

# **A WORD IN ITS SEASON**

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# THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

## Colossians 1: 12-20

**RWMcC** I wondered if we could enquire together about the matter of the headship of Christ. In thinking over this occasion and what might be before us, a thought came to me about headship and lordship, and I realised that I did not know the difference between the two; I could not think it through. So I wondered if we could briefly contrast, or distinguish between headship and lordship, and then think about the headship of Christ. There has been a lot of ministry about headship, and I find that I do not know very much about it; so it must be taken up in the spirit of enquiry, and the desire to learn a little bit more about it. One thing that struck me, when I studied it, is that headship and lordship are centred in one blessed Person, the Lord Jesus. They convey two distinct ideas - I am quoting there, FER vol 4 p173. Lordship represents in a man the authority of God - the Lord has subjects and servants, and so on; whereas headship involves more the thought of relationship, and wisdom, and a source of supply. I think headship is a wonderfully great thought. I think we would understand from Scripture that lordship is for time. The scripture in 1 Corinthians 15, where it speaks about the Lord giving up the kingdom would bear that out, I think; whereas headship is a great eternal thought, and goes on right through. So we can get a sense of the greatness of headship, what God is expressing in headship, when we think that, in the eternal state, the emphasis is not so much on the assertion of authority and rule as on headship and subjection.

Headship is seen in the Lord Jesus Himself. There are a good number of references to it in Scripture. This chapter in Colossians is bringing out, and opening up the headship of Christ personally; you read it and you see how great a Person He was and is. There are many, many aspects of headship, and we might touch on some of those as we go on; but I thought it would be good to get a view of Christ as Head, His personal glory, His personal suitability. It gives this list of things, and it has been said that where it says that the Father has “translated us into the kingdom of the son of his love” the kingdom is where headship is worked out (JT vol 38 p116); and then there is this list of things which all draw attention to Jesus, and promote His personal qualification and beauty to us. There is the thought of creation, and then the thought of thrones and lordships, and so on, and “*he* is before all”. It says that He is “firstborn of all creation”. He is the One who set it all on; so He is

Head in that way. And then it goes on to the clause that particularly drew me to this scripture, in verse 18, where it says, “that *He* might have the first place in all things”. I think that would be the desire of the Lord for our time together; perhaps I myself might grow in that, “that *he* might have the first place in all things”. So we have different aspects of the Lord's headship, and in Colossians I think it has been suggested also that it is the collective side; it says, “*he* is the head of the body”. The Lord is Head in many ways, and people better than me have developed each of these thoughts over many occasions, and so there is a lot to cover. His headship has been spoken of as moral; He is morally qualified to be Head; and He is Head in the created order. The moral side comes out in Romans, and the created order comes out in Corinthians, where it says, “the Christ is the **head** of every man, but woman's **head** is the man, and the Christ's **head God**”, **1 Cor 11: 3**. Then we have the personal side in Colossians; and Ephesians has been described as His official headship. These are all very great thoughts, but I thought that if we focus our minds on the greatness of His Person, we might get help together.

**DAB** I cannot say how thankful I am for what you suggest, because I have been praying that the Lord would give us a word about this very subject. I have been very interested to re-discover that it was in fact the point of light that led to what we speak of as the recovery, that - to pick up one aspect - every believer, by virtue of having the Spirit, is united to Christ; and by the death of Christ, separated from the head we had in Adam. And then the church is viewed in the same way because, “in the power of one Spirit, we have **all** been baptised into **one** body”, 1 Cor 12: 13. So that the collective side which you have in mind is the product which each of us should have arrived at by receiving the Spirit?

**RWMcC** Yes. I suppose we come to know Jesus as Lord before we recognise Him as Head. I have felt for myself that there is a need to understand headship better. It seems to have this individual and collective bearing. As you say, the recovery of the truth that we have been blessed to have had opened up to us involved that, a Head in heaven and a body here.

**DAB** It sets us up in an entirely different way, does it not? If I can refer to it again, I suppose we all understand the idea that Adam is head of the race, because we are all descended from him - not only physically, but morally. It was “by one man sin entered into the world” (Rom 5: 12), and we have all been “constituted sinners” (v 19), because that man is

head of the race, the fallen race. But God has dealt with that in the death of Christ and, in the wonder of His purpose, He has set on something new through the coming of the Spirit, which unites us to a Man in heaven, and, by that means, to one another. And that sets fellowship in an entirely new way, and you would look for the unity and dependence and making way for His mind which an understanding of that would bring.

**RWMcC** Yes. I think it has been said that there are only two who can be considered head of the race; that is, Adam and Christ. Adam, because he was the first and we know what we have all inherited from that; and in a sense we carry that with us until the Lord comes. But the Lord is Head in relation to a new order and condition and that is how it is to affect us, through the wisdom that comes from the Head

**PM** Adam was established as head positionally, was he not, but he had not the resource to maintain it? But Christ as Head has all the resource, and does not this passage bring that out, that He has a resource to maintain all that He has been appointed Head over?

**RWMcC** Yes, I was thinking of what it says somewhere in the prophet, "He shall bear the glory", Zech 6: 13. Everywhere you look, Christ is qualified to be Head; in every aspect in which he is viewed as Head, He is fully qualified. In the greatness of His Person, He set creation on; He was before Adam. I think that is what this scripture touches upon.

**PJW** Ephesians says, "from whom" (Eph 4: 16), and I was thinking that everything comes from that glorious One; and nothing will nourish the body but what comes from Him, do you think?

**RWMcC** Yes, that is what I was thinking. Everything for God involves that Christ is Head, and it becomes clear as we consider it that this is not a reaction to a problem. The note here speaks of prepositions: He is the Head of creation because, as the note says, He was the characteristic power behind it; He is also the Head of creation because He is the active instrument (note *c in v* 16); and He is also the end in creation. The scope of it is just awe-inspiring, is it not?

**DAB** It has been remarked in relation to Adam that God finished everything else first and put a man in it; and in what is new He has begun with the Head. You could not say that the physical creation took its character from Adam, could you, although it became so morally? He has put his sinful stamp upon it, but creation does not derive from Adam

in the way that this does from Christ. Adam was simply not great enough as a creature for such a thought, was he?

**RWMcC** No, and when we consider that Christ, that Person of the Godhead, was “before all”, we can see that in Genesis 1 and 2 Adam was a type, a figure; and creation does not take its character from him. But he named things, and in principle that naming remains, does it not? It says he was made in God's image and after His likeness (Gen 1: 26), but he failed in that. It never says of the Lord that He was 'a likeness' of God, but it speaks about Him here as the image, “who is image of the invisible God”. We could not say He is 'a likeness' because He *is* God, God in His own Person. He is the image of God; all that we may know of God we see in Him, and we shall be able to look upon Him - that is a wonderful thing.

**PM** What it says of Him is that He “is image of the invisible God”; and that same One took His place “in the likeness of men”, Phil 2: 7.

**RWMcC** That is a good reference, because that scripture in Philippians (Phil 2: 5-8) is full of deep meaning and precision, is it not?

**PJW** It says He is “the effulgence of his glory and the expression of his substance”, Heb 1: 3. Could you explain that to us, please?

**RWMcC** I do not think I could. All that God was, was expressed in Christ. Where we read it says that “all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell”, in Him. God was here as a Man when Christ was here.

**DJW** I was thinking of this expression here, “who is the beginning”; it is something entirely new. Adam was head of an earthly race, but Christ is the Head of a heavenly race, and all that is for God is in that blessed Man.

**RWMcC** Yes; it is a wholly new order that takes its character from Him, “the beginning of the creation of God”, Rev 3: 14. Then it says, “who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead”. It shows us that, in the wonderful counsels of God, this is how it is worked out. He is “the beginning of the creation of God”, but He is the “firstborn from among the dead”.

**DJW** He is “the heavenly one”, and “such also the heavenly ones”, 1 Cor 15: 48. So persons who have part in this august vessel, the assembly, take character from Him who is the Head of it, do you think?

**RWMcC** Yes. One of the aspects of headship is the way the body *derives* from Him, takes character from Him; but then another side - as I think we have been taught - is in Ephesians, where the assembly *shares* with Him in headship. He is “head over all things to the assembly” (Eph 1: 22), and it shows us the immense scope of God’s thoughts in this. But I think the great idea of supply and wisdom in the Head should affect our spirits, should it not?

**MRC** The body cannot exist without the head, can it?

**RWMcC** I think the idea of the head in relation to the body adds a distinctiveness to headship. You can say that “Christ is the head of every man” (1 Cor 11: 3); we have been taught that you could go out and say to anyone that the Lord is Head, because He has qualified Himself, He is qualified morally to be the Head of every person individually. But when you bring in the body, there is a wonderful thought of supply and influence. It seems like a relationship where love flows, does it not?

**RDP-r** I think it has been said that headship works out as influence by love, and really it is what God is flowing out towards man, and towards this wonderful vessel of which Christ is Head.

**RWMcC** Yes, I think that is right: influence by love. The thought of the Lord’s headship over every man has that in mind, does it? It is in order that every man, and every woman and every child, might come into blessing under the influence of the Head, in coming into that relationship.

**DAB** I think you are right to hold our minds and hearts in relation to the glory of the Head, but it may be worth remarking in relation to what was just said as to the body not existing without the head, that the Head is *expressed* in His body, is He not? I was thinking that it says that “in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead **bodily**” (Col 2: 9); that is, that there is something substantial. He did things by the Spirit; and He does things now by the Spirit in His body. We need just to keep in the back of our minds whether the outcome of a conversation about the glory of the *Head* might be that there was something more consistent with Him expressed in each of us, and in our fellowship together?

**RWMcC** Yes, you are entirely right about that. I did think about Proverbs 31 and the woman of worth, because you see there headship expressed in the body in that sense, do you not? She shares in headship, and it is expressed as wisdom. Wisdom comes down from

the Head, and the assembly in her place expresses it *in all her dealings*.

**PJM** It would be a shame, would it not, if we did not get beyond the forgiveness of sins in verse 14? I think we are conscious sometimes of how selfish we are in our appreciation of the Head; it is too much a matter of what is for me. Forgiveness of sins is where you begin, is it not? And then we are to see the extent of His influence and of His love, and what He is working on; and the end result should bring joy to my soul, should it?

**RWMcC** It should indeed, and scriptures like these should bring joy to our souls. It should be a joy to every Christian, should it not, to read of such a One? But as you say we come in by way of verse 14. It is the door. I often think of it as like a mouse hole: you have to get right down to go in through the door, you *have* to go down; but when you get through things open up, and you have the sense that all is established in another Man.

**RWF** The idea of being made “fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light” seems to be very attractive in connection with what you are saying. We might think of Christ as pattern for that. It is not simply that everything is put right with us, but there is that in us which is formed after Christ as pattern, which is perfectly acceptable to the Father. Headship works in that way, does it not?

**RWMcC** Yes, I think that is right. And “sharing the portion of the saints in light” has been linked with inheritance. The note takes us back to where Paul is speaking to Agrippa of the “inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me”, Acts 26: 18. I think what you say as to being made fit is good, because it is not the old man, it is not our old nature that is modified to make it fit, but God has begun again. We have been *made* fit; as we have been made in the new creation, we fit in our place.

**DAB** That is what redemption does, is it not? It puts us in a new position. I was struck by what Mr Stoney suggests (vol 5 p129), that you need to be at the right level to be united to Christ. He uses a very dated example, but at that time in society people married others who were of the same rank. That idea has gone - maybe mercifully from a natural point of view - but you did not marry *below* your station. And what God has done in the work of redemption is to elevate us to the level at which union with Christ becomes a possibility.

**RWMcC** It sets things on an exalted level. The assembly is entirely suitable: she is a suitable vessel as Eve was for Adam - made from his body. And so with the assembly, she is entirely suitable and fit in that way.

**DAB** And so are you. That is the glory of the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit, is it not?

**RWMcC** Yes, and so all the individuals of the assembly, that is, every believer on Jesus who has the Spirit. We need to remember not to be restricted or sectarian at all in our thinking. Every believer who has the Spirit is fit to take their place in power.

**PJW** They are made fit as soon as they believe on the Lord Jesus and receive the Spirit; there is no process exactly, although in our appreciation there may be, but we are not made more fit. We are as fit as when we first believed. Is that right?

**RWMcC** Yes. It has been said that our place in heaven is on the ground of pure grace; that is what has made us fit. What you say is right.

**PJW** I am wondering if the idea of headship is a very sensitive thought. Maybe you could say something about that - both individually and collectively?

**RWMcC** Well, I feel the need for help about that, but I believe that there *is* a sensitive side to it. Elsewhere we read about those who were “not holding fast the head” (Col 2: 19); and it says somewhere, “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have not need of thee; or again, the head to the feet, I have not need of you”, 1 Cor 12: 21. That is really bypassing the head; if one member says to another “I have not need of thee”, that is bypassing the head. Everything must link back to the head, and I think is a link with the sensitive side that you draw attention to; that He *is* our Head, but we are to be kept in the gain of it.

**PJW** That is helpful, and I wonder if that is where we need the Spirit, and to give place to the Spirit, do you think?

**RWMcC** The Spirit is not spoken of much in Colossians, but you can see that the Spirit's work in their souls underlies the ministry that was given to them. We are not going to make progress in divine things without the Spirit.

**PM** Could you help us as to how we get the gain of the headship of

Christ?

**RWMcC** I would like you to say a little more, please.

**PM** Well, in this epistle, Paul speaks of some who were drifting away from it and it was in danger of being replaced with “philosophy and vain deceit” (chap 2: 8); and perhaps that tendency is always present with me. But I would like if you would just help us.

**RWMcC** Well, I hardly know what to say about it, but “holding fast the head” should be how I feel about it. If I allow matters to depend on me, there will be a problem, will there not? It is not exactly what I hold but what Christ holds for me. Colossians has been described as 'over Jordan' but not in possession of the land, not yet in the enjoyment of the land. We remember that they came to Gilgal (Josh 4: 19), did they not? That suggests the cutting off of the flesh, and they had to learn dependence. Do you think those things would help us?

**PM** I was wondering about that. It is unquestionable that the headship of Christ remains. “In him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”; that is never changing, is it? But I change, and do I have to come to it that the first head has been removed, and I cannot draw from that resource because it will only lead to death; but in my links with the Lord Jesus practically, by the Spirit's service, I come to prove what He is - not only what He has done, but what He is, and the way He can meet every need, and far surpass every need. Does that bear on it?

**RWMcC** Yes, it does; as any one of us is preserved in our appreciation of Him - we find our resource in Him - there is the thought of a resource and wisdom. They are there to call upon, so that they might flow down.

**RJF** Do you think the illustration of a natural body helps in an enquiry as to these things? What I mean is that, if you think of a part of the natural body that is damaged or hurt, the damage is at that place, but the head knows about it and the head feels it. At the same time, if we think of movement, the instruction for that and the direction is given by the head and co-ordinated by the head. So there is that flow of sympathy, of feeling, of knowledge in these things, do you think?

**RWMcC** Yes, I think so; the illustration Paul uses is good for us to think about; and as to the thought of movement, it has been said that every impulse is derived from the Head. There is the thought of the joints and bands that link the body together, and they might relate to our links

together and the way the body is ministered to and united together. The Head is the source.

**AGM** Is the apostle in this chapter drawing attention to the greatness of the Head, so that our affections might be fixed upon Him? Then he speaks as to the other things that were referred to, as there is always the attempt to bring in the other head, and the thinking of the other head. Do you think this is the answer to the Laodicean position, holding on to the Head, and referring everything to and receiving from the Head?

**RWMcC** I think that would be right. The apostle Paul sets the greatness of Christ before them, and what can compare with what comes from such a Head? From Adam, all that we derive ends in death, and even before that it brings in trouble and problems. That is because of what *he* is as head, but from Christ as Head it is an unfailing line.

**PJM** Would you say a word as to the work of reconciliation in verse 20? The Godhead was pleased to dwell in Him, and then the work - "and by him to reconcile all things to itself", and then the basis of it is spoken of; but that is a great work of God through the Head. Would you say something about that?

**RWMcC** I was just looking at the note there "by him" is 'the instrumental power'. This headship is an active thought, is it not: "and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace"? There is what has been done at tremendous cost to secure our blessing. All the moral questions have been met. This is the ground we can enjoy, and God can come out in this way; "by him to reconcile all things to itself" shows that it is the heart of God that is involved, the desires of God to reconcile all things to Himself.

**DAB** The means by which He did it was the "death of his Son" (Rom 5: 10), was it not? He has not brought what was incompatible to Him nearer, but by removing it He has replaced it with something that can be near Him.

**RWMcC** Yes. As you suggest, what has gone has been removed out of God's sight for ever, and we need to be in the gain of that, to recognise that. So that everything that is derived from Christ is suitable: we are reconciled on that principle.

**MRC** One order of man has gone completely in the death of Christ,

has it not? It is an entirely new order of things, is it not, entirely compatible and suitable to the Head?

**RWMcC** Yes. It is not a transplanted head or a transplanted body, but it is one that derives from Him; it really and literally derives from Christ and is therefore entirely suitable and compatible, as Eve was to Adam. Men talk about clones, but she was not a clone. She was a creature in her own right, but she derived from Adam.

**PJM** Is it interesting that when Adam sees her, having seen the rest of the creation, he sees something completely new and different, does he not - "this time"?

**RWMcC** It says, "as for Adam, he found no helpmate, his like", as if all the other creatures found a helpmate their like, but Adam did not. But that was because God wanted to make something special. Eve is a special example, and she is a helpmate, his like; she can share with him in his headship.

**HTF** It also gave a completely new dimension to headship, did it not? He was head to the creatures; now he was to be head to Eve.

**RWMcC** I think it is very fine to think of it that way, that in the working out of God's thoughts that is what we see; headship is introduced in this relationship. There is the thought of rule in the sun and the moon, and God's hand is in all that; but then we see it in the man and the woman. It is remarkable; it brings a dignity to headship. There is a kind of respect in creation but headship brings a dignity.

**RMB** I wonder if this chapter would also help us, in line with what you are saying, to have a view of the greatness of the assembly? I have often thought that the only way to get the divine view of the assembly is by having the divine view of its Head: we might say, 'What a body it must be to have such a great Head!'

**RWMcC** I think so, yes. You can imagine the Colossians reading this and saying, 'We knew Christ was wonderful, but this is superlative!'. And, as you say, it is wonderful that such a One should have a body that is entirely suitable. I have noticed before that it says here, "and *he* is head of the body, the assembly"; but in Ephesians it is, "head over all things to the assembly, which is his body", Eph 1: 22, 23. It is as if the body and the assembly are different views of the same personnel, the same wonderful creature. The body is organically linked; but the assembly is the side of relationship and affection. I do not know if that

links with what you are suggesting?

**RMB** Yes; I suppose that if we speak of the body that is one aspect of the truth of the assembly, is it? But I was thinking too about the question as to “holding fast the head”, how it is practically that we get the gain of the headship of Christ. Do you think one way in which we do that is to be exercised not to introduce anything that comes from any other source? If I have any impression of the greatness of the assembly, the body of Christ, I would be very exercised, would I not, not to bring anything in but what comes from Him? Because it is only what comes from Him that will edify His body, do you think?

**RWMcC** Yes, that would be perfectly right. The way it works out is beautiful, because, when we think of the Head and the body, it is not an austere thought, is it? There is supply, there is love, there is what flows; every impulse is a benevolent influence, so that if I am attached to the Head in that way, the principle of what the Head is will come out in the body. Anything that does not derive from the Head is foreign, is it not? Our natural bodies will expel that sort of thing. If you get a sting or a splinter, for instance, the body acts in relation to that, that it might be contained and the problem removed, and the body healed and brought into uniformity.

**RMB** I was thinking just by way of practical example, I might read something in the ministry, and maybe there is some particular aspect of the truth that strikes me in a fresh way and I read up about it in the ministry - and that is a very important and valuable thing to do, and I come away with a better understanding of that aspect of the truth than I had before; and I might think I can say something about it when the saints are gathered together. But is not necessarily the same as deriving from the Head, is it? It is an exercise to be in living touch with what is coming down from Him, do you think?

**RWMcC** Yes, I was really challenged by something I read in Mr Taylor, where he said that we are prone to speak about things that we have not assimilated, vol 41 p181. I have felt that, even in relation to this occasion, and what I had in mind. It is a challenge, but I think what you say is right, that we need to have everything in principle as deriving from Him - and that will then regulate me.

**AGM** That brings in life. The body is full of life; it is not a dead body. As deriving from Christ the Head, it is really representing Christ, showing the living character of things.

**RWMcC** I believe that is most important.

**CHS** In Colosse and Ephesus, Paul speaks of evidence of the practical effect of the Head, and of a state which would be able to receive the truth presented to them.

**RWMcC** I think that would be right, and I think it was remarkable how the apostle Paul was able to minister what was needed to each assembly; and this epistle was to be read in Laodicea. The Lord gives Paul something specific for the Ephesians and something specific for the Colossians, and also the Laodiceans; and do you think the Lord is faithful in that, that He gives us what we need? The Lord wants us to move on to the next step in our spiritual progress?

**CHS** I was thinking of the reference in Colossians 1: 8, “who has also manifested to us your love in the Spirit”, and then in the next verse they had heard of their faith and love. And there are also similar references in the Ephesians to what was there flowing out of that state. The writer appreciated it, did he not?

**RWMcC** I think it is fine to see that. Paul was immensely skilled in building up. He speaks about what was given to him “for building up, and not for overthrowing”, 2 Cor 13: 10. I really covet that. There was some danger in Colosse, we would understand, of certain things, but Paul was ministering to them. They were in a position where this was relevant. If they had been further back in their soul history, they might not have appreciated it so much

**CHS** What we speak about and what is seen in practice need to be connected. And that is deeply testing for us, is it not, how far we have been formed by what we know?

**RWMcC** It is very challenging, but the idea is that we might be formed in it.

**DSB** How do we move towards headship? I might know what lordship is, but how do I get into the gain of this? It has been said that we have been made fit; that is in purpose, and is true in that sense from conversion, but how do I get into the gain of it?

**RWMcC** Well, that is help I was hoping to get from this occasion; perhaps you would say a little more? I am appreciating what is coming out because it must involve my personal link with the Lord Himself. If I do not recognise Him personally as Head to me, then I am not going to

be of much help in the assembly. As to headship, it says, “that *he* might have the first place in all things”. I know that is much wider than our lives, but it includes them, do you think?

**DSB** I was thinking of what you said earlier about relationship. In relation to lordship, I could do things out of duty; but in terms of headship, that brings in a relationship out of affection.

**RMB** As to what has just been said as to being made fit, it is important to distinguish between what we sometimes refer to as our standing and our state. As far as our standing is concerned, we are as fit for this wonderful kingdom as ever we shall be - our standing can never be improved, it is at the very highest level; but as to our actual spiritual state, I am sure all of us feel that there is plenty of room for growth. It is often in connection with our state that we realise that there are things which need to be adjusted, and we have not made as much progress as we should; and perhaps it is on that side that the exercise comes in as to knowing the headship of Christ, because that depends on how we are with the Lord, and also whether the Holy Spirit has liberty with us, do you think?

**RWMcC** I think so. I think we perhaps know a little more of what was mentioned as to knowing Him as Lord - perhaps I should speak for myself. God has addressed our standing, and has resolved that in the work of Christ; but as to our state, God has every resource for us so that our state should be in keeping with our standing. But things are worked out in the ways of God, and I think that is to provide substance to our growth. It is a growing season now, is it not? When the harvest comes, then the fruit will be made manifest. It says “one thirty, and one sixty, and one a hundred”, Mark 4: 8. That is how these things have affected our state, as we have been exercised.

**RMB** The great type of it for us is the journey of the children of Israel through the wilderness, is it not? We see the people of God on a journey. God had a wonderful purpose for them; they were the people of God. He did dwell among them, and there was no question that they were going to reach the promised land; but in practice there was a lot of sinfulness and rebellion, there were a lot of deep lessons to be learned, in order that they might in practice answer to God's thoughts about them. That really corresponds with our experience, does it not?

**RWMcC** The practical side of it is where we are tested, is it not?

**DAB** Do you think it helps us to put these things to the test? There is nothing abstract about the question just raised as to how we get the gain of headship; these things can be proved, can they not? And, dare I say, we are not short of things to take to Him, even among the brethren, are we? It is instructive to feel that you have the sense of His resource, which will often be expressed in taking the thing away from you, so that He can manage it and deal with it - maybe through another member, but maybe by His own personal intervention?

**RWMcC** Yes, it is fine to think of it that way, is it not? The wisdom and resource are available in Him, the living Head, if only I would draw from Him.

**DAB** I was thinking about that point earlier, because reference has been made to Israel. God had a relationship with Israel but they were in the flesh, and the approach to influencing them was through law. I sense that things arise, and people want to know what the rule is. But the body does not work that way, does it? I am not saying that we re-invent solutions to problems every time they arise, but as our brother said, this is a living thing; and that is what we need to prove, I think, and trust more than perhaps we do.

**RDP-r** Does the matter of subjection come into experiencing the headship of Christ? The assembly is a subject vessel, and if we are subject to the Head, we will prove the blessing of His headship.

**RWMcC** Yes, I think that is right. Headship is seen in the creatorial order, is it not? The head of the man is Christ, and man is head of the woman. It is not liked in modern times, but that is the divine order. On reflection, what has been brought out as to life is key to what we are talking about, because it is easier to talk about it than actually to let it have its effect in my life - not just in a practical way but in a spiritually formative way. So it is not just that practically I order my life in an honourable kind of way, but that the Head is to be represented. And the only way in which the Head can be represented is to have this flow, this life-giving flow, from the Head. Subjection in the way in which it is presented in Scripture is a very honourable and beautiful thought. It is not demeaning, but it is the idea of love flowing and responsiveness.

**RDP-r** We often think of going to the Lord if we have a problem, but that is not the way it should work; it should be that we go to the Lord for everything. How do we conduct our day? We start it on our knees, looking for help for the day; not that we assume to know what is to be

done. We have One who is able to direct us, and we want to take His direction because of the greatness and the knowledge of who He is.

**EOPM** There is an interesting little word at the beginning that you referred to, “that *he* **might** have the first place”; that seems to allow for my responsibility. I may learn gradually - perhaps through a lifetime of experience - that that is the best solution, to let Him have the first place in everything. You can also understand how the truth of a Head in heaven and a body here put paid to the whole idea of clericalism: every impulse must come from the Head and not from man.

**RWMcC** That phrase did strike me and was the first indication of a Scripture that we might read, “that *he* might have the first place” - it is emphatic: “that *he* might have the first place in all things”.

**EOPM** The Lord will seek to bring me to this and to His influence. On our side, it may be a bit like Romans 12, “that ye may **prove** what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God”. Here we prove not only that headship is the best way, it is the only way to make spiritual progress.

**RWMcC** Yes; somebody commented recently that we might understand the “good”, but we might find the “acceptable” a bit more of a challenge. I think what is coming out is that it is an organic thing, it is a living, feeling thing. The affections, the feelings, the life, are involved in it. The Lord can command whatever He wishes, and He does; but, whilst authority is not absent, headship is a more sensitive thing. What was in my mind was not only that we need to get the gain of it now, and to be practically in the enjoyment of it, but for it to be our way of life. It would lift our thoughts, when we think that this is the way the God is going to work eternally.

**PJW** So subjection is a state of soul. Ephesians puts submission first - to the Lord, and then subjection to the Head. It is not simply doing what I am told, or obeying, but it is a state of soul, do you think?

**RWMcC** That is very interesting. I had not really thought about that, but yes, subjection there is not to lordship but subjection to the Head.

**PJW** I might be terribly insubject and rebellious in my spirit but still do what I am told; but what comes from subjection is more automatic and natural, do you think, because it is formed through love?

**RWMcC** There is a mutual side, a mutual responsiveness.

**PJM** Was the Lord working with Simon Peter in John 21 to get him

thinking in terms of headship? There was a time when he says, "I go to fish", v 3. He may have thought it was reasonable enough, but perhaps he neglected to think of the body, or the headship of Christ; and what he did had its consequences in others following him. The Lord speaks to him at the end, movingly, about what he needed to do in respect of the body, to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep. I must see Christ in relation to "all things" - it is not just my things, is it? It is all that is of interest to Him.

**RWMcC** The Lord's commission to Peter has been going through my mind, feeding the lambs, shepherding the sheep, feeding the sheep. That is what we need, that is what is going to engender right feelings in us, and attach us to the Head. Peter may have had the best intentions when he went fishing but it was actually not the right line, and others followed him. He was influential there on the wrong line, and that is quite a sobering thought, but the Lord graciously brought him back.

**PM** The first breakdown in headship was in the one in whom it was introduced, and it seems that distance had come in so that Satan could appeal to Eve. You cannot know headship at a distance, can you?

**RWMcC** No. You are thinking that, if she had been with Adam, Eve might have been preserved. We do not know. Really, in principle, she had stopped looking to the head. You say that headship does not work at a distance, so in terms of the body - it speaks of the "working of the body" - that is in close relation with the Head.

**AAC** Could you give us some sense of God's delight in Christ as Head, and all that enters into what we have been speaking of? This is something that is of great delight to God, is it? Could you help us as to that?

**RWMcC** I am not sure what I can say, but where we started off, Paul is "giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit ..., who has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love". That is a full expression, and that gives us an impression of the Father's delight in the work that Jesus has done; and in the Person, the Son of His love. In principle, He was that when He was here; there was the Son of His love, to whom He could say, "in thee I have found my delight", Mark 1: 11. We think about it, but does all that God has desired to work out really lay hold of me? As the hymn says -

All that His love designed  
Secured by Thee!

(Hymn 268)

That is God's affection for Jesus, for the work and the Person. Headship is the place that God has chosen to give to Him, and He has chosen it because He delights in it.

**AAC** So much that He will have this throughout eternity.

**RWMcC** That is right; it is the thought of the Father and God dwelling, and it is wonderfully represented in all the families there. They are all there because of the work of Christ. Headship flows through it all, and it is suffused with joy.

**DAB** There is a fine reference in Ephesians "his good pleasure ... to head up all things in the Christ"; and then he says that "we should be to the praise of his glory", Eph 1: 9-12. They would be among those who have a place in the body? God has the most stupendous design in His mind, and He can hang it all on this One, and let Him give character to all the rest.

**RWMcC** He gives His own character to it as the Head; and God looks at every aspect of what He will have in every family, the assembly being the nearest as we understand; and He will see the headship of Christ and the glory of that light shining through it all.

**JSH** I was thinking of what you were saying as to relationships, and that as we have what flows down from the Head, and as we see that working in one another, it helps us in our relationships and building up together, does it?

**RWMcC** I do think so; it has got to colour everything that we do. We had a head in Adam, and deriving from him colours what we are naturally - we cannot help it. Well, should it not be the same from our heavenly Head, that we can hardly help ourselves? "As *he* is, we also are in this world." 1 John 4:17. In the working out and enjoyment of these relationships and links together we should be like the Lord - the characteristics seen in the Head being seen in the body. It is a most wonderful thing.

**CHS** Paul speaks of giving thanks to the Father and if we appreciate Christ as Head we would know more of that. We learn from the Father to appreciate the One who has been made Head. I was thinking about our links with the Spirit, how the Spirit would help us; things flow out of our links with divine Persons; and then horizontal links are worked out.

**RWMcC** That is entirely right, and John the apostle develops the

character of those horizontal links a little in his black and white way: “If any one say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar”, 1 John 4: 20. That is stark, but it gets down to the truth. Our links with divine Persons are vital, and our appreciation of what God is doing must go beyond our appreciation of what has been done for us to save us from our lost estate.

**EFW** It says, “the fulness of the Godhead was **pleased** to dwell”. I thought that is much more than just a fact; it is fact, but to get some sense of the *pleasure* divine Persons have in what they have done is, I think, very encouraging.

**RWMcC** Thank you for that; it is very interesting - it was *pleased* to dwell. When the Lord was here, the Father was here and the Spirit was here, CAC vol 9 p276. God has worked according to His pleasure, and everything that God has done is towards that - it is for His pleasure. That involves having everything centred in Christ, but it involves each one of us being brought into a place. We have a place, and according to His pleasure, He desires to bring us into that place. I often think of how we write invitations, and it says, 'So-and-so requests the pleasure of your company'. That is really what God is saying to us, is it not?

**London**

**21<sup>st</sup> June 2014**

**Key to Initials:-**

D S Bodman, Dorking; R M Brown, East Finchley; D A Burr, London;  
M R Cook, Maidstone; A A Croot, London; R J Flowerdew, Sunbury;  
R W Flowerdew, Sunbury; H T Franklin, Grimsby; J S Hutson, London;  
A G Mair, Cullen; P Martin, Colchester; R W McClean, Grimsby;  
E O P Mutton, Walton-on-the-Naze; P J Mutton, Walton-on-the-Naze;  
R D Painter, Yeovil; C H Smith, Chelmsford; P J Walkinshaw, Strood;  
E F Woodford, Dorking; D J Wright, Havering

**WHAT GOD DOES FOR HIMSELF**

## **Neil McKay**

**Genesis 4: 1-8**

**Hebrews 9: 26 (from "But now ...)**

**Acts 14: 19-22**

We had an impression this morning of the way in which God has acted in the presence of sin, and of all that has come in against God, because sin is against God; and of the way that God has wrought through this to establish what is for Himself. It is good to bear in mind that God is not surprised or taken aback by anything which has come in. A brother said this morning that His ways sub-serve His purpose. In fact, everything sub-serves the will of God. God will not have it otherwise. But He has used and allowed the incoming of sin to bring about His own purposes, His own will, His own designs. God is too great to be turned aside by anything which has arisen against Him.

Mr Raven said that, if you look around in the world, and take account of the world that exists, you would draw the conclusion that the One who made it is either powerless or evil (FER vol 18 p203), because that is what the world is. You would come to that conclusion because the world is not a true expression of what God is. If God is the God of this world you say to yourself, 'Well, He is either powerless to change it or He must like unrighteousness'. But neither is true. God has allowed the world to go on and Satan's power to continue in order to bring about His own glory. Therefore the present time is a time of faith, a dispensation when persons are taken up by God in faith, because there are two lines that are going on in the world. There is a line in this world in which men are going on to destruction; that is the line of Cain. Then there is the line of Abel, which brings in Christ - a line of righteousness in which God is saving persons through divine mercy and bringing them to blessing and glory. This is not outwardly evident in the world, but God maintains that the gospel should be preached, not only so that we are to be a testimony to persons, but that men should see things in the light of God - not only as to what God will do to remedy the sinful state of all that is around, but what God can do in your soul; because sin has gone so far as to affect you and affect me.

At the end of Genesis 3 we see that sin had come in - Satan tempted Eve, and the sin that came in through Eve is extant. It came in through Eve, it affected Adam through her, and through them and their progeny it affected the whole world. It was not exactly that when Eve

took of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil she was affected by the evil, but when she accepted Satan's suggestion into her mind. As soon as Satan made the suggestion and she acknowledged it as being true, or even being possibly true, she believed Satan rather than believing God. I would say soberly that the current trend and power of this world is the suggestion of evil. Satan is not so stupid as to tell you that God is wrong, that He is a liar, but he is intelligent enough to suggest that God might not be right; and through that suggestion Satan leads men astray. 'Maybe God is wrong', Satan would say to you. 'Maybe, it may just be that there is not a God': Satan is using surreptitious and devious means to take the hearts of men away from God - marketing ploys, billboards, books, anything devised by man as away from God may have the suggestion of that in it. 'It may be evolution is the way that things have happened. Maybe there was just a big bang and no God, just maybe. There are other things, you know, there is not just Scripture' - Satan is using the power of suggestion to take control of men's minds, of their lives. The gospel goes out in order that men may know that Satan's suggestions are lies, and that God has established what is true. You will not find the truth in the world, dear friend. You will not find persons saying things that are absolutely true, but I can tell you this, that the Scripture contains that which is *absolutely* true. There is not suggestion in it. There is no power of evil, insidious influence and no trying to bring in some sort of marketing trick. God would speak to you tonight in the gospel to tell you what is absolutely true, because it involves Him. It involves His very nature, Himself, made known in Christ.

So sin came in chapter three of Genesis, and in chapter four we see God's solution to it. He did not wipe out Adam and Eve and start again. He did not chastise them or bring about evil upon them. What He does is He brings in a righteous man. He brings in the answer. He brings in the means by which He is going to accomplish everything and that is in one righteous man, who died rather than be unrighteous: you can see in this that He points to Christ. There is no one who could take up the difficulties in this earth other than Christ. God brings in in Abel one righteous man and one righteous sacrifice, one that satisfies Himself. Can you see that God does not present problems or difficulties? He presents that which is absolutely true, and that is in Christ. And it is able to meet every matter. That is true of the greatest things in this world. It is true of the principle of sin, it is true of governments, it is true of the world's difficulties, it is true of the very

nature of mankind. It is true in my soul and it is true in your soul. Christ is able to meet every single matter. He is able to meet the whole sin principle and all that has arisen up against God. It has affected me and it has affected you; it has come into our very beings, and God would operate in view of removing it. It says that the blood of righteous Abel "is crying ... from the ground". What a testimony! There is still a testimony no matter how much man would desire to get rid of it, a testimony in what Christ has done. That is, He was here where all men were unrighteous; He was here on this earth in absolute perfection. We spoke about it this morning: every day He gave fresh delight to the Father, every movement, every word bringing about delight for the Father. Here was a man upon this earth in whom God found absolute delight; who is, He says, "Altogether that which I also say to you" (John 8: 25), who was everything that God took delight in. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14: 6. He was these things.

So God in Christ took up every matter, and Christ went to the cross and to the grave. He did not give a sacrifice such as Abel did here. He did not sacrifice of the flock and of the fat. He sacrificed Himself. He gave up Himself in His body on the cross: "who by the eternal Spirit offered Himself spotless to God", Heb 9: 14. He "gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously", and "himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 23, 24. He did not go there in weakness; He went to the cross, and in victory He bore our sins. What a tremendous thing to lay hold of. Can you say that? In your own weakness and your unease of conscience, can you say that, 'Christ bore my sins'? There are things that you are not able to do, dear friend, and bearing your sins is one of them. You cannot do anything in regard to your own sins. It says, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree". He actually took them on Himself in those three hours of darkness. When men offered Him up in hatred, malice, and wickedness, and put him on the cross, God in those three hours of darkness met the whole matter of sin and sins in Christ's body on the cross. It says, "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son but delivered him up for us all", Rom 8: 32. God has taken up the matter in Christ, the righteous Man was slain; He sacrificed Himself for us, the One who, as having taken a place like us, and who as a Man should take up the needs and the transgressions of man, the transgressor. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities", Isa 53: 5. Dear friend, can you say it for yourself?

Hebrews states, “once in the consummation of the ages he has been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice”. That was the first appearing of Christ when He came to this earth. He came here, God become flesh, to take up every matter. But it says here, that He was “manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice.” It is great to get that into your soul, what Christ has done by His sacrifice. He came here in order to remove sin before the eye of God. I wonder if that has sunk into your soul, dear young friend. He has entirely removed the principle of sin before the eye of God forever - all that came in to offend God, to stand against Him and dispute His rights as a Creator. Where man had offended God, Christ came here to establish His rights and go on in obedience to the cross, and by that one sacrifice remove forever from before the eye of God all that offended Him. He has appeased God in regard to the whole principle of sin and satisfied God in regard to every single matter caused by that root principle. It says that: “for the putting away of sin”. You might say, 'It has not been put away: I still see it in the world'. No, but it *will* be put away actually in His power in a future day, and Christ has effected this before the eye of God already. That is how great the sacrifice of Christ is.

Then it says, “it is the portion of men once to die” - dear friend, how sober that is - “and after this judgment”. Because of sin, that is the portion of men. Men go on in their sins and put these things aside: 'Well, I have got a long time; I am only young'. It is sorrowful to see men about their daily business, and in speaking to men at work, to see the common disregard of God. Paul writes, “the mystery of lawlessness already works”, 2 Thess 2: 7. You think of that: what is going to head up in the man of sin in outright defiance against God is already operating, at the present time, operating against God. I shudder to see how openly man is defiant of God because all that awaits man on that line is judgment and death.

But it says, “thus the Christ also”. In regard to all this defiance of God, Christ has come in. He has come in to meet the matter, not in outright obliteration of all that stands against God, but in love for His fallen creature; He has been offered to bear the sins of many. Not every man, but many. So what is the difference? Have you put your faith and trust in Christ? Do you know yourself as one of the many? Do you know your sins are forgiven on account of the offering of Christ and His shed blood? Because if you do He shall appear to you the second time without sin for salvation. The Lord is coming again. You may put that

off in your mind, men may do so, but He is coming again and this time He is not going to have to deal with sin. The whole matter has been settled and He is going to take those who are His own, those who belong to Him, to be with Himself. He will not have to take up the matter of their sinful state or history with them; that matter will have been settled with the blood of Christ. Think of those words on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. Dear friend, I trust you can put your name in one of the many. Job is an example to us. For many years Job went on in a certain self-righteous state. He was a faithful and godly man, but there remained with him a certain self-righteousness. God put many things before him, largely in creation, but the children will remember the leviathan, which speaks of Satan and his power - the king of all the children of pride, chap 41. How great the leviathan is as created by God! God says, 'What can you do against him?'. You cannot bait him, you cannot touch him with a spear, or fire: none of these things can touch him. He is saying to Job, 'Against Satan you can do nothing'. He was bringing Job to an understanding that God has dealt with sin. If you will allow Him He will deal with it completely in you. He says to Job,

“Wilt thou draw out the leviathan with a hook,  
and press down his tongue with a cord?  
Wilt thou put a rush-rope into his nose,  
and pierce his jaw with a spike?  
Will he make many supplications unto thee?  
or will he speak softly unto thee?  
Will he make a covenant with thee?  
wilt thou take him as a bondman for ever?  
Wilt thou play with him as with a bird,  
and wilt thou bind him for thy maidens? ...  
Wilt thou fill his skin with darts,  
and his head with fish-spears?”

He is saying, 'Satan is a wily foe'. Do you think you can play with him for a little while, do your own thing, and then turn to God when the time suits you? Do you think you can defeat Satan or play with him, such as you would play with an animal? Dear friend, he would have your soul in an instant. Satan would have you for himself. Do not think you can play with the world and touch the world's things and draw back. Stay away from him! Keep clear of Satan, dear friend. He is too strong for you. It took Christ to deal with sin and sins. God says,

Lay thy hand upon him;  
remember the battle, do no more!", v 1-8.

That is, remember the work of Christ and how God was able to defeat Satan in Christ. It took Christ to deal with that matter and it takes the power of God to deal with Satan in you. Do not trifle with these things. Touch them very, very lightly. The world will make a big play for you. You can lose your soul. What a terrible thing to gain the whole world and lose your soul.

The Acts of the Apostles give us a great history of the beginning of the course testimony in our dispensation. It is wonderful to read of these bright believers and how the gospel spread. Three thousand persons at once heard the gospel and believed and accepted Christ as their Lord. Many persons will turn to Christ tonight, I am assured of that, and will know their sins forgiven. The weight of their sins and their sinful history will be lifted from their shoulders tonight, as they turn on their knees to Christ and find Him a blessed forgiving Saviour. That is what happened to all these persons in the beginning of the Acts, and the gospel is spreading still in spite of all the persecution. Paul found that not only did he have a transaction with Christ in his conversion, but then one with Ananias. He had a transaction with Christ, then a further transaction with the brethren, JT vol 6 p63. And what a blessed matter, he found that not only was Christ his Lord but there were many others who knew Him in this way.

Here Paul was in his first great mission, in testimony moving out towards the Gentile nations under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, and going on in faith in the Lord he was stoned. The disciples drew him out of the city, supposing him to have died. Again he found that there was a blessed area, the circle of the saints, an area of love. I think the Christian circle is seen in John's gospel in chapter 13. There was an area in the upper room where those who loved the Lord were gathered around Him. Outside were those that hated the Lord and were just about to crucify him. Inside is the Christian circle, and those who belong to it love the Lord Jesus and gather around Him, and support and love everything that is of Christ.

You find that there is love and life among those who love the Lord Jesus. Well, Paul finds that here. There is still a circle of persons, persons who encircle Paul. It does not say that the saints raised Paul. It says, "he rose up and entered into the city". That is, there is life to be found there. There is an area where all the teaching of the Scriptures is

held; where persons understand and appreciate Paul and his ministry and they hold it. They hold the truth of God. They are not influenced by a lie of Satan, the influence and the power of suggestion which holds the hearts of many, but rather by the truth of God, by the love of the Lord Jesus, and by the Holy Spirit in their hearts making these things real as we had in the reading today.

I would urge you to consider these things, that there is life and blessing and enjoyment in knowing your sins forgiven. God would give everything at the outset of the gospel. He would give the Holy Spirit to those who believe and to those that are obedient. He would bring you into an area where these things are known and enjoyed and appreciated, an area where you are looked after, an area where the saints would do everything for you. Heavenly light was given to Paul and preached to the Gentile nations - passed on to us and brought into this very country. Thank God it largely came to the western nations. It came to us, dear friend, the gospel came to us through God's grace. We have been given the greatest light and the greatest blessings. The West has turned away from it in the greatest degree, but it is still available to us and there is an area of the love, enjoyment and appreciation of all the blessings of Christianity.

May we know these things in a real way; may you not go out of the room tonight without being assured of your salvation, and being assured of what line we are on: the line of righteousness, the line of Abel, and a line of righteousness through the work of Christ. May we be assured of these things for His Name's sake.

**Kirkcaldy**

**13<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

## **GATHERING**

**J Bruce Ikin**

**Luke 11: 21 - 23**

**John 12: 31, 32**

**Luke 24: 10 35, 49**

**Ephesians 4: 1 - 3**

This verse in Luke's gospel, that “he that gathers not with me scatters”, came to me about a fortnight ago. I felt searched to the core by this verse. I was wondering about speaking of it at this occasion, and then last Lord's day the other scriptures I have read came to us in the reading and I felt more than confirmed to speak about the way the Lord Jesus gathers: the way He does it.

In Luke, we are exhorted to gather with Him. His words are, “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters”. I am searched as standing here, and no doubt everyone in this room will be searched as to whether you and I are gathering with Him or not. If I am not then I would be guilty of scattering. To gather with Him I need to see how He gathers. I also need to be with Him. The enemy is the one who would scatter the sheep. He seizes and he scatters the sheep but there is One who is stronger than he. The Lord Jesus speaks of the one “who serves for wages, and who is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees”, John 10: 12. How did the Lord Jesus serve? He served in love; love for His Father, His love for the sheep, His love for undertaking the will of the Father, cost what it may. He is the good Shepherd; He is the One who has laid down His life for the sheep. What a cost it has been to Him. He has gathered, He has brought me into the flock, and I trust He has brought everyone here in this room to the flock; and He is forming His assembly and the power for that is in the Holy Spirit.

In John's gospel He speaks about His voice. As a result of His voice there is the forming of the one body. The result of His voice is that they become one. If we are to arrive at being together, dear brethren, it must be as a result of hearing *His voice*, what He is saying at the present time. I feel searched as being asked to speak here but it is that the Lord might speak, that it might be His voice; and it is for each one of us to hear Him. How do we come to Him? Hebrews tells us that that is by leaving the camp, “therefore let us go forth to him without the camp,

bearing his reproach”, Heb 13: 13. It is not an easy way, but it is the one way: one way for every believer, one way is presented in Scripture, one way that is indicated by the Spirit, one way as indicated by the Lord Jesus; and it is through understanding what it is to bear His reproach that we find what it is to be there in the way.

I read from John because we see the way that the Lord Jesus has served and the way that He has given Himself. He indeed was lifted up upon the cross; think of the way that He has taken, “now shall the prince of this world be cast out”. He is greater than Satan. We know that Satan is strong; we know that from experience. If we are honest, we know that Satan is too much for us, but there is One stronger than he, One indeed who has taken away his power. How did He do it? It was through being lifted up, “and I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me”. This is the love of Christ, expressed in the way that He suffered, in the way that He was lifted up out of the earth. No one passing by could fail to see Him. Think of the ignominy, think of “the scandal of the cross” (Gal 5: 11); it was an awful thing that He was put there upon the cross, but He took that way. Man put Him there, but He took that way. He was prepared to suffer the ignominy and scandal of the cross because of His love for you and for me, and for His dedication to the Father’s will. It was that I should not only be saved from my sins, but should come into the knowledge of what it is to be at rest in His presence, and to gather *with* Him. He speaks of being lifted up out of the earth. This means that all that I am naturally, all my natural way of thinking, my natural feelings, all go there: they are judged, they are exposed for what they are at the cross. What a lesson that is, the way of the cross; we have to come back to that. Our brother spoke earlier of the need for humility; as we consider Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, we can only be humbled as we see what He has done for each one of us, lifted up. We know that He was lifted up as the serpent of brass put upon the pole, and that every one that looked lived, Num 21: 9. You would have to look up, and now you see there the One who was made sin for us (2 Cor 5: 21), who took on the whole matter and bore the judgment of God. As looking up to Him, I get relief, and not only relief but I see that I am delivered from all that bound me here on the earth.

I read from Luke’s gospel and this was particularly in mind as to the way He gathers. Luke presents factually the state of the company as it was. Conditions amongst the apostles were not as they should have been. It says “their words appeared in their eyes as an idle tale,

and they disbelieved them". The state was low. but what does the Lord do? He gathers. *He* gathers, and we have an example in these two persons here who were disappointed, they were disillusioned and confused. They did not know what to do; so they went back to Emmaüs, they turned their back on their brethren and they went to Emmaüs. The Lord Jesus did not leave them alone, just as He has not left me alone when I have gone astray. What a friend He is. Someone here, and I include myself, might feel troubled or disillusioned, might feel the brethren are this and that; the Lord knows and He would allow you to speak as to your feelings, but then He would turn you round. *He* will turn you round in His presence. It is a wonderful thing that *He* uses time to turn each of us round in relation to Himself; in relation to the way, *the* way of suffering that He has taken, the way that He has trod. The Lord Jesus listens to them; He listens to their discourse. They were speaking together and they were being scattered. Scattering was taking place, the enemy was in that. They were disappointed and as they speak it became evident that they thought that the Lord Jesus had failed in His mission. The Lord listened to them, He let them speak. What does He do? He brings in the answer and in doing so He shows grace: He then brings in truth.

A brother in the interval was speaking about how the Lord is marked by grace and truth. As having listened to them He rebukes them. Am I prepared to listen to the rebuke of the Lord Jesus in His presence, knowing that He loves me? He just shows me where I am in my poor state away from Him, in my disillusionment, in my disappointment. When it comes down to it, it may be I am really disappointed with the way He has taken, expressing my feelings which are natural. He is lifted up out of the earth so all that is gone. He explains everything. What a wonderful occasion this was. He covered the whole of scripture in this short interval.

The Holy Spirit would bring the Scriptures home to us and who are they about from cover to cover? They are about the Lord Jesus, the One who has revealed God, the One who has glorified God. He says, "O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!". I may say I know the Scriptures, I am familiar with the ministry, but I have to come to it I have been senseless and slow of heart. He rebukes them, but He goes on with them, "And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself". They were not yet turned

round. In His presence, suddenly their eyes are opened. I think that would have been the eyes of their hearts. Paul speaks about the eyes of our hearts in Ephesians 1: 18. How it suddenly dawns on you as to the glory of the Person! I have read about it in the ministry, I have heard and been present at meetings and I have heard the brethren speak and I have heard wonderful things said, but it has not yet dawned on me as to the glory of the Person, and suddenly it dawns and I am turned round; it is really repentance. It was not that they were grossly evil persons but they were turned round, turned round to then find their part in the Lord's direction to the way. This is mentioned twice as they retrace their steps. I do not think it took them very long to go back. They were quickly recovered to where they should be. I should have liked to have been there when they walked through the door. Think of what a reception they would have had when, as recovered persons, they "related what had happened on the way, and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread". That is not literally the Lord's supper but it was the way that the Lord did things, and thus they are fully restored. And not only that, but they help their brethren. It was part of the gathering process under the direct hand of the Lord Jesus. The Father has put the administration of this wonderful dispensation in His hands because He loves Him, and the result is that He gathers the saints to Himself.

In verse 49, they are under the commandment of the Lord Jesus. He simply asks them to do something. He says, "behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but do ye remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high". Salvation, dear brethren, is in hearing and carrying out what the Lord Jesus would direct us to do. It is all in view of our being gathered together. We know Luke writes about it in the beginning of the Acts; they were together waiting for something to happen, and that was to be "clothed with power from on high". A wonderful thing did indeed happen. The Holy Spirit came upon each one of them, and appeared as tongues of fire, Acts 2: 3, 4. He had descended on the Lord Jesus before but fire was not needed there. He was totally in accord with God's will, sin not marking Him in any way whatsoever. With you and me, the fire is needed; but what a wonderful thing happened that the Holy Spirit sat upon each one of them. It was evident for all to see as a result of the Holy Spirit coming upon them, that then they were in perfect unity. We have been speaking of how separation from evil is absolutely necessary for God's presence to be known. We also need grace, the power of unity and gathering, and so the two go hand in hand; and so it was the Holy Spirit who united the

brethren here. We were reading at home of that prayer that went up, they “lifted up their voice with one accord to God” (Acts 4: 24), which is a wonderful thing. The evidence of power was there, “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit”, v 31.

What about our day? We have read in Ephesians about the unity of the Spirit, and we know that is a tangible thing; it is a real thing. But it can be broken into, so that we are to use “diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit”. The unity of the Spirit, I believe, is known through being subject to Him, subject to what He says, what He is saying to the assemblies. The Lord Jesus, as the Lawgiver, would direct and give wisdom in each local assembly in relation to what is due to Him. The Holy Spirit speaks universally; the unity of the Spirit is known as we align ourselves with what He is saying at the present time. So we are to use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. That means I have to judge myself, my own feelings, and leave them there at the cross.

In addressing the divided state in Corinth, which was so grievous to Paul, amongst all the other things in his letter to the Corinthians; the first thing he brings out is the cross. My own feelings, my own inclinations, my own murmurings, my own rebellion against what the Lord might be saying I leave there at the cross, and identify with what He is saying, and with what the Holy Spirit is saying; and thus we find that there is power for unity in the uniting bond of peace. Without the unity of the Spirit there will be no uniting bond of peace. If we try to walk together in disagreement there will not be that bond. Our bond is in the truth and the power for understanding and walking in the truth is in the Holy Spirit. What a Friend we have, a personal friend and indeed One who would help us as together. The Lord Jesus has in mind that we should be maintained together in alignment with Himself, and the power for it is in the Holy Spirit.

May God bless the word.

**Maidstone**

**31<sup>st</sup> May 2014**

## **EDITORS' NOTE**

In the October issue (No 91), on p 15, a section in the middle of the page should read as follows -

“We know we cannot fathom the depth of the Lord’s sufferings. That point was reached when God forsook Him....”

We agree with our brother Paul Gray that this more closely reflects what the Lord Jesus Himself says about this holy matter, Matt 27: 46.