

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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NAMING THE NAME OF THE LORD

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JDG What was in mind was the thought of naming the Name of the Lord as related to the expression of God in His house in the setting of the local assembly. I thought we might look at Antioch and Ephesians to see how things worked out in the lives of believers in those days, and then come on to 2 Timothy to see how Christianity works out in our lives as naming the Name of the Lord. We can go into the detail as we proceed. Firstly, those persons who heard the word of the Lord in the area of Antioch; then those who heard the word of the Lord in Ephesus; and how *our* lives are to be changed as the Name of the Lord comes into our lives, not only individually but as naming that Name and finding some expression of the assembly in its characteristics in our own day. That is what was in mind.

JMcK So it is interesting in chapter 11 in verse 23: “and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide with the Lord”. It seems that their whole lives were affected by their profession.

JDG The background to the passage was that there had been persecution on the occasion of the death of Stephen and brethren had been scattered and then there was a new movement. The Lord Jesus was establishing Christianity in the power of the Holy Spirit on the earth. He Himself is at present in glory and He was so when these disciples heard this word, but there was something down here that He was going to establish. It has been pointed out by others that Judaism was set aside and now He is establishing Christianity. There are some earlier interesting passages in the Acts but it would be too much to go into them all today. So I thought we would begin in this part where there is the setting up of a local assembly in a place, which has become the pattern for the dispensation in which we are. So, as our brother points out, they announced the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus to them, v 20. Now that is very fine. It is good to be enlightened about the place of the Lord Jesus as a Man in heaven and to have a link with Him as our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, but He would point out to us that He has something down here that will glorify His Name.

JMcK So the preaching of the Person is very important, is it not?

JDG The Holy Spirit has come here as indwelling the saints. The Giver of the Holy Spirit is the Lord Jesus Christ, although the blessed Spirit came down at Pentecost; there was only one outpouring from heaven of the Holy Spirit of God, and it spreads from that point to other believers who come into it. The One who gives is Christ.

MJW Is it the truth of the kingdom that is being established in view of the assembly by acknowledging and professing the Name of the Lord?

JDG The truth of the kingdom involves persons and involves a certain kind of person. The Lord Jesus says in John's gospel at His trial: "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my servants had fought that I might not be delivered up to the Jews", chap 18: 36. The persons of the kingdom are distinct persons, are they not? They do not belong to this world. They do not fight according to this world. What do you say?

MJW I am really trying to get what is in your mind by the naming of the Name of the Lord.

JDG Christians are persons in whom a change has taken place in their lives. Conversion is a real matter. It is not just an acknowledgment by name of the Lord Jesus Christ, wondrous as that is, but as you confess the Name of the Lord Jesus truly, a change has taken place in you. You become "partakers of the divine nature", 2 Pet 1: 4. So what comes to light in the persons in the book of the Acts as they set up assemblies, and are gathered together to the Name of the Lord Jesus, is that love is working amongst them; not philanthropy, not the love of men, but love that derives its fruit in God. Would that be right?

AEM Is something of that seen in Barnabas? The way he exhorts them "with purpose of heart". I was thinking of what you were saying, that there is something concrete in view. This is not just a random exhortation to movement, but there is a real objective, is there?

JDG Barnabas is first brought to our attention in chapter 4 of the book of the Acts. It says there in verse 36: "And Joseph, who had been surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is, being interpreted, Son of consolation), a Levite, Cyprian by birth, being possessed of land, having sold it, brought the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles". That was not philanthropy. That was movement because of a change in the man's soul in becoming a partaker of the divine nature, and so he

acts accordingly. So he is a Son of consolation and he remains that and in this chapter he comes to light as the same kind of person.

IMcK Say something as to the widening out of the gospel here. The first preaching seemed to be just to the Jews alone at the end of verse 19, but then there is great expansion when these others, Cyprians and Cyrenians, speak to the Greeks also.

JDG That is a new movement, one for which we are very thankful, that the word of the Lord was not restricted to the Jewish nation now. In the Old Testament times God worked with the Jewish nation and set other nations in relation to the Jewish nation so that blessing might flow to man. Israel failed and thwarted God's thoughts as to that immediately, but here Christ is in glory, the Spirit has come down, and is establishing something that is to go beyond the Jewish fold. "And I have other sheep which are not of this fold" (John 10: 16); that is not of the Jewish fold. He had other sheep. We belong to that and this is the first movement of it and what comes to light is remarkable vitality in the power of the Holy Spirit in the persons thus received. Barnabas was "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith". You can be assured that the teaching that took place, particularly with Barnabas and Saul, would stress that thought.

JMcK Although the outward circumstance that prompted the widening out was the Saviour of the Jew, the real reason was the greatness of Christ.

JDG That is interesting. It was in the divine mind. Still in God's faithfulness He presented the word to the Jews after they crucified the Lord Jesus. He presented the word to them until the stoning of Stephen and then the matter was widening out now through that incident, but the Lord's hand was in it to bring in the Gentile and to set up on this earth the expression of Himself in a place, in a local assembly.

BWB So these persons were "added to the Lord". Is that the result really of naming the Name of the Lord? It is a gravitational attraction in that way; they were drawn to the Person, do you think?

JDG Yes, I was thinking that naming the Name of the Lord is not a casual matter. It is a very sincere matter and a deep matter because it involves my committal to the expression of Himself here below in persons seen together in a place. The expression of God is seen in persons. The presence of the Holy Spirit and His activity is seen in

persons; it is seen in believers; it is seen in you and me, or ought to be seen in us.

BWB So in that way we find our place in the assembly.

JDG That is right. That is how we come into it. The assembly is a great divine conception. It is one whole matter, the matter of the assembly. “I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly” (Eph 5: 32) involves all the saints, but the expression of it for us is seen in local places. That is what we can compass. We may take account of the work of God in a universal way, in a certain objective way, and have love towards all the saints - that is the Ephesian situation - but the actual expression is seen in persons that I come in contact with.

JAT Lydia did not assume a place. She said, “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there”, Acts 16: 15.

JDG That is the kind of person that is coming to life here. We are also told what Lydia did for her business .and what the jailor did for his business before he was converted. But it does not tell us what these persons here did. What it tells us is what their life was. What is my life? Sure, we all work and earn our bread and that is necessary, but where is my life? What is coming to light in this section of scripture is where the life of the persons is, and chapter 13 brings that out in a very distinctive way, where their life was.

JAT It has been suggested, I believe, that the Gentiles needed to be brought in really to get the full thought of what was in mind in the assembly.

JDG That would be right. We will come on to that when we come to Ephesians: “For through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father”. That is Jew and Gentile, but we will come to that. I thought in Antioch we should see the evidence of life coming to light, life according to God, life in relation to a Man in another world, but life in relation to His Name here below.

JMcK So what is the force of “ministering to the Lord”?

JDG I think that is the climax of being converted and set together with others in this place of Antioch. We will take Antioch as it stands. These persons were set together in Antioch, a varying company of persons, of different social status, but they had one common matter and that was

the Lord and the Spirit as indwelling them. So “they were ministering to the Lord”; they were exclusively taken up with Him. Their hearts and minds and souls were absorbed by Him. I was going to suggest it is not just the ones that are named; there are named persons as the Spirit of God brings out personality in the place; but they are set in the assembly. So the whole assembly would be affected in Antioch by this gathering together to minister to the Lord and fast. At least that is my thought.

JMcK I wondered if there was something very positive in it. It is not that the Lord was ministering to them. It is that He was receiving something from these persons as thus together. Is that right?

JDG That brings to mind something I came across in the last several weeks. Mr James Taylor was asked about Christians being in the Lord's service. Is it preaching the gospel? He said, 'No. In a comprehensive way the service of God is the activity of divine love toward God, toward one another, and toward all men', JT vol 1 p176. That is what you have here: divine love in activity Godward and divine love in activity in the company, and it makes way for divine love in activity towards all men because the Spirit is free to name them to go out in service.

RDP-r I wondered whether you could help us a little bit into coming into this. I was thinking there are a lot of young ones here with us. We want them to know what it is to name the Name of the Lord, and what it means as a result of doing so and in a sense how simple it is to do it.

JDG That is the object of what is in my heart. Perhaps we will come on to it in more detail when we come to speak of 2 Timothy because that has a direct bearing on us at the present time. This that we are reading about was, you might say, in the springtime of the assembly's history on the earth, and I just thought we should see how it began in relation to the establishment in a place of the expression of the local assembly and the persons that were added to it and how they continued. It says in chapter 11 verse 26: “And so it was with them that for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd: and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch”. You can understand that their life was now in relation to the Lord Jesus and what He had done here in His saints, and they were subject to teaching. It was not a crash course; it was for a whole year. It brings out the agricultural thought: there was growth in them. They “taught a large crowd” and then “the disciples were first called Christians”. So there

was an evidence of formation of Christ in them in accordance with the divine work that had taken place in their souls, new birth having taken place and culminated in the confession of the Lord as Saviour. They had been made “partakers of the divine nature”; now they were in an atmosphere where they were taught. Am I prepared for teaching?

GR This is a different thought from naming the Name of Jesus. Does it involve understanding of the truth and subjection to the Lord personally?

JDG What was your thought in naming the Name of Jesus?

GR Well, in Christendom there are many dear believers who will name the Name of Jesus, but you bring the thought of His authority and its bearing on them and they may be a bit lost because they do not understand the truth.

JDG I think that is important what you have brought up. It is not to be despised, to name the Name of Jesus. We have the hymn:

Jesus! how much Thy Name unfolds
To every opened ear! (Hymn 6)

We would not despise that. There is a work of God in naming the Name of Jesus, the preciousness of that One. He is the One who was crucified here. But then naming the Name of the Lord involves, as you point out, that He has authority over my life. Mr Darby has a hymn:

Blest Lord, Thou spakest! 'twas Thy voice
That led our hearts to Thee (Hymn 47)

and he speaks too in that song of another voice. It is not a different voice, but it is the voice of Jesus as Lord that is leading him on from the simplicity of the Name of Jesus to understand that as Lord He has a place in my life of regulation. Would that be your thought?

GR Yes, surely. I feel concerned as to the need of understanding the scriptures. There are some who say they have the Bible and they do not need anything else, but I would say I would understand the Bible very little if I had not got the gain of the ministry of the recovery. It helps me to be intelligent as to naming the Name of the Lord and what it means.

JDG That is what I thought in this passage in Antioch. They were gathered together for a whole year and they taught a large crowd. The

crowd does not suggest too much of formation but it does suggest there was an ear for the teaching. Do I have an ear for the teaching? Do I recognise that I need teaching? The Lord has given persons ability to teach. Now, that comes out in this passage in a most distinctive way because Barnabas “was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”. But he felt, I think, there was need of further help and he had an acquaintance with Saul of Tarsus and he had an understanding that the Lord had given Saul of Tarsus something that he had not given to Barnabas. So he goes away to Tarsus and he finds Saul and he brings him and together they teach a large crowd. That is, there should be a recognition in my life that there are those who have ability to teach that I do not have and for us, we would say, much of it is written down in ministry that we would regard as being of the Lord.

DJW Can you help us as to why the twelve are in the background here and the Lord takes up Paul particularly?

JDG That is a big subject. In the context of it the twelve were related to the initial work of God in Jerusalem and the immediate areas beyond Jerusalem, really in the area of the Jew, but the Lord had in mind to set up Christianity apart from Judaism and so He brings in this other vessel, Saul of Tarsus, to work out His thoughts. But, in saying that, I read in Ephesians 2: 19, 20, just to touch on it as we are speaking about it: “So then ye are no longer strangers and foreigners, but ye are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone”. That would carry forward not exclusively the twelve, but it would include them, would it not? It would not be exclusive. There would be other apostles and prophets included there, but it would carry forward the teaching and is the Lord not very careful in the early days in the Acts to show that what was established in Jerusalem was not immediately set aside in relation to the work of God there, but the Lord was now establishing something to show that the assembly had nothing really to do with Judaism?

DJW Does it connect particularly with the fact that Saul was affected by the light out of heaven? It was Christ glorified, “a light above the brightness of the sun“, Acts 26: 13. There was something really that eclipsed everything that had gone before.

JDG Of all the apostles at that time he was the one who was clearest in his understanding of the revelation in relation to the assembly. There

was a distinct vessel apart from Judaism. The Lord in His grace went along with the twelve at Jerusalem and did not in any way set them aside. When the matter of the circumcision came up, the matter was not settled in Antioch; it was settled in Jerusalem. That was divine grace to maintain “the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace”, Eph 4: 3.

RH Is it affecting to be reminded that this thought of movement is not a historical one, it is a current one, one in which we have our part now through grace? I was thinking really as to the thought that there are no national boundaries in God's mind. This thought is a comprehensive idea, is it not?

JDG That was a large lesson that was learned at the time that these chapters were penned - what took place in Antioch! - there were lessons to be learned that there were no national boundaries. The dear Jewish brethren had quite a bit of difficulty about having to do with Gentiles, and you can understand that because God had committed Himself to Judaism for centuries. Now it was set aside in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and they had to learn that and God was very gracious with them, but here where we started, it is really apart from Judaism, this local assembly in Antioch.

RH Is it good that we should have these lessons rehearsed amongst us at this particular juncture?

JDG That was in mind in reading this section, to carry forward what was in Antioch on into Ephesus, on into our own day. Maybe we should go over to Ephesians. One thing that comes to light when Paul comes to Ephesus, he finds twelve men there and the first matter he raises was the matter of the Holy Spirit. You cannot have an expression of the assembly without the persons involved having the gift of the Holy Spirit.

JMcK Is it so that the Spirit in His greatness could not be confined to the national boundaries, even as the Lord Jesus could not be?

JDG Say what is your thought about the Lord Jesus not being confined to national boundaries.

JMcK Well, we said that the widening out was not simply a consequence of Israel's failure but because of the greatness of Christ. You can also say that because the Spirit, Himself being God, is so great, He could not be confined to what was in Jerusalem so the widening out is clearly of God and must be so.

JDG That is right. Divine Persons knew what was going to take place on the earth. It has been said before there is no future really with God from His point of view. He knows what is to be and He had in mind the development of the Christian assemblies, particularly in the western world. We cannot go into all the detail in the book of the Acts, but chapter 16 shows that the Spirit of God had in mind to come westward into Europe and to establish the light of the assembly in places and cities in Greece and in Italy or Rome, and here He comes into a place that is called Asia Minor, which is part of modern Turkey.

BWB Was there something of this in Paul's own commission as he recounts it in Acts 26, "taking thee out from among the people, and the nations, to whom I send thee", v 17? He was taken out of the Jewish nation altogether and sent really from the Lord's own presence, do you think, in view of what was much wider?

JDG That is right. It is good to see that. There was the expression of the mind of Christ in a man here through revelation. That was Saul of Tarsus who became known as Paul. That dear man had the light of what was in the Lord's mind to set persons apart for the Lord in places in this world and how the testimony should progress from there. So in this passage what I wanted to draw attention to first of all was the necessity of the Holy Spirit. That is received as individuals. In Acts 10 when Peter was preaching to Cornelius and his household, to quite a company there, it says in verse 44: "While Peter was yet speaking these words the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were hearing the word". There may have been others there but He "fell upon all those who were hearing the word". That was the activities of the Spirit in identifying Himself with those persons.

BWB Would you say in that way God was justified in His sovereignty, as He always is, in taking up Cornelius and those with Him in that they heard the word and the Holy Spirit was free to fall upon them?

JDG That is right. The boundary of nationality disappeared completely. The boundary of race disappeared completely; so neither nationality nor race is of any consequence in the assembly. At Antioch there were mixed races, various races.

RDP-r Peter says in Acts 10 of Jesus Christ "*he* is Lord of all things" (v 36), and the note says 'Gentile and Jew'.

JDG That is right. That comes out in Ephesus too: "has broken down

the middle wall of enclosure“ (chap 2: 14) and made them into one body.

JAT So divine love cannot be restricted. This is the heart of God involved in this enlargement and expansion. It is really the heart of God that is behind it which must link with the sovereignty of His choice, in whatever He chooses.

JDG It links with His sovereignty; but what comes to light in persons is the substantial results of a sovereign operation, and that is what was seen in these persons. Their lives changed. I read that verse in the middle of chapter 19 about burning the books to show that it had an effect on their whole manner of life. Now we will come onto that in 2 Timothy in relation to ourselves but that is what happened to these Ephesian believers and also there is a basis there for separating the disciples from those who were argumentative, or contending. It says, “But when some were hardened and disbelieved, speaking evil of the way“, chap 19: 9. Paul did not continue with that. He separated the disciples to an area where there was the thought of rule as suggested in the name of the schoolmaster. It was the schoolmaster's room, and he was able to teach them for two years. Christianity is not just one meeting. It is a commitment for life and these Ephesian believers committed themselves to a line of teaching day by day. Paul says, “for three years, night and day”, chap 20: 31. It says two years here but in chapter 20 it tells you “three years, night and day”, both in the assembly and the houses. He was teaching. That became their whole object in life, to be related to the Lord, to His people here below, and to divine love in activity in the saints. Someone has said you cannot see the Holy Spirit. Can you? How do we see the Holy Spirit? You see the Holy Spirit in divine love in activity in the brethren. A few persons, meeting together, naming the Name of the Lord, owning His rights with love amongst themselves, is something that is far removed from this world's system.

JMcK So do you think what happened in Antioch in chapter 13 was part of Paul's education, that is that having ministered to the Lord, the Spirit was free and He says, “Separate me now”? Was that part of his education in view of the emphasis he was to put on it later?

JDG Yes. Paul did not say “Separate me”; it was the Spirit of God who said it. He would say it through someone, but it was not through Paul, but the Spirit of God was free to say there, “Separate me now”.

First of all he had seen something of that in the city of Damascus when he was converted. He saw something of an expression of divine love in activity when Ananias came and said, "Saul, brother", Acts 9: 17. What a word to a man who had been a persecutor and murderer of the saints and yet had met the Lord on the highway and was subject to Him from that day forward!

JMcK So Paul was already aware or would have been of his own commission. He had met the Lord, as you say. He had been apprehended for greater things, but he was to learn that there was something in the assembly that was to set him forward in the presence of this divine Person.

JDG His history is very interesting because it tells us in the Acts that from Jerusalem the brethren sent him away to Tarsus; and he never moved from there until Barnabas went and sought him out. And then he stayed in Antioch until the Holy Spirit said "Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them". He was moving in relation to what the Lord had here below in setting him forward on his commission. That is a very beautiful circumstance that he waited until such times as the Spirit of God indicated it was time for movement. I do not doubt there was education for Saul in those waiting times.

DJW In referring to the Holy Spirit have you in mind that He is still here, completely, and perhaps 2 Timothy helps us to identify where He is free?

JDG That would be in mind. Yes, the Spirit of God has remained throughout the dispensation. The Lord said in John 14 verse 16: "And I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive". Now I understand that scripture to mean that the Spirit would remain here during the dispensation. He would always have vessels in whom He could dwell and throughout the dispensation He makes use of persons who are available to Him

GJR One of the things we might fear is narrowness. I was just thinking that after the disciples were separated, it did not lead to narrowness, but to the opposite: "And this took place for two years, so that all that inhabited Asia heard the word of the Lord", Acts 19: 10. It actually led to great expansion.

JDG I understand that scripture is a basis for saying Ephesus was

the candlestick. What you have referred to was a public expression, “that all that inhabited Asia heard the word of the Lord”. It was a public expression of what He had in His mind and what He could identify Himself with as expressing fully His thought in the local place. Do you think that is right? It is worth thinking about anyway.

In Ephesus, there was an expression of “a habitation of God in the Spirit” about which we have been speaking. In 2 Timothy we come to a day of public confusion and breakdown. We cannot return to Ephesian days, but we can have the privileges of the Ephesian saints in a lowly walk and in humility as taking account of this second epistle to Timothy. No believer needs to go on with evil, morally or ecclesiastically, that is in the church or the establishment. No believer needs to go on with that because of this scripture we have in 2 Timothy. I was thinking that in Antioch and in Ephesus and further back in Jerusalem they had named the Name of the Lord. I think it was true that the saints as separating from what had marked them beforehand were naming the Name of the Lord, particularly in Antioch and Ephesus as coming into an understanding of it, greater than what the saints had at Jerusalem. So we are here as believers in the Lord Jesus and we would have to say, these are broken days; there is mixture in Christendom. There are many so-called churches and establishments and many believers going on with things such as the clergy, robes and crowns on men's heads and all that, as well as wrong teaching. As believers in the Lord Jesus we would say, Does that reflect the Lord Jesus Christ? Is that in keeping with the One who says to Paul from heaven, “I am Jesus the Nazaraean, whom *thou* persecutest”, Acts 22: 8? And you would have to say, 'I do not think so'. “Yet the firm foundation of God stands”. That is His foundation. “The Lord knows those that are his”. But what is the responsibility of a believer who names the Name of the Lord? Everyone of us here as believers, are we naming the Name of the Lord? It says, in *this* scripture, “and, Let everyone who names the Name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity”. Now we may be alongside believers at work, etc. who are free to belong to associations, and professional bodies, and trade unions and other such things which involve membership of a corporate body. Believers who have the light of the assembly as the body of Christ, and are governed in their walk by scriptures such as 2 Timothy chapter 2 and 2 Corinthians chapter 6 would have to say that such membership of worldly associations is inconsistent with being a member of the body of Christ. The young people here are on the threshold of life. According

to the hymn that we sang at the beginning (228), we have taken up the highway of life, 'My song is ever - God!'. What is my walk going to be through this scene? Am I prepared to name the Name of the Lord at the present time? What does it mean for me? It meant for the disciples in Antioch that they separated from what they had been attached to before, heathenism and such like things, and the same in Ephesus. They gave up their books of charms, they burnt books valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver, Acts 19: 19. What am I going to do as naming the Name of the Lord?

RWF Can you tell us why the name “Master” is introduced here?

JDG “Serviceable to the Master”: well, the scripture exhorts us in this setting, “in a great house” - what is the “great house”?

RWF Well, that refers to the wide extent of Christendom, but the question is whether in naming the Name of the Lord, I acknowledge His sovereign power. That is what the name Master implies.

JDG Paul uses the simile of a great house, a literal great house, to say that in that house there are “not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honour, and some to dishonour”. Now we know at the present time that the name “Christian” does result in reproach and persecution for believers. In India there is persecution in certain parts of one of the states. It was so in Iraq according to what has been made known by the media, regarding Christians. “The Lord knows those that are his”, but the name “Christian” brings a certain reproach. What is in question in this scripture is the Lord's Name; what I may go on with as attaching to that Name, as naming His Name, and saying that He is my Lord. Am I going to go on in my life with that which scripture says I should separate from? He says, “If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work”. Well, that is what I would desire to be. What would you desire to be?

RWF Precisely that. It is a positive thing. What I mean is, we do not just, as it were, grow into it or flow into it; it needs the positive confession of His Name, positive action in separating.

JDG What you have brought up is interesting because a week or two back in speaking about “prepared for every good work”, the scripture that came into my mind was in Ephesians 2 verse 10: “For we” - that is

believers - “are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them”. That is the positive side of separating from vessels to dishonour, that you are available to the Lord and He has prepared things for you to walk in, but on the negative side, it may *cost* me something. It has cost brethren that have gone before us trials and tribulations. When I was a young man, one of the issues that came up at the time in Scotland was that brethren who worked in the mines were required to join a trade union, and they would not do it; and some lost their jobs. In Loanhead where the meeting room now is in Edinburgh, the other miners went on strike. There was animosity and anger in the place; the brothers stood firm and they lost their jobs. That was naming the Name of the Lord. So I would say to young people here, as you have careers in mind and other such like things, what does the Lord Jesus mean to you, and what does His Name mean to you? You might need guidance and help, but there is a place where you will get it and that is amongst the people of God. Salvation for the present time is keeping amongst God's people.

DJW So, does naming the Name of the Lord involve a public expression in testimony of what you hold to?

JDG That is good to say that. Naming the Name of the Lord is an expression in testimony. So they say, 'Why will you not join this professional association?', and you say, 'Well, I have named the Name of the Lord. I belong to another body, the body of Christ. I am a Christian and want to be free from other associations'. Some persons will respect that.

DJW And the Lord must honour that. Practically I have proved He came in for me in those circumstances.

PJH So enjoying being “called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1: 9) is how we respond to that. It is really the Master's use of those who are serviceable. We have found, “But he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit”, 1 Cor 6: 17. It is the power of the Spirit that comes in there.

JDG I am glad of your reference to “called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”. There is only one Christian fellowship in the world, but scripture here is exhorting us in the midst of the public confusion that you have a right: you can name the Name of the Lord and separate from iniquity because you have authority in the Scriptures

to do that. You are not casting any slur on any other believer. You are putting yourself right with the Lord.

PJH And there is security in it too. It is fit for the Master's use.

JDG There is salvation practically as walking in testimony here below for the Lord Jesus. Young people have to face these matters, indeed we all do, but a good number here have proved, as our brother has said, the protection and care of the Lord, and the succour and support of the saints as being identified with what the Lord has here in places, persons walking in the light of the assembly.

JMcK So the subject of this passage is not the judgement of evil; it is keeping myself from it.

JDG That is right. It is not ours to judge the churches or to judge a man's ways. It has been pointed out that if somebody comes to your door with wrong teaching, it is not our position to stop him going to the next door. Our position is to clear ourselves from him and not encourage him on his way. John's second epistle says that, verse 10, 11. You would not help a man who is carrying evil doctrine on his way, but it is not your job to go out and stop him from going along the street. You clear yourself from the matter.

RDP-r Does the Supper help us to be sustained in this naming the Name of the Lord, and continuing in it?

JDG I think that is very attractive. You meet together with persons with whom you can express fellowship in the Lord's Supper. That is unity in testimony.

RDP-r We need to be kept fresh in our affections for the Lord and for one another. To name the Name of the Lord historically would not preserve us as we go on day by day.

JDG No, naming the Name of the Lord is an active thing that I maintain daily. Every day of my life here while the Lord leaves me here I am naming the Name of the Lord and my pathway is consistent with that. It is His honour and His Name. You are fastening your flag to the pole, saying, 'I am here for the Lord Jesus and there are certain things I cannot go on with. I will steer my course in relation to the blessed Lord Jesus who is my Saviour and my Lord'.

JAT So in Isaiah Jehovah is power for "them that turn the battle to the gate", chap 28: 6. There is that in it really, do you think?

JDG Turning the battle to the gate is seeking counsel. That comes out in the book of Ruth, that Boaz turned the battle to the gate. He sought counsel and wisdom and testimony amongst the elders, chap 4. So there is a place here where you will get help as to your exercises. Young people want help and guidance: there is a place here where they will get it. They will get it among the brethren. They will get protection and care there that is not in the world.

JAT Amen. It was just that I was feeling that we need the help of the Holy Spirit when we take this stand. The Spirit would be the verity and strength of the one seeking counsel, and the Spirit would be a help for anyone who would take that stand. We do need the Holy Spirit to help us in this stand, would you say?

JDG The scripture that supports your thought is in Peter: "If ye are reproached in the name of Christ, blessed are ye; for the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you", 1 Pet 4: 14. How is it that young people can go against the streams of this world? Another has said that it is the holy, unseen, unknown-by-the-world protection that enshrouds the believer.

DBB In the other scripture it spoke about him not contending; it says here: "And a bondman of the Lord ought not to contend, but be gentle towards all; apt to teach; forbearing". Could you say something about that?

JDG I am glad you brought it up because I nearly read from verse 14, but we had read quite a bit, but this matter of naming the Name of the Lord is encased between two matters: verse 16: "But profane, vain babblings shun, for they will advance to greater impiety" and then this matter here in verse 23: "But foolish and senseless questionings avoid, knowing that they beget contentions". The believer is not going to be carried into that line of argument over scripture. He sets the truth out in his person and his body and his actions. As naming the Name of the Lord he takes a certain course and establishes that course positively. Is that what you have in mind?

DBB That is very good because it is what he actually *is*, not exactly what he says.

JDG What we are speaking about as not having part in is negative but necessary, but the great matter is to see the positive side: "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating

himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work. But youthful lusts flee, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". You come into fellowship one by one. We come to the Lord one by one. You come into fellowship one by one, and then we find companionship in which these matters; "righteousness, faith, love, peace" are in activity. Our bond together is the truth, but love must be in activity. If there are a few believers meeting together in love in activity, God can work there.

GJR There are those that "call upon the Lord". There seems to be a great humility attached to such persons.

JDG Humility, yes, I would say so. There is humility because you are a broken-hearted churchman, to use an expression that Mr Lyon used years ago. You have not left other believers because you do not love them. It is not hatred of your brethren; it is hatred of the things that they might be associated with even if they do not understand. But humility is needed. You would carry in your spirit the conditions in Christendom. We were reading Habakkuk two or three weeks ago in Edinburgh. Habakkuk is a man whose spirit was burdened by what was going on in Israel at that time, just as many a believer may be burdened at the present time by what is going on in Christendom, and what the teaching that is going on there is. The Lord has shown to us the teaching that is in the establishment, particularly in Anglicanism at the present time, and the awfulness of it, and there are believers there and they are still going on with it. But, thank God, we have been liberated from it and set apart, but you still carry in your spirit the burden and humility of what is associated with the Name of the Lord Jesus publicly.

Well, these were thoughts we had. I trust they have been of some profit.

Witney

18th October 2008

Key to Initials

D B Bodman, Birmingham; B W Burton, Taunton;
R W Flowerdew, Sunbury; J D Gray, Edinburgh; P J Herbert, Newport;
R Hodge, St Ives; I McKay, Witney; J McKay, Witney;
A E Mutton, Witney; R D Painter, Yeovil; G Richards, Malvern;
G J Richards, Malvern; J A Turner, Malvern; M J Welch, Newport;
D J Willetts, Birmingham

KNOWING GOD HIMSELF

Jim D Gray

John 16: 22-28; 17: 11-12, 25-26

1 Peter 2: 24 to “tree”

Hebrews 1: 2-4

John 14: 1-3

Romans 8: 22-27

Revelation 21: 3-4

What is on my heart is to say a few words, maybe just impressions, about how divine Persons, having come into the economy, desire to be known individually by believers. Each of these passages refers to a divine Person as Himself or Itself. God in the Old Testament was known as Almighty God and as Jehovah, but the Persons of the Godhead were not distinguished. In the New Testament the Persons of the Godhead are distinguished and they are distinguished with a view to the believer coming to a knowledge of each Person. The Lord Jesus introduces the thought “the Father himself has affection for you, because ye have had affection for me” in this section when their hearts were grieved. These dear disciples that are spoken about here had been with the Lord for the three and a half years of His public ministry, and now He was going away to leave them, and they were broken-hearted. They thought the Lord Jesus had come to restore the kingdom to Israel. At that moment they were under the heel of the Roman Empire. A proud Jewish nation they were, revolting always against the Romans, but these disciples are the remnant of Israel, the true elect of God at that time, and they were attached to the Lord Jesus Christ, and they really thought He was going to set up the kingdom. Their hearts were grieved because He was going to die. He was going to leave them, He had been rejected, and He says to them, I know your hearts are grieved but, “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one takes from you”. He had spoken to them about the Father throughout His teaching in the three and a half years, and He says in this section that there is a day coming - that is our day - when “ye shall ask the Father in my name”. He says, “Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”. He says, 'I am going to commit you to the Father'. That is a comfort, dear brethren. He says, 'I tell you, He has affection for you'. He does not say, 'the Father has affection for you'. He says, “the Father himself has affection for you”. That is an intense thought concerning

this blessed divine Person, the Father, who has retained His place in deity. He does not take a lower place in the economy. For the sake of the young people, God always existed in Trinity in three Persons. In the Old Testament it was not revealed, but when He reveals Himself in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit He is coming within the range of the human mind, so that man can know it. The Trinity is beyond us. It involves infinitude but the economy, as we speak about it, involves God in revelation in those names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He took the name of Father and we all understand what that name means in nature and so it gives us an indication of the characteristics of that Person in the Godhead. He is distinguished in the Godhead with a view to our coming into an appreciation of Him. He says, "I came out from the Father and have come into the world; again, I leave the world and go to the Father". What was the Lord saying when He said that? They were grieving over His rejection. They knew that He came out from God. He says, "I came out from the Father ... and go to the Father". He was telling them in secret that it was nothing to do with His rejection. He came out from the Father, that is, He had been sent. He was going to the Father; that was His object. Divine purpose was to be secured by the Lord Jesus. He was going to the Father. He says in chap 17: 1, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee". That is more than the cross. That is Christ's present position, "glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee". That is His present position. That is where He was going. What a secret to grasp hold of, dear brethren. Things were not in the hands of men. They were in the hands of divine Persons. He came out from the Father and was going to the Father. And to leave with them, "the Father himself has affection for you" involves that He is indicating to them that sonship was in mind for them, sonship was in mind for us. What a thing to approach the Father in the understanding that you are sons; not just a sinner saved by grace, wonderful as that is, but you are a son, and "God has sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father", Gal 4: 6. What a joy that is!

In chapter 17: 11, the Lord was going out of the world. He had kept His disciples. Now He says, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me"; that is, He had been given the Father's name. The Lord had that Name amongst them when He kept them. Now He commits them to the Father, but not just the Father but, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name". What a thing to grasp hold of, dear brethren. The Lord has committed us as going out of this world to the

Father, known as “Holy Father”. He asked the Father to keep us in accordance with His holy Name. That is a wonderful thing to grasp. How do I get the gain of that? There is no doubt the Father would never fail in that request, but how do I get the gain of that? By keeping close to Him, by being near to Him, asking the Father to keep me in accordance with His holy Name. This chapter envisages the saints in the present dispensation being in the same place as the Lord was in His lifetime here; now the saints having the same relationship to the Father as Christ has, not the only-begotten Son but sons by adoption. He says, “keep them in thy name”. 1 Peter says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy. And if ye invoke as Father him who, without regard of persons ...”, chap 1: 16, 17. We are kept by the Father, known as the “Holy Father”. I would encourage us all to seek to be established in that relationship with the Father, known as “Holy Father”, to be kept in accordance with that name. In a world of evil and corruption, the believer can be kept. There is what is in you and me that will respond to that holy Name because there is a work of God in us. Grasp hold of that: there is a work of God in the believer. If you make way for the work of God in you, you will be kept in accordance with that holy Name.

Then later in the chapter it says, “Righteous Father, - and the world has not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.” The Lord distinguishes two companies. He distinguishes the world, and He distinguishes His saints. He appeals to the Father on the basis of righteousness, not now on the basis of holiness, but on the basis of righteousness. So we want to come into the knowledge of the Father as “Righteous Father”. If the Lord addressed Him as “Holy Father” and “Righteous Father”, we can address Him too. He Himself has affection for us because we have had affection for Christ. How delightful God finds the saints, those on the earth that have affection for the despised Jesus, “ye have had affection for me”. What holy intimacy we have with Himself. Dear believer, dear young believer, cultivate a personal known relationship with God as Father, “the Father himself”. Cultivate that relationship in the holy intimacy of your own room, that is where to cultivate it, in the intimacy of your room, a personal relationship with the Father. I know we can address Him publicly as that. That is right. But this involves intimacy for the believer. He says, “And I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known” - now listen to this, “that the love with which thou hast loved me”, that is the Father’s love for Christ, “may be in them”, that is in you and me. That is a wonderful capacity that we can love the Lord

Jesus with the same love that the Father loves Him. It is true of us, dear brethren. It is true of you and me as the subject of divine operations. It is not true of the flesh in us; it is true of you and me as subject of divine operations, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, that we are able to love the Lord Jesus with the same appreciation of love that the Father has for Him. That is what it says, "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them". You find Christ dwells in us. You find a repose dwelling in the believer by the Holy Spirit; Christ dwells in the believer. What a company of persons believers are! You and I belong to that company. Do these things mean anything to you in your life? As you grow older they mean more and more to you, and I would exhort all of us, especially those that are younger, to seek to make acquaintance with the Father. Whatever the matters in your life are, you can go to the Father. Tell Him about them. He has an ear to listen to them. Why? Because you have affection for the Lord Jesus. What a delightful privilege believers have to have God known as Father. I would encourage you to speak to Him daily, perhaps more than daily but daily anyway. In the privacy of your life make known to Him your thoughts and calculations and ask Him to keep you according to that holy Name, and then as the Righteous Father He will take account of you as being apart from the world. He will take account of you as one who has love for Christ and the same quality of love that He has for Christ.

I come to the Lord Jesus in 1 Peter 2. You get another reference to "himself". We are perhaps more acquainted with Jesus because of what it says here. It says in verse 24, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree". It might just have said, 'who bore our sins in his body on the tree', but every word of scripture means something. "Who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", that precious Saviour, that divine Person, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. No other divine Person became incarnate but, becoming incarnate, it says, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree". Such a One as that, a divine Person come into manhood, a blessed Man, and He "bore our sins in his body on the tree". Does it not affect you that that blessed Man bore our sins in His own body? "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him", 2 Cor 5: 21. That is going to be seen finally in eternity. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus you are going to be in eternity as the righteousness of God. What a display! Everyone who is there will, I suppose, come into that description. You cannot think of any of the families not setting forth the righteousness of God in Christ because they have all been secured

because He “bore our sins in his body on the tree”. Every believer who goes into eternity would be able to say, “who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree”. I think that is true.

In Hebrews 1 we get His exaltation. I refer to this scripture because it says, “having made by himself the purification of sins, set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high”. How rightly crowned is Jesus! This blessed Person, the Son, a divine Person, made the worlds. Galaxies and galaxies in the far reaches of space that man's puny mind seeks to explore, set out the greatness for the believer of the God who put them there, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ, “by whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory and the expression of his substance” - that is in His manhood - “and upholding all things by the word of his power”. He upholds the worlds. The sun and the moon and the stars and the galaxies all move because they are under the control of Christ. They are not left to do as they wish. There is no asteroid going to come into the earth unless divine Persons allow it to come in; wandering stars are all literally controlled in the heavens by Christ. And then it says of Him, “having made by himself the purification of sins”. It says there in the note, ‘the form ... of the verb here, has a peculiar reflexive force, “having done it for himself”. Though we, as alone the sinners, have the profit, yet the work was done within his own person and work, without us’. We alone as sinners get the profit. “Having made by himself the purification of sins, set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high, taking a place so much better than the angels, as he inherits a name more excellent than they”. He “set himself down”. Is it not right that Jesus should set Himself down “on the right hand of the greatness on high”? That is where He has set Himself down; that blessed Man has set Himself down. That is where He is at the present time. He “set himself down”. We might say only a divine Person could do that, “set himself down”! Also He says in the Scriptures, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”, John 2: 19. Life was inherent in Jesus. He raised His own body. Now, that is an important matter in scripture, the power of life that was in Jesus. The other side, that He was raised by the glory of the Father (Rom 6: 4), brings out affections between divine Persons and the delight of the Father in raising that blessed Man from among the dead. In the Scriptures the actions of the Persons are distinguished. Keep scripture in its context; do not look for disparities in them; look for the divine thought in them. “Made by himself the purification of sins”, something He did by Himself; “set

himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high”, that is what He did by Himself; “taking a place by so much better than the angels, as he inherits a name more excellent than they”. What is the name He inherits? The name of Son. It says later down, “Who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire; but as to the Son ...”. Then it says, “Thy throne, O God, is to the age of the age”, v 7, 8. You get an intertwining of manhood and deity in these verses. We cannot hold them both in our minds at the same time but we can marvel at who He is and the place He has and the name He inherits.

From the place of majesty on high He is going to come for us. What I have to say is very simple, but I trust it will reach our affections, and bring us into a sphere of the activity of divine love. It says there in John 14, “In my Father's house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you: for I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be”. He is seated at the “the right hand of the greatness on high” - that is His place at the minute. He is going to rise from there. The Father does not come for us and the Spirit does not come for us. The Spirit is here, but the Lord comes for us. He comes Himself. It says in 1 Thessalonians, “for the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God”, chap 4: 16. He is going to come personally. That is the hope of the believer. He is going to come for us personally and “we shall be always with the Lord”, v 17. He is going to take us to where He is, that is, into the presence of the Father. That is where He is. He is going to take us there. He uses the figure of the temple. He says, “In my Father's house there are many abodes”. In the temple in Jerusalem there were many abodes, and the Lord uses the figure so that those to whom He was speaking would understand. It shows the grace of Christ, the grace of divine Persons. They adapt themselves to humanity. They speak in a language that we can understand. “In my Father's house there are many abodes ... for I go to prepare you a place”. He has prepared a place for us. That is a specific place; that is a place for the assembly distinctively. Other matters are His matters, the place prepared for other families, but for the saints in the present dispensation He has prepared a place for us and He is coming for us “and shall receive you to myself”. He is speaking to His own here as belonging to the assembly, but He is going to come for all the saints from Abel onwards, all the dead in Christ are going to be raised and taken to heaven. All will be caught up to be with the Lord Himself. So He says, “I am coming again ... that

where I am ...". Where He is, is a very blessed atmosphere. He is associated with the Father and He is going to bring us into that place.

Now I come to Romans 8. In this scripture it says, "the Spirit itself". It is to me a very remarkable scripture because we generally associate the Holy Spirit with a spiritual area as in 1 Corinthians 2. It says there, "for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God ... thus also the things of God knows no one except the Spirit of God. But we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God" (v 10-12), and so on. In Romans it is an area of creation. It says, "For we know", that is believers, "that the whole creation groans together and travails in pain together until now". That is the whole of creation, even the animal creation groans on account of the fall of man, and suffers. "And not only that, but even we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, we also ourselves groan in ourselves, awaiting adoption". That is, we feel the burdens of the present state of things and the burdens of the physical condition. There are burdens relating to this toilsome life, and the Spirit of God comes alongside us. What a blessed thing for the Spirit to draw near. We are "awaiting adoption, that is the redemption of our body". That is the final act of salvation, the redemption of our body. And then it says, "And in like manner the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness; for we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting, but the Spirit itself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered". That is the Spirit of God expressing in the divine presence what is in the heart of a believer - all the pressures of the way, not only individual matters but particularly related to the testimony. The Spirit of God is particularly related to the testimony and the effect on the testimony, affecting creation, of the fall of man and sin. So Paul says of the believer, "for we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting". One person pointed out recently that it does not say, 'if we do not know', it says "for we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting". There are burdens on your spirit, and you wonder how to pray, what to say, "but the Spirit itself", that blessed Person who indwells you and me, "makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered", and then, and this is an important matter, "But he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit". That is the hearts of believers, that is God searching the hearts of the believer, and He finds in the believer those feelings of the Holy Spirit that He Himself, the Spirit, expresses because the believer is personally unable to express them. God finds those feelings in the

heart of the believer, feelings that He can rejoice in. The heart of God is gladdened by what He finds in the believer, "But he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit". God searches our hearts. He finds there some expression by the Holy Spirit of divine feelings that are a comfort to Him. He finds them because the Spirit is there present in the heart of the believer, expressing the feelings of the believer in the divine presence "with groanings which cannot be uttered". That is a comfort to us. I just thought to draw attention to this matter, the Holy Spirit itself in this area, not in the area of privilege or a spiritual area, but in the area of dependency and feeling. How sin has ravaged the creation of God, ravaged man and brought in a state where there are "groanings which cannot be uttered", fallen creation. The whole section deals with that, anticipating the day of redemption for even the creature. It says in verse 20 and 21, "for the creature has been made subject to vanity", that is God's creature, "not of its will, but by reason of him who has subjected the same, in hope that the creature itself also shall be set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." Creation is going to be liberated when Christ comes, and in the meantime there is a divine Person here who carries those feelings, the Holy Spirit itself. It says, "the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness". Well, we can understand that, frailty, infirmity, and then we are encouraged by, "for we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting". That is an encouragement that He intercedes with God, and I say to you again, God finds in your heart and my heart those feelings that are expressed by the Holy Spirit.

Finally I come to Revelation 21, and this matter of "God himself". We have been speaking about distinguishing of divine Persons in relation to the believer coming into a knowledge of each One, and that is a precious truth, but do not let us forget that God is one. The Old Testament insists there is but one God, but in the New Testament, when the revelation of God is made known in the economy, scripture states that God is one, 1 Tim 2: 5; Gal 3: 20. There is but one mind. Sometimes divine Persons are not distinguished for us and we would address God as God with holy reverence. Revelation 21: 3 represents the eternal day, and it says, "and God himself shall be with them, their God"; "God himself". Oh the blessedness of addressing God as God. We know there are three Persons but we do not have capacity always to distinguish them. In speaking to Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as far as I can carry in my mind, you are distinguishing the Persons of the Godhead in all their glory, and yet in unity and

oneness. When God is before you, it is a blessed Person that you know. Ever retain the blessedness, dear brethren, of addressing God as God. "God himself shall be with them, their God". God as known has taken His abode in the tabernacle, which is the assembly. In the eternal day "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God". Wonderful thing! We do not always have to differentiate the Persons. We can worship God as God, the greatness of who He is, the One who operated to bring in all things according to His own mind, the One who is going to dwell eternally with men, that blessed, holy Being. So our hearts can be filled with worship in relation to God Himself.

May the Lord just encourage us with these simple impressions. For His Name's sake.

Witney

18th October 2008

GOD'S STANDARD FOR MARRIAGE

Phil J Walkinshaw

Ephesians 5: 22-23

1 Peter 3: 1-7

I was thinking of the standard of marriage and the practical walk for those of us who are married, and indeed, for us all. What we see in Ephesians is the divine standard, God's standard for marriage; and it is seen in Christ and in the assembly. That is the standard and nothing lower than that. We tend to lower the standard, lower the level, all the time. We are affected by what goes on in the world and by how far the standards have fallen. Alas, it can tend to creep in amongst the people of God. I think it helps us to keep God's standard before us, keep God's view of marriage before us as we have it here in Ephesians, "Husbands, love your own wives". There might be a possibility of loving another man's wife, but Paul says, "even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it". What could be greater than that, to love and deliver oneself up for it? Then it says, "in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word" and "nourishes and cherishes it, even as also the Christ the assembly". That is the standard for those of us who are husbands, to love our own wives. It is not dependent in any way on the wife, what she may be or her behaviour; we are to love our wives, "as the Christ also loved the assembly". It is a great challenge to us all to maintain things at this level, but it is in the Scriptures; and I think God would have us keep it before us that the standard in Christian marriage is that of Christ and the assembly, and nothing less. He says, "So ought men also to love their own wives as their own bodies", how testing that is. Men are selfish by nature; that is what marks the man naturally - selfishness. Women naturally are more unselfish, but here there is no thought of that, we are to love our own wives as our own bodies, "he that loves his own wife loves himself". The object in view is not to love oneself, but we are to love our own wives in that way, "even as also the Christ the assembly". We are to nourish and cherish, we are to care for our wives, be thoughtful as to their welfare. The standard in Ephesians is that of Christ and the assembly.

Paul says, "Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife", that is an exercise. Once a man

has his household he is responsible to the Lord. He has left his father and his mother, he is not under their influence exactly, although always open to guidance and help, which many of us have been so thankful for in the past; but you leave your father and mother. That would be morally, and you cleave, or are united to your wife, “the two shall be one flesh”. There is nothing between them; they are indivisible in that way, “one flesh”. Then he says, “I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly” - what a standard in Christian marriage, that of Christ and the assembly. There could never be any thought of disparity, or distance, or darkness, or a spot between Christ and the assembly. It could not be contemplated, and so it should not be between wives and husbands, they should be united, “one flesh ... as to Christ, and as to the assembly”. How testing these things are.

Peter takes up more the practical side of our walk. It is not only husbands and wives; it is all of us, but he speaks to the wives, “wives, be subject to your own husbands”, and as it is worked out practically what a result there might be, “even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be gained without the word”. So, the wife in that sense by her demeanour and her manner of life is a substitute for the word of God. How precious that is, that a wife, by her behaviour and her demeanour and her manner of life, can be used of God to gain the husband! Not by His word exactly, but by the conversation of the wife. Then it says, “whose adorning let it not be that outward one”. What a test that is. We often say, 'God looks on the heart', and that is true, but I might just say, feelingly, that others do not look on the heart; they look on the outward. If they see in me the habits, the dress or the customs of the world, what are they to think? They cannot see my heart. I might say God knows my heart, but is that enough? He says, “let it not be that outward one of tressing of hair ... but the hidden man of the heart”. That is Christ Himself. Then, “the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit”, seen so perfectly in that Man when He was here, perfectly in every moment of every day, “which in the sight of God is of great price”. We should covet to have these features which are of great price in the sight of God, not in the sight of men, or even our brethren, but what is of great price in the sight of God. He goes on to speak of the holy women that have been examples to us, all subject to their own husbands, “Sarah obeyed Abraham”. I do not think wives are told to *obey* their husbands in the Scriptures, but Sarah did, and she was a help to her husband too. On one occasion Abraham was told to listen to Sarah, Gen 21:12. The wife does not just do everything her husband tells her, she does what is

right before the Lord, obeys her husband and is subject characteristically. How precious these things are. “Ye husbands likewise, dwell with them according to knowledge, as with a weaker, even the female, vessel” - we need to care for our wives and for one another, “a weaker ... vessel”. Man is weak, but woman is weaker. It is not that the man is strong and the woman weak, but the man, weak mortal man, and the female vessel is the weaker vessel. We are to look after them, “giving them honour, as also fellow-heirs of the grace of life”. How wonderful that expression is! No doubt the life that was seen in the Lord Jesus was here, “that your prayers be not hindered”. We have spoken about households and household prayer. So there should be nothing with us, personally, individually or householdly that would hinder our prayers because prayer is one of the greatest influences that a believer has, one of the greatest resources and one of the most effective ways of bringing to pass God's thoughts for His people.

These are just a few thoughts. I thought we could get help from; even just reading the Scriptures, to see the perfect divine standard in Christian marriage and in the way that it is worked out, not only in husbands and wives, but that all of us might be exercised to have this incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit and to be those who can be spoken of as “fellow-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered”.

May God bless the word.

Tunbridge Wells

13th September 2008

