

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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“KEEP THY HEART”

John Laurie

Proverbs 4: 23

There must be something especially important about what is mentioned in this verse concerning our hearts, if we are counselled to “Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded”. It is very evident that we have a valuable possession that has to be protected and looked after. God has a great interest in the hearts of the saints. I have no doubt that most of us are fairly diligent in protecting other things. We might protect our toys, our games, our cars and our houses. None of these will go into eternity for the eternal satisfaction of God's heart. The affections of the saints will contribute to the praise and delight of what there is for God eternally, which is part of the importance of our hearts. God seeks to possess them for His own delight. He seeks to fill them.

There is a very great deal said in the Scriptures about our hearts. I think any one diligent in pursuing the subject will find that there are several hundred references to our hearts in Scripture; but there are a few references to God's heart. It is a remarkable thing that God should be said to have a heart. God is not a man; God is a Spirit, and yet there are many physical characteristics of men that are spoken of by God about Himself. Think of God graciously using language which we understand so that we might grasp certain thoughts regarding the knowledge of Himself. He speaks about His eyes, His hands, His feet, and He speaks about His heart. God's heart is towards us. That is a wonderful thing. The apostle Paul says God is for us and he also says, “If God be for us, who against us?”, Rom 8: 31. What a precious thing that is. Think of the affections of God being towards the saints, enriching us and blessing us with knowledge of Himself.

Many things will not go into eternity but the preciousness of the knowledge of God will. Things written in the hearts of the saints are written there indelibly by the Spirit of God. We have hearts that are so conditioned that they can take on impressions; they can be written upon by the Spirit of God. We were reminded earlier that whatever is formed by the Spirit of God is in itself perfect. Perhaps there is much more to be done and written in my heart. I can only seek to be a quicker learner; that my heart might be more available to the Holy Spirit, in view of what He would desire to write there in permanent record according to His own skilful work. There is a fineness about the Spirit's work that yields

such pleasure to the Persons of the Godhead.

At the time when Solomon completed the house of Jehovah he spoke to God and God answered him. In 2 Chronicles, we have a record of that particular occasion. God said, "Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attentive to the prayer made in this place; for I have now chosen and hallowed this house, that my name may be there for ever; and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually", 7: 15, 16. What a beautiful reference. God's eyes and God's heart were perpetually focussed upon His house. I have no doubt that was in a certain sense in answer to Solomon's appeal in intercession before God. Solomon sought that, on account of His house, God would have regard for the people. If they should fail, then he desired that God might graciously bring them back.

My own impression is that God's eyes and God's heart were also focussed upon His house because the ark was there. Think of the delight of God in His own beloved Son. Think of the heart of God finding such delight in the place that Christ has before Him and will have eternally. The One who came here to express the love of God, did so fully, by going into death. What suffering was involved for the Lord Jesus while bearing our guilt and resolving every requirement of God's will, then going into the depths of death and being buried. He was raised again by the mighty power of God. He was raised by the glory of the Father. He is seated at God's right hand. That is not only an evidence that God has set Him there because of His perfect delight and total satisfaction with all the work that Christ has accomplished. I think it is also an evidence of the delight that the Father has in the Son Himself; that He has put Him in that place at His own right hand.

The saints will share Christ's throne, but no one else shares that place at the Father's right hand; it is for Christ alone. He has a unique place in the Father's affections. Think of the Father's eye and heart focussed, I might say with the greatest reverence and with the greatest delight, on His own beloved Son. Christ will be the centre of that vast universe of bliss. It will be characterised by breadth and length and depth and height; but Paul then says, "and to know the love of the Christ", Eph 3: 19. That seems like the anchorage point at the very heart of the universe. God's eye and heart perpetually focussed on His own beloved Son. We have a place in the heart of God and His affections too. I feel justified in saying that because we are told that God has shone in our hearts. Why did He shine in my heart? Was it to

show the wickedness that was there? That has undoubtedly been one effect of the light shining in, because light exposes. It is not stated as the reason for God shining in our hearts. He “has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”, 2 Cor 4: 6. It all radiates from the face of Jesus Christ. God's delight is bound up with Christ and with what has been formed in the saints, which speaks to Him of Christ. He has shone into our hearts that they too may be illuminated with the blessed knowledge of Himself made known in Christ. What a wonderful thing!

Think of God opening our hearts by shining in there. God is able to perform things in the hearts of the saints. He is able to transform a stony heart. That is one effect of divine grace; “where sin abounded grace has overabounded”, Rom 5: 20. Grace brings about a transforming effect. How wonderful the effects of God's grace in the hearts of believers! Where there might have been resistance and opposition we have the blessed transforming effect of grace. Sin brings about *deformity*. Knowledge might *inform*, but grace *transforms*. It changes the heart, and through the operations of divine love and the service of the blessed Spirit it is brought into accord with the thoughts of God; that God should find His pleasure in what is formed there which speaks to Himself of Christ. I like that beautiful reference to God's eyes and heart being perpetually there, 2 Chron 7: 16. The house was destroyed, and you might ask therefore how God's eyes and heart could be said to be perpetually there, but I think it is a reference to the delight God has in Christ because the house was the place where the ark was put. It was the resting place for the ark. God's resting place is in Christ and in all that delights His heart and will do eternally because of Him.

We are told to keep our hearts. There is wonderful potential in the hearts of the saints for God. It would appear as if damage might be incurred through lack of doing so. The heart can soon be led away by other things. I doubt if anyone in the room today needs me to tell them that. If we are in any way honest with ourselves, we very well know that our hearts are so easily led astray, and there is an urgent need that we should keep our hearts, guard them, protect them and hold them. We sometimes sing that verse,

Hold our hearts, O Lord, we pray Thee, (Hymn 127).

Do you ever feel the need of that? Do you ever ask the Lord to hold your

heart? Think of the Lord listening to Solomon calling out to Him to hold their hearts, as it were. You may feel at times distressed in your heart. Scripture goes as far as to speak of a broken heart, Ps 34: 18. You may feel so thoroughly distressed, you hardly know what to do or to whom you may turn, or what course of action you may next enter upon. Ask the Lord to hold your heart. He has an interest in your heart. He so loves us that He has given Himself to win our hearts for Him. How He desires that our affections might be held for Himself.

The heart speaks of the affections of the saints. It is not just a literal functioning member of the natural body that may pump blood around. It is viewed in Scripture as having a spiritual significance; otherwise there would be no relevance in speaking of the eyes of our hearts. We have the capability because of the affection represented there to have our hearts opened to see things. The human heart in itself has no capacity to do that. The heart that has been operated upon by God has the capacity to be opened up to see the heavenly things that are being revealed. How precious that is. Think of God granting me that great capacity within that I have something that is going into eternity, formed of God; and able to see the heavenly things, to treasure the knowledge of God through the affection that God has generated there and through the service of the Holy Spirit: "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit", Rom 5: 5. I have no doubt a consequence of that would be that there ought to be no room in the heart for anything else. If there is a dark corner in my heart then the expression "shed abroad" does not appear to have had the result which would be in the mind of the Spirit for me. "Shed abroad" would involve that the heart is to be fully filled with the preciousness of the knowledge and joy of the love of God.

"God has sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts", Gal 4: 6; that is a wonderful thing. There are three subjects that greatly interest me in relation to divine things: love, life and relationship. God so loves us that He has operated to bring us to the conscious knowledge of His own precious love. God is love; that is His blessed nature. John says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us", 1 John 4: 10. John would say in effect, I will give you an explanation if would you like to know what love is, well herein is love: "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins". Do you know what that has involved? Amongst other things it has involved the clearance of the guilt that put me under the sentence of death. That is

wherein life comes into view, love and life enjoyed because the sentence of death has been removed. Christ has gone into death for me. Now I have the life of the One who died for me.

What a blessed thing life in Christ Jesus is. Through what Christ has wrought, I have been brought into relationship with God. How wonderful the relationships that have been opened up in Christianity, amongst the brethren of Christ. That is not any particular or exclusive sect: may we be free from any such thought in order to value and appreciate everyone who belongs to the body of Christ. They have a place in the heart of the Lord Jesus and thus they ought to have in my heart. We are encouraged to pray for all the saints. They have a great place in the affections of the Lord Jesus. Soon every lover of Him will hear His blessed voice; the dead in Christ will be raised and we shall all be changed. We will all be brought into conformity to Christ. What a wonderful thing to be brought into the eternal enjoyment of such blessed conditions where we shall be forever with the Lord, to be like Him and to be for Him. You will not need to guard your heart then; you will not need to keep it any more, for there will be nothing but Christ to fill it. There are plenty other things to fill it now: that is why you need to keep it now. We will be held in full and eternal blessedness through being filled in our affections with Christ. Nothing will ever arise to mar our joy or detract from it. There will forever be the blessedness of all that is to be known and experienced where Jesus is.

As one of the Lord's servants has quoted: "In eternity, nothing is either past or to come but only subsists", JND Collected Writings vol. 7: 13. Nothing will be lost that has been formed, for all will subsist. I do not doubt but that we will forever enjoy fresh impressions of Christ in all His blessedness. Could I be in the presence of the Lord Jesus and never have any fresh appeal to my affections or any fresh sense of joy pour into my heart? Surely full eternal joy will be in the blessedness of Christ's presence. These relationships that we have been brought into perhaps reach their highest setting in sonship before the Father. The Father has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, which is not just a nominal relationship, or merely a term that is used in Scripture: it is something very real. It has been said many times that someone may adopt a child but no one can ever impart their spirit to the child, but God has done that. He has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts so that the very consciousness of sonship with all the liberty that it implies, and the dignity of the relationship before God, might be real experiences to

every one of us. Think of the blessedness of the relationship of the assembly to Christ. What joy for the heart of the Lord Jesus! Relationships have a very great place in the divine system of things, if I could speak of it as such.

If you care to observe some of the sad features of the enemy's work you will find that he has methodically set himself to destroy every possible relationship that he could, whether it be the marriage bond, family links or other happy relations between persons. What sorrowful things have intruded into the normality of what should apply to relationships. God preserves His own thoughts, however, and will never give them up. God said through the prophet, "My counsel shall stand", Isa 46: 10. God's counsel stands and He has the ability because of who He is to fulfil His will. The will of God is not just an arbitrary thing that He will most certainly fulfil, because He has the power and ability to do so, but His pleasure is bound up with His will. The two words in Scripture are at times interchanged - compare Psalm 40: 8 and Hebrews 10: 7. God's good pleasure is in the heart of the Lord Jesus. Think of the Lord Jesus with a perfect understanding of God's will. It could be said prophetically of Him, "thy law is within my heart", Ps 40: 8. It was treasured there in the heart of the Lord Jesus according to that prophetic word as He came to fulfil the will of God. It is not said there that God's righteousness was hidden in His heart, nor His loving- kindness and truth. These things were brought out into expression by the Lord Jesus. They have been made known and expressed in the blessedness of all that has shone out from the heart of the Lord Jesus. We have learned of God through Him.

I have touched on quite a variety of things but all this seems to enter into the importance of keeping our hearts. There is such a potential there for God that we surely need to protect and keep our hearts more than anything that is kept. "Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded; for out of it are the issues of life"; that is a beautiful thought. The issues of life emerge from the heart of the believer as wrought upon by God. What belongs to the life and enjoyment of the heavenly family proceeds from the hearts and affections of the saints as a consequence of what God has implanted there. The counsels of God form a principal part of Paul's teaching. Lydia had a heart that was opened by the Lord to attend to the things spoken by Paul. She invited Paul into her home; such was her interest and affection in relation to the scope of Paul's teaching that she sought

to absorb these things and hold her house in relation to them, Acts 16: 14, 15. What a wonderful thing to have a heart opened to take in something of the counsels of God.

There are great distinctive lines of teaching in Scripture. Paul's particular line is connected with the counsels of God. Peter's is connected with the promises of God and John's with the love of God, although we must not be restricted in our thoughts about any. There are many others that we could touch upon but these are interesting subjects to get an outline of. God has so much to fill our hearts with. No wonder at times we may feel as if our hearts fails us. I often feel unable to take in the vastness and wealth of all that is in view. There is a scripture which comforts me, however, where John says, "God is greater than our heart", 1 John 3: 20. We learn that God is greater than our hearts and He is able to sustain and hold them. Some of the older brethren may feel that their memories are beginning to fail. It is a comfort and encouragement that the Spirit of God has not exactly written things in our memories, for they may fail. He has written them indelibly in our hearts and what is there of God will never fail, but go into eternity. We might forget about things here but the work of God implanted in our souls will abide throughout eternity.

God is able to protect our inheritance. That is a thought that arises in the Old Testament. The psalmist may have felt at one point that he was unable to care for his own inheritance and protect it. God is able to protect the portion of our hearts and our inheritance, "thou maintainest my lot", Ps 16: 5. He is able to hold things for us. He will preserve His own work because His glory is bound up with it. God is glorified in what He has wrought. He is glorified by His own works. The psalm indicates, "All thy works shall praise thee", Ps 145: 10. God will be honoured, praised and glorified by what He has wrought and we may say how great is the area in the hearts of the saints where God has wrought.

He has wrought in creation but all things are to be made new. The new creation work will go into eternity and that is bound up with what has been wrought in the hearts of the saints. We do not have the full scope of new creation yet but we do have elements of it already. What is formed in the hearts of the saints is a new creation work in old creation vessels. Soon the vessels are to be changed and made suitable to house the work that has already begun. The whole realm will be brought into entire complacency with the mind and thoughts of God.

The new creation sphere where all will subsist in perfect blessedness according to God's own mind, will answer to His own affections and be for His praise.

The word is of all importance. It is important to the young and to the old that we keep our hearts continually and hold them in view of Christ having His true place. May there be no part of our hearts given up to the transient things of life or to the moral corruption of things in this world. May they be held for the Lord Jesus and for the pleasure of our God. May He keep us in the enjoyment of His own blessed love in view of His glory.

Witney

12th October 2013

PUTTING OFF THE OLD MAN, AND SOWING TO THE SPIRIT

Alistair M Brown

Colossians 3: 9-11

Galatians 6: 7-9

I want to convey a simple thought about these injunctions from the apostle as to things that we have to do. We have to put off the old man with his deeds; we have to put on the new; and we have to sow to the Spirit. These are all very practical matters. The old man with his deeds relates to the flesh. We have to learn that the flesh has no part in what is for God. It has to be put off: it is not reformed or modified, nor is it renewed: it has to be put off. God would teach us that important lesson. He may take different ways to teach you and me, but He desires to bring us through to the conclusion that the only way to make progress for those who love Christ is to put off what is according to the flesh - not to modify it or improve it, but to put it off. There is a whole line of behaviour, activities and attitudes, and all the things that go with it - indeed a whole life and character of things - that has to be put off. But it does not stop there. The putting off is so that something else can be put on. The scripture speaks of it in this sequence for a reason. There is a moral sequence. You find in the scriptures that there is a moral sequence in which things are put forward. The old man with his deeds has to be put off with a view to what is new being put on. "Having put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to the image of him that has created him", the apostle says. Without putting off the old there cannot be any putting on of the new, and without the putting on of the new we cannot come into the knowledge of God - "according to the image of him that has created him".

Now what is in view is full knowledge of that blessed One. As we read this passage, we see that there is what is characteristic of the old man that has to be put off, but then what is characteristic of Christ is formed, what is spoken of as "the new". It is the features of Christ. It is not an abstract concept; it is not an outline. It is tangible, substantial and real features, seen fully and perfectly in Christ. It is all there for God in Him, and the injunction to us is to put on these features.

Our brother has been speaking about the reality of divine things, and the importance of us seeing the reality of them. "Putting on the new" is real: it speaks of putting on the features of manhood that were seen in Christ. They were infinitely pleasing to God and He looks to see

them over again in His people. You might say, 'He cannot possibly see all the features of Christ in me'. No, but if He sees a feature, or some features, of Christ, God takes account of that. Remember too that this is really a collective matter. When all the saints, ourselves among them, come out in display, all these features of Christ in individuals who have "put on the new" will be seen together in myriads, and then there will be a complete counterpart, a complete answer to Christ. All these features will be seen gloriously together. That is what God has in mind. He will bring to pass unerringly what He has in mind. You and I, and every other true believer, will be part of that. But God's grand concepts, which He brings about in moral substantiality, require an answer in me. That requires me to put off all these old things, all these deeds - how obnoxious they are - and to put on the new.

I can only do that by the Holy Spirit and that is what we get in Galatians. We have already been considering the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit speaks of the result of the activity of the Spirit. That fruit has one source; the source is the Spirit. It is one fruit, one blessed moral whole. That fruit is the result of sowing to the Spirit. One thing to say about sowing to the Spirit is that a seed is a very small thing, and what grows is much larger than the seed was. If we make room for the Spirit perhaps by reading, by contemplating, by prayer, and by thinking about the Lord Jesus, it may not seem very much, but the result of sowing to the Spirit is wonderful. It says "he ... shall reap eternal life". There will be the enjoyment together of a whole scene of things of which Christ is the centre and God is over all. The Spirit is the power for us to come in and enjoy that scene fully. We are able to enjoy a tremendous harvest of fruit from sowing to the Spirit. If we enjoy something of what the Spirit would do, then as is often said - God is enjoying that in us, in you and in me. These are real things. Our brother has been speaking about what is real. When we sow to the Spirit and we reap the fruit of that, we reap eternal life. These are things that are eternal, they come from God, and they are blessed. They are not affected by death nor are they terminated by death; they are not tarnished by what goes on in this world, because they proceed from the heart of God Himself. They are wonderful things and real things. They are also simple. The way into them is made accessible to us by sowing to the Spirit and, as doing so, reaping eternal life. That speaks of great blessing enjoyed together with the saints and in the power of the Spirit in freshness, vigour and vitality that will never end. These matters are laid out before us as being in God's mind for us. We come in to the experience and

enjoyment of them through exercise and desire.

I would encourage myself and each one of us to do so, for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

23rd July 2013

RECOVERY

Paul A Gray

Genesis 1: 1-3

Mark 1: 1

Ephesians 2: 11-22; 3: 20-21

We had a word in the gospel in Linlithgow recently as to the matter of recovery, and that subject has been in my mind since then. I wanted to speak about some of the features of recovery and its results, and the first thing to notice is that the creation as we know it is a work of recovery. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We know from Isaiah that, "not as waste did he create it: he formed it to be inhabited", Is 45: 18. However, something came about after the "beginning" that brought in disruption, so that the word here says, "And the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep". What God had originally created had been altered, and He comes in, in order to set things right. The first feature of this recovery is that "God said, Let there be light. And there was light". I believe that light is a leading feature in the work of recovery. It may be said sometimes that the light has been recovered to us, but I would rather say that we have been recovered to the light. The light that shone in Christ has never changed, it has never altered. The scripture uses the expression, as the brethren know, "as the truth is in Jesus", Eph 4: 21. How could that ever have altered? It has not, but through God's mercy, believers have been recovered to what shone in its pristine glory and has been maintained through centuries of time by the Holy Spirit. For, if we can see the truth in Jesus objectively, so the Spirit has maintained it subjectively in the hearts of those lovers of Christ who have been there even in the darkest of times when there was little outwardly responsive to God. You think of the hymn written by Bernard of Clairvaux, who was born in the 11th century, (a time that is sometimes spoken of as the Dark Ages), when he could write,

Jesus! the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills the breast (Hymn 279)

The light was there, and there was one to take account of it. That same hymn-writer wrote another hymn - It is not in the hymn book that we use - but he speaks of the Lord,

Thy countenance transcendent -
O life-creating Sun
To worlds on Thee dependent! -
Was bruised and spit upon.

The light was shining in his soul, and I simply say that because the light has remained constant whatever the outward circumstances of Christendom might have been, but God has worked in recovery to bring persons back to it. So light is a feature of John's ministry for the last days, the Lord as the Light of the world, and then in his epistle, "But if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light," - that is God - "we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1: 7); so recovery in relation to fellowship requires the acknowledgement of the light of the Christian dispensation, light as to Christ and the assembly, light as to Christ glorified, a Man at God's right hand and the Spirit here. God's work in recovery, you might say, begins with the light, and conditions are created thereby in which life can subsist. As we have been taught, on the first day we get light, on the second atmosphere, on the third food, on the fourth rule. And these are the conditions into which life can be introduced, first in its variety on the fifth day, and then man, the top-stone of God's creation, on the sixth. God has in mind to produce a result for Himself.

When we come to Mark's gospel, I just read the first verse and want to touch on it because Mark himself was a recovered man. He went away and then he came back, serviceable for the ministry. Again many will know what has been said: that Mark departed in the sunshine of the Acts and was recovered in the gloom of 2 Timothy. Why is that said? Because God works in recovery even in the darkest of days. He is able for it. And what is the feature of recovery that is drawn attention to here? Recovery draws attention to Christ, not to the person recovered. Mark begins, "Beginning of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, Son of God". He does not spend time speaking about what a poor person he was, and about all the things he did that were wrong; he points immediately to Christ. Think also of Peter. You could say of Peter that he was a recovered man, and did he speak about his own failings? No, but he recognises them in what he says as to the Lord Jesus, "who when reviled, reviled not again; when suffering, threatened not; but gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously", 1 Pet 2: 23. As a recovered man, he was able to judge that in which he himself had failed, rather than speak about it. He spoke

about Christ as the Model who has been left for us that we “should follow in His steps”, v 21. So Mark also draws attention to Christ. You look through the gospel according to Mark. There are certain features of it, but one in particular I draw attention to is that Mark regularly draws out where there is unbelief, because I think unbelief militates against recovery, and that is why Mark speaks so strongly about it. Even at the end it says of the Lord that He “reproached them with their unbelief and hardness of heart”, Mark 16: 14. I reproach myself because sometimes I pray for recovery, and I pray perhaps because I think I ought to do so, rather than because I truly believe that the Lord is able for it. What is He not able for? “With men it is impossible,” the Lord says, “but not with God; for all things are possible with God”, Mark 10: 27. Think of what the Lord has done. God's Man has brought about, in righteousness, conditions in which God can recover the whole of mankind to Himself. Now not all accept it; as was rightly said earlier in this meeting, we have to come in alone. Not all accept it, but we have been taught, that the whole world stands provisionally reconciled to God on account of what Christ has done. So God is righteous: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5: 19), and He is righteous so to do in the light of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

I go on to Ephesians because a further feature of recovery, I believe, is that of reconciliation, and that is what comes in here. Now, if we look at what we may regard as impossible, who would have thought that there was any possibility of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile? It says of the Christ whose blood has been shed, “For *he* is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of enclosure”. What recovery has been made possible by the cross! The things that stand between one person and another were dealt with at the cross. They were all dealt with there, washed away in the blood of Christ, all the features of the man that offended taken away by the Man in whom there was no offence. “Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. The work of the cross is a wonderful thing. The hymn-writer says,

O the cross of Christ is wondrous!
There I learn God's heart to me;
Midst the silent, deep'ning darkness,
“God is light” I also see. (Hymn 212)

When that darkness obtained, when darkness covered the land from the sixth to the ninth hour, yet "'God is light" I also see'. The darkness there was impenetrable as Christ suffered at the hands of a holy and sin-hating God, and yet what a light dawned upon man as a result of the death, the blood-shedding, the burial and the resurrection of Christ. What a light dawned on man, and that light has not stopped shining. The work of the cross takes away the features that prevent reconciliation from taking place. What are these features? Well, we cannot go over them all but they include pride: that went at the cross. You think of the offering of the red heifer, including as it does the cedar-wood, the pride of man, the scarlet, anything that would magnify, and the hyssop, that sense of humility on which we might come to lean too heavily. They are all cast into the burning. They go; they do not have a place; they are all finished at the cross. And the learning of the Gentiles against the religious standing of the Jew all goes at the cross. You think of the inscription on the cross in Hebrew, Greek and Latin letters. The Greeks with their education, the Jews with their religious standing, the Romans with their military might, all went at the cross. So what stood between man and his God was dealt with, but also what stood between man and man was dealt with there, "that he might form the two in himself into one new man, making peace". The Lord says in Matthew's gospel, "Blessed the peace-makers", (Matt 5: 9), and He knew what it would cost them to make that peace that would allow the two to be formed into one new man, "having by it slain the enmity". The enmity was not put aside or stayed for a while: it was put out of sight; it was slain. So that is what God does, and that is what God is able to do, and there is what He produces. Well, there is access, of course: I do not go into the detail, but there is access through Christ and by one Spirit to the Father in order that there might be privilege and response, and there is "a habitation of God in the Spirit". Why is that? Because God's house is here and it is available in order that the gospel might go out so that more might be secured for this place of blessing. It is not reserved just for a few. God has all in mind, "a habitation of God in the Spirit". If you look at Luke's gospel chapters 14 and 15 you see the house of God in operation, and Christ in His place: "Give place to this man" (chap 14: 9), and "my house may be filled", v 23. Luke 14 and 15 deal with the house of God in its operation in view of securing persons in response to God. "A habitation of God in the Spirit" has in mind that there is a dwelling-place for God from which this message of recovery and blessing can go out, but the great end is "to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen". Every

true heart has found its place in the assembly, and I use that in its broadest sense as including all believers who have the Spirit. Every true heart would acknowledge that he or she is a recovered person, brought back. Mr Darby has an impression of that,

Father, Thy sovereign love has sought
Captives to sin, gone far from Thee; (Hymn 87).

I thought of reading about David who recovered all and brought all back, 1 Sam 30: 19, 20. He recovered everything then he brought it back and made it serviceable to God. Christ has recovered all and brought all back, and what He has secured as a result is glory to God “in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen”. Well, may we be encouraged. For His Name's sake.

Edinburgh

17th December 2013

FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Robert Taylor

Colossians 1: 3-5 (to “heavens”)

1 Thessalonians 1: 2-4

Ephesians 1: 15-16

These scriptures refer to faith, hope and love. Paul calls them “these three things” (1 Cor 13: 13) and they are often grouped together in Paul's writings. He writes of them in most epistles and invariably as I have said he invariably as I have said he frequently he groups them together as if they are like the fabric of the believer. Without them you are *not* a believer. It says, “without faith it is impossible to please” God, Heb 11: 6. God has given them to us, and each one of them increases as it is used. The more you exercise your faith the more you will grow, and Paul is writing like that. He says “praying for you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which ye have towards all the saints, on account of the hope ...”; y You see how they are linked together there; you cannot really have one without the other, or, at least, that would not be a full idea. But they are grouped, and they are all working together. Galatians says, “faith working through love” (chap 5: 6), and hope could not work without faith; they are “a threefold cord ... not quickly broken”. Ecclesiastes 4: 12 speaks of that. They are bound together; they give structure and strength to the believer in his pathway.

Well, Paul is saying here “continually when praying for you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus”, a beautiful touch. Men today, especially politicians, have faith in themselves, and what a ruin it brings, and we have found that in ourselves. If you have faith in yourself you do not get very far. You may get a very good deal very quickly, and it collapses; it has no structure, you see; there is no strength and no stability to it. They are in Christ Jesus, the anointed Man that the Father has found His delight in: “faith in Christ Jesus”. Where else could you have it? Could you have faith in this world? Even in your possessions? They all pass so quickly, but “faith in Christ Jesus”, it is like the rock on which the building goes up. The man dug deep (Luke 6: 48), and maybe the Lord would encourage us to dig a bit deeper and find the rock, “faith in Christ Jesus”. He is the Man whom God has anointed and placed as the great centre of Christianity, God's beloved Son. Early in our lives we are brought to have faith in Christ Jesus. Some may say they do not have faith for it; well, it is because of

who their faith is in: they have got their eye off Christ, but it is “faith in Christ Jesus”. Some, alas, their faith has waned; as I say, these things grow by using, and they shrink by not using. That is very obvious: if we look at our own histories we will find that. We get discouraged, our faith wanes, and we do not grow in our souls. But these are like seeds that grow in good soil, faith, hope and love; well, it is “in Christ Jesus” and that can never be shaken.

If people say they do not have faith for the pathway, it shows a lack of confidence in Christ. Did you doubt when you felt your need as a sinner, to put your trust in Him? No, you came to trust Him, and that is part of our pathway. That is Abraham's life in contrast to Lot's. Lot went a bit on the way, but it came to a point when he saw in the well-watered plains, something that attracted him away, and he went “as far as Sodom”, Gen 13: 10, 12. And what faith he had - for he must have had faith at one time - waned, and he had to be dragged out of that city, chap 19: 16. Abraham was on the same path, but it says, he “believed God” (Rom 4: 3): he had faith. He said to Lot, 'I will stay where I am, I will take whatever you do not want'; there was a man of faith. The Scriptures speak of “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16: 26); it has to be used. I would encourage us tonight, dear brethren, as the Lord becomes increasingly precious to us, our faith grows and His beauties will shine the brighter in our paths. So it says, “the love which ye have towards all the saints”: that is a step of faith. There is much you may see in the saints that is not loveable, but faith would guide you to look past that and to see that they are God's own possession, God's property. He purchased them: so you have love “towards all the saints”.

And here is another reason, you cannot have one without the other, “on account of the hope which is laid up for you”. W e l l , dear brethren, what a hope it is, what a hope! As I say, most of us have felt at times it has waned in our lives. We become discouraged; there are many whom we know who are like that. I spoke to one some time ago; he said that was all in the past. He had been a bright friend and believer, but that was all past, it all became a passing tale. You know, Christ can become that to you. It is a very interesting thing that the ark was in the house of a man, and it says, “the time was long”, 1 Sam 7: 2. It was brought to another man's house and he was blessed immediately (2 Sam 6: 12); he had faith. The Spirit of God says that about the time it was in that the first house, “the time was long”. It was not that it was not there; maybe we know Him, but is it current with us? That man had lost

his hope, but hope comes; it says, “on account of the hope” in a glorified Saviour, and that is something that is always testing us, the hope of what is before us. It casts us on keeping our links with Christ fresh. It involves being used; it is not historical. Hope is not yet fully accomplished, but what a hope it is: we get touches of it. We were previously speaking about the Spirit; He is the power for the enjoyment of these things, for the filling out of them, that we may be kept in the living joy and expectation.

It speaks of these things too in the Thessalonians, again grouped together. It says, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you at our prayers, remembering unceasingly your work of faith”, it is operative. It was not operative in Lot, but it was operative in Abraham. Well, we are tested about that. Light comes to us, light from God, and the ministry we have had. It is held through the work of faith; that means it is put into practice. We have had a great deal of light, dear brethren, and there are exercises coming in and I feel constantly the danger of not appropriating the light, which is what faith is. Faith is the substantiation (Heb 11: 1) of the light that comes to us. It enlightens our souls, brings in the hope, and it stimulates love. And here Paul is encouraging these Thessalonians. They are not long converted, and they are doing the work of faith. They were not turning back to the worldly principles as the Galatians did, and the Corinthians did, but the thing was going on. It was increasing, “your work of faith, and labour of love, and enduring constancy of hope”. The thing was stable, there was a threefold cord in these Thessalonians, and how brightly it goes on in their lives and brings them in the epistle to the great thought of the rapture, the Lord coming (chap 4: 15-17); what a hope! It will be a day beyond all expectation, dear brethren; it will be a time then that we could never have compassed, but hope has kept us alive, the hope of it, and as I said we already get touches of it now by the Spirit, “the earnest of our inheritance”, Eph 1: 14. It brings in a touch about hope. Christ Jesus is our hope. It is all centred in Him; so it can never break down, it can never be unfulfilled; it will all be brought to its own fruition as it says in chapter 4. He shall descend from heaven, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice, and with trump of God, v 16. What a time it will be! And it says “the dead in Christ shall rise first”, what a comfort then! “We, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air”, and then, perhaps the best bit, “thus we shall be always with the Lord”: what a touch, what a hope! What a hope to be enfolded and embraced in our

affections, and to be coming out in the experience of our lives.

Well, in Ephesians Paul speaks about these things again, and how much he is ready and able to unfold to these Ephesians of the greatness of the hope. It says "having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is in you"; there it is again, "faith in the Lord Jesus". That Man is becoming increasingly precious to believers in their pathway here. It says it "is in you"; "faith in the Lord Jesus which is in you", working, "and the love which ye have towards all the saints". And then it says, "the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling". I referred to the ministry, and that is what this verse would bring in, embracing the ministry as to Christ and the assembly. As I have said already we have had a great deal of light; that is perhaps not appreciated today. Well, dear brethren, these are dangers. But Paul was not referring to that here; he was praying "that ye should know what is the hope of his calling". Well, do we apprehend what our calling is? Our calling is a heavenly calling. Mr Darby says,

What powerful, mighty Voice, so near,
Calls me from earth apart, (Spiritual Songs p1)

- powerful, mighty voice! It has called us out from a system of bondage into a system of light that Ephesians makes much of, the bright shining of that day to be embraced in our affections - your calling, Eph 4: 4. That is what Israel forgot; they forgot their calling. When tribulations arose in their life what did they say, "Let us return to Egypt", Num 14: 4. They lost sight of their calling. The most of them lost sight of the heavenly land; they did not appreciate the ministry that Caleb brought, and what happened? They fell in the wilderness, Num 14. Hebrews tells us that very thing. It says, "the word of the report did not profit *them*, not being mixed with faith in those who heard", chap 4: 2. Well, we may all hear the same things but unless there is the operation of these three things, faith, hope and love, we are not getting the gain of them. But God's calling, as I have said, brings us on to assembly ground. Faith, hope and love working bring us on to assembly ground. We are all part of the assembly, I know, if we are believers, but assembly ground is something different; it is heavenly in contrast to being worldly, and that is what Ephesians is bringing us into, that we "should know what is the hope of his calling".

Well, dear brethren, “the riches of the glory of his inheritance”, and it is our inheritance too: what a hope has been placed within our reach! May we be exercised; I feel the danger of slipping away. Paul brings that into his epistles too; in fact he rejoices in these epistles where I read at seeing faith, hope and love working: may it increase among us!

For His Name's sake.

Kirkcaldy

21st January 2014

READY FOR THE LORD'S COMING

David McFarlane

John 14: 1-3

We recently visited an aged brother at a care home, and such a wonderful visit we had with him! He spoke of the coming of the Lord and quoted Thessalonians. I was just struck by that and thought, 'Am I ready for the Lord to come?'. He was: you could see it as we spoke. He was very bright and it was encouraging, to me at least, to see a brother who was over 90 so confident and able to say without any doubt that the Lord is coming.

I thought that was a challenge to myself, especially, and maybe to the brethren, to have a sense of what the Lord says here, "Let not your heart be troubled". It was a time when the disciples knew He was going to leave, and He speaks to them to comfort them. Am I in a right position in this life? Am I comfortable? I have to wonder about that. Is my life easy enough as it is, so that I am not concerned whether I am ready to be in the presence of the Lord? He speaks of the Father's house: the Father's house is our home. The Lord says, "In my Father's house there are many abodes". I was impressed with the hymn that we began with. It says,

Soon shall we see Thee as Thou art (Hymn 47).

Is that not a wonderful prospect for the believer? Of course, we should be concerned about the way we live and things in the world, but should we not be more concerned with the coming of the Lord? If He tarries, yet we will meet Him in the air; and that is what our brother said. It was such a wonderful uplifting time for me. I just thought the exercise should be, at least on my side, to be more concerned about the Lord's coming.

And there is no doubt. He says, "I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again". It says of the disciples in the first chapter of Acts, "as they were gazing into heaven ... two men ... said, ... This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven", v 10, 11. That was a comfort to the disciples and should be a comfort to us. It is the Lord's word. He is faithful; so He says, "I am coming again". We should be clear of conscience, and our affections should be stirred to the point where we would desire the Lord to come. We would desire the Lord to come to us. We know that He

comes to us, but He says, "I am coming again and shall receive you to myself". So He wants us to be there with Him. Is that not a wonderful thing, to be with the Lord of glory, the One who came and gave Himself for you and for me at the cross, and took on all my sins, so that God has said He will not remember them any more, Jer 31: 34; Heb 8: 12? My sins are forgiven. I should be at rest in His presence. Am I ready?

That is my exercise, dear brethren, just to touch our hearts as to the matter of the Lord coming. He says, "I am coming again and shall receive you to myself". Am I happy? I should be happy. I will be joyful. It should be a comfort to me to know that the Lord is coming again, and we can trust in His word. His word is faithful. He says, "that where I am ye also may be". So we again remember that He went into death for us. It was something that He did considering for His own and, as a result of that, He has us in His heart, and He wants us to be with Him. "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".

This is just a thought, dear brethren, to encourage our hearts together that we should not be settling down here. Abraham waited for a city; he could see the foundations of another city and another world, Heb 11: 10.

May it be so, for His Name's sake!

Edinburgh

7th January 2014

“TO MYSELF”

David J Hutson

John 14: 3

I am sure we are affected by what our brother has said as to the prospect that is before us. How soon it may be! It has been suggested, although I must say it is not so in my case, that we should waken every day thinking, 'Is it going to be today?'. The imminence of it, beloved, has been the hope of the saints through the centuries, and we are nearer to that blessed time than ever we have been.

But what has struck me, and has often impressed me in this scripture that our beloved brother has referred to is what the Lord Jesus says, “I am coming again and shall receive you to myself”. Brethren know that I have often said that two words in a section of scripture can make all the difference. It would have been very blessed if He had said, 'I am coming again and shall receive you that where I am ye also may be', but He adds “shall receive you **to myself**”. Although John does not give us the light of the assembly and the body of Christ as Paul does, I would suggest that receiving us to Himself is more than just simply a matter of place. He does speak of place. He says, “I go to prepare you a place”, but we have often been reminded that the preparation of the place is by His *being* there, and how wonderful that as He is there, He would receive us to Himself.

I just suggest that it has an allusion to the place the assembly will have, although the truth of that is not developed in John's gospel. Yet it must ever have been on the Lord's heart for He was about to deliver Himself up for the assembly so that in due course He might “present the assembly **to himself** glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things”, Eph 5: 27. Surely when He presents it to Himself, He will receive it to Himself. How wonderful this is, the blessed, holy intimacy of the place that is ours as with Him! It is not only - I say 'not only' carefully as related to Him - there in relationship to Him, as His kindred as He speaks of His own in this gospel, His brethren, but being brought to Himself. It seems to me that it involves something very close and intimate, “receive you to myself”.

How wonderful what is before us is, but we should think not only of what is before *us*, but think of what it will be for *Him*, and as we think of what it will be for Him, it will affect us in our path and service and testimony here so that in what is here at the present time in the light of the

assembly, and in the light of the body of Christ, there should be even now something for His own heart, as there will be in its fulness in that day when He presents it to Himself glorious.

I suggest these things, beloved, as coming freshly to mind. What a difference these two words “to myself” make: the intimacy, the wonder of it, something which is really beyond the natural mind to comprehend, as it speaks of “the two shall be one”, Eph 5: 31. Wonderful things, beloved, are before us, but they are to affect us now in our testimony, and above all that there might be in our assembly service that which is for Himself in anticipation of that glorious day. In His Name!

Edinburgh

7th January 2014

CLOTHING THAT GOD MAKES

David C Brown

Genesis 3: 21; 37: 3

It is quite a remarkable scene we have in Genesis chapter 3. Rightly, we often make an application of it as to what there was that God was looking forward to in the righteousness that we should be clothed in. But I was thinking of it, firstly, in a literal way. In the earlier chapters we have seen the glory of God, the glory of One who could say, "Let there be light. And there was light", chap 1: 3, 4. Before that there is the majesty of One who created the heavens and the earth, and there is a history of the grandeur of God's operations in creation in chapter 1. We would be affected as we think of the majesty, the glory that belongs to God, God, the Almighty. We have these titles referred to, El, and Elohim, 'the Supreme', and other titles that are drawn to our attention at the beginning, Gen 1: 1, note. How majestic He is! Then we have His counsel and His operations that there should be what is brought in for His pleasure in man, and Satan's intrusion on that; how it must have affected the heart of God! He knew what was to be before it took place. He was not therefore disappointed, but there must have been feelings akin to what we have when we are disappointed: He was grieved when He saw what sin had done in intruding in His newly formed universe, and these persons, these two guilty persons - and guilty Satan too - worthy to be immediately cast into judgment. And here He is, Jehovah Elohim, and what is He doing? He is making them clothes. Think of that! The God of glory is here, *literally* we take it spiritually, but just think of it literally! What a God we have that He would take the time to make clothes; He would see the need. Adam and Eve would go out of Eden. I do not think it is fanciful to say they would notice a change in temperature as they went out of Eden. All would have been according to His mind, suitable conditions in Eden, but they would have to go out; and before they go out, God takes the time to make clothes for them, and not just to make the clothes for them but to put them on them. I am just affected by what a God we have, and His interest in you and me, and the things that He has provided for us, and the detail of them.

Now we see, of course, in all this the grandeur of what is in His mind, what there would be that God would have. He is going to have persons who go out from being in His presence, not under judgment but clothed in Christ. He is giving some inkling here that what there is that is to be

secured for His pleasure is to be secured by means of sacrifice. How great the divine thought! We can apply this to persons clothed in the worth of Christ, that they are going to be suitable for God, and they are going to take a place in the testimony in that way. How great the divine thoughts are! But the One who has these great divine thoughts was prepared to take the time to make clothes for two guilty sinners.

How things are to be worked out, we get in this reference in Genesis 37. What is notable - what I had not really noticed before until it was drawn to my attention in something I was reading - is that Jacob "made him a vest of many colours". I knew well enough he had given Joseph one, but Jacob made it. Jacob "made him a vest of many colours". That was the delight that Jacob had in this faithful and beloved son, and I think it gives us just a little impression of the way in which the Father glorifies the Lord Jesus in *making Him* "a vest of many colours". You can see shades of glory that accrue to the Lord Jesus, and I think especially we can see them in His pathway here. Applying this scripture, the Father made them. The Lord has many glories, and there are different ways of viewing them. There are His moral glories, and the glories of His own Person, and the glory of what He has won. But let us just think of what this passage in Genesis conveys as to the Father's delight in Christ - the glory Joseph bore that had been made by the father. The Father *conferred upon Him* glories. We see it especially in John's gospel. Early on it says He had "a glory as of an only-begotten with a father", chap 1: 14. The Father, in conducting Himself towards Him in the way that this figure suggests, conferred a glory on Him. He is giving Him a glory as One who is in the perfection of a son, "an only-begotten with a father".

It moves on to speak of "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father", v 18. Think of the shade of glory that came to the Lord Jesus when He was received into that place in the Father's bosom, a distinctive place taken up in manhood. No-one had had it before, something unique and distinctive to Christ, glorified as the One. who was received into that place in the Father's bosom. It goes on to say, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand" (chap 3: 35), the Father giving another shade of glory, another colour of glory, to Christ as He would display His affection to Him, and confer upon Him that right and that activity as giving all things to be in His hand as the great Administrator. How wonderful it is!

And then in chapter 5 we find again "the Father loves the Son" (v 20),

and again there are glories, but there is distinction in the glories. In chapter 3, “The Father loves the Son”, as the note points out, the word for love used is 'agapao', which is the settled disposition of affection that the Father had for the Son, so that the Lord Jesus has that glory as the One who is in the settled disposition of the Father's love. But the reference in chapter 5, “the Father loves the Son”, uses the other word for love, 'phileo', the love that is intimate and intense. There is a different shade of glory attached to Him, if I could suggest it, “the Father loves the Son”. Think of the One drawing out the intimate and intense affection of the Father, and glorified as the One distinctly in that place. And then the Father “shews him all things which he himself does”, v 20. This chapter brings out a number of these glories which He has. How wonderful that there is Someone who has been given this glory! The Father “has given to the Son also to have life in himself”, v 26. That is another shade of glory. “Neither does the Father judge anyone, but has given all judgment to the Son” (v 22), another glory conferred by the Father. What an array, a coat of many colours! What a wonderful display it is!

We continue in the gospel and how wonderful it is! When you come to chapter 17, the Lord can speak of “the glory which thou hast given me”, v 22. What a glory it is that the Lord Jesus has had conferred on Him in that reference, “the glory which thou hast given me”, perhaps in a distinct way referring to His place in sonship. But then in this instance the Lord says, “the glory which thou hast given me I have given them”. I was thinking of the ark as it went through the wilderness. It would be quite a scene as the children of Israel moved from place to place. As I understand it, the whole procession would move on, in various orders, and there in the centre of it the movement of the tabernacle and all the furnishings of the tabernacle would go forward, carried by the Levites, covered over in badgers' skin. The ark was covered in badgers' skins too, but it was also distinctly covered, covered in blue. There in the middle would be one shade of blue, Num 4: 4-15. There was a distinctive glory of the heavenly Man that was being seen as the ark went through the wilderness. But then where else would you have seen blue? Every one of the children of Israel had a lace of blue on their clothes. That is *you*; that is *you*. As going through the wilderness, as going through the pathway, yes, He is there, glorious in the distinctiveness of His heavenly character, the blue; but you have a lace of blue on your clothing too. You have something of that feature of the heavenly Man. Perhaps you feel you do not display it very much, but it

is there for you to look at. With a tassel there was a lace of blue (Num 15: 38) for the children of Israel to look at, just to be reminded. So as we go about our daily tasks, and whatever we have to do in the wilderness, just be reminded there is a colour that you have that is the same as the colour that He has. There is something going through the wilderness still after His character. I trust it is right to apply that to “the glory which thou hast given me I have given them”; part of that grand array of glory that belongs to the Lord Jesus, He has given you. You are clothed, too, with that thread of blue so that there is some token of the glory that you belong to when He comes. And when He “shall receive you to myself” (John 14: 3) He is receiving you to the place where you already belong, and that would help us in what our brother has been saying, to be ready because there is that appreciation that that place is secured and is yours already.

May the Lord bless the word!

Edinburgh

7th January 2014

