

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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FOLLOWING THE LORD

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RG-y What is in mind in suggesting these scriptures is to enquire together about following the Lord. It has always been, in this present dispensation, that the Lord has looked for persons who would follow Him, and I suppose it is no less important today that we should be found here as followers of Jesus.

I suggested John's gospel first because I think in his writings John shows us the workability of Paul's ministry in a broken day. John and Paul agree entirely in every detail, but John helps us to see how we can work out Paul's ministry in the present conditions. And so we began with this account of those persons who saw Jesus and followed Him.

In the second scripture we are told about Bartimæus who followed Him, that is Jesus, but it says he "followed him in the way". I think that is something that we need to consider. Every Christian would say that he is seeking to follow Jesus, but the question is, how does He wish us to follow Him? He sets out the way for us, and I think the Christian way is set out for us in Paul's teaching.

In Acts 19 we have what comes in by way of opposition in the history of Christianity, with persons who spoke against the way, and Paul "separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus".

And then finally in Joshua we have, typically, the result of following this Person whom we have spoken of as Jesus. In Joshua we see how following the Lord is brought to its full completion; that is, we follow Him over Jordan. That is a rather sketchy outline, but I hope we can make something of it.

JDG I am sure we will be able to make something out of it; it is very interesting, and very important. It seems that John's exclamation as to the Lamb of God helped these persons to identify themselves with Jesus.

RG-y Well, that is part of our Christian experience. Many of us have

been brought up among the brethren and from early days we have had the Lord presented to us both in the gospel and in teaching, and it may be said in the saints, and I believe the design of the Spirit of God is that we should become impressed with this Person. John's writings bring out particularly the matter of family affections. We are brought in to this position on the ground of love for Christ.

JDG The disciples were with the Lord and then spoke to others, and it seems they had the power to convict them. There must have been something in the men's spirits that clearly showed they had been with the Messiah, Christ.

RG-y It is something that we need to learn, that as we come as children to the meeting, there comes a time in our histories when we begin to feel that there is a voice speaking to us, maybe through the saints, or through a scripture, or through circumstances. The Lord Himself is becoming attractive to us and we begin to see Him through the eyes of faith too as a Person who would draw us to Himself.

JTB In Mark, Bartimæus refers to the Lord as "Rabboni" and there is a reference here to the Lord as "Rabbi". Is that an important principle, being amenable to teaching? Does that help us in this exercise as to following? And then when you come to Joshua, "What mean ye by these stones?", chap 4: 6. I suppose it required some teaching by those who had some experience to communicate what that was all about. And that continues, so that is of all importance, do you think?

RG-y It is important. The fact is that the world today would stress that you are an independent unit, you have a mind of your own, and you have rights. Christianity would teach us that we owe everything to Christ, and when we accept that, then we begin to learn from Him. There is no teacher like love. That is a simple statement of the obvious, but if we love someone we surely try to please them, and we watch out and see what suits them, and so it is between the believer and Christ.

DCB The beginning here is "looking at Jesus as He walked", that is, He had a way and had a path; would you say something about that?

RG-y Well, you have really put your finger on the core of the exercise. What you say is very important; He has a way. Now we have all met persons who say, 'Yes, Christianity is the thing, and we know the Lord, but let us pursue Christianity in our own way, let us be in liberty'. Well, liberty is right, there is no doubt about it, but the Lord has a way, and it is

our salvation to be found in that way. Can you say more?

DCB Are we helped by admiration of Him, in this way, by the assurance that there is only One?

RG-y Yes, that is one of the reasons why I started with John. You might have said, 'Why not start with Paul and his setting out of matters, and then go to John', but John shows us that persons are bound together by admiration for Christ, and their love towards Him and towards one another.

RG Is that borne out by the fact that you see subjection, and you see adjustment, and these are two basic features if we are to be followers, do you think?

RG-y Yes, and when we begin to see the need for that and accept it, then we have really got our feet in the pathway, do you think? And that only comes through affection for Christ. The parliaments of this world try to legislate for human nature with multitudes of laws, 'Do not do this, do that, and so on', and man after the flesh finds ways round it. Christianity binds us to Christ and as we love Him we love to do what pleases Him. Is that what is in your mind?

RG I was thinking that John himself was subject to the Lord, but then there were those brothers, who were subject to one another. Then in Nathaniel there was a necessary adjustment, and he was ready for it; and these are all prerequisites to be true followers, do you think?

RG-y Yes, and I think it is one of the reasons why we need to keep on with the teaching of the gospel, and listening to the gospel, because it is for unconverted souls no doubt, but the terms and the teaching of the gospel would help us to be amenable and subject.

GBG Some might say that the Lord will lead one Christian one way, and another another, but that is harmful, is it not? That is not the truth, is it?

RG-y No. There is only one way and it is the way that He is on and leading in.

GBG And similarly the Spirit guides into all the truth; He would lead Christians who are subject and amenable in the one direction not in various directions; and that would bring about unity, is that right?

RG-y Yes, it is. The enemy has used the idea very successfully that

there are various ways, Roman Catholicism, Methodism, Church of England, and who would deny that there are genuine souls in each; but that is not God's thought, and that will not prevail in heaven.

NJH Following Jesus involved a change on His side. It is not just that we follow from our own side, it actually affects Christ: it says "turning round". Is that important to see, that He is getting something out of our following?

RG-y Yes, I think that is important. And I do not want to oversimplify things, but there comes a time in our lives when we begin to realise that He is actually listening to us, He is interested in us. You say faith would tell you He is always interested, but to have a conscious sense of a link with Him, and that He has His eye on you, He is looking on you for good, that is a very blessed thing, do you think?

JDG Is that generally communicated in our experience by receiving the gift of the Spirit?

RG-y Yes, I think that is helpful. Things begin, to use a simple expression, to come alive for us when we realise the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

RG Bearing out what was said just now, I remember James Taylor speaking about the two milch kine which went by the one high way, 1 Sam 6: 12. He made the comment that there is only one way, vol 28 p395. You cannot say, 'You go one way, and I am going another way'. There is only one high way, and the Lord was walking in that one high way.

RG-y Yes, He was, and the scripture tells us that He has left us "a model that ye should follow in His steps", 1 Pet 2: 21. Now that is right, and the model is fixed, it does not change, the model is always the model, but what we come to, as following that model, is a current living sense that He is actually speaking to us in the way. We are in a position to hear His voice.

DCB Is it a sacrificial way, in the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, but also in these milch kine?

RG-y Yes, that is helpful, and it emphasises further the fact that it is a moral necessity that we begin on the basis of true love for the Lord, otherwise it becomes an imposition.

JCG Allied with that, energy is required in continuing, do you think? "Come and see" involves that there is a measure of energy and exercise in continuing and not just slackening off.

RG-y Yes, that is helpful, and it is an encouraging thing to see the brethren sacrificing to be together. We are not going to start eulogising one another, but we do need to take account of features of Christ as they appear in the saints; in a sense that is what we live on. It is not a substitute, we have got our links with the Lord, but we see those features of Christ practically brought out in the saints.

DTP What has been said about what is sacrificial is so essential, because the things of nature have to be denied, and it can be grievous. But if Christ is the object that gives us strength and power to go forward. The word of the Lord, "follow me, taking the cross" (Mark 10: 21) was a real test to the young man who had himself before him.

RG-y I think what you say is necessary and timely. We tend to follow the Jewish attitude, which was right in its time; that is if my fields prospered and my cattle grew, then that was God's blessing, it was a sign of God's favour. That is not the line we are working on now. The brethren are suffering quite a bit of discipline - I do not speak about it carelessly - but the Lord's love is behind it all, and we have to learn to follow Him whatever the circumstances.

TWL So in Isaiah the setting is slightly different, but at the time when there was recovery and at the time when the Lord was going to be with them, it says in chapter 30, "but thine eyes shall see thy teachers. And when ye turn to the right hand or to the left, thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it", v 20-21. And it gave them the power to cast off all the things that were contrary. Does that fit in with what you have in mind?

RG-y Yes, it does. I remember an old brother quoted that to me years ago when I was questioning how I would know the Lord was speaking to me; he said, 'Have you never heard a voice behind you?'. Well, I had; most of us have. You say, 'That is just the conscience'; no, the Lord is speaking in relation to what we know to be true, and it is His faithfulness.

Mark's gospel expands a little on what we have spoken of. It would emphasise the way in which we begin to follow the Lord. We come in by means of the gospel, and one of the things that we have to

come to, and it is sometimes not easy, is that we do in fact have a need. We sometimes meet persons in the world who say, 'Well, I am no worse than anybody else'. But God begins to work with us, and we become conscious of having a need, and a need that only He can settle. So Bartimæus began to cry out and say, "O Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me". When the Lord speaks to him He says, "What wilt thou that I shall do to thee", and the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni"; that came from his heart. He had a sense that there was Someone here who could help him and he, so to speak, laid hands on Him; "Rabboni" he said "that I may see". If we have an exercise or a difficulty the thing is to cling to Christ as if we meant it.

JDG So does "Rabboni" mean 'my own teacher'? It brings out a certain affection in the Lord, in the response.

RG-y It does. True affection, true love for Christ, is the foundation for everything in one sense, and His work in our souls. The world has made a debauched idea of love, and it really means that we need to be clear in our minds how divine love works, and we learn that I think when we see it operating between divine Persons.

DMC It is interesting that the blind man threw away his garment. He was holding on to something, but he threw it away. What would you say about that?

RG-y Have you and I not had to do that in our histories? Hebrews speaks about a similar thing; it says, "laying aside every weight, and sin which so easily entangles us", chap 12: 1. This man already had something in his soul because, as you suggested, he had a consciousness of what was unsuitable and cast it away, so that he would be fit to approach. Have you any more to say?

DMC I was thinking as to what you were saying earlier as to those that would have held on to the Jewish system. There are things that we may hold on to by tradition, but do we have to see what the Lord is doing and saying?

RG-y Yes; that is so, and it may not necessarily be an evil matter exactly; it may be something more subtle, tradition or teaching or some ideas that I have.

JTB I was thinking of that scripture in Hebrews: "looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith", chap 12: 2. This blind man's eyes were opened to look on Jesus, and therefore he was

motivated to follow in the way, following Jesus in that way. Throwing away his garment would just be that, every weight of sin or other encumbrance was jettisoned, was it not? He was able to follow Jesus without impediment.

RG-y Yes. I think that is the point, without impediment. There are some things that we do have to deal with, such as the working of sin in the flesh; there is no question about that. There are other things however of which we could say, 'I would be better without that'; it is not exactly gross evil, but I would travel lighter, travel better without it. I think that goes on throughout our lives; the Lord shows to us from time to time things that we do not really need. We should just put them aside.

NJH Is sight needed for the way? I am thinking the hearing brought him into the wayside; he had hearing. But he needed sight for the way; that is how young people come to it; they are in a privileged environment where the Lord is moving, but they need sight to follow?

RG-y Yes, they do, but you have opened up a big question, because people's minds have never been so besieged by various stimuli; television is the obvious one, but there are dozens of things that would catch our sight from morning to night and can bring confusion into our mind. What is going to help us is this spiritual eyesight and the beginning of that is with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

JCG If we have spiritual eyesight it involves the objective, and that is that Christ is going to the cross, through death and into new life; that was the way He was following, was it not? Is that important for all of us at the present time when there is so much which is against the saints, and so much of a formal and ceremonial character?

RG-y Yes. If time permits we will get some impression of what is involved in following in this way. I do not want to divide the thing into compartments, but really the Christian way is set out in Paul's ministry. I am not excluding Peter or John, but the nub of it is there, and it involves (and you cannot over-stress this) that I have an impression of a Man in heaven, and remember the way He has taken in order to be there before God in righteousness.

PAG God has in mind to head up all things in the Christ, which I suppose is something of the top stone of Paul's ministry as to Christ and the assembly. Do you think if we had the sense that God only had one

Man before Him that would help us?

RG-y It would, yes. How often have we said that God only has one Man before Him, and the question I would ask myself is, 'Is it true?'. Well, you say, 'It must be true, the scripture teaches it', but, is it true to *me*? Does it govern my life? And that is what the Christian way involves. I am not now walking at my own charges; I am following Him.

JDG Paul stresses quite a bit the thought of the call in his ministry. The Lord calls this man; is it to indicate that he belongs to Christ? He has ownership of him.

RG-y That is another important thing you see. I have come to the Supper; who asked me to come? It is the Lord's call; it is His commandment. He said, to do this 'for the calling of me to mind', 1 Cor 11: 24 footnote i. Now that is plain and simple, and it is His word, so that it would have the effect of a commandment, do you think?

TRC The Lord does not tell him to follow Him; it seems instinctive. At the end of John's gospel the Lord exhorts Peter to follow Him. This man saw something in Jesus; the Lord says "Go, thy faith has healed thee", but the man follows Him. He obviously saw something in Christ that he recognised he could not do without, do you think?

RG-y Yes, that is helpful. On many occasions the Lord says, "Follow me", but here the man's instincts were such that he could not do anything else. He left the encumbrance behind, he saw the Man who had saved him, and followed Him; I think it is something that we have to come to. One of the scourges of present Christendom is comparative religion; there is no comparative religion, there is only one Man, and there is only one Way, and that is Christ.

JAB I feel the need to understand that the Lord wants us to follow Him in this way. It is not something that would be nice to do if we were committed. The Lord wants us all to follow Him; would it be going too far to say He needs us to follow Him in this way?

RG-y No, it would not be going too far to say that, I believe it is right. The Lord has come in; it is a tremendous matter that God has made time, and showed Himself in it, and He has done it through the Person of His Son, as you are suggesting. The Lord needs us to fill out the purpose of God, and hence the matter becomes very pressing on us. Have you more to say?

JAB I feel the need to keep both thoughts in mind. Our brother referred to how this man was attracted to follow Jesus, and if we are not attracted to Jesus then we are not in Christianity really, livingly; but at the same time He asks us to do this and He needs us to do it. So we have got to hold these two thoughts in our hearts, have we not? We need to be there because He is everything to us, but we also need to understand that He needs persons in this way, and to be stimulated and exercised, because there is a certain rigour about it as your scripture in Acts shows, does it not?

RG-y Yes, what you say is helpful, and so what we begin to see is that we are surrounded by help as we enter on this way and proceed on it, and God gives us every resource that we need in order to help us on this way. But it is not optional; that is what I feel about it.

GAB Paul instructs Timothy as to one who is a soldier: he is not to entangle himself with the affairs of this life, 2 Tim 2: 4. It is interesting that his calling is not exactly to fight, although he is a soldier; but his primary objective is to please him who has enlisted him. That is a similar thing to throwing away the garment, is it not? So you have only got one objective before you and that is the One who has enlisted you.

RG-y Yes. I think that bears on what we are saying, and helps. Our object is to please Him who has enlisted us. Affection enters into that, but the kingdom setting of things involves that we are under regulation; that is part of the way, and we have to accept it.

RG Is what you are saying worked out in Paul himself? Remember when the Lord said to Ananias, "this man is an elect vessel to me" (Acts 9: 15); that links with what was said. But then it says, "And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales", and then it says, "And he was with the disciples who were in Damascus certain days" v 18, 19. There was the company that could support him in the way as an elect vessel. He went then and "preached Jesus *he* is the Son of God", v 20.

RG-y That helps to expand the matter. When we come into the way we say, 'Well, there will just be the Lord and me'; but, no, there are myriads of others in the way who will pursue the Lord's ordering and who will be a help to us and a support to us, and we can work things out together.

RCT Did Bartimæus have a good start? It has been helpfully suggested he was on the Jerusalem side of Jericho. I wondered if that

would help that kind of outlook.

RG-y Yes, that is helpful. Jesus had passed through Jericho. I believe as we follow in this way we begin to gather up impressions, and not only have the blessed Man Himself, and have His help, but we begin to gather up impressions of what pleases Him. That is in the assembly, and we are accordingly brought into a very wide sphere of things.

RJC One thing that marked Bartimæus was persistence, do you think? Do we need to have that in view of finding out about Christ, and following Him in the way? He was not to be put off, was he?

RG-y That is good, because some of us are quite easily put off, and especially when we are younger. There are so many influences, and so many interests all whirling around in our heads, we come to it, 'Yes, it is time I did something', and then it slips away, but Bartimæus knew what he needed, he knew what he wanted, and he persisted until he got it, and the Lord blessed him on that account.

AL I am just thinking of what we have in verse 50, "he started up"; that was a junction in his life, really that was when he committed himself, and the chapter ends with "he ... followed". We need to be helped in continuance.

RG-y Yes, that is good. James Taylor said quite often in his ministry that the Lord loves definiteness, vol 7 p71; He does not like half-hearted persons; Laodicea would bear testimony to that. What you say is right, this man in a sense had a single eye; I know he was blind, but in a spiritual sense he had a single eye; he knew what he needed and he knew who could provide it for him and nothing would turn him aside.

JCG These matters of persistence and resolve to be with Christ lead to attachment. Mr Raven's ministry (eg vol 16 p 322) as to attraction, attachment and affection for Christ would bear on it. Persons like Bartimæus become attached to Jesus, and the way becomes easy because He is in front of us.

RG-y Yes. That is helpful, because what we find (and I would say this to anyone who is exercised on this line) is that at the beginning of soul exercise in us, the Lord is standing by. He is waiting to add help, and the Holy Spirit too, to give power and grace to go on. Do not stifle exercise in yourself. If there is something stirring in your soul, pray about it; tell the Lord. Even if you are not clear, or not sure exactly what

your thoughts are, speak to the Lord and make way for the Spirit. You will not be short of help.

DCB The history immediately moves on to the colt, does it not? Is that suggesting someone conscious that the Lord has need of him, and carrying the testimony forward?

RG-y Yes, that is helpful, and again it goes back to what our brother said, that the Lord actually needs us. You might say He can do everything Himself; yes, that is so, but the glory for God comes when persons like ourselves are taken up, and blessed, and given the gift of the Spirit, and made useful in the testimony; God has something He can point to, and say that this is the fruit of His work.

GBG John's gospel is very individual to begin with; it is "he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life", chap 8:12. But then in chapter 10 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me", verse 27. We have also to follow together, do you think? And is it often by ministry that we follow together?

RG-y Yes, that is an interesting suggestion. So 2 Timothy speaks about separating from evil and then "with those", chap 2: 22. In a way it is like the furnishings in the path. There are others there and the Lord will bring His work together and make use of it.

GBG It is "hear my voice"; it is in the plural. We hear His voice as together, and are exercised about it, and remember and take it on, and are governed by it; that is following the Lord, is it not? And then it brings about this unity: we are doing it together, and in John's gospel it is characteristic of sheep to follow, as being true to the work of God in them, is it not?

RG-y Yes. "My sheep hear my voice, ... and they follow me": do you think that would include the Supper? We come together, and for the moment all our matters are set aside. We see Himself first of all in the emblems, and then we receive a spiritual touch as He comes in, "My sheep hear my voice". In other gatherings too something comes in that is living; that is confirmation, that is strengthening in the pathway, is it not?

RG You were speaking about the Supper, and we experience that; but I wondered if the Lord is speaking to us right now in this meeting. There are a lot of young people here, and the enemy is making a bid for the young people, and what the Lord is saying to us is, 'Are we going to

go on together, following Him in the one highway?'. What do you think?

RG-y We have to be wise. I do not point the finger at anyone else in this, but I have to be careful not to see the young people as a kind of class apart. I know John speaks of children, young men and fathers (1 John 2: 12-14), we know that and understand it, but to get the truth across without lecturing is a tremendous gift, and one of the best ways of doing it is walking in the path ourselves. But coming together for meetings and finding something that is enjoyable and satisfies our hearts; that is a testimony too that would attract them, do you think?

TWL Is that seen then in Elijah and Elisha when they went on, because there was a moral road that Elijah was going on, and Elisha would not be put off. So there was zeal with him, but Elijah went with him on the way, the two of them went together, until they got to the other side of the Jordan, 2 Kings 2. Is that important?

RG-y Yes, I think going on together is very important. We have been reading at home locally about Joseph and the way he turns his brethren round over four or five chapters; it is a lesson book in skill. The story they start off with, when they tell Joseph who they are and where they came from, changes as the chapters go on, and eventually what shines out under Joseph's hand is that they start speaking feelingly about their father and their own history. What I am trying to say is that to have skill to bring out the best in the brethren, and go along with them, is most desirable.

TWL That is what I was thinking, and it is important that we are all in this together, none are more important than the young are, and body feelings involve everybody. So the service of God involves everybody, young people and old people, young sisters and old sisters. It is important that we all are attracted to the same Person, on the same way, with the same power, because then things will continue, but otherwise they will not. Young people may think that they are not up to this, but they are. The young and the old go together.

RG-y I think that is important, and something we should carry with us, to show affection without being sentimental; it is something that we need skill to do. The young people have a place in our hearts, they have a place in God's heart, more to the point, and it would help us in our dealings, not just with them, but with one another, to be more gentle, but I do not mean sentimental.

RG Ruth was affected by Naomi. There was no sentimentality in that but there was love.

RG-y That is it in a nutshell. We can talk about love, but can I display it? That is the test.

PAG You have spoken about the working out of Paul's ministry. It says in 1 Corinthians 12, "For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free, and have all been given to drink of one Spirit", v 13. Everyone who has the Spirit can be regarded as being baptised into the one body, and that is nothing to do with age or stage.

RG-y Well, that is true, and so that would bring up the matter of respect for one another. As we hold each other in affection, and respecting the work of God that is there; then we will be influential with each other.

DMC Referring back to Mark for a moment, do you think the fact that Mark was a recovered man would cause him to feel the very words that he was writing, that they meant something to him? Do you think that we have got to come in on the line of recovery?

RG-y I think recovery is one of the features of this present dispensation, involving repentance and self judgment. We can be brought back into full usefulness and Mark is a shining example of it.

NJH In Acts 19, Paul knew where the enemy was active, and it says "he left them", v 9. There was a certain leadership in that in love, and then he "separated the disciples". That is how the influence would take place when we recognise what the enemy is at; is that right?

RG-y I think that is helpful. That is one of the reasons that I suggested Acts 19. The thought may arise with some 'Why all this separation; why can we not be more broad in our outlook; and make way for true lovers of the Lord?'. But what you have said is right; there was something here that was valuable, that is, the way, and persons spoke injuriously about it. 'You are far too narrow; you are bigoted'. Well, what do you do? Do you stop loving these people? Of course not. We must, however, keep separate, because otherwise the purity of what has been entrusted to us will become contaminated. Would you agree?

NJH Yes, the character of Paul's ministry really, and his own devotion, was to keep the way pure. When we come to 2 Timothy, it is

to keep the way pure; that is how we have to act.

RG-y Well, that is so, and we have had quite a bit in our local readings about holiness. I can see the need of it, holiness that would instinctively cause us to turn away from what is not right.

JCG There was no persuading after the disciples were separated. In the first incident, there was reasoning and persuading during three months, but after the separation there was only the reasoning. Does that mean that there was a state engendered by the Holy Spirit that encouraged the taking on of the teaching and the understanding of it?

RG-y I think that is helpful. We have had to touch on things quite lightly, but really what underlies the assembly, which is what we are coming to now, is the truth of the kingdom and in that persons are subject. And if they are not subject, they are not really in the good of the kingdom.

JDG Would admonition be out of love for the person and love for Christ? It says in chapter 20, "I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears", verse 31. It must have been something of his personality that came out in Paul that showed his affection for the Lord, and his affection for the saints.

RG-y Yes, that is helpful, because admonition can rouse the flesh, but admonition where the affections are really involved is a necessary part of things.

JDG You need to show your local brethren, and all the brethren, how much you value them as being partners in the fellowship.

RG-y Yes. What I had in mind in Joshua is the fact that if we follow the Lord here faithfully, in the tests and the vagaries of the wilderness pathway, the time will come when He will lead us into what we speak of as privilege. We break bread in the wilderness, but then He comes in and takes us out of that setting of things, and Joshua deals with that.

APG Would Caleb be an example? It says of him several times he "wholly followed Jehovah". It says the inheritance, Hebron, was given to him because he had wholly followed Jehovah to this day, Josh 14: 14.

RG-y That is helpful, and I think it is a word to us all, "wholly followed Jehovah". It is the truth, and it is what should be aimed at, and he was given what answered to that in Hebron.

DCB It is the ark that they are now following. Could you say something about that?

RG-y The fact is that they did not usually follow the ark. I know it happened once in Numbers 10, the ark had led them, but they usually followed the pillar of smoke or the pillar of fire; it moved and then they moved. The ark was normally in the centre. That is, so many tribes went off, then the Levites bore the ark, and then so many tribes followed. But here was something special, and I think as we come to the Supper we have that in mind. We are not embarking on a ritual called 'holy communion'. I am not sneering at that, but what we have in mind is to meet the Lord and follow Him, but perhaps you could say something yourself.

DCB That helps. Here is One who has fulfilled the way, One who has the law in His heart, who is doing what is entirely pleasing to the Father, and you have that One in your view, and that attracts you forward.

RG-y We must never forget the greatness of who we are dealing with. We often have, or usually have, at the time of the emblems and just after, an ascription of praise to the Lord Jesus as to His greatness and His glory. I sometimes think there is room there for reference to what is creatorial; it is one of His glories, "by him were created all things", Col 1: 16. We have to have the sense that we are engaged with something that is entirely separate from the world and its ways.

JAB Do we see then that the way that we have been speaking of leads to the service of God, and to the magnification of Christ? I was thinking of verse 14 of chapter 4, "On that day"; they had followed the ark as you have been saying, and "On that day Jehovah magnified Joshua". And what we arrive at from experience, as well as from ministry, is that the way that you have been speaking of leads to the richness of the service of God, and no other way does. Mr James Taylor's ministry stressed the necessity for what you have been bringing before us, but also was used to develop the richness of the service of God, and these two things are mutually interdependent, are they not?

RG-y Well, you could hardly over-emphasise that. Because if we think we are pursuing a slightly superior kind of Christianity, that we know a little more, or claim to, that is hopeless. What the Lord has in mind, as you pointed out, is all tending to this. That is what our weekly experiences are, that is what the Supper is for, and the wilderness

discipline; it all has in view that we should be with Him before the Father, and the Supper is the way into that.

NJH Moving from your place would eventually take you through to the ark's place under David, is that right?

RG-y Yes indeed, but we have the advantage of looking back and seeing what the significance was of these things. The service of God in type under David, and as filled out by Solomon, has a wealth, a fulness, and a grandeur that can be matched by nothing else.

Edinburgh

21st January 2010

D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth;
J A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown, Edinburgh;
D M Crozier, Warrenpoint; R J Campbell, Glasgow;
T R Campbell, Glasgow; R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; A P Grant, Dundee;
G B Grant, Dundee; J C Gray, Grangemouth; J D Gray, Edinburgh;
P A Gray, Grangemouth; R Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow;
A Lidbeck, Göteborg; T W Lock, Edinburgh; D T Pye, Kirkcaldy;
R C Trotter, Edinburgh

THE GOD OF THE VALLEYS

Rodney Brown

1 Kings 20: 22-30 to "were left"

Joel 3: 14

Psalms 23: 1-4

Nehemiah 2: 11-15

Psalms 84: 4-7

These scriptures all have reference to valleys. The challenge is raised in the scripture we read in 1 Kings 20 that the God of Israel was "a god of the mountains" but He was not "a god of the valleys". God showed what folly there was in that statement, and I have been thinking about that. There are times in our histories that are marked by what we may call a valley character, and I believe in the experience of many here, indeed us all, there are things currently marked by that character. There is pressure on the saints in various ways, pressures of health, bereavement: a number of brethren in this area that have been taken recently. There is pressure in employment; there is pressure in the testimony in view of the departure of some. The brethren feel these things. These are what you might call valley experiences. They are not wrong experiences. There are some such experiences that we go through that we get ourselves into. I suppose the second scripture I have read comes into that category. While I suppose we have all gone through the valley of decision at some point, it is not intended that we should remain in it, nor is it intended that we should remain in any of these valleys; because the great thing to lay hold of is, not only that God is "a god of the valleys", but He is also "a god of the mountains". Even the Syrians acknowledged that. There was no doubt in their mind that the great truths were founded and established and could not be assailed. The enemy here acknowledged that, and we could apply some of the scriptures in the New Testament to bear that out. When the Lord Jesus cast out the demons, the demons acknowledged who was there. There is something which even the enemy has to acknowledge. Only men do not acknowledge it, men like you and me that have not come into the blessing as we have come into it. So, what I would seek to encourage us in is that God is "a god of the valleys", and as we go through these exercises He can support us in them, and He can bring us out of them, and He can bring about a glorious result, because really our experiences which speak of the valley and the experience that speaks of the mountain go on at the same time, and one subserves the

other. The eternal day will render testimony to that. While we are in these valleys that may seem difficult; the main thing is to find God in them, to find the God of the valleys and to rely on Him rather than on ourselves, and to seek help from Him because He alone can bring in help.

This is a particularly dark period in the history of the children of Israel. This king was abominable. Think of what he did in the next chapter in relation to Naboth and his vineyard. I am not really speaking about the state that was found in Israel at this point, but the ability of God to bring in help, almost as a direct consequence of this challenge which is brought up, that the God of Israel is not "a god of the valleys". What folly! Think of the hymn that we have sung, of the way the Lord Jesus has gone: 'Thou didst measure then sin's distance', Hymn 298. Think of the sorrow of the Lord Jesus, everything that He took on; is He not the "god of the valley"? Has He not conquered the domain of death? He has, and He has come out of it triumphant, and there is therefore no area where He does not have free sway. He has been there, He has conquered it, and He is no longer there, and therefore there is no fear in it for the Christian. Wonderful matter! I would seek to establish my own soul in the truth of these things and to encourage us all, for these are real things, and I believe the affections and the body feelings amongst the saints are operative at the moment, perhaps in a particular way; and God would encourage us that He is "a god of the valleys". He is over these things; He will bring about a wonderful result for His own pleasure, and He is doing so. It is only a chapter since Elijah had to be reminded that there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, v 18. So it shows what a dark period this was, but God has His reserves, and He has His reserves today. I think one application that could be made as to this scripture is that Satan is content to acknowledge that there are objective truths of Christianity. That bears, too, on what we had in the reading, that these objective truths stand and cannot be assailed; but what he is set on is to destroy the enjoyment the people of God have. He would leave them with these objective truths, saying, 'These things are too great for you. You cannot possibly go in for them'. That is what Satan would seek to do. That is why this challenge is raised that "he is not a god of the valleys". But God is in the valleys, and He is bringing through a result in the hearts and souls of persons like you and me, and He is using a time like this to assure us that He is over these things. He is the "god of the valleys", and there is a result. What a result there was here, a hundred

thousand footmen slain in a day. To get the benefit of these valley exercises requires that we ourselves are humble. "And the children of Israel here were numbered and victualled, and ... encamped before them like two little flocks of goats". You might say, 'How defenceless, how derisory!'. What would the Syrians have thought when they saw that? Were they defeated because of that? Not at all. What is inwardly weak, what is outwardly humble, is very precious. God is supporting what is weak and what is scorned in the world, specifically and particularly, in detail, not in a general way, but in those available by way of support and it brings about this wonderful result. "The Syrians have said, Jehovah is a god of the mountains, but he is not a god of the valleys". Well, that is a challenge that has been raised in the day in which we are, a broken day, a day of departure. Satan would seek to use that to suggest that everything is up, and that there is no point in carrying on because it is not workable: 'Why are you gathering with so few? Go elsewhere where numbers are greater'. No, dear friend, God is "a god of the valleys" and He will support His people, and He will bring them through, and He will bring them through in power.

Joel again speaks of a valley. It speaks of a day to come when judgment will come about, but it has its application to us now. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!" Well, in application this is a valley that we have all passed through, I trust. I trust there is no one still in the valley of decision in terms of their eternal salvation. It would be a sad thing if anyone of responsible age, who has sat under the gospel many times, still has not decided for Christ. The Lord would appeal in our time, if there is anyone here who is needing to decide, that they would decide rightly and that they may come out of this valley, that their eternal salvation might be secured. Then there are other decisions that may relate more to what I have said in relation to the previous chapter in Kings, decisions about committal, decisions about the path which is pleasing to the Lord Jesus. Perhaps there are some here who feel they are in a valley of decision. Maybe you feel torn one way and torn another. Maybe your parents want you to do something but you would rather do something else. Maybe you are here because you have respected your parents' desire for you to be here. The Lord would appeal to you even through what is being said now, even in the reading of this scripture, if you are in the valley of decision, do not stay there. Make a decision, decide for Christ. Align yourself with what God is doing, and prove God in doing so. Seek to ask Him what you should do. He will make it clear. God delights to bring confirmation to an

exercised soul. He loves to do so. So in the reality of your links with God, ask Him for help, ask Him for power, ask Him for the strength you need to overcome what is natural, what would keep you, perhaps, in the world, what would keep you in an association with persons who are not walking in the truth; and find the resolve through relying on the help that comes from above to decide, to move out of this valley. This is a valley that we have all been in, there are points in our lives when decisions have to be made. As these things are gone through in our souls: may there be a definite outcome and may there be a positive outcome, and may it be in line with what God is doing, the "god of the valleys", because He would seek to bring you onto higher ground than the valley of decision. He would seek to encourage you and build you up and strengthen you and bring you into a living system to enjoy things as you should be enjoying them.

Then I read in Psalm 23 because we really need to know the Shepherd in these things, "Jehovah is my shepherd". This is, you might say, an individual exercise which may relate to a valley later on. It speaks of "the valley of the shadow of death", but, "Jehovah is my shepherd" and, as we prove Him there, and as we prove Him anywhere, there is the help and the resource that we need to get through that valley. "He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me". So you might say the "god of the valleys" in the Person of the Lord Jesus is available, the Shepherd, my Shepherd. Have you found Him to be thus, dear friend, dear young friend? Have you "returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls", 1 Pet 2: 25? Do you know the Lord Jesus in that way, the One that cares for you, the One that protects you, the One that guides you, the One that brings you through, that does things for you that you cannot do yourself? Well, you can know that One and, if you have drooped a bit, if you are in need of revival, He is available to restore your soul through wonderful Shepherd care for the sheep. He knows each one. I want to draw out what relates to this experience, a very real experience, an experience that many have passed through; but the Lord Jesus is there and He is available, and as we go through these things with Him there is a wonderful formative effect and result that cannot be achieved any other way. It has been said that the Christian, in particular, feels the reality of these things. Think of the Lord's feelings in dealing with death at the tomb. It says, "Jesus wept", John 11: 35. Think of what the Lord went through. Again

I refer to that hymn, what a hymn it is. I trust the reality and the depth of it has sunk into your soul and may produce a result. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me”. We heard in the reading that what is light to us becomes law to us, the need of regulation. The rod would bring that about. We need to submit, we need to be subject to what the Lord is doing and maybe through discipline or guidance in His ways with us we need to know what the rod is, before we can prove what the staff is by way of support, priestly support. We had reference again to that in the reading, the Lord Jesus as our High Priest who is able to sympathise with us in our infirmities. What a blessed resource we have! So as we experience this, and I suppose it comes on us all and it will do as it has done recently, we may be encouraged to go through with the Lord Jesus, to prove the restfulness and what the green pastures speak of and to be led beside still waters. These are very blessed things, and I say again that the outcome of an experience like this, proving that God is a God of this valley, will produce depth in the soul that nothing else will. The Lord has been into death.

We have referred to Nehemiah. I think it has been rightly said that the Lord Jesus came in by way of the valley-gate. The valley-gate has been likened in ministry (CAC vol 9 p473) to what comes out in Philippians 2, the One who “did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself” (v 6, 7) and He came into this scene. What a matter that is. Think of the depths to which the Lord Jesus went. Not only that, He humbled Himself as a Man and He went into death, “and that the death of the cross”, and He has dealt with death gloriously and victoriously. Nonetheless, the valley-gate still has application for us as we move here, and again, we would seek to move here humbly as Nehemiah did. His movements here are very comely. He was in Jerusalem for three days. These three days would be significant. Think of the Lord Jesus in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, a complete period in that sense. “And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me ... And I went out by night by the valley-gate, even toward the jackal-fountain, and to the dung-gate; and I viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were in ruins”. That is what the enemy of our souls would seek to suggest very obviously now, ‘Everything is in ruins, there is nothing left. Why are you wasting your time?’. I think Nehemiah has the answer to that, and looking round this room I think we can see the answer to that in the faces of the brethren in

terms of what is being maintained here and sustained in the power of the Spirit. We are in a day of departure, we are in a day of public ruin, and it is right that we feel these things; and Nehemiah felt them. He went out by night by the valley-gate. Think of his sorrow when he saw the state that the fountain-gate had got into, suggesting no room being made for the Spirit, nothing of life springing up. That is what we covet in our occasions, is it not? That is what we covet in our links with divine Persons, that there should be freshness and power and life springing up. "And I went up in the night through the valley, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the valley-gate and returned". It puts you in mind of the expression, 'the broken-hearted churchman'; we should all feel the public breakdown, and you can see the truth of that in the times in which we are, but Nehemiah did not leave it at that, he did not just view the ruins and shrug his shoulders and go back. He did something about it. I suppose the teaching would be that in his own soul he established these things. In actuality he built it up again, and in the next chapter we have these gates being built, and their beams being laid and set up, and their locks and their bars and what was repaired there is gone through in detail. The detail is tremendous. What a variety of persons! It has often been said that the valley-gate was repaired, chap 3: 13. Some of the gates were not repaired, they were built. It seems almost as if they were beyond repair, but the valley-gate was repaired, and the dung-gate was repaired, and the fountain-gate was repaired. The enemy sought to pour scorn on all that was happening, and Tobijah said, "if a fox went up, it would break down their stone wall", chap 4: 3. They are contemptuous in that way, but Nehemiah kept going, and for myself there are times when I feel the need just to keep going in quietness, using the words of our scripture in the reading, "that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all piety and gravity", 1 Tim 2: 2. I think we just keep going because we know the rightness of the things we are engaged with, and we know what the outcome is going to be. The outcome is assured. As we have had in the initial scripture, there is no question as to the outcome. We need to be exercised that our lives are in accordance with that outcome now, and that there is something being formed in the saints that is going to come out in display in a coming day.

Later in the same book you have the great culmination of the repair, and that is a tremendous thing. These two choirs, that perhaps relates more to the "god of the mountains", chap 12. One choir that went one way has been spoken of as the service of God. The other

choir that went the other way is administration manward, as it has been suggested in ministry. All I wanted to bring out of that is the triumph and the unity that marked these choirs as they ascended, and that is what we enjoy together in the service of God. There is a procession; it has been said that you do not want to find yourself outside of that procession. There is a great procession, an ascending line, but it has its roots morally in what the valley-gate speaks about and it cannot be arrived at any other way. It requires that these things are gone through in reality and in humility, as feeling the breakdown but not being deterred by it; in our own souls, going over the principles that have been stood for in the time of recovery. The reference to the gate of the old wall again in chapter 3: 6 suggests principles that have been long established, first principles you might say. That needs to be insisted upon. There is no other way for the choirs to ascend. There is no shortcut to these things. There is no other way. The principles of fellowship are just that. They have to be insisted upon because without them the wall would not be built, and without them the service of God could not go on as it does go on. So I would seek to encourage us that while these exercises are just that, exercising and sorrowful exercises, there is a need to be maintained in them because there is an objective. We are not going through these exercises for the exercises' sake. We are not bearing them stoically. We are bearing them because we have the light in our souls about what the outcome will be, and I trust everyone in this room has that light in their soul, and I trust everyone has that assurance and is established in what is going to be brought out, not only in a coming day, but in the lives of persons now. I was thinking of that in relation to those the Lord has taken. Think of the knowledge of God in these persons and of the experience with God of these persons. Think of what they enjoyed in terms of what we are going over now. All these things are not for nothing. They have gone before us as examples for us. In that way it would encourage us to go on with things, and to be maintained in things, because that is in accordance with God's desires.

There are many other valleys that could be referred to, many exercises through which the people of God pass. There are some things that are self-inflicted, but still, as there is a resort to the presence of God and a return to humility and a humble spirit, things are brought about according to the divine end. I was thinking in that way of Joshua 7. Joshua went into the valley in relation to Ai when Achan buried the garment in his house. That was a very sorrowful exercise, but that, too,

comes out in the minor prophets: the valley of Achor is there for a door of hope, Hos 2: 15. So there is always a way back, even if we are in a valley, you might say, of our own making, because we have trusted in ourselves and our own power to get through something and we have been completely humiliated in trying to do so. There is always a way back because, as we are often reminded, the point of departure is the point of recovery, and I suppose the valley of Achor for a door of hope would speak of that.

I wanted to turn to Psalm 84, because again there is a valley, "Passing through the valley of Baca", that is 'weeping', "they make it a well-spring". It is just to bring out that these exercises go on in tandem with what we enjoy in God's house, because it is from that standpoint that this valley is gone through and that this well-spring is arrived at. "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be constantly praising thee. Selah. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, - they, in whose heart are the highways", v 4. Well, these are very commendable features and these are features that we would covet, and we are glad to say we see them amongst the saints. These are fine features, "in whose heart are the highways". These are persons who are self-judged; they enjoy the presence of God; they know what it is to dwell in His house. They are not earth-dwellers in that sense, "they will be constantly praising thee",. Even as that is so, there are still exercises that have to be gone through which have the character of the valley of Baca but, as we go through them from the standpoint of what we are enjoying with God and with His people, as the matter of praise is maintained, then, while these exercises are sorrowful and result in weeping, the outcome is a well-spring. There is no doubt as to that, "the early rain covereth it with blessings. They go from strength to strength: each one will appear before God in Zion". So something again of what is of the mountains is coming into view. The well-spring would speak of that. There is a motive power that the saint knows as he goes through these matters which spring up and which eventuate in what is for God: "they make it a well-spring; They go from strength to strength: each one will appear before God in Zion".

Well, these are wonderful things. These matters that saints are passing through, I know very little about them; other brethren here have experienced and are passing through things in a deep way. But the great end is being reached, and I think we can see that. There is what is of the well-spring. There is what is consistent with Zion. It is spoken of in another Psalm as "the hill of his holiness. Beautiful in elevation, the

joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion ... the city of the great King", Ps 48: 1-2. You get a lift when you read a verse like that. How, then, the valley of Baca can be turned into a well-spring as we enjoy these matters. There is one other thing to note about Zion: we have to "Walk about Zion ... count the towers thereof; Mark ... her bulwarks, consider her palaces: that ye may tell it to the generation following", Ps 48: 12-13. There is a need to make these things attractive to the generation following. I do not mean in a novel way; I do not mean in a way which is contrary to the truth as we hold it, but the best way to tell it to the generation following is to be the exemplification of it ourselves, and I feel that now more than I have ever done, "For this God is our God". We had in the reading as to "my God", and as we grow in the knowledge of God there is what flows out of that. The telling it to the generation following may take the form of teaching, and we need teaching, we need instruction, but we also need example. That is the best way to attract persons into it, I would say, and the measure in which I have been attracted into it has been through taking account of the effect of these truths in the lives of believers. Some of them are in this room, others have gone on before us, but nonetheless there is a very powerful testimony as to what God can do as the God of the valleys in the lives of persons such as you and me. Now, He is the God of the mountains, of what is beyond any doubt, the great cardinal truth of Christianity, the truths which we hold which are not ours alone, but we hold them on behalf of all believers; these are great truths. These mountains relate to the purpose of God. These cannot be shaken; they cannot be overthrown. It is not in man's power to do so, but this challenge will come up from time to time, and perhaps with increasing insistence from some, 'What if that is true?'. What about the valleys? What about the working out of these things practically? Well, the answer to that is in the same God, the God whom we know, the One who is the God of the valleys, the One who will bring us through and the One in whose hands this wonderful result is assured. May we be in line with what God is doing in these things, and may the Lord bless the word! For His Name's sake.

Kirkcaldy
4th February 2012

THE WORKING OF THE BODY

Alistair M Brown

1 Corinthians 12: 7-12

1 Corinthians 14: 26

Colossians 3:16

Ephesians 4: 15-16

These scriptures are all very well known to the beloved brethren. They have come into my mind in connection with a matter that is currently causing concern among the brethren. Some dear ones with whom we walked have gone away to Christian companies where pastors are given an official position. Some may themselves want to take up the position of a pastor. I do not want in any way to criticise people who are believers. But I thought of these scriptures, and there are others too which could be referred to, which confirm the truth that setting someone up, a man, or indeed a woman, in an official position of authoritative teaching in a Christian company, giving them an official position, requiring them to study and to take a degree, and perhaps also paying them to do so, is not according to the truth. That, of course, has been taught among brethren for about 180 years, but it is important that we have a conviction ourselves as to the truth according to Scripture. It is not a matter of traditional teaching, although we are glad of those who have gone before, and who have demonstrated that certain things which were and are widely held in Christendom cannot be substantiated from the Scriptures. It is very important that we go to the Scriptures to see what the truth is, and that we have a conviction as to it, and that we hold to it. These are the scriptures that would help, for example, if I was seeking to persuade a fellow believer that the matter of a pastorate or priesthood or ministerial arrangements could not be substantiated from Scripture. These scriptures go to the heart of Christianity; they go to the heart of Paul's teaching as to the body of Christ. Each of these scriptures refers, either directly or by implication, to the body: that is what Christ identifies Himself with on the earth, what serves Him, what represents Him, and what pleases Him.

And then as I read these scriptures at home, I began to be very much searched by them. It is one thing to refer to Scripture to justify the holding of the truth - and it is right to do that. We should not refer to Scripture to justify our point of view, but we should refer to Scripture to justify the truth, because the Scriptures are the truth. We derive the

truth from the Scriptures. But as I read each of these scriptures, I felt searched by them, because they all refer to what the Lord looks to find among the members of the body.

The scripture in Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians refers to the operation of the Spirit, and that is a very blessed and sensitive matter. What the apostle is bringing before the brethren in Corinth is that the Spirit is sovereign in His operations in the assembly, in the body, and that He does things according as He sees fit. He does that sovereignly. It is not for me to say what I will do; it is for the Spirit to say, and the Spirit distributes these things that are spoken of here. Some of them are not generally found among believers now - gifts of tongues and gift of healing are not generally found among believers. But there are other examples of what the Spirit might distribute, and He may distribute to any one. That is the point. In His wisdom, He can give the word of wisdom to any believer in a company. And He could give the word of knowledge to anyone; and certainly "to a different one faith, in the power of the same Spirit". What is stressed is the sovereignty of the Spirit, and the variety of His ministrations, but the unity of that work of His. The apostle emphasises that it is one Spirit, the same Spirit, and he emphasises that it is all in the body. At the end of the passage he says that "for even as the body is one" - the human body - "and has many members" - as members of the body are one - "so also is the Christ". He is speaking about the Christ, the body representing Christ, being inseparable from Him.

I find that very searching, important and real. The question that I raise with myself is whether I am subject to the Spirit and sufficiently sensitive to His promptings, and receptive to what He might give me. I am sure that every one here has been dealt a measure of faith; the Spirit comes into that. Do I use the faith that I have? Do I keep it bright and active and sharp? And if I am given a word of wisdom, not that any one would claim that, am I ready to bring it in for the edification of the body? That is searching. It means that I cannot be a passenger, that at any time the Spirit might speak to me and give me some impression to bring in. It might be to a sister, or to a brother. If to a sister, it might be imparted as a word of wisdom spoken to someone else. A brother might do the same, or bring a word of wisdom into a meeting. The Spirit might work at any time. We can take that from this scripture - He might work with anyone at any time. That is His prerogative; He can do that as the saints are in the liberty of the Spirit, and, as subject to the Head,

are in the good and the experience of the truth of the body. How important that is, how wonderful, but how searching too, because if I am going to be in the good of this, I have to be self-judged, and I need to make way for the Spirit, I need to sow to Him. These things are not easy, but they are very important, and they are according to the truth. As we accept this, we are aligning ourselves with the doctrine, with the living truth that the apostle Paul seeks to bring home to these Corinthian brethren.

And then in the fourteenth chapter, there is another reference to “each of you”. I felt very searched by this when I read it. “What is it then, brethren?”. It immediately follows on from the passage speaking about prophesying. Then he says, “whenever ye come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation”. How searching that is. Do we come to the meeting with something of our experience which has been wrought out with God, ready to contribute, at least in spirit, and perhaps if the opportunity arises, out loud - “each of you has”? The apostle credits the Corinthians with that. And we would credit one another with that. But the searching thing for me is whether I can say that of myself, that when we come together, I have a psalm, I have some experience to contribute; or a teaching, something for the edification, teaching, building up and encouragement of the saints. We cannot say much about a tongue nowadays, but a revelation - that is a spiritual impression. It is something like what we had on Lord's day afternoon when we gathered in this room, and spoke about the glories of the Lord Jesus. Do we bring a view of His glories with us to the meeting? “Whenever ye come together, each of you has”, the apostle says. This has not been set aside by the passing of twenty centuries: this is true now. As the saints gather in the light of the truth, seeking to honour Christ, seeking to make way for the Spirit, and under the headship of the blessed Lord Jesus, the apostle says of them: “whenever ye come together, each of you has”. What a blessed thing that is, and yet how searching. How spiritually invigorating, and how morally invigorating, to apply this to ourselves. But also how important it is that we are honest with ourselves. Is it the case that when I come to a meeting, I have something to contribute? Because if I come ready to contribute in my spirit, that will add to the material with which the Holy Spirit can work in the body, in the representation of the body in this circle. If I come with something, and you come with something, sisters and brothers, if all of us come with something, the Spirit has wealthy material that He can

work with. Without in any sense claiming anything, and making no boast of any kind, I think that the saints here and in many places experience something of that. Spiritual wealth comes into circulation, and it is enjoyed. There is edification and building up and formation after Christ. These are all things that the Spirit is doing. It is testing but also very encouraging.

In Colossians, it is something of the same thought, but what is in the apostle's mind is the word of the Christ dwelling in each of them richly. That would be an individual matter: the word of the Christ is to dwell in you and me. And then the matter of wisdom comes out in teaching and admonishing one another. So there is no hierarchy or stratification. We can teach and admonish one another in wisdom. Love would come into that wisdom - regard for one another. Each would esteem the other as more excellent - each having regard for the qualities that are in one another. These are features of the body; how important they are, but also how searching. Would I be able, in wisdom, to teach or admonish someone else, and maybe more searching still, be ready to accept teaching or admonition from another, a sister or a brother, who might have something delivered to them to impart to me? Would I be ready for that? Because that is what the scripture lays before us, as the normal experience in a Christian company. "Whenever ye come together, each of you has" these things; it is the normal experience of a Christian company. The matter of teaching and admonishing one another must be when the saints are together, because we could not teach or admonish one another when we are alone. It is presented here as the normal experience of believers as together. Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God; it is a lovely picture of saints together in harmony, encouraging one another, exhorting one another, edifying one another, bringing in their own experience, which psalms would speak of, bringing in some appreciation of the attractiveness and the glories of Christ in these hymns and spiritual songs.

The matter of singing would be a matter of being together; I do not think what is envisaged is solo singing: it is the voices of saints blending together. Each of these scriptures brings before us what is collective and mutual, and every one has their active, vital, living part in the matter. This is of the utmost importance. Also it is honouring to the Spirit, because as responding to His promptings, we acknowledge the liberty of the Spirit. And it is honouring to Christ, who is the Head. It is what is in the divine mind, that believers should be so. It is therefore to

be vitally maintained in the experience and enjoyment of it.

Ephesians 4 brings it all together in this beautiful passage that describes how the body works together. It is very much a collective passage, but what is in mind is that “we may grow up to Him in all things, who is the head, the Christ”. His glory as Head is gladly and willingly acknowledged and ministered to, and then that glory is brought off the page of scripture and made to live, brought into demonstration and active living reality. These are real people that are spoken of here. These are real believers such as those sitting in this room. We do not form the whole body, not at all, but we are to be found in the good of it, in the enjoyment of what Scripture says. It speaks about being “fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply”. It is individuals who are fitted together, and individuals who are connected by every joint of supply. You might say, it is like a matrix, it is not a hierarchy, but the members of the body have their links with one another horizontally. The members keep these links or joints in good order, and what flows through them is love and concern, and care and regard for one another. Then each member of the body has its link vertically with the Head, whom we are to hold fast, as another scripture enjoins us. What a blessed picture that is. Then this whole organism is living according to the working in its measure of each one part - there we have the individual again. You might think, 'I am a rather unimportant part of this Christian company, I am just young, or I feel that I do not understand things very much'. No! “According to the working in its measure of each one part”; each one is vital in the operation of the body, each one loved by the Head, each one linked through these connecting joints of supply to the Head and to all the others. What a blessed matter that the apostle should speak of the “measure of each one part”. No-one can elect themselves out of this, and no-one would want to, because it is so blessed.

Then it speaks about “the increase of the body to its self-building up in love”. There is an organism. We often use that expression; it does not come into Scripture but it is well justified by this scripture here. Living relations are enjoyed, and glory given to the Head! The glory that is given to the Head is enhanced by the fact that these relationships are living and involve each one part in its measure. None other than the Head, none other than Christ, could so impart the impulses of life to a company, that these things could be written of them. You might take an analogy in the world, that somebody proceeds by

diktat or by enforced means to subdue others' wills to their own. Our wills are subdued to the will of Christ - of course they are - but the motivation is love, and loyalty to the One who gave Himself for us. The result is an organism made up of those who love Him, who are connected together and connected to Him, and each one part in its measure is contributing to that. We can certainly safely say that there is no organism like this anywhere in the world around. You will not find it anywhere - you will only find it in a true Christian company. And then I search myself as to the importance of maintaining this in my own exercise, in my own measure contributing to it, my "one part" in measure contributing. How searching, but how encouraging it is! I would encourage us all to be vitally in these things, and to be living, spiritual contributors to the body, and to the glory of the Head, for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

21st February 2012