

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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COMFORT

John 14: 15-21

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PAG It will be clear that the thought of comfort runs through these scriptures. We had a touch in our hymn, and in the opening prayer, of what it will be to be in the Lord's presence for ever. We have touches of our eternal portion at the moment, but we are still in a scene where comfort is needed. When we are with Him, we will not need to be comforted because we will be in His presence all the time, but where we are, comfort is required, and it is a wonderful thing that a divine Person is named the Comforter. He is "another Comforter"; so the comfort that the disciples had when they were in the Lord's presence when He was here is still available because there is a divine Person here now. Sometimes the disciples were with the Lord and sometimes they were not. They went away to buy provisions, for example; or the Lord went to the mountain, to pray; they were elsewhere. They enjoyed His presence, no doubt, but there were times when He was not there, but the Holy Spirit is here all the time. The Lord says to His disciples, "but ye know him, for he abides with you," - that was because the Lord was anointed with the Holy Spirit - "and shall be in you". That was when the Spirit came at Pentecost.

And then that works out in our relations with one another. The word to Isaiah is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God"; so the prophet is instructed to comfort the people, and I believe that, as enjoying relationships with divine Persons, we can comfort one another. The Lord says, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you". The King James Version says, "I will not leave you comfortless". The Lord also says, "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you". There would be direct relations with divine Persons as the Lord was on high and the Spirit here. The enjoyment of these relations forms a basis for bringing comfort to one another.

Then as to Genesis 24 we must not forget that the Lord Himself proves comfort in His present relations with the assembly. Israel's praise is silent. It says, "And Isaac was comforted after the death of his mother". Really, as far as affections towards the Lord are concerned, Israel is dead, but the Lord has comfort in His assembly. But the Lord feels the fact that the present scene is largely unresponsive to Him, and He proves comfort in what He has in His assembly. I wondered if we

could get help together.

DCB It is indeed helpful to be reminded that we have “another Comforter”. It is not that the Lord has ceased to be a Comforter. He remains, as does the Father, but what fulness there is in the supply of the comfort that comes directly to us by the Spirit.

PAG Yes, so Paul speaks to the saints in Corinth about “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions, and God of all encouragement” (2 Cor 1: 3); so “the Father of compassions” is known, and the Lord Himself in His present Priesthood no doubt comforts us. It says in Hebrews, “For he does not indeed take hold of angels by the hand, but he takes hold of the seed of Abraham”, chap 2: 16. I judge that the comfort we enjoy in communion with divine Persons is known to us on a spiritual basis because the Spirit is here. So, “another Comforter” would remind us that divine Persons are set to comfort us and to keep us now.

JTB In Acts there is a reference to the assemblies being “increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit”, chap 9: 31. That comes in after the matter of the introduction of Saul of Tarsus, which was settled, was it not? Do you think the Lord in His grace - having accomplished all His work, and therefore to maintain the saints in the good of His work - provided the Comforter? The matter of Saul of Tarsus had been addressed, and given the significance of Paul in the development of the testimony, comfort comes in there. I suppose divine Persons really operated in that way to ensure that there was a basis in which we can have confidence in the ministry of Paul.

PAG It is interesting that Peter came to the tomb in John 20, and entered into the tomb and “sees the linen cloths lying, and the handkerchief which was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a distinct place by itself”, v 6, 7. Now, Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul, coming in really made way for a great unfolding of what had been hitherto retained, and I believe the unfolding of Paul's ministry coming from an ascended Head would be of particular comfort to the saints of this dispensation, as really showing them that Christ was living on high. The Lord had not simply disappeared; He had gone on high and was still unfolding things through the apostle.

JTB That must have given them great assurance: “that he may be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth”. It is marvellous consolation that a divine Person should be with us for ever.

PAG Yes; so this service will never be withdrawn until the testimony's course is completed here, but then the Spirit's mediatorial service will be retained because we will always be creatures although we will have bodies of glory.

JTB Thinking about the mediatorial service of the Holy Spirit, it is a very blessed thing to think that we have the Lord's mediatorial service and that is distinctive, but another divine Person is also serving. It shows you how well provided we are.

PAG That is what I was thinking. There is a lot encapsulated in verse 20: "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you". We should be comforted by the thought that divine Persons are dwelling but they are providing us with a dwelling-place too.

DHM I wondered if there was a suggestion that divine Persons are working together in relation to all of this. We have the Father, and we have the Lord Jesus, and we have the Holy Spirit. We have them mentioned in one verse, which is quite unusual. You get the sense that they are all at one with this.

PAG I think so. The operation of divine Persons is always at one and when you see the Trinity, as revealed, operating together, it brings a particular distinction to the moment. If you think of the time of the Lord's baptism, for example, the Spirit descended as a dove and abode upon Him, but there is a voice out of the heavens. The Father's voice was heard. So the Father and the Son and the Spirit were there. Then in relation to His death, "who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God", Heb 9: 14. There is a particular distinction, do you think, given to moments in the course of the testimony where the Trinity is seen operating together?

DHM That is very helpful because here you see it in operation. There must have been great reassurance that there would be new relationships established with the Holy Spirit, and new relationships established with the Father. Here there is almost a preview of that as to what is going to take place. We are not going to be left as orphans; there is going to be a great source of supply.

PAG The believer must feel the orphan character of being in this world. We are not here with anything outward to support or sustain our faith; it must be an inward, spiritual matter. The Lord is reassuring them here that they will not be left without resource. Indeed, they will have a greater resource than the world has: "greater is he that is in you than he

that is in the world”, 1 John 4: 4.

GB In John 17 the Lord's prayer to the Father is very full of the love which they proved when Christ was here, but in view of His going on high He is saying, “keep them in thy name”, v 11.

PAG Yes; this dispensation in which we are is the Spirit's day, and therefore what is enjoyed is by the Spirit, but it is to be no less than it was when the Lord was here. Indeed, it is greater to us because the Spirit helps us in understanding. I was struck this morning when we were together for the Supper, both as to the knowledge we have of divine Persons, and as to the power we have to enjoy what proceeds. That is a direct consequence of the Spirit being here. The disciples had a certain amount of knowledge when the Lord was here. They had everything before them objectively, but they had not the power to take it in because “the Spirit was not yet”, John 7: 39.

DJH And do we prove this as our relationships are right with the Lord Jesus also? I was thinking of the introduction of this, “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter”. It seems our relations with the Lord Jesus are still maintained, rightly, in view of our enjoyment of the presence of the Comforter.

PAG I think that. It is very important to understand what this word “another” conveys. It is not a 'Comforter instead of'; it is *additional*; it is “another Comforter”; so our relations with the Lord must be maintained. We have the opportunity to take up relationships on a wider scope on account of the Spirit being here, but it is “another Comforter”; it is not a replacement.

DJH I was thinking that. It is not that one Comforter is lost and another One comes, but it is “another” as additional.

DCB The Lord says in Matthew, “Blessed they that mourn, for *they* shall be comforted”, chap 5: 4. Circumstances are such that mourning is and was appropriate. Mourning is not to cease exactly; but there is a blessing in that comfort that can only come from divine Persons.

PAG If our relations with divine Persons are right, and because the Spirit is here, we would feel things more deeply, rather than less so. You see the way the Lord felt things when He was here. A certain condition came before Him, and it says, “he groaned” (Mark 7: 34); in another matter, the death of Lazarus, He “wept”, John 11: 35. His

feelings were unique, and distinctive to Him, particularly in relation to the cross itself: “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour”, John 12: 27. He felt things in depth. The Spirit would help us to feel things in depth, but He would not cause us to be overwhelmed by them, do you think?

DCB We can think of what the disciples were about to undergo as the Lord was taken away, going to the cross, and He says, “ye shall weep and lament, ye, but the world shall rejoice”, John 16: 20. This whole series of chapters would be giving something to sustain them before that particular trial.

PAG We are often glad to recall the Lord's words in Luke 4 when He quotes from Isaiah 61 as to “the acceptable year of the Lord”, v 19. That section in Isaiah 61 goes on to say, “to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, that beauty should be given unto them instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness”, v 2, 3. We might think of the Spirit, the Comforter, as being linked with “the oil of joy” but yet the mourning goes on, “to comfort all that mourn”, and particularly in relation to mourning in Zion. There would be sorrow, even in relation to the greatest of God's thoughts and the way that they have been largely set aside, but there are those who can be comforted and who can see that God is carrying the greatest of His thoughts through, and will bring them out in triumph.

RCT The fact is that the Spirit remains. There is a verse in Haggai, “The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you: fear ye not”, chap 2: 5. That is something the enemy has been against, the continuance of the Spirit here.

PAG Because it is the Spirit's day, the enemy's attack might be particularly against that, and would promote all that would cancel out the service of the Spirit. Liturgies and other systems of set worship would tend to displace the Spirit, but the life that is maintained by the Spirit's presence and by giving place to Him is something that is very pleasing to God.

DHM Do you think that in a way this whole section in John 14 alludes to the prospect of a vibrant life in Christianity after the Lord is gone and has taken up His place as ascended?

PAG I think it does. There is triumph in that: in a scene of adversity God can bring through life. The word “life” is important. It is not a form

or a doctrine; it is life. I have been thinking lately of what came to Hezekiah, “The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I this day”, Isa 38: 19. There is life. The Lord Himself makes clear that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and the scripture says that, “The dead praise not Jah” (Ps 115: 17), but the Spirit is bringing in life according to God.

DHM We are reading locally in Romans and several chapters end with that thought, “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (chap 5: 21) and “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”, Rom 6: 21. It is something that is living.

PAG It is. We prove that in Romans, “but the Spirit life on account of righteousness”, chap 8: 10. “For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace”, chap 8: 6. Before that we come to the point when we recognise that because of who the Lord is and where He is, we are “saved in the power of his life”, Rom 5: 10. God is maintaining a system of life in the midst of a scene of death.

DJH “Because I live ye also shall live; I was just thinking that confirms what you are saying. It is because He is alive there, we live here. That is by the Spirit.

PAG It is, and that is very important because we might think that we live because He has died, but we live because He lives. He died so that we might live, but the maintenance of our life is because He lives. By the Spirit we get the benefit of that.

JTB It shows how the Christian is superior to what is in the world. You have already referred to “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world”, but I was thinking when Noah sent out the dove, she “found no resting-place for the sole of her foot” (Gen 8: 9); then she came back with “an olive-leaf plucked off”, v 11. There must be some pleasure for the Holy Spirit having begun the work of new birth in a person’s soul, then to come and indwell him, and in such a capacity, not only as the Spirit of life, but as a Comforter.

PAG I think that. In Ephesians 1: 12 and 13 it speaks about “the Christ: in whom ye also have trusted, having heard the word of the truth, the glad tidings of your salvation”. New birth enters into that because there would be no hearing if there was not new birth. But then it says, “in whom also, having believed, ye have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”. The Spirit comes in to seal what He has begun, to seal what is for God, do you think?

JTB We had a touch about the anointing recently, and God is in the matter too: the work is His. But to be sealed and to be anointed is very blessed.

PAG As you know, in Leviticus 2 there is a very helpful note that draws out the matter of anointing but also mingling (v 4, note k). Mr Darby points out as to the thought of mingling, 'it formed his strength'. It is a wonderful thing to think of, that the Spirit in that sense forms our strength, both in relation to what we may have to face here, and also for what is heavenly. We are strengthened for our walk here in Romans, although you also get the matter of response, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father", chap 8: 15.

JTB "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us", Rom 5: 5. What wonderful diversity of functions He discharges!

PAG I think that. It is good for us to understand that whatever the Lord did in service for His own when He was here, the Spirit would do for us now. There is not some deficiency as a result of the Lord being on high, but rather, what is available is expanded.

DCB I was wondering about verse 20 which you read on to, which makes no direct reference to the Spirit, but you can see that it must be by the Spirit. It is only in the Spirit's power that you can know what it is, "ye in me, and I in you".

PAG I judge "In that day" to be the Spirit's day. It is really when the Spirit is here: "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you". How else could we know it, because that is an entirely spiritual thought? It is not something we can see. The evidence of it is by the present service of the Holy Spirit, would you say?

DCB Yes, so that this is where we would look to see that we are united to Christ, and being united to Christ must be by the Spirit.

PAG John does not describe things in any official sense. So union does not come into John explicitly, and the assembly is not formally mentioned in John, although the personnel of the assembly are, but the practical expression of being united to Christ is this: "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you". When Paul says, "and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3: 19), we could not know that but by the Spirit. But if we know it, we know that what the Lord says, "I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I

in you”; “the love of the Christ” is not simply Christ's love for the assembly, but it is His love for the Father too, and we know it by the Spirit.

DJH I was just thinking of the way this matter of love comes in again. As referred to earlier it is, “If ye love me”, and here it is a question of loving Him also. We always think of that as related to the divine nature. That must be by the Spirit that is working in us in view of the knowledge of this wonderful relationship.

PAG I would say so. What a comfort it is to be brought into the enjoyment of divine love, not just to be the objects of it, but to be able to reciprocate and to dwell in the conditions in which that love is free.

We might look at Isaiah. The thought is that these known relationships, enjoyed with divine Persons, would have a direct effect on our relations with one another. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God”. This was an instruction to Isaiah the prophet but, nevertheless, I believe it would bear on us all. The Lord had said not long before where we read in John, “A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you”, chap 13: 34. That was the standard of divine affections, which would now apply in the relations that would be formed, and would be suitable to saints of the assembly. There are many references in the New Testament to our relations with one another, “using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace” (Eph 4: 3); also, “be to one another kind, compassionate, forgiving one another, so as God also in Christ has forgiven you”, Eph 4: 32. It is worked out at the divine standard. It is not mere philanthropy or being pleasant to one another; it is worked out on the basis of the divine standard of affection, and it is a matter of righteousness to do so.

DJH So it says not simply 'saith God' but “saith your God”. Does that confirm what you say? It is a God who is known, is it not, according to His nature and the way it has been expressed?

PAG I think that. It comes with authority but it also comes with affection, “saith your God”. He is giving Isaiah a direction here which He expects him to follow, but it is a direction coming from One whom Isaiah knows.

DHM It really operates through right feelings. Agitation has no place in Christianity really. The devil would seek to cause agitation, but it is interesting that comfort is something that would put that to one side and

put us at rest. We read just the other week here in Matthew 8 how the Lord slept on the ship, v 24. Things were adverse in many ways, but comfort would help us at times like that.

PAG I do think that. In Mark's gospel in chapter 1 it says, "And the mother-in-law of Simon lay in a fever. And straightway they speak to him about her. And he went up to her and raised her up, having taken her by the hand, and straightway the fever left her, and she served them", v 30, 31. The Lord took this dear woman by the hand and the fever left her. She was comforted. In another setting it tells us that it was "a bad fever", Luke 4: 38. It had maybe gone on for some time, but the Lord took her by the hand. That is the Lord's comfort. He takes us by the hand. Just to be simple, things do make us feverish at times in our spirits; that happens. We should not pretend that it does not, but then is it possible for us to take one another by the hand? It need not be a literal matter, although it might be, but just to assure one another of our desire to provide these conditions of restfulness in which the Spirit's voice can be heard.

DHM You are right. Things come in and sometimes our spirits could be better. On reflection, I think we would almost always say that, but we have something we can go back to, this commandment of love: "A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you". That is something we can fall back on.

RCT "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people" would come from respect for one another, would it?

PAG It does, I am sure. I have often been struck by Acts 21 when they sought to kill Paul. It says "And as they were seeking to kill him a representation came to the chiliarch ... But they, seeing the chiliarch and the soldiers, ceased beating Paul" (v 31, 32); what a dreadful way to treat Paul! As soon as Paul had the opportunity to speak to them, it says, "and a great silence having been made, he addressed them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Brethren and fathers", chap 21: 40; chap 22: 1. One might ask, why would you speak to people that had just been beating you ten minutes before? But he addressed them in the Hebrew tongue, spoke to them in their own language. He could have spoken to them in another language but he says, "Brethren and fathers". Even at that time when they had been attacking him, he sought to comfort them rather than attack them in return.

JTB When Eutychus fell through the window, there was obviously a

lot of consternation, but the solution to that was Paul descending and enfolding him in his arms, and they “were no little comforted”, Acts 20: 12. That was the effect of Paul's actions to revive the stricken youth.

PAG I have no doubt Eutychus was comforted, but they were comforted. Just to be very simple, we may think of Eutychus as a rather naughty, foolish boy; we wonder if he should have been listening and he was not; or that perhaps he was looking out of the window, and he was bored and he fell asleep; but Paul did not say, 'Never mind; he is not of much account'. He descended and enfolded him in his arms; he went right down to where he was. The Lord has been like that with us.

JTB The way the Spirit puts it is, “And they brought away the boy alive, and were no little comforted”. Obviously, their consolation was complete, and they were now at ease, having this recovered youth in their midst.

PAG Yes, and that made way for certain things to take place. That is another thing the Lord would have us understand. If we are comforted and restful, it makes way for Him, and things can move on.

JTB It leads to the elders being summoned and so on, that great chapter.

PAG That is what I was thinking, and all that flows out of the incident. He would just bring a certain calm to the situation, and then there would be a further unfolding.

RCT Paul could recognise “his life is in him”, v 10. That was of the Spirit, do you think?

PAG It is a great comfort to us all that, even if a person has got away, we can recognise that there is life still there. That is what we should be looking for. The Lord going after the two on the way to Emmaüs had to rebuke what they had done. He calls them “senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken”, Luke 24: 25. But there was something living there, and they say, “Was not our heart burning in us”, v 32. The Lord recognised that there was life there that could be reignited.

DCB In 1 Corinthians, there is the reference to the prophetic word as being for “edification, and encouragement, and consolation”, chap 14: 3. I was wondering, in the context of Isaiah, since it is the prophet that seems to be addressed to “Comfort ye, comfort ye”, whether the prophetic word should play a particular part in the comfort of the people

of God.

PAG It should. I do not mean in any particular case or situation; I just mean in general; if something is wrong, it needs to be named and corrected, but it should not be our occupation. Our occupation should be what comforts the saints and what builds them up. I know my own heart. We can become taken up with things, whatever they are, whether in assembly matters or family matters or other things that may weigh on our spirits, but the Spirit's service is to occupy us with a Man in the glory, and I believe that is a comfort to the saints. In one sense there is no more comforting occasion than the Lord's supper, where the Lord, to put it simply, fulfils every promise that He made. Think of the scripture in 2 Corinthians, "For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us", chap 1: 20. You can see it all spread out before you at the Supper, and it is a time of great comfort, I believe, to the hearts of the saints, but also comfort to the heart of divine Persons.

DJH It is a proof of what we referred to earlier: "because I live ye also shall live". We have an impression, a real experience, of what it is to be living, and therefore it brings in this life and comfort to us, does it not?

PAG It does. There were difficult times amongst the brethren in the 1960s, but my father often goes over the fact that the Supper never ceased; it was maintained. The Lord maintained that so that the saints might be kept and comforted.

DJH Yes; I can remember it was very real at that time, and the Supper itself went through in a peculiar distinctiveness.

PAG Well, the Lord would see to that. It is His own direct command. Paul says, "For I received from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you", 1 Cor 11: 23. The Lord's command relates to the Supper. On other occasions, we have had help as to how they might be conducted as time has gone on, but the Supper itself, the setting on of the emblems, is the Lord's own command.

DCB Would you say something about the fact that divine Persons may be viewed as needing comfort?

PAG We spoke already about divine feelings. Think of the Lord's feelings in relation to Israel at the present time. They may observe certain rites, and follow a calendar, but there is no living link with their Lord, their rejected Messiah. He feels that. There is no food in

criticising what other Christians go on with, but, suffice to say, in certain areas of Christendom things have been allowed in which are directly contrary to Scripture, including what is corrupt. The Lord feels all that. It is not simply that He looks on it and dismisses it. He feels it. Well, then, is He to have any comfort in the present time? It says, "He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall he lift up the head", Ps 110: 7. He *is* to have comfort at the present time when there is silence in Israel and deadness in certain areas of Christendom, although there are very real believers in some places. We would not deny that at all. Is the Lord to have comfort? I believe He is.

JTB Psalm 69 is very affecting: "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am overwhelmed: and I looked for sympathy, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none", v 20.

PAG Well, the Lord has been that way, and do you think the spirit of that may still be found amongst true believers? They look for comforters and find none, persons perhaps, particularly in isolated circumstances, where there is nobody to understand, but the Lord understands.

DHM The Lord really wants to be remembered in affection by His own. The hymn puts it well. It says,

Love's remembrance, Lord, Thou seekest
From Thine own assembled thus (Hymn 30).

PAG Yes. We do not assemble because it is a meeting that is announced. We come with true hearts: "we being assembled to break bread", Acts 20: 7. There is a dignity that attaches to it. It may be a very few persons. You will know what that is like, just a few coming together, but we are not just congregating at a particular time of day. We are assembling to break bread, because we recognise the rights of the One who has called us to that place, and our hearts are affected by it. We sang that hymn this morning:

Thine is the love, Lord, that draws us together (Hymn 4).

We have one Object for our affections as we come in.

DCB It is really a very great privilege that we should have part in what is for comfort to the Lord Himself. Perhaps we need to be conscious of what that is as coming to the Supper.

PAG I feel that. We are doing what He asked us to do. We may, and

we do, look at it from the standpoint of what it means to us, but He asked us to do it because of what it means to Him, that He should have His portion, that the Spirit should have His portion, and that the Father should have His place, be recognised and responded to. We cannot really measure what that means to the heart of divine Persons. We should also, I believe, take account of the fact that as the service proceeds we may be responding to the Lord or to the Spirit or to the Father, but the other divine Persons are not absent at that point. They too are taking account of what proceeds and are receiving something as a result of that.

JTB There is a certain poignancy in that it was “in the night in which he was delivered up” that the Lord Jesus “took bread ... and said, This is my body”, 1 Cor 11: 23, 24. He sought remembrance in such an atmosphere, at such a point in His sojourn here, “the night in which he was delivered up”.

PAG The hymn-writer takes that up:

On that same night, Lord Jesus,
When all around combined
To cast its darkest shadow
Across Thy holy mind (Hymn 435).

Think of all that lay upon His spirit at that time, and what would He say? Well, as to the passover, He says, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer”, Luke 22: 15. There is what He desired at that time, but He desired that they should remember Him: “this do in remembrance of me”, 1 Cor 11: 24.

GB The message through Mary was “go to my brethren”, John 20: 17. It was an occasion of rejoicing with the disciples gathered.

PAG Yes, indeed, and that is what came about: “The disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord”, v 20. “Having seen the Lord”: not simply having heard that He was risen, but “having seen the Lord”. That again would give character to the occasion, do you think? That we might see Him as He is; not as He was, but as He is.

DCB We are announcing “the death of the Lord, until he come”, 1 Cor 11: 26. When He comes, what is included in that is that He will have His rights in Israel and in the world, of course, publicly restored; but it is a privilege of the period of His absence that there should be those who answer to His desire.

PAG Yes, and as you say, He will be established here on earth, and there will be no need to remember a Person as He is present. We do not have to remember someone if they are there, but we call Him to mind. That does suggest something not simply passive, but active. I think the Spirit helps us to call Him to mind. If our minds are available to the Spirit, the Lord would have access to them.

DCB Is that part of having the actual emblems there? They give us a focus for our attention and would affect our spirits every time we gather.

PAG Yes. We do not have much that is symbolic, and rightly so; so if the Lord has left that for us, it must be particularly significant. He has not left us signs or symbols or icons. I know some have adopted them, but this is what He left, the loaf and the cup; so they must have a special significance. I suppose there are the two things that have visible signs attached to them, one is the Supper and the other is baptism. Now, if these have been left by the Lord, then we must regard them as having special significance.

GB When Jacob saw the waggons, he “revived”, Gen 45: 27.

PAG Well, that is right. “Joseph my son is yet alive” (v 28); Christ is living. I suppose Jacob had decided long ago that Joseph was dead, but he was not, and not only was he not dead, but he had a great administration of blessing under his hand, and it was all available for Jacob. Jacob says, “I will go and see him before I die”.

GB So Joseph had said, “And tell my father of all my glory”, v 13.

PAG Yes; his brethren were to tell his father of all his glory in Egypt. We have the opportunity now to tell the Father of all Christ's glory. We can do that. That all flows out of the Supper. What a comfort to the heart of divine Persons that there is an occasion where believers can come together and take account of divine glory, and can respond to it.

JTB It says of King Solomon's palanquin

The midst thereof was paved with love
By the daughters of Jerusalem

Song of Songs 3: 10.

They created an environment where that matter of consolation for the heart of Christ could be met, do you think?

PAG I think that. Much depends on what divine Persons do, of course, and without Them there is nothing, but we do have a responsibility. Even here, I know it is a little different, but in verse 65 it

says, "Then she took the veil, and covered herself". She came prepared too. We can prepare the conditions in which divine Persons can receive what is due to them.

JTB You have quoted: "He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall he lift up the head": what satisfaction for Christ to have this portion at the Supper!

PAG You would hardly think of the Lord being refreshed, and yet He is. It is not that He requires to be strengthened in any way, but, nevertheless, He finds refreshment in what comes before Him.

JTB The psalm says, "from the womb of the morning shall come to thee the dew of thy youth", v 3. These are invigorated persons; they are typical of persons indwelt by the Spirit.

PAG Yes, indeed; the Spirit's power is really pervading all. The dew in that sense covers all and strengthens. I have often thought of Song of Songs 4: 8:

Come with me, from Lebanon, my spouse,
With me, from Lebanon.

The gospel says come *to* me, but in the Supper it is, "Come with me". He wants those who have come *to* Him to come *with* Him.

Edinburgh

30th April 2017

List of initials (Edinburgh unless otherwise shown):-

G Bailey; D C Brown; J T Brown; P A Gray, Grangemouth; D J Hutson;
D H Marshall; R C Trotter

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Alistair M Brown

Luke 11: 1-4, 9-13

Romans 8: 24-28

Colossians 4: 12

Ephesians 3: 14-21

The matter of prayer has been before me since our reading on Lord's day afternoon when we read the first half of Luke 11. The disciples heard the Lord praying, and when He had finished they asked Him to teach them to pray. Taking account of that blessed One in prayer, they must have been greatly struck by what the Lord said, and the way in which He prayed, and so they asked Him to teach them to pray. The Lord was pleased by that request and says, "When ye pray, say, Father". He immediately brings before them the name of the Father, the name of relationship. The Lord was glad to answer the request of the disciples to be taught to pray. As in everything, He is the great Pattern. It is wonderful to think of the Lord in prayer as a Man. In Luke's gospel I think the Lord is spoken of eight times as being in prayer. He sought things from His Father as a dependent, blessed and perfect Man. His perfection under pressure is borne out by what is recorded at the end of His pathway: His prayer in Gethsemane was intense. That should be in our minds as we consider the matter of prayer.

How important prayer is for every believer. Somebody who does not know about prayer could hardly describe themselves as a Christian. Every believer would pray. It is an absolutely vital part of Christian life and experience, and I would urge upon myself first of all to give more time to prayer. A brother notable amongst the saints once said that if he had his life over again, he would pray more, FER vol 12 p137. A simple exercise would be to spend more time in prayer. The Lord, speaking to His own in a parallel passage to this in Matthew 6: 5 to 14, tells His own not to pray as the Pharisees did. They stood on the street corners and said their prayers, and they liked vain repetition. In that sense, prayer is essentially a private matter. In contrast to the Pharisees, therefore, the believer was to go into his chamber, and close the door and pray in secret to his heavenly Father, and the "Father who sees in secret would render it to" him. So prayer is a personal matter and is part of the bedrock of our Christian lives. It is very, very important. We should, every one of us, begin the day with prayer and

we should finish the day with prayer. I need exhortation, and I exhort myself in this matter.

Prayer is an expression of dependence. We realise that we do not have the answers, and we have needs, and worries and fears, concerns and troubles, and we cannot resolve things ourselves. But we have recourse in prayer to One who has the answer to every question. He “is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think”. What a blessed matter for a Christian to get into the presence of One who has made Himself known, and to express his needs to Him. What a blessed matter to know that when we pray we have the ear as somebody has said - of the One whose hand controls the universe. So the matter of expressing dependence is important.

Another important matter is that prayer would be in faith. We believe in the One to whom we pray, and we believe in His power and His beneficence towards us. We believe in the One who gave His Son to be our Saviour. How He loves to hear prayer directed to Him in dependence and in faith. But prayer is even more than that: it is an expression of communion. It is a matter truly of communion of the soul of a believer with God, an expression of relationship, and thus of communion. I commend to all, including myself, the matter of prayer, and of concentration and perseverance in it. The apostle Paul speaks frequently of persevering in prayer, which suggests that there may be opposition to prayer, and that we have to overcome it. There will be opposition in ourselves. We may find that we have not left enough time: that is a matter to be overcome. We have to persevere. It may be that our minds wander. I am speaking here from personal experience. The word is to persevere in prayer, to set ourselves for it, to wrestle in the matter of prayer, to be sustained in it and to be characterised by it. If anything comes along, our first reaction should be to go to God about it in prayer, even in a fleeting moment. If something comes up at work or at school, let us pray about it.

There is also the matter of to whom we pray. We pray to God, and the fact that the Lord in this passage says, “When ye pray, say, Father”, indicates that the Lord had in mind that a believer would turn to the Father in prayer. He is the One who knows all about our needs. We are also able to pray to the Lord Jesus as the One who sympathises, our great High Priest, the Saviour of the body. We might particularly turn to the Lord Jesus as to these matters, as to illness and suffering, physically and mentally too. We can also pray to the Holy Spirit,

particularly to guard us and keep us from temptation. He is in us. If you are a believer who is obedient to the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is within you, and you can turn to Him and instantly receive the power to resist temptation. These things are real and I commend them to us all, particularly to myself.

Luke 11: 9 speaks about asking, seeking and knocking. The Lord said, "And I say to you. Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you". He goes on to say, "For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it will be opened". These are the Lord's own words and they are for us. They were said to the disciples, but they are for us, too. They are very blessed and instructive words. The matter that the Lord brings in at the end is receiving the Holy Spirit. It appears that the objective before the Lord Jesus in giving this instruction and this teaching to His own was that they should receive the Holy Spirit on the basis of their asking. The Holy Spirit was not here literally at this point. He came down, as we know, after the Lord went into the glory; but the Lord had in mind that the disciples should ask for and should receive the Holy Spirit. If there is anyone here, a believer, who is not yet sure that they have the Holy Spirit, then He is given to the believer on the basis of desire and exercise to have the power and the help of the Holy Spirit by asking, and he who asks receives. The Lord would love to hear a prayer uttered by a believer who wanted to receive the Holy Spirit. You can count on the Lord's word that "every one that asks receives", and then the Spirit is with you forever. The Scripture says that He is with us for ever (John 14: 16); so we have that indwelling power to help us. We may grieve Him (Eph 4:30), so - having been exercised to ask for His presence and for His power - as responsible believers we must seek not to grieve the Spirit, but to make room for Him and give Him space to operate in our hearts. Asking implies what is specific, and relates to felt need. I would encourage my own heart to ask in prayer. We need to ask according to God's will. It would not be intelligent to ask for something that was not according to God's will. It would not, for example, be intelligent for a believer to ask for some special earthly blessing because now is not a time for earthly blessing. We need to ask according to God's will.

Sometimes we do not know what to ask for, as indicated in Romans 8. You are not alone if you do not know what to ask for. You may feel something has come up and you do not know what to say in prayer. If so, you are in the company of Moses, because he did not

know. In a period of great trouble in the history of the children of Israel, he says in Exodus 33, “make me now to know thy way, that I may know thee”, v 13. That was Moses' prayer of dependence. He was a man of God but he did not know what he should do and he prayed to God about it, “make me now to know thy way”. He sought the sense and the blessing of God's presence. I thought the scripture in Romans 8 bore that out. Here the apostle Paul takes account of the fact that we may not know what to pray for as is fitting, and then “the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness”. Weakness is part of the human condition. As is often pointed out, it is not will. It is where we desire to do what is right but we do not know what the right thing is to do, and in that situation, as we allow the Spirit to come in to our minds and our hearts, He joins His help to our weakness. He is not weak; He is powerful: what power the Holy Spirit has, but He joins His help to our weakness, and in doing so, “the Spirit itself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered”. That implies feelings. As we seek the help of the Holy Spirit to pray rightly, that is like a double expression of dependence on the part of the believer. Then the Spirit Himself makes intercession. He takes up the cause of the believer as He Himself “makes intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered”. It would convey something of the feelings of a divine Person as expressed on the lips of a believer.

Then it goes on to say that “he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for saints according to God”. So that the Spirit always knows what God's mind is, and what His will is, and if we seek the Spirit, and ask in faith genuinely, then the Spirit will help us to know what God's mind is in a matter. We will be conscious of His help, and His power joining His help to our weakness, so that we might pray for what is according to God. That One in whose strength we are praying knows the mind of God Himself. So whatever we ask for, the important thing is to ask according to God's will, and if we feel that we do not know what that is, and even if we feel that we do, ask the Holy Spirit for help that we might pray rightly according to God. We have available to us the power of that One who searches all things, even the depths of God, to make things known to us.

I was encouraged, too, by what we read in Ephesians 3, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ “is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think”. What a God we have to do with; what power, plenitude, and resource is towards us. That scripture suggests that God's ear is attuned to whatever His own might ask or think. Think

of the Father having you in His heart, drawing you to Christ, seeing the reaction in you as a believer, in faith towards Christ! How the Father takes an interest in someone drawn to Christ, in affection for Him and faith in Him. Our faint or feeble cry reaches the ears of that blessed One. He takes account of our prayers and He loves to answer, and He does so as the One who “is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think”.

In the passage that we read in Luke 11, the next thing the Lord speaks about is seeking, “seek, and ye shall find”, and then it says, “he that seeks finds”. I link that to the scripture we have read in Colossians. Seeking is not so much a matter of distinct felt need, but of seeking something outside ourselves. Epaphras might be an example of one who was seeking; he sought the blessing of his brethren. He was a brother who lived in Colosse, “one of you”. He cared about his brethren. No doubt he served them in various ways, but one way in which he served them was to seek their blessing by prayer. In prayer a believer can seek things for his or her brethren, because this is for sisters and brothers equally. I am sure Epaphras prayed at the prayer meeting for his brethren, but I think that he would pray privately too. He is described as “the bondman of Christ Jesus”; so he was a fervent and committed brother, “always combating earnestly for you in prayers”. His whole being was committed to this; he was consistent and persevering in it. It says in verse 2, “Persevere in prayer”. Epaphras persevered in prayer he did not pray a couple of times and then forget about it. It characterised him, that he always combated earnestly in prayers, “to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God”. His particular burden was his local brethren in Colosse, that they might be able to occupy the ground and stand up in it as responsible persons, “perfect and complete”; - 'fully assured', footnote e says - “in all the will of God”. What a thing that is to seek after. It is a right thing to seek for your local brethren. How strengthening to be in a gathering where sisters and brothers all had that exercise - to combat earnestly in prayer that the brethren would stand “perfect and complete in all the will of God”. I think it would give moral and spiritual strength in our localities. It would be a great thing to pray like Epaphras, having the brothers and sisters that I know and love in my mind. God would love to hear an Epaphras type of prayer; He would love to hear Epaphras pray. Epaphras had God's will in mind; he was thinking for God. He did not simply think about the blessing of his brethren, but he sought the blessing of the brethren according to the will of God, and his desire was,

not that they should just come to the edge of God's will, or have *some* appreciation of it, but that they should “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God”. I think Epaphras himself must have had a full appreciation of what God's will was. It went beyond the individual blessing of these souls. It would include that, but it went on, I believe, to embrace God's desire that there should be what was according to Christ and faithful to Him, faithful to that high calling. He would pray that the Holy Spirit should be free in the company at Colosse, and that souls would be filled with the Spirit, and that they should be overflowing, imbued with affection for the Lord Jesus and for each other too, so that there should be something that was entirely according to God's will and pleasing to the Lord Jesus here, forming part of His assembly. That was what Epaphras sought, and the Lord says, “he that seeks finds”. So I commend to myself and everyone here a desire to seek, as Epaphras did, the blessing of saints in our localities, praying for our brethren in this way. I feel the test of that but also the necessity for it. It is good to pray for one another by name, speaking about what you know about the exercises, pressures and sorrows of the brethren, and about the work of God in them. Heaven takes account of that. It is also difficult to be out at elbows with a brother or sister that you have been praying for the day before.

The third matter that the Lord Jesus spoke to His own about in Luke 11 was knocking, “knock, and it shall be opened to you”. The passage in Ephesians 3 might relate to knocking. This seems to go beyond need and to relate to the believer's desire to open the door and enter an area opened up through communion with divine Persons. We should have a desire to find what is on the other side of that door. The Lord would love to answer the knocking of a person wanting to know more about His things. Here in Ephesians we have the prayer of the apostle Paul. “For this reason”, he says, “I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. He is praying to “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, and then he gives Him glory, “of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named”. How great is the glory of the Father and His relationship with every family, and Paul prays “that he may give you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts”. What an expansion that would involve! Knocking at the door results in the door being opened to you, with a view to Christ dwelling through faith in your heart, “being rooted and founded in love”. It goes far beyond need, and into the realm of the satisfaction of the

desire of a believer to be near to Christ and to have Christ dwelling in the heart. And then he adds, "in order that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height". What a knocking! What a door! We find what is opened to us - "and to him that knocks it will be opened" - a wonderful sphere with "breadth and length and depth and height". The Father is over it all, and Christ is the Centre of it, giving character to it, a scene where there is no question of unmet need or anything attaching to us as sinners. These things have all been dealt with, and we are in the very place where God Himself dwells, where He has made Himself known as Father and Son and Spirit, and where there is a response according to His heart and mind. Paul prayed that this might be the experience of the brethren in Ephesus, that they might enter into these wonderful matters. He prayed so that they might have the exercise themselves to knock and that it would be opened to them, and that they would have something of the experience that he, the apostle himself, had. I think Paul knew abundantly what it was to have the Christ dwelling through faith in his heart, rooted and founded in love there. He had a fuller experience than any other man, I think it would be right to say, of "the breadth and the length and the depth and the height". His prayer was that the brethren in Ephesus should have the desire to knock so that this blessed sphere should be opened to them. They needed to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner man to get the benefit of the opening.

What divine resource is available. How wonderful is this scene; we talk about a sphere and a scene and a realm, and these are all right words. What marks it is breadth and length and depth and height. It is the all-embracing fulness of the place where God is known, and where everything is according to Him, and we are to apprehend it. Paul's prayer for these Ephesian saints was that they should be "fully able to apprehend with all the saints" the dimensions of the blessings that are in God's heart towards us, and we can include ourselves in that. The scripture makes clear that this is to be enjoyed collectively with others who are appreciating it too, and who are strengthened also by the Holy Spirit in the inner man. Paul does not say 'comprehend', but "fully able to apprehend". If he had said 'comprehend', that would indicate that it was possible to get right round this sphere and understand it completely in our minds, and I do not think that is possible for creatures. But we can apprehend, taking account of the riches of the blessings that God has in mind for us by the Spirit and which are opened to us as

we have the desire and the exercise. Then he adds, “and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge”. You may ask, 'How could we know something that surpasses knowledge?'. Well, “knock, and it shall be opened to you”. If we have a desire to know and experience by the Holy Spirit's power spiritual things that pass knowledge, we can be brought further and further into them. It reminds us of that river in Ezekiel 47: our appreciation grows from ankles to our knees, then to our loins, then it is waters to swim in. We are surrounded and supported by what surrounds us as coming into a spiritual scene which has breadth and length and depth and height.

Then he adds, “that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God”, and that leads on to Paul's doxology where, still speaking about Him who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he adds, “to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus”. So the thought of being filled “even to all the fulness of God” immediately makes Paul think of the assembly in which in Christ Jesus there is to be glory to God eternally. It is God's purpose, that He should make Himself known in flesh in a blessed and perfect Man, and then that Man should have a companion for Himself, a creature vessel “having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things”, as the apostle says in chapter 5: 27, and that vessel should be the fulness of the blessed Lord Jesus, the One who Himself fills all in all, chap 1: 23. God has purposed to head up all things in Him, chap 1: 9-10. Christ Himself has a companion who is His fulness, that is, His counterpart, the one who is able blessedly to answer to Him. The knowledge and experience of these things is available to one who is exercised to knock, in the desire to have spiritual things opened to them.

I feel for myself the vital importance of prayer. We need to be developed in it, first in relation to our needs, conscious of the help of the Spirit being available to us all the time, but especially when we do not know what to ask or to pray for as is fitting. How important it is to have God's will in relation to what we ask, and the Spirit is the One who is able to help us. Then to seek, as Epaphras did, the things that are above, and to seek that our brethren, and ourselves among them, “may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God”. Finally to have the desire to knock, and to find opened to us this wonderful sphere with breadth and length and depth and height, the Spirit strengthening us in the inner man to go forward and to get into the swim, as it were, of what God has in mind for us, far beyond our need, and into what relates to His glory and His praise.

May we know these things for ourselves, and may they be for our encouragement, beloved! For His Name's sake.

Grimsby

11th October 2014

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

Richard M Brown

Ephesians 1: 8-10

I wanted to draw attention, dear brethren, to this reference to the mystery of God's will. When that word "mystery" is used in the Scriptures it refers to something which can only be known by divine revelation. In other words, it is not something we could otherwise arrive at; we could not deduce it from circumstances or from whatever facts might be at our disposal: it would be impossible to understand but for light from God. I think that is just what it means here: the mystery of God's will, as it says, is "to head up all things in the Christ". Now you could not have arrived at that by looking, for example, at the situation in the world. It could only have been made known to us by a direct revelation from God. If we reflect on it carefully it ought to impress us that He has "made known to **us** the mystery of his will". The more we think about it the more we must come to see what a very blessed thing that is. Here we are, just a handful of us, we feel our smallness and weakness; we are of no account at all as far as the world outside is concerned, yet, through grace, we can count ourselves among those to whom God has made known the mystery of His will! What a very blessed thing it is that there are persons on the earth who are in the secret of what God is going to bring to pass. He has made known to them something that could not be known any other way; what was never known even by saints of earlier dispensations. Its being referred to as "the **mystery** of his will" helps us to see that behind God's public dealings, behind all that happens in the world, and the way God influences those things, and His providential dealings with men - behind all of that - God is working steadily towards this great end, when "the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth" will be headed up in the Christ.

It is important to see that the bringing in of Christ was not dependent upon the incoming of sin. This is what God has always had before Him. If I may so speak, reverently, God did not decide to introduce Christ when it was a question of meeting the challenge of sin; God had in mind to bring Him in *anyway*. It was always in God's mind that He would introduce Christ and that He would secure a universe - heaven and earth - all brought under the sway of that blessed Man and held for the pleasure of God. Adam is a figure of Him who was to come. God made him head, and gave him dominion over the lower creation. Adam was to represent God to the creation; and he was to gather up

from the earth all that was for the pleasure of God. That will be seen in a far greater way in Christ in the world to come, in “the administration of the fulness of times”.

Now, dear brethren, the understanding of this great fact is intended to steady our hearts. Outwardly things are going from bad to worse, but our hearts are to be steadied by knowing that, in spite of all that is going on around, God is working towards this great end. It is “the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself”. He did not consult anyone else; He did not seek anyone else's mind about the matter; and because it is what He willed there can be no question that God will reach His end. The knowledge of that is to steady us; so we are not swayed this way or that, we are not blown off course, and we do not give way to discouragement or despair.

We have examples of how this works out in a practical way in 1 Samuel 2. The chapter starts with Hannah's song, and verse 10 says, “Jehovah will judge the ends of the earth; and he will give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed”. That is the first reference in the Scriptures to God's Anointed. One might ask what Hannah was referring to, given that Israel did not have a king at that time. We know it looks on to David and, ultimately, is prophetic of Christ. Some commentators say this must have been written long after Hannah, because she could not possibly have known anything about God's king. Of course, Hannah was speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit. But whilst Hannah was privileged to give utterance to it, it reveals - just for a moment, we might say, the curtain is drawn back - that God had His King before Him; God had His Anointed before Him. There is another example later in the chapter, where a man of God was sent to Eli to pronounce God's sentence of judgment upon his house. It is a very solemn message: that God would cut off his house, so there would not be an old man in it for ever. Then in verse 35 God says, “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest” - and this is the reference - “and he shall walk before mine anointed continually”. The man of God was God's spokesman; he is one of those persons who is not named in the Scriptures. As far as we know, he appears on this one occasion to deliver this very solemn message and is never heard of again. What comes out is this remarkable reference to a future priest that would stand before God's anointed. Now, again, I take it that is a reference to David. But the point I wanted to bring out is that persons such as Hannah and the man of God, when they found themselves in the position of speaking *for God*, it is almost as if they could not help but refer to God's anointed. Why? Because that is what God had before

Him - the introduction of His Anointed in a coming day.

Now, as far as the public position was concerned, things had reached a very low ebb in 1 Samuel. It says, "the word of Jehovah was rare in those days; a vision was not frequent", chap 3: 1. Things had fallen into disrepute under Eli's sons, and there was a famine of the word of God. There is a correspondence with the public position in our day. Shortly after this the ark fell into the hands of the Philistines, and was then neglected in the house of Abinadab for possibly sixty years, a period which included forty years of the reign of Saul, and what a reign that was! Had you gone by the public position, you would say it was going from bad to worse. Yet these references to God's anointed show us what God had before Him even in those dark days; and it shows what individuals who were with God had before *them*. I think it right to say that, if God has something before Him, then those who are with God are entitled to have it before them too.

Now, I give that as a simple illustration of "the mystery of his will". Behind His public dealings, God had His anointed before Him, and though many years would pass before David was crowned, God was working steadily towards that day when His anointed would be introduced. So you can understand that persons like Hannah, or that man of God, would not have been overcome with discouragement, though living in very difficult times, because they had that secret in their souls, as having received light from God. And I think that is just the position we are in: God has made known the mystery of His will, "to head up all things in the Christ". That is something we are to treasure in secret. It is part of our testimony, the knowledge that, notwithstanding all that is going on around, the great departure that we, alas! have had our part in, God is working to this great end and He will not fail in it.

I trust, dear brethren, that this simple impression may comfort and strengthen our hearts; and stimulate the desire to be more with God, and that the light of God's great thoughts may be more real to our souls; that we may prove in increasing measure their power and the satisfying character; and thus be able to overcome in an evil day. It is a very great privilege that He has made these things known to us. I trust we may appreciate more and more the privilege of it, and be exercised to take up divine thoughts in a greater way, both for the pleasure of God and for our blessing.

Word in a meeting for ministry, East Finchley

15th November 2016

My dear Grandchildren, and others

It was a joy to hear that you wanted to remember the Lord Jesus in His Supper because you love Him. You have now come 'into fellowship', as we say, so that you are now not only my grandchildren, you are my *brothers and sisters in Christ*. We are brethren. But as some of you are quite young brethren, I have asked the Holy Spirit to help me to say something plain and simple to you about this wonderful new path.

What you have come into is really a -

Partnership

You know what partners are: they are people who do everything together. That is just what we do when we are in fellowship. Before you started to break bread, you loved the Lord Jesus and you wanted to please Him, but it was just you yourself. And if you did something that did *not* please Him, it was just you yourself who had grieved Him and brought in a cloud.

But things are different now. By coming into fellowship, you have joined hands with the Lord's people who are in fellowship all over the world. You are not one alone any longer. This is a most happy thing, but it is most serious too; because whatever one partner does, good or bad, brings in all the other partners as well. Let us never forget that. A young sister slipped into the 'movies' once, but a brother saw her coming out, though she did not see him. The next day he said to her, 'I did not want to go to the pictures yesterday'. She looked amazed and said, 'Did you go, Mr. Gill?'. 'Yes', he said, 'you took me'. She never forgot, I am sure, that lesson about partnership.

But we are closer together than even being partners, for all those who are in the fellowship are bound together into -

One Body

The Holy Spirit is dwelling in each one, and 'we are all baptised by one Spirit into one body'. How close this brings us to each other. We are all members one of another, just as your hands and eyes and feet are members of your body. You know that if you hurt your finger or your foot it makes your whole body hurt. It is the same in this wonderful spiritual body: if one member is sick or in sorrow, we all feel the sadness; and if anyone is joyful, it makes us all glad.

One thing that the loaf at the Lord's supper suggests is this one body. You have often come into the meeting and looked at the bread and the cup, and perhaps they did not mean much to you. But now they speak to you. The loaf speaks of the precious body of the Lord Jesus given for His own, and the cup speaks of His precious blood shed for them. That makes us love Him. That is why we break bread, to show our love for Him.

But the loaf speaks of something else too and that is the one body that is made up of every one of His own bound to Him by the Holy Spirit. 'We being many are one body', Paul tells us. So that when we eat the Lord's supper, we are not thinking just of the few in the meeting room, or even those in all the meeting rooms; we are thinking of all those all over the world who belong to Christ. Most of them do not know they are part of the one body; they have never heard of the assembly. That is why we are not all together.

You have often heard those words -

The Assembly

but I wonder what they mean to you? What could you say about the assembly? You are part of it so you should be able to say something. Sometimes it is called *the Church*. People in the world think of the church as a building made of stones and mortar; but that is not what God means by the church.

His church - the assembly - is built of living stones. You are one of them, and so is every believer who has the Holy Spirit. Indeed the Holy Spirit, Who is God, lives in this wonderful building, the assembly. It is the house of God.

I remember hearing of a dear old sister who was putting on her hat to go out one Lord's day morning, and a neighbour said to her, 'Are you going to church?'. 'No' she replied, 'I am a bit of the church going to the meeting'. She was one of the living stones.

So, dear children, we come together on the Lord's day with others who belong to the assembly to eat the Lord's supper and to remember Him. As we do this we look for Him to come in Himself and be with us. We cannot see Him with our eyes as the disciples did, but He comes just as truly. How reverent and attentive we want to be so that we may be ready to welcome Him and to give Him our praises; He loves His assembly. He loves it so much that He gave Himself for it. He calls it -

His Bride

In answer, we give Him our love as our glorious Bridegroom. Our praises go out too to the blessed Holy Spirit who is with us to help us in the service. He is God, and the Lord Jesus is God, - we must never forget that.

And yet, though the Lord Jesus is so great, He is not ashamed to call us -

His Brethren

That is a great honour. He loves to take His brethren into the presence of His Father, and lead their praises to His Father and our Father, and to His God and our God. His brethren are all -

Sons of God

and God delights to hear His sons giving Him praise and worship.

There is nothing more wonderful than this service to divine Persons on the Lord's day. But Monday morning comes and we have to go back to school and work, with people who do not love our Lord. The brethren are not with us now, they cannot see what we do. But we are still in fellowship, we are still part of the body, and we must be true to the Lord in -

The Place of Testimony

That is a long word but "testimony" means what we are and what we show in the world outside. Here in this cold world we are to show that *we belong to Christ*. He was a Stranger here, and we cannot be friendly with a world that cast Him out. We need to ask the Holy Spirit for courage to be true to Him.

I am sure you would like to hear what Mr Taylor said a good many years ago to a boy of nine years old who asked to break bread. In those days the very young ones did not ask for fellowship as so many are doing today. Mr Taylor said something like this - 'I hear, William, that you have asked to remember the Lord. I do not say that you should not ask, but I do say that if you break bread when you are nine you should behave like a boy of twelve; and when you are twelve you should act like a lad of sixteen; and when you are sixteen you should behave like a young man of twenty'. That boy took Mr Taylor's words to heart. He is grown up and married now, and has children of his own, but the Lord has kept him true to the partnership all the way through, as I long that

He may keep each one of you.

It will not be easy. There will be reproach and you will be laughed at for being 'different'; even some of the young people in the meeting who have not much love for Christ will laugh at you, and that will be hardest of all. When *they* want you to cut your hair shorter, or whisper in the meetings, it is harder to say 'No' but the Lord will be with you. He suffered for you far, far more than you can ever suffer for Him, and He says that if we confess Him and are true to Him before men, He will confess *your name* (think of the glory of that) before the angels of God!

One of my little grandchildren of seven years old said a very wise thing to me one day. She was finding it a little hard not to be doing the things that the children around her were doing, but she said, 'It will be alright to be worldly when we get to heaven, won't it, - because it will be *our world!*' We want to learn about 'our world' now. Do not think these things are too hard for you. If you are old enough to break bread, you are old enough to understand something about God's great things. So read your Bible, read simple ministry; pray about everything, ask your parents many questions, especially about the assembly; and ask the Holy Spirit to help you to understand.

With love to you, my dear grandchildren, and many prayers that you may grow 'by the true knowledge of God'!

Affectionately,

Your grandmother

(Who is also your sister in Christ)

Mrs C. A. Markham (Westfield)

PS Will you read this letter two or three times, or ask someone to read it to you? If you read it again in a few days, perhaps you will notice something the second time you did not notice at first.