get here,

“been preached by us among you by me and Silvanus and Timotheus”; there is an example of things. There is something exemplified in the way these persons preached that things were established in another Man altogether.

E.C.B. I think we need exercise as to the preaching of the gospel, but in these verses, “glory to God by us”, is not what we speak of as the service of God; it is somebody coming into the meeting and demonstrating it.

R.T. Yes, and it is persons walking in the faith and the enjoyment of the promises. Abraham did that, there was glory to God by Abraham as walking in the light of the promises. God gave him promises and they seemed impossible, but there was glory to God by Abraham moving in the light that they were all secured in a risen glorious Man. It is not a writing on the wall, not something that is in a covenant that is written down, but it is in a glorious Person, the Son of God.

D.J.H. Could you say why He uses that full name, “the Son of God, Jesus Christ”? I was thinking of the way in which everything that God looked for in man was seen in that blessed Man, Jesus Christ. It is the Man who was here and no less a standard is to be before us, nothing less is what God is looking for at the present time.

R.T. There is nothing official about it, “the Son of God, Jesus Christ”, a well known Person. He says, “who has been preached by us”, and these promises are all secure in Him. Paul here is being accused of going up and down, but Paul says, that is not the case. He is saying here how things have been set and established in this blessed glorious Person, “for glory to God by us”. He comes down to it then, “Now he that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God”.

D.J.H. So, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and to the ages to come” (Heb 13: 8) – no variation up and down there.

R.T. That would help us as to stability. It says, “he that establishes us with you”, he is putting himself and the Corinthians on the same ground. It says, it “is God” – he brings all the authority into it – “establishes us with you in Christ”.

D.J.H. It is all established in another Man. That sets aside everything from which we have been washed.

R.T. It is irrevocable. “He that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God”, that is where God has placed the believer, however young we may be, whatever lack of knowledge we may all have, God has done this, established us with you in Christ.

D.J.H. And what possibilities there are. Paul could say elsewhere, “I know a man in Christ”, 2 Cor 12: 2.

R.T. What better favour could God confer upon us than to establish us in Christ? I think we need to allow our hearts to expand that God has established us in Christ. We are in very tempting and testing circumstances, but this is where God has placed us. We are no longer in Adam: that is the contrast, in Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made to live. Everyone of us – that is where God has put us in Christ.

H.A.H. Is there a touch of the Spirit of that Man in the grace in which he says, “establishes us with you”. We might have thought he would say ‘establish you with us’, but he says, “establishes us with you”.

R.T. Over the whole of the epistle to Corinth you can see Paul as a new covenant minister, he was a man in the enjoyment of divine favour and here he is – he says we have a place alongside you, both have a place together in God’s thoughts in Christ. This is the point from which God is working with us, “establishes us in Christ”.

W.L. What do you say about, “has anointed us, is God, who also has sealed us”? Is it divine approval and divine permanency?

R.T. I think it is to bring hope to us, it is a real thing, not an empty position, not just title exactly or standing even, it is status. That is the status of the believer that he has been placed in Christ. And now he says, “anointed us”, that is to give us the sense of dignity about the place where God has placed us in Christ. I think it gives us a sense of being at home and a sense of the dignity that is proper to being in Christ.

H.A.H. The sealing would link with what he said in chapter 6 of the earlier epistle, “ye are not your own”, 1 Cor 6: 19.

R.T. It is ownership, it is who we belong to.

P.M. Has God done this not only in relation to what is future, but in relation to the present testimony so that the features of Christ might be seen in the testimony?

R.T. I think it is essentially relating to the present time. As you say, it will be so then. There will be no need to be reminded of it in that day, but there is a need for us to be reminded of it today, “he that establishes us with you in Christ”. That is the level of our relationship together in the area into which He has called us. There can be no room for the features of what is in Adam coming out.

Think of the permanency and the power of being established in Christ.

P.M. I was enjoying the dignity of the features of this heavenly Man that is seen here in testimony in the saints. There is no other level of testimony there than that heavenly Man seen in expression.

R.T. So there is a need for enjoying it in ourselves. It is not doctrine only, it is to be enjoyed. Doctrine is to be enjoyed: it is not a creed but something that is enjoyed in the person’s own soul. What a thing to revert to, that God has established us in Christ – the circumstances in my life, maybe they are testing and at times that we fail, but God has established us in Christ. It is an unalterable position and it is open to the very youngest believer. That is how God looks on you and there is a need for each of us to look at ourselves and know ourselves as in Christ. As has been said, “I know a man in Christ”, 2 Cor 12: 2.

E.F.W. It adds, “given the earnest of the Spirit in our heart”. I wondered if you would explain for us the “earnest of the Spirit”. It is not just the legal side or the authoritative side, but it is in our hearts which would add the affection that is needed.

R.T. In a day to come when we will be in Christ in the full sense, the former things will have passed away, but now in the present

conditions, “the earnest of the Spirit” brings the reality of all that will be yet to come to be enjoyed now and it is in our hearts. I think all that we are speaking of is a heart matter. So the Spirit having room in our affections causes us to be in the enjoyment of our heavenly portion.

D.A.B. It is fine to see how in the earnest we get some measure of what God’s desires are that we should have these things. This is not a bunch of grapes on a pole, however big; this is a divine Person. You could not think of it at all as a sample. It has been said that the earnest is greater than the inheritance because He is a Person in the Godhead.

R.T. The actuality will not be physical but something different, but there is a divine Person in whom it is all there for our present enjoyment.

M.J.W. All these things that are listed here, establishing us in Christ, anointing, sealed, and the earnest, involve the Spirit particularly. The last thing he connects with the Spirit especially is the enjoyment of it, but they all involve the Spirit in a particular way.

R.T. That is the present time, the Spirit’s day. The other day will be the day of God, love divine at rest, but in this day where we are, a divine Person has come into the circumstances we are in and has brought the grace and the power and the dignity of all that is yet future to be our present enjoyment. It is in our hearts so that it should come out in our lives. What impresses you here is that it is God that has done this and there is not a power in the universe can stop it happening in the believer. “He that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God”. Paul makes that very definite, the majesty of divine operations to bring us now in these circumstances into the enjoyment, and the realisation too by the Spirit, of better things.

D.J.H. You said, in Christ all should be made alive. This life is to be in expression at the present time. The fulness of it will be seen in that day when He is manifested as Saviour to change our bodies, but the life is to be seen in testimony now.

R.T. The need is that we individually apprehend and make room for this to be true in us. If God has done this it should encourage our hearts. The forces of evil, the powers of darkness, must recede in the presence of divine operations as we make room for the Spirit in our hearts.

E.C.B. What you have just said as to these things being individual is essential to the actual working out in enjoyment of the things that are firmly established in any case. What I would be glad to get at a bit more is how these things come into expression.

R.T. First of all by believing them. Do we really realise that God did not just take me up to forgive my sins, but He had a place in His house for me? I think that is the gospel, that God has come out to bring us in, and in bringing us in He has brought out these resources of His love to wash us, sanctify and justify and to anoint us too and seal us. That is how God has come out that we may be brought into the house to be at home in the enjoyment of divine favour.

E.C.B. I think that, and I think what you have before you is critical at the present time, but does it not involve that I myself give myself up to these things and manifest them?

R.T. We do not treat them lightly, nor just as terms of brethren, but do we apprehend that in the gospel God has something great in mind for us? Do we make room for it? We may speak about faith later; we are justified by faith and this scripture as to the promises all being secured in Christ, the Son of God, requires faith. I think that apprehended in the soul enables us to make room for the anointing and the sealing.

E.C.B. Perhaps we might compare the degree to which we enjoy and express these things with the degree to which we get absorbed by administrative matters all over the place. Are these not more critical?

R.T. They are and we will never approach the administrative rightly unless we have this. This is the approach. That is why I said that over the whole of Corinth is written the new covenant. The enjoyment of the new covenant is that we are in divine favour and

we are coming out from the house dealing with things as they should be in the house.

E.C.B. So that we are apt to look at Corinthians as if it was largely about administrative matters, but in fact it is about the Supper and eternity, the gospel, and all these things.

R.T. We have only read a few of the passages but I have often been impressed as to how woven through the two epistles are these features that we have been calling attention to. He does not have one section on one line of things, and another section something else, but interwoven through all these exercises that he has to deal with is the grandeur and glory of the divine calling.

D.W. I wondered whether the apostle himself was an example of this in Acts 26 before Agrippa. He says, "I would to God ... that not only thou, but all who have heard me this day, should become such as I also am, except these bonds" (v 29).

R.T. He was in the enjoyment of divine favour and the prison could not stop Paul enjoying it, nor the chains, nor being before Agrippa. It is an area that we are called to live in, that we have been established in Christ. That affects us in our daily path, in all our circumstances.

Anointing is to give us power in the adverse circumstances so that there is a testimony in the way that things are done and how we act of another Man in expression.

D.A.B. The way you speak of the construction of the epistle recalls what Paul says in chapter 3 that he was building with gold, silver and precious stones (see v 12). His gift had been given for building up and it was almost as if he was saying, I have to speak about these things, but I can hardly regard that as the normal exercise of my gift because it should be related to these precious things.

R.T. He approached the brethren as God's people, "I have much people in this city", Acts 18: 10. It was hard to recognise it maybe, but Paul clung to that. We have to do that with ourselves, we have to have a sense that we are in Christ or we will not be able to approach other persons as being in Christ. In the dignity of what we

enjoy; we approach our brethren from this standpoint. I think it is the only way that the level can be raised.

J.W. “Established in Christ” – would the intent be that we become firmly attached to Christ? I wondered whether it is our attachment to Him that by the Spirit we are able to work out the features of Christ here.

R.T. The footnote says, The word translated ‘establishes ... in’ means ‘attaches firmly to’, ‘connects firmly with’. We do not want to act in the flesh, we want to act as enjoying being in Christ.

J.W. I wondered whether the appreciation of that would help us, that we are consciously in relation to Him as being attached to Him. We might accept the fact that we are in Christ as a statement but to be consciously in the gain of that would help us to work out these things.

R.T. It is how you live. You wake up in the morning and you have a sense of this. You go into circumstances where there is maybe bad language and testing circumstances but you live and move in the enjoyment of your place in Christ. Temptations come in employment, in family lives, and all sorts of things, but you have some sense in your soul by the Spirit that you have been established in Christ.

J.W. We have spoken of the preaching and the level of it, but it is really a presentation of Christ: the end in view is that persons might be attached to Him.

R.T. It has often been said, change your man. That is the point of the gospel that you change your Man. Here is the change, “in Christ”. I think it is a wonderful thing to have some sense day by day that that is where God has placed me.

D.E.B. Do you think we are perhaps liable to rest on the promises.

The promises relate to the future and we get a bit over-occupied with what will come to pass, and even such things as being put right at the judgment seat and so on, but what you are engaging us with is

not the promise but the present enjoyment of what God has in mind for us.

R.T. I feel the need of being established in what is the true Christian position and, I may say, the only Christian position. God does not have different ideas for different persons. It says, “us with you” showing that the thought for God as to every believer is that He has brought them into another Man in Christ. As I said, I think there is a need individually for young and old to realise that that is where the gospel of divine grace has placed us, “in Christ”. As in Christ, you have been anointed, you have been sealed and you have the earnest of the Spirit in your hearts.

D.E.R. So to be in accord with what is true for us from the divine side and to be in the enjoyment of it requires overcoming of self and the world on our side.

R.T. Yes, but you have to start at the top. In the way we have conducted things, maybe some think that we start at the bottom, but I would like to get an impression on all young hearts today that at your conversion, when you put your faith in Christ, God put you there, “in Christ”. We have to learn a lot through exercises, but in the working out of it this does not change. It may be that we fail, and fall into traps of the enemy, and we do, but this does not change. Mr Darby says:

If clouds have dimmed my sight,
When passed, eternal Lover,
Towards me, as e'er, Thou'rt bright. (Hymn 51)

I am encouraged today that we should start at the top, start where God has placed us and then see that if we have changed our mind, He has not. If our conduct has become unsuitable, God has not changed His mind, but He has given us the resources to go through these moral exercises so that it is a real enjoyment in our souls.

In the final scripture that we read I think he is meeting what has been called attention to, the very moral exercises that follow. He brings in the cross. The way God has arrived at placing us in Christ was by the cross, preaching Jesus Christ. It says, “we preach Christ

crucified". That is where the Adam order of man was exposed to the full, the princes of this world crucified the Lord of glory. Paul is going over the ground of these exercises, how that God exposed the whole thing to deliver us from it, and then He brings us in through divine choice and favour to where there is wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption, all available in Christ.

E.C.B. He says he would know nothing, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

R.T. You have to know Christ first to do that. Paul was operating from the top in going through Corinth; he was determined; there is to be a certain determination in the way that we arrive at things. But we have to apprehend it first, we have to have some sense of the blessedness of it. I think we do in our gatherings together, and in our own private links with the Lord, get some sense of the place of favour in which divine love has placed us in Christ. Then there is a determination to know nothing else but Christ.

E.C.B. We have been reading Corinthians in London following the scripture in Matthew on the resurrection of Jesus, "ye seek Jesus the crucified one. He is not here ... Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28: 5), that is there are things which are finished, but now in Corinthians he is showing them what seeking the crucified One means.

R.T. In the beginning of Acts he transfers the sphere of interest from earth to heaven. We have to follow Him. We think of Him crucified but we see where He has gone and, dear brethren, He has gone there for us. He has gone into heaven itself, the apostle adds, "to appear before the face of God for us", Heb 9: 24. So you have a place there in Christ that is unchanging, unalterable and we need determination in our hearts and faith in our souls to enjoy it and the effect of that is that we display it.

E.C.B. We do not only have the faith of it and so on, but we want it.

R.T. That is the object, the place which divine grace has called us becomes our life. It is what we speak of as assembly-minded persons, their mind, attitudes and their circumstances are all ordered

in relation to the place that the assembly has and the Spirit has in the assembly as working out things now in view of another day.

E.C.B. As you drew attention to before, arriving at these things is individual.

R.T. It is but it is real. It is real to the individual and I think the more real it is the more we are able to speak about it. Paul says here, "has been made to us". Think of the dispensation continuing, and I think it is a very wonderful thing that the dispensation has continued as it has to this day. You may say it is broken; maybe, but there has been some testimony to, "Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption". The fact of the testimony being here today is a witness to Christ's wisdom operating in the face of all the powers of darkness that has been against the assembly.

E.C.B. Wisdom, righteousness and holiness are things which become manifested in individuals, that thus enter into the company.

We have things that are established in the gospel, but this is something that comes out in the activity of daily life.

R.T. I think so, and it is just about all you need. Wisdom – where do we get wisdom? Where do we get righteousness? It is in Christ. In my own soul I laboured a long time to establish my righteousness. I met an old woman some years ago, she said that she was brought up in the Church and she thought that she was the Lord's; and somebody came and preached and she saw at once that all her righteousness was as filthy rags. She said, from that day my life was changed, Christ was my righteousness. God has provided it. If you needed righteousness, you have it in Christ, "righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ", Rom 3: 22. It is a wonderful thing to come to that the things that we need, God has provided them right at our door to help us to lay hold of them and enjoy them.

D.E.B. What do you say about, "the things that are not"?

R.T. It is divine grace stretching out to the outcasts of society, the foolish things, the weak things, "has God chosen". It is a very beautiful verse that, God has chosen. Think of God having chosen

things that are not, “that he may annul the things that are”. He will do that in the day to come, but He is doing it now in the way that the testimony is going through, that there is a witness in persons of no public repute who have been able to live on another line in the power of grace.

B.H.C. The father in Luke 15 could say, “it was right to make merry” (v 32) – how he saw everyone there in Christ and clothed in His righteousness.

R.T. It is very beautiful, it was all waiting for the son to come back to when his mind was filled with himself and all these things. What sorrows they caused him, but it was all there in the father’s affections for him and it was held for him. It is very fine to return into the enjoyment of it. Do you think he would ever go out of the house again? I do not think so. These things are to encourage us to come in. In the returning son there was something there of glory to God, in the expression of his favour upon that son. What a tribute to divine grace and blessing.

J.W. Would it be right to say that God had deliberately chosen what was outwardly weak and despicable in the eyes of men in view of the public testimony. However, this would bring into relief the dignity the saints have and the resource they have in Christ?

R.T. Again we need to realise that individually. There was nothing in me that merited divine grace, mercy was purely from His side. There was nothing in us. It speaks of “vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory”, Rom 9: 23. God has operated with such unlikely material but only to bring out the resources of His love and His grace that persons are brought into other circumstances.

J.W. The outward side of things discourages us; the weakness (and I know there is our side to that), but God has definitely chosen that. It says, “He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord”.

R.T. That is primarily why I spoke about this today, that we might be encouraged. There is so much to discourage, but, “of him are ye in Christ Jesus”, is a very beautiful expression. That is where we are,

that is where divine grace has placed us with all the resources that we need to be in the enjoyment of that favour.

P.M. God chose the weak and the despised things because Christ has been made righteousness, holiness and redemption. He had every resource in another Man and He did not need the resource of man according to the Adam.

R.T. They have all come out into display. Think of the woman in Luke 7 in Simon's house. Think of the power of darkness that was against her and Simon's criticism. I think she had some sense of "Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom ... righteousness ... holiness ... redemption". She did not need to say a thing. Think of the Lord acting like this, on her behalf when Simon had everything against her. Would that our hearts had confidence in Him and be more attracted to Him, attracted to the place in which God has placed us that this wisdom may operate and righteousness, holiness and redemption.

D.J.H. It has been said of that woman that wisdom has been justified of all her children. I was thinking that it would be an example of the way that wisdom from God had reached out to such a one.

R.T. That is the testimony. You see it going through the Acts. It says they were unlettered men, but there it was going through. It says, these men have turned Jerusalem upside down. Think of all the power that was there, the counsels of man, but it is all overthrown by unlettered men who were proving this wisdom. It is a very definite statement; it is not only what He will be in the day to come, but "Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God" now.

T.H. The prophet says, "I will call not my people My people", Rom 9: 25. Does that link with what we are saying? We cannot claim that we have been born Christians.

R.T. It would cast us back on divine mercy, but it begets confidence in God if we believe that there was nothing in me that God should chose me. Why do we not make room for Him? He has been made

to us wisdom from God. It needs a little patience, it needs waiting on God, it needs the shutting out of man, but it says He has been made to us, as if it is Christ's whole occupation today as seeing the saints of God through in the light of the assembly, His body here on earth: and here are the resources that it may be in expression in our local companies.

V E.W. The woman referred to in Luke 7 never said a thing, but was her boasting manifest in the testimony?

R.T. Our problem is that we say too much. She did not say a thing, but divine wisdom came in. I think what you say is a lesson for us.

In Acts 15 it says, "Brethren, listen to me" (v 13), an unexpected brother giving a word. That is how wisdom operated. It is not operated through gift, that may come into it, but I think that in these matters we need to sit and say, wait a minute, brethren: allow this wisdom to come in, wisdom from God. You say, it is this scripture or that scripture, it is what happened so many years ago in these things, it is all there, but do we patiently allow Christ operating in each vessel, "made to us wisdom from God".

D.A.B. God has never had to rely on what we are naturally. He can take up things that are not, and then what we are made is altogether of Him. Perhaps we do not entirely trust ourselves, but God has never needed to.

R.T. I think if we look soberly at the history of the testimony it would encourage us to see that God is seeing things through. There have been more difficult days than we are in and divine wisdom came in, maybe unexpectedly, but divine wisdom came in as it was made room for. Think of Luther, divine wisdom coming in in that man. As has been said, he delivered a blow that the system has never recovered from: divine wisdom operated. There is a need for vessels who apprehend Christ like this, "has been made", it is a very definite word. Then it comes down to "righteousness, and holiness and redemption". It warms our hearts to see that He has redeemed us. It brings home to us the preciousness of these persons to God that He has brought them out into other circumstances and provided

all the things that are necessary to see us through. So, “He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord”.

LONDON

20 September 2003

Key to initials

R.H.Brown, East Finchley; D.A.Burr, London; D.E.Burr, Colchester; E.C.Burr, London; B.H.Clark, London; R.W.Flowerdew, Sunbury; T.Harvey, East Finchley; D.J.Hutson, London; H.A.Hutson, London; W.Lamont, Cumnock; P.Martin, Colchester; D.E.Remmington, St. Albans; R.Taylor, Kirkcaldy; M.J.Welch, Sunbury; E.F.Woodford, Dorking; V E.Wraighte, Gillingham; D.Wright, Havering; J.Wright, Havering

STRENGTHENED IN FAITH

Bert Taylor

Hebrews 3: 14-4: 2; 1 Peter 1: 3-9; 2 Peter 1: 5-11; 1

Thessalonians 1: 2, 3

It will be obvious from these passages of scripture that I would seek that we may be strengthened in faith. It is what marks the day in which we are. Reference was made in the reading to how we are going to come into these matters that we were speaking of, the enjoyment of our heavenly calling, of the place we have in Christ, being justified before our God. It is evident, and I trust it will be evident to us all, that it is open to faith. All that we have been speaking of is real and faith is like a door that opens the whole matter up for present enjoyment.

The passage we read in Hebrews is a warning, it says, “we have had glad tidings presented to us ... but the word of the report did not profit *them*, not being mixed with faith”. We enjoy the meetings and what we hear, but there is a danger that we do not profit from them. I think we would all feel that in our histories. We have not profited any of us as much as we might have and here the apostle is speaking about these persons with a glorious prospect before them. It refers to the time when the spies brought back the fruits of the land, when they showed them those grapes and pomegranates, and the words of Caleb and Joshua saying that God, if He delights in us, will bring us in. It is like the time we are in. God has brought before us in wondrous grace the fruits of the heavenly land and we are each of us in circumstances where we are tested, young and old, as to whether we are going to move forward or to move back. The passage is written to encourage them. It says, “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”. The contrast to acting in faith is that we act in self-confidence, we act according to how we see things and as men would view them, but I would seek to encourage our hearts that we have had glad tidings presented to us. We read that whatever promises of God there are they are yea and amen in Christ. Whatever promises you care to look for in the Bible

you will find the reassurance of them, all in a glorified risen Saviour.

I speak to all who have faith in this room, all who would have repented and come into the blessedness of their sins forgiven.

There was an operation of faith, you had a transaction with God, with Christ. Some light shone into your heart that all your history, all your sins, even the kind of person that you are as of Adam's race, all met by God in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. By faith you received the remission of your sins. They may rise again in our mind but I would tell you this, it is the devil that raises them: many a time he may bring home to you how bad you are, but never in all your life were you worse than when you were lost and dead in your sins, and it was then that God loved you! When we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. May your heart be reassured, dear brother or sister, that whatever comes into your life, God loved you when you were a sinner at your very worst, and He has provided for you for the rest of your journey. Abraham proved that, it speaks of the steps in faith of our father Abraham. He was tested very severely, God had promised him great things and the very opposite happened; it says, he found strength in faith (see Rom. 4: 20). May we be encouraged not to fall back on our own way of thinking of how we are going to work through the truth. Faith is always tested and in very simple things. It is a fact in our lives that we are always under test. God tested Gideon by a simple thing as to persons lapping the water. It seemed quite an insignificant matter, but it was a test of faith. God said, by these few men that are dependent, I will save you (see Judges 7: 5). Let us just think of that in exercises that may be testing you at the moment, that God is just testing your faith. He has given you something to fall back on. You have had some history with God and with Christ already in your soul. May we be encouraged to fall back on that experience with God and with Christ, rather than the expediencies of our own human minds.

It says, "but the word of the report did not profit *them*". We often find this, perhaps in ministry; we think it is for somebody else, we think that we know better than what the Lord may be saying in the ministry. The sad consequence of this was that for another thirty

eight years they wandered in the desert. How sad! One meeting they missed, you may say, one presentation of Christ they turned aside, and their lives were lost as to the enjoyment of the thoughts of God. What happened on that occasion was that God presented to them His purposes of love. He says, here is a presentation to you of what I have promised, and He is very gracious, He stimulates faith. I think, as Caleb and Joshua saw those grapes and the land, they saw that the promises of God were real and enshrined them in their affections. I would encourage everyone here to lay hold in faith of the purpose of God. Otherwise we are functioning at a lower level than the purpose of God centred in Christ. I tell you a blessed fact – it included you. Think of that, His purpose included you. It says, “chosen us in him before the world’s foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love”, Eph 1: 4. These are the thoughts of divine purpose for us and faith lays hold of them, and I would say cling tenaciously to them.

As we said, Abraham was tested about these things, but he clung to them through various temptations. The temptations that you may be passing through today, I think if you look at Abraham’s life you can find him tested about them, tested about natural things, tested about the love of money, he was promised all that he wanted by the king of Sodom but he said, no. These are the temptations that come in our way and God tests us by them and how pleased God was with Abraham. It says as to Abraham once that God appeared to him again. It is a feature of Abraham’s life, testings to faith and divine appearings. How beautiful! How God answered his faith when He tested him. It says, He appeared to Abraham again a second time from heaven, accentuating the way that God presents and encourages and stimulates his faith.

There is a word of warning here but a word of encouragement. It says, “not being mixed with faith”. You may not understand the ministry, and our natural reaction to that is to forget it, but Paul has a fine word about that, “think on these things”, Phil 4: 8. Do not put them out of your mind, even at quiet times think on these things. That is how the Lord helps you, how faith becomes

strengthened. It says, “for the Lord will give thee understanding in all things”, 2 Tim 2: 7. Faith sees beyond the snares and the traps of the present circumstances, and lays hold tenaciously and counts on God for the way through the exercises. Caleb and Joshua did, but others could not enter in, “the word of the report did not profit *them*, not being mixed with faith”. I repeat again, do not just say you do not understand it, allow faith to operate, allow the Spirit of God to operate in your soul, because these two things are very closely connected, faith and the Spirit. If faith is not operating, I say quite unreservedly, normally the Spirit is hindered, but if there is an operation of faith, the Spirit of God comes in to bring the power.

Faith answers to light in the soul and the Spirit of God made room for gives power to answer to the light. That is how simply it is put and as faith is there the Spirit delights to join His help to our weaknesses. It is the weaknesses that we may feel in faith. One man said, “I believe, help my unbelief”, Mark 9: 24. I have said that many a time – you felt that it was right, you have wanted to do it, but you have felt the insufficiency in yourself, and the Spirit joins His help to our weakness to strengthen us, that the glory of the divine purpose and the word of the report may be allowed to have its full impress and value with us. God’s displeasure was against those people. How solemn as you think of the divine displeasure that was there! It says He was wrath. It is a very strong term for the beloved people whom He had brought out of Egypt. Dear brethren, we may be suffering, and I do not exclude myself, through the word of the report not being mixed with faith. I speak specially as to the light of the assembly that has come to us in the word of the report. There was and is still going on a great line of ministry as to the assembly as Christ’s body on earth and He our glorious Head in heaven. I urge you, dear brother and sister, that the word of the report may profit us, it may find a lodgement in our hearts, that it may be mixed with faith. There is great reassurance. You look at church history – the forces of darkness and the powers of evil from Pentecost have been against the light of the assembly, and thank God through the faith of some, and the grace of the Spirit, it is to be enjoyed today.

May we cherish it and seek to make room for it amidst the

breakdown. Some have said that things were all finished, things were all broken; things are not all broken, the light is still shining and faith finds strength to walk in the light. It is not just the light of our sins forgiven, blessed as that is, but faith finds strength to walk in the power of the Spirit, in the light of a glorious Head in heaven who is soon coming for us to translate what is here on earth so precious to Him, into other surroundings. To bring us home, in other words.

That is what faith is looking for, looking and waiting to be at home.

This is one of the great things that faith cherishes, that He is coming for us. Alas some will have to be awakened. May it not be anyone here who needs that reawakening when He comes, but when He comes He will find faith, find persons looking for Him, He will find persons who each Lord's Day gather together to remember Him in the breaking of bread until He comes. That is what we do every Lord's Day; we are thinking of going to the Supper, it is until He comes. A high-born man has gone away to receive a kingdom. Until He comes there are those who are operating in faith on the earth, maintaining things in simplicity and in faith awaiting the return of that high-born One so that when He comes He will have something for Himself (See Luke 18). He has left with everyone of us something; the trading of those minas flowed out from faith, or the lack of it.

One man bound it in a towel, he was not harkening to the word, it was not mixed with faith. What a loss! These are very simple illustrations, but they are very real. That man suffered loss. Another in whom the word was mixed with faith was very diligent and very urgent, and faith is a very active thing. The stress of the conditions we are in necessitates faith being active.

Peter was speaking of the proving of your faith, "much more precious than of gold which perishes", involving that faith does not perish. It will soon give place to sight; we will not need it then, "though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable". We are looking for that time when we will see Him in actuality, but in the meantime, there is the proving of our faith, much more precious. It is very interesting to look at the accompaniments of faith. It speaks of it being holy. You did not derive that from your

parents; that is divine work in your soul. Peter speaks of it as “precious faith” (2 Peter 1: 1), and Paul as “faith working through love”, Gal. 5: 6. These all show that it is from God, and how He values it.

Peter is speaking to these persons who have been suffering.

Faith is the great power to go through the sufferings. These persons had lost their homes, their job, maybe lost most of their possessions, he is speaking here about something that faith has opened to them that is incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. Can you tell me anything better than that? That is what God proposes to faith, something that cannot be damaged by rust or moth or anything on earth, fluctuations in the markets, it cannot be spoiled, “an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance”. It is a beautiful word, “reserved in the heavens for you”. Does your faith give you that in your soul? It is reserved for you, not just for the older brethren, persons who are more intelligent. In addressing the scattering of the remnant of the Jews, he says, “reserved in the heavens for you”. Think of that shining as divine light into their souls when they had lost so much. They had something that could not be spoiled. The Lord sometimes allows us to gain things that we have gone after ourselves; there may be many things in our lives, aspirations of our abilities, He sometimes allows us to gain them, and we find that in gaining them they are hollow, they are not the satisfaction that we had thought. But what He has given us is something incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. These things are all connected with the proving of your faith. What the proving of our faith has in mind is to help us to use it, and it grows. If you look at the ministry of Elisha you will see that he always used very simple things. He says to the woman who was facing death, What have you in the house? – in faith, use it. There is more than enough there to meet the debt and to live, “thou and thy sons on the rest” (see 2 Kings 4: 2-8). She, perhaps as we have been saying already, had heard the word, she was a widow of the sons of the prophets, she knew the ministry, the terms, but there she was surrounded by the terms, the bookcases full, and knew the doctrine, but she was

discouraged, it was not mixed with faith. Elisha says, just use what you have. The waters were spoiled and he says, bring salt, an ordinary commodity. You will find that through these chapters in 2 Kings. There was death in the pot, he says bring in meal (see 2 Kings 4: 41). They were all things that were just to hand and they were not being used. "The word is near thee, in thy mouth" (Rom.

10: 8), the word of faith which we preach, "believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved" (v 9). You found that when you were in need of your sins being forgiven, did you not, that the word was near you, in your mouth?

Well, faith is near you today amidst the testings to help you come into the blessedness of what Peter is speaking of here, that we may not be short sighted but that we may prove "faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; on whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable filled with the glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls".

Peter is making it very real to these persons, that through faith they were coming into the blessedness, "receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls". It is a very fine thing, soul salvation. I do not just mean from your sins, but it means that the soul is happy and restful in its links with God, "receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls". It will look on to the future no doubt, but until that hour dawns faith is operating, bringing the salvation of your souls. It is a very blessed thing to be at peace with God. We are not quite at peace with God if we are letting the ministry go over our heads. People say, we do not understand it. You have to rise to these things and the Spirit of God would help us to raise our sights that what is presented to us is for our present soul salvation that we may be in the gain and the joy of what divine love has purposed for us.

Peter says "in your faith have also virtue"; it means it has power. I do not intend to go into the list of these things, but the use of faith multiplies and there is one thing added to another so that to

the persons with whom it is operating he says, “to make your calling and election sure”. It is not just that we believe that we have been brought into the fellowship of God’s Son, but we make it sure by the use of faith and harkening to the word. It says of these persons that the word has been mixed with faith and they are using diligence, “to make your calling and election sure”. You say, I thought election depended on God; well, the enjoyment of it depends on your faith.

God has done all that was required from His side, the enjoyment of your election depends on your use of your faith. Election means that God chose, that He destined you for His world of bliss, chose you and destined you for a realm of wonderful blessing, and in the meantime He has given the earnest of the Spirit into our hearts that the enjoyment of it may be known by us now. Peter is encouraging these brethren.

Paul is writing to the Thessalonians, who were young believers recently converted, remembering, “unceasingly your work of faith, and labour of love, and enduring constancy of hope, of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father”. He is encouraged in the way that they were operating. They had turned from idols to serve a living and true God. I would like to say that their diligence would encourage us to make room for the Spirit. If we say we do not understand and we shut our eyes to the ministry, the holy Spirit of God is hindered. You will find that in the history that I have referred to in Exodus the rock gave its water, they did not seem to drink of it until Numbers 21. A long period when there was not enjoyment of divine thoughts and purposes, but in the drinking of it in Numbers 21 they very soon journeyed into the land that God had destined for them. May it be so with our hearts that we are making room for the Spirit of God to develop in us a kind of personnel, a kind of attitude and actions that are different. I think the product of making room for the Spirit of God, as the enjoyment and shedding abroad of the new covenant, is that there is a new atmosphere established through persons who are moving in faith, and the Spirit has liberty that there is, instead of a line of demand, the new covenant as a line of supply. The new covenant is, ‘I will’. That is what we come into as making

room for faith, we come into the blessings. The new covenant is not made with us, but the spirit of the new covenant is to be enjoyed as faith and the Spirit are made room for. The grand result of that is that there are happy conditions among the brethren. The new covenant makes room for God, shuts out man and his thoughts, and makes room for God to operate and brings persons into the enjoyment of divine love. I think the new covenant and reconciliation are two things that we need to think about, as making room for the atmosphere of the house to be enjoyed. Reconciliation is that you come into the house and enjoy its atmosphere; you enjoy the kisses. We often speak about the robe and the ring, but more precious than all was that he covered him with kisses (see Luke 15: 20). That is reconciliation, that the son is brought in to the full enjoyment of the house.

This is where faith is leading us, shining into these dark circumstances in which we are. I appeal again to my own heart, as to us all – may we make way that the word of the report may profit us being mixed with faith, for God's glory and praise.

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