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THE VALUE OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE

Andrew Martin

Philippians 1: 12-18; 27-end; 2: 1-11; 3: 8-12; 20-end; 4: 1-9

We live in a very confused world and in every aspect of society there is confusion. We see it everywhere, whether it is in governments or in business or even in the social behaviour of people. There is confusion everywhere. There is confusion too in men's understanding and conduct in relation to God. When I go to work I am one of a team of five and besides me there are two people who would say they are Roman Catholics, one who is a Muslim and one who is an atheist, and of those four with whom I work there is only one who is passionate about what he believes and that is the atheist! What terrible confusion exists in the world, the world in which man has been placed for the glory of God.

Beloved, as thinking about the occasion this evening, what has been laid on my heart is to speak of the value of a Christian life. I am quite sure that most of us in this room, if not all, would claim to be believers in the Lord Jesus and could therefore claim in some respects to be living a Christian life. I wonder if there is anyone who is not. I wonder if there is anyone who has never had to do with Jesus. Is there anyone in this room who has never had to do with the Lord Jesus? Never faced up to the fact that you are a sinner and that apart from the work of Jesus you have no future at all, no hope? Is there anybody here in this room who has never looked at the Lord Jesus upon the cross, seen the One who suffered there and never claimed Him for themselves? Beloved, do not let another day pass if that is you. Do not let another day pass. See the value of the blood of Jesus; see the great value of His work, all that He has done in settling the whole matter of sin. Beloved, if there is anyone in this room who has never received peace in their soul based on having to do with Jesus, do not let another hour pass by – you cannot afford it. There is no reason why anyone in this world should not have peace with God. The work of Jesus is sufficient for every man, woman, and child on the earth and the blood of Jesus is there as a testimony

before God that the work is sufficient and it pleases God, the work of Jesus, and that work is sufficient for everyone.

But then, if you have put your faith in the Lord Jesus and if you are conscious that you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, you would desire to walk here pleasing to Him. It is not just a matter of profession. It is not just that we are here as Christians. People at certain times, (for instance if you were to go into hospital) would say 'What is your religion?' and a lot of people say 'Christian' because that is what they are brought up to say. That is not what a Christian life consists of. Today there was a little child who was placed on Christian ground, through baptism – that little child was placed formally on Christian ground. Now that little girl, as far as I am aware, has no work of God in her soul but she was placed on Christian ground. She was in a household, and knowing that household I am quite sure that her parents set themselves that she should be brought up receiving Christian teaching, she should be brought up in the light of the gospel, in the light of what God looks for in man, she should be brought up in the light of these things and shall have every opportunity to commit herself to the Lord Jesus.

She will have that from her earliest days, I am convinced of that.

But what about actually doing it? What about placing oneself, not just formally on Christian ground, but accepting for oneself that I am a believer on the Lord Jesus and I am going to live here for Him.

God puts a great value on that and as I have said I want to speak about the value of a Christian life.

First I would like to speak about the value *to God* of a Christian life and I think we see in this epistle to the Philippians, Paul writing as a Christian to other Christians. The assembly here in Philippi when Paul wrote was not in the early days of pristine power, with Paul acting in apostolic authority. Paul was in prison. He was unable to act freely in relation to the local assemblies; not as in Corinth where he could lay out what had to be done and say 'I am coming to you and I am going to put things right'. It was not like that in Philippi. Paul was in prison. He was taken out of action. In a sense it was looking on to another day when the apostle would no

longer be here. Here was a local assembly and they were trying to work things out. They were doing very well and things did crop up, as they do everywhere. They were doing very well and Paul writes to them about normal Christian life. He is not in any great way addressing issues and problems that crop up. He mentions one or two things but they are personal. He is not devoting the epistle to that. The epistle is effectively a thank-you letter, a letter of thanks.

The Philippians had sent Paul a gift and he was writing back to thank them. That is the context of the letter. What a letter this is! I have never heard a letter like this read out. We know it is difficult to write letters. Paul writes from normal Christian experience. Paul writes as one who has the light of another world in his soul, who has a goal before Him, who has something He is striving after. You might say Paul comes out as a *Christian* in this epistle. So as he starts off, he does not even call himself an apostle. He is a bondman. He is writing as one Christian to a company of other Christians. Where I have read from verse 12 he is referring to his circumstances because the brethren were feeling, I am sure, very sorry that Paul had been taken out of action. He was there in prison and the brethren felt it – how much they felt it. They loved Paul. We can understand the Philippians' affection for Paul when we read Acts 16. You see what he went through for them, you see the sufferings he endured, they owed their spiritual existence to one who was prepared to suffer for the Name of Jesus. He says 'I know you are sorry about my circumstances, but I am rejoicing in them because they have turned out for the furtherance of the glad tidings.' Now that is something that God values very much. A believer, a Christian, is marked by supporting and promoting the work that God promotes.

Divine light has shone out from heaven, has shone out in Jesus, and you might say that was wonderful sovereign light coming out from God. Here we have a man who says, "I am set for the defence of the glad tidings". I am set for it. It is as though he would say 'my whole life is geared up for this: I am determined to be here for the defence of the glad tidings, that come what may, for me the important thing is the glad tidings'. How the apostle relates himself to the very heart of God Himself. 'I am set for the defence of the

glad tidings'. Think of what that meant. What value that was to the heart of God that there should be a man on earth who could actually use those words. I do not believe this was any proud claim on the part of Paul – this was true – his very life bore it out. He was set for the defence of the glad tidings. What God finds in a believer is one who is sympathetic with Himself; one who has the same object as Himself and that is that men should come to an appreciation of His beloved Son. Is that not wonderful? No wonder God puts a value on a Christian life. Paul here displays it. He says – 'I've been put in prison, think of how it has worked out. I can see what God is doing here'. He is sympathetic with the way in which God is acting. He says, 'First of all there are the people in the praetorian' – that is Caesar's household. They have heard the gospel. Is that not wonderful? It is because I am a prisoner they have heard the gospel, and moreover because I am a prisoner others are coming out and they are speaking about the gospel. They may not have pure motives, but it does not matter, I am rejoicing because the glad tidings are being announced. I am rejoicing about it'. He says, 'So long as Christ is being presented'. God places great value on a person who is sympathetic with Him and is set so that others can share in His appreciation of Christ. Wonderful thing God's valuation of a Christian life that is set for the defence of the glad tidings. And this was regardless of the cost to him. For him, all that mattered was that Christ should be announced.

Later in the passage he speaks about God's plans for them. He speaks about their salvation, which has come from God. Every believer would understand and know that, that salvation has come from God Himself. It could not have come from any other source, but he also speaks of something else that God has given the believers. "For to you has been given as regards Christ, not only believing on Him but the suffering for Him also." You see, the Christian takes everything from the hand of God and God values that, God appreciates that. How often we kick against things, how often we resent maybe the restrictions that come upon us. How often we wish that God would act in another way, but here is

someone who is living a Christian life. Here is Paul and he is demonstrating a Christian life and he is saying, 'Whether it is my salvation, whether it is the very fact that I believe or whether it is the sufferings that come from God, I am taking it all from God – it is a gift'. Whatever the circumstances it is a gift from God and I am tracing it all back to God who is the source of all. How God values that, a soul who is able to accept whatever the circumstance may be, to accept that there is One who is above, who has ordered them, and has even given them for our blessing. God values one who lives his life in the light of the acknowledgement that everything he receives whether it be bright or sad, whatever it be, he receives it from God and he accepts it as a gift from God. How wonderful. What faith Paul had, but how great the valuation that God would put upon a life like that, that was led in the simple acceptance of everything from divine hands.

And then he goes on, There is something that is important and that is the way you regard one another because that is precious to God as well. He says, "let nothing be in the spirit of strife or vainglory but in lowliness of mind." Lowliness of mind. You say, 'Well I can put on an act', but it is lowliness of mind. This is inward, this is genuine. "Each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves". I heard of a brother who had a family and whenever the family would start talking about somebody this brother would not let them leave the table until they had all said something good about that person. That is a wonderful thing to do, but even that is not lowliness of mind, is it? Lowliness of mind is inward, it is not even trying to think of something that is good, it is inward, it is genuinely regarding everyone else as exceeding me in some feature or other, that I can see something in everyone that is more excellent than in myself, and this is sincere lowliness. Paul goes on to say, This spirit has been seen, this has been demonstrated in perfection, it has been demonstrated in Jesus, the One who of all had no need to esteem everyone highly, One who had no need to take the lowest place. He came in in lowliness of mind. Think of what he says, "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who subsisting in

the form of God did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God but emptied himself". Think of the mind that was seen in Jesus, the One who was seen here as a man. He had become a man emptying Himself, though He was equal to God.

Even in the days of His flesh He could still claim that, "I and my Father are one". He had come into manhood's form because of that attitude of mind which was demonstrated in manhood, that attitude of mind was seen in the days of his flesh, but He had come into manhood's form in order that that mind should be displayed. He, subsisting in the form of God (see Phil. 2: 6) – that is how great He is. He came into manhood. He was entitled to take up another condition. That is how great He is. Subsisting in the form of God, – He could claim equality with God. He was taking nothing from God to be on an equality with God because of Who He is. Satan alas put himself in the place of God and thus robbed God of all that He had looked for in man but Jesus in manhood could claim equality with God and that took nothing from God. Think of the greatness of the One who was there. He emptied himself, taking a bondman's form.

That is the lowest place, one that would take the place after everybody else in the household. You think of Him in John 13 going to the disciples one after the other and washing their feet. That was the work of a bondman to wash their feet – the feet of the disciples – and He says, "Do you know what I have done to you?" He says, "Ye call me the Teacher and the Lord, and ye say well, for I am so. If I therefore, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet", John 13: 13-14. He could set an example. He had shown them lowliness of mind. He would say, If I could do this to you, then surely you are able each to esteem the other as more excellent than yourselves. He took a bondman's form, taking His place in the likeness of man. There He was, beloved, indistinguishable naturally from other men. You think of Jesus. He had to be marked out. It always affects me to think of that. You read it in the gospels. Who needed him to be marked out? You know that suggestion did not come from the priests. It did not come from those who came to take Him. The suggestion came from one of His own. One who had kept company with Him for three and

a half years and had seen the works of power that He had done and seen the demonstration of grace ceaselessly throughout all that time. He had seen the compassion that He had for man and His power demonstrated in all that He had done, that one who had witnessed so much said 'You will need some means of distinguishing Him from others'. What terrible darkness that such a one who had seen so much would say that. But the Lord Jesus in grace took His place "in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death." That is the extent of the obedience. It was not obedience to death. He was obedient to His Father, and the obedience to His Father led Him to death. That is why He came – He came to die. "And that the death of the cross", the most awful form of death that man had devised. His lowliness was even as far as that "and that the death of the cross". Nobody has ever suffered in any way that exceeds what Jesus has endured. See the place that He has been given. The Lord Jesus said Himself "He that humbles himself shall be exalted". "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him and granted him a name, that which is above every name." There is God's pleasure in the life of lowliness of mind, a life of subjection, a life of self-denial and of humility under the hand of God. There we see God's pleasure, "God has highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Wonderful thing to think of that glorious Name ringing out throughout eternity and every knee will bow and every tongue will proclaim that it is right that He should be given the highest place. As the hymn writer says:

No place too high for Him is found,
No place too high in heaven. (Hymn 451)

Because He went to such depths, He demonstrated such lowliness, He has established His claim to the highest place in heaven and Paul says, 'This is the mind that God values, this is the life that God values'. Is it going to be found in you? Well, we find examples in the scriptures and I suppose as Paul was writing this he would send this letter by the hand of a beloved brother, Epaphroditus. There was a brother esteeming the brethren more excellent than himself. This

brother had been very ill and what concerned him about his sickness was that the brethren might be concerned about him. What lowliness of mind. One might say Epaphroditus, how are you today, are you feeling any better? And he would just be interested – Are the brethren at rest about my condition or are they still distressed?

That was what concerned him. You think of the lowliness of mind that was seen in Jesus being seen in others and that, beloved, is a feature of a Christian life, a thing that God values and looks for in you and in me. What a testing thing that is to say, but God is looking for it because He will have the life of Jesus before Him eternally and no other life will do.

In chapter 3, I would like to speak about the value of the Christian life to the Christian. You might say, What do you mean by that? What I mean is that the Christian life gives you much more than any other form of life could give you. I remember a time many years ago I was speaking to a man. He wanted to know why my manner of life was as it was. I would have to say that I was not a very good example of a Christian, but he wanted to know anyway why I did not have certain things. I tried to explain and he said; But what is in it for you? Paul here has no hesitation about the value of the Christian life to the Christian. He has no hesitation about that.

The first thing here is that he has certain goals before him. He is not aimless; he is not going through this world being fed with the diet of corruption and pollution that is in this world as men are. Men have lost the idea of a standard. There is a generation that is growing up now and has grown up which has been fed a diet with no concept of a standard to aim at. It is a diet of everything which exists around us, all the worst forms of pollution and violence. That is the diet that a whole generation is being fed on with no concept of a standard, nothing to aim for. Paul had something to aim for. God would have a goal for men. Paul says, naturally I have many advantages.

These were not bad things, these were good things, nothing that would condemn him, but he says, I count it all loss, I have seen something better, I have seen the light of a man in the glory, I have seen something which outshines everything which I had before. It is

all become of no account, it has all become meaningless to me because I have the light of something before me and that is what I am aiming for, that is my goal and that is what I am pursuing and I am not going to be diverted from that. Beloved, let us pursue. He says, "I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." That Man in the glory shone out in all His grace on the Damascus road. Paul could claim Him as His own. My Lord, "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." This is the one to whom every knee will bow, every tongue shall confess that He is Lord. But Paul says, He is my Lord, on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Him nothing else matters. Everything pales into insignificance. The things that I regarded as good and that appealed to me, I count them as filth. Why would he count them to be filth? Because they might become a hindrance, they might divert his eye from the One who was before him. They might turn His eye away from Christ. You see, he could say, "I was a Pharisee," something he could be proud of. He says, "I was zealous". That was something else he could be proud of. While he is saying those things he is not looking at the goal. He is not looking at Christ. 'I count them as filth; I don't want anything to do with them'. He says, "Surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all, and count them to be filth". He says 'I am better off without them, that I may gain Christ'. What do you mean Paul, that you may gain Christ? I think it means fully to gain Him. When the Lord Jesus takes us, or if He delays and we should die, we shall be with Him and we will have nothing before us but Himself. He will be our all. There will be nothing that can hinder us. There will be nothing to come between Him and us. We will gain Him fully. And Paul here is on the pilgrim journey and here in his Christian life He says he has a goal "that I may gain Christ". He says 'I am looking away from everything else. It is that I may be found in Him not having my righteousness. I am not going to try to work out something myself to make myself acceptable'. He says there is another righteousness, "the righteousness which is of God through faith", that through faith we

have been brought into a righteousness that we could never attain through effort. If we try through our own effort to please God all we will find is disappointment, disappointment, and disappointment. But it is through faith, and faith is the power of the Christian life, one of the great resources of the Christian life, for without faith it is impossible to please God. And if we are to go through this life it must be a life of faith. Remember those in the Old Testament.

Some are marked out for us in Hebrews 11. There were many others who lived a life of faith and I believe that living a life of faith meant they constantly had God before them. They were living in the light of the way that God had been made known to them and they were seeking to answer to the way in which God had come out in grace. God had shone in their hearts. The work in their hearts was His own work, it was the work of faith but they had received His word and answered to it. And that is the beginning of Christian life and it brings us into a righteousness that is far beyond anything that man could work up to. It says the righteousness of God, because it is the righteousness that causes us to be acceptable to God. Not a righteousness that causes us to be satisfied with ourselves, but a righteousness that causes us to be acceptable to God. Is that not blessed? Is that not what the sinner needs? That is what troubles the sinner. That is what troubled me, that I was going to face God and how could I stand before Him? But there is a righteousness that is not just acceptable for me, not just for my conscience but acceptable to God, and “through faith” says Paul “I have that righteousness”. And he says ‘The goal I am pursuing is the goal where there is nothing to becloud that’. I will be before Him not in my righteousness but in Him, “that which is by faith, the righteousness which is of God through faith, to know him, and the power of his resurrection”. What a mighty power that was, the power of His resurrection. In a way the eleven disciples had an advantage here. They had seen Him in flesh and blood conditions, and then they saw Him out of death. They could see it was the same Jesus; the One who had gone into death was the same Jesus who had come out of death. The Lord Jesus assures them as to that – read the end of Luke. He goes to great lengths to assure them that it was

the same Jesus they knew in flesh and blood conditions. Paul says he wants to know something of the power of His resurrection, that mighty power with which God wrought, the surpassing greatness of this power, which He wrought in the Christ. Somebody said that the surpassing greatness of His power has been exercised only once and that was in raising Jesus from among the dead. Paul says “to know Him and to know that power”. He tells us elsewhere that the power is working in us. How is it working in us? It is working in us by the Holy Spirit, the other great resource for the Christian life. Not only do we have faith but we also have the Holy Spirit. A Divine Person Himself, taking up His abode in the hearts of believers, guiding them, leading them, giving them power, giving them resource, giving them refreshment. O beloved, what a resource we have in the Holy Spirit. What is in it for us? The light of a man in the glory, the light of a righteousness which is eclipsing everything else, the light of the power which works in resurrection, working in us through the Holy Spirit. How greatly we have been blessed and not only that but there is a pressing on to the glory. Paul says, “I pursue”. He says “not that I have already obtained the prize.” He says ‘I am not completely like Jesus yet’. We will be like Him.

Because of our condition we are not completely like Him but He says I am pursuing, I have one goal before me and that is what I am pursuing. Beloved, let us keep that goal before us. Let us not find other attractions. I remember my father telling me about a man who needed a driver (I think it was in the days of horses and carriages).

He said that he wanted a very good driver and there were two men who had excellent references and lots of experience. He did not know how he was going to distinguish between them. So he asked them both a question, separately. If we were going along a mountain road and there was a precipice on one side and the mountain rose up on the other, how close could you drive to that precipice? The first man said ‘I could drive within inches and you would be perfectly safe’; the other man said ‘I would keep as far away from that edge as I could’. Well, you know who got the job!

Do not run your life on the edge. Do not take risks, have that goal before you. Paul says ‘I am pursuing, I am not taking risks with my

life'. When pursuing you do not run your life on the edge. It will bring in sorrow, it will bring in disappointment. I know what I am talking about. Keep your eye on that goal. Paul said 'I have one thing before me. I am not concerned with running along on the edge, looking out to see what else there is'. He says 'I have one thing before me'. He says, "I pursue, forgetting the things behind and looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." What a goal he had before him! To be like Jesus, to be called on high, to be caught up to have part in association with Him and being like Him. What a goal he had before him!

At the end of the chapter, he says that is where our life is, "*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens." He says we do not have a commonwealth here – that is not where our life and associations are, beloved. That is all finished in the death of Jesus.

We have a new order of life. A believer here has a life, which has its existence in the heavens. What an advantage that is to the believer. The Christian life assumes great value to the believer as he realises that all his associations of life are in heaven and that he does not have to be preoccupied with all the things that are going on on earth which make people fear, which make people concerned.

The believer's life is centred in heaven "from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory." Can you think of that – our body of humiliation, His body of glory. Can you think of two greater contrasts, but it will happen, beloved. It will happen in an instant. Transformed, "according to the working of the power which he has even to subdue all things to himself." Paul says, that is the goal I have before me. What value every Christian should place on the Christian life because he has a goal in heaven and he has his associations of life there.

So Paul says, we have still got to work out things on earth.

We are not exactly taken out of our circumstances, although we have such a hope. He says, the brethren are here and I exhort them to be of the same mind. He goes on. "Yea, I ask thee also, true

yolk-fellow, assist them.” There is another thing that is of value in a Christian’s life. He has others. He says ‘assist them’. Helpers abound. How would any of us fare if we were left alone, if we had to work things out in this scene on our own, without any links or communications with anyone else? He says ‘assist them’, be one of the helpers. If somebody has a difficulty, if somebody has a problem, help them. Is that not simple? Well, beloved, what a system of help there is that exists today. Helpers one of another. He speaks of another “she has been a helper of many and of myself also”. Beloved, I look round this room today, and I can identify brethren who have said things and done things and they may not be aware that they have been a helper to me. But let that be our attitude, that we should be helpers of one another. Then he goes on with this wonderful section, we often speak about. “Rejoice,” he says, “rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known of all men. The Lord is near.” The Lord is near. Do you always remember that? The Lord is near. What a cause for rejoicing. The One who loved us so much He died for us is near. It says, “Let your gentleness be known.” Let the features of Jesus come out. Let them be manifested. He says, “the Lord is near.” The One whose moral qualities are to shine out in the believer is the One who is near us. Be careful about nothing – that is to say do not be preoccupied with anxiety about things. They are all in the Lord’s hands. We know that He can take care of us. We know that He can order things for our blessing. It says “but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”. Prayer and supplication – that is what we do with problems and difficulties. There is Someone on whom we can cast them. We can put them on Him. Scripture says, “Having cast all your care upon Him.” What a wonderful expression that is, casting all your care on Him – as if to say I am going to have nothing more to do with that. I am going to cast it on Jesus. He says “by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” We can give thanks because we know that God to whom we are committing them. We know the God to whom we are committing our lives and He says, “the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding,

shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus.” Blessed thing to have peace. Blessed thing to know the peace of God. Let us enjoy it! That peace which is not known and cannot be known by anyone who does not go into His presence and cast all his anxieties and cares upon Him but as doing so that peace not only fills your heart but it guards it. You can come out again from His presence and you know you have gained something there. That peace, the peace of a realm which nothing can disturb. You have that peace and it is guarding your heart because the problems, the difficulties and the fears you knew before have all been committed to Him and in their place He has given peace. What a God we have! The peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus. Then he says “for the rest brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if any praise, think on these things.”. You say, where do I find them? You find them all in Christ. They are all in Jesus. True, noble, just, pure, beloved you find it all in Him. Think on these things. Make time to do it. In this world where everything is so hectic, make time to do it. Maybe you have to use time when you are on the underground, or on a train or driving (with care), make time to think about the things which concern Jesus, the things which are pure and noble and true and holy. Think on these things. He says, “what you have both heard and learned and seen in me, these things do and the God of peace shall be with you”. So you have the peace of God guarding your hearts, and you have that God, the God of peace being with you. What is the value of the Christian’s life to the Christian? How much does he have?

I have only touched a few things, but have we some impression of the value of the Christian life? Think of its value to God as He looks down and sees believers in the Lord Jesus pursuing their lives here, pleasing Him, and displaying features of Jesus. Think of the value to a Christian. He has glory before him, he has a goal before him, he has the righteousness of God before

him, he has the coming of the Lord Jesus before him, he has surrounding him a whole system of help and helpers, he has One on whom he can lay every burden and care, he has things to occupy him to feed his mind and his heart, things which are pure and holy and which would build up his soul, he has the God of peace himself being with Him. Beloved, there is nothing like the Christian's life.

May we enjoy it increasingly for the Lord's Name's sake.

MALVERN

20 July 2003

TOUCHING

Norman Henry

Psalm 105: 14, 15; Daniel 8: 15-18; 9: 20-23; Revelation 1: 17-20; Genesis 32: 24-28, 31

There was a reference at the end of the reading to Daniel which made me think of these two scripture references in Daniel.

But, I wish to speak first of all as to the thought of touching. The divine word is, "Touch not mine anointed ones". God is able to protect His own and maintain His prerogative. In doing so, God always maintains His right to keep in contact with His people. That is a very great encouragement to us that we are not left here without contact with the blessed God and His Christ. It is not just a matter of redemption being accomplished, the power of the world broken in the Red Sea, brought out into the wilderness and left there, but God maintained through His word and as he refers to it here, "anointed ones, and ... my prophets". God maintains His contact with His people. That is a divine provision. I do not know where we would be without it, I do not know how I could be sustained spiritually without divine contact with His people. Our brother referred to the living God. Mr Grant in Dundee used to say, it is living relations with a living God, that is Christianity. "Touch not mine anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm". He reprov'd kings, for instance, on behalf of Abraham, for the sake of His people, but He says, "Touch not mine anointed ones". That is persons who are distinguished, an anointed person is a distinguished person. I think there is only one prophet referred to as anointed – certainly Elijah was told to anoint him – kings were anointed, the priestly family were anointed, (that was the great thought of the anointing), the cleansed leper was anointed – that is precious. The day the leper was cleansed he made his way to the tent of meeting and there was the pronouncement that he was clean and he was anointed and then he walked back through the camp. Think of that man walking back, he would not be cut from the people; the leper was cut off from the midst of the congregation but he walked back and there was

anointing. He is now under divine protection. I know the thought was that there was a certain dignity and distinguishment in the anointing – it speaks of the Spirit – but persons were anointed. He would go through the camp and he was marked off. What a difference! That is how we have come in. In the three synoptic gospels, the first touch you will find of the Lord in gospel was that of a leper, He touched a leper. So the leper is going through the camp anointed, and the word is “Touch not mine anointed ones”. The Lord has His own rights over His people and He will not allow persons to infringe these rights; we must understand that.

Thessalonians helps us to respect what is in the brethren, respect and dignity: all the epistles do in some measure. As to the dignity that is due to the brethren, you respect a person whom God has taken up and whatever his view may be, we must always respect him. He says, “Touch not mine anointed ones”. The Lord has that right, it is a prerogative that He has, and I love to think of Him having access. When we sit in the assembly, as Mr. Wigram says, we sit there to be worked on by God. In other words it is not to ‘get through’ the meeting; it might be a very short meeting, I suppose most of the accounts we have must have been very short, brief meetings, but just sufficient to be worked on by God. Mr Wigram says, you read until something strikes you and then lay the book down because God is working. Why should our life not be made like that? Why should I become insensitive?

Balaam was a totally insensitive man, he asked God for the word – God told him not to go and he goes back to see if God had changed His mind. That is insensitive; that is worse, that is lawless. He thought that God might have changed His mind overnight. God had told Him not to go and he goes back, and eventually God says, Go. We know that as he is going along the angel appears to his ass first, and we know what happened on that journey. How insensitive we may be. We are not Balaams, because he died under the hand of Eleazar when he went out in Joshua and Balaam was slain, but how insensitive we can be to the rights that the Lord has to touch us

in our affections, in our hearts, our minds, just a touch in the meeting, you would say, it is the Lord.

In resurrection, John said, "It is the Lord". John is a very sensitive man to the touch of the Lord. In each case the touch was in view of what lies ahead. It gives you an understanding, it settles you and I think in this scripture, when He says, "Touch not mine anointed ones", He was not only protecting them, but He reserved His right to keep in contact with the anointed ones. That is very blessed. He will see us through and if we are sensitive enough, He will touch us in our affections in every meeting, He will lift you up.

You have had a difficult day, you come to meeting and something comes in from the Lord; you know it is from the Lord, you cannot mistake the touch of the Lord. That is what quickening really means. When He touches you it must involve quickening. How can you describe it? Something comes alive in your affections, you feel stretched inwardly, your heart is enlarged, some attachment to Christ as the last Adam, a quickening Spirit. How can that be effective in you and me unless we know the touch of the last Adam? Our bodies will be quickened – that will take place – but in our affections now He says, "Touch not mine anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm".

My mind went to Daniel – Daniel was in a difficult time, something like our own, because there is a similarity between Daniel's writings and John in the Revelation and you need this coming in to settle you. You have a touch, in this case it is the angel Gabriel, who is the priestly angel, and he comes to Daniel. Daniel does not understand – as you go through the book you come to the end of verse 14, "then shall the sanctuary be vindicated". Everything was in ruin and what we have spoken of, the court was given up to the nations, the whole sanctuary was overrun by apostasy; that is what he was facing, the period of time he could not see daybreak.

Sometimes in our hearts we do not see daybreak and a touch of Christ comes in to settle you. That is what Gabriel does here, "And he touched me, and set me up where I had stood". He gives you strength to stand. Daniel was an extraordinary man, a man of deepest regard and feeling. As we know his windows were opened,

not that he opened them, but they were open continuously towards Jerusalem and three times a day he prayed. He had kept things before his heart which were according to God, and yet outwardly the place was given up, the gates were ruined, the walls were down, and the whole thing was in terrible break up. What is going to sustain you and me in the face of the break-up in Christendom, the marks of the great house? Are we callous as to it? Do we feel the Lord's feelings as to the great house? The house of God in 1 Timothy is not the house in 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy is what things have become in man's hand in responsibility, the great house, vessels to honour, vessels to dishonour, but it settles us, He touches us, this dear Man, "And he touched me, and set me up where I had stood. And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be at the end of the indignation", it is taken up with all the desolation that takes place. "Until two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings: then shall the sanctuary be vindicated" (v.14). With the Israelite it is all future, they have not got it yet, there is no restoration yet. What they will have to face in the short period after the rapture and the coming of Christ, the awful things they will have to face, but eventually the sanctuary will be vindicated, things will be established, the tabernacle of David rebuilt. What a time it will be when Christ comes. Blessed anticipation! This man has a touch to help him to stand.

In chapter 9 it has been given – again Gabriel comes, Gabriel is the angel that is used, He "touched me about the time of the evening oblation". What was being maintained in Daniel's heart and mind was the morning and evening oblation, he was in keeping with it. It was not maintained in Israel, Israel was at a low ebb at this point, but in persons that were with the Lord they maintained the morning and evening oblation, and that takes place in the households of the saints. Daniel would take it quietly, no doubt he would share things with his three friends, and he would go over things, and at the time of the evening oblation he is entirely with the Lord, entirely with God. It is a good time to be with God to get a touch in your spirit. We need to pray more and be focused in prayer.

Sometimes in prayer our minds are apt to be drawn aside to think of other things, maybe even just things, but be focused in prayer that you believe you are speaking to God, to the Lord Jesus or to the Spirit. You have freedom to do that, but address divine Persons and be focused in prayer. I think it is a very important thing.

It says here, “about the time of the evening oblation”. He is presenting things to God, he is confessing “my sin and the sin of my people”, and then he is presenting “my supplication before Jehovah God for the holy mountain of my God”. What feelings that dear man of God had! He felt things deeply, but he is maintaining what is due to God, and it says “at the time of the evening oblation”. It is the time of it; as the evening would come round, the time of the evening oblation, God is to get His portion. Think of the Lamb, the Lamb of the morning, the Lamb at night, still Christ – tender usage of that type of the Lord Jesus – and the great, blessed time that He would secure at the time of the evening oblation, going up to God. It says, “I am now come forth to make thee skilful of understanding”. That is what the touch is for to settle this dear man.

When we come to John in Revelation, it is a new experience for John to see the Lord in this posture. He is in this judgmental attitude. Think of what would be opened up to this man! It has been said he had dealings with these assemblies, and he probably did not realise the extent of the Lord’s feelings as to them, and yet it says here, “when I saw him”, that is Christ, “I fell at his feet as dead; and he laid his right hand upon me”. How blessed! It gave him strength for what lies ahead. Do we not need it? Everything is in His hand.

He speaks about the seven stars and the seven lamps; He has everything in His hands. He will deal with the western nations; He will deal with everything on the earth, that is how great this Person is. But to see Him in this posture was new to John. You might say he had known and he had carried forward the wealth, the atmosphere of the bosom of the Lord, but here he sees that He is girt about the breast, he would listen to what the Lord said, and write down what He said about these churches. Some of the conditions which He speaks of may not have been extant at that time, but he

gives a dispensational view of the church, conditions of the church that were present, and would be still to come. That is the moral condition of the church in the dispensation, and for that he gives John a touch, "he laid his right hand upon me". It does not say He took His right hand off him; it is just a touch of support to this man of God. These persons are men of God who have gone before us, "men of like passions" (Acts 14: 15), as was told to Elijah, and this man here, feeling the pressure of things sees the Lord in this guise and knows that He is looking, His eyes were as a flame of fire. John would know the link he had with the Lord, how close he had been, how real the beatings of his heart. It says, "the disciple whom Jesus loved", John 21: 20. He did not lose that sense, he wrote at the end as to the one whom Jesus loved. He was the youngest of the apostles and here he sees him in this guise and He lays His right hand upon him. What a touch that was! Do we not need it? Is that not a prerogative of the Lord to touch our hearts, keep that avenue open? Why should we not place ourselves where He moves, where He acts? We say, Well I am tired tonight, I will not bother going out tonight, it has been a heavy day, but you get there and a touch from the Lord comes into your heart and you know that the Lord is dealing with you. That is how true Christianity is, your link by the Spirit to Christ where He is.

When you come to Jacob in Genesis, Jacob needs a touch with what lies ahead in his horizontal relations. How are you with your brother, with your sister? He gets a touch here; through this exercise he is made a prince. It was a princely action to wrestle with God. It says, "for thou hast wrestled with God, and with men, and hast prevailed". This man is having to do with God and his name is changed, "he touched the joint of his thigh; and the joint of Jacob's thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him". That remained with Jacob, his natural strength was affected, he appeared different through his relations with God. I think every touch from the Lord makes us different. We might read, we might do a lot of things, but we need relationship with the Lord and here he is touched and he faces his brother, who was incorrigible, you could never change

Esau. Esau was always Esau; in fact at the end He says, “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated”, that is after the man had proved what he was, but you could not change Esau, but Jacob had to be changed, he could be changed. You cannot change an Esau.

Jacob you could change and the Lord used that prerogative He had with Jacob and He changed him, and he was different, “he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him; and he limped upon his hip”. It was a new day in his life, the sun rising upon him. He was changed! There is nothing like a touch of Christ. He was changed outwardly, but what a man he was!

Think of that patriarch. There are not many patriarchs in scripture, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – David was a patriarch according to the Acts, but Jacob is a patriarch. Think of the whole expanse of God’s thoughts which he would take up as to Israel.

What God would do, the opening up of everything, establishing everything according to His earthly people, all comes out here. This was some change in Jacob himself, he changed to Israel and as Israel he sets forth according to the sovereignty of God. Jacob was a responsible man and like all of us he makes his mistakes, always mistakes, one after another, but as Israel, it is what he is, he is made of God, the sovereign operations of divine grace. I think that comes through in the touch. As you get a touch you get a sense that you are loved by the Lord, and He wants to keep that way open and touch your heart.

I think it is very encouraging that He loves us so much that He continues to touch us in the assembly. I am not saying that He does not touch you otherwise, in family prayer, or your committals, but there is something special in the assembly that gives Him the door open to act in His own prerogative and right to touch His people so that they are ready for what lies ahead. I understand that is what is prophetic, it is not exactly opening up something that is not known before, that is in scripture and has come through in the ministries of the revival, but it is preparing the person. That is what I understand prophetic ministry does, it prepares you and me for what lies ahead. That is why what is prophetic in the meeting is intended to change us

so that we are ready for what lies ahead, but it is all because He loves us so much. May we keep in the area of divine prerogative that He can touch our affections and help us to move forward together. For His Name's sake.

DENTON

6 September 2003

AT A BURIAL

(i) THE SPIRITUAL BODY

Roland Brown

1 Corinthians 15: 42-46

I wanted to draw attention, dear brethren, to this reference to the “spiritual body”; the only reference, I think, in the Scriptures to it. Not much is said about it, but sufficient to promote our interest and enquiry. The expression itself is perhaps to us mysterious, the thought that what is spiritual should take bodily form, but the apostle says there is a spiritual one, “if there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one”. What a contemplation for us, dear brethren, in the presence of death, that just as assuredly our brother has had a natural body, a body in which we have known him, in which what he is has been expressed, just as assuredly as that he will have a spiritual one. Not much is said about it, but there is sufficient to be said about it to quicken our affections. It will be in power, it will be in incorruptibility, it will be glorious. Those things are said of it in contrast to the natural body. The figure of a seed sown is applied by the apostle to the burial of the body of a saint, that it is sown in weakness, it is sown in dishonour, it is sown in corruption. That is what nature of itself ends in. What a solemn consideration for us who are living, is it not, as to what our energies are devoted to, whether they are devoted to what ends in corruption and dishonour and weakness, or whether our hearts have been drawn to what is incorruptible, powerful and glorious. What a prospect, dear brethren! May the comfort of it come home to us all, and particularly to our dear sister and the family, that the work of God in itself indestructible, and a new creation, *must* be clothed with a body that is suited to it.

If we think of a spiritual body, it must mean that what is spiritual should come into expression and it must also convey to our hearts the substantiality of what is spiritual, what may seem to us, particularly when we are young in faith, to be ethereal or unreal. The scripture says there is a spiritual body. Each saint will have that, that the work of God in new creation may come into expression for His

glory and for the praise of the glory of His grace eternally. So that we get some indication of it, I think, in the Lord's own movements in resurrection. It is very striking that on the many times in which He appeared in the forty days He was not recognised by His physical appearance. All that had come to an end in His death, but He was discerned, in affection, by those that loved Him. He was discerned by His voice and what He said; it was unmistakably the Lord. One beloved apostle said, "It is the Lord", John 21: 7. No, 'ifs' or 'buts' or 'maybes' about it, as there is none of that in this passage, the apostle says there is a spiritual body. How it reflects, dear brethren, on the greatness of Christ as a quickening Spirit. The first man, he became a living soul; it was granted to him, but he was out of the earth and made of dust; but the second Man is out of heaven and He is a making-alive spirit, "a quickening spirit". How wonderful to be attached to Him, the One who, as we have been reminded in this place, has been into death in order to destroy it eternally and to bring to light out of it life and incorruptibility. What a portion He has won for us. How full is the salvation that we have in Him, that we shall be with Him and like Him eternally, body, soul and spirit. Nothing less than that. He is able to save to the uttermost. What a Saviour He is, not only to save us from our sins and remove the power of death and the threat of judgment, but to translate our bodies of humiliation into conformity to His own body of glory. The natural body for our brother became that in a very real way, a body of humiliation, but what a deliverance death becomes, dear brethren, as we see the great end in view. "He that has begun in you a good work"; that has been completed, but not only has it been completed, it will be clothed with a tabernacle house from heaven. It will be clothed, God will be pleased to do it. The passage speaks of Him giving bodies to the various forms of creature on the earth as it pleases Him, and you think of it pleasing God, to clothe what has been wrought out in humiliation and in suffering, with a body of glory distinctive to that work, but nevertheless a body of glory like unto His. The great purpose of God, dear brethren, in taking us up and in taking up our beloved brother was that we should be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren.

May our hearts be comforted in the assurance, and the certainty of these things to which no element of doubt applies, and may we who remain to the coming of the Lord be more concerned to devote ourselves to what is incorruptible and glorious and eternal, and may we increasingly be delivered from what goes to corruption and dishonour and weakness, for His glory.

(ii) THE HOUSE FROM HEAVEN

John Wright

2 Corinthians 4: 16-18; 5: 1-10

We have, beloved brethren, in this section, the contrast between our earthly tabernacle house and the house which is from heaven which is something that ever, believer in Christ will have. It says, “ardently desiring to have put on our house which is from heaven”. Paul had that desire. It is a wonderful thing to have that desire to have this house which is from heaven. We have witnessed with our beloved brother the frailty of the tabernacle house, which is the earthly one.

Paul says, “we know that if our earthly tabernacle house be destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”. The house which is from heaven is from God. It is made by God, and it is prepared for us by God. God is taking account of what is going on in the present tabernacle house and there is something there which is going through, and it will be housed suitably, eternally. It will be glorious, and it links with what our brother has been saying as to the spiritual body, but it is referred to as a house here, something that will suitably house what is of God which is going through. There is the outward man, “Wherefore we faint not; but if indeed our outward man is consumed”. With Paul it was being consumed. There was, of course, with it the outward decay and decline, as we have seen with our brother, but it was being consumed. It was being consumed in service to the saints, but he says, “the inward is renewed day by day”. It is wonderful to have a link with God now, and with what is eternal. God is preparing a house eternal in the heavens. Let us be engaged with what is eternal. Paul says, “our momentary and light affliction works for us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory”. There was something being worked out in the suffering and in the pressure.

There is much suffering and much pressure among the saints, and God is working something out, He says it “works for us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that

are seen are for a time, but those that are not seen eternal". How real, beloved brethren, are the unseen things, the eternal things, to me? Christianity is not just in word, it is in substance, it is in things which are eternal. So that Paul was engaged with these things and he had the desire to be clothed with this house. He speaks of "we who are in the tabernacle groan, being burdened; while yet we do not wish to be unclothed, but clothed, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life". That could happen very quickly, that could happen today, when the Lord comes, "that is what is mortal may be swallowed up by life". Let us be in expectancy. Then he says, "Now he that has wrought us for this very thing is God, who also has given to us the earnest of the Spirit". "The earnest of the Spirit", beloved brethren, to have the blessedness of the Spirit as the earnest in this way. Eternal things become real to us as having the earnest of the Spirit. We shall enter into them in actuality soon, but we have the earnest of them, we have the earnest of the Spirit; and the Spirit would give us some impression of what is before us and would sustain us in the little time that remains. Our beloved bereaved brethren will realise what there is in the Spirit and what there is to be engaged with in a forward look into eternal things, which would sustain us at the present time. Then he says, "we are always confident, and know that while present in the body we are absent from the Lord, (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are confident, I say, and pleased rather to be "absent from the body and present with the Lord". That is another desire that Paul had. Be then he says, "Wherefore also we are zealous, whether present or absent, to be agreeable to him". The effect upon us of eternal things being before us and being with the Lord would be that "we are zealous, whether present or absent, to be agreeable to him. For we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of the Christ". We shall be in our heavenly tabernacle house, then, and the judgment-seat is not for punishment but to get the Lord's review of all that we have done in this present body, right from the beginning to the end of our course, and we shall get the Lord's assessment of it, some things will be for profit, some things will be for loss. I just felt led to speak of this, beloved brethren, that these eternal things and being with the

Lord may stimulate us at the present time that we may be helped to be agreeable to Him. May it be so, in His Name.

(iii) DYING TOGETHER, LIVING TOGETHER

Richard Brown

2 Corinthians 7: 3, John 12: 1-3

One of the things that is a comfort to us on an occasion like this is to consider the present portion of our brother, and we know that it is not his final portion; his final portion of course will be actually to see Christ and to enjoy His blessed presence with the saints. It was necessary for that that he should pass through death, and now he is with Christ, precious matter, his spirit is with Jesus awaiting that moment when the saints also will be with Christ and we shall be forever, as the scripture says, with the Lord. But what we can see from that is that in a very literal sense death preceded the experience of life, and I wondered whether it would be all right to suggest that this finds its parallel in a moral and spiritual sense to us even now, that before we can enter into the experience of life together there must be the experience of death together. It is the order in which Paul the apostle introduces it here. He says, "ye are in our hearts, to die together, and live together". I would like to bring this principle, if I could, before the dear saints, that it seems to me there is this blessed area of life together. Elsewhere the apostle speaks of living together with Him, that is with Jesus, but here he does not go quite so far as that, but he refers to this circle which I believe can be experienced even now which is referred to as "life together", and I would like to suggest on the basis of this verse that the only way into it, dear brethren, the only way into the practical experience of it is by dying together. I want to emphasise that, that it is dying together. I suppose in the teaching of it the dying would connect with the present application to our souls of the cross of Christ, and the teaching as to that is gone into in other sections of the New Testament, as we know. But what I simply wanted to draw attention to was this, that the only way into the experience of life together is by dying together. I think the "together" in this verse would be Paul and the Corinthians, that Paul as it were, was not going to retain his own integrity but he was going to die. In fact in

one place he says, "Die I daily". 1 Cor 15: 13. He was going to die, and he wanted to die in a moral sense with these Corinthian saints so that he with them might enter into the experience of life together.

Now I wondered whether this little circle at Bethany would be a practical illustration for us, a little picture of how this principle works in practice. What I would like to suggest is that in chapter 11 of John's gospel the Lord passed this little company at Bethany through the experience of death together, and that in chapter 12 what we see is the circle of life together. We have often drawn attention to it, the way the Lord does not act immediately, the way that He waited two days. And, dear brethren, if we think of our own experiences, especially in this place, we know that the Lord did not intervene immediately. In His infinite wisdom things were allowed to be prolonged, but then He acted, and as we see with Lazarus, the Lord allowed things to go a certain course. We know what was in His heart to produce in the saints because it says in verse 2 that it was the Mary who anointed the Lord. We know the end that was in His heart to reach with these beloved saints at Bethany, and in His infinite wisdom He allowed things to go a certain way before He intervened Himself. And I wondered, dear brethren, whether it would be fair to suggest both as to our exercises locally and as to questions which have perplexed the saints for a long time, whether it would be permissible to suggest that the way forward might be if the saints could be encouraged to die together. I just bring that simply before the saints, the question of dying together. It is not a question of this side or that side, or anyone standing in his own integrity, but if the saints could be encouraged to die together we might find opened up to us even in the days such as we are in the blessed experience of life together. And what we see in chapter 11 of John is how one by one the Lord leads each of these beloved saints into the experience of death together. We know that literally it was Lazarus who had died, but we see in His gracious ways with them the Lord brings them all into it, one by one brings them all into it, and that is what I am pleading for, dear brethren, that maybe we might find the way forward as to the reality of this area of this life together if we

accepted the present bearing in our souls of death together. What we see is a circle of saints gathered round the Lord with a simple desire to make much of Him. What a blessed possibility, dear brethren, is held out to us, a circle of saints whose simple desire is to distinguish Him. There is no disunity here. We know that there had been, we know that there had been friction in this circle, but there is nothing like that here. No one is out of their place. Everyone is there, and it is Him they made a supper for. They were providing for Him. And one person comes forward, it was Mary, and we know that characteristically she was more spiritual than the others, but you almost get the impression that it could have been any one of them, but one of them comes forward and everything is perfectly suitable, everything is in perfect harmony. What we see, I think, is souls who having passed through the experience of death together, there is nothing left before their souls but Christ as the object of their hearts. What a possibility, dear brethren! What a possibility. What I would desire is that we might be so drawn, so attracted by the prospect of life together that we might in our own exercises be prepared for the experience of death together. I believe it is possible, dear brethren, in days such as we are in of smallness and brokenness, I believe this experience of life together is possible, but there is only one way into it, and it is by death together. I would suggest it to my beloved local brethren, and to us all, that we might find even in these days that such an experience is opened up to us, the true experience of Christian fellowship, a circle where Christ is supreme and everyone is held in their right relation to Him. May the Lord greatly encourage our hearts in relation to this blessed possibility, for His Name's sake.

EAST FINCHLEY

18 December 2003

Burial of John Harvey