

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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CONTENTS

God's House

Page 1

Piety

Roland H. Brown

Page 16

Responsibility

William S. Chellberg

Page 25

Paul Before Agrippa

John N. Darby

Page 29

GOD'S HOUSE

1 Timothy 3: 14-16

RHB I wondered if it would be profitable in this reading to consider what the saints are as God's house, which is - as the passage says - the assembly of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth. The thought of God having a dwelling place on the earth goes back a long time in the scriptures. It is a thought that is very precious to His heart that He would dwell with men. I think it comes in initially after the Passover in Exodus. Redemption having been in figure accomplished, God reveals His desire that there might be a sanctuary in which He could dwell with men. What was set up then in the tabernacle, as we know, is a figure of what was much greater. When Solomon built his house he said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold ... the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built!", 1 Kings 8: 27. I trust that we do not lose our sense of the wonder of that.

These things that I am speaking of are fairly fundamental but I think our souls are to be filled with a sense of wonder, that the One whom we have addressed in our hymn (405) in such exalted terms, should dwell on the earth. We know He is going to dwell with men eternally, Rev 21: 3. And then we get the clear statement of Stephen, "the Most High dwells not in places made with hands", Acts 7: 48. It was evident even as the temple made with hands was built, that the builder of it found it almost incomprehensible that God should accommodate Himself to it, but what is presented here is what is spoken of elsewhere as a spiritual house, which is, as the passage goes on to say, "the assembly of the living God" - the *living* God. I wondered if we might get help in looking at these expressions as to the house of God and the features that are to mark it which are developed in this epistle. Firstly, we have the thought of prayer in the beginning of chapter 2, prayers for all men, v 1. That is a prime feature of God's house, that prayers are to be made: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations", Mark 11: 17. It should be evident that there are persons in living touch with God and in touch with Him in relation to His interests, which involve all men. And then in chapter 2, it goes on to speak of God's order in creation in men and women, and appearance and behaviour that is suitable, v 8-15. In chapter 3 you get references to oversight and practical service, care of persons' souls, and care of their bodies and their bodily needs, v 1-13. All this is going on in what is

typical and characteristic of God's dwelling place, which is the assembly of the living God. It is stressed that He is the living God not only in contrast to idolatry but in contrast to the danger of falling into becoming fossilized in relation to forms and procedure. But God is the *living* God and I think the reference would include the thought of divine communications; not only our speaking to Him but present living communications from Him. And then it speaks of it as the pillar and base of the truth. I am very much relying on the help of the brethren to open up these few thoughts.

We get in chapter 2 the desire of God that men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, v 4. We might speak of what that means - the truth, but in this chapter we find where the truth is. It is in God's house and it is there to be discovered. God desires that it should be discovered and what follows in the verse which pre-eminently speaks of Christ personally, I think is helpful as to the truth that is to be discovered. God manifested in flesh, and the other references in that verse, are very brief but very extensive, but what was manifested in Christ in flesh is to be manifested in God's house. I think that is the reason that it is brought in here in relation to the mystery of piety. I hope that will be profitable for us.

EFW I am sure it will be, and it is of great interest to every believer. Going back to your opening remarks do we get something, very early, of God's desire to be with man even in the Garden of Eden? He called out to Adam "where art thou?" (Gen 3: 9) and, although the conditions there were not suitable for His dwelling, do you think that it gives us some impression that at the outset that was His desire to be with man? The conditions there were of disobedience; now is that something to which the truth would be the opposite? The Lord said of Himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14: 6. He is that.

RHB Yes, I think that is helpful. God making man from the outset in His image and after His likeness (Gen 1: 26) had that in mind, that He might enter into relationship with men. It says in 1 Timothy 6: 16, of God, "who only has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor is able to see", so that in His essence He is unknown and unknowable; and that would never be sufficient for the heart of God?. He desires to be known. He is the God who reveals Himself, and we as His creatures are dependent upon what is revealed, are we not? But He has revealed to us "his great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph 2: 4) and I thought that what has been so expressed in

the blessed God is to be expressed in His house and in those who form it. Would agree with that?

EFW Yes, that is very good. I do not think I can add anything to that.

STE Is the house of God a complete matter or is it something that is being built at the present time?

RHB Well, I think in the context here, it is really speaking about the Christian circle on earth at any one time, is it not? It is referring to what is here. We know that many of the saints are with Christ, but I think the house of God as it is spoken of here refers to what is on the earth at any one time, and how we are to conduct ourselves in it. I do not know if I have answered your question but that seems to me how it is presented; but you tell us what you were thinking.

STE It just struck me that there is something that is so precious. Men's buildings are for our eyes to see, to look at naturally, but this is something that has to come from the heart; it has to come from the inward being of the believer to appreciate, and that is what God takes pleasure in, does He not?

RHB Yes. And we know that in the beginning *all* believers were together so that it was easy to identify the Christian circle as opposed to the Jewish synagogue and the idol house, but in writing this epistle the apostle could see what was coming in. In fact the next chapter opens with the Spirit speaking from the house, that there would be apostasy from the faith. All that was anticipated, that the Christian circle as it was set up in the Acts in its pristine glory would not remain like that. The present chaos and confusion in Christendom publicly was fully anticipated and provided for in the scriptures but what is important in the apostle's mind, as he writes, is that this man to whom he wrote would know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house. I think what is brought out in the epistle is timeless. It is always true as long as the house of God is here on the earth.

JW Was the house built by Christ and the Spirit took His abode in it? It has been here since Pentecost, persons are brought into it by receiving the Spirit but it was built by Christ and the Spirit took His abode. That is how God dwells in it, is it not?

RHB Yes. I thought that would be included in what is said in verse 16, that He was justified in the Spirit. There was what was formed on the earth by Christ but the Spirit took possession of it in the Acts. It says in

Acts 2: 2, "and there came suddenly a sound out of heaven as of a violent impetuous blowing, and filled all the house where they were sitting." Now while that was clearly a reference to the literal building they were in I think there is spiritual significance in that. The persons there had been brought together and formed as a company by Christ, but the Spirit took possession of the House and the evidence of that was that the gospel went out.

PJW It is spoken of as "the true tabernacle, which the Lord has pitched, and not man, Heb 8: 2. I was thinking it is important that man has nothing to do with it, neither its origin nor its building. Is that right?

RHB Well, in the truth of it, it is right. Of course in our experience man has had a great deal of interference with it. It is through the introduction of what is of man that what we, perhaps too lightly, sometimes refer to as the breakdown, has happened. There have been things brought in to the house of God that do not belong there.

DAB The house of God has to be worthy of the One whose house it is and everything in it must be as He would have it. The way it may be held in the profession may not be right, but that departure cannot compromise the integrity of the divine thought, which as our brother says is maintained by the Spirit. Unlike Solomon's temple, this house is not falling down is it? There may be those whose walk and conduct is not in keeping with it, with whom God would not feel comfortable, but the house is there in all its wonder and glory, is it?

RHB I think that is a helpful way of putting it, that we get to know one another, speaking simply, in one another's houses. If I come to your house I see things as you would have them arranged. What proceeds is according to your taste and preference. Now if that is so in our houses, how much more so should it be evident in God's house! That is why I thought these features that are touched on in the epistle are so important and that the predominant feature of God's house is the matter of prayer. I wonder in that connection why there is with us sometimes a slowness in relation to prayer. Sometimes in the prayer meeting and meetings like this there is slowness to pray. Maybe we fall into customs and think, well, it is for somebody else or it is their turn and so on, but it seems to me that the predominant feature of the house of God is that in it men are addressing God in reverence.

DAB That is interesting that you should say that. If I am right that everything in God's house is to be done God's way, it is significant that

He says, "My house *shall* be called a house of prayer", Matt 21: 13. That is not just when we are ready, is it? That is something He has ordained as an initial characteristic of His house and should therefore be supplied. Is that your thought?

RHB Yes. It is ordained in chapter 2 as well. The chapter opens with "I exhort" that these things proceed. But when you get to verse 8 of chapter 2, "I *will* therefore". I think that reference to 'I will' is apostolic authority ordaining that the men (that is, in contrast to women) pray in every place. I think we should encourage one another, dear brethren, as to this because the sisters are not free to pray aloud publicly. It has been ordained in God's house that the men are to pray. Now why should there be delay or reluctance or hindrance in that? The predominant feature of God's house is that He is surrounded by those whom He has blessed, and in the sense of that blessing their hearts go out to Him responsively.

AMcS Do you think the delay in our prayers is because we have not grasped the reality of the current situation? I was thinking of Acts 4 and the position in which the disciples found themselves, and the prayers that were offered up.

RHB What are you referring to in Acts 4? Help us.

AMcS I was just thinking about when Peter was challenged by the authorities because of his service, that the saints gathered together to pray. They were not praying at that time for the sick or the poor even, although that was one of the things they prayed for normally, but it was the reality of what it was to be a Christian - to testify to the living God.

RHB Yes, there was great prayer in relation to Peter in the early Acts and the position that the testimony brought him into. In 1 Timothy 2 it is particularly prayers for men; you might say it is prayers in relation to the glad tidings because the passage brings out that they are very near to God's heart. The reason why that is brought forward is given: "for this is good and acceptable before our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved", 1 Tim 2: 4. It seems to me that comes back to what was said about God being entitled to have things as *He* would have them in His house: His desire is that men should be saved and that they should come to the knowledge of the truth. That is God's desire and He would have that desire reflected in those that form His house here on earth.

JW Would God in His house set himself in relation to all men? He did in the Mediator when Christ was here. He sets Himself now in relation to men in His house: do you think that is why prayers are made for all men?

RHB It is one of the great features of the house of God, is it not? That it is for all. It is not, as in the Old Testament, for one nation on the earth but it goes on to speak of God being manifested in flesh and so on. He has been preached among the nations and has been believed on in the world. It is universal, is it not? It is God setting Himself in relation to humanity, and where is the evidence of that today if it is not in God's house?

JW You can understand that the gospel went out from the house: the house had to be there before the gospel went out. We have to keep that before us even in the day of breakdown, that the gospel goes out really from the assembly.

RHB Yes, and the assembly is built up by the gospel. The brethren will know that, historically, amongst us there has been a tension between what have been described as 'church men', or 'assembly men' and 'evangelicals'. If you look at the scriptures it is difficult to see why that should be, because it separates things that the scriptures put together. The preaching of the gospel is an essential feature of the house of God, and the assembly of God is built up through the preaching of the gospel. In the Acts, it says that "the Lord added to the assembly" (Acts 2: 47) through the preaching as it went out and one wonders why there has existed and may still exist to some extent, this tension; some fearful that through stressing the gospel we are somehow lowering the dignity and truth of the assembly, and others thinking that by stressing the truth of the church we are in some way overlooking the gospel. The two, it seems to me, are inextricably bound together and what I think should be a concern with us is that the gospel as it is preached amongst us in our rooms and wider in our testimony is maintained at the level that God would have it preached because if it is not, if we overlook that feature of the house of God apart from the grace of God, we shall wither away. We cannot rely on what has been described as a hereditary fellowship, there must be the outgoing of God's heart reflected in His house if we are looking to Him for the maintenance livingly of the testimony on the earth.

EC Could you help us as to how the assembly of the living God

becomes the pillar and base of the truth? I was thinking of a pillar being supported, and the base being the foundation, but how do you link those two things with the assembly please?

RHB Well I would be glad to enquire about that, but I have always thought that the thought of the pillar is what can be seen, and the base is what is supportive, is it not? The assembly of the living God is spoken of as the pillar and base of the truth and I suppose we are familiar with what has been said as to the truth that it involves all that can be known of God. It is not just simply what is true as opposed to what is a lie but all that God has been pleased to reveal to us as to Himself. He Himself is unseen but where is what has been revealed to be seen on the earth if it is not seen in His house? So the truth is located there. It is there, I suppose, primarily in testimony - the thought of a shining out for others to take account of but I think it is there also, if it is the assembly of the living God, in the sense of living hope in the souls of those that form the house.

DAB Is not what we are now enquiring about exactly what you were just saying? I wonder if there is a connection with the porch of Solomon's house which was formed with two pillars, 1 Kings 7: 15. They did not hold the temple up, because they were taller than the temple, but I wonder if the idea of the pillar is monumental. The Lord says that in relation to the overcomer, "him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God ... and I will write upon him" (Rev 3: 12), that is on the pillar. What is written on the pillar is a witness to what that person is. Is that not what should be manifested among us as people approach, as it was to those who approached Solomon's house? One might be at the porch, and there should be this witness to the things that you have spoken of, the harmony of church truth with the gospel. Is that what it is intended to be a monument for?

RHB Yes. I think it is and that is a helpful way of putting it, that in the house of God the harmony between those two things is readily seen; and it is there for all who would accept it. It struck me as thinking about this before the meeting that the element of testimony in the house of God is part of man's responsibility, is it not? We speak of persons who hear the gospel coming under responsibility in relation to what they hear. But because the Spirit is in the house, even in the broken day in which we are, the testimony that goes out puts men under responsibility and accountability to God in relation to it, do you not think?

DAB I was thinking that there should be a testimony, as any one drew near, not simply that there is a living God, as opposed to the idolatry that marks other systems of religion, but that He is the centre of a living order of things. As Joshua said "Hereby shall ye know that the living God is in your midst", Josh 3: 10. The spiritual house you refer to is made of living stones (1 Pet 2: 5), it is not? And as anyone approached, the testimony and witness that they would find would be to the living and responsive system of things of which the living God Himself was the centre. That would challenge us as to our moral responsibility and whether we are marked by moral life or death.

RHB I think what you say is very challenging because it is not the house of God simply because we are in fellowship with one another, is it? The house of God is composed of living stones. Persons that have come to Christ - "to whom coming", 1 Pet 2: 4. They have come this way. It is interesting in this epistle that the apostle speaks of how he came. He says that what he was before he came was "a blasphemer and persecutor, and an insolent overbearing man ... But the grace of our Lord surpassingly over-abounded", 1 Tim 1: 13,14. He speaks of himself as the first of sinners and mercy shown him, v 15,16. All these things are recounted here. He recounts how he came to be part of the house, and that is the way we all come. We cannot presume, because we are in fellowship with one another that that is the house of God; it is through personal contact with Christ.

DAB It is not as if Paul was shut away to have some kind of theological debate with himself, but he was drawn to this by the living witness that there was among the people of God. He was drawn to it with a desire to persecute it but drawn to it he was, and the Lord showed him as he was drawn towards it what its true moral character had to be.

RHB I think that is very interesting because, as you see from the account of his conversion, he had to do with the Lord personally on the road to Damascus; but then the question "What shall I do, Lord?" was met with, "go to Damascus, and there it shall be told thee all things which it is appointed thee to do", Acts 22: 10. His attention was drawn to a circle here on earth. The Lord was not operating independently of that, so that, as Saul came to Damascus his first contact with that circle was a man coming and putting his hands upon him and saying, "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me" (Acts 9: 17) - "*Saul, brother*". His first impression of the house of God was of a welcome. If we think of Luke 15, we often speak of that as the Father's house and of course there is a

good deal of prominence given in that chapter to the father, but what the prodigal son came to was not the father's house in glory, he came to God's house here on the earth. The first impression he got of it was of a welcome.

JRW I was just wondering if you could say a little more of what is in mind as to the preaching in that regard. Was what you are speaking of established before the preaching went out?

RHB I think it was, yes. What were you thinking about it?

JRW I was just trying to link on with what is in your mind and the question in relation to the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. It seems that if there is to be the gospel going out (it speaks here of 'has been preached') it would be God, would it not, who "has been preached among the nations, has been believed on in the world"? There must be something stable to which that relates.

RHB It was in a relatively small compass in the beginning when the Spirit came, but it grew rapidly through the preaching. The house of God had to be formed first before the preaching could go forth from it so that there was a place of salvation here on the earth to which those that were affected by the grace of God could be brought, do you think?

JRW Yes, I was struck by what you said of Paul when he was Saul, there was something there that could be attacked. And I wondered whether one of the features of God's house is that of life. Prayer, which you have spoken of, would be evidence of life, would it not? It says, "the living, he shall praise thee, as I this day" (Isa 38: 19); there is evidence of life in God's house.

RHB Yes, it is the living God. We know that His earthly people went on with feasts that had been ordained of God but left God out, so that each became described as "the feast of the Jews", John 5: 1; 6: 4; 7: 2. I think that is an ever present danger that we may lay hold of or apprehend things that in their time originated from God Himself but we may hold them apart from God. The thought of the assembly of the *living* God is that it is not historical, things are living, there are living communications from Him.

CJRB Does he keep this thought very much before Timothy? In 1 Tim 4: 10, "we hope in a living God, who is preserver of all men, specially of those who believe". Then he challenges him to "be a model of the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity", 1 Tim 4: 12. He

encourages Timothy even in his youth. I was thinking of the reference made to the young ones amongst us, is this showing the path that we should take, the energy that should be used in what is in relation to the living God?

RHB Yes, and you are quoting in chapter 4. There is a very touching note to verse 5 where it speaks of the simple matter of giving thanks for our food. The verse speaks of the very food itself being “sanctified by God's word and freely addressing him”. Mr Darby's note to “addressing” speaks of 'intercourse with a person ... one person speaking personally to another'. It is a very blessed thing, is it not, to have that liberty with God - freely addressing Him - and He having liberty to freely address us, and without the consciousness of anything that might hinder such intimacy? You see the things that you have referred to as to conduct, love, faith and purity: any failure in relation to those matters would bring in tension in that relationship, would it not? He stresses in the first chapter that, “the end of what is enjoined is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and unfeigned faith - *a good conscience*; that is, the knowledge that there is nothing between you and God, and that must be maintained if there is to be the intimacy of this freely addressing Him, do you think?

CJRB I value that.

MRC What you are saying raises a challenge with each soul as to how familiar I am in my intercourse with divine Persons, reverently speaking, and how readily I turn to them. In John 17: 1 it says, “these things Jesus spoke, and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father”. It shows the simplicity of the way in which He could just turn to the Father at any time. Is that your desire that we should be more free in our individual communion and hence as together be more ready in prayer?

RHB Well, I feel the need of it. I am feeling my way on these things with the brethren because I feel the need of it myself, the need of being stirred up in relation to it and the danger of becoming fixed in forms and procedures and customs and so on. We might wait at a meeting to pray because it is customary for this or that to happen or somebody to speak, but in the assembly of the living God there is liberty for men to speak to God publicly, and that is all men, all that form the house of God. It has been well said that it does not require gift to speak to God in prayer. It does not require gift to open a meeting in prayer or to close it.

What it requires is affection, affection for God and affection for His people, that would serve them and would serve Him in that way.

DH Do you see any connection with the house of God you were speaking of and the body of Christ?

RHB Well now, that is a big question! You must give us some help on it.

DH You spoke at the outset about being available. 1 Corinthians 12 mentions the assembly there, but it is as the body, “all the members of the body, being many, are one body”, v 12, and “have all been given to drink of one Spirit”, v 13. There is a mutuality there?

RHB Yes, I suppose the thought of the body is that it is Christ's body, it is “the fulness of Him who fills all in all”, and it is what the saints are as expressive of Christ, do you think? The position here seems to be the more public one, and I suppose this epistle is more practical. There is very little in the way of doctrine in this epistle. What is stressed is what is practical and I suppose in the day we are in there is a need for that because we may become top heavy, we might know it all in its terms but our practice may part company with what we know, and therefore the stress in the epistle is on how what we know works out in very practical and basic ways. I think the mystery of piety is that; it involves the simplicity in the detail of our lives, not simply when we are together but when we are away from one another.

DJR The first thing mentioned of the mystery of piety links us directly with Jesus so that any time we are together anybody would see that here are some people who are occupied with One who is God manifest in flesh.

RHB Yes, although He is not named here. *God* has been manifested in flesh. It could be rendered of course He who has been manifested in flesh. All that God is has been expressed. All the fulness of the Godhead dwelt and dwells in Him bodily (Col 1: 19; 2: 9) and that has been expressed. It has come onto view and it has been seen publicly and it has been rejected. That is the situation. People say that there is nothing to see but there has been everything to see and it has been rejected, but I think in the house of God there is a continuation of that. God is manifested in flesh, speaking reverently.

DAB There is something very wonderful here, is there not, because this reference to piety involves that God is glorified? God was

manifested completely, would you say, in One who glorified Him completely? If people ask 'What was there to see?', the glorifying of God is what there was to see. Is that right? And that continues now by the Spirit in God's house. That precious testimony is still here. I wonder if that is partly why the name is not given because there is a principle at stake here which continues in the day of the Spirit.

RHB That is what I was feeling after. You would go with that, would you? This pre-eminently refers to the Lord Jesus, that God was manifested in flesh in Him, and all these statements, glorious in themselves, relate to Him but the fact that they are brought in here in relation to the house of God seems to convey to me that there is a connection of each statement with those who form the house of God. Would you agree with that?

DAB I was just noticing that God and God's dispensation is the theme running through this letter. That was set on, was it not, in the life of Jesus here and has been set on too in the coming of the Spirit, but it continues now? We are in God's dispensation in which He has this relationship with the world through His house. These things that were seen in the initiation of that dispensation in Jesus should continue in the power of the Spirit.

RHB And they do, do they not? It says in the Acts "all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach", Acts 1: 1. You get the harmony supremely there in the things that Jesus did and the things that He taught, and it seems to me that the history of the dispensation has been that the enemy has sought to drive a wedge between them. What we teach and what we do tend not to be equal but in Him they were perfectly equal.

JW The mystery of piety would involve that God was seen in the details of the life of Christ, and piety would ensure that we bring the living God into the details of life and God is expressed in them, would you say?

RHB Yes. So that even as to the matter of the giving of thanks for the food that is referred to in the next chapter, it was the way that the Lord Jesus did that in resurrection that revealed to His own who He was, Luke 24: 30,31.

DAB We could just make a simple point for the children; they are accustomed to giving thanks but the Person who started that was

Jesus. That rather illustrates the point that our brother was making, that things came into expression in the detail of life, in the life of Jesus. They should be continued now in any rightly instructed believer, any who “are faithful and know the truth”, 1 Tim 4: 3.

RHB How easily that simple act could become a formality. People speak about saying grace - it could become a formality, and yet it is an opportunity for my heart to go out to God in thankfulness for His blessing and it is an opportunity to remember that what is before me to eat does not simply come from the supermarket, but it comes from the hand of God. I think that God would have us to be reminded of it, that what we are appropriating and need to appropriate for the maintenance of our lives comes from the life-giving God Himself.

KJM In Corinthians It speaks of a simple person and the comment is made that he would report “that God is indeed amongst you”, 1 Cor 14: 24,25. I wonder if that would be a characteristic of the house of God.

RHB Well, I think so. It is the evidence that God is there, and it speaks of that in relation to what we call a ministry meeting too. Someone might come in, and they would be searched by the fact that God was there and His word was there. There is that side to it, the very nature of God involves that if we live in intimacy with Him we shall be searched. It is an inevitable consequence of being called to be the people of God that His word will search us out because of His intrinsic holiness.

EC Could please say how you explain God being justified in the Spirit.

RHB Give us your impression!

EC My only thought is that the Spirit has made manifest much of God Himself and that has justified God. There has been a witness by the Spirit to what God is.

RHB It is quite a profound reference, I think. I would like help on it myself, but He was not justified in the flesh, was He? The Lord Jesus was not justified in the flesh. He was God *manifest* in flesh. But as far as men would say outwardly, His life was one of sorrow and He died and He has never been justified since. That is the public position. He was not justified in the flesh. His justification was in the Spirit in the things that He did in His life in the power of the Spirit, and in the Spirit coming upon those that He left and the testimony that the Spirit of God has

borne to Him since. You get also that reference in Romans 1: 4 that He was “marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness”. He was marked out, and was justified in the Spirit, and He was marked out “by resurrection of the dead”. That, of course, was the public evidence that He was the Son of God, not only His own resurrection but the fact that He raised the dead. The Spirit of holiness is referred to in relation to that.

JRW Does what the Lord says in John 16: 10 help? He speaks of the Spirit bringing demonstration to the world (v 8), and one of the things is “of righteousness, because I go away to my Father, and ye behold me no longer”.

RHB Yes. The Lord did not look for justification in the flesh did He? If we bring this through to those who form the house of God, there will be no public accrediting of that until the Lord comes into His own. There will be no justification, you might say, in the flesh, rather it will be suffering; it will be, “all indeed who desire to live piously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”, 2 Tim 3: 12. The maintenance here of what was seen supremely in Christ will attract the greatest hostility of the enemy, which is why we might shrink from it and be slow in relation to it. The justification is very real in the Spirit, is it not?

PJW Would it be right to say of every believer who receives the Spirit that that in itself is justifying God?

RHB And they received it from Him, did they not? Is that what you had in mind?

PJW Yes, it is vindicating God really, is it, in His operations? Your suggestion that this carries forward this thought which I think is very helpful.

RHB “Has appeared to angels”. You see, angels are brought in in relation to the saints, they desire to look into the glad tidings (1 Pet 1: 12) and in relation to the token that is referred to in Corinthians it is on account of the angels. There is something that can be taken account of that is of God.

DAB I remember when I was a boy, a brother used to say that the death of Jesus raised a question about whose side God was on. Would He take sides with the Jews, and what they had done in treating Jesus as an impostor, or would He be true to the One who testified to His glory? And the Spirit came on those who believed on His Son. That

justified Him, did it not? God signalled His allegiance. I was thinking of what was said that, the Spirit comes on those who believe and that is the witness, is it, that God has justified Jesus in that it is His believers who have the Spirit?

RHB Yes, I think that is helpful.

Dorking

30th June 2007

Key to initials

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Editors' Note

We wish to clarify an expression used in the November issue, 5 lines up from the foot of at page 21: the bearing of sin and sins by the Lord Jesus was only at the cross, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24.

PIETY

Roland H Brown

1 Timothy 3: 16; 6: 3-11, 17; 4: 1-6

2 Timothy 3: 1-5, 10-15

I felt led, dear brethren, to say a little about piety, but I want to say something first in general about these two letters to Timothy. Most will know that they were written to a younger man, and there are many younger men here this afternoon; and they were written by the apostle Paul, a man who on any view - even in the view of those who hated him - had given his life to the interests of Christ and the interests of Christianity. He did not have the domestic happiness that most of us have - he had no wife or family, or permanent home or local brethren. In 2 Corinthians 11 he lists his suffering, under pressure, as though he otherwise would not have mentioned it. (But we do have it mentioned, and we get it with intent from the Spirit of God). What this beloved servant went through, including things such as, "a night and a day I passed in the deep ... in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers..." and receiving a scourging, v 23-27. We were reminded in the meetings nearby, a little while back, of the cost at which the testimony has reached this part of the world. I believe the Spirit of God would underline that, that others have laboured, and we this afternoon are privileged to enter into their labours, John 4: 38. We are not called upon to undergo what *he* underwent. What the apostle, and indeed the twelve as well, had as their mission was pioneer work. In the beginning of the Acts, Christ having gone up on high and the Spirit having come, you see the Spirit's thrust in the testimony. First of all, primarily through Peter, the testimony went first to the Jew. The Lord's commission to him was to feed His sheep and to feed His lambs (John 21: 15, 17), and great blessing attended the labours of that servant of God; but great suffering attended them also. And, of course, he undertook that work with a peculiar discipline from the Lord upon him. He had been told by the Lord that he would live to be an old man but that his life would not end naturally; he would not die, as men say, of natural causes, but his life would end in martyrdom, John 21: 18, 19. You see him in prison, with his execution set for the next day, *restful* because the Lord had told him that he would live to be an old man, Acts 12: 6. The circumstances made it look as though that was not going to happen, but it did. He laboured through great suffering and under a peculiar discipline from

the Lord in order that the Jewish brethren might receive the glad tidings, and the other apostles did too.

But then you come to the apostle Paul and he was peculiarly sent to the nations, to the gentiles. (All this is known by most here, but perhaps not all, which is why I go over it.) He was sent to the gentiles and to Europe; and into the part of the world where we are. He too was engaged in pioneer work. Whereas Peter was combating the religious pride of the Jew, Paul was confronted with heathendom and idolatry and all sorts of licentious practices that were associated with that. He was securing assembly material. But the Lord had imposed upon him too a peculiar discipline. "For I will shew to him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9: 16); the Lord showed him that. A man who, in his time, had persecuted the assembly of God. One thinks of the way that he writes about that and the grief that that must have been to him as he more than any came to learn what the assembly was to the heart of Christ. He speaks of his intelligence in the mystery (Eph 3: 4), and must have thought that that was, at one time, what he was set against. In the ways of God - inscrutable and unfathomable in their wisdom - he was shown how much he must suffer for the Lord's Name's sake. And that did not put him off; the effect of the love of Christ upon him was such that he devoted his life to Christ. He says, "having judged this: that one died for all, then all have died; and he died for all, that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them and has been raised", 2 Cor 5: 14,15. You get a glimpse, I think, in those words, not only of what is helpful for us, but of the prevailing principle in the life of that apostle. He had judged this that Christ had died for him, and he was no longer going to live to himself, but he was going to live to Him who had died for him and has been raised. Now I think that very simply is the principle of piety, as a principle of living, that his life was not going to be with self as an object any more, but his object in his life was going to be Christ. And it was going to be Christ whatever the consequences. He was prepared to commit himself to have Christ as his object and to leave the consequences of that to Him. This is the basis, dear brethren, on which the testimony has reached this part of the world.

Now as he takes up his pen to write to this young man, Paul has in prospect, particularly, and more particularly in the second epistle, the prospect that he is going to pass off the scene, and the question clearly pressed upon him as to how this young man, his protégé, would manage in his absence. More pressing was the question how what he

had devoted his life to here was to be maintained, in view of the increasing cloud of opposition to it. What you find running through these letters is the urgent appeal that there might be personal godliness and holiness with Timothy in his life. Indeed, he was not only to be so personally, but as he says in 1 Timothy 4: 6, "Laying these things before the brethren, thou wilt be a good minister of Christ Jesus". That is, he was not only to be personally pious but he was to lay that before the brethren. He could not very well lay it before the brethren if he was not so himself personally. So there is a great deal in the epistle as to his personal holiness. He is urged, for example, to keep *himself* pure. Not simply to rely on others, or even to rely on God, in a sense. He would need divine help as we all do, but the responsibility *to keep himself pure* is pressed upon him, 1 Tim 5: 22.

Now he speaks to Timothy (especially in the second epistle) in view of his departure and that is what made me think of the peculiar appropriateness of this to our own day; because Paul was the last of the apostles, 1 Cor 15: 8. "*He* has given some apostles", (Eph 4: 11); how thankful we are for them! But Timothy was not an apostle. He was left to occupy the ground that had been won. The pioneer work had been done by others at tremendous cost, and the question now is not exactly the pioneer work. The question is whether there is the heart to maintain what has been won at such cost, or is it all to be surrendered? That is the question, and the Spirit of God draws attention in His faithfulness and in His grace to the fact that there are great forces at work to destroy what has been won. He speaks of the mystery of piety as we have read about it in the reading. Each of those statements in verse 16 is profound. There is a depth of meaning in them. They deserve reflection, each of those statements in verse 16, and they are spoken of as the mystery of piety, what is known to piety. It is what is not known, or taken account of, or given much credence, in the world but is known to faith, that God has been manifested here in flesh in the person of Jesus, and justified in the Spirit, and seen of angels. How amazing that is. It has been preached among the nations: that had gone on, and he is urging Timothy elsewhere to "do the work of an evangelist", that the work might go on - "believed on in the world, has been received up in glory". *Received up in glory*.

That is the great end, it was the end for him and it is the great end for the church, that it will be received up in glory. It may be despised here and rejected, but it is appreciated there. Peter says of

Christ, "cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious", 1 Pet 2: 4. The Lord Jesus is spoken of as the pious man, "Jehovah hath set apart the pious man for himself" (Ps 4: 3) and it says of Jesus that He was "heard because of his piety" (Heb 5: 7), or "in that he feared" (AV). He was heard. How affecting it is to think of One who said, "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will", Heb 10: 7. A committal was made to complete the will of God in the knowledge that that will would involve the sacrifice of Himself - the laying down of His own life and the shedding of His life's blood. But then the Spirit speaks expressly that some shall apostatise from the faith. I just want to draw attention to the grace of that, that the Spirit of God should protest against that. It is not His usual work. His usual service is to draw attention to Christ, to speak of Him, to receive of the things of Christ and to show them to those who love Him, and to announce to them what is coming, John 16: 13,14. Only the Spirit of God can do that. Only the Spirit of God can announce what is coming. Many people try to speak about the future but - I say this for the benefit of those who are younger here - the great hallmark of the Bible, this book that you are greatly privileged to hold in your hands, one proof that it is the word of God, is that it contains prophecy. You will find in it prophecies that have been fulfilled already, and yet they were foretold long before they took place; and you will find prophecies there that are awaiting fulfilment but are just as reliable as the ones that have already been fulfilled. The Lord Jesus spoke of His own death. He spoke of the manner of it, and it had been spoken of by prophets long before. The detail of His sufferings had been spoken of by prophets long long before. "They gave me vinegar to drink", Ps 69: 21. "They parted my garments among themselves, and on my vesture they cast lots", John 19: 24, Ps 22: 18. The Spirit of God goes to great lengths in relation to the life of Jesus, and particularly to His sufferings, to show how every detail that He had indited so long before was fulfilled. What a precious thing to have the Scriptures in our hands. What a precious thing to have a divine Person here, alerting us as to the course of the testimony and influences abroad that would seek to destroy its character beyond recovery.

And so He draws attention to these apostasies that would come in. The particular ones that he is speaking of here are the *forbidding* - the forbidding to marry, the forbidding of certain foods. It is well to remember that some people advertise, or advocate, vegetarianism. If people choose to eat vegetables and not meat, that is their choice.

There may be a medical reason why they do it, but to *teach* that it is wrong to eat meat is error. We want to be clear about that. It is one of the apostasies that the Scriptures speak of here. Things that God has given can never harm you; what comes from Him is infinitely benevolent. Everything that God gives to man is for his good. It was so in the law, it was so creatorially in the Garden of Eden, and it remains the same, that every good and every perfect gift comes from Him. Nothing that God would give you will harm you. What man may do to it may corrupt it, may be damaging, but even that can be met by this scripture that says that the very food we eat “is sanctified by God's word and freely addressing him.” That is comforting in a day when persons are concerned about climate change, and pollution in the environment, and damage to the food chain, so much so that you begin to wonder if anything is safe to eat at all. You come back to this scripture, that in simple piety you can take what God puts within your reach, in the knowledge that as you turn to Him in thankfulness for it, it is “sanctified by God's word and freely addressing him”. How simple Christianity is, is it not? How simple it becomes! How complicated life is, but how simple the life of piety is. One feels the challenge of it for oneself in speaking of it, the responsibility, indeed, in speaking of such a thing that it might mark us more. It has been said before that former generations were more marked by this feature perhaps than we are. Generations that suffered material deprivation, generations that, for example, went through the war years and wondered where their food was coming from, learnt to trust and rely upon God and found resource in the most unlikely ways and avenues. Needs were met in the most unexpected ways. The result was that, through very real experience through years of adversity, God was proved. God says in the scripture, “prove me now”, Mal 3: 10. He invites us, dear brethren, to put Him to the test as to whether He is able. He says in 2 Corinthians 6: 17, 18, “come out from the midst of them ... and I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters”. Now that is not teaching, as I understand it, the great truth of sonship. That is teaching that if we come out from what is obnoxious to God, and we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God in simple trust upon Him, He undertakes to be a Father to us. The great feature of a father is that he is responsible for his household. He is responsible to put the food on the table and to pay the bills, so that the water is hot, and there is heating when it is cold and that everything runs smoothly. It is his responsibility to provide. Children are not wondering where the meal is coming from or if the heating is going to work; father is

there, it is his responsibility to do it. You think of God coming down to a simple figure like that and saying, 'if you come out' - and you think of Jewish believers coming out of Judaism, facing complete isolation from those upon whom they might previously have relied. God says, "I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters". He will provide what is needed. He might not provide always what is wanted, fathers do not always do that. Many requests are made of fathers. They do not always provide what is wanted, but a father worthy of the name will provide what is needed as far as he is able to. The Lord Jesus said that of the Father of heaven, He said "If therefore ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much rather shall the Father who is of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?", Luke 11: 13. He spoke of fathers. If your son asks for an egg would you give him a scorpion, or a loaf of bread would you give him a stone, v 11, 12? Which father would do that? You would do the very best within your ability for your children. I speak with the greatest reverence - you think of the ability of the Father who is of heaven to bless, "no good thing will he withhold", Ps 84: 11. These things are written for us in the scriptures, poor untrusting creatures that we are, that we might be prepared to let go the moorings and cast ourselves upon the love that "marked us out beforehand for adoption ... to himself" (Eph 1: 5) and has eternally "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ", v 3. What a God He is! And so Paul speaks about piety that it is not on the line of false holiness, as some would say, a great professing system that lays great store on celibacy. We have seen humbly - how humbling it is to see it - the great exposure of moral corruption in that system. A false holiness, or a system that would promote the rejection of mercies freely given of God. Piety takes what is provided of God with thankfulness and blesses Him for it.

But then in the passages that I have read there is a warning against covetousness. There is a warning against the power of money. There must be something, dear brethren, for us to reflect upon as to that, in the days in which we are, when we are not in the war years, nor in the years of material deprivation. We are in very different times, times of relative plenty, economically, and there is not only much more available to have but there is the means, generally speaking, to have it. That can be a very pernicious influence. You read about the rich man who said, "Thou hast much good things laid by for many years", Luke 12: 19. He spoke to his soul in those terms, "much good things laid by for many years" and he was going to knock down his barns and build

greater so that there would be even more, and the word is, "Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; and whose shall be what thou hast prepared?", Luke 12: 20. It is a reminder, as far as material things are concerned, that we can be taken from them or they can be taken from us, and the question remains, "What have you got?" But the great principle of the world in which we live, the great lie abroad, is that the more you have the happier you will be. There never was a greater fallacy than that. I have had occasion to meet persons, some of them who have wealth beyond the imagination of many of us, and have discovered the misery and unhappiness that lies behind it. Do not envy the rich of this world, they are not to be envied: "piety is profitable", it says, "for everything", 1 Tim 4: 8. "Bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but piety is profitable for everything". It is a great principle of life now, and it has "promise of life, of the present one, and of that to come".

But there is a warning in chapter 6 for two classes of persons. The first is those who desire to be rich. You see, I may not be rich but I might have a very great desire to *be* rich and my energies may be devoted to that, to acquiring more, to getting a bigger and better house or car or job or whatever. There is a warning as to that, and the lie that the apostle is directly meeting here is not that the more you have the happier you will be, but that of those who would *actually teach* that material gain is the end of piety. You see, that thought had some credibility in the old dispensation where the blessing of God was reflected in flocks and herds and land. In the old dispensation that was rightly recognised as a blessing from God, a sign of His blessing indeed, for persons who dwelt here on the earth and whose outlook was limited to an earthly inheritance. But the warning is that those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many unwise and hurtful lusts. I speak carefully, but we have had examples of this amongst us for us to take account of. I do not go into that, but the Spirit of God not only warns us of these things in His word but we sometimes see examples of it. Persons who, through the pursuit of riches, have pierced themselves with many sorrows. And so it says, "the love of money". It is not that the money itself is evil but it is the love of it and the love of it comes very near to us. I venture to say it comes very near to us when we are younger. There is a great pressure to get on in the world and to acquire, and a man is measured in the world by what he has materially. He is not measured like that in God's world. Pre-eminence in God's world is based on moral worth. I remember Mr Walkinshaw saying once that in man's world public prominence and moral

corruption go hand in hand, but in God's world pre-eminence is based on moral worth and that is why Jesus will be supreme. God will have no one else to be supreme in His world because of the moral excellence and worth of that blessed One.

The next exhortation is to those who *are* rich, and in the ways of God there are persons who have been enriched materially and have used their wealth and means for the support of His testimony. There are persons who I suspect we would be surprised if we knew (perhaps it is just as well we do not know) how much they have devoted materially for the support of the testimony, and to the support in times past of the Lord's servants, many of whom were in need. Persons of means provided rooms in which meetings could be held and for the needs of those who would travel to them.

All this activity, as we saw in the reading, is characteristic of God's house, not only the ministry for souls but the ministry that goes on for the bodies and circumstances of the saints. In the ways of God there are such, but such are enjoined "not to be high-minded", not to think that their wealth entitles them to what they otherwise would not be entitled to, "not to be high-minded nor to trust on the uncertainty of riches; but in the God who affords us all things richly for our enjoyment".

I only read that other passage in the second epistle because the apostle goes over his own conduct to his child. Timothy knew what Paul had taught but he knew also the life that lay behind it. We often speak of Paul as the great apostle (and he was), and of the greatness of his gift and the greatness of his apostleship, but the scripture does not just give us that side. It gives us the character of the man to whom that apostleship was given, and he lists here things that were well within Timothy's knowledge; what sufferings happened to him, and he lists the places. We can read about them in the Acts, "what persecutions I endured; and the Lord delivered me out of all". What an encouragement for this man who was young, which could have been a handicap to him: he was to conduct himself so that his youth should not be despised, but he was to commit himself to the maintenance in simple piety and godliness of what had been entrusted to him, and the ground that had been won at such cost. He should be free from inhibition and a false modesty through his youth, but equally he was not to be high minded. He is reminded that the maintenance of these things would involve courage. Paul says that "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice", 2 Tim 1: 7. If I am marked by that, God has not given it to me - a spirit of cowardice. The apostle is able to point to a life that this

man knew and the detail of it, where he had been courageous in the testimony.

I think it comes down to us in our time, dear brethren, as to whether the great heritage that has come down to us is to be maintained. And whether there is going to be committal to personal holiness and devotion, and a forsaking of personal interest and advancement materially, in order that what is precious to Christ might be held inviolate until the Lord comes. He lists a great long list of ugly features in 2 Timothy 3 that ends with persons being “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”, v 4.

You see, in days of material stringency there is probably not the opportunity or the time so much for the pursuit of pleasure, but in days of material prosperity there is great opportunity for self pleasing. “Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”. Be honest about it in the presence of God! You have free time, a few leisure moments? How are they spent? Which way will the pendulum swing? Will I reach out for pleasure, self pleasing, or will I turn my attention in the few moments that are given to me to the things of God? Let each of us be honest about it. We know our failings, the Spirit of God knows them too, but He is here to help us, and if, like me, the pendulum has often swung with you towards self pleasing ask the Spirit of God to give you strength to resist it. As you reach out for what will edify your soul, you will find that the Spirit of God is capable of lifting you in your soul to another realm altogether. The exhortation to this man is to lay hold of eternal life. Do not just read in the Bible that, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”, (John 3: 16) but “*lay hold* of eternal life” (1 Tim 6: 12), for yourself. I think the suggestion is that the enjoyment of it in the soul will eclipse anything else that is on offer. “*Lay hold*”, he says, “of eternal life”. He warns us as to being “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”, and then, “having a form of piety but denying the power of it”.

I do feel, dear brethren, that that is the risk that the Spirit of God would alert us to, the outward form. What we speak of sometimes (although it is not a scriptural expression) as to the assembly calendar, the round of meetings, the form is all there. But what about the power of it, the inward communion with God as God is sought and found and proved in the daily details of life? May we be stimulated, dear brethren, on these lines. For His Name's sake.

Dorking
30 June 2007

Responsibility

William S Chellberg

Matthew 25: 1-9, 14-30

I would like with the Lord and the Spirit's help to say something about responsibility - the Christian's responsibility. When God created man, man was not just another one of the animals. Man was God's crowning creation - "Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1: 26) - He never said that about an animal. He created the garden as well, and He set man in it. It says He, "took Man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to till it and to guard it", Gen 2: 15. That was man's responsibility. God immediately put man into responsibility. Now I hope to address what I have to say to those who are believers today, those who say that they are Christians.

If I were to ask you, 'Are you a Christian?', what would be your answer? It is an important thing, you know, to take up your responsibility. There are persons who say that they are Christians, and in what I read there are five of them who took oil for their torches. The oil speaks of the Holy Spirit. I would like to say to every one that it cannot be emphasised enough that you must have received the Holy Spirit to be here rightly. It is possible to take on the things of God, to take on the terms of the gospel, to speak right, to go to church, or to come to meeting, or even to break bread, but just in terms. In this allegory Jesus is pointing out the need for reality, and it is your responsibility to be sure. "Use diligence to make your calling and election sure", 2 Pet 1: 10. So I would just like to begin with those words of warning, because it is very important. Young people, ask for the Holy Spirit. If you are not sure, ask for Him and you will find that the things that we have had in the meetings earlier today will become meaningful. The very mention of the name of Jesus will cause something to leap up in your heart - that precious Name. There is no name like it - the Name of Jesus. The Spirit will soften your heart and make it impressionable to that wonderful Name, the Name of Jesus.

I would like to speak mainly about the talents. Back in chapter 24 of Matthew Jesus leaves the temple and goes out and sits down on the Mount of Olives, and His disciples come to Him and ask Him to explain these things. I think that is a wonderful thing. This chapter now is part of what Jesus was sitting there restfully explaining to these disciples, privately. He was not now talking to the Pharisees and the

scribes. Jesus would like to sit down with us today privately and talk with us - with each one of us. The first thing He does is to warn about merely professing to be a Christian. That is what this first allegory is. These ten virgins were all professing, five had oil and five did not. The five without oil were not real Christians. The other five had oil and they went in to the wedding. Take oil! Dear brother, dear sister, get oil in your vessel. Be sure you have the Holy Spirit.

Then Jesus goes on and He says there is another thing. There was a certain man who was going away and he delivered to his bondmen his substance - five talents, two talents, and one talent. I would like to say that this is not an insignificant amount. This was probably a talent of silver, which would be worth perhaps about ninety thousand US dollars. I say that so we can understand - he was giving them something very valuable. The meetings today were about what is "more excellent." This master gave the bondmen something excellent, and Jesus is giving everyone who has come to Him something excellent. That is Jesus - He is speaking of Himself in this allegory - He was going away and He was giving something to His disciples. He gave them five talents, two talents, and one talent. Some of His disciples we hear much about in the book of the Acts - Peter, for example. Others you do not hear about quite so much. Some you hardly hear of at all. That does not mean that they did not trade. The man who got the one talent, we will talk more about later. But they all were given talents.

You have been given talents and I have been given talents. That is not talent in the sense of being able to perform some sort of act, or ability - we are not talking of natural talents. He gives you something - He gives you a gift. He gave the first man five talents - he must have known he was a capable man. The second man, he gave two - he knew that he could handle two. He gives you what you can handle. So what will you do with it? That is the question today. The first man, with the five talents, went out and he traded, and he got five others. That is a 100% increase - he doubled his money. The second man went out and he did the same - he had two talents, and he doubled it. Now I would like to ask you, what are you doing with your talents? Are you trading? What do we come to these meetings for? I had an old brother years ago tell me that when I went to meetings, fellowship or three day meetings, (and I was young at the time) I was to think about it before I went and see what I would suggest if I were to take the meetings. Well,

I have actually done that, and of course I prayed about these meetings, and thought, what would the Lord indicate for these upcoming meetings? That is called coming under exercise. I wonder how many of us came to these meetings under exercise. Our brother spoke about young people or brethren taking notes and that is a good thing. (I would suggest as an aside to what I am saying and a little off the subject: when a reading meeting is progressing and various scriptures are being referred to, and a chapter and verse are mentioned, be sure to look it up, turn to it and see what it says.)

Well, I think that is how you get an appreciation of what your talents are, what you are holding from the Master, what the Master has given you. One tremendous and wonderful thing about this trading is that you do not lose your initial investment when you trade. You keep it. The man says "here are your five talents" - so he had still the five talents he had been given, and had gained more - he had traded. What I would propose this weekend is that we use it to trade. What an opportunity we have for trading. Speak to someone else about an impression that has been on your heart, and they will reply with something that has been on their heart, and now you have an extra talent. I am not suggesting that the young people should not have a good time and we do need social interchange, but trade - use your talent or your talents and start trading. What we need is to use what we have been given, whatever it may be. Each one has something different. Sisters have something, brothers have something, even young children can have something to trade. We can speak about Jesus, say some word about Jesus, this wonderful Man that we have been speaking about. That is all you need; that is a talent, use it for Him - for His glory. And what comes out of this is, "enter into the joy of thy lord." I have thought a lot about what that means. Is it not a realisation that your Lord is pleased with what you have done? "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Well, I prefer not to talk about the man with one talent. I already spoke about taking oil. If persons take oil, they will know the master. This man did not know him he said, "I knew thee, that thou art a hard man" - he certainly did not know him. I know Him, and He is not a hard man. I think there are a number of others here who would say the same thing. He did not know him, so he went and hid it. Are you hiding your talent? There are consequences for that decision. What I want to focus on is that the master gave them what they could use. He knew the character of each one. "He knoweth the way that I take," Job says,

“he trieth me, I shall come forth as gold”, Job 23: 10. He knows you and He will not give your talent to someone else. When you received the Spirit you would normally receive your talent, so now trade with it. You say, 'Oh no, I am satisfied, I have the Spirit, I have oil in my vessel, I have my torch, I am ready to go.' The Lord says, 'Trade with it, use it'. I trust it will mark this weekend. May we be trading, not just in the meeting - but between and after the meetings. Young people will be together and maybe having some good times, but remember Him and do not forget to trade, so that when He comes you can say, 'here are five other talents'. I think that is a wonderful thing and especially to get His approbation when He says to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

The Lord's words bring up another matter - faithfulness. For example, you may sit at your computer, and through it you could get just about anything that the world has to offer - *will you be faithful?* Nobody may know what you are browsing - nobody but you and God. I think that is the issue that the Lord is raising at the present. I would just like to encourage each one of us including the older ones, and especially the young people, to think of this matter of faithfulness, especially because of the way that the world is piping stuff in - into your ears, into your eyes, and into your mind. In every way the enemy is attacking. John Bunyan has a book, called *The Holy War*, and it is about how the enemy attacks the believer - how he comes at you from every angle, from every possible way. Will you be faithful? I think the key to it is to be trading actively; then you will not want what the world has. What we have is so much better! And I think that is what our brother has in mind for this weekend - the things that are more excellent. They are so much more excellent than anything the world can give you. Let us have Jesus before us. He said, “the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing” (John 14: 30) - not a thing!

What a Saviour He is: praise His Name!

Calgary

29 June 2007

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

John N Darby

Acts 26

Men must find themselves in an uncomfortable situation when they must decide whether someone who has spoken for God and proclaimed His goodness in this world is worthy of death or prison. That such a question could be raised and discussed shows the world's state of rebellion. Paul, on the other hand, could wish with boldness that "all...should become such as I also am"; and it is in the presence of God who judges hearts and discerns all things that he makes this wish.

What characterised the apostle was: firstly, he had the certainty of his salvation and of his position before God; secondly, he greatly appreciated this position; and, thirdly, he had the love which made him desire that others should be such as he was.

The effectiveness of Christianity lies in the ability to wish that others should be such as we are. Paul desired that the judge who summoned him to court should be such as he was; for this to be so he had to have the joy of heart and the certainty that he possessed a happiness which others did not have. He did not desire that all should be apostles, but that all should be Christians. He does not speak here of a state of sanctification which he might have reached because, later, he says to the Philippians, "not that ... I am already perfected", chap 3: 12. It was not the progress he had made but what he had in Christ that made him wish that all should be such as he was. If you have understood that Christ is yours and that you are Christ's, if you have the communion of the Father and of the Son and the seal of the Spirit, you can wish that others might be as you are.

Paul encountered all kinds of distresses; poor prisoner, far from his friends, with chains his only portion in this world. However, even if we find ourselves in the most difficult circumstances, we can nevertheless desire, if we have Christ, that everyone should be as we are, except for the bonds and the painful circumstances. If someone were to lose his reputation, his goods and his liberty, instead of desiring that all should be as he, he would wish that no one should be like him. If a person does not have Christ, he has nothing but what the world has, nothing but what death can take away. Paul was, at the same time, the most righteous man and the greatest sinner. If a man has not broken the law, he can have boldness but not the assurance of salvation. Paul has assurance, even in calling himself the first of sinners. He is the only example of this in the word of God: he acted according to his conscience, even while persecuting. He felt compelled to make, and did make, great effort for his religion; he had a great deal of religion. His compliance was very exact, with a good conscience and irreproachable

as to the law. At the same time, he was the first of sinners, for he was impelled by the greatest possible hatred against God. To the extent that religion feeds self-righteousness and pride, he was very religious. When we boast in our religion, it is nothing but pride in the presence of God. True religion is what God is for us, not what we are for God. Paul was well taught in his religion; the traditions of the Pharisees had driven him to a hatred of novelties. As soon as we limit ourselves in our religion to what man can understand and find reasonable, Christ becomes a novelty to us. It was inconceivable for man to ask God to give His Son for him; it was something entirely new and unexpected. We may pride ourselves in the religion of our ancestors, but when there is the confession that one is a sinner, without strength, the pride of man's heart is injured. This is opposed, as his reputation is touched without the conscience being reached. Paul knew well that the name of Christ contradicted all his traditions and he would have wished, if possible, to eradicate this name from the earth. The heart rises against the idea that there should be nothing but grace for a lost world. Is there anything more sinful than to wish to eradicate the name of Christ from the world? Meanwhile, Saul was irreproachable as to the law, very exact in his religion and of good conscience. If there is anyone here in this condition, who may not have the conviction of being a sinner in his rebellion against God, may he remember that, in this state, he is lost. This is what Saul of Tarsus understood as he found himself in the presence of Christ and, if convicted of being the first of sinners, how can he wish here that all men should become in every way such as he was? It cannot be a wish that others should be sinners, nor that they should be lost. Paul, therefore, must have found that he was saved, that there had been a response from God to this sinful state. Paul could not have been reassured by man's righteousness, since, before God, all the righteousness of man has been weighed and He has pronounced this sentence: "There is not a righteous man, not even one", Rom 3:10.

Saul was committed to the destruction of the name of Christ, when the Lord Jesus met him. It is a most fearful circumstance to be caught in an act of open warfare against God! Thus Saul is crushed. What becomes of his good conscience when he finds himself an enemy of God? Of what value henceforth are his religion, his correctness, and his learning? What are his teachers worth? All these things had misled him, had even driven him to war against God. All the supports of his soul desert him at once; he is in Christ's presence as an enemy and a rebel. This sometimes happens. What purpose is there in being instructed in religion, if, after all, we are involved in war against God? Paul discovers suddenly that the object of the thoughts of God is this

Jesus whom he is persecuting, that this Jesus is Lord and that he is in the presence of His glory.

“Why dost thou persecute me?”, Acts 9: 4. Saul is informed of the perfect unity of Jesus and believers; he has this revealed to him. It is the gospel preached to Saul from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. He begins with this, with what would seem today to be suited to a very advanced Christian state. Saul persecuted this way (Acts 22: 4), a reproachful form of reference to Christians. Jesus says to him: all those of this way are one with me. If the Lord Himself recognises that I am one with Him, is it, from that point onwards, surprising if I wish that everyone should be as I am?

Jesus was in glory after having suffered and endured the penalty of our sins to unite us with Himself. It is therefore a finished matter; it was even before we were born that Jesus bore our sins. “Having made by himself the purification of sins” (Heb 1; 3), He set Himself down on the right hand of God. I need to see that in order to present myself before God. If we had the right to ask God for the greatest mark of His love, God could give us no more, for He has already given His Son; He has already loved us according to the perfection of His love and Jesus has united us to Himself in communicating to us His life and in giving us His Spirit. If I love someone, can I desire for him anything better than the life of Christ, than the inheritance of Christ, than the seal of the Holy Spirit indwelling him to assure him of this inheritance? Conscious of his sin, his ruin, his corruption, but knowing that God had taken account of it, and in spite of it, He had given His Son for him; assured that God loved him as a Father, sealed with the Holy Spirit, Paul can desire that others might be like him. And it is what we also can do, we who possess the same privileges.

In order to be able to say with such boldness, “I would to God” that you “should become such as I also am”, it is necessary to live close to God, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, the Spirit being grieved, we are unable to speak of Jesus and the position of the Christian in a true and living way. In order to render testimony, it is necessary for the grace of God to have been well known, the fulness, the certainty of grace. Furthermore, it is necessary to live in communion with the Lord and not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

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