

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 335

February 2001

Contents

GOD'S PEOPLE MARKED OUT

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

GOD'S PEOPLE MARKED OUT

**1 Samuel 16: 11–13, 17, 18; Exodus 33: 12–16; John 14: 21–23;
Romans 8: 12–17**

J.S.G. What was in mind was to enquire as to the marking out of God's people as distinguished in His sight. I think we shall be helped if we first of all occupy our minds and our affections with the Lord Jesus Himself in this respect. I wondered if the passage in Samuel would help us to receive some impression of features of beauty and glory in the Lord Jesus as man, which marked Him out and are attractive to God. We shall be helped as we enquire but one thing that might be said is that the feature of David brought forward in verse 12 particularly is of beauty which was inward. What was manifested came from within and God looks on the heart, as we get earlier in this chapter. As we occupy our thoughts for the moment with the beauty of the Lord Jesus as the One in the divine mind to be anointed, marked out in that way for God, it might help us to see what the divine thought is as to the saints. The later verses show that others, at least one other observer, were able to speak about what was seen in this unique One; and I was especially concerned to call attention to the fact that it closes with this statement, "Jehovah is with him." I wondered if we might be helped - with our view upon the Lord Jesus and all that He is and has been for God, His personal attractiveness and His ability to carry through everything for God - then to consider this feature as to God being with *us*.

Moses seems to suggest that that is the essential thing. Here is Moses with the care of all these people and he evidently accepted the obligation of leadership. I think it is good for us all in some sense to take up obligation and care as far as it is within our reach. Moses in a very special way, I believe, is taking up responsibility as selected by God to lead His people, and he evidently regards the fact that God should go with them as essential if they were to get through the wilderness. I think that is in a way essential for us now. If God is not with us, what are we going to do and how are we going to go through and fulfil what is needed? I wondered if we should seek help as to

how our individual relations with God and the consciousness of His presence with us would be essential to our proving His presence among the saints collectively.

E.O. It is affecting, too, to consider the wonder of divine love in activities among Themselves, to think of the unselfish service of the blessed Holy Spirit descending upon the Lord Jesus to mark Him out as Son of God.

J.S.G. Yes, I think that. I was greatly encouraged by the opportunity for our hearts to go out to God the Father in praise at the beginning of the meeting and I am sure that we should be stimulated in that connection. God would call our attention to the One who is the centre of His thoughts, the One in whom everything for Him is set forth.

G.C.B. Did you want to say something as to Romans 8 in your opening remarks or had you finished?

J.S.G. The Spirit is able to direct how we can be helped as to that. I was thinking that the section we read in John 14 is individual and the passage in Romans 8 is also the fruit of individual exercise. We use that expression 'exercise'. I think it involves feeling things with God and seeking God about our lives and our relations with Him; but the fruit of all that is for our instruction in the precious Roman epistle comes to a certain climax in chapter 8 – there is more, of course, in chapter 12. The hymn we had suggests response in the precious expression "Abba Father" which would give us an objective to desire to be responsive to Him who has called us. I was thinking of the question of being led by the Spirit of God. "As many", that is an individual thought: "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God." I know it is referring to more than one but I think it is the fruit of individual exercise. The thought was, if we are helped as to it, to enquire as to how we can make these things practical in our lives and the circumstances of the testimony so that we can prove consciously that God's presence is with us.

M.I.W. In connection with the Lord Jesus Himself in the type as to David, God had said to Samuel earlier, “for man looketh upon the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh upon the heart”, v 7. What was seen in David was the expression of what there was inwardly. Would that be right? And so with the Lord Jesus, there was that in Him as a man which morally was totally pleasing to God. Is that the basis, as it extends to us, upon which God can be with us?

J.S.G. Well, I think that is right. The fact was as to David that the features were being formed out of sight. The heart of David was no doubt in activity in the care of the sheep, in resistance to the power of the attackers, the animals that would take the sheep. I think that love can be manifested in our disposition towards what Satan may do to interfere with the things of God, but it should correspond as you say, with the secret life of Jesus under the eye of God. So little is spoken about it and yet divine approval manifested, in His anointing.

G.C.B. In that it proceeds from what is within, it is an exercise for us and for men generally as to the appreciation of Christ. Does that not depend on God’s work in us? The thief is an illustration of it; he changed ground to appreciate the moral beauty of Christ, apparently very quickly, but it was God’s work that made him appreciate the Lord Jesus.

J.S.G. I think that is right. We acknowledge that naturally, as the prophet Isaiah says, “when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him”, chap 53: 2; but He is under the divine eye. It is God’s grace that He should have caused us to find the One who is precious to Him attractive to us. As you say, it is His work. It is interesting that the name of David is not brought forward immediately as this part of the passage unfolds. I think there is a suggestion in that of the fact that it is the moral qualities and beauties that are being brought forward, that is, the thing itself before the name is put on it, so to speak. When the others passed before Samuel earlier we get first the names of the three eldest but what God is looking for is the moral qualities, as our brother says.

L.A.B. Is it interesting in Isaiah 53 it says, “For he shall grow up before him as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground”, v 2, that is there is no name given, but what is brought forward is the moral excellency of Christ?

J.S.G. That is very helpful and confirming. That links with how this passage is set out. “There is yet the youngest remaining”. Well, his name was known. You are suggesting that, to lovers, the attractive One is known without the name needing to be given. Have you more to say?

L.A.B. I have often been struck by the fact that we know so little of the Lord’s thirty years. Does it not help us to see that for all of us the essential part really is our own secret history with God as answering to what there was with the Lord personally?

J.S.G. Very good; that is the exercise to-day and it affects us all. I do not think that we should say it is only for certain ones. We should not be thinking like that. It is how God would work in each of us to cause us to be, as it were, at the centre of His thoughts in the sense that the One who is precious to Him becomes attractive to us in His moral features.

K.G.S. Would you link verses 17 and 18 that you read with what you are saying? While there is no name given to him, the qualities that come into expression *are* known and the fact that, as you commented already, Jehovah was with him.

J.S.G. Yes, it may be that the feature that is becoming more prominent as the observer’s description comes out is of manhood, do you think? “Provide me now a man ...”, said Saul, “And one of the young men answered and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse ... and he is a valiant man and a man of war,” and so on “and Jehovah is with him.” Would that be a prime quality of a man of God that “Jehovah is with him”? Can you help us further?

K.G.S. I was very interested in what you said as to what was not named and the fact that Jehovah was with him. Obviously there is an expression of God’s work in the individual that can be known.

J.S.G. Yes. As to the Lord Jesus personally this would link with what we get in one of the preachings of Peter, how God marked Him out. It says, "Jesus who was of Nazareth: how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went through all quarters doing good, and healing all that were under the power of the devil, because God was with him", Acts 10: 38. That, of course, is a reference to the perfect manhood of Jesus as anointed: "God was with him." Well, beloved brethren, what about power in our case, individually or collectively? I think that is something we need to be concerned about. Paul says to Corinth that what he looked for was not the words or the externals but the power. The Spirit might exercise us as to whether, from experience of God being with us in any conscious way we can contribute power in our part together in the things of God.

E.O. I was thinking of the attractiveness of the name of Jesus. It was given by divine command, "and thou shalt call his name Jesus" (Matt 1: 21) and then throughout the word there is a fragrance with that Name. "Thy name is an ointment poured forth" (Song of Songs 1: 3), wonderful attractiveness!

J.S.G. There certainly is. It would link, I think, with the meaning of David's name, 'Beloved', that is to all who know Him He is very attractive. The thought is to see how God has marked out One who has these moral qualities and the testimony of this observing young man is of these beautiful and, one might say, comprehensive features in a man, finishing with "Jehovah is with him."

L.W.B. I was thinking of power in our initial links with the Lord but we need help to confess His Name. We get the victory in that way, do we?

J.S.G. Yes, I think that is so. You are thinking of "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe", Prov 18: 10. That is salvation. That is very important for all of us because we all need to be ready – I include myself in that – to bring forward that precious Name.

D.E.R. Is it in your mind that if we are to know God with us individually or collectively, it must be as we afford Him conditions which are suitable to Himself?

J.S.G. That is in mind, and the pattern for it is in the One who has God's total approval and committal. We often refer to the preciousness of the Father's voice, both at His baptism when He was anointed and on the mount of transfiguration. I think we ought to consider that as setting out the divine standard of the approval of features that are to be found in man, seen in perfection in the Lord Jesus Himself.

G.C.B. We cannot exhaust the glories of Christ. Thank God, by the Spirit they are inexhaustible to speak of and to dwell on, but did you have any thought about what this young man says? He "is skilled in playing, and he is a valiant man and a man of war, and skilled in speech, and of good presence ..." We want a view of Christ in many aspects, do we not?

J.S.G. We do. One point would be, would it, that there was no thought of a specialist here? There was everything that this young man thought Saul would need or would be suitable for a king's palace, but from the standpoint of the divine view everything is there in perfect proportion, would you say? What is your thought?

G.C.B. It has newly been drawn to my attention. It is interesting that we have concentrated a little on this appreciation of Christ typically and the different aspects that are brought forward. There is no doubt a wealth to be gleaned which we cannot exhaust this morning.

J.S.G. Well, the impression that the young man had that he was "of good presence" seems to me to link with our enquiry. It would exercise us as to whether, as we meet one another, we have any sense that we are coming from the presence of God.

E.O.P.M. Is it interesting in that connection that the first thing is "skilled in playing"? Does that suggest one that is concerned for what is for God? The whole service of God is developed under David and this skill is with him obviously at an early age. I was thinking

that if we are concerned firstly for God, we will frequent His presence and therefore be formed and come out, as you say, as having a presence? It does not start with the fact that he was a man of war. We need to learn how to enter into that in the presence of God, but “skilled in playing” is a very important first requisite to our being complete for every good work.

J.S.G. That is very helpful. You are referring now to the passage in Timothy, “that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work”, 2 Tim 3: 17. That is preceded by a reference to moral qualities. I am sure what you say is right and links with the thought mentioned earlier as to what should be before us as an objective in these practical things, that God’s service is the prime thing. It is not simply one occasion of the week when we concentrate all our affections and desires in that direction but it should be characteristically marking us, you were thinking?

E.O.P.M. Yes, I have been thinking a little of how, practically, much of our approach to God is characterised by the needs that we have, circumstantial needs, the needs of care and direction in our everyday life and the needs of the testimony and the sorrows and exercises in it; but primarily the believer should be here as occupied with what is for God. I am just feeling for myself that if I were more occupied with what is for God it would put other things into perspective and give a balanced and complete outlook in contrast to being a specialist.

J.S.G. Well, I am thankful for what you say. Skill comes with practice and experience, does it not?

H.A.H. I was thinking of what it says at the end of Psalm 78, “And he fed them according to the integrity of his heart,” – you said earlier that his affections would be in relation to the care of the sheep – and then it says, “and led them by the skilfulness of his hands.” That is interesting because you need your hands to play an instrument, so there would be some link there.

J.S.G. I think that is full of wealth to consider and enquire into. There is great value in spiritual skill in the hands and it may link with the desire of Moses to know God’s way. We might enquire as to this

just a little. I was wondering whether, “make me now to know thy way,” though much may be in it, would include this thought of skilfulness in service and activity on God’s behalf, how things are to be done, because I think that will manifest whether we have any consciousness that God is with us.

H.A.H. I think that is very suggestive because, speaking reverently, God has acted with wondrous skill in the way that He has taken to secure His purpose.

J.S.G. I am sure that we should learn skill from Him in that way. There is much in the scriptures even as to the physical creation that involves that in a majestic way; but as to the new creation, how great the skill and the wisdom that have entered into it.

P.J.W. Is it interesting in that regard that when Paul is speaking to the elders at Ephesus, he says, “Yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my wants, and to those who were with me”, Acts 20: 34? Then he goes on to say “I have shewed you all things, that thus labouring we ought to come in aid of the weak” (v 35) and so on. Would that fit in with what you are thinking?

J.S.G. That fits very well, I think. How beautifully it was demonstrated in Paul. He is used of God really, is he not, to set things out for us in an attractive way after Christ Himself? There are other instances in the record we have as to Paul’s activities that he was ready to do anything that was needed and it did not matter whether people were watching or not. Do you not think we are a bit affected by that sometimes, whether people are watching or not? But that does not matter to God. God looks on the heart, and the motive for these things it seems to me is love for the Lord Himself and that formation after *Him* should come about in the saints. Would that be right?

J.W. I was wondering if really the skill you are speaking of is the outcome of love. It has been said that wisdom is the handmaid of love and the skill that marked Moses here in the way he speaks to God would be the result of Moses’ love for the people and his love for God.

J.S.G. I am sure that is right. I am glad you confirm it in that way. What an undertaking, to commit himself under God's direction to the care of these people through the wilderness! Love, as you say, was behind it, but I think in Moses' case what you mention would be linked with what characterised the man was that he spoke to God face to face. Do you think that is how love is formed?

J.W. I am sure of that because knowing the immediate presence of God he would know what the people were to God.

J.S.G. That is good and is a valuable matter for us to think about. It enters into how we pray from our earliest times. Are we concerned for the blessing and prosperity of the people of God? I was thinking of the review of Moses' life which we have at the close of Deuteronomy and the distinctiveness that there was about him as a man, as a prophet and a servant, and that he had known God face to face (Deut 34: 5-12).

L.W.B. For us it involves links with the Lord Jesus in glory: He is a glorious Man and our links with Him are by the Spirit, do you think?

J.S.G. Surely. We have not known Him according to flesh. We only know Him there. Do you have something more in mind?

L.W.B. Well, if we were habituated to His presence more, we would be more like Him and as to what our brother was saying about keeping in the presence of God, it means in our links with the Lord Jesus where He is.

J.S.G. Surely it does. Quite so.

D.E.R. Should we be in this earnestness of exercise, which marked Moses, for God's presence to be with us?

J.S.G. I think so. That is what was specially in mind in this passage. What about our prayers, beloved brethren? What about our desires for God's presence with us? We did not remark on it but Samuel says, does he not, as to David, "we will not sit at table till he come hither", that is, that the presence of Christ for lovers is essential before anything else can be done.

D.E.R. And is the presence of God to be sought not only on Lord's Day morning, as we would say, but also throughout the week - on Saturday evening, on Monday morning and so on? It is something that we would covet, to provide God with conditions where He can be with us continuously.

J.S.G. That is what I think and the wilderness is what is in view here. Moses is not just saying, What is the route through the wilderness? It is not that way. It is, "make me now to know thy way", God's way.

J.W. The presence of God as Moses knew it enabled him to do instinctively what was right, what was suited. I was thinking of the earlier reference to him pitching the tent outside the camp. We could not really ask for God's presence without doing that, do you think?

J.S.G. I think that helps in the enquiry because God had one to whom He was very close. He was very intimate with this man and you find in some of the things that are said, it is as if God is saying, If you do that, I will be with you in it. He knew what to do in a crisis and God manifested His support for that in the cloud coming down, which really is a figure of the divine presence.

L.A.B. So that all this flowed out from the fact that what had been disclosed to him on the mount was the tabernacle system.

J.S.G. Please say more.

L.A.B. Well, it is not only a question of God being with us. What is in the divine mind is that we might provide a place for God Himself and that surely is the secret of all our operations.

J.S.G. I believe it is and I believe too that we shall be helped if we seek God so that our thoughts as to the Lord Jesus are enlarged to include what He is to God in connection with the fulfilment of a whole scene of purpose, the centre of a scene of blessing. I have found myself perhaps occupied a good deal more with the personal glory and beauty of Jesus, right and necessary and precious as it is, but God's thoughts set out in the tabernacle, the pattern of which Moses received, includes the thought that the centre of it all was the

ark. The carrying through of every thought of God is assured and its display in a wide way involves Christ as the Centre?

L.A.B. I was going back to your remark as to power. Paul says, "For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified", 1 Cor 2: 2, as though that is really the secret of power.

J.S.G. That is very good. We will come to the experimental side in a moment and I am concerned that we should be able to give a little time to these other passages, if the Spirit helps us, but you rightly call attention to the experimental way into these things. But I just raise the question, beloved brethren, as to our general position at the present time in these last days. Are we distinguished?

G.C.B. I would like to enquire in that connection. There seems to be a rather sensitive matter here of Moses seeking God's presence collectively and God speaking first about His presence with Moses. I hope that enquiry fits in with what you have just said.

J.S.G. Yes, if Moses did not know it, how were the people to be led? We do not always find it easy to distinguish where such as Moses were types of the Lord Jesus Himself. He is in some ways in these chapters a type of the Mediator, is He not? But I think we can look at him also as one who is earnestly desiring divine help and guidance and instruction and assurance that God would be with His people. He says in verse 16, "so shall we be distinguished, I and thy people, from every people that is on the face of the earth."

R.H.B. Are the people of God distinguished by there being a heavenly people? The people in this verse that you read were travellers. They were going to be led through the wilderness. They had no place there. That was very evident. They were travelling to the land of their possession. Have the people of God lost their divinely intended distinction when they have lost sight of that and chosen instead to settle down in something other than the purpose of God for them?

J.S.G. Yes, I think that is helpful. I had in mind that we should remember that divine thoughts, God's thoughts for His people,

remain. I was recalling the word which we get in the prophet Haggai, often referred to, "The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you", chap 2: 5. I think that would be a reference to the close of chapter 19 of Exodus, that God committed Himself to His people as His own possession. God was committed to them on the principle of calling from His side, but I wondered, and I enquire among the brethren, whether the thought here, "so shall we be distinguished" includes more than the thought of the calling, in the sense referred to, involving also what is seen, how they are manifested as distinguished. I do not know whether that would be right.

R.H.B. I wondered if it included being pilgrims and sojourners here. They passed through the wilderness where there were nations that were settled, but they were in appearance a nomadic people, with no base in the wilderness. It is a challenge whether that is true of us.

J.S.G. Quite so. That helps and it is a very practical thing as to what is said of us, beloved brethren. I think we ought to be concerned as to whether the conditions and state exist so that we can be seen to be distinguished as those who have the presence of God with us.

B.E.S. I was going to follow up what you said about what could be seen as distinguishing the people of Israel. In Exodus there was a visible glory, was there not? That made it evident to others that God was with them, but when you come to Haggai, which you mentioned, there was no visible glory: there was what could be discerned by faith, but they were just a remnant – they were not the whole people - and that corresponds more with the present time, does it not?

J.S.G. That is very helpful. Would it work out in this way that we are established in our relations with God individually and cling to the divine thoughts unchangeable - they remain - then we seek to take up with divine help the need for the maintenance of a state

individually, and conditions amongst us collectively, in which the consciousness of God's promise might be experienced?

B.E.S. Yes, that is very important, I am sure. You are speaking of the Lord being with the saints in the sense of Matthew 28, are you not, rather than in the sense of being in the midst as in Matthew 18?

J.S.G. Help us as to that distinction.

B.E.S. Well, I am not, of course, ruling out Matthew 18, but that is not exactly what we are speaking about at the moment, is it? That is when we are assembled, "where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them", Matt 18: 20. But then when we are not assembled but maybe going out in service or anything else, it is "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age", Matt 28: 19,20. The Lord is with the saints in support in that sense even when they are not gathered together.

J.S.G. Yes, that is what I was thinking of. I think it is dangerous for us to assume things and I think there is great need at the present time that we should be concerned about what the actual conditions are amongst us so that nothing should impair or hinder the liberty of God being with us supportively.

G.C.B. Do we have individual responsibility, every one of us, for the conditions amongst us?

J.S.G. We do and we have individual privilege. I think I would bring both into John 14.

H.A.H. I was just going to ask whether it comes back to the matter of power. I think what has been said is important that we have to take account of *all* the saints, but the distinguishing feature at any time as to whether God is there is this matter of power that you have referred to already. That was so in Corinth, that one coming in would see that power was there and say "that God is indeed amongst you", 1 Cor 14: 25.

J.S.G. That helps. So Paul begins by calling attention to what was true of the saints in the divine mind and then presents the truth

according to God so that they should attend to the state of things amongst them.

R.M.B. "The word, ... and my Spirit, remain among you" is not the first thing that Haggai says. It comes quite late on in that prophecy. There is a process that has to be undergone in the souls of those addressed before he is able to give them that word.

J.S.G. Well, that is a very practical thing, but our desire is that the divine promise should be experimentally known as a consequence of right conditions being found amongst us.

B.E.S. We can learn that lesson in Jeremiah, for example. They were claiming in words that it was the temple of Jehovah and that God was with them and so on but the conditions did not match that claim and therefore, according to the prophet's word that became the very basis of the judgment that was about to fall on them.

J.S.G. Yes, that statement we get there is remarkable that it should actually be recorded in the scripture, the routine way they were claiming, "Jehovah's temple, Jehovah's temple, Jehovah's temple is this", (Jer 7: 4), but what matters is what is in the heart. What are the heart's relations with God? What are we collectively, beloved brethren, if it is not the product of what we are individually with God? But I was thinking that in John 14 we have the reference to the word brought in: "If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him."

R.H.B. Say something about that; open it up for us.

J.S.G. Well, we are here to enquire. As we know, the Lord says earlier, "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me". Speaking simply, brethren, we have a lot of ministry, we are greatly privileged to sit under a lot of ministry and many preachings of the gospel, but do we keep what is said to us? I think that means the practice of what the Lord said.

J.W. Would the word bring out the detail of the Lord's mind? What you have here with this person who keeps the Lord's word is

tabernacle conditions, and Moses had the pattern, as we have been reminded. Do you think it links with that, the pattern that Moses had, the keeping of His word?

J.S.G. Well, I think that is helpful. It is very distinctive, is it not, speaking reverently, even from the standpoint of God's will and desires that such should be found who love Christ and keep His word? I wondered if this distinction between the word and the commandments links with what you brought in earlier as to what is instinctive. It is as if intimacy leads to knowing what is expected.

J.W. And the *commandment* would set out in an authoritative way what is required, but do you think in the *word* we would have the mind of the Lord and the mind of God?

J.S.G. Yes, I think that is right. What was said earlier as to divine love being behind it is how it works out, it seems to me.

G.N. I am just struck by what is being said, the desire to be serviceable, not for the sake of service, but that we might each take up our own part, because there is a part for everyone. We have been reminded of that recently, have we not? The Lord can use each one of us as we make ourselves available.

J.S.G. Well, I think that is right. You were not thinking that there was any particular reference here in John 14 exactly to service? It seems more the side of the Lord providing securely for how His own would be in His absence, do you think? But it involves, I think, the result of love that we would do whatever is needed, as we were saying earlier as to Paul.

G.N. That was what I thought, the keeping of His word, whatever that might entail.

J.S.G. Very good and we are therefore available as lovers and knowing what He has said.

L.A.B. Is it not interesting that this is the very feature that the Lord finds so attractive in Philadelphia at the end of the dispensation, persons who have kept His word and not denied His name and He says what will be manifest is "that I have loved thee", Rev 3: 9. Is

that not going back to what was said that what affects us is not even our love for Christ but a sense of His love for us? Is that the great basis?

J.S.G. That is very good. I think it links very much with that and with the need that we no doubt all feel as to overcoming at the close of the dispensation. We ought to be urgently before the Lord as to how we are to get through, because it will not be by externals nor by knowledge alone, precious as knowledge is, especially the knowledge of God. That, incidentally, enters into what Moses was exercised about. He desired to know God's way that he might know Him, and that is very essential for us. But it is relations with God, it seems to me, and maintaining the Lord's word so that conditions are right for His coming to us, that would be the way of blessing, would it?

L.A.B. Yes; so that John begins with that: "To him who loves us", not 'has loved us', as though that is something we need to know at the present time. He says, "and has washed us from our sins in his blood", Rev 1: 5. That goes back to the source of power, to know "Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified", not only the Person, but it is the greatness of the work that has set every other man aside and established another Man in God's presence.

J.S.G. Very good. I am sure that is right, but the point you make comes into this passage in verse 21, "but he that loves me shall be loved by my Father," – what a great thing that is! – "and I will love him and will manifest myself to him." I speak enquiringly, beloved brethren, but we need to ask ourselves whether we know something of this. This is not in the scripture just to speak about. It is in the scripture to *prove*. "But he that loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him" and, as we are enquiring now, Judas enquires, how is this to be? It is not a public manifestation. The world does not see it as we get earlier in connection with the Spirit's coming. The world does not see these things but "If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him". Is it not beautiful that the Lord repeats it in answer to the question? "My Father will love him, and we will come to him and

make our abode with him.” We know something about this, do we not?

D.E.R. Does “make our abode with him” suggest that divine Persons are complacently at home? They are at rest. There is nothing which is out of keeping with Themselves and Their presence.

J.S.G. I think that is the thought. What do you say about this question? What do we know about this?

D.E.R. Well, I think it is very good that you should raise it because I believe it is a crying need of the day that we should be exercised that there should be conditions where we can prove and experience what the Lord speaks about. We want Him not just as an occasional visitor but as One who makes His abode with us.

J.S.G. Very good, yes. Now, when you meet me, you would know, would you not? We have to be practical about these things. What do you say?

J.W. It has to begin with myself personally. It is the individuals, as you were stressing earlier. I have to know this personally. It is not sufficient to rest in the right position, as we might think of it, but provide these conditions personally. It is the exercise of whether I know personally the abiding presence of the Father and the Son.

J.S.G. Yes, well, I think we know something of this complacency of the Father and the Son, but as has been said it hangs upon our being maintained in the consciousness of love. Love is very sensitive and the least thing interferes. We need help as to the sensitiveness that is appropriate to love so that we become more aware of things that will stand in the way of this, because the way of blessing and the support and prosperity of our gatherings together, it seems to me, is through this.

J.W. I was thinking of the assembly in Ephesus who had left their first love, Rev 2: 4. Mr Raven said they lost the consciousness of the Lord’s love. Things outwardly were still the same but that

spring had gone. That is the exercise you have, that we should be maintained in that.

J.S.G. Quite so, and love in the Lord is sensitive too. He notices things before we do.

L.A.B. Love in the Spirit, too, because the secret of this seems to be the presence of the Spirit. You spoke about sensitivity, but that is the Person who is indwelling us. Is that not the secret of knowing these other things?

J.S.G. I think it is. You will have noticed in chapter 14 of John that it is immediately before the Lord speaks about “I am coming to you” that He speaks about the Spirit. As soon as He has brought forward the fact that He would “beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth”, then He says, “I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you.” So that it depends upon that, as you say. I was concerned that we should make these things practical and wondered if we might just refer briefly, in closing, to the passage in Romans 8 in connection with the Spirit. It says here – and there is much valuable detail in this chapter which we cannot go into because of the time - but “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God.” I wondered if we might consider how far we know anything about this, that it is manifest by our walk that we are God’s, the Spirit leading us.

A.G.S. It says of younger persons in the Old Testament that what marked them out was that they were all as “the sons of a king”, Judg 8: 18. Say something about what is in direct relation to God Himself, sons of God. There is dignity in that.

J.S.G. That enters into my concern. I am glad you brought it in. Gideon in that passage you refer to brings forward the thought of the mother, which I think would link with the inward side of things in which formation takes place in us. There is evidence in those mentioned that the upbringing was influenced by love, do you think? But this thought, as you suggest, is a very dignified one. Brethren, we need to be concerned about our dignity in the way we walk. The

brethren will not mind my speaking about this because we are seeking practical help. It says in this passage that we read, “So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to flesh;” and I would like to say simply that we do not need to follow the things of the flesh – we have no obligation to that. We do not need to follow the things of the world. We do not need to follow the ways and fashions and practices of the world or its language. We do not need to switch the music on when we get into the car. We do not have to do these things because of the dignity attaching to us as sons of God who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

G.C.B. It would be good to speak to the Spirit more. It would help us to be characteristically what is said here as to being, “led by the Spirit of God”; we should speak regularly to the Holy Spirit.

J.S.G. That is very good. That is what I think is in mind in that thought “led”, that is moment by moment, as it were, hour by hour, in accord with Moses’ desire. What is the way to go, how is it to be done, how is life to be carried out according to God? And the thought was that the attraction of these things is that it makes way for the experimental knowledge of liberty towards God; otherwise we are hindered.

E.O. Would the Lord be emphasising in Matthew 11 that He is the model? He says, “learn from me”, not ‘of me’, but “from me”. We are to do things as He would do them.

J.S.G. Yes, we would need to be near to Him and in His company for that because then we see things as they are in perfection.

R.M.B. I think it has been pointed out by others, but the remarkable thing about crying “Abba, Father” is that it was the language the Lord Himself used.

J.S.G. That makes it a distinctive matter but nevertheless something, as here brought within the range of those who are sons of God, and God is looking for it and therefore our desire would be that nothing should be allowed to hinder the free flow and experience of this matter.

J.W. That is why being led by the Spirit is preceded by “if”: “but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body ...” Life is known in that way, is it not? So that if we have power to put to death the deeds of the body, we can enjoy this leading of the Spirit and this relationship with the Father.

J.S.G. Yes, I think that is just how it works. My desire was to call attention to these precious things as distinctive and marking out those who belong to God and are known here, as in this passage, as sons of God, as has been called attention to. If we have any sense that we are not in the liberty and enjoyment of this, then we have to address the “if”.

H.A.H. It has been pointed out that although it says we are not debtors to the flesh, and we are certainly not, we owe nothing to it – it has been condemned – it does not say we are debtors to the Spirit, because it is a great matter of liberty and, as was said, the obligation of love, is it not?

J.S.G. Quite so. Do you not think that that means that the inward has been gained through the experimental side as it is set out in this epistle, and the result is to be manifested in a walk which involves clear dependence and leading by the Spirit, and the liberty to respond to God?

H.A.H. Just reverting to John 14 a moment, you will recall that Mr Alfred Gardiner pointed out that it says the Father and the Lord Jesus would come, but the Spirit is already there. So that God is there in the full sense, the fulness of God is with the believer in that way. It is a wonderful conception, is it not?

J.S.G. Well, it is. It links with the thought in mind that we should have a clearer impression of the divine thought as to distinctiveness in the saints, being marked out as different. I do not think that we should allow any thought that it is impossible or beyond us, because it is set in the scripture here and believers normally have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and the way is set out for us. Moses says, “make me now to know thy way”. Well, how are we going to get through? We have divine help, but we need to make way for it.

G.N. I was just thinking of divine support. I was wondering if what Paul writes in Titus 2 would suggest that, that it is divine support for us in our taking up our responsibility. I feel it for myself. It says, “our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”, (vv 13,14). Would that not bring out the side of divine support in securing what is distinguished?

J.S.G. Well, I am sure that is so. “Our great God and Saviour”, that is, He is able to see us through, but His desire is that the precious thoughts of distinctiveness should actually be found with us for His pleasure.

B.E.S. What you were saying earlier about not being debtors to the flesh and to the world is developed further in chapter 12: “And be not conformed to this world ...” and that is linked with “present your bodies a living sacrifice” (vv 1,2).

J.S.G. Yes, that is a development of the thought and the passage there shows that the normal thing is that the affections should be engaged in view of doing so. The person is gained when the body is given as a sacrifice.

D.E.R. The putting to death the tendencies which mark us naturally, the desires which come to us naturally, involves conflict, but this section would show that it is so worthwhile. It leads to the enjoyment of the liberty of the sons of God.

J.S.G. Yes we might even say it is essential because it says, “ye shall live”. We must live. We are believers and God has taken us up to live to Him and to Christ and so it is essential for us. If we feel, as many of us may feel, that our experience in these things is perhaps less than it might be, then we must take up prayer with God so that we can increase in it.

H.A.H. The emphatic “*these*” would bear on the matter of distinction that we have already mentioned.

J.S.G. Quite so. God sees them. They are under His eye. We may say it is a wilderness thought, but then God is looking for that: His people are to be distinguished and it is a question of whether we can come into this, beloved brethren, a little more experimentally through the exercises that we have spoken about.

J.W. I was thinking that sonship is for God for His pleasure. So we are not going to be distinguished in the eyes of the world, but distinguished by God in that way for His pleasure.

J.S.G. Quite so. We get the thought, do we not, in the passage in Genesis 48 about God's name being named upon the grandsons? It shows the pleasure of the divine claim, and it is to be known by those who truly desire to set out God's thought, with the Spirit's help, in their walk here.

BUCKHURST HILL

14 October 2000

Key to Initials

G.C.Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; L.A.Barlow, Bexley; L.W.Burton, Merton; R.H.Brown, East Finchley; R.M.Brown, East Finchley; J.S.Gray, East Finchley; H.A.Hutson, London; E.O.P.Mutton, Walton; G.Napthine, Colchester; E.Oliver, Redbridge; D.E.Remmington, St Albans; B.E.Surtees, Felixstowe; A.G.Smith, Bexley; K.G.Samways, Buckhurst Hill; J.Wright, Redbridge; M.I.Webster, Buckhurst Hill, P.J.Walkinshaw, Gillingham

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

James S.Gray

**2 Timothy 3: 10–17; 2 Peter 1: 19–21; Luke 24: 25-27, 44–49;
Acts 17: 10, 11**

It will be evident, beloved brethren, that I had the thought of speaking about the precious Holy Scriptures. My purpose is to attract us to their value. The Lord Jesus used them. He used them, I would say, in a perfect way, as everything He did was perfect; but I am impressed with the need in the last days that we should be equipped for whatever may come, and the passage in 2 Timothy suggests the thought of being “complete”, as the note says, ‘complete as to qualifications’. Now, we may any of us feel that we have some way to go if we think of that, but what is presented here is that “Every scripture is ... profitable ... that the man of God may be complete”, that is to say, whatever else is in it, beloved brethren, that if we are to be here in a fixed way for God, then we need the qualifications that the Holy Scriptures provide.

Now, I would say before I go any further that the scriptures alone would not be sufficient for us because we need their living application to us, which perhaps the expression ‘the word of God’, would convey, as we get in the epistle to the Hebrews, “the word of God is living and operative”, (chap 4: 12). It accomplishes things. Perhaps the Spirit will help us as to what is said about it in this passage in that connection. We find also in the scriptures of truth, especially in the teaching of the apostle Paul, that the Holy Spirit’s help and guidance are especially needed in understanding the scriptures and in using them and being guided by them.

I want to refer first of all to the authority of the scriptures. The apostle Paul is writing to a man who would be left after he had gone. He is told first of all about the things concerning Paul personally and his teaching with which he had been “thoroughly acquainted”. Now, beloved brethren, I raise the question for myself and for us all as to how we would feel if this were addressed to us. Would we able to say, yes, that is how I am, “thoroughly acquainted” with all Paul’s

“teaching, conduct, purpose, faith ...” and so on, all these things? I would have to say as to myself, I desire to increase in the acquaintance that I have with these things and in the thoroughness of my acquaintance with them. I think the thought in it is that the truth set out in the scriptures is embodied in persons, supremely in the Lord Jesus Himself. As it says in the word, “as the truth is in Jesus”, Eph 4: 21. But, beloved brethren, the scriptures contain the inspired, written mind of God. I wonder therefore if we might open our hearts for the Spirit to convey an impression to us of how valuable they are. They are the word of God, recorded in writing, infallible, divinely inspired, the supreme authority for every question as to faith and truth and conduct in the sight of God. Paul is bringing in, in this chapter, this emphatic word, “*thou*”, as he does elsewhere in this epistle. He refers to his sufferings – I did not want to go into that, precious as they are – but he brings forward for Timothy the emphatic instruction to “abide in those things which thou hast learned, and of which thou hast been fully persuaded, knowing of whom thou hast learned them”. Now, beloved brethren, what have we learned? If we are to abide in those things which we have learned, what have we learned? Has our instruction begun? How far has it progressed? Well, there is a great blessing attaching to our being present on an occasion such as this when God graciously gives us encouragement through the word. He gives us to know the life of it because it is in the experience of persons who know God, and He gives us the joy and liberty that it leads to because it is connected with the unfolding of eternal things which are in the mind of God for men.

And so I raise the question from this passage as to what we have learned and, further, whether we are fully persuaded about it, and then “knowing of whom thou hast learned them”. I think that we would do well to take account of the source of what we read. I am sure brethren are generally careful about that, but we are to know of whom we learn things and I speak of these things in a way as introductory to lead up to the vital importance of the scriptures themselves. We have noticed before, that the apostle Peter calls

attention to the scriptures, the word, by encouraging the saints to be “as newborn babes” desiring “earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”, 1 Pet 2: 2. If we are to learn from the scriptures, beloved brethren, we must read them.

I have noticed that on a number of occasions the Lord Jesus draws attention to the necessity of that by implication. He says, for example, “have ye never read ...?” (Matt 21: 16) and other things like that. Think of being in a company where a question is brought forward and the Lord as it were addresses our souls and says, “have ye never read ...?” He also brings forward scriptures from the prophets and from the Psalms. Indeed it is something to be considered seriously that the Lord Jesus shows the authority of the scriptures by comparing what Moses wrote with His own words. He says, “for if ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me”, John 5: 46. So that the Lord Jesus regards the Old Testament scriptures as authoritative on a level comparable with His own words. How remarkable that is! We do well, therefore, in these days of decline and brazen rejection of the word of God, to pay attention to the divine setting out in the scriptures themselves of their infallible authority.

If we were to look into authentic history, we would be able to trace very remarkable facts as to the way in which the original manuscripts in which scripture was recorded were handled and regarded in a holy way by those who were concerned with them. But in our time I believe the Lord would put the responsibility upon us in a fresh way to accept the preciousness of the scriptures on the one hand, and their absolute authority over our souls on the other. They are authoritative, as it says here: “Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”. Do we not feel and see the need of these things in our time? Is there not a need of teaching? The scriptures are “profitable for teaching”. If you want to know about the things of God, go first to the scriptures. You say, where shall I look? Well, it is a purpose of mine to-day to call attention to the value of

reading the scriptures, that we may know where particular teaching is to be found.

It says here that Timothy had “from a child ... known the sacred letters”. I wonder if we have had that privilege, beloved. Have we known the sacred letters from a child? Do you remember that your mother or your father read the scriptures to you? Do not undervalue it! Do not let the practice slip! Maintain what has been begun from your earliest youth and diligently commit yourself to the reading of the scriptures, as I was saying, “the pure mental milk of the word”, the scriptures by themselves, and allow the Holy Spirit to cause the wealth and the instruction and value of them to govern and feed and guide us! And this expression “the sacred letters” not only refers to what is in the title page of the precious book we have in our hands – the Holy Scriptures - but that every word matters. They matter in detail. We may not see the significance of all but let us value and therefore seek to know the “sacred letters”.

Another thing about God’s word, as we read it, is that not only has it teaching, as we have here, but it has conviction. It is “profitable ... for conviction”. You may say, I have difficult days before me. How will things go? Will you seek the guidance of the word? I think that as questions arise in our lives - and I do not leave aside the necessity of prayer as essential to the life of a Christian in communion with God - but, supporting that, I believe it is necessary that the scriptures themselves should have a prime place. I would appeal to the brethren to be regular - if never before, start now in regularity - in applying ourselves to the reading of the scriptures!

I want to be practical. Supposing that I was to select one or two from this company and ask, Have you read the scriptures, all of them from beginning to end, would we all be able to say that we had? Well, of course, our younger brethren have not had so much time as those of us who are older but they are able for more perhaps. You will say to me, but time is short. I think that the practical answer to that is what I heard a beloved servant of the Lord say years ago, that when it is a question of matters of time and what can be done in the available time, one practical solution is to put the

essentials among the things that have got to be done, in other words, to prioritise. I suppose a good many of us here feel that in these times in which we live, priorities are coming from all directions, but they do not come with more authority than from God; and, beloved brethren, the answer to them does not come with more profit than from God. I think, therefore, that in making our decisions we are to consider both the priority of the claim, and the advantage and profit of the result in the long term. And so the priorities for the believer are communion with God, at the beginning of the day certainly, and at the end of the day certainly, and as continuously as we are able for it otherwise; and also to give place to the reading of the Holy Scriptures for what they are and for what they will do for us as communications from God.

So that they are “profitable for teaching, for conviction”. I may go over the day in retrospect. I may review things that have taken place and I may find that in little things or even in greater things perhaps I am uneasy. Well, read the scriptures! Turn up something! We all know something, but turn up a word and it brings conviction because it is living. The word of God is living and it brings something home to us, which may involve correction. Let us be ready to accept the conviction and the correction of the precious scriptures so that we may be guided, preserved and instructed in righteousness.

The younger people here will not mind my saying that we older ones are very sympathetic with the practical difficulties of exercising discrimination about righteousness in these days, but the scriptures help. Make yourself familiar with the scriptures and you will find that they give you instruction in righteousness! You say, well, the little things do not matter. They *do* matter to God and we who believe and who love the Lord Jesus, are concerned about what is pleasing to God, so that the scriptures are valuable for “instruction in righteousness”. It is like just a touch or a pull, this way or that, to keep us in the path of God’s mind.

Now, I want to refer to the passage in Peter for one simple reason – the Spirit may help us as to other aspects of it – but my

purpose was to point out that it is necessary to hold the scriptures as a whole in our regard for them. There are learned men who have tried to apply the human mind to the destruction of the authority of scripture or certain parts of it. You take the book of the prophet Jonah. The simple answer to men's reasoning and questions is in the fact that the Lord Jesus Himself used it in quotation when He was here. I think that there are simple answers to the reasoning of the human mind if we are subject and obedient to the Lord Jesus Himself. So it says here that "the scope of no prophecy of scripture is had from its own particular interpretation". Now, I do not feel able to explain the full meaning of that but I think one feature of truth that is in it is that you cannot isolate a particular scripture and use it in separation or contrast with others. The whole must be seen as presented by God to convey His mind. And I therefore suggest that we should not in practice limit what we read. As I have said, the Lord Jesus quotes from Moses and from the Prophets and from the Psalms, and we would do well, therefore - as our custom is in our gatherings, I believe - to seek to cover through dependent enquiry the range of the precious scriptures. The Lord might raise the question with us as to whether we have read a particular Prophet. You will remember that the evangelist, Philip, when he joined the chariot of the Ethiopian on his return journey, found that he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Do we read the Prophets? The prophetic writings, beloved brethren, are not only for learned or older people. The Prophets are part of the inspired Holy Scriptures, and I use them only as an example. There are practical books in the Old Testament which give much instruction which can be used as we are helped of the Spirit for the life of the believer in the present time though themselves not immediately and directly written for that purpose, while no doubt in the mind of God for all times.

Now, in the earlier verse I read, the apostle Peter is referring to the prophetic word of which we have just been speaking and he says, "And we have the prophetic word made surer, to which ye do well taking heed". Now, beloved brethren, would that the Spirit would stimulate our hearts as to taking heed to what God has said! I

think that so far as I understand this passage, Peter is saying that on the mount of transfiguration they had the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory in anticipation. That was what these believers had specially come to look for and Peter, of course, specially brings in the kingdom in his writings. But the kingdom was coming and the confirmation of it, the thing that made it sure, as I understand it, was that Peter and the other apostles with him had seen it when they saw the glory of Christ on the mountain. It was not then a long-term hope for Jewish believers. It had been “made surer” through the announcement of the glory of Christ from heaven. Now, beloved brethren, if there is a voice from God, I would say in the words of this scripture, we do well taking heed. I challenge myself as to how much we go over what God has said to us. We do not learn all at once and may we helped, beloved, to go over and take heed to what we have received.

But he goes on to say, “(as to a lamp shining in an obscure place)”: that, I understand, would be referring to a prophetic voice appearing and giving light in darkness, but the morning star is what gives the light for believers, “until the day dawn and the morning star arise in your hearts”. Let us see that the precious scriptures present to us the glory of Christ personally. That was the purpose of the Father’s voice on the mount, to magnify the personal glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is what we will find is the purpose of the whole of scripture, that Christ might be magnified and that the divine thoughts concerning the fulfilment of everything in Him for God’s pleasure should be set out and be understood.

And we are presented here with the prospect of the day dawn and, as we have often been told, the morning star is the assurance of that. We may have been accustomed to think of this on the line that there are signs beforehand that the Lord is coming for the assembly; but look at it this way, beloved brethren; the Lord is very soon coming into His public kingdom; He is about to be manifested; and the conviction of it is in those who have seen His glory. Before that the Lord Jesus will take to Himself those who love Him. He is coming to take His own to Himself and then it will be that we will

prove that the day dawns. We shall be in our eternal conditions immediately. The morning star then will have risen in our hearts and it will be that the precious coming of the Lord for His saints will but a short time anticipate the introduction of His public glory, but we shall first be with Him. May it stimulate our hearts to look for Him and to be found valuing the precious things which speak of Him!

Now, I must speak of how the Lord Jesus Himself read and referred to the scriptures. I wondered about reading – I have read a good deal already – the passage in which we have the beautiful record of His reading from the prophet Esaias in the synagogue at Nazareth, but time prevents. But we should see the glory and beauty of the precious Saviour Himself, God manifest in flesh, illuminating in His reading the dignity that should mark our reading and handling of the precious scriptures: He “stood up to read”, Luke 4: 16. Another thing about that passage is, as we have noticed, that He stops at a particular point before the passage itself reaches its completion; but He stopped when He reached the point which was needed for the moment and He says, “To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears”, (v 21). Beloved brethren, when you read the scriptures, remember that the fulfilment of everything is in Jesus. The eunuch we referred to was reading something and he says, “concerning whom does the prophet say this? of himself or of some other?”, Acts 8: 34. We may say, how are these things, these glorious things spoken of, to be fulfilled? They will be fulfilled in one Man who is the centre of heaven, the theme of the Father’s pleasure and delight. So He says, “To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears.” I believe the principle is set out, in that unique utterance, of the value of the present application of the scripture to those to whom it is addressed. May we always be ready as the word of God is described as a “two-edged sword” (Heb 4: 12), to allow the truth to apply itself to us so that we may get gain from it in a practical way.

But here on the road to Emmaus the Lord speaks of the scriptures and He speaks about believing “in all that the prophets have spoken”. Well, surely you would need to know all that the prophets have spoken before you could believe in it. I do urge

diligence – and I feel the need of it for myself, but I urge diligence - in pursuing the reading of the scriptures and seeking understanding of them in their detail of and in their scope. But He says, “O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory? And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” Well, beloved brethren, that shows to us that all the scriptures contain things concerning the Lord Jesus. You say, what about these prophets? Take the prophet Obadiah, or others, which largely if not almost exclusively speak of judgment? What about them? What about the sufferings of Christ, beloved brethren? Our attention was drawn in comparatively recent times to the way in which the sufferings of Christ are pointed to in the prophets. If we think that a prophet is substantially about judgment, let us think about the sufferings of Christ, He who bore the judgment that was due to you and to me! I believe that appreciating all that Christ is personally is an essential part of valuing the scriptures and I call attention to the fact that here the Lord began from Moses. We are not told that He began from the first book of Moses, but He began from Moses, and one thing I learn from that is that we should learn the value of the books of Moses in relation to the setting out of God’s thoughts as to Christ and especially, as we had brief reference to it earlier, as to the value of the divine view that is represented in the tabernacle system in which God sets out that the One who is precious to Him is at the very heart and centre of the whole thing. Beloved brethren, young and old, I say to you that Jesus is at the heart of the whole of scripture. *He is the One* of whom the Holy Spirit desires to speak. *He is the One* who is the attraction in the scriptures. *He is the One* in whom is the fulfilment of everything that is said there. And it says, “And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Well, later, as they were assembled, the Lord Jesus says further, as we noticed, “that all that is written concerning me in the

law of Moses and prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.” As we were saying, the whole range of scripture will be fulfilled and the embodiment of its fulfilment is in Christ. Of course, it involves the government of God and the ways of God and the working of them into result to His glory and according to His majesty, but the fulfilment of scripture will be worked out in the place which the Lord Jesus has in the quickly-coming day of His glory.

Now, I wanted to say that we need great help, I believe, in a spirit of dependence in approaching the scriptures that we should depend upon divine help for the opening of our understanding. We can ask the Lord for that. He did it for them. How favoured, how distinctive they were! But, beloved brethren, He can do it for us! Let us ask the Lord to open our understanding to understand the scriptures so that we may be equipped, as we have been saying already, for the pathway of the believer until the Lord shall come.

And so He says, “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from among the dead the third day” and so on. I think that it is very important for us to pay attention to what is written: “Thus it is written ...” May we be greatly helped to pay attention to these things, but feebly presented, but I desired that we might be encouraged to consider the great value of what is contained in the written word.

Now, I want to call attention to a passage in Romans chapter 15, in closing, because Paul says there, “For as many things as have been written before have been written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (v 4). Well, now you say that things are bad publicly. Where can we look? I say to you that there is sufficient in the scriptures to give us hope. There is both endurance and encouragement of the scriptures to be found because the things that were written before were written for our learning. I think it is very encouraging that God has provided everything that is needed. Perhaps we are not familiar with a passage such as this in Romans 15 or we have forgotten that it was there. I forget certain passages at times and the Spirit helps us by bringing things to our

remembrance. The Lord spoke of that as part of His service when He came. But I call attention to this passage as showing that there is encouragement in the scriptures and, by implication, they give strength for endurance so that we might have hope. Now, if anyone here had ever any thought of giving up in the path of faith, I say to you, turn to the scriptures and find that the things that were written before were written for us. Someone else may have gone through something very similar to what you are going through now and God may have had something written down which will be for our learning and for our encouragement and to help us to endure so that we might have hope. I say, do not give up hope because there is provision in the Word for our encouragement and uplifting.

Now, these saints in Berea of whom we read are compared with those in another locality. It is not that there is any disrespect for the brethren in Thessalonica, because they were greatly valued and the features of God's work in them were set out quite distinctly and in an appreciative way by the apostle Paul, although they needed exhortation, as we all do. But it is quite permissible to call attention to a feature that is of particular value. It does not mean that others are necessarily condemned except that they would perhaps, if they heard about it, also desire that a feature of quality or virtue which was in another company of believers might also be found in them. And the feature of quality, of course, as we well know, in the Berean saints was firstly that they received "the word with all readiness of mind". They were not opposers. They were ready to listen, ready to understand, but they "daily" searched "the scriptures if these things were so". One might say simply, if it were not too familiar, that the brethren in Berea were not just going to swallow down everything. They were going to say, 'How does this go with what is said in the scriptures? This is a new thought to me, how does this fit with the teaching of scripture? And I think that is how we should apply our minds with the Holy Spirit's help to the receiving of a word, as it is ministered to us, that we should test it by what is in the written word of God.

Now, it is not that they did it only on a Saturday afternoon or evening but they did it daily. I have felt the challenge of the fact that this is not only that they read the scriptures daily – I do trust and I believe that we would all here do that – but “daily searching the scriptures”, that is, does it agree with this passage? does it agree with the Lord’s words? does it agree with what He has given to His apostles? does it agree with what the apostle Paul received from the glory? That is what the Bereans would say – of course they had only the Old Testament scriptures, I take it – but they would search the scriptures and it proves that the scriptures are one whole because their testimony is one and it concerns Christ.

Well, beloved brethren, I feel I have spoken feebly but I did have a purpose to lay upon us the sense of obligation as to the preciousness of the scriptures and their authority and I do emphasise the value and profit and advantage of using them and becoming accustomed to using them for what they are in themselves and what they can furnish for us in the way of equipment. I think the thought of being “prepared for every good work” (2 Tim 2: 21) is not just the same as the thought of having the unction and knowing all things (1 John 2: 20); that would be that there is the capacity, by the presence of the Spirit in the believer, for being able to discern things as they are in the sight of God. But this in the passage in 2 Timothy is more the thought of equipment which is valuable so that it may be used both for our preservation and, I may say, for the help and encouragement of others that we might be able to “succour by a word him that is weary” (Isa 50: 4), as is said prophetically of the Lord Jesus Himself. He shines in everything. Let our hearts be towards Him and let us learn from Him how the scriptures are to be respected and used, but may we use them and find the profit of it as useful to us and for God while we are here in the path of His will until the Lord comes. For His Name’s sake.

BUCKHURST HILL

14 October 2000