

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 162

September 2020

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DIVINE ORDER

Genesis 1: 14-19, 26, 27

Job 38: 33

1 Corinthians 11: 3

PAG I thought we might get profit in speaking about divine order. The apostle Paul writes to the Colossians and, among other things, he says of them that he is “rejoicing and seeing your order” (chap 2: 5), but shortly after that he goes on to say, “See that there be no one who shall lead *you* away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the teaching of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ”, v 8. The Colossians were proceeding in an orderly way but they were surrounded by what was disorderly, “philosophy and vain deceit, according to the teaching of men, according to the elements of the world”, and they were to be on their guard against it. I feel exercised that we are surrounded by a world where disorder is increasing. I mean general disorder, disorder of relationships.

The reason that I read in Genesis 1 particularly was the reference to “male and female created he them”. That is God's order, and it is to be observed. We need to be on our guard against what the world thinks; things that are wicked in the sight of God are approved, and the whole system of order has been turned upside down. It will not be put right until the Lord comes: “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment”, Isa 32: 1. In the meantime God would have us to be preserved in relation to what His order is, and so the question arises in Job, “Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens?”. But Job is also asked in a salutary way, “dost thou determine their rule over the earth?” God determines it; we do not. When exercises have arisen, some may have wanted to determine their own order as to things, and there is only one order and that is God's. The end in view in 1 Corinthians 11 is that we recognise that God, in His divine order, has set in place a system of headship from which great blessing flows: the truth as to the Supper placed in the assembly, then follows the working of the body, the operation in love in 1 Corinthians 13, the order of the assembly and what is suited to it in chapter 14, and then the kingdom is handed over “to him who is God and Father”, 1 Cor 15: 24. Everything is handed over in perfect order, and there is victory even over death itself. I suggest that we take up the thought of order and speak about it together.

JAB I would like to ask if divine order is not a merely outward form, which it tends to be in men's world. Men impose order on situations or behaviour by setting a form that is to be observed, and they call that order, and then there are forces of law and order to keep it so. What makes divine order different from that, because we know from the New Testament that God is a God of order, is that it is not a formalisation of anything, is it? What is the difference?

PAG We have been speaking locally about the offerings, and what was to be seen in the burnt-offering was the head and its fat, and the inwards and the legs, Lev 1: 8, 9. The inwards would suggest that in Christ there was an example of perfect inward order, which manifested itself in what was outwardly orderly, but the manifestation came from what was within, not from what was imposed from without. What would you say?

JAB I think it is very helpful because that clearly is the key to the enjoyment of everything that God has in mind. It begins with what is inward and then expresses itself towards God and towards each other. I am glad of what you say about that.

AMB What you have read in Genesis shows that God's thoughts are orderly, and then they find orderly expression, and that in the physical creation He created a sphere where life could be set, and that is so morally. The physical creation would make us think of God's moral creation.

PAG Yes, so God's "eternal power and divinity", as Romans tells us, are "apprehended by the mind through the things that are made" (chap 1: 20), so that God intends that something should be known about Him from what is made or created.

AMB The physical creation does reflect God in His power. It tells us about His power and about His wisdom, and order is in it, and laws that govern the physical phenomena and so on are all set by God, and things obey His will. But then man has the ability to exercise his own will and when that happened at the beginning, disorder came in, conflict, and all the history of man really flows from that. God's original thoughts are all orderly and He will ensure that these prevail.

PAG Another scripture that was in my mind was Revelation 21, "and the street of the city pure gold, as transparent glass", v 21. There is complete transparency marking the divine order and it can be observed in Revelation 21 from any direction and seen to be true.

GAB Can you just say a word as to the naming of things? “And there was light ... And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night”, Gen 1: 3, 5.

PAG I think it is important that we accept God's name for things. I referred to Isaiah 32, “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness”, and one of the reasons that it was in my mind was “The vile man shall be no more called noble, nor the churl said to be bountiful”, v 5. The world has come to a point where it calls things good that are not good. God's order is seen, in that it says of each of the days apart from the second day, that “it was good” or indeed that it was “very good”, Gen 1: 31. So God's order is good.

GAB The word liberty is a very fine spiritual thought but it can be misapplied in a dangerous way. What people call liberty can just be licence. We need to get God's definition.

PAG The best place to get God's definition is in the Scriptures; so in James 1 is says, “But *he* that fixes his view on the perfect law, that of liberty, and abides in it, being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, *he* shall be blest in his doing”, v 25. So liberty itself is part of a regulated sphere; we are not in liberty if we are not regulated.

ADM So God's order is really for the blessing of man. Where you have quoted from Isaiah, that section ends, “But the noble deviseth noble things; and to noble things doth he stand”, Isa 32: 8. If we are subject to divine ordering, do you think there will be prosperity?

PAG If you look at the typical teaching as to the matter of sabbaths, and as to the matter of the land lying fallow, all of that was divine ordering in order that man might rest, it was in order that God might enjoy something, but the rejection even of the principle of a day of rest is harmful to man. It distracts him from God, and God does not receive His portion; so there is blessing for man and glory to God in observing the order, do you think?

ADM I know it seems a very obvious thing to say but why does verse 3 come after verse 2? What I am meaning is it says in verse 2, “darkness was on the face of the deep”. Did God act to counter that in verse 3 or is verse 3 an original thought?

PAG Well, we know that “God is light” and it also adds, “and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1: 5); so darkness came in, not on account of something God did, but on account of some wicked force. It has been suggested it may have been the fall of Satan, but we cannot say;

Scripture does not tell us; but God would not have darkness in the world that He created. He would confine it to its place and, “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night”. We are called to be “sons of light and sons of day”, 1 Thess 5: 5.

JCG What you bring up reminds me of Mr Raven's teaching on rule, atmosphere and light, vol 3 p320. What he brought out of that was that it makes way for a perfect administration in the assembly, and that is what we follow. There is always the danger of being influenced by forces outside in the world, but we follow what the truth is in the assembly.

PAG That is why it is so important that the inward formation that our brother spoke of is there, otherwise we will be subject to external influences. One of the things that was said to Israel, if they pursued things in a certain, positive way, was that none of the complaints of Egypt would come upon them, Exod 15: 26. The complaints of Egypt are all around, but if Israel went on in obedience, they would be preserved from all that. I do think it is essential to stress it requires inward formation. It is not just outward conformity - that on its own is just the law.

APG We had ministry recently about keeping His commandments; His commandments bring order, do you think? “For *he* spoke, and it was done; *he* commanded, and it stood fast”, Ps 33: 9. In 1 Corinthians it is “the Lord's commandment”, chap 14: 37.

PAG That is helpful, and perhaps links with our thought as to inward formation because the Lord says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments”, John 14: 15. Would that be right?

APG I think that is helpful. Keeping commandments without love is legal, is it not? These two things go together, love and obedience.

ABB We had a word last night as to Asaph going into the sanctuaries, Ps 73: 17. We can say that in God's presence there is order; so, as we spend time in the divine presence, we would see things in a perfect order, and a perfect Man who always walked according to the divine path, and be formed thereby. Seeing things according to God's standard would help us along these lines. It would also help us to see what is not orderly and to set that aside.

PAG We have been helped as to assembly order, and the order when we come together in view of the breaking of bread, and then what flows from it. The great thing about it is that it is centred in Christ, and in the

example that He gave. So we even have the simple matter of “having sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives”, Matt 26: 30. As we are occupied with Christ, He leads us away from the wilderness sphere into what is heavenly, but it is as occupied with Him that we are thus led. Is that what is in your mind?

ABB That is very helpful; so influence would link with order. I was thinking of “the great light to rule the day”. Speaking simply, if we are in the sunshine of the love of that blessed One, we will be attracted to this order and as we develop spiritually, we would recoil from anything that is disorderly. Do you think that is one way we would develop?

PAG Yes; so Paul, in warning the Colossian saints against what was unsuitable, reminds them that in Christ “dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in him”, chap 2: 9, 10. He says quite plainly that you can take every direction from Him; you do not need any direction from anyone else.

JCG Do you think that the man in John 9, under the Lord's influence, illustrates the matter? He was in darkness, literally, of course, but morally as well, but then he got light and he clung to Jesus, did he not, and became the one who confessed the Son of God? It is wonderful the way in which the simplicity of the work of God makes progress, as we are occupied with Christ.

PAG And he stuck to what he knew: “One thing I know”, v 25. Again, I would encourage all of us, especially our younger brethren; we are not called to be clever enough to argue our way round “philosophy and vain deceit” and prove that we are right and other people are wrong. We need to stick to what we know, and what we know is in Scripture, and it cannot be changed. I feel that, especially for our younger ones when they are at school. They are being told all sorts of things that are simply not true, and a grounding in Scripture is protective.

AMB Faith is the answer to these interminable questions that are brought up. “By faith we apprehend that the worlds were framed by the word of God”, Heb 11: 3. That would be an example. We do not argue about that, but by faith we understand things. Another great cardinal point connected with what you are bringing before us is that the mind of man is not orderly. It is what the scripture refers to as the flesh; the mind of the flesh sets itself against God's order. We see that in the world around. There is tremendous deliverance for a believer to have the mind of the Spirit and therewith to overcome the mind of the flesh that tries to act within us.

PAG “For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace”, Rom 8: 6. The first three chapters of Romans are interesting in that regard. In chapter 1 you get the “reprobate mind” (v 28): that was the Greek; in chapter 2 you get the religious mind: that would be represented in the Jew; and in chapter 3 is the wilful mind: that is really the Romans who conquered everything. Greek, Hebrew and Latin letters were above the Lord’s cross in its superscription, John 19: 20. They are all dealt with at the cross, and “there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”, Rom 3: 22, 23. My exercise is not to point at lots of other people and say they are doing terrible things, but rather that I might seek within myself to be governed by God’s thoughts as to matters, “transformed by the renewing of your mind”, Rom 12: 2.

AMB I was thinking that Christianity overcomes these matters not by substituting some different law for us to follow, but by renewing. The believer is born anew and then our minds are renewed and the spirit of our mind is renewed too. That is by the Holy Spirit, so that the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, and sowing to Him, and giving Him the place that He seeks in us relates to the matter of inward formation which we are considering.

PAG Would you link that then with the Spirit’s service in guiding us into all the truth, John 16: 13? Would that bear on it?

AMB That is what is in view. The Spirit helps us to judge within us what would be disorderly, but that is just the beginning of His service. What He has in mind is to bring Christ before us, and to bring the things that relate to life.

JCG The lights were brought in “to divide between the day and the night”. By application it is a question of whether we are walking in the light of the sun, that is Christ, and, of course, represented in the assembly down here. Then I suppose the reference in Hebrews to having “their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil” (Heb 5: 14) bears on your thought of what is inward morally, does it?

PAG Yes. One of the things that comes out in John’s epistle, which relates to inward formation, is that the greatest light is available in the darkest days. The light has not dimmed because of the darkness of the day in which we are. The light remains the same. It is still “a light above the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26: 13), and it will never change. Even when John sees the Lord in judicial garb he says, “his countenance as the sun shines in its power”, Rev 1: 16. That is the light that is shining.

ADM Is the man in Romans 7 really going through these exercises of inward formation? There is a certain amount of confusion and disorder in that chapter, but by the time we get to the end of it order has been restored, because the light of Christ and the gift of the Spirit help us to resolve these exercises in our own lives, do you think?

PAG I am quoting another, but in Romans 6 the person gets out of the boat and in Romans 7 he starts to sink and in Romans 8 he is back in the Lord's hands again and on perfect stable, solid ground. But you sink in the confusion: "For I do not practise the good that I will; but the evil I do not will, that I do", Rom 7: 19. It is an insoluble morass of confusion and then you say, "who shall deliver me out of this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord", v 24, 25. You are back on solid ground.

AB I was thinking of Legion. It was a change from disorder to order when he was "sitting, clothed and sensible" (Luke 8: 35), and then he goes out and proclaims "how great things Jesus had done for him", v 39. I suppose you can see examples of that throughout the New Testament, when the Lord had to do with people.

PAG That is helpful. The authorities tried to bring order; so they bound him, but he just broke every boundary they set, and the Lord is able for that. In a day to come He will, by the agency of an angel, bind Satan, Rev 20: 2. He is able for that and yet the striking thing about Legion is that, although he was "sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus", the people around did not want that, v 37. That is not what they wanted. I find that quite stark.

APG Does order bring peace? In 1 Corinthians it says, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace", chap 14: 33. There is the contrast there. In Genesis the seventh day is rest. Our brother referred to the man "sitting, clothed and sensible"; He had peace in his soul, did he not?

PAG Do you think in that sense true peace is only found on resurrection ground? The disorder of the world was dismissed at the cross. There were the various cries against the Lord, and the witnesses did not agree, and Pilate came under the influence of the crowd and was weak. There was a disorderly scene around but all that was dismissed at the cross. It required the Lord's death, but out of His death has come a wondrous spiritual and moral order, do you think?

APG He "made peace by the blood of his cross", Col 1: 20.

JAB I suppose what we speak of as the truth, is the truth of the living

word of God. I am thinking of that scripture that speaks about “sincerity and truth”, 1 Cor 5: 8. We have recently had a book with Mr Dennett's ministry in it, which has a fascinating account of how he came to it as a clergyman that he was on wrong ground scripturally, but he had been on that wrong ground in all sincerity. He accepted traditional theological teaching, yet he was sincere. That is something that can stumble us. We may see believers going on in all sincerity with what is not according to the truth of Scripture. What would you say about that in relation to order, because it seems to me that order and truth in this way are quite similar principles?

PAG They are. It says elsewhere, “Send out thy light and thy truth”, Ps 43: 3. They run together in that sense. What you say is a challenge because there are many genuine and very sincere believers going on with what they believe to be right. There is a tract by George Cutting, 'In Great Earnest on the Wrong Road'; he recognises that. I think the test always has to be the truth of Scripture. Where can this be traced to Scripture? When the matter of the Lord's Sonship was in Mr Raven's thoughts, he said that he had come to it that, 'The point is to be within the limits of Scripture and not trading on what is merely orthodox', Letters p148. In other words, brethren held to what had previously been taught and they had always heard, but Mr Raven could not see a scriptural basis for it. Now, I know that it was some considerable time before that truth was fully brought out, but the fundamental importance of being able to trace what we say back to Scripture cannot be overstated, would you say?

JAB I feel the exercise and responsibility of being able to do that although very tested by my knowledge of Scripture. I also feel the responsibility that we have to young people to be able to do that without appearing to be imposing a rigid order on what they think. That is why it must start with love for Christ and that develops into a love for Scripture, for the word of God, because if we love the Lord Jesus, then we would want to do what the living word of God would open up to us as we seek the Spirit's help to understand it.

PAG Then comes the importance of taking the Scriptures together: “the scripture cannot be broken”, John 10: 35. You cannot take one scripture and set it off against another; if it is not too common an expression, that is not the way it works.

GAB The Lord says to take His yoke upon us: the yoke would involve coming under divine direction, would it not? But He says it is “easy”:

“for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”, Matt 11: 29, 30. So if we are governed by our love for Christ, the commandments which He lays upon us are not onerous; they are not irksome: it is “light” in that sense.

PAG There is light in it, and there is help; He will walk alongside us. And there is food, because immediately after that, they come to the incident of the disciples in the cornfields, and there is something to eat. They are criticised for it. The Lord explains why what they did was right; He defends them. So another thing to have in our minds is if we hold to what is right and walk in step with the Lord, He will look after us.

AMB To take Christ's yoke upon us we have to learn what it is to be “meek and lowly in heart”: to learn that from Him. The metaphor of the yoke is very important. I have to learn that my will will just get me into trouble, and it is the Lord's will that is the way of safety and salvation and blessing, and the way to life. That is a lesson we all need to learn through the whole of our lives. The earlier we accept it the better off we will be.

PAG Well, in accepting the regulation of our parents when we are young, and at whatever age we are, the regulation of the brethren, and of the assembly is important. My father often quoted the scripture, “and whoso breaketh down a hedge, a serpent biteth him”, Ecc1 10: 8. If you go outside the area in which you have been set, harm will ensue. The positive is, if you stay where the Lord has set you, great blessing will ensue.

AMB I think that is right and the scripture that has been quoted in 1 Corinthians 14, “God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints”, is part of your exercise; as seeking to walk in the light of the assembly, our gatherings should be havens from the world where Christ's will is yielded to and He is put first, and the principles of the world and the principles that dominate man's mind are excluded.

PAG Hence the need of subjection not only to the Lord but also to the Holy Spirit. There is also the thought of being “in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live” (Heb 12: 9); so subjection to divine Persons is in itself a substantial protection.

ABB The verdict is that “it was good”. Would we have some sense as to our individual households, and particularly in the meetings, how wonderful it is for God in a world of tumult and disorder that there are those who have accepted the divine order and seek to be in accordance

with it? Would that be another incentive as we see how God feels about it?

PAG I think that is right and as was mentioned earlier, what is good involves accepting God's name for things. That is what is good. If He calls something good, then it *is* good. The Lord emphasises that in a most striking way. He says, "There is none good but one, God", Luke 18: 19. He says effectively to the whole of mankind, 'It is not up to you to decide what is good; it is for God to decide'.

ABB I was struck recently by Isaiah 5 where you get the divine word, "Woe unto them who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness", v 20. I agree with what you said earlier. We do not want to be taken up with what is negative but you can write that across the world, and I feel, whether it is in education or so on, it can almost drift into our thinking, and I must be on my guard against it. What was your thought in Job about what God said?

PAG Well, there are two questions. "Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens?" - that is the first thing. Are you familiar with the truth? Are you familiar with the principles? Now, that is not meant to be a hard question that everybody has to answer a lot of difficult questions about, but do we desire to be familiar with these things? But then I feel the second question is important, and it has weighed with me in recent exercises, "dost thou determine their rule over the earth?". No, we do not. We cannot say that in the present circumstances certain principles that applied in the past do not apply any more. I am not saying this in any facetious way: the laws of gravity still apply and we cannot decide that we will just not have them any more. That is just the natural order of things. Well, divine principles are immutable; they do not change; so we need to ask ourselves: "dost thou determine their rule over the earth?". No, and what has been said about each locality being a haven, that is because they are all operating to the same rule in a positive way, "the ordinances of the heavens".

JCG Job got a great blessing once he came to abhor himself. Our brother drew attention to Romans 7. The apostle brings in the blessing of the Spirit, the liberty of the Spirit, and Job had a great increase, literally, of course, but it speaks to us of spiritual increase, if we come to the fact that what is of the first order and what is in the world, as governed by that, is finished.

PAG Yes, and Paul brings in the dividing line in Romans: "by the disobedience of the one man the many have been constituted sinners,

so also by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous”, chap 5: 19. So there is a disobedient man and there is an obedient man, and there is only one obedient Man truly, and that is Christ. Do you think we need to come under His sway, under His authority, to come into the blessing that you are speaking of?

JCG Absolutely! What we had on Lord's day, and what you suggested about the reception of the Spirit, bears on what you are suggesting tonight as to “them that obey him” (Heb 5: 9) and desiring: if we ask, we are given. These two things go together in view of the liberty of Christianity.

JTB I was thinking as you were speaking that the Scriptures begin, “In the beginning God” (Gen 1: 1) and finishes with Revelation 22: 13: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”: it is all the unchangeable God.

PAG He begins by bringing in light and at the end you have “the bright and morning star”, Rev 22: 16. There is a heavenly light still shining and it foretells another day altogether. The end of God's creation is not in night; it is in day: “And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day”, Gen 1: 5. Man's idea of creation is that the morning comes and then the evening, but God's thought is that the evening is there and then there is the morning and it dawns and it never ends.

AMB Connecting that thought back with Job, the writer to the Hebrews says, “He takes away the first that he may establish the second” (Heb 10: 9), and all of what we are speaking about would remind us that God has established the second Man and He will establish a universe that is formed after Him and over which He will have sway. Do you think in what we are speaking over tonight we can see Christ as the One who sets all of this on as Man in the perfection of His submission and subjection to God's will? Then He sustains a whole world that is according to God and that is according to God's will as He is. That is an encouragement for us.

PAG “And as we have borne the image of the one made of dust, we shall bear also the image of the heavenly one” (1 Cor 15: 49), but I am struck by the fact that it says just after that, “For this corruptible must needs put on incorruptibility, and this mortal put on immortality”, v 53. “Corruptible” and “mortal” are the result of the disorder that sin brought in and we are brought into what is incorruptible and immortal as a result of the heavenly Man. It lifts our whole vision of what divine order truly means.

AB In the beginning that we have read of in Genesis, obviously you could say that everything was orderly when Adam and Eve were put in the garden, but we have learned God's true feelings for us through sin coming in. What would you say about that? It is almost as if disorder had to come in before we could truly know God. Is it right to say that?

PAG Well, what we do know is that God had in mind that we should be "holy and blameless before him in love", Eph 1: 4. Now, man in innocence is not holy; he is not apart from sin. I could not say too much about the incoming of sin save that it served in God's ways, not necessarily in His purposes, but in His ways it served to bring into relief His love, but also His holiness and His righteousness and His goodness, His mercy, His grace, His patience, His kindness, all of these attributes in ways which they could never have been known otherwise. But His *purpose* is that He chose us in Christ "before the world's foundation"; so that is before any of this ever happened, and He thought of us in terms "that we should be holy and blameless before him in love". That is what He had in mind and sin, if you like, the fall of man, created the backdrop against which He could demonstrate what was truly in His heart. As I say, I think it would form part of His ways, but His purposes were further back. Is that suitable, would you say?

GAB God had Christ in mind before Adam: we must get that order correct. That is the kind of man that God patterned His whole universe on; so anything that happened in the way of man's failure is not the primary thing; I think that you are right in what you are saying. The prime thing is man patterned after Christ. That is what God always had in mind from the very beginning.

PAG That is why it is stressed that Christ is "firstborn of all creation", Col 1: 15. He is not Himself created, but He gives character to all that is beautiful in the mind of God in relation to His creature.

JCG The whole of Genesis 1 is illustrative of the mind of God, what He was about to do, and the seven days really looks on to the whole period of time in which He worked out everything according to the pattern of Christ, do you think? We have spoken about the two lights, Christ and the assembly, but then the whole area in which God has operated brings out all that He had in mind for man through Christ. It is an illustration. For example, we can now see that the separating of light from darkness involved the cross, and the great matter of dry land appearing brings us into resurrection ground and new life. These are all suggested in the chapter, are they not?

PAG Yes, it has been said, as you know, that that starting point in Genesis is really an index to the spiritual world. It is like looking at the front page of a book and you see all the headings, and then when you read the book, you see all the detail. I think what has been said is important. God is not taken aback by sin and had to bring in Christ as an antidote; He first had Christ in mind.

AMB Genesis 1, and indeed the rest of the Bible, is recovery because actually sin comes in as soon as Genesis begins. God did not make the earth “waste and empty”, Gen 1: 2. That was a result of the operation of sin which He permitted.

Evil's challenge, long permitted -
Met by Thy supremacy -

So the incoming of evil brought out the supremacy of God in every department.

PAG Well, that is a good note to close on. All I wanted to say in relation to 1 Corinthians 11 is that God is supreme, “Christ's head God”, and the observation of that order of the man and the woman and Christ and God is a recognition of God's supremacy. That again is something that the world has lost sight of, but it will be acknowledged - “every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory”, Phil 2: 10, 11.

Grangemouth

20th March 2019

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THE WORKMAN AND HIS WORKMEN

J Bruce Ikin

Zechariah 13: 5, 6;

2 Corinthians 12: 15;

Philippians 2: 19-30;

2 Timothy 2: 15, 1, 2; 4: 11;

Mark 16: 20

I seek help of the Holy Spirit to speak of the Lord Jesus as the perfect Workman, and the work and His workmen. We were reading in the previous occasion of the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting and how it came under the approval of Moses. The Lord Jesus is the One who is the perfect Workman and the work is still going on. Workmen are needed. The Lord tells us, "The harvest indeed is great, but the workmen few; supplicate therefore the Lord of the harvest that he may send out workmen into his harvest", Luke 10: 2. I would challenge myself as to whether I am truly available to Him as the Lord of the harvest. It is not that He is looking for volunteers exactly; I would speak carefully; He is looking for those who He would send out, for those who are prepared to be one of the workmen securing His harvest. What a fruitful harvest it is - it is for God, and He is the Lord of the harvest. As we come under His scrutiny, as we are serviceable to Him, He would send you and me out. Who would be involved in that? You might say that a woman would not be free to preach, but a woman is free to do the work of an evangelist, and we are thankful for sisters who do that. It is open to all of us to come into the work, to be workmen under the direction of the Lord Jesus as the One who is the Lord of the harvest. Not only is He Lord of the harvest, but He is also Son over God's house, Heb 3: 6. The preaching of the gospel would lead on to what is for the heart of God and for the Lord's own heart as a result of the Spirit forming assembly characteristics in the saints.

We have been reading about Moses and how he was looking at the work, and how it met with his approval. The Lord is looking on at each of us, looking on at each of our localities too. I speak soberly as asking, 'What is the Lord saying?'. He says to each of the assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3, "I know". To some of them, He says, "I know thy works", Rev 2: 2. We are before Him but let us be encouraged that as we set ourselves in relation to the work we may prove the power of the Holy Spirit that there may be results for the harvest and for bringing in what is for God's pleasure in His house.

What characteristics do we look for in the workman? Let us look at the Lord Jesus Himself, the perfect Workman. We need to read this passage in Zechariah carefully, but wonderingly, as we look at what was seen in the Lord Jesus as the perfect Servant. The prophet says, "I am no prophet". Would any of us, as believers, say that that the Lord Jesus was not a prophet? The Lord Jesus was surely a prophet, and yet He took such lowly ground. The woman in John 4 says, "I see that thou art a prophet", v 19. At the end of Luke's gospel, the two on the road said that He "was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people", chap 24: 19. They had arrived at that conclusion. Do you know what it is for the Lord Jesus to speak to you as He did to the woman in John 4? Her life was turned right round through His word; He was here, truly as prophet. But then she arrived at the fact that He is the Christ, and she herself became a workman. She proclaimed who He was to her, and as a result the men of the city came to verify that wondrous matter for themselves. She came under His hand. She left her water pot behind and she was serviceable to Him as a workman.

Zechariah speaks prophetically about the Lord Jesus and His wounds: "one shall say unto him, What are those wounds in thy hands?" Have you asked that question? His answer will be, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends". Think of the wounds of the Lord Jesus, what it meant for Him to be rejected in the house of His friends, what it was for Him to be betrayed! Yet, as Paul reminds us in his first epistle to the Corinthians, even in that dark scene of the night He was delivered up He instituted the Supper for our remembrance of Him, chap 11: 24, 25. What a service that was! That service has gone on still, thousands of years to the present time. What it means for every true lover of Christ to remember Him at His Supper, as to which He gives us that promise, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you", John 14: 18. He surely keeps His promise as we give Him room in our hearts in our company and He engages us with Himself; and He leads the praises expressed by the saints forming the assembly as appreciating and loving Him. These are very real experiences. While wounded or betrayed He yet served in such a wondrous way. We see the lowliness of the Lord Jesus, the lowliness in which He served, the spirit in which He served. He speaks of the Father going before, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work", John 5: 17. He, unlike ourselves who like to draw attention to ourselves and think perhaps we might be a little better than others, took such a lowly pathway. He "humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death,

and that the death of the cross”, Phil 2: 8. Think of His work on the cross what He has borne in the sight of God. If we put our trust and hope in Him, our sins are forgiven, washed away in His precious blood. What wondrous work the Lord Jesus has undertaken.

He is continuing to work too, and He is looking for those who may work with Him - you and I as available to Him. We read of Paul, and what was committed to Him by the Holy Spirit, the work; he was called to the work. The word “the work”, is spoken of very frequently in Scripture - the work that is continued by the Holy Spirit under the hand of Christ. Paul was truly a workman, and he took that matter on in obedience and affection for the Lord Jesus. And it cost him much; it cost him wounds. We read here in 2 Corinthians 12, “Now I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved”. It was not easy for Paul; he was faithful and was also loving; love and faithfulness go together. How important it is to see that; and we see that his faithfulness comes out in his first epistle especially. He was not well thought of and they criticised him. I suppose that was really wounding, and so he becomes like Christ, the perfect Servant, prepared to be wounded for their sakes and prepared even to be less loved. That did not stop him loving them exceedingly, “I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you”. These were really features of Christ coming out in the workman, in Paul himself, as carrying out the commission that was given to him by the Holy Spirit. He was called out with Barnabas and separated from that little company that lovingly laid their hands on them and released them as recognising the authority of the Holy Spirit. Think of how the Holy Spirit is here, and seeing through what is for the Lord Jesus until He comes. As we were reminded in the earlier reading, He is prepared to do that despite the breakdown and failure of the church publicly and despite our own failure too. The Holy Spirit is committed to that.

We read about two other workmen in Philippians, Timotheus and Epaphroditus; how Paul valued them: they were like Paul. What is so interesting is that they had their own love and care for what was precious to the Lord in the saints. We see that Timothy was one who had “genuine feeling how ye get on” v 20. We may ask one another how we are getting on in business, at school, college or in health, but do I really genuinely care how that person is going on in his or her soul? I feel challenged by that. There was a dear brother in this city, who some

of us would remember - how he served us, not only as a brother, but as a father, and he would go up to a young person (I can speak from experience), and say, 'How are you getting on in your soul?'. That is a real thing, a real question. I do not often get asked that. Do you? Am I one who cares with genuine feeling how one another get on in our souls, where we are in our love for Christ, our experience of His own affection for us, and our affection for Him? Is it genuine? "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on. For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". The things of Jesus Christ not only include the proclamation of the truth in all its grandeur, but the formation of what is of the Lord Jesus Himself in the souls of the saints. There is the proof of him, "as a child a father, he has served with me in the work of the glad tidings". Again that shows the spirit of a workman according to what is pleasurable to God, meeting the approval of the Lord Jesus as Son over His house, "as a child a father, he has served with me". How attractive that is, attractive in that relationship between Timothy and Paul. Timothy regarded Paul as a father and Paul regarded Timothy as a child. Think of that relationship of affection and trustworthiness.

Then we see this man Epaphroditus, in whom we find a certain selflessness: he loved the saints and desired after them. He wanted to go and see them, and it says that he had "a longing desire after you all". That is very attractive, to regard the saints so precious that you want to go and see them and see how they are, have a desire after them, a desire to see the work of God developing in them, and to see what is precious to Christ. Epaphroditus disregarded his own sickness: Paul says, "he drew near even to death, venturing his life that he might fill up what lacked in your ministration toward me". What can any of us say in relation to such a standard of devotion? But there it was in this man, and Paul valued it; the Lord Jesus valued it. What am I prepared to do for Him? Am I promoting myself? This man was even distressed that the saints had heard that he was sick, distressed that they should know how much he had suffered for their sakes, suffered for the work. What he was desirous for was promoting the work of God in the saints whom he loved. What a standard, and it really is those features seen in the Lord Jesus Himself who made nothing of Himself and everything of His Father, and yet the Father honouring Him. Think of how the Lord Jesus was there upon the mountain, and He was there alongside Moses and Elias, and Peter then voicing his desire to build the three tabernacles; and the Father saying, "*This* is my beloved Son: hear him", and then

they see Jesus alone, Matt 17: 5. Think of how the Father delights to honour the Lord Jesus; think of how the Lord humbled Himself, obedient even unto death, but it is God who has exalted Him. A wonderful fact!

In 2 Timothy we read of what the workman is to be. What Paul says is, "Strive diligently to present thyself approved to God, a workman that has not to be ashamed, cutting in a straight line the word of truth". Think of what that means. Paul's work is now finished; he is now with the Lord Jesus. So is Timothy, but we see that the standard is to go on, the work is to go on, but can only go on as approved of God. The workman is to present himself "approved to God". I feel so measured in speaking of that, feel my own failure in that too. I confess it too. "A workman that has not to be ashamed". The standard is, "cutting in a straight line the word of truth". The scriptures speak for themselves. It is important to be able to apply them, apply them rightly that there may be that which results from what I say, and what I am too. Then we see that Timothy is to "entrust to faithful men such as shall be competent to instruct others also" what he had heard from Paul. We are numbered amongst the others. We all, including the younger ones, are to go on taking up responsibility based on being instructed. The instructions of Paul are very clear, instructions for the last day. Chapter 2 verses 19 to 22 is the charter for the assembly and is key to the instructions, the instructions of Paul; and we are to instruct others also. I feel the test of that too - that there should be faithfulness and competency to continue in the Lord's testimony, as He would approve. If it is not approved of Him it will not last; it will not bear fruit. It must be based on what is meeting His approval. So we see, "Strive diligently to present thyself approved to God, a workman that has not to be ashamed".

Then I read about Mark. We see in the book of the Acts that Mark abandoned Paul, abandoned the work and went away (chap 15: 38); here we see his recovery. I feel the need to take it home to myself as to being ashamed. Mark had been ashamed; he had gone away; he had not continued in the work. The work is to continue, and the question is whether I am available. Mark was recovered to the work; he was recovered to Paul himself, "Take Mark, and bring him with thyself, for he is serviceable to me for ministry", 2 Tim 4: 11. No doubt it must have been through repentance and through recognising the Lord's rights over him and his life.

So I read the last verse of Mark's gospel because it shows that

the Lord is working yet and working with those who are loyal to Him and available to Him as His workmen. In the beginning of his gospel, Mark draws attention to the Lord Jesus as, “preaching the glad tidings of the kingdom of God” (chap 1: 14), and at the end He shows that the Lord was working with them, and confirming the signs upon it. The work is going on under His hand; He is the One in whose hand is the testimony, the testimony of our Lord and that is going through. The foundation of the house is there and secure, and the foundation is there in Himself, and there is what is established through the prophets and apostles and it is going right through to the end until He comes. Think of what is thus being built up, a spiritual house for the pleasure and dwelling of God, founded on Him and comprising true believers loyal to him.

We see that the workmen are seen at the end of Mark's gospel as continuing in the work and the Lord working with them. What a wonderful privilege to experience the Lord's help in the work as the One with whom we are yoked. In Matthew's gospel we see that, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”, chap 11: 30. Think of what it is to be yoked with Him in the work, and to prove what is fruitful under His hand in the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord help us that we may have a desire to be available to Him as the One who is the Lord of the harvest, and who is Son over God's house.

For His Name's sake.

LONDON

18th January 2020

NOTE BY EDITORS – On page 5 of the August issue (No 161) the end of our beloved brother's remark in the penultimate paragraph ought to have been published as 'He was forsaken of God. It should draw out our affections towards Him'. This accords with the Lord's words, quoted from Psalm 22.

GOD'S WAYS

A John E Temple

Psalm 17: 5

Psalm 23: 3

Romans 8: 18

I would like to say a little as to God's ways, God's ways for His saints. I was led to the first two scriptures just after the Lord took our sister home to be with Himself. The last scripture was brought to me earlier this week by a brother; they fit in together. What I have to say as to those two scriptures in the psalms stems from part of a note in regard of God's way or ways that is given in our Bibles in Proverbs 2: 9 note *i*. One of the references there speaks of 'God's path for the saint, which does not always lead where we expect, or so that we can see straight on in it'.

These two scriptures in the psalms are linked by the thought of the way. It came to me in regard of our sister: who would have thought of the way that God led her, being in the nursing home for over twenty years, and able to do so very little for herself? But it was God's way. I do not want to expand on that exactly, although in these situations you can understand naturally we might ask, 'Why?'. Why was it? Why has that happened? Why has this been allowed to happen? Beloved, although our sister being in a weakened situation for so long is an extreme case, challenging things do come into our lives; and so I thought a word of encouragement might help us to realise that when difficult things arise in God's ways with us, and we appreciate that they are so. We do not always understand; we do not always see. We certainly may not, as the note suggests, be taken in the way that we expect; and the way certainly may not always enable us to see right on. Who could have seen right on with our sister when, following surgery, she was taken into that nursing home; that it would have led on in that way? I can say that our sister found a certain acceptance in that way, acceptance of God's ways with her. There was a quietness - yes, you might say that was natural on account of her weakness - but also a certain restfulness and acceptance day after day in God's way with her.

I will come briefly to the scriptures read. "When thou" - that is Jehovah - "holdest my goings in thy paths, my footsteps slip not". It suggests that that is when I come to recognise what God is doing, what He is holding. I know it says "When"; it does not simply say, 'Thou dost

hold', but I think the "When" would suggest that it is when I come to it as realising that is what is happening; "thou holdest my goings in thy paths". God has a path for me, a path for you, and it is not only the path, but the way I am to go in that path: "When thou holdest my goings". Am I content, am I restful? Do I see that it is God who is leading me in it? When I do, I can be assured that, while I may not see all things in relation to it, "my footsteps slip not". Why not? because God is doing the holding. It may seem unusual at a burial to take the scriptures up in this way, but I think that with the background of our sister, and our seeing the lives of one another in the path, no two the same, we may wonder at times. If we ask 'Why?', let it not be a 'why' of discontentment, but a 'why' of desiring to see more God's ways with me so, that my knowledge of Him may increase.

We get that suggestion in Psalm 23: "He restoreth my soul". I understand that, when it says He restoreth or He reviveth, it does not mean necessarily that I have fallen out of the way or anything like that, nor done anything wrong in itself, but sometimes we need this reviving. We need rekindling, dear brethren, in our spirits. First we get, "He restoreth my soul" and then, "He leadeth me" - now we get His leading; "he leadeth me in paths of righteousness". Surely the believer would desire to know these ways. You would expect to move in a path of righteousness, but we are to know God in these paths. However, I am not emphasising the character of the paths, for there would be other godly features marking them, but that we come to "for his name's sake". We come to it that it is not only that God is leading us in these paths, it is not only that we may be preserved in that way, but above all it is for what is for Him in it. It is "for his name's sake".

I turn to the final scripture. There are the paths here, the ways, but there is going to be a culmination as well; God is heading up to what will be: there will be "the coming glory to be revealed to us". Meanwhile God's paths for us do involve suffering. Paul says it here, and what a sufferer he was. He is not saying this abstractly; he is saying it as one who had known suffering very soon after he was converted. It was not long before he found himself in a pathway of suffering. He knew the sufferings; he would have seen it in the saints and known these things in himself. How does he sum it all up? "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time". You might say the present little time when our lives here are compared with the great scope of what God is doing. Though our lives might be brief, they are important because God is working in

them. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us": how wonderful that glory is that the sufferings are not even to be compared with it. It is like the sun shining, shining in regard of that glory, so that all else has gone into shade. The ways of God with us in this time are all leading on to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

I trust this will give encouragement to us at this time.

SUNBURY

27th February 2020

REMEMBER PRISONERS

Roland H Brown

Hebrews 13: 3

2 Timothy 4: 6

Matthew 25: 34-40

Our brother has spoken of God's ways and the questions that might arise in our minds as we think of our sister, as we wonder 'Why?'. Of course we have to recognise that God does not have to account to us for His ways with us or with any. Why should one of the Lord's own, one who was borne up in prayer before the throne of grace as our dear sister was, be left so infirm? In our gatherings and in the home she was the subject of prayer. Yet the Lord did not heal her, nor did He take her to be with Himself; she was left in prison conditions.

These scriptures speak of prison conditions; quite clearly in each case referring to persons who were literally in jail on account of their faith. I believe it capable of extension to think of the prison conditions in which our sister was. I remember speaking to a fellow believer, not one with whom I was in fellowship, in relation to my own mother who was left for a long time with advanced dementia and difficulty communicating, as to 'Why?'. The one to whom I spoke said there were many reasons. One was the testimony that such a person, who might well be written off in the world in which we are, was visited. There was evidence that they were loved and they were cared for; and I thought how important that was. The apostle obviously thought it was important too because he says, "Remember prisoners, as bound with them". Those who are unable to gather with us on account of weakness are not to be forgotten. This verse brings out the reality of the body, the body of Christ that "if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it", 1 Cor 12: 26. There is a testimony in that. There is a testimony in persons going to see such as our sister, and there are those in this room who committed themselves to that; and as the final scripture I have read shows, they will receive the Lord's own commendation and reward for a service which was largely unseen and, you might say naturally speaking, unrewarding. There was a testimony for others to take account of, that one who might have been regarded as of little account was remembered by those that in a very real sense were bound with her: bound with her in the bonds of fellowship, bound with her in the bonds of Christ; and in visiting her, as the Lord Himself says in this verse which refers to another time. I think the bearing of it

can be brought forward: “Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren”. “My brethren”: that is what our sister belonged to; she was one of the brethren of Christ. None of us could be greater than that: whether we have part in any public service or not, none of us will be greater than being one of the brethren of Christ, and our sister was numbered among them and the Lord Himself takes account of that. “I was ill, and ye visited me”. Ye visited *Me*. That is the force of it; it was done to Him. He recognised it just as He says to Paul, “why persecutest thou **me**?”, Acts 22: 7. If we speak of ourselves as being bound with prisoners, how indissolubly the Lord Himself is bound with His own in such conditions. We have no doubt of that. We may have found it difficult to communicate with our sister, and she at times finding it impossible to communicate with us, but the Lord was able to communicate and He is able, and in visiting such we are visiting *Him*. “I was ill, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came to me”; conditions where she could not come to us or to our gatherings. I say these words that these features might be stimulated amongst us, not in any way suggesting that there is any lack in it, because I know there are those in this room that were devoted to it and are devoted to it. I believe the testimony is bound up in it.

Another reason such are left is because of the development of these body feelings with us. We live in a busy world. The apostle could say, “all seek their own things”, Phil 2: 21. What a thing it is in the age in which we are; how easy to be marked by it. The Lord would appeal to us that these feelings for His own might be developed with us. That is why I referred to the beloved apostle. He too was in prison literally. He says, “the time of my release is come”, my release. He was not going to get parole; he was not going to get remission for good behaviour; what faced him was martyrdom for Christ. That is the way he spoke of it, “the time of my release is come”. There is that in death: the time of our sister's release has come. She has known prison conditions, confined in the home, and even her own body. The body that we bury had become a prison to her, but the time of her release has come. The apostle speaks with great affection. He says, “I am already being poured out”. He could view it with equanimity that he was departing to be with Christ, which was very much better. How wonderful to take account of death like that. There are deaths that cause great sorrow in the heart, lives which people say are cut short, but there is in this verse a sense of triumph; “the time of my release is come”. It is a great thing to take account of death, not as something to be feared but as

deliverance, as it was for our sister and for the apostle, one who had devoted himself to the Lord's interests and suffered on account of them. There came a time when he was going to be released from all that. He was going to be released to be with Christ, to depart to be "with Christ" which he says, "is very much better", Phil 1: 23. He speaks of being poured out. The earthen vessel which we bury today of course is not forgotten; it will be raised. "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power", 1 Cor 15: 43. Transformed into a body of glory like unto His own.

What salvation has been secured for us through the death of Christ; it was all in divine purpose for our sister, and for each believer. So while we are left here in this hard, cruel and cold world may we be developed in these body feelings for those who are left amongst us in these very limited conditions.

For the Lord's Name's sake.

SUNBURY

27th February 2020

“THE LEAST AMONG YOU ALL”

D Andrew Burr

Luke 9: 48

Luke 22: 25-30

These two passages have just come to me, dear brethren, because of our brother's reference to “the least”, “the least of these my brethren”, Matt 25: 40. This first passage refers to “the least among you all”.

It is very sad that the admonitions in both these scriptures arise from controversy among the men who followed Christ, as to who was the greatest. I will not go into that, except to say it is not a controversy into which our sister would ever have entered at any time in life. We have spoken of the last twenty years of that life, but I cannot imagine her ever engaging in such a dispute in her whole eighty-five years. A spirit like that is of value to the Lord, it is rewarded and it is preserved too.

In relation to the first scripture, we might wonder if the Lord is referring to Himself. I have wondered the same about the passage in Luke 14: 7-11, which has this in common with the scripture in Luke 22 that the Lord was observing a company assembling to sit at table. He saw how there was a striving over the first place. The Lord would not have had any part in that. I think it has been suggested as to Luke 14 that *He* might have taken the last place. That passage is very telling; I have also heard it said in the preaching that it is *He* who is more honourable than those who sought the first place. The point comes in the preaching when someone, we could say it is God, enjoins everybody else to “Give place to this man”. It is a wonderful point to come to when we might say, as Mr Darby wrote -

All thought of self is now for ever o'er! (Hymn 247)

because we have given place to this Man; this Man who calls Himself “the least among you all”. How wonderfully gracious is the place that the Lord has taken; what a spirit He has shown. Our brothers have sought to show, dear brethren, that it is a spirit that others can show: they can learn it from Him. How wonderful it is that it is seen in Him, the spirit of “the least among you all”.

I am confirmed in this idea by the other scripture I read. It has been suggested that the dispute among the disciples here arose over

where they would sit, even at the Supper. The idea of natural precedence of some sort had come into their thoughts. There is no little child here to set in their midst as in chapter 9, but there is the Lord who had set Himself before them. He says, “ye shall not be thus; but let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader” - that is surely Himself pre-eminently - “as he that serves”. Then He asks, “For which is greater, he that is at table or he that serves? Is not he that is at table?”. And He adds, “But I am in the midst of you as the one that serves”. He took the ground that they were all greater than Himself. John 13 records how He demonstrated this to them. John does not record the argument; he had joined in it and no doubt he felt ashamed of having done so, but here we have the words of Jesus, and in John's gospel we have the actions of Jesus to make the same point. He “rises from supper and lays aside his garments”, John 13: 4. He took upon Himself a service which I understand the most junior would undertake in a house where servants were waiting on those at table, to divest Himself of anything that might suggest status or anything of that sort: “he pours water into the wash hand basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples”, v 5. Then He says, “If I therefore, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet”, John 13: 14.

Our brother has already exhorted us to take up practical services, but I also feel that we need to think about the spirit in which we take up any practical service, the spirit in which we follow Jesus. Our brother referred to the path, the good path, the path in which Jesus has been the Leader; and these blessed features are seen in Him. He “emptied himself” (Phil 2: 7), and He took a place among His own for which no status was claimed except the right to serve them.

May He bless the word.

SUNBURY

27th February 2020

(At the meeting for the burial of Miss F Lindberg)

THE SISTERHOOD

William S Chellberg

Nehemiah 2: 6

With the Lord's help, I would like to speak to the sisters about sisterhood, and I would like to speak to the brothers about sisterhood. It is an important thing and there is a feature here that is generally missed, among us, and among all believers.

In the early 1800's Christians around the world became exercised about the place the Holy Spirit would have among them, and they were not finding it in any of the churches. It began, and largely focused upon Ireland, but it was also in England, on the Continent, in India, all pretty much at the same time, and even in New York, probably other places - places we do not know. Persons were leaving the churches, leaving the establishments, leaving whatever churches there were, and they were seeking to make room for the Spirit. We should hold to that foundation - making room for the Spirit. In the course of years of time various gatherings were worked out among those who had been exercised in this way - first of all, the Lord's supper followed by the service of God, and then the prayer meeting. There are scriptures for those two meetings. The reading meetings, this meeting for ministry, the care meeting, a meeting of assembly character in the case of a matter of discipline - those are all meetings that were worked out on the basis of the Scriptures over the years, amounting to almost two centuries. They were worked out in such a way, and the primary exercise was, that the Spirit would have His place, and this is no less important today than it was two hundred years ago - four hundred years ago, two thousand years ago. The Spirit should have His place; Paul says, "the Spirit speaks expressly", 1 Tim 4: 1.

In Acts 13 we see that a meeting was proceeding, and some brothers were named in this meeting. I will say at this point, that in God's order, beginning in Genesis, men have the responsibility of speaking and praying in a public way; Paul says, "I will therefore that the **men** pray in every place", 1 Tim 2: 8. Women, he says, are to "be silent in the assemblies", 1 Cor 14: 34. As this meeting in Acts 13 was proceeding, "the Holy Spirit said, Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13: 2); the Spirit said that. We would assume, because of God's order, that brothers were speaking and this came out. But there is no reason that a *sister* could

not have been there praying, and brought that about. There is plenty of Scripture to indicate the importance of sisters, and that is what I want to speak about. When I say, 'sisterhood', I am speaking about spiritual sisters. These meetings that we have: the Lord's supper and the service of God is the central gathering in the Christian experience and in the testimony at the present time.

And so, we come to this scripture that I read. It is very interesting, though maybe an unusual scripture to read in the ministry meeting, "the queen also sitting by". Why did the Spirit say that? There were three people mentioned at this meeting, just three people: the king, the queen, and Nehemiah. But the Spirit, you might say, goes out of His way to say, "the queen also sitting by". There is a reason for that, because in spiritual things, sisters are no less than brothers spiritually. Brothers speak, and that makes them more important in a public sense, but spiritually it does not make them any more than a sister who quietly speaks to the Lord or the Spirit herself. I say this not as a challenge, because I think we have godly sisters in this place, but it may be that sisters generally get talked down to - perhaps because of clothing, because of hair, because of whatever. Those things are important, but they are also important for brothers as well.

But the Spirit here says, "the queen also sitting by". The king here was about to make one of the most momentous decisions in his kingdom, probably *the* most momentous decision. He was going to let Nehemiah go back to Judah, taking a number of people who had been born in Babylon, and he was going to let him take them all back to Judah. That was a huge decision in those days and would be in these days even; that was a huge decision. But the queen was "sitting by", a moderating, modifying, quietening spirit. Someone could perhaps go on and speak about what the sisterly spirit is; Peter says, "a meek and quiet spirit", 1 Pet 3: 4.

I love the expression "the queen also sitting by", because I can just picture this ornate palace and a king sitting there, and the queen sitting there. I do not know if the queen was Esther - I do not think so, but she was of that character of a person. Esther says quietly to Mordecai, 'Well, you go and fast and I and my maidens will fast', Esth 4: 16. What a wonderful sister Esther was. I just raise this so that we can think about this fact that sisters are as important spiritually as brothers are important spiritually.

We come to the Lord's supper - it is not just a 'you and me' thing;

it is not just each one of us coming and partaking; remembrance is a collective experience. Paul does not praise in 1 Cor 11: 17: "each one in eating takes his *own* supper" (v 21); that is what they may do in the churches; they have these little wafers and a little cup - very little collective remembrance. That sort of arrangement is just between the communicant and maybe the Lord, if they are attached to the Lord. But when we come together, we are united in our love for Christ. And while the brothers do the talking, I trust the sisters will not just sit there and say, 'Well, we have to wait for the brothers to say something' - that is not my exercise - because the spiritual power of a sister can change the whole meeting. How many times has it been that a brother has given out a hymn or said something and a sister has said, 'I was just thinking of that at the same time'? That is one way in which spirituality in sisters can be seen.

So that when the Spirit says, "Separate me now Saul and Barnabas", how did that come about? There were six brothers there who were significant, of various backgrounds; but it does not say what sisters were there. However, I think you would find that there were some godly sisters there, and three chapters later we find Lydia, a seller of purple who was at Philippi. It says, "whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul", Acts 16: 14. That is a tremendous statement. Not much else is said about Lydia, and not much needs to be said, because she was a spiritual sister. She invited Paul into her house; Paul was the centre of the testimony at that time; in one sense he carried the testimony. Of course, there were other brethren too, but because of his prominence and what the Lord had given him he was carrying the testimony. Yet, here was a sister, Lydia, and others - we get, "Aquila and Priscilla", and, "Priscilla and Aquila"; either way, the husband and wife are equal.

I just want to encourage the sisters that they are not insignificant. Sisters are not insignificant in the meetings. They should not be looked down upon because, whatever the Spirit will say in a gathering such as this, or a reading or whatever meeting it may be, His power is there. Paul speaks about it in Corinthians; he says, "ye and my spirit being gathered together", 1 Cor 5: 4. He shows that it was not just Paul who was saying this. It was a difficult time in Corinth when he was saying that in chapter 5, but he was pointing out that it is a collective experience. When we come together for a reading, we hallow that meeting; it is not just any old 'get-together'. We hallow it, and all of our meetings, and most importantly the Lord's supper.

I just say these few things based on this scripture. The way the Spirit speaks it is to alert us to this fact, because He says, “the queen **also** sitting by”. We do not have Haman here; in Esther we have Haman by the king; in other places we have other advisors to the king. Here Nehemiah was the cup-bearer for the king, which was a very close position to the king, but the Spirit says that this woman, the queen, was “sitting by”.

I trust that our gatherings would be like that; I think in some sense they are like that, but I would encourage the sisters especially. Why I said I was speaking to the brothers about sisterhood is because brothers need to know that there is something coming from the sisters spiritually. That is why I said I speak to the brothers about sisterhood; we need to be open and ready for what the Spirit would say. A brother may take what a sister says in prayer and bring it into the meeting, and this is an important thing.

I just leave that with the brethren and suggest we ponder on it a little, for His Name's sake.

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Wheaton

5th March 2020