

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 120

March 2017

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THE TEMPLE OF GOD

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RMB I wanted to draw attention, dear brethren, to the references in these scriptures to “a holy temple in the Lord”, “the temple of God” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit”; referring respectively to the universal assembly, to the local assembly, and to the believer's body. We should begin at the top and consider, in this first scripture, not exactly what the assembly is now, but what it will be when the building work is complete, as a great vessel of light in the world to come. It is important to keep before us the greatness of the assembly, and the greatness of the dignity and blessing God has conferred upon us by giving us part in this body in which all the light of God will be known in the future.

Then we might see that God has His temple on earth now, just as much as He did in Solomon's day. 1 Corinthians 3 teaches us that the temple of God at the *present* time is found in the local assembly. In these days when there is so much weakness and fewness it is important to keep before us the greatness of the local assembly in the mind of God. In a world where there is so much in the way of darkness and corruption, the local assembly is the only place where the presence of God and light from God can be known.

From 1 Corinthians 6 we might get a fresh impression of the importance and value of the believer's body. Most remarkably it is referred to as “the temple of the Holy Spirit”. God has given us something priceless in giving us our bodies as an instrument in which He might be glorified day by day in the lives of the saints.

PJW That is confirming, establishing, but exercising too. I suppose that the thought of a temple is a dwelling place. I wonder if you could open that thought up for us. It has always been God's desire to dwell with His creature. There must be a suitable dwelling place for Him, and I wonder if your exercise would help us along those lines?

RMB The two leading thoughts in connection with the temple are that it is the place where God's presence might be known; and it is a place where divine light can be known. I think those two things go together. I understand this reference to “a holy temple in the Lord” to be to what the assembly will be as part of Christ's kingdom. There will be light shining out from it. There will be light available to men on the earth from this wonderful temple. That would help us to appreciate the greatness of

what God is working out at the present moment.

PJW The present time, then, is a time when there should be increase. Is that your thought? It says, “in whom all the building fitted together”, which might relate perhaps to the individuals, “increases to a holy temple in the Lord”. That is the present time, is it? I suppose in God's purpose the assembly is always complete, but there is the thought of it increasing. It says “the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved”, Acts 2: 47.

RMB You get the two sides in these verses. Verse 22 gives us what, in one sense, has been complete on the earth at any time since Pentecost. It says, “in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit”. That is an important point for our hearts to lay hold of, that there is a habitation for God in the Spirit at the present time on the earth. But then verse 21 is the work that is going on, as you have drawn attention to it: it is increasing. In this first scripture it is exclusively a divine work. In the passages in Corinthians we have to consider *our* responsibility. But in this first scripture it is exclusively a divine work, that is going on steadily, and nothing can prevent it. Not all Satan's attacks, nor man's failures, can prevent this work, which will result in perfect beauty and harmony marking this great divine temple.

DJR It is significant that it is “built together”: every addition of each one, I suppose, right up to the rapture, will add something to the building that is to be displayed.

RMB The work will not be complete until every single soul who is part of this has been brought into it. That is one aspect of the increase. But there is another view of the increase: it “increases **to** a holy temple in the Lord”. That would stimulate the exercise as to what increase there is with us on the line of holiness, and what increase there is with us as to this great matter of being “in the Lord”. As we take up a verse like this, and see what God will yet bring about, it would exercise us as to there being some *moral* answer to it even now.

DJW Would the moral answer that you speak of be of the character of “Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone”. Everything takes its measurement from Him, and everything takes character from Him? That is what is being developed in the temple in the Lord, is it?

RMB It is important to draw attention to that, because both verse 21 and verse 22 start with the words “in whom”. That would raise the question as to the character of man that God is going to build things on, the character of the man that God would entrust things to. What you

say about Jesus Christ should ever be kept before us. In that sense there is no other man before God.

PJW Would you enlarge on that by helping us as to the foundation here in Ephesians 2: 20? In another scripture, Paul says, “which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3: 11), but here he says, “being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”.

RMB The apostles and prophets referred to here are the New Testament ones, which brings out that what God has established in relation to the assembly is entirely new. As we sometimes say, it is not an add-on to what proceeded in Old Testament times; it is not a growth out of Judaism. It is “the foundation of the apostles and prophets”, showing that it is based on something that never existed before. Further, through the apostles and prophets, the mind of God has been made known to us. Through their ministry and what has been left on record by them, God has been fully revealed to us. And it is on that great foundation that God is working at the present time.

PJW I think that is helpful, because in the previous verses he speaks about forming “the two in himself into one new man”, v 15. So any thought of Jew and Gentile, and the rivalry between them, is gone. It is a new concept altogether.

RMB That is a theme that runs through this chapter, how God has taken up both Jew and Gentile. That is in mind in verse 19, when Paul says, “ye are no longer strangers and foreigners” - that is what the Gentiles had been but they had become “fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God”. You get the impression Paul expected the Ephesians to be impressed by that - “fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God”. In addition, they were built into this temple. The Gentiles never had access to the temple under Judaism, but now they were part of it!

JRW Can you open up a little more what you understand by “a holy temple”? I was thinking of what Stephen says, “the Most High dwells not in places made with hands”, Acts 7: 48. You made reference to Solomon's temple, which was an actual building. Stephen seems to suggest that that has been superseded by what God really had in mind. Can you say a little more about what you understand by “a holy temple”?

RMB It is referred to as “a holy temple **in the Lord**”. The reference to “in the Lord” is an allusion to Christ's kingdom. We get the idea of it from Solomon, because there was no temple until the kingdom was

established. There had to be the establishment of the kingdom before there could be the establishment of the temple. Now this holy temple is going to be the light and glory of Christ's kingdom in the future. Being a holy temple "in the Lord" involves, I think, not only that everything is in accord with God Himself, in accord with His holy presence, but there is what will shine out in the way of light and blessing towards others. So it says in one place, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah", Isa 11: 9. The world to come is going to be a time of great light, and persons will draw on that light by means of this temple. Men and women on earth, Jews and Gentiles, will get the gain of the shining out of what is set forth in this temple.

JRW What you are saying is very helpful. We sometimes need these figures for our minds to picture things. We have made reference to Jesus Christ "being the corner-stone". That is something we can relate to in a practical way, as to a building of a house or whatever it may be. But I think what you are saying helps to elevate our minds to what is in God's thought, which is entirely spiritual, and yet at the same time very real.

PJW You have made reference to the kingdom. Is it true to say that only persons who are in the kingdom, subject to the King, are built together into this holy temple? I am thinking of what we have often been told, that the truth of the kingdom underlies the truth of the assembly. We have spoken of the moral answer. Is it persons who are subject to the King, and rightly in the kingdom, who are built together?

RMB Every believer forms part of this, but in order to get the gain of it we have to come under the sway of Christ. That will be manifested in the world to come, the absolute supremacy of Christ. If there is to be any answer to what is in God's mind for us here at the present time, it involves that we should be exercised about practical holiness, and that we should be exercised about the authority of the Lord with us.

RHB It says of the city in Revelation that "the nations shall walk by its light; and the kings of the earth bring their glory to it", Rev 21: 24. Does that indicate that God's temple will not only be a place where light is diffused, but it will become regulatory?

RMB Yes, I think Revelation 21 helps us in the understanding of this. Of course, it is a city there, not a temple; the thoughts are distinct but closely connected. One of the themes which runs through Revelation 21 is that there must be the light within in order for the light to shine out. It speaks, first of all, of the holy city "coming down out of the heaven

from God", it says, "having the glory of God"; that is the light within. Then it says, "**Her** shining was like a most precious stone", v 10, 11. Men and women who will live on the earth at that time will not be able to bear the direct shining of the glory of God. It is not something they will be able to stand; but it will shine for them indirectly through the assembly. So it says, "I saw no temple in it; for the Lord God Almighty is its temple" (v 22), and then it says, "the nations shall walk by **its** light" (v 24). The nations will learn from God; they will acquire the knowledge of God; their whole course and pathway here will be regulated by the shining of this most remarkable vessel.

GCB Why is it that we are perhaps more up to the appreciation of verse 22, which you have spoken of as true at any time since the Spirit came, and rejoice in it, than what you are now speaking about as to what will be in the day to come?

RMB The light of what the assembly will be is an item that we carry with us in testimony. I wonder if it affects us sufficiently that we belong to this body in which all the light of God is going to shine out in the future. One of the dangers, when living in days of breakdown, is that we might have limited views. It is a constant exercise for us all to have the *greatness* of the assembly before our souls.

GCB I think what you have said is helpful, that we might in our day have limited views.

PJW Do you think the next chapter would help us to see something of what you are saying, when he says, "that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God", Eph. 3: 10? That is a present matter; and then what you are speaking of will be seen not only by those in the heavenlies but by men and women on the earth?

RMB The "all-various wisdom of God" has been manifested in different ways at different times. It was seen at the creation - the remarkable wisdom of God that entered into the creation. The wisdom of God was seen in His ways with the children of Israel, choosing a people, bringing them out of Egypt, defeating their enemies, bringing them into the land and establishing His dwelling-place among them - all a wonderful testimony to the wisdom of God. At the present time the "all-various wisdom of God" is set forth in the assembly to these heavenly beings. We might wonder how that would work, but it shows what a remarkable vessel the assembly is as having in view the setting forth of what is in the mind of God.

DJR I was thinking that what our brother has just said is quite important, because how do we get help to see this from the divine point of view? Sometimes we might look at things a bit negatively from our own point of view, but what the angels and principalities see is something different, something glorious.

RMB Our starting-point should be the Scriptures. God's great thoughts for us are set out for us in His holy Word. We can be exercised to commit ourselves to these things, so that they are not simply texts to us, but become light in our souls. It seems to me that it is a great exercise that what God has set out in His word should become light in the soul. That will only be so where there is desire for it and committal to it. It is as we exercise diligence in regard of the heavenly things, that we prove their power and satisfying character.

RAS Would you say a little more about the practical bearing of this? You have spoken of practical holiness, and how the view of these things should help us practically, but could you say a little more as to that for our teaching?

RMB The first thing to understand is that this is exclusively a divine work. We have to recognise that and, of course, to be thankful for it. There is no failure attached to this whatsoever; it is what God is working at, and He will bring it through and accomplish it in divine perfection. But as we treasure divine thoughts in our affections, as we increasingly value what God has in mind for us, it will be an exercise that there should be an answer to it. So, as to holiness, what are the conditions with us actually for the experience of the presence of God? Are we exercised to maintain holy conditions, both individually and collectively? As to being "in the Lord", are we exercised about the Lord's will? Are we exercised about what His will is for us, individually and collectively, and how that might work out in detail?

DSB When was the "habitation of God in the Spirit" established?

RMB At Pentecost.

DSB I was thinking that; and that Paul's exercise here was that they might not feel as if they were strangers and foreigners; but they were fitted together into something that was already there. When he went to Ephesus initially, "he said to them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit?", Acts 19: 2. Solomon's temple was made of stones, hewn stones and costly stones (1 Kings 5: 17), but they were fitted together so that there was no hammer or axe heard in the house while it was being built, chap 6: 7.

RMB As “strangers and foreigners”, they had been outside the sphere of divine blessing. But they were no longer that. In chapter 1 he opens up to them that they had been in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, v 4. Then, drawing on the illustration we have in Solomon, Mr Darby says we are like stones that have been taken out of the ‘quarry of the world’ (Collected Writings vol 16 p191), and are being shaped by God in order to fit into His holy temple. It is a wonderful thing - I think it ought to impress our hearts more - that God has taken us up in that way.

RHB The assembly is also spoken of as the house of God. That is the matter of *dwelling* that has been referred to; it refers to a *habitation* of God. Did you have any more in mind as to the distinctive thought of a temple?

RMB We could turn to the passage in 1 Corinthians 3. He does not say to the Corinthians, 'ye are the house of God', but “ye are the temple of God”. It has been pointed out before that the apostle never speaks of the house of God when writing to a local assembly. The house of God is a much wider thought. When people spoke about the house of God, for example, in Old Testament times, it meant not only the building but all its precincts, including the court. So the house of God includes the whole profession of Christianity. Another thought in connection with the house of God is that, because God dwells in us by the Holy Spirit, we are in it all the time. But the temple of God is brought in in the Scriptures in this context specifically in relation to the local assembly; and its particular bearing is on when the saints are together. The idea of a temple is a holy enclosure in an unholy environment, where the presence of God might be known, and where we might receive light from God. That strikes me as a very great privilege if it can be proved by us.

RHB It should be proved by us, to bring it into focus, in meetings of this character. The psalmist speaks of beholding the beauty of Jehovah and enquiring of Him in His temple, Ps 27: 4. We often hear that referred to in relation to reading meetings, that we might experience the temple of God. It is a real exercise, is it not, as we come together on an occasion like this, that it is not just the exchange of thoughts about the Scripture, but there is some diffusion of light by God Himself amongst us? If that is experienced, it is something that is intensely precious, and is to be protected.

RMB I would suggest that the idea of the temple is not limited to our

reading meetings, because the literal temple included the holy of holies; and nothing was said there. But I think what you say is right, and it has been confirmed by those who have gone before. The thought of receiving light from God particularly applies to occasions of this character. So that it becomes an exercise in that way as to whether, in gathering together like this, the temple of God is the thing which has ascendancy in our minds. I would urge the dear brethren, as we gather together for occasions like this, that the functioning of the temple of God ought to be the prominent thing before our minds.

PJW And that must depend upon the Spirit being free, is that right?

RMB That must be so. He puts those things together: “Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God, **and** that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

PJW “Ye are ... temple of God” is a characteristic thought, is it not? The Spirit of God might dwell in us, but we might not be giving Him liberty and freedom in our local gatherings; so that is an exercise. I doubt there was much of temple character about some of the Corinthians' meetings practically. But characteristically and abstractly Paul addresses them as such, and it would provoke exercise with them, do you think?

RMB Yes. We might wonder how Paul could speak of them in this way, “ye are the temple of God”, given all that we know about them and what was proceeding amongst them. But I think it shows us that this is what the local assembly is. In the first place we need to grasp objectively that the local assembly is the temple of God. It is not that we make the temple of God. It is not that we somehow bring the temple of God into existence. My desire is that that might lay hold of our souls in view of being maintained in the sense of the greatness of the local assembly and the privilege that belongs to it.

JRW What you are saying is very challenging because Paul says here, “the temple of God is holy”. That, as a statement, cannot be gainsaid. Then he says, “and such are **ye**”. That is very challenging. How do we bring ourselves up to that very high standard?

RMB I would suggest it is not a question of bringing ourselves up to it, but of answering to what we are in the mind of God. We may have to hold the idea somewhat abstractly in our minds, particularly in localities where conditions are not as they ought to be, as at Corinth. But we must hold to God's thoughts about us. In these days when practically there may only be a handful of us together, it is vital that we keep before

us what the local assembly is in the mind of God.

JRW I think the way you have put it is very succinct, and suggests that the way we can enjoy it is to make way increasingly for the Spirit and allow Him to have sway. Is that how we will enter into the enjoyment of it?

RMB The temple of God exists, but we need to be exercised about *temple conditions*. The teaching of the first two chapters of this epistle would show us the way to that. Firstly, the bearing of the cross of Christ; Paul says, "I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified", chap 2: 2. And then he brings out in chapter 2 the service and operations of the Holy Spirit. I think these are the way into the practical experience of the functioning of the temple of God.

MRC I was noticing that the word that is used for temple here, *naos*, the shrine, is the same word which the Lord uses in John 2 as to the temple of His body, v 19. I wondered if, while, on the one hand, that would exercise us, on the other hand, it would give us a sense of the greatness of the temple of God, the glory of it? We cannot limit that to the handful of those with whom we meet. It is the assembly of God in the place. It may in measure be abstract, but God has no lesser thought in mind, does He?

RMB He does not. The saints are the temple of God *because* they are the body of Christ. As you say, the Lord refers to His actual body as being the temple. It must also follow that what we are as the body of Christ is the temple of God too. We have to be careful about how we speak of these things in days of breakdown, but where you have persons who are seeking to maintain the truth and principles that are proper to the assembly, the thing *in principle* is there.

DJW In John's gospel the Lord Jesus speaks to His disciples as to the Comforter coming. I understand that that is a collective setting, and in those verses He speaks about Him guiding us "into all the truth", John 16: 13. I wondered if that was an important thing in relation to giving place to the Spirit, that the whole truth is kept before us. But at any particular time there may be something specific that the Spirit needs to draw attention to. That would require holiness and sensitivity on our part, do you think?

RMB That is most important. So the teaching of the cross, as it comes out in the first chapter, would help us as to the removal side, and the disallowance of everything with us that would militate against the

gracious activities of the Holy Spirit. We need to be constantly exercised to be committed to what God has set forth in the cross of Christ. But then, that makes way for the operations of the Holy Spirit. What possibilities are open to us in a holy environment where the blessed Spirit of God is free!

PJW I think you have put that very attractively, because it says, “the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God”, 1 Cor 2: 10. We are not able for that by ourselves. But the Spirit searches them and brings something of the savour of them, and opens them up to us, if we allow Him to.

RMB That is good. Then the verses that follow show how dependent we are on the Holy Spirit. The things of God are “revealed to us by His Spirit” (v 10); they are communicated “by spiritual means” (v 13); and they are “spiritually discerned” (v 14): revealed, communicated and discerned by the Holy Spirit. The appreciation of that would exercise us as to providing holy conditions amongst us, where we can really get the gain of all that is available to us in the presence here of the Holy Spirit of God.

RHB We often speak of making room for the Holy Spirit, but what does that actually mean?

RMB There are two sides to it. One is the negative side that we, individually and collectively, seek to judge anything with us that might act as an obstacle or a hindrance to the Holy Spirit, anything that might grieve Him, anything that is out of keeping with the holy presence of God. That is one side. Then there is a positive side, in which we definitely commit ourselves to the Holy Spirit and to moving on this line. In this particular context, as we come together in this way, we are to be exercised that nothing should have greater prominence with us than this thought of the temple of God. As we are gathered like this the temple of God is to have ascendancy with us. What would you add to that?

RHB That is helpful, and would therefore begin before we come together. John speaks of himself in the isle of Patmos; he says, “I became in the Spirit on the Lord's day”. Although he was on his own, he speaks of being “your brother and fellow-partaker”, Rev. 1: 9, 10. So that he was conscious of his part with others. But he was exercised on that day to be in a state to receive divine communications. We said earlier that what we are speaking about is challenging. If God is going to speak to us we should expect to be challenged, should we not?

RMB I think we should expect to be challenged and searched, but find too that spiritual desires are stimulated with us. So we ought to approach each occasion in a state of spiritual exercise and expectancy. We are very thankful for the outward order in our gatherings, that we can sit down together quietly, but you could have all the outward order and yet not have the functioning of the temple of God. That is why I think it ought to be a great exercise with us, especially as we are together, that we should have some sense of the operations amongst us of the temple of God.

JRW Why do you think the apostle brings in so much about the wisdom of the world here by way of contrast? Why would that be necessary in going into these precious matters?

RMB To show us that it has no place; the temple of God is no place for the mind of man.

JRW I was struck by what you said as to the form and order of these things. Maybe there could be an intelligent mind that would follow things in the order in which they should be followed. But do we need to be on our guard in relation to that? Is that the thought here?

RMB I think it is. So how would you know when you have had a good reading?

JRW That is a challenging question, but all I can say for myself is that the thing goes further than the mind and it reaches my heart. If my heart is touched and attracted to what we are going over, then there will be a lasting impression. That is only my simple thought. What do you say yourself?

RMB The word of God is quickening, and I think that if in any measure we are conscious of having been brought into touch with the word of God, there will be that quickening effect within us. Then too, in connection with what we are saying as to the temple of God, there would be some sense of having received light from Him.

GCB I suppose one exercise for each of us personally, if we have set on a reading, is that we have received something ourselves, besides what we have introduced.

RMB Well, I find that a great test, because you come to the occasion with some thoughts in mind, but it is a great exercise to be sensitive as to what it might be that the Holy Spirit is drawing to our attention on this particular occasion.

RAS You have spoken of light a number of times, but what is it, please?

RMB The effect of light from God is to cause us to see something which we had not seen before. Persons like you and me, who have been born and brought up among the brethren, pick up a lot of things along the way, so to speak, in our understanding of the truth, simply because we have heard them from others. Of course, there is nothing wrong with that. But what seems to me to be so vital is that we should receive the truth as light from God, because it is only as we do that it will really enter into our souls and govern our practice. But light from God is the experience we have when God causes us to see things, either that we have never seen before, or in a light in which we have never seen them before.

PJW Do you think we see it set out perhaps very forcibly in the experience of Paul himself? In Acts 9: 3 it refers to a light out of heaven. It was not just something that he saw, I suggest, but light in his soul - "why dost thou persecute me?", v 4. Then he speaks of a "great light" (Acts 22: 6), and then he speaks of "a light above the brightness of the sun", Acts 26: 13. There are many great lights in the world, but this was like none other, and it filled his soul, do you think?

RMB That is something we ought to be in faith and exercise about.

DJW Would it be right to say that light, as we speak of it, must be in relation to the Person of Jesus, that we see some fresh aspect in Him that we had never seen before?

RMB And then widening out from that in relation to the greatness of God's thoughts of blessing for us.

AW We have spoken of dependence, and we have referred to the Spirit; does prayer play a big part in this?

RMB It does. So you would pray for each meeting before you went to it, would you not?

AW Yes.

RMB That is most important.

DSB I was thinking of what was said about light coming into Paul's life; he saw those in the testimony as those who were "of the way". As receiving light he saw them as brothers, he saw them as disciples. And he was able to preach Jesus that He was the Son of God.

RMB It is an exercise to see the saints in the light in which God sees them. So, when he says to them, "Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God?", it was almost as if Paul was surprised that they did not know that. This could have been light for many of the dear saints in Corinth. And there is no doubt that, as this light dawned on their souls, it would make them very exercised about the things they were going on with.

DJR So, earlier on they seemed to have sectional thoughts. But Paul reminds them that "all are yours", 1 Cor 3: 22. They said, "*I am of Paul ... I of Apollos*", v 4. But he said, 'No, it is Paul *and* Apollos *and* Cephas or anyone else'. That would give us the idea of the resources that are there. Then he reminds them that "ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's", v 23.

RMB Verses 22 and 23 really bring out the greatness of the saints. I suppose it is because we are Christ's that all these things are ours.

MRC This is addressed to "the assembly of God which is in Corinth", chap 1: 2. Is it no less true of the assembly of God in Strood today?

RMB We have to recognise that we are now living in days of breakdown. No instructed believer would regard their gathering as the assembly of God in a place. But where you have persons who are exercised to be moving on this line, then what is set out in these verses in principle ought to be known and enjoyed. Is that what you were thinking?

MRC I was thinking that. Every blood-bought saint as indwelt by the Spirit forms part of the assembly of God in this place. How much they are practically in the gain of it is another matter. But from the divine side it is accredited to every one.

RMB We ought to refer to the passage in 1 Corinthians 6. The verses we have read come at the end of a paragraph in which the apostle is seeking to bring home to the Corinthians the importance and value of the believer's body. So he says, for example, in verse 13, that "the body is ... for the Lord, and the Lord for the body"; and in verse 15, "Do ye not know that your bodies are members of Christ?". Then he comes to where we read, and he says, "Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God ... ?". That is a most remarkable reference. What must God's thoughts of blessing for us be for Him to make our bodies the temple of His Holy Spirit? It seems to me that is a most wonderful thing to lay hold of. Then to see that in doing that God has given us a great treasure,

because in our bodies He has given us a vessel which may be used to glorify Him.

JRW Say a little more as to the distinction which you see between “the temple of God” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit”. Is it more than one being collective and the other being individual?

RMB I think that is just the distinction. “Ye are the temple of God”, as we said, applies to the whole of the local company in Corinth. But here he says, “Do ye not know that your body” - “your body” is individual - “is the temple of the Holy Spirit”. If that laid hold of me more, what a difference it would make to my walk and ways.

JRW How does that link with “ye are not your own? for ye have been bought with a price”? There is something very precious about that.

RMB Underlying “ye have been bought with a price” is the great truth of redemption. God has paid a great price for us through the blood of Jesus. That establishes His holy claim over us. That is a question for us all: have we considered God's holy claim over us? The way we answer to that claim is in glorifying Him in our body. So our bodies - which previously were vehicles for the doing of our own wills, committing those sins which God has had to address - these very bodies in which we pleased ourselves, are now held for God and used to glorify Him day by day.

STE Is it a wonder that our bodies can be filled with the Holy Spirit, which is the encouragement of the Acts?

RMB They can be filled with the Holy Spirit. We have examples in the Scriptures of men who were. What we can say of that from experience is, of course, another thing. But this verse, “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit”, applies to every individual who has received the Holy Spirit.

RHB Is the thought of the individual's body being a temple conveyed in what the apostle refers to in the second epistle: “the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine who has shone **in our hearts** for the shining forth ...”, 2 Cor 4: 6? God had shone in; He had shone in the apostle's heart that there might be a shining out. I wondered if that is the thought of the believer's body being a temple, that - as he says elsewhere - they are “lights in the world”, Phil 2: 15? The way we use the body, what we put on it and how we appear, may becloud that light, but it could enhance it.

RMB The shining out is a practical consequence. The idea of our

body being the temple of the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit has found suitable conditions for His dwelling there. It is a remarkable thing that the Holy Spirit, a divine Person, should find suitable conditions for His holy dwelling in the body of a believer. I think what you say is right, that as we think carefully about that, it would cause us to reflect on how we dress, how we appear before others, where we go and what we do with our bodies. All these things ought to be profoundly affected by the fact that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

DJW Does Romans 12: 1 have any bearing on this: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice"? That affects our day-to-day life, and everything that enters into it, which I find very testing. As these exercises are gone through, is the effect that we present our bodies a living sacrifice?

RMB So God is glorified in that. I think it helps to see that God is glorified by believers who practise His will day by day. I was affected some time ago by something I read in ministry. It was in connection with that incident in Luke's gospel, where at the Lord's baptism, the Father said, "*Thou* art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight" (chap 3: 22) - not 'I am finding it', but "**I have found** my delight", A J Gardiner, *Piety and Other Addresses* p 125. In other words, that was the Father's assessment of the first thirty years of the Lord's life, years which we know almost nothing about. It was said that it was in the Lord's ordinary circumstances, brought up in Nazareth, in subjection to His parents (Luke 2: 51), His occupation in the workshop, and so on, in those ordinary circumstances of life day by day, that He was an absolute delight to God. That is something to weigh over. If we think of glorifying God, we might think of what men would speak of as great things. But God is glorified in the lives of believers who practise His will in the power of the Holy Spirit.

PJW So the question for me, in connection with the reference to Romans 12, is whether my body is presentable. In the life of Jesus everything was infinitely acceptable and presentable, and that raises a challenge with me, do you think?

RMB It is sometimes said, when questions are raised with individuals about their appearance, that the inward is the important thing. Of course, the inward is the important thing. But that does not mean the outward is not important. This scripture would show us that what a believer is outwardly ought to be the reflection of what he is inwardly. The two, in that sense, should be in correspondence.

MRC We can be exercised to seek to conform to things, perhaps in an outward way, and we may be in danger of laying a burden on others. But do you think the apostle here is working on the line of attraction, that in fact we are very precious to divine Persons. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price, the sacrifice for that being the blood of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, do we find that as that becomes attractive to us, things that would naturally engage us become less attractive to us? It does not become onerous if I find that the love of the Christ constrains me.

RMB I would just add this, though, that even as to the practical matters to which you make reference, there is great value in being subject to the brethren. God puts a great value on persons that are subject to the desires and sensibilities of the brethren. But I think at heart that what you say is right, that we want to be impressed with the greatness of God's thoughts for us. What must be God's mind about poor sinners like us, that He should make our bodies the temple of His Holy Spirit? It is not a tabernacle here; it is a temple, a dignified dwelling place. And I think that the more we reflect on that, the more it will be carried forward in exercise in all our walk and ways.

Strood

8th October 2016

List of initials:-

D S Bodman, Dorking; R H Brown, East Finchley; R M Brown, East Finchley; G C Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; M R Cook, Folkestone; S T Eagle, Dorking; D J Roberts, Strood; R A Smith, Strood; J R Walkinshaw, Maidstone; P J Walkinshaw, Strood; A Wraighte, Strood; D J Wright, Tunbridge Wells

THE COMING OF THE LORD

Richard M Brown

1 Thessalonians 1: 8-10; 2: 17-20; 3: 11-13; 4: 13-18; 5: 6-11

It will be evident, dear brethren, that I would like to say a word as to the way the Lord's coming is presented in 1 Thessalonians. You will have noticed that it is mentioned in each chapter. It may help in considering the various passages we have read to remind ourselves that when we speak of the coming of the Lord, we are talking about one event which will take place in two stages: there is the rapture and there is the appearing. The rapture is when the Lord Jesus will come *for* his saints; the appearing is when He will come *with* them. The rapture is a private matter between the Lord and His own, largely unseen by the world. The appearing, on the other hand, is a great public matter when the Lord Jesus will come, as He says, "with power and great glory", Matt 24: 30. Every eye will see Him. He will come to establish His glorious kingdom over the earth. As we have often noted, the Scripture has relatively little to say about the rapture. The passage we read in chapter 4 is the only scripture which sets out in detail what will take place on that blessed day. By contrast, from beginning to end, the Scripture is full of references to the Lord's appearing. Think of the first prophecy that was ever entrusted to a man, Enoch's prophecy, where he speaks of the Lord coming "amidst his holy myriads, to execute judgment", Jude 14, 15. I think of that dear man going on, walking with God for three hundred years, Gen 5: 22. We do not know if there was anyone else he could share things with. But evidently God spoke to him about the coming of the Lord. He spoke to him of holy myriads. How wonderful that is! I do not know if Enoch ever wondered where these myriads were, but he was in no doubt that when the Lord came it would be with them. So throughout the Old Testament we have references to "the day of Jehovah"; and in the New Testament we have references to "the day of the Lord", "the day of Christ" and "Jesus Christ's day". From beginning to end, the Scripture is full of references to the Lord's appearing.

Now we might ask why there is to be such a thing as the world to come; why it is necessary for there to be this thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Why, for example, could not the eternal day begin instead at the same time as the saints are raptured? Well, I think one reason is that if it were not for the world to come it would seem as if evil

had triumphed on the earth. What God will manifest in that millennial day, in a very public way, will be the complete and final victory of good over evil. It is important that everyone should see the complete unravelling of good and evil, and the establishment of what is good on the earth. But there is another reason, too, why the world to come is necessary, and it is to do with the public vindication of Christ. The vindication of Christ is a very great matter with God. When you think that the last this world saw of the Lord Jesus was when He was hanging upon a cross, dying the death men thought suited to a common criminal and being buried, you can see just what a great matter it is with God. And not only has God raised Him from among the dead, and given Him that place in the glory we know so well, but God will also ensure that the whole world will be brought to see what it was in Christ that was such a delight to His God and Father; and the whole world will have to confess that God was right to exalt Him. It says that every knee will bow to Him "and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory", Phil 2: 10-11. So you see, dear brethren, those of us who love Him would not be content only with the rapture, blessed hope of our hearts, but we want to see the Lord Jesus vindicated. We want to see Him come into all that is His. The whole earth belongs to Him. All the nations are His. And we want to see the Lord Jesus take possession of all that belongs to Him, and take up all His rights on the earth which have for so long been denied Him.

One further thought. Usually when the rapture is alluded to in the Scriptures, it is presented as a comfort to our hearts, something to encourage us as we make our way through this wilderness. The appearing, on the other hand, is often brought in in connection with our responsibility; as a test as to the extent to which we are fulfilling our responsibility here. I think we shall see that borne out by the scriptures we have read.

In the verses we read in chapter 1 the apostle does not distinguish between the rapture and the appearing, but he simply describes the profound effect that the gospel had had on these Thessalonians and how fundamentally it had changed their lives. He speaks of "how ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God". Remember that most of the Thessalonians would have been pagans prior to hearing the gospel, though some of them were Jews. But the Thessalonians had been enlightened about some very important matters. The first one was that there was a God who could be

described as the “living and true God”. No doubt the apostle speaks of Him in that way as standing in contrast to idols that were not only dead but false. And these Thessalonians had discovered the wonderful joy and liberty and dignity of becoming servants of the true God.

There was another point that was new to them, a most remarkable one, that this God they had come to know had a Son. What a blessed thing that is! I wonder if it has ever struck you as most remarkable that God should have a Son. As we have often said, if God has a Son there must be another world where His Son is exalted. It is clearly not yet this one. God has not only raised Him from among the dead, but He has ascended, and He has become the Sun and Centre of another world altogether. This was new light for the Thessalonians.

They had learnt something further too, that God's Son was coming back for *them*! They had been converted in order to await God's Son from heaven. I wonder if all of us in this room who have been converted realise that the reason why we have been converted, according to this scripture, is that we might serve God and wait for His Son. I venture to suggest that in these few verses the apostle sums up the whole reason why we are here. The twofold reason why the saints are still on this earth is that we might serve God, and that we might await His Son from heaven. We are here for no other reason than those two things. I think that consideration would cause us to review where we are. If there is anything we are engaged in, if there is anything we are going on with, that does not properly fall under either one of these two - serving God or waiting for His Son - let us be done with it. It is not what we are here for. What a dignity God has placed upon the saints that they should be standing here waiting for His blessed Son.

This had had a profound effect upon the Thessalonians. He says that “in every place your faith which is towards God has gone abroad”. Their neighbours and acquaintances were all speaking about it. These neighbours of theirs might have thought that the Thessalonians were very foolish to believe that God's Son was coming for them. But they could not deny that that was what the Thessalonians really believed, because it governed their lives. Now, dear brethren, what about us? I would like, if I can, to convey something of the dignity and the blessedness of being in this position of waiting for the Son of God. I have sometimes used this illustration. There are persons who would regard it as a great honour and privilege to receive an invitation from the Queen. But think if, when the big day arrived, she sent to

collect you, not one of her servants, but her own son! What would it say about your standing with the Queen? What would it say about the kind of reception you could expect at the Palace if the one who came to bring you there was the heir to the throne? That is a feeble illustration, but think of our position as waiting for no less a personage than the glorious Son of God. What must God's thoughts of blessing for us be? What must our place in the glory be, if the One who is coming to bring us there is no less than the Son of God? What a dignity God has placed upon us! As rightly apprehended by us it would deliver us from everything here. You can see, in the light of this, how unworthy is the pursuit of worldly possessions or pleasure for persons who are waiting for God's Son. What has the world to offer persons who are awaiting the Son of God? As the Son of God He is the great, glorious, attractive object for our affections. I trust that as we are together the Spirit of God might work this into our affections, that it is for *Him* we are waiting - no less than the glorious Son of God.

Well, I pass on to chapter 2, because here the apostle refers directly to the appearing of the Lord Jesus, when he speaks of being "before our Lord Jesus at his coming". Now the background to this, as we read from Acts 17, is that the apostle had come to Thessalonica and he had preached in the synagogue for three sabbaths, and many of the Jews and Greeks had been converted. But it was not very long before the unbelieving Jews, jealous as they were, stirred up a persecution against Paul and the saints. It was so severe that the local brethren in Thessalonica urged Paul to leave; so he did. Having had to move on in a hurry, he was worried about the Thessalonians. I suppose some of them had not been converted for more than a month; they were brand new believers. He was worried about whether the severity of the persecution they were suffering would cause them to give up or to turn aside and, as he explains, he had tried more than once to get back to them but had been hindered by Satan. Eventually he sent Timothy to them, and Timothy had come back with very good news of the Thessalonians: they were holding the ground! The apostle was so thankful to hear that, that he sat down and wrote this letter to them. He was presented with the very real possibility that he might never see them again in the flesh. That leads him on to think of the Lord's coming. You can see that he is thinking about that day when he would appear before our Lord Jesus. What he had seen and heard of the Thessalonians made him confident that they would be there too, and it is as if the apostle Paul is saying to these Thessalonians, 'If I cannot get

to you now I will meet you there': "Are not ye also before our Lord Jesus at his coming?". He would be there and the Thessalonians would be there too. As the apostle thought about being *before* our Lord Jesus, it reminded him that he - as indeed is the case with us all - will have to stand before the Lord in view of having His assessment of our pathways here. The Lord Jesus will review our responsible pathways here, and each of us will receive from Him His evaluation of everything we have done. As the apostle Paul thought about that, he was thankful the Thessalonians were going to be there, because they were the proof that he had not laboured in vain. There was nothing about the Thessalonians that would make him ashamed. In fact, he describes them as his "hope, or joy, or crown of boasting." On that great day when the apostle appears before the Lord, he will be able to point to the Thessalonians as evidence that his labours for the Lord have not been in vain; and I have no doubt at all that the apostle Paul's recompense, his reward from the Lord, will be very great.

But then, dear brethren, we need to think about this aspect of the Lord's coming because we shall all appear before Him. I think, in the first place, that it is intended to sober us, for it will not be a question then of whether I feel that I have done enough for the Lord, or whether I have been able to pass muster among the saints. It will not be a question then of appearances, but only of what can stand in the glorious light of the presence of the Lord. How sobering that is! At the same time the prospect is intended to encourage us. It is intended to stir us up to be committed to the Lord Jesus, to be committed to His interests and to be committed to His service, in the little time that is left to us. So if a man has been called to preach the gospel, for example, if a man has received that call from the Lord, let him labour at it heartily; let him be absolutely committed to it; let him not allow anything else to take priority with him: his own convenience or arrangements or whatever it might be. But let him commit himself to it wholeheartedly in the knowledge that one day he will stand before the Lord to render an account to the Lord for the way he has answered to His call. If it is a question of serving the saints, the Lord will want to see how we have handled those whom He has entrusted to our care. Whether that be in our households, or whether it be in our localities, or wider still, the Lord will take account of all that we have done for the saints. This is to be an encouragement to us in the face of the trials of the way, in the face of discouragements, in the face even of Satan's hindrances, that we labour on in the light of that great day when we shall stand before the

One who misses nothing that has been done for Him. We can rest assured that even the smallest service, undertaken with Him in view, will be remembered by the Lord on that day when we shall appear “before our Lord Jesus at His coming”. May we be freshly stirred up with that day in view.

Chapter 3 speaks of “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints”. So this is about the Lord Jesus *coming out* in public glory. We have spoken of the vindication of Christ, and when I think of God's delight in Him it is no surprise that God will have the glory of Christ to shine out in a very public way. But what strikes me as most remarkable is that God is going to see to it that the saints will shine out in the same glory as Christ! “The coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints”; *all* of them! Every single one will keep company with Christ on that great day! The next epistle speaks of that day “when he shall have come to be glorified in His saints, and wondered at in all them that have believed”, 2 Thess 1: 10. Think of what God is going to set forth in the saints. In Ephesians we have reference to the display that God is going to make, in the saints, of the surpassing riches of God's grace, chap 2: 7. And there is that precious prayer of the Lord Jesus, recorded for us in that most sublime of chapters, John 17, where He prays that the saints might “be perfected into one and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and that thou has loved them as thou hast loved me”, v 23. How is the world going to “know”? It will not be a question of faith then. Saints who were greatly despised when they were on earth, saints who were caused to suffer - these Thessalonians - will be there: how will the world *know* that the saints who were caused to suffer such reproach were, all along, loved by the Father with the same character of love that He had for Christ? Because they will see the saints coming out *in the same glory as Christ*. How wonderful that is!

So, in the light of that, he exhorts them “to exceed and abound in love toward one another”. I think there was already a good stock of love at Thessalonica. He refers earlier to their “labour of love”, chap 1: 3. The Thessalonians knew well how to serve one another in love but there is just a suggestion here, in the way the apostle speaks to them, that he thought that there was at least one respect in which they could go further. He brings before them, perhaps what the Thessalonians had not seen before, that love for the saints is the way to holiness. He says: “But you, may the Lord make to exceed and abound in love toward one another ... in order to the confirming of your hearts

unblamable in holiness". Now, "unblamable in holiness" is what the saints are going to be; it is what they are going to be on that great day when they will come out with Christ. If we look around at all the departure, and the worldliness, and all the things that the people of God, sadly, are mixed up in, what a triumph for God, that on this great day after it all, the saints will be "unblamable in holiness".

Now, we have to keep before us what the saints are going to be. I do not think we can serve the saints well unless we hold before us what they are, and what they will be, in the mind of God. And we might remind ourselves that if that is what we are going to be, then that must be the standard for us now. It is not that there is one standard of holiness for up there and another for down here. It is not that at all. If this is what God has in mind for the saints we should not allow ourselves to accept any lower standard for ourselves now. And I lay this before the dear brethren, that love, love for the brethren, is the way to holiness. If each of us were individually more deeply affected by the love of God for us, the more holy we would be. The more we love the saints, the more holy we shall desire them to be. People sometimes say there needs to be more love among the brethren; I doubt anybody here would deny that. But love among the brethren does not mean we have to countenance conduct that is unbecoming in the people of God. It does not mean we are to tolerate those things which dishonour the Lord. According to this scripture, love for the saints is the way to holiness. And you notice that he says it is "before our God and Father". I suppose literally the saints will be in the Father's house. But I suggest it also includes the thought that there is no one who is more jealous for the glory of Christ than the Father is. No one is more concerned than the Father that nothing should detract from the shining out of the glory of Christ; therefore, any suggestion that we should go on with things which dishonour the Lord is quite out of keeping with the Father's thoughts about Him. And the sense of that would exercise us as to whether there is anything with us, anything at all, that would be unsuitable for us coming out with Christ, anything that might be a stain on us in view of that great day. This is to stimulate in our hearts a sense of urgency that we might settle matters; that we might set things in order for the Lord's sake, in view of being held in readiness for that great day when God will draw back the veil and reveal not only Christ, in all His glory, but the saints in company with Him. What a prospect! May it greatly stir up our hearts. May it stimulate fresh exercise and desire with us that we might be held in readiness for that great day, in view of

being suitable to come out with Christ.

Chapter 4 refers directly to the rapture. You will notice those verses that we know and love so well, verses 15-18, are in brackets. That is because the apostle only refers to the rapture, so to speak, by the way. It is very important for us, of course. But he only refers to it in order to explain something else. The Thessalonians were worried that those who died before the Lord's coming, and no doubt there were numbers of them that had been martyred in the persecution they were suffering, would somehow miss out when the Lord came. That is why he says in verse 14, "If we believe that Jesus has died and has risen again, so also God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus". Paul is saying, 'You need not worry about the saints have who died, because God is going to bring them with Jesus when He comes'. That then raises another question, how is it that the saints will *already* be with Christ in order to be brought with Him by God? And in order to answer that question he gives us this section in the brackets which we refer to as "the rapture".

What struck me freshly about these verses is the emphasis on *the Lord*. You notice that it says, "that **the Lord himself** ... shall descend". Then in verse 17 it is "to **meet the Lord** in the air". And then he says, "we shall be always **with the Lord**." I think it is important to see, therefore, that while there will be an event, it is a blessed *Person* that is the hope of our hearts. It is the Lord Jesus Himself.

The Lord shall descend, it says, with "an assembling shout." It is very comforting, in these days of brokenness in which we live, that the first aspect of the Lord's coming will be to *assemble* His people. The Lord Jesus is going to put His people together in a way that they have never been together before and He is going to do that *before* they meet Him. In other words, all the saints will be together as one vast company in order to be ready to meet the Lord. Then he says, "with archangel's voice"; that is the voice of power. Think of the power there is with the Lord to release the saints, to set them free from whatever may be holding them; bearing in mind that the vast majority of them are at this moment lying in their graves. Then he says finally, "with trump of God". Now, we understand that that is a military allusion. In writing to the Corinthians the apostle speaks of "the last trumpet", 1 Cor 15: 52. We understand that in the Roman camp there were three. The first trumpet was the signal for the soldiers to put down their tents and to pack up. The second trumpet was the signal to get into line. The third and last

one was the signal to move. The Lord Jesus will descend with trump of God, and the saints will be gone!

So it says that “the dead in Christ shall rise first”. The Thessalonians were worried about the dead in Christ. But the apostle says, ‘You need not worry about them. If there is any advantage to be had it is with them, because they are going to rise *first*.’ “Then *we*, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds”. And then he adds, “to meet the Lord in the air”. I want to pause there for a moment, because that is what we have immediately before us. We are going to *meet the Lord*. That is something that we need to reflect on carefully and soberly. It is to be the joy of our hearts that we are actually going to meet the Lord. I do not know whether you do, but I sometimes wonder what that moment of first realisation is going to be: that moment when we shall see His face for the first time, when we shall hear His voice. You can be sure the Lord will have something to say to us. Somebody asked, ‘What will Christ be like when He comes?’ And the answer was, “Altogether lovely.” He is going to be all that our longing hearts have waited for. “To meet the Lord in the air.” I trust that that might register with us, because this is what we have immediately before us. And then he adds, “And thus we shall be always with the Lord”. Always with Him! I wish I were more with the Lord even now. But it is a very great comfort to think that a day is coming when we shall never be away from Him again. Wherever He is, whether it be in the world to come, as we have spoken of it, whether it be in the eternal day, wherever the Lord is, we shall be with Him, *always*. Blessed prospect! Well might the apostle add, “So encourage one another with these words”.

Well, the apostle goes on in chapter 5 to speak of what the appearing of the Lord Jesus will mean for the world. He speaks of the Lord coming “as a thief by night”. It will be an unpleasant surprise, because the Lord will come to put down evil, and to exercise judgment, and to establish His kingdom on the earth, but then he says, “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief”. So we need to be prepared for this. He says, “So then do not let us sleep as the rest do, but let us watch and be sober”. That is the attitude of those that are waiting for the appearing of the Lord Jesus. And then he adds, “putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as helmet the hope of salvation”. Do we not find that it is the waiting time that tests us? One thing it tests is our confidence in God. We tend to

wonder about things, and to look this way and that. We look at the problems and the difficulties. It tests our faith in God. Another thing it tests, I think, is our affections. It is easy for our affections to wane while we are waiting. Or it is easy for our affections to go out in a wrong direction: it is easy for something else to become the object of our hearts. How important this breastplate is, in order that our confidence in God might be strengthened and that our affections might be kept alive.

Then he speaks of “as helmet the hope of salvation”. I do not know how it is with you, but I would have to confess that I am liable to get disheartened. I find it easy to give way to discouraging thoughts or unbelieving thoughts. I feel the need of having my mind guarded. I can see the need of having “as helmet the hope of salvation”. The apostle goes on to explain why it is that we can be maintained because, he says, God has set you for this. We have every reason to have hope “because God has not set us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation”. What a great comfort that is. We are conscious that the truth and the principles we have sought to maintain are being severely tested at the present time. But I think it would encourage our hearts not to faint in faithfully seeking to insist on what is right, not to lose courage in seeking to hold the ground for the Lord, in the knowledge that God is set to bring us through. I think that ought to put strength and courage into our hearts while we wait for the coming of our Lord.

Then Paul speaks of “our Lord Jesus Christ, who has died for us, that whether we may be watching or sleep, we may live together with him”. What a beautiful verse that is! We can think, no doubt, of a number of reasons why it is that the Lord Jesus has died for us: to save us from our sins, to deliver us from this present evil world, to make our peace with God. But here is one: He “has died for us, that whether we may be watching or sleep, we may live together with him”. In other words, so great was the desire of the Lord Jesus to have us with Himself, that if in order to reach that end it was necessary for Him to suffer and to die, He would. He would go the whole way. Does that not melt our hearts in relation to our beloved Lord? Does that not stimulate sweet longings after Him? So great was His desire to make us His companions in glory for ever, that He laid down His life! He died for us that whether we may be watching or sleep (“sleep” here refers to the departed saints), we may live together with Him. He wants us with Himself, and He has won for us a place with Himself in the glory for ever!

Even at this moment, I believe, the Lord Jesus is preparing to translate the saints to be with Himself; it is what He has before Him. Oh, dear brethren, may we have it before us! May that bright and blessed prospect be much more before our souls. May we be exercised to be held in readiness for it - nothing less than living together with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, I trust that our hearts may be stimulated and exercised, but also that we might be very much encouraged and strengthened. May the Lord, in His grace, be pleased to bless what has been before us, for His Name's sake.

Strood

8th October 2016

OBEDIENCE, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PATIENCE

Allan P Grant

2 Timothy 2: 3-6

I have been thinking of the three figures that Paul uses here, a soldier, one contending in the games, and a husbandman. The background to this epistle is, as it says in the previous chapter, that all in Asia had turned away from Paul: "all who are in Asia ... have turned away from me", 2 Tim 1: 15. In this Paul represents Christ, and the truth of the mystery of Christ and the assembly, the most precious truth that was brought out through Paul. He says to Timothy, "Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner", 1 Tim 1: 8. There were persons who were believers who were ashamed of Paul, but he refers to Timothy in this epistle as his child, chap 2: 1. The subject in this paragraph is how the testimony is to continue in life and power.

So I was just impressed with these three things that Paul refers to, a soldier, one contending in the games, and a husbandman; they suggest moral features that I think are appropriate at the present time if things are going to continue rightly according to the truth and for God's pleasure. He says, "Take thy share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ". A good soldier of Jesus Christ would reflect Christ. A soldier would be marked by subjection. The centurion in Luke's gospel refers to his soldiers as under him, "For I also am a man placed under authority, having under myself soldiers, and I say to this one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my bondman, Do this, and he does it" chap 7: 8. Unquestioning obedience to the Lord might be suggested in the soldier. If soldiers did things according to their own will, nothing would be achieved. It says here, "No one going as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of life, that he may please him who has enlisted him as a soldier". "A good soldier" is concerned to be pleasing to the Lord, and that would be expressed in subjection to Him. Paul refers a great deal to the thought of conflict. It is interesting what he says to the Corinthians as to the arms of our warfare, "For walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ", 2 Cor 10: 3-5. So the feature of obedience that marked Christ would be seen in good soldiers. In that

same chapter, he is entreating them “by the meekness and gentleness of the Christ”, v 1. We might not associate these features with soldiers, but I think what would mark good soldiers of Jesus Christ would be the features of obedience and dependence that marked the Lord here. Divine power comes in as we are marked by these features. A soldier too would be able for any situation that might arise. Abraham had trained servants, ready for conflict (Gen 14: 14); not that we are always engaged in conflict, but ready to meet anything that would be against the rights of Christ. Their first consideration would be to please the Lord, being ready to obey any command from Him. So we all have a part in the conflict in some way. Paul says later in this epistle, “I have combated the good combat” chap 4: 7. He was faithful in that. He had met the efforts of the enemy, especially in this dark day. Things were publicly broken down, but he continued faithfully in the spirit of Christ; so I think these features are important at the present time.

The second thing he refers to is contending in the games. What is brought out here is that “he is not crowned unless he contend lawfully”. If sportsmen have an unfair advantage it brings disgrace, not only on themselves but on the country they represent. I think for a believer, the danger is that we might bring dishonour not only on ourselves but also on to the Lord's name. I think this thought of contending lawfully is that we would be marked by righteousness. Later in this chapter Paul says, “and pursue righteousness ...”. Paul says later that, “I have finished the race”, and he adds, “Henceforth the crown of righteousness is laid up for me”, 2 Tim 4: 7-8. Those who contended in the games were crowned. Paul says, “the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will render to me in that day; but not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing”. I think it is attractive how Paul extends his thought of the crown of righteousness “to all who love his appearing”; that would be any true believer who loves to see Christ having His place. The thought of “the crown of righteousness”, means that we are to be marked by righteousness at the present time, the time of suffering. Scripture speaks of suffering for righteousness' sake, 1 Pet 3: 14. I think that would be something of what is included in contending lawfully.

The third thing he speaks of is the husbandman. We spoke of this on Lord's day, the labour required in sowing and reaping; “The husbandman must labour before partaking of the fruits”. One thing that is suggested in the husbandman is patience. Scripture speaks about that, “the labourer awaits the precious fruit of the earth, having

patience”, James 5: 7. The result does not become apparent immediately. How Paul laboured! I think Paul expressed all these features in a particular way. He is concerned that Timothy should continue in the same way, Timothy being a child of Paul. In verse 1 he is referred to as being a child. We would all seek to be children of Paul, so that the testimony may continue on that elevated level on which Paul laboured. When he is speaking to the Corinthians he says, “But by God's grace I am what I am; and his grace, which was towards me, has not been vain; but I have laboured more abundantly than they all, but not /, but the grace of God which was with me”, 1 Cor 15: 10. He is giving the grace of God the credit. In continuing with his labour, he proved the supply of divine grace for every situation, and that is what sustained him. He was sustained by divine grace. How often he would labour without seeing much fruit, but there was fruit from his labours; there was encouragement as Paul closes that chapter, “abounding always in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”, v 58. Timothy was engaged in this work too, and marked by the same features as Paul.

So I thought these features were important, the soldier, one who was marked by obedience, obeying whatever the word of the Lord may be, and then being marked by righteousness and also patience. The husbandman, too, is depending on God. God is the One who gives the increase. Paul says to the Corinthians, too, that he is depending on God to bring about a result.

May we be encouraged for His Name's sake.

Word in a Ministry Meeting Dundee

23rd August 2016

