

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE BODY

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RT I am counting on the Lord helping us this afternoon to get a fresh impression of the body. I remember an address in this city, the brother was giving an address on sonship, and he said, 'We often speak about laying hold of sonship, but I would like tonight to speak about sonship laying hold of us'. And I thought about that in speaking of the body; it might lay hold of us that we are part of the body of Christ. Paul had to say to the Corinthians, "Do you not recognise yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5); "ye are Christ's body, and members in particular". There is a great danger of settling for less than what divine grace has called us into, thus functioning at a lower level. I thought that in looking at these passages we might be helped, I trust, to apply them to how the body functions in local gatherings, that it may strengthen us together, and may result in an increase for God, as well as in testimony and praise to His Name.

There is something distinct in what is mentioned in Corinthians, and in Colossians and Ephesians, which I think would expand our view, but it is all to be worked out locally. I would like to encourage our hearts about that. The body is not any particular company. God has in mind that every saved soul, each forgiven sinner, should function in the body of Christ. Yet, for many reasons, many do not. But most in this room have had the privilege to have come into an area of light, and the Lord would be appealing to us to be functioning with all who are available in the true expression of the body of Christ. It is illustrated somewhat when the Lord said of the ten lepers "Were not the ten cleansed? but the nine, where are they?", Luke 17:17. Well, I trust that we would all be exercised to be like the one who returned, a reference to someone who would come, applying it to our day, to function as a living member of the body of Christ.

Now the breakdown has not altered that, dear brethren. We often speak about the state in Corinth. Here Paul was reminding them, that "ye are Christ's body, and members in particular". That is you and me. Now we need help to get some experience as to how this works. He says "in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body". Baptism is an experimental thing; it brings you on to a change of ground. "In the power of one Spirit" we have been "baptised into one body". Paul in this chapter is stressing that each one is a member of the

one body. Now the realisation of this, dear brethren, settles many practical questions. If I am a member of the body of Christ, how could I be part of any other body? We are called into something that is beyond anything that man can confer upon us. Who would want anything that man could confer on them if they had some sense of their place as a member of the body of Christ? I trust the Spirit will help us as to how we may function in it and prove as in Colossians what is flowing from our glorious Head. One of His glories is that He is Head of the body, the great source of supply. So in Corinth the members are attached to one another, no division. In Colossians we are attached to Christ, the Head, no division between the Head and the body. And then, in Ephesians, we have got the body functioning, set together and maintained in keeping the unity of the Spirit. I trust that the Lord and the Spirit may guide us to have some sense of the attractiveness of having been brought to have part in this wonderful vessel, and to prove the functioning of it even in this day of departure. I trust these things will touch the affections of the brethren and give us liberty to enquire that we may be each of us built up.

RJC Does baptised by one Spirit to one body do away completely with every natural distinction? So we merge together now on an entirely different footing, do you think?

RT Yes, indeed, "in the power of one Spirit". There is power to bring us into this, dear brethren. So, while we feel our weakness, and the greatness of what God is proposing, another divine Person has come to give us power. As I say, it is an exercise that we should all have not only to hear the truth, but that the truth may lay hold of us, to deepen our relationship with divine Persons, including this glorious Person the Spirit of God. It is in the power of one Spirit, baptised into one body. And then it says "given to drink of one Spirit"; He has not only placed me there but He has given me the power of enjoyment, to be functioning as a member of this wonderful body.

NJH So as long as the Holy Spirit is here the body is here. I was just thinking that the great functioning of the Holy Spirit coming down at Pentecost was the forming of the body was it not? And as long as He is here the body exists.

RT Yes, that was how it began, you may say, and what power He brought in, did He not? You see the body functioning in the beginning of Acts, setting aside all the power that was there against Christ. Think of Peter standing up and the power of his preaching turned Jerusalem

upside down. That was functioning in those days, but it is still the same Spirit, is it not? And I think we should set ourselves to experience the power of being baptised into one body; we are not left as loose ends, nor left to do what we like, but He has brought us into an ordered system of things, where each member is expected to be functioning in their measure, at their true level.

DBR It is one Spirit and one body; could you help us as to that?

RT Well, it is many members; so it is unity that is emphasised here, is it not? There is unity; there is no disorder in the body. He takes up the example of the human body, and the power of one Spirit is able to do away with these idiosyncrasies that you and I have and join us together in this one body, to be functioning each in our measure in our true part. Is that right?

DBR The Corinthians is really “the assembly in the wilderness” (Acts 7: 38); would this be the inner side of it?

RT Yes, it is. The power of the Spirit helps us to take up our responsibilities. We have all been set in local meetings; whatever age group you are in, you are set in a local company, and there is a responsibility lying on you. Today people go to the church and they are just part of the congregation; the minister will do everything, and they can sit back and some even go to sleep. Well, that is not in the body. The body is that every member is there and realises it has a responsibility to function. There is no point in criticising, saying it is a poor meeting, it is a weak meeting, or that kind of thing; every member has a responsibility to fill out its true place in the body.

GAB You had something in mind about being “members in particular”. I notice that earlier in the chapter the Spirit is spoken of as “dividing to each in particular”, v 11. Perhaps you could open that up as well.

RT Well, I think that through “being baptised into one body” the Spirit would help us to fill out our place in the local company as representing something in smallness and outward weakness, but there is something inwardly formed there that is able for the circumstances to fill them out to the glory of God.

JAG In the gain of this in some measure we can manifest the “way of more surpassing excellence” (1 Cor 12: 31) as seen in the next chapter. This would be the basis for communion and holy intercourse amongst

the brethren, so that the divine nature is in evidence.

RT Yes, as we have said, it is love; we appreciate one another's influences, our local brethren. In the body where would the eye be without the ear or the foot? Where would they be? So God has put you in your local company for a reason, that you may fill out your part in it so that the body is functioning. Now that requires resources, it requires love, it requires respect for the brethren. These members have great respect for one another.

JCG You mentioned in prayer as to being in our own company, a reference to Acts, "And having been let go, they came to their own company" chap 4: 23. That would indicate that we have the desire to be with one another, and that the body may function, and that we may be in it with others.

RT Well, anyone that knows their sins forgiven must have some affection for Christ. If we have had that experience with Christ our liabilities have been met, and now we are placed as members of the body, and we have each our responsibilities as brought into it, and I think the Spirit would give us the power and the help to meet our responsibilities, so that the body is functioning for testimony that will issue in praise to God.

WL At the beginning of the chapter there is a reference to the power of the Spirit, v 3. Is that essential for the proper understanding and functioning of the body? And that power is undiminished. Is that right?

RT He is more than able to help us to meet the liabilities. I thought of the widow in 2 Kings 4: 1-7. She was a widow of one of the sons of the prophets. Now these were persons that we would speak about as 'congregationalists'. They knew the terms without enjoying the power of things, and there she was about to die. But through the prophetic ministry she is stirred up, and what happens is that using the oil she is able to meet her debts. Now, that helps you to come into the body in liberty. We all feel the responsibilities laid upon us, but I think the Spirit will help us to meet our debts and to come into the joy of our place in the body, functioning, each in our measure for the good of the whole.

GCMcK Divine Persons are operating in connection with the body, are they? The Spirit especially is mentioned. We have been speaking of that, God tempering the body together, v 24. At the beginning of the chapter you get the same Lord, and same God too, v 5, 6. It would make the body a very great matter in our minds then if we understood

that there are divine operations there.

RT Indeed. We will see that more in Colossians, that such a glorious man is Head of the body; what kind of body it must be with such a Head! Paul is stimulating them in the wilderness surroundings and circumstances to realise their potential, what God had in mind for us, with us each filling their place and in harmony. There is unity as drawn and bound together in the power of one Spirit.

CKR Is being in the body the same as being in fellowship, or is there a difference?

RT There might be, yes.

CKR You had better open this up to us, because we use a lot of terms: the body and the house, the assembly, being in fellowship. At the heart of them all is affection for Christ and a desire to influence your life in relation to Him. So it is important to come into fellowship, but then also to be part of the body, do these two come together then?

RT I think truly in fellowship would be in the body. There would be an expression and enjoyment of the body. I think it is experience with the Spirit. I think there is a divine Person come here to give us a sense that we have got a place in it, and not be electing ourselves out of it.

JAG What would you say about drinking of one Spirit?

RT Well, it keeps you fresh. It is not only what you may know, but in the body there is something fresh. It is fine to come to the local meeting and get some fresh touches, is it not? What would you say?

JAG Yes, I think so, and I think we were helped here in this room a year ago. It involves drinking into the brethren. You look at the local brethren and you drink into them, see God's work in them, and it is very seemly.

RT So it keeps things fresh; it brings buoyancy, does it not? Not only are the liabilities met but we see that we are able to function in freshness. It is not just in terms, but we are able to function in the freshness of the divine supplies of grace.

WMP These members are somewhat prominent, an eye or a foot, but elsewhere we get joints and bands which is more a hidden side; your encouragement is that we can come into either of those categories.

RT Well, as you say, these members here may seem prominent,

but what would you do without these others? The eye can see, so the light may shine; then the feet, what good would it be if the feet do not move? We may have light about things but if there is not the movement in the body, it remains as light, and there is no real gain from it. So we are dependent on one another, dear brethren, in the local meeting, brothers and sisters, filling out their place. It is not optional; there is a responsibility placed upon us as being set together and there is power in the Holy Spirit to help us to fill out the responsibility and to be in the freshness of divine grace.

WL It says “the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular according as he pleases”. What do you say about that?

RT Well, “according as he pleases”; what delight He has! He sees the need, and I think He would exercise our hearts to be amenable to how He would set us and how He would help us to function. What do you say?

WL I think that is helpful. Is it a sovereign matter, “as he pleases”? It is not setting aside any other, as the Lord, but the Spirit has a peculiar function in relation to the body, has He not?

RT Yes, and I think the exercise in Corinth, was to be available to the Spirit. None of these members are officials. They are all there for a purpose, and they are all functioning as He pleases. He gives us the power to meet things. You see something needing to be attended to, and you would be exercised with the Spirit to be available. For example, I knew a young brother in a small locality and there was hardly anybody able to start the tunes. He could not sing very well either, but he was exercised by this simple thing, to be available to start the tunes. I can tell you today, he does it very well. You see a need, and you say, 'Well somebody else will do that, that is not for me', but I think the Spirit would exercise us to see that, whatever things are needing to be done, we are available and we will prove the power to be functioning. That is how the body works in perfect harmony.

RJC So we have a resource to fulfil our responsibility. We cannot opt out of it. God has given us a resource so we can function rightly and fulfil our responsibilities, do you think?

RT Yes, and, here in Corinth, it is by the Spirit, and in Colossians it is in Christ, the glorious Head. In Corinth he is speaking about the local meeting as it is seen testimonially, how it is seen publicly, the public view of things; but in Colossians he emphasises more the hidden side

that has been referred to, that there is a Head, from whom all these supplies of grace are flowing and maintaining the body in its fullness.

GCMcK Is there a local expression then? It says, “Now ye are Christ’s body, and members in particular”. I suppose the body is a universal thought really, but it expresses itself in the locality. Is that your thought?

RT Yes, I think so. What would you say?

GCMcK It makes it very practical. You spoke about laying hold of this. In meetings like this, and in our local meetings, do you think we should just let this lay hold of us as we sit together, seek to experience it working?

RT Yes, I think that is how it works. The Spirit would give us a sense of what we have been called into. It is very much like the tabernacle system of things. It has often been said there were no spare parts, and each, even the tent pegs, had a function, and if some time some of these tent pegs were not there, think of the wind that would get into the tabernacle system and the damage it could do. Every tent peg had a purpose, to maintain the whole thing in its integrity and for the purpose that God set it up.

WL I remember Mr Percy Lyon saying once that if a tent peg was loose or was lost, it would throw extra strain on the rest. That is a very timely word, is it not?

RT Well, you see that in Corinth. We know it in our own bodies, dear brethren; some member is weak, but you see how graciously another member takes an extra load, does it not? And that is how it works in our local meeting. We are members one of another. We have proved that, dear brethren, with sorrows, and the sicknesses that have been among us, and the burdens that are carried as extra pressure comes on some; but there is somebody able to share the load. Another member comes as comfort, and a word of encouragement. So the thing is maintained at its true level, and there is no division in the body.

RG Do you think that after Saul heard that word, “Why dost thou persecute me?” (Acts 9: 4) he saw the body functioning when he went into Damascus and knew what it was to be let down through the wall in a basket by willing hands that were part of the body, v 25?

RT I am glad you raised that, because I was thinking about it earlier. He saw the thing in function. There he was; the Lord says, “Why dost thou persecute me?” but what he saw was a small company, and

everything in that company that he needed he found, to save him from the plots of the Jews even. That is a very fine reference. Think of Saul coming in there and somebody greets him in the house and says, "Saul, brother", v 17. There is the body functioning. It is able for the situation; what an issue that was. You could have had care meetings about, 'What will we do with Saul?', but there was the body functioning under the Lord's touch. And Paul never never forgot what he found there that was superior to the plots of the Jews and all that was against him.

NMcK Does the Spirit bringing us into the body involve not only the power but that there is a certain character to the way in which the body functions? Does being baptised into one body by one Spirit involve not only the power to carry out responsibility, but also there is a certain character and way in which things are done in the body, a spiritual way, the spirit of Christ marking those who operate in the body, do you think?

RT I think it would endear the Spirit to us, and make us dependent upon Him. For it says, "these things operates the one and the same Spirit". So we should not always be expecting one brother to give the answers to everything, you know. With the body working you may find some of these hidden members have got the answer. You have Paul's sister's son; the whole thing was met by a young boy. Somebody is available at the time, to meet exercises that come in. I think it is the way we sit in the meeting, dear brethren, as I say not as 'congregationalists', but we are there attentive, having a sense that we have part in a living system of things and it is functioning. You have more to say?

NMcK The body is to represent Christ, is it not? It is Christ to be seen here in the saints, so that the way in which even the members of the body act as under the power of the Spirit would have that character. They would express Christ in the way in which they did things as well, would they?

RT Testifying to another Man altogether. So that is what you get in Colossians; there is something emerging now that is very beautiful. You see the Father comes into it as well. Think of what divine Persons have spent upon us, dear brethren, delivered us from the authority of darkness to bring us to be sharing the portion of the saints in light. That brings you into the body. You are brought into an area of things, and what you find is this glorious Person; what glories belong to Him. It would almost seem that it is an added touch to those glories, our brother read it well, the emphatic '*he*': "*he* is the head of the body", and

“that *he* might have the first place in all things”; it is all setting forth Christ.

DBR It is remarkable, as you were saying earlier, that this is included among His glories. There are all these distinct glories from the previous verses, yet it comes to this, “*he* is head of the body”. Would you say more about that please?

RT Well, having created all things He has that right over them all. But, do you not think that His great occupation today is “*he* is the Head of the body”.

DBR Would there be a bond therefore between the Head and the body so that they are inseparable? There are glories of creation and so on, but you could hardly bring the thought of a bond of affection into that. But when it comes to the body of Christ, do you think there is a bond of love between the Head and the body?

RT I think so, and that is what gives it character and impulse. He is the Head of the body, the assembly. There is what flows from Him to keep it and nourish it here in the days that we are in, with a flow of divine grace and supplies of power so that the body in its integrity, you may say, may be found in expression in local gatherings, do you think?

NJH While it may not exactly come into Colossians, would it be right to say that the Lord takes on, in view of the service to His God and Father, what the Spirit has effected in the body?

RT Yes, I think that we may see more of that in Ephesians. One of the great purposes of the body is that it is a testimony and will be a testimony in the millennium too, but the other side of it is that we prove His headship in the service of God. So that there is not only His headship to meet the circumstances while we are here, but there is the flow of divine grace, it speaks about “nourishing and cherishing it” in Ephesians. I think these things are all enriching us in view of what is Godward.

NJH If it pleases the Spirit it must please Christ and it must please the Father, such Persons being brought together in unity in service. Is that right?

RT There is something superior to all that has broken down in having a Head in heaven. Well, that light, dear brethren, freshly dawned on the saints in earlier years. Think of the recovery of the truth, and of what has gone on in history, and you can see that it revived

things in a remarkable way when saints began to realise that what was here was the body of a heavenly Man. The Head was in heaven, and there was something here, not regulated by archbishops, or deacons or these kind of things, but by what was directly flowing from a glorious Head in heaven. So the body must be of heavenly character even while in the wilderness circumstances.

JTB Does the fact that it says He is the Head bring out the distinctiveness of Christ in that function, do you think? Interestingly in verse 15 “who is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation” the definite article is not utilised, but in relation to Christ’s headship the definite article is used. Is it to emphasise the distinctiveness of His function in that regard. And also in the reference to the close association of the body with the assembly does it bring out the affectionate association of the body with Christ?

RT It is bound up in this living way is it not? The body is drawing all from the Head, not from anything here, but from a Head in glory, a glorious Head, the Father’s Son. ‘The kingdom of the Son of his love’: that is the Head, is it not? The Father’s love expressed in Him, and think of that same love coming to be in us in the body, so that it is functioning here superior to the influences that are around.

RG-y Do you think the Lord had something of this in mind in John 17 when He said to the Father “that they also may be one in us”, and then He adds “that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” v 21?

RT He is not here, He is rejected, and what things are being said against Him. But the saints are gathering together, and in those few saints there is some expression of that great love flowing from the Head into these circumstances to maintain us in heavenly character, do you think? I think it is important to see that it is a heavenly character that marks the body. I say that again: that settles many things. We cannot be earthbound; he goes over that in that next section in Colossians, that we are to get our mind on the things that are above where the Christ is. He is in that position and His great occupation today is enriching the body that the testimony may go through but also that there may be something secured for the eternal praise of God.

PAG Would the scripture in Joshua that says, “When ye see the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then remove from your place and go after it” (Josh 3: 3) bear on your exercise? You are setting before us our responsibilities; it is not just that we take account of the glory of Christ and are attracted to Him,

but we move in relation to Him too, do we?

RT A body that does not make room for the head is confusion. I think Colossians 1, as you are suggesting, is a chapter to attract us. We are held by attraction to this glorious Head and the consequence is He is to have the first place in all things; we are irrevocably attached to Him, with a hidden secret link between the Head and the body, and what comes into expression is a glorious Man.

GCMcK It also says in this epistle that the body is *of* Christ. So it not only draws from Him and has a blessed inward link, an organic link, but the body is *of* Christ. Could you help as to that?

RT There is the Father's work in that, is there not?

Thou gav'st us, Father, in thy love,
To Christ to bring us home to Thee,
Suited to Thine own thoughts above, (Hymn 88)

The Father "has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love", Col 1: 13. It is all divine workmanship, is it not? You thank God every day for the sovereign operations of divine Persons, clearing us from this awful confusion in the world (and we feel our part in it), but divine operations clearing us that we may be brought into this living system of things in these close, enjoyed relationships with divine Persons.

WL You spoke earlier about the heavenly one. When Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15 he is suggesting a sort of equivalence, if that's the right word; "such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones", v 48. Does that mean the members of the body?

RT Yes, and so what comes into expression is a heavenly character. We do not do things in the way that the world would do things, and the way things are imitated, but things are done in the freshness of the power of the Spirit and drawing from a Head who is in heaven. Now He is above all these things dear brethren, principalities, authorities, and some of them are working against the saints today. But above all that, we have got a glorious Head who would attract our hearts into this system of things that is flowing directly from Him.

RG Our hymn put it well, our first hymn (No 199) -

Lord Jesus Christ, our living Head,
How bright Thy glories shine!

but then,

Great source of wisdom, power and food,
All riches from Thee flow;

Do you think this would help us to leave aside every other resource and rely only on the one resource who is our heavenly Head do you think?

RT Yes, I was encouraged with the hymn, and so it helps us to come out in these features of “bowels of compassion, kindness, meekness”. There is a new character in the body. Can you tell me any company of men, dear brethren, where you can get these things working? It only works with attachment to the heavenly Head. Hence these features coming out.

JAG Appearing “as lights in the world” (Phil 2: 15), would it be that sort of thing?

RT Well, have we not been taught that Philippians is like a tree upside down, the roots are in heaven and the fruits are shining here? That would be working out like this in the body, would it?

JAG “In the midst of a crooked and perverted generation”, Phil 2: 15. It is so distinctive; that, would you say, is our basis, how we learn Christ as He is?

RT Well, we were just speaking about that the other night. To be like Him where He was, we must know Him where He is, and this is feeding on Him. We know where He is, in an unassailable position; no authorities or powers in heaven or earth can disrupt a Head who is in heaven, nor the flow of divine grace that is coming. So we are encouraged to put on, it says “as the elect of God ... bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness,”. These things are coming into expression, not only to meet needs, but to maintain something of the glory of the heavenly character that marks the body of Christ.

RJC Paul speaks of “not holding fast the head”. Do we need to maintain our link with the Lord Jesus in a constant steady way, that everything flows from Him?

RT Well, why do we pray at the start of the meeting? These things are very simple but we are praying at the start of a meeting, that the Head, and the glory of the Head, may come into expression and function among us, are we not? So that these are simple things, but the

reality of them is that we are making room for the supplies that are needed for that meeting to come in, and to be a stimulus to the work of God in the saints.

WMP “Put on therefore”: is it following from those first few verses of chapter 3, so that there is a motivation really for us in having our views fixed on Christ?

RT They are there to be put on. We may have our own thoughts about how things should work out, but the resource is there; put them on to be available, that there may be the supply of divine grace coming in to the circumstances that are there at that moment.

WMP If they are there, can we see them in others? It might be a stimulus for us, do you think, in our local meetings, when we see these features in others? And we can be exercised that we might have them too.

RT I think we have all proved that at times, for it has preserved us. Somebody else has come in to fill the breach, but that is to make me stronger, is it not? So that there is “bowels of compassion, kindness, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another”. We have learnt it from the Head. You do not get these things in the academies of the world; these things are learnt from the Head. So it says that “ye have been called in one body, and be thankful”. That is drinking into one spirit, is it not? We are made to be thankful that we are in such a company.

DBR What do you say about the beginning of that verse? I am speaking about “to which also ye have been called in one body”.

It is something very attractive, “let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one body”. It would look as if it is something that is exclusively enjoyed by the one body, do you think?

RT It is something that He said to the disciples, “I give *my* peace to you”, John 4: 27. Think of Him giving His peace; “Let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts”. It is a fine thing in the care-meeting, is it not? Exercises that come up sometimes we do not know what to do; “let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts”. Our affections are regulated, are they not? We are not stirred up to act according to the law maybe, but the “peace of Christ” presiding brings a different answer to matters at times.

DBR Nothing could disturb that peace.

RT Many of us have known it in the sorrows we pass through and thank the Lord when He just puts His hand on us, and says, 'I know'. What calm that brings, does it not? Now these things, dear brethren, are practical. We need to enquire more about these things. It is a real matter, that the Head in heaven is dispensing the riches of His grace into the very circumstances we are in, so that there is something here reflecting the heavenly Man.

JSp Is it like the precious oil, flowing from the Head, down to the hem of the garment?

RT You can say more about that.

JSp Well, you have referred to it originally as grace; that is like the precious oil (Ps 133: 2), it is the power of the Spirit. But it affects what is down here, the golden bells and the pomegranates. Some effect can be taken account of by these precious operations by divine Persons.

RT You get eternal life in that chapter, do you? That is what we come into, the enjoyment of eternal life. It is in the body, something that is enjoyed and worked out there that is flowing down from the Head, very beautiful. Well, I think we are needing to raise our expectations, dear brethren. It is so easy to say, 'Well, things have changed; there are the pressures and the weakness; all these things are around us'. But here is that oil flowing down, coming into the circumstances that we are in, and bringing us into the enjoyment of what is heavenly and functioning today.

NJH The daughters of Zelophehad really wanted to experience the body in their tribe, is that right?

RT Very good. That is interesting; go on.

NJH I just thought there was patience there, the peace of Christ really. Moses waited, and then God says, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right", Num 27: 7.

RT That is very good. So Moses did not go back to the law. You can think of Moses getting this question; would he go back to the law and see about it? He would not have found the answer there. But something else came in. There was a fresh supply of grace, and the divine answer is "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right". You find these things practically, dear brethren, in our gatherings; there are

some times when things are very difficult, but the Lord would encourage us to depend on the Head, and something comes in that has never been before. And so there was something new added to the system, you may say; there was provision made, there was grace overflowing.

JAG Is it included in “the word of the Christ dwelling in you richly”?

RT Well, what do you say about that?

JAG Well, it was something further that Moses got; it is like the word of the Christ, is it not?

RT Very good. Well, that is interesting, and if it happened in that day how much more it should be happening in our day. “Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly”; “dwell in you”. It is not something just for an emergency, but this is how we live: “Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly”.

JAG If that is the case there is addition to it; the Lord adds to it, and wealth is increased amongst the brethren.

RT And the singing is better too. “Singing with grace in your hearts to God”. They are not wondering about the problems and things that are going to overtake us, but these persons are thankful, and have been enriched by the word, and they are singing with grace in their hearts to God. What a triumphant company to be in, and that, dear brethren, should be realised in expectation in the local company.

JD We have spoken of character, but do you think these things we are speaking of now would involve atmosphere as well? I was thinking of how you have been exercised as to how this works out in our localities, and how we come together. The things begin to function, and there is a character of heaven upon earth, and there is an atmosphere, and the whole thing begins to accumulate, not only for our satisfaction, but as we move to Ephesians for the satisfaction of divine Persons, do you think?

RT And does not the atmosphere change everything, another fragrance comes in. ‘The word of the Christ’ - that creates an atmosphere, some touch from the heavenly Man. He sees these exercises we are carrying. I remember speaking to a brother who was passing through deep waters, and he came to the meeting and I spoke to him about his sorrows. And he said, ‘Well, I am heavy burdened, but when I come into the atmosphere among the brethren I am able to rise

above it'. He gives us power; the grace of Christ that comes from a heavenly Head.

GCMcK So it is striking how much thankfulness comes in therefore: verse 15 “called in one body, and be thankful”, verse 17 “giving thanks to God the Father”, “giving thanks to the Father” in chapter 1. Is that a kind of delivering thing, that we are so satisfied with the divine provision, satisfied in Christ, we are full of thankfulness, so that we do not need philosophy or anything else. We are thankful and enjoying what we have; is that it?

RT They are overcomers, are they not? Overcomers, because of the grace that is flowing, and the richness of it, not only to meet the needs and the sorrows and exercises but to give us to be in triumph: “giving thanks to God the Father by him”. There is a touch of His headship, is there not? That is not just repeating that we are sons, or some other terms that we so often use, but it is an enjoyment of something coming from the Head, that gives impulses and power to the words that are spoken.

JAG Experiences with Christ bring out psalms, which are part of the singing.

RT Yes. Go on and tell us more about them.

JAG “Teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God”. There is a real knowledge of God and wealth in this choir, in this singing, and there is impartation in it.

RT Yes, you go out of the meeting better than you came in. Well, that is what is normal, dear brethren, is it not? We come in, and we carry sorrows, many of us, but we go out better than we come in. The word of the Christ comes in dwelling “in you richly”.

My soul is all transported
Whene'er I think of thee! (Hymn 51).

You come into the meeting feeling these sorrows, but singing the hymn gives us a touch that we are in touch with another system, another Head, that is superior to all that is around us, and we enjoy eternal life there.

RB I was wondering if you could say something about verse 14, “to all these add love which is the bond of perfectness”. Why does the

apostle put that in there?

RT “To all these add love”. It is inexhaustible. It says “the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge”, Eph 3: 19. “To all these add love”; that is the oil in the system; that is what makes it work, is it not? So, if there is to be admonition, love would do it this way because Christ is presiding in your hearts, and exercises do arise and 'adding love' is how things are done, because that section reminds us, how grace has met us. If you have got a complaint, remember that Christ has forgiven you. It levels us out, does it not? It takes away the spirit of pride or self confidence and gives us to be in the enjoyment of what is flowing from a glorious Head.

DBR Adding love would involve what our brother brought in earlier, formation of the divine nature in the saints. You must add it; it is not something just plucked out of the air, but you must add it, do you think? Is that formation of the divine nature then?

RT We have learnt that in our experience with Christ, have we not? It is not just something out of a verse of scripture, but we have learnt in our experience with Christ the way He has loved us and met us in love; and now He is saying 'Draw on your experience with Christ' and give that touch in whatever you may be ministering or whatever you are going to do. You add the touch of the love of Christ.

WL Is that the significance of 1 Corinthians 13? It is the oil that makes things work smoothly, do you think?

RT Well, that keeps the unity of the Spirit. That is a good connection with Ephesians, because there again you get the whole matter working out. He says, “Walk worthy of the calling”; that would be the one body we have been called into. “With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love; using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. There is one body”. So the resources that are there are to maintain things at the true level of our heavenly calling.

JCG The reference to the uniting bond of peace would follow Colossians, would it not, that the peace of Christ is presiding in our hearts? Mr Darby's note is very interesting in the reference to the uniting bond. It says that it is the practically uniting in fact, which is what you are striving to help us with, that we work together with one another, making way for Christ as the Spirit would.

RT And a hidden bond between us, you know, that is not to be interfered with. There is a hidden bond holding the body, and the saints use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. He says, "There is one body and one Spirit"; so it is as we draw on the supplies of grace that things are maintained at their true heavenly calling.

Well, Paul is gathering things up, I thought, in Ephesians. He is counting on what they have gone through, and the exercises they have worked out, in the place and he is encouraging them as to the thing being maintained. In Corinth they were members one of another. In Colossians they were drawing from the Head in heaven, and now in Ephesians these things were working and he is concerned about the continuance of it, and it is as coming out in this character we are maintained and continue in the uniting bond of peace. So he speaks of things working together, that the body is working "to its self-building up in love". So we are exercised in the places where we are; what can we add? What can we contribute to the building up of the body, its self-building up in love? Members are functioning, each filling out their place in it.

WL Is the key "from whom"? There is only one source there. Sometimes we resort to other methods; the history of the recovery has proved that, and many have lost their way because of it. "From whom".

RT The whole body, "from whom the whole body, fitted together"; these exercises have helped us to be fitted together. Experiences have helped us to be fitted together so that what is expressed is not a prominent brother but what comes into expression is Christ. So that even in Corinth someone may come in and says, 'God is here', 1 Cor 14: 24, 25. It is something different from the assemblings of men. There is something coming into expression in the meeting that is heavenly in character, flowing from that glorious Head.

PAG Is that why it refers in verse 7 to "the measure of the gift of the Christ"?

RT Yes, so that we are conscious of that, are we not? It says that each one has been given grace. We have all been given grace. Some have been given some different things, not to make them prominent, but to make the smooth working of the body. But it says, "To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ". Measure; we cannot hold too much, but Ruth held a lot more after some of these experiences she went through. She held six

measures of barley in her cloak, you know. So I think the grace is increasing, is it not? "Each according to the gift of the Christ." How liberal He has been in dispensing it, and how liberal He is in what He would give, that each may function in their measure according to what supplies He may give.

JAG Do we know the brethren now as we will know them in heaven? I think it is a wonderful thing if we follow what you have been saying, there is not going to be a change in character because it is going to be Christ.

RT Very beautiful. Soon all to be brought home. Here the assembly is functioning, you may say, in foreign soil and yet in the grace of the heavenly Man, but soon to be at home in the surroundings of divine provision for us.

DBR The word supply is used in verse 16, "every joint of supply". I was looking at Mr Darby's note there; it says, 'The article denotes a known supply from Christ, sufficiently known to be referred to, to which also the 'from whom' lends force'. The body functions, and the members of the body function but really the supply is coming from the Head there; is that the idea?

RT So we never need to be nonplussed. It may not come that night, but I think the patience of keeping the unity of the Spirit helps us to draw on the supply by these joints so that things are met in patience, do you think? So the Lord would encourage us not to be defeatist, or to fall back on law, but to wait on the supplies of grace and to be expectant that all may work it out to His own praise and glory.

Glasgow

25th April 2009

Key to initials

G A Brown, Edinburgh; J T Brown, Edinburgh; R Brown, Grangemouth;
R J Campbell, Glasgow; J Drummond, Aberdeen;
J A Gardiner, Aberdeen; R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy;
J C Gray, Grangemouth; P A Gray, Grangemouth;
R Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; W Lamont, Cumnock;
G C McKay, Glasgow; N McKay, Glasgow; W M Patterson, Glasgow;
D B Robertson, Cumnock; C K Robinson, Glasgow;
J Spinks, Grangemouth; R Taylor, Kirkcaldy

WHAT GOD WILL SHOW US

Robert Taylor

Exodus 3: 1 - 8 (“and honey”)

Deuteronomy 34: 1, 2

2 Kings 2: 9, 10 (... “so to thee”)

Revelation 21: 9, 10

I seek grace, dear brethren, to say a word about some of the things that God is ready to show to us, things that He has prepared before the foundation of the world. I trust I will say something to touch the heart of you young people. The world is showing you many things, but there is not much substance behind them. God is showing you things that He “has prepared for them that love him”, 1 Cor 2: 9. Are you a lover of God? Has the Lord Jesus touched your heart? His great desire is to do that. I would say this, with all assurance, the Lord has a very special place in His heart for young people who commit themselves early to Him. There is nothing that can compensate for years that may be thrown away. I know people say you can make up ground, but do not count on that. He says, “I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals”, Jer 2: 2. A simple thing such as confessing the Lord Jesus at school, I can assure you now, will stand you in good stead through the whole of your life. The Lord will remember it. If He sees you being careless, of course, He is very grieved.

The book of Exodus is a young people's book. You may think it is very hard and difficult to understand, but these people were very young believers. They were only a few months out of Egypt when God began to show them things. Early in their lives they came to waters that they could not drink. It simply means, dear young soul, that you will come to something in your life and you will find it is very bitter. You do not understand it. It says of Moses that “Jehovah shewed him wood”, Exod 15: 25. What does that mean? That is the Man of the gospels, the Man of Luke's gospel and Mark and Matthew, the Man who was here, He “shewed him wood”. What did it mean? It meant as he cast it in the waters became sweet. The Lord has been in our circumstances, tasted the sorrow of being ridiculed. He has been here. It says Moses took the wood and put it in the waters. Bring Jesus into your circumstances! However simple it may be, look to Him! Maybe you get despised, mocked. He has known that. I said it in the reading but it is very true, He often says to you, “I know”. He has been through those

sorrows. He has tasted the bitterness. Read the gospels in your early years! You will remember them better. I would advise young people if they want to get memory training, read Isaiah 53. It is not difficult to learn it off by heart in your young years, a bit more difficult when you are older, but in your young years learn by heart Isaiah 53. You will see the manhood that came into the waters and made them sweet, changed the whole environment.

They went on a few months and they said, 'What are we going to eat?'. One morning they went out and there was manna all over the ground, and then every morning. You wonder how you are going to face the day at school or work, or even if you are retired how you are going to go through exercises you have to bear. There is manna. It never, never failed. They murmured; they despised it even, some of them; but the manna was there and do you know what it says about the manna? It says they ate it "until they came into an inhabited land", Exod 16: 35. I think that is very beautiful. Not until you die, but until you are in glory, there will be the manna there, the manna there for the day, fresh, to touch your heart and to remind you about Jesus, that He was here, and came into those very circumstances.

They rebelled time and time again. Do you know why God showed all these things in their histories? God says about them, "I will make to cease from before me the murmuring", Num 17: 5. He could have judged it. He could have said, 'Did I not bring you out of Egypt and forgive you your sins?' But when they murmured, He gave them manna. Again they rebelled, and what did He do? Ah, one of the best things in the wilderness that He showed them was Aaron's rod that budded. What did that mean? It meant that every other man was to be removed from their view and their eye was only to be on Christ. I love to think of Caleb and Joshua going through the wilderness, and their eye was on the ark. You might say, that was on Christ. Yes, but what a Man He is! Inside that ark were the tables of stone. There was the golden pot with the manna and there was Aaron's rod that budded. I think Caleb had some insight into what was in that ark, enough to carry them through as overcomers and in triumph to the end. Well, that was all for young persons. The Lord is very ready and gracious to give you, whatever age you may be, impressions of Jesus that will last you the whole of your life.

I have read about three persons who treasured what God showed them. The first I would like to speak about is Moses getting an

impression of the incarnation. It is the greatest thing that happened in the world, that the Lord of glory, the Creator of all, came down. It says, "I am come down to deliver them", Exod 3: 8. Why did Jesus come? Because He loved us. He came down when nothing else could meet our condition. He came down when He saw the need to bring these people through, that the only way it could be met was that He would come down. And there was Moses, he was in perplexity, but each of these persons I speak of made *time*. Moses turned aside. He was a busy man. Tending sheep is no part-time job. It is a twenty-four hour day occupation, you may say. He was working for another man who would be demanding that he looked after these sheep all the time. It was his responsibility, but it says that he saw something that touched him, and he turned aside, and what did he see? He saw a bush burning. You say that was no unusual thing. I suppose the bushes must have burned every day in the wilderness, but he saw something special about this and he heard a voice saying out of the midst of the thorn-bush, "Moses, Moses!". God would address you directly. Some very fine persons in the Old Testament have their name called twice because of His delight in them, and here is a man turning aside. The Lord will see that. He does see it. He sees if we turn aside. Sacrifice, it may be. He is all the more ready to honour it, and He says, "Moses, Moses!". God calling his name twice must have touched his heart. And he heard more than that. It says, "I have seen assuredly the affliction of my people". All those years of history, God saw it, from Adam right down. He saw it, and the answer to it all is that Jesus, God's own Son, came down into the world. Why? Beautiful verse: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first", 1 Tim 1: 15.

Well, He has much more than that to say to Moses, but that is why He came down. Dear young heart, do you realise that, that Jesus came down to save *you*? I know an old man, and he was rejoicing one of the last times I spoke to him. He said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". He said, 'That means me! That means me!'. He came into the world to save *me*. Moses got some touch of what that means, but God has much more to say. He says, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham ... And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians".

Have you ever given time, dear souls, to think of the incarnation? It is despised today. There are all sorts of theories to set it aside, but it remains and will remain in all its glory, that God Himself came near, came down, came down in lowly form.

Come now, and view that manger -
The Lord of glory see,
A houseless, homeless Stranger
In this poor world for thee.
(The Man of Sorrows, J N Darby)

Oh what a stoop, my friend! What a stoop! But He came down to deliver them. He came down to take them out of it into His own arranged circumstances.

I think of Simeon when I read this passage. There was a man, I think possibly the most privileged creature, with the babe in his arms, the Lord of glory. How did he recognise Him? There must have been many babes came to the temple. It says "it was divinely communicated to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ", Luke 2: 26. He had turned aside. Persons who turn aside to see this can rebuff all these theories and speculations that come in. It says it was "divinely communicated to him" and he recognised that Who was there called out the worship of his heart, "divinely communicated to him".

Well, may the incarnation in all its glory be entrenched in our affections! It is the centre-piece of all God's ways, and it was in His mind before the world began. As soon as sin came in God said the seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent, Gen 3: 15. Jesus was in His mind. The Man that we sung of as despised was there, the Centre of all God's thoughts. And God is effectuating all His purposes because Jesus, the Lord of glory, came here into those conditions that we are in. It is worth turning aside, my friend, to think about the incarnation. Think of Him there coming in, not in triumph. He set the whole world in confusion. Just read Luke's gospel or Matthew's gospel, and you will see that the whole world was in confusion through a babe in lowly circumstances. Herod did not know what to do; the Pharisees did not know what to do, or the chief priests. There is something undeniable they had to say, but they did not know what to do. But Simeon knew the secret. He knew who was there and he knew what was going to happen. It is a marvellous thing, a man who was a Jew and limited to what was in the Old Testament, he knew that in that Babe in his arms there was the centre of all God's purposes, and they were all going to be effectuated because of the One who stooped so low. Glorious Man, "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2: 5), as Paul delights to speak about Him.

Well, we can say it was enshrined in Moses' affections. He lived a good long time after this. Do you know how he speaks about this incident? He says "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush", Deut 33: 16. Beautiful! What problems he must have had! What exercises he faced! Good will! The angels used similar words. It is what came in in the incarnation: "good pleasure in men" (Luke 2: 14), men with a long history, but God was able to take the long view. We could never have understood the Old Testament without the incarnation. It would have been a book of history, but as you look at the incarnation you will see the glory and delight God had. He could not wait. That is the impression I get, that God could not wait for the circumstances in Luke. Think of how He spoke about it in Isaiah! It says "he saw his glory and spoke of him", John 12: 41. These prophets must have wondered who God was speaking about, but I am sure the Spirit gave them some touch: it was about Christ, the Man that was coming. Moses said, "Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken", Deut 18: 15. He knew his own shortcomings but he was feasting on that One who came down and dwelt in the bush.

And there at the end of his life God shows him something else. He takes him up the mountain. A lot of these showings are connected with mountains. You do not get them reading the newspaper, or on the sports field, or whatever area you may be attracted into. You get them, my friend, in the local meeting. You get those views of Christ that God shows through some sacrifice. You do not go up mountains in a car or whatever it may be, but these mountains were all climbed. There was sacrifice, there was labour, and God says, 'I see your labour and here is the reward'. God saw Moses go up and "Jehovah showed him the whole land", Deut 34: 2. It is very beautiful what he saw. He not only saw the geography of it, but he saw the tribes in it. A dear brother once said about it that Moses had a look into heaven with the saints in it. That is a beautiful touch, to look in and see the saints all there. That is what Moses saw, those tribes that had wearied him, perhaps; he had seen their weaknesses, but God says as it were, 'Before you go, Moses, I will show you that the result of the incarnation will be that there is a Man who has effected all my thoughts and all my promises, and here are all the tribes, all in their place, enjoying their heavenly portion'. My friend, may I tell you, it is worth turning aside. A little bit of sacrifice it may be, but it is worth turning aside to see what God is ready to show. It says, "Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him",

1 Cor 2: 9. May I ask you again: are you a lover of God? He wants to show you His best.

Now I want to speak about Elisha. I should have read more, but the scripture is very full, and do you know the secret of Elisha's life? He is one of the most remarkable men in Scripture. In his history they came and told him that the water was not fit for drinking. He says, 'Bring salt', 2 Kings 3: 20. They told him the food was not fit for eating. He says, "Bring meal", chap 4: 41. He met the need. Do you know the reason he met it? He knew a man in heaven. There is the answer for you, my friend, to all the wilderness path and the sorrows and the exercises: Christ in glory!

Elisha went through the *exercise* though. There were some other people there: they are called sons of the prophets. They stood afar off. They just had a cursory knowledge of things. I suppose they could preach, but they knew nothing practically of a man in glory. Where were the sons of the prophets when the food was not fit for eating? Where were they when the waters could not be drunk? They could maybe have quoted a scripture; maybe we should try this. Elisha has no hesitation. He says, "Bring meal",. Where did that come from? For us, it is the knowledge of a risen, glorious Man. "For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us", 2 Cor 1: 20. We are, to use another expression, "saved in the power of his life", Rom 5: 10. Elisha knew typically that Man that was there was his Friend. Is Jesus your Friend? The Person who has gone in is a Man that we could turn to at any time, with any problem, and we would find the answer. Oh, my friend, feed on Christ in glory! Christendom is full, as another has said, of a historical Jesus, the Man who was here, but may I fix your eyes tonight, dear friend, on the Man who is there, "ascended up above all the heavens", Eph 4: 10? Largely in the world they do not know what has happened to Him. Peter says of Jesus, "who is at the right hand of God, gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him", 1 Pet 3: 22.

He is the answer to those problems that arose among the people. Elisha could well have washed his hands of it. The sons of the prophets tried, but there it was, "bring meal"; 'bring salt' . What impresses you about these things is that they were all ready to hand. He did not go and look up the ministry, precious and profitable as that is, but he had the thing to hand. To the woman that was in debt, he says, "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?", 2 Kings 4: 2. There is more than enough to meet it from a risen and glorious Man. This is like what

we were speaking of in the reading, what is flowing from a Head in heaven to a body here to testify to a Man who is in glory.

Well, Elisha went on. Whatever the circumstance we can turn to the Man in heaven. My friend, He is always ready to hear. It speaks about Him in the New Testament: He is gone "into heaven itself", Heb 9: 24. I often think of that verse. It was perfectly right that He should go into heaven, but it does not stop there. It says, "now to appear before the face of God for us". Think of Him being there for you! That might be like what Elisha had the sense of. He is there to sustain me and to sustain the people, appearing before the face of God for us. My friend, that is a very practical thing. We turn aside to speak about it, but it is worth speaking about for a moment. The enemy will tell you how bad you are. The enemy will try to overcome you by your sins and your weakness and the breakdown of all that is around, but look to Christ! He is there before the face of God for you. Do you know that your name is on His breast? Have you a sense of that? In the midst of these problems, have you? We have to learn that bitterly sometimes. We try our own ways; but there He is, the Great High Priest, there with our names on His breast, and that is what God looks on. God is looking on your name on that breast and He says, 'That is my son', and heaven's resources are available to maintain you here in accord with the place that you have in heaven. There was an old brother that I knew well who heard Mr Raven speaking on Hebrews 3: 1, "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus". As Apostle, He maintains the calling at its height. The system cannot break down. As the High Priest, He maintains the people at the height of their calling. My friend, just think of that! It is something that will help you through life. There is breakdown, but the system will not break down. The Apostle, Jesus, the glorious Man, is maintaining it and will maintain it to the end and he is "a merciful and faithful high priest" (Heb 2: 17) who will maintain you in the joy of your salvation. Make time for it, my friend! What I am saying is not a theory, or only a verse of scripture. There are many in this room have proved it: make time to consider it! That means pause and wait and think. Paul says that. You do not understand things? "Think of what I say, for the Lord will give thee understanding in all things", 2 Tim 2: 7. Pause and consider that, "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession". Well, Elisha knew something about that.

But then I want to speak about John for a moment. He heard those words, "I will shew thee", something that had been prepared before the world's foundation. "Come here". You have to move. As I

have said already, you do not get help by sitting waiting for it. Have you ever been touched by a word of ministry or in reading a verse of scripture? The Spirit may have touched your affections. Well, "Come here". Do not hurry away from it. Think of what touches of divine grace are so readily shown to you. John could have said, 'There are all sorts of things to do', but this voice attracted him. That is something that happens in the beginning of Revelation. John heard a voice and he turned to see the voice, chap 1: 12. Mr Darby puts it:

What powerful, mighty Voice, so near,
Calls me from earth apart (The Call, J N Darby).

It is a voice calling you away from these circumstances that may be holding you. Well, John was very ready to turn to hear the voice, and he was ready to take this journey. The angel says, "Come here, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the Spirit". He is seeing the saints of this dispensation. He is seeing these local brethren that you may have been meeting with; John is seeing the aggregate of them; he is seeing "the bride, the Lamb's wife". It is a touch of another but it is very precious: an examination into the overcomers' rewards will enable us to arrive at the thought of the bride, JT Vol 47 p465. If you just look at that, there is a lot in it. Of some of them it says, they shall be clothed in white garments, Rev 3: 5. These overcomings that are going on in your life, they are making the threads, weaving the threads that God is going to put together in this beautiful garment of "the bride, the Lamb's wife", displaying those glorious features. Well, John sees her no longer in breakdown, but sees her coming down. She has been in glory at this point, and John sees her coming out, the wonder of the universe. Nations will be brought to admire what they see in this "the bride, the Lamb's wife".

John got a view of it. May it encourage your heart, my friend, and mine in the days we are in to look, to see

The church complete and in Thy beauty dressed (Hymn 226)

What an influence she is going to have, despised today maybe, but what an influence she is going to have in a universe to come. Her shining, her glory, is going to illumine the earth and it is going to give Israel an impression of what they missed, but they are going to see with great admiration what God has secured in a creature vessel that will bring blessing and healing and glory to the world. Well, God is showing it to interested persons today. It has been said again that John stood

amidst the ruin of Paul's assemblies in the beginning of Revelation. He must have had a broken heart as he went through chapter after chapter and saw the confusion in the world and the breakdown, but God says, "Before I close the book, I will show you something else. From all that confusion and all that breakdown I have secured "the bride, the Lamb's wife". My friend, make time amidst the sorrows, amidst the breakdown, amidst the weakness and the confusion, make time for God to show it to you. *You* and I are part of that bride. Wonderful grace! And here she is coming out in all the freshness and glory of all God's thoughts. John sees all that and before he closes the book, he says, "come, Lord Jesus", chap 22: 20. That is the effect, my friend, of having some sense that things are all completed and secured in the Man Christ Jesus. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come", chap 22: 17. God is listening for that cry from your heart and mine: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come". Then it says, "He that testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly", v 20. There is the answer to the cry of the bride to come. He says, "I come quickly". But then it says, "Amen; come, Lord Jesus". May it be so for His Name's sake!

Glasgow

25th April 2009

FELLOWSHIP AND THE BODY

Eric C Burr

1 John 1: 7

1 Corinthians 12: 12

I thought we might consider fellowship and the body and learn the distinction between them. It might well be thought that the two different words mean the same but they do not quite do so. I could illustrate that by drawing attention to the fact that we used to say that 'someone has come into fellowship' but they would not want to come into fellowship unless they were already part of the body. So the two things are distinguishable.

I think it is important for us to understand fellowship and its nature. The most specific reference to it in the epistles, I think, is in the beginning of Corinthians, where Paul says that "ye have been called into the fellowship of His Son", 1 Cor 1: 9. The fact that it is 'the fellowship of His Son' puts His own stamp on it, and one thing that it does is to take away any thought that fellowship is just a social organisation. I wonder if we think social relationships form Christian fellowship, but they do not. It is of great importance to understand, I think, that fellowship is something that is to be worked out and its maintenance demands that we walk in the light. We are familiar with the idea: John wrote his epistles late (possibly the latest thing written in the scriptures), but what he says in relation to fellowship is that "if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another". A lot has been said about what walking in the light means, but one thing that it clearly means is that it is an unmixed condition. The light shines and you walk in the light. John does not describe exactly what the light is, but, being John, he would refer you back to his gospel, where, for instance, Jesus says "I am the light of the world" (John 8: 12), and the fact that that light sheds its radiance and its colour on all believers is a test. You notice that in the epistle where I read it begins with "if" - "if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light". Therefore it is clear that the basis of fellowship is that we walk in the light with one another. I do not, in referring to these things, have in mind any particular exercise amongst us, but John does not write in relation to circumstances - he writes in relation to principles - and the reality of fellowship according to John is a pure and unmixed relationship between believers who are such already, but believers individually.

The one thing I think about fellowship in distinction from the body is that fellowship always has the idea of what is individual in it. I do not exclude the idea of relationships and that kind of thing because they

develop but fellowship is that you and I are governed by the same things and we identify ourselves with the same interests and with the knowledge of the Lord Jesus as the One who governs our lives. The reality of Christian fellowship is something that is entered into once the word of God has taken effect in you; that is the enjoyment between believers as individuals of their common interest in the Lord Jesus. That always needs to be asserted. My recollection of past procedures among the brethren was that if somebody wished to break bread they expressed themselves as wanting to break bread, and they were commended on the basis that they had come into fellowship. That fellowship, while having common interests among all concerned, was the fellowship of individuals looked at as individuals. That is at least how I understand fellowship; that it is what you have and what I have and we can share. Many institutions in the world are a bit like that - in fact some of them are called fellowships - because there is a common interest, and those who have the common interest come together; and that common interest has to be maintained and for believers it is maintained by the maintenance of our common interest in the Lord Jesus and His work. We would do well to consider, if I may say so, what our brother brought before us, as to the pattern that there is in Jesus - what He was when He was here. Could any of us say that we must be engaged in His Father's business? You might even say it came naturally to Him to be engaged in His Father's business. I must be engaged in the things of my Father, Luke 2: 49.

I was thinking, however, that the idea of the body goes a bit further than that of fellowship. The scripture in Corinthians clearly has within it the idea of fellowship - it says 'we all'. Paul says 'the body is one and has many members' and the members have their own distinguishable histories and they function as members of the body

But the idea of the body goes beyond what fellowship with one another implies. You may say the two things are bound up together, and so they are, but in the body you are formed with others into one single entity. You have the Spirit, and the work of God has bound you into a single entity; not exactly where individualism may shine - although Paul goes on here to point out the distinction between the different aspects of the body - but the body is a single corporate entity and I think that if we understand that it helps us, not only to work out what fellowship is (involving us as individuals) but in the body as expressed the reality of what the Lord Jesus is Himself - not so much in His work but in Himself - one body in Christ. We hold these thoughts and we treasure them as we hold them, but in the body there is no aspect of the body as I understand which is purely social. The danger

in fellowship is that our sharing common interests tends to promote what is social among us, and I venture to say that that is not enough. We have to learn our bonds together and the reality of them. Christian fellowship and that aspect of things is very valuable and important, but the reality of what the body is has made bonds between oneself and every other believer. I was very interested in the recent reference to the wide scope that we may have in our minds as to other believers, and the body embraces all. Fellowship may involve just what is available to you. You may have fellowship with some other believers in relation to certain aspect of it, but what Paul is looking for, and what John is looking for, is a single idea of fellowship in which the interests of all are the same. I do not think the idea of fellowship can wholly exclude the idea of what is social but Christian fellowship does not depend on social relations between believers: it depends on common, shared interests in the things of Christ and the work of the Spirit, and it depends also, beloved, on you and me walking in the light. If I have any parts secret I am damaging the fellowship that there is. It is not to say that we all want to know everything about everybody - we have a certain tendency to do that - but we have no dark parts because we are walking in the light.

These thoughts just occurred to me because I sometimes think that some terms that we learn from scripture and which have been developed in their meaning in ministry get taken up in a slightly superficial kind of way without our penetrating to the reality of what is included in them and I make a distinction myself between fellowship and the body, although they should include all the same people but fellowship can be a bond between individuals. The body does not exactly retain the idea of individuals; it is a single corporate entity in which Christ is represented and that representation maintained.

I had not thought these things out, but I was just impressed with, perhaps, a need for us to understand, to be established in just what some of the words that the Scripture uses actually have in mind to be worked out and demonstrated in believers in the present time.

Perhaps the Lord would give us to think about this.

London

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