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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

COMMITTAL TO THE WILL OF GOD

THE COMING OF THE LORD

THE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 3: 8; 2 Corinthians 3: 17; 1 Corinthians 12: 7-11; Romans 8: 14.

E.C.B. I think that the Lord is recovering to us some sense of the sovereignty of the Spirit, and I wondered if it would be profitable to touch on that during this reading. We have been through a period in which the sovereignty of the Spirit (I think it would be fair to say), has been limited because, while there is always the principle of leadership, any sense of canalizing through a single channel what comes to the saints so that nothing may be said other than what comes through that channel limits the operations of the Spirit. But my impression is that what the brethren are enjoying now, and increasingly enjoying as they are together, especially for meetings of this kind, flows from the Spirit acquiring again His place in sovereignty among the saints. One evidence of this is that brethren speak of freshness and variety and interest in the meetings. It is not possible for the mind of man to predict the operations of the Spirit of God; and, if brethren are together subject to the operations of the Spirit, there is bound to be the interest and the variety which comes from the Spirit having liberty.

I read in John 3 not so much to engage us with the operations that relate to new birth, although those things are there in the section, but to get some impression that "the wind blows where it will". This seems to me to bring out by way of application that the Spirit operates according to His own will and His own inclination and intention. Where the verse goes on to say, "thus is every one that is born of the Spirit", that is not to imply that those born of the Spirit go about like the wind where they will, but it is bringing out the consequence of the sovereign operations of the Spirit, I believe.

Then I read the familiar verse in 2 Corinthians 3 in order to touch on the fact that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty". Much could be said about those verses as to lordship, and so on, but what is certainly contained in them is that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty". Therefore if the Spirit is there and He is free, there

is bound to be liberty. I have read the other two scriptures in order to remind us that, if there is liberty flowing from the sovereign operations of the Spirit and the place that He has, we have all of us to remember that we ourselves are constrained by the Spirit's own operations. In 1 Corinthians 12 the Spirit divides "according as he pleases". Just to take up what is said in the chapter, it is no good my thinking that I ought to have a gift of healing if that is not what the Spirit has been pleased to give me. The Spirit is sovereign in His operations and, in that sense, the liberty that we enjoy is, on the one hand, constrained but, on the other hand, is enjoyed as we submit to those operations. Then I have read the verse in Romans 8 to remind us as well that we do not walk according to our own will but are "led by the Spirit of God". I think that the Spirit always leads us in liberty, but we have to keep in mind we are constrained by His operations; that is to say, any personal liberty is surrendered to the degree to which we come under the control and power of the Holy Spirit. I wondered whether these things might touch on what I believe is current among the brethren at the present time.

C.M. I believe, that is a very important enquiry. In your first scripture it says, "thou hearest its voice". We do not know all about it but we are to hear.

E.C.B. Yes, we are. Of course we would be applying this scripture, because no doubt it has a good deal to do with the initial operations of the Spirit in us, but the wind blows where it will, not where I will; it blows where it will "and thou hearest its voice" and, as you say, we are to be alert for what the Spirit is saying. That corresponds with what the Lord says to the assemblies in Revelation: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies". Therefore it would be a question in every assembly whether His voice is heard, but His voice is His voice and it is not what we choose, it is what He says.

C.M. It is really stimulating when something comes in that we recognise is His voice. It is a very normal thing, is it not, and yet it has a stimulating effect on the saints?

E.C.B. I think that is what we are experiencing in the present day.

Things are small and we cannot speak of anything other than weakness. Often we feel that if we spoke of a little power we would be boasting; but there is a little power and I think it flows from this recovered liberty that the Spirit has in His own sovereignty amongst us.

A.A.B. Is it needful to take account of the Spirit objectively in relation to your thought as in the book of Acts we see His sovereign operations relative to the testimony and the setting on of the dispensation?

E.C.B. I think it is. I doubt whether we really apprehend the fulness of what attaches to the Spirit, certainly by way of His Person but also in respect of His service, unless we have some apprehension of Him objectively. So that we do not think of Him just as an influence but as a Person who is Himself operating - "These things operates the one and the same Spirit". I think that we are finding again what flows in liberty as the Spirit has His place amongst us, and what belongs to anything else is displaced as the Spirit acquires His place. The tendency of man is always to channel things and canalize them and organize them so that the liberty of the Spirit is displaced by the direction of man. But the Lord operated in the recovery in the beginning of the last century against that and He has been operating against it ever since, and I think that He is getting some triumph in that connection at the present time.

R.E.T. When you speak of acting sovereignly have you in mind that the Spirit is linking on with the work of God in the souls of the saints, which is alive and alert to His movements and operations?

E.C.B. The Spirit does connect with what is of Himself in the saints, and it is through that that He operates. He does not direct the flesh. The flesh is always resistant to the Spirit and what belongs to the flesh is unresponsive, but there is that in the saints - the mere fact that they are called saints indicates that - on which and through which the Spirit can operate. What I am concerned about is that we should see that it is the Spirit that has the initiative and not man; and

the Spirit connects, as you say, with what is of Him in the brethren and He brings that under His direction, so that we do not set out in any way to tell the Spirit what He must do.

C.H.S. When they were fasting at Antioch the Spirit spoke; there was the negating of flesh and the making way for the Spirit.

E.C.B. That is right. There were circumstances there in the assembly (and that is an interesting allusion too, because it is peculiarly in the assembly that we want to learn these things), in which they were "ministering to the Lord and fasting" (Acts 13: 2) and the Spirit operated, Himself taking an initiative, and they responded to Him. Now that is a very great example for us, that the Spirit took the initiative and there was a company that responded to it. What flowed out from that the Acts tells us about; but what will flow out amongst us as the Spirit recovers room for His own untrammelled operations?

H.J.T. And that is always for profit, is it not?

E.C.B. Yes, in fact every other line in the end proves unprofitable. If we think about what goes on at the present time we can trace the profit, even in small circumstances, from the liberty that the Spirit is gaining for Himself.

D.E.R. What you are saying raises with us the exercise as to how far we know the Spirit. We know the doctrine and the teaching, and what is set out in the Scriptures as to the Spirit, but how far do we know the Spirit for ourselves?

E.C.B. Well, that connects with what Mr Bellamy said about the knowledge of the Spirit objectively, and it is essential that we acquire that knowledge of Him. Jesus says to the disciples in John, "ye know him"; would He say that to us? I think that sometimes we would not necessarily recognise in the initiation of some movement that it was the Spirit working, but as the thing goes on we see that it can only be of the Spirit. If you think of the meetings at the present time, nobody came in and said they must take a new direction and get a new kind of power in them, but it comes about and you look to

see what that is due to, and you find 'it is due to the Spirit reclaiming room for Himself; and the Lord is insisting that He should have it.

G.W.B. In Acts 10 it says specifically of Peter that "the Spirit said to him ... go with them" (v 19, 20), and then in the next chapter when he is recounting it he again says, "the Spirit said to me" (v.12). What was specific was recognised by Peter. It was a very important matter in Peter's history, apostle as he was, with very great results in his service.

E.C.B. Yes. I suppose Peter began to realise it fairly quickly at the time, but it was really a turning point in the history of the testimony; that is that the Spirit acquired room Himself to give direction. The obstacles that were in Peter are the obstacles that are perhaps in us naturally. We say, Well, we are not used to this; but we can see, and that scripture helps us in committing ourselves to this line, that the intervention of the Spirit there was a turning point in the testimony. I think we would long to have the assurance in our souls, after the sorrows and the breakdowns and divisions, that the Lord has such a point through the acquisition of a fresh place for the Spirit, so that we look forward to going on into further enjoyment of the truth.

J.T-n. So that in Acts 2 there is great expectation as to the Spirit coming. While that was initial, do you think that there should be that expectation with us in our gatherings together?

E.C.B. I think that every touch we have of that kind of experience would make us long for more of it. So that, for instance, you come to the meeting with expectancy in your mind; and how many of us have proved even when we are just two or three together that we can touch the greatest things, that we are not hindered because there are only two or three together. We were speaking somewhere else about how you come together for the Supper and quickly get into a state in your soul when you are no longer speaking about the small numbers. After the Lord has come in you are no longer speaking to Him to the effect that 'Lord, we are only two or three here'. You might say that as you come together, but once the Lord has come in

you lose that sense, because you are in this fresh atmosphere where the Spirit is taking things over for the Lord.

C.M. I suppose the knowledge of the Spirit would be cumulative in sons who are led by Him.

E.C.B. It would; that is an interesting point in connection with what was said as to our acquiring knowledge of the Spirit, that in our day by day experiences He is becoming more real to us and more and more of a Leader to us. I am sure it means that, while the Spirit always maintains liberty, we have to submit to being under His control and His government.

G.T.P. Acts 10 is interesting in that Peter, as a result of that experience, gets free from what is merely orthodox.

E.C.B. That is right. The idea of becoming free from what is merely orthodox has been used to damage a lot of the brethren and to carry them away under the fiction that what was unorthodox must be right: the Spirit has what is unpredictable but it is all under His regulation and control and it never allows room for the operation of the flesh.

F.N.S. You spoke of the fact that, "thus is every one that is born of the Spirit". He can do as He will. Will you say on the positive side what that really means?

E.C.B. I think that what Jesus is instructing Nicodemus about here is the operations of God in new birth and in the establishment of God's work in him, and that you cannot predict where the wind will be and you cannot predict where the Spirit will work. But you and I are, we trust, beyond that point, we are on ground where we know that God has worked in us by new birth, that we have been converted by the gospel and that we have received the Spirit. Now we are brought in relation to One who still does as He pleases; He does as He pleases and not necessarily as I please. I cannot direct the Spirit; but I think that the Lord is helping us by drawing us into the leadership of the Spirit both privately and collectively so that we find that, even though constrained, we are at liberty.

F.N.S. You get the idea of a certain inscrutability about the work of the Spirit.

E.C.B. Yes, that is just what I think it means.

A.A.B. This would be foundational to what Paul says, "the spiritual discerns all things, and he is discerned of no one", 1 Cor 2: 15.

E.C.B. Yes, this line from John runs right through into that, but when you reach that chapter in Corinthians you are in an area where the Spirit is searching the depths of God. Now we cannot take over control of the Spirit searching the depths of God; what we need to be in is the current of what He brings out of those depths to minister to us.

G.W.B. Do you think we need to be in faith as to the recognition of the Spirit in an initial way and to be continually maintained in it as to His presence and operations?

E.C.B. Yes, I think that. The expression 'faith in the Spirit' was used quite a lot, but it is a right expression and we do need to have faith in Him, because He is not seen. The tendency of man is always to go back to what he can see; hence men begin to love what is clerical.

The Lord in His goodness is preserving us from that at the present time, and I think that some of His recent operations can be traced to the fact that He was not going to allow what was clerical to grow up.

But now we are together with the Spirit free to operate, and we need to be believing as to what He will take us into and to have faith in Him as He moves into it.

W.McK. That brings us back to the verse you quoted in John 14: "whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor know him" (v.17). The world only believes what it can see. But the Lord says, "but ye know him, for he abides with you, and shall be in you". I wondered if you could say something about that. It seems to be a dual aspect of the Spirit - "he abides with you" is objective, and "shall be in you" is what we experience in ourselves.

E.C.B. I think that Jesus there is helping the disciples in regard to the fact that He Himself was going away. They had been

accustomed to Jesus being with them; corporeally He was there and they moved about with Him, they saw Him eat and drink, and they could touch Him. Now He says, I am going away but the Spirit will be with you; that is, the Spirit alongside them as Christ was. But I think what He says to them, "and shall be in you", is something that adds to the experience they had had of Himself; the Spirit being here would not only be alongside them by way of company and support but He would be in them as well. Paul takes that up and extends it in Colossians when he says, "Christ in you", chap 1: 27.

W.McK. It is very remarkable that I should become aware in the assembly that there is something in me that connects itself with what I have seen objectively.

E.C.B. That connects with what was remarked earlier and which we need to apprehend; and it requires, as Mr Brown said, some operation of faith by us to apprehend the Spirit's working in us and the Spirit Himself connecting with that. This is really the way into the experience of the body and what is properly collective.

R.E.T. Is the secret of the knowledge of the power of the Spirit found in recognising that the Lord has gone on nigh, yet the holy Comforter has come to guide us and to lead us into all the truth?

E.C.B. Yes, it is important to keep in mind that He is the Spirit of the Lord, and the title 'Lord' really applies to the Spirit because He is God. The title is applied to the Father - "I praise thee, Father, Lord" (Matt 11: 25) - it is applied of course to Christ and it is applied to the Spirit; because They are God They must be Lord. But think of an occasion when Jesus was here: it is clear that the centurion was applying the same thing to Jesus - "I say to this one, Go, and he goes; ... Come, and he comes", Matt 8: 9. Now if Jesus said that to you, you would have no hesitation about it, but what if the Spirit says it to you? The Spirit has the same authority to say those things as Jesus had or God has; He is God. Are we ready for submission to the Spirit as He pleases to say 'Go' or 'Come', and will we go or come?

G.W.B. So that we should follow the pattern, not just being obedient when we choose.

E.C.B. Yes, and the sense in Romans 8 of "as many as are led by the Spirit of God" is that He is leading all the time: the Spirit never surrenders His leadership at any time. Therefore all the time we can be connecting ourselves with His leadership. It is unceasing, and all that we need to do, in a sense, is to follow Him, but do so discerningly.

C.M. Would it be right to connect that thought with John 3, for as knowing not where it goes yet hearing His voice we would be prepared to follow where He goes?

E.C.B. That is the point: as hearing His voice we are prepared to go where He goes. You see it in relation to Paul's history as Jesus came into it, it was the voice; he saw something as well, but there was the voice, and "My sheep hear my voice", John 10: 27.

Therefore we need to be alert for the voice of the Lord but also the voice of the Spirit. Now the Spirit never leads those submissive to Him into anything other than liberty, but the liberty is enjoyed because you are controlled by Himself as the One who leads you into it.

A.A.B. Having secured the affection and submission of Rebecca, the servant goes to Isaac. Is that parallel with what you say, leading into liberty? The more we are brought in affection and expectation and hope into the light of the heavenly land, the more liberty we shall know.

E.C.B. I think that is right, and we would then have a full sense of the truth having set us free and the Son having set us free, because the Spirit leads us into the area where the fulness of those things is to be understood.

W.McK. In Genesis 24 the Spirit says, "That is my master" (v.65). It might help us if you would say something about the relationship between the Lord where He is and the Spirit where He is.

E.C.B. Well, the Spirit is here, as we say, and He has taken up the lowliest place in the economy. God is known in Father, Son and Spirit; and the Spirit has taken a place in which He is even subject to what He hears from the Father and the Son. Therefore everything that the Spirit does will be consistent with the desires of the Father and the Son, and the Spirit having taken that place is set to serve the pleasure of the Father and the Son. At the end of Genesis 24, "That is my master" is Isaac; at the beginning of the chapter his master is Abraham, that is characteristically the Father; but the Spirit's service really ministers to the satisfaction of both, and He has taken a place in the economy in which He is content to serve the desires of both the Father and the Son.

J.T-n. It seems that we come into a very sensitive area, the area of the Spirit. Perhaps I own subjection to the Lord and to the principles which we know, but then a refined subjection is required, shall I say, in the sensitive area of the Spirit. Are we equal to that?

E.C.B. We are tested as to that sometimes when we are together. We are tested very much in our personal lives as to whether we are ready to be sensitively subject to the Spirit; but we have a great advantage when we are together in that the flow of the truth in the operations of the Spirit will itself subject you to what the Spirit is doing in the meeting, and in that sense you have an experience of being lifted out of your own will and your own desires, even your own pre-occupations, merely by the power of the operations of the Spirit in the company.

D.E.R. Philip in Acts 8 and Peter in Acts 10 are two examples of persons who are sensitive to the Spirit's leading; they are not governed by circumstances or their own natural proclivities.

E.C.B. In chapter 8 the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away and there must have been something physical in that because he was found at Azotus, which is a bit off the road from Jerusalem down to Gaza. In chapter 10 there is not the same sense of what is physical but there is a real sense of the Spirit making His own initiative felt in those circumstances; and Peter, after that battle within himself and

even with the Lord (which we are familiar with), comes to it that "the Spirit said to me". Now that is a thing that we long to touch both in our gatherings and in our private lives.

R.E.T. So you get the constant reference to "the same Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12. That is personal, is it not? I believe that is where, speaking for oneself, the weakness is, that we need to know the Spirit in a more intimate way.

E.C.B. Yes, and we need to become engaged with Him, as was said, in faith, because the divinely appointed means of acquiring power is by faith. But we are tested a lot, of course, in things that should be fundamental in us. We should all of us be acceding in practice to the fact that the Spirit must have the victory over the flesh; we should really be committed to that. We do not always triumph and we have a lot of lessons to learn but we should be committed to that. Now if we are committed to that privately, I think that we shall find that the flesh is greatly held at bay when we are together, so there is more room for the exploration of the depths of God. The Spirit keeps showing us at the present time that He has very great things to open up to the brethren.

C.H.S. Would you say a word as to the Spirit's sympathetic intercession in Romans 8, joining His help to our weakness?

E.C.B. I wonder how much any of us has actually experienced that. We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit joins His help to our weakness, and God knows the mind of the Spirit. We are to be brought more into the things that the Spirit Himself is holding and carrying before God. It is a great thing to find yourself formed in the course of praying. A lot of us fall into routine in praying; we ask for things, but to have acquired some sense of what the Spirit would have in mind at that time would help us a great deal in what we should pray for, and we will find Him sympathetic in the exercises that He is bringing about.

F.N.S. At the close of 2 Corinthians Paul speaks about "the communion of the Holy Spirit" being with them all, chap 13: 14.

Would that be the result of giving place to the Spirit, being on easy terms with Him and receiving impressions?

E.C.B. I think so, and that would require that everyone in the local assembly was set personally in relation to the Spirit so that the company would find the communion of the Spirit when they are together . I think that is one of the greatest means of finding the truth opened up to us, that we are together in the communion of the Spirit.

R.E.T. Would the ministry which Mr Taylor brought out in regard to the Spirit help us; the different titles that He has - "Lord Spirit", "Spirit of God", "Spirit of Jesus Christ"? If we were in the knowledge of these things would this not make us more wealthy persons in regard to the Spirit?

E.C.B. It certainly would in relation to our knowledge of the Spirit; but then, if you acquire a knowledge of the Spirit, you will find that you are being educated as well into such things as the meaning of 'Jesus' and 'the Son of man' and 'the Son of God' and 'the Son of His love' and 'the Beloved', and so on. (I think that there is scope for a good deal of teaching amongst us as to the truth of the Son of man). Then you will also find that the Spirit as known will engage you with the glories of the Father. What is it that the Father is Lord of the heavens and of the earth? What is it that He makes His sun shine on the just and the unjust? All these are characteristics of the Father that the Spirit would illuminate for us.

J.McK. Is that demonstrated in Simeon at the beginning of Luke's gospel? The divine communication to him was followed by a wonderful opening up in scope as to the Person of Christ.

E.C.B. Yes, and the divine communication to him brought him into a position where he could actually hold the Lord's Christ in his arms. That was the result of following a divine communication; and what it would be to us if, coming under the control of the Spirit and thus brought into a sphere of liberty, we were able to embrace more of what Christ is, more of what the incarnation means, and so on.

G.W.B. The communications would not have been only one way in the case of Simeon or of Peter. I think Mr Taylor used these New Testament scriptures, as well as the Old illustratively to liberate us for our speaking to Him.

E.C.B. I am sure that is right, and the communion of the Holy Spirit is not one way either. It involves what is horizontal but it also involves what is vertical (we use these words), and the communion of the Spirit involves both our exchanges with Him and our exchanges with one another in His power.

A.A.B. Would it be diverting to ask you to say what it is to prophesy to the wind as in Ezekiel 37?

E.C.B. I do not know that I could say much about that, you could probably say more yourself, but one thing it seems to me about that scripture, as bearing on us, is that there is some apprehension of what is about to happen, and therefore there is the power to call in the Spirit in relation to what is about to happen. The Spirit illuminates for us what is coming, and what do we say as to what is coming? We need the Spirit in relation to that, do you think?

A.A.B. I do. Ezekiel helps us as to the matter of acquaintance with the Spirit. I do not think there is another prophet on such terms with the Spirit as Ezekiel was. Also, the title, Son of man, comes into that prophecy predominantly. I think what you are saying is helpful as to the depths of God, what we may be on the threshold of if these living conditions can be accentuated more amongst us.

E.C.B. Yes, and therefore what Mr Brown said as to faith in the Spirit becomes essential to us, because there is no doubt that it requires almost a degree of courage to go in for these things. If you are accustomed to being told you can do this, that and the other, and this is defined and that is defined, and if you want to find out what you do not know you ask a certain source: the effect of that is that saints begin to lose their faith in the Spirit; and faith in the Spirit needs to be recovered if the exploration of the truth in the way we are speaking of it is to be enjoyed amongst us. Do you think that?

A.A.B. I do, and body feelings and affections go along with that, do they not ?

E.C.B. They flow out of it, I do not think you can get a company of people together and create body feelings amongst them. The only way for there to be an experience of the body is for the one Spirit to work.

C.H.S. So it is, "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies", Rev. 2: 7. It is individual, in that way.

E.C.B. It is, because in the assemblies in Revelation the Lord is really having to look for individuals in the public position who are ready to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

C.M. Would our faith in the Spirit be stimulated by our having experience of His operating as the Unction? I believe His operations in that way had been suppressed a good deal until recent times, but now we are beginning to get confidence in the way He works as the Unction in our hearts.

E.C.B. I think that is right. It is a common experience that, if people have been under very rigid direction and control from a source other than the Spirit of God, it takes a while for them to become accustomed again to the liberty that belongs to what is proper to them. In the political sphere, if people are oppressed for a long time and the oppressor is removed, the result is often revolution; but in spiritual things you do not, of course, anticipate that; but it takes the saints a little while to become accustomed again to the liberty that belongs to the Spirit of God. I think that the Spirit has secured that for Himself again, and the confidence of the saints should be built up in it so that they are ready for what He will bring out consequent upon the fresh liberty that He is finding.

W.McK. In Acts 13 is the Spirit asserting His own authority and rights in the assembly there? He says, *Separate Me*, not simply *Separate* - "Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (v.2). Is that something that is current? I am thinking of what the Lord is doing at the present time with regard

to the ministry and whether the Spirit should be fully recognised in relation to the selection that He is making.

E.C.B. I am sure that that is right, and trust that all of us are ready, if the Lord gives something to any brother that is for edification, to acknowledge it and go with it. We do not need particular labels on what is said to make it acceptable. What we look for is the power of the Spirit of God. This connects, I think, with what I had in mind in 1 Corinthians 12 - "as he pleases". Now Acts 13 is a demonstration of "as he pleases".

W.McK. I wondered too if what you have been referring to in Acts 8, 9, 10 and 11 all lies behind chapter 13.

E.C.B. I think it does, because the particular operations of the Spirit have been brought out for us. For instance, at the end of chapter 9 the assemblies "were increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit" (v.31). Now if we are looking for enlargement it seems to me that the comfort of the Holy Spirit known amongst the saints is an essential pre condition. How much comfort the brethren are finding at the present time because the Spirit has liberty! - and everyone goes home from the meetings, I trust, restfully and with something further to reflect on.

G.W.B. In John 4 the Lord cuts across the woman's orthodoxy and brings in what springs up, so that she herself acts in an unconventional way finally; she is not bound by anything.

E.C.B. One thing clear is that she is not doing her own will. In a sense she is entrusted with an administration, and she goes to the city and speaks to the men; she has a full impression of who it is that she has been speaking with, but she is in the liberty that springs from the control of the Spirit.

D.E.R. It is important to stress that, that the control of the Spirit, while it brings in liberty, is not liberty to do as we please. If we do that, the Spirit's abnormal service is required in negating the flesh or in extricating us from the world. The service He loves is to occupy us with Christ and with heavenly things, and that is the sphere in which the liberty comes, is it not?

E.C.B. That is right. You will remember that Mr Darby said (I think it is in his letters) in regard to the disorderly situation that prevailed (I think at Plymouth) that he had never understood that the assembly of God was to be the only place on earth where the will of man had unbridled sway. In the world there are constant controls on the will of man, there are pressures from this side and that side; Mr Darby had the impression that some were working towards the idea that in the assembly, everyone did as they liked. But no; the only way for us to be led into the truth - "he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16: 13) - is to submit to the direction and control of the Spirit, and we shall find liberty in coming under His control.

D.E.R. That really starts with Romans 8 because it is the law of the Spirit that has set me free.

E.C.B. Yes, it is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (v.2), but the immediate context in the verses read is, "if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live: for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God"; that is to say, the deeds of the body are put to death by the Spirit. Now what are you going to do when these are put to death? Well, you come under the leadership of the Spirit; and the one thing about His leadership is that those who are led are not doing as they like, they are doing what He says. The enjoyment of that is that "these are sons of God". The sons of God never seek to do as they like, they are just submissive to the will of God and of the Father.

A.A.B. Is this the secret of what is constructive proceeding amongst us? The expression "the same Spirit" comes in as a kind of refrain in these verses we have read from 1 Corinthians 12. So that, as I recognise that in a brother or a sister, there is what is constructive and edifying.

E.C.B. That is really the only way by which what is collective and corporate can be developed amongst us. Paul said, "There is ... one Spirit" (Eph 4: 4), so that it is no good our thinking that we have spirits of different kinds: "There is ... one Spirit". He may, as Mr Turner said, take different titles, but there is one Spirit. Now if that

Spirit, the one and the same Spirit, is operating in us all, order is brought into the local assembly and I think it paves the way for the prophecy in chapter 14.

A.A.B. "We ... have all been given to drink of one Spirit". Do we not need to maintain that?

E.C.B. It is very interesting how the sense of 'one Spirit' had impressed itself on Paul: "through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2: 18); "There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph 4: 4); and so on. Now we should have that sense too, and we will the more as we allow ourselves to be led by that one Spirit in the way in which He is going.

C.H-t. Why does it say in Ephesians, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God", chap 4: 30?

E.C.B. Because that is a thing that we are so prone to do. I think that the Spirit is grieved if I seek to take over the direction of my own way when He is ready to do it for me. Often we know that in ordinary circumstances. People are grieved; they say, I would have done that for him, and here he is doing it himself; and you can see that there is underlying grief there. The Spirit would long that He should be allowed to keep the direction of our lives. Of course we can grieve Him, not only by allowing the activity of the flesh, but even more by actual sin; but the Spirit being ungrieved is really what is in mind, that we may be in the enjoyment of what we are speaking about.

R.E.T. Is not that what Paul is at in Romans 8 regarding "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"? Is not the Spirit of the anointed Man what is going to keep us free?

E.C.B. Yes, but life in Christ Jesus is life where He is now; it is life enjoyed by us here where we are, but which comes from another sphere - a Baalshalishah order of things.

W.McK. All the time that we are being led by the Spirit and directed by Him, personality is developing in the one who is so led. It does not diminish the personality in the least.

E.C.B. I think that is important, and I have the feeling that that kind of thing is coming to light again. In our earlier days we were accustomed to personalities and anyone here that is over fifty can think of ten in a moment; but all that seemed to die out. I think that the Lord is reviving personality again, so that people become interesting in themselves, and it is a result of the operations of the Spirit that is producing the different glories in the star .

W.McK. Is "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" connected with what you were referring to elsewhere, the cedars of Lebanon? It is fine to see the personality that is His, appearing among the saints.

E.C.B. I think that is another one of the manifestations, symptoms you could call them, of the present operations of the Spirit, that personality is emerging again.

C.M. So where the Spirit is free would we expect these manifestations to come abundantly?

E.C.B. Yes, we would. I could give as an example our experience in our local reading. A brother suggested that we should read Daniel.

Some brethren think that Daniel is not the easiest book in the Bible to read; perhaps the first six chapters are not too difficult, but the second six are a bit more so. However I have never been at such readings on Daniel, because we were together in simplicity with the Spirit; and I think I learned more about Daniel in those twelve readings than I had ever learned about it before, because the Spirit is here and He shed light on it. We then went on and read Esther.

You get fresh light on these scriptures because the Spirit is free amongst us.

J.T-n. It is very important at the Supper to give place to the Spirit.

For instance, I may give out a hymn but I would not immediately get up and give thanks unless it was essential to do so on account of the small numbers, because the assembly will work, will it not?

E.C.B. Yes, but you need not think that it is wrong for you to give out a hymn and then get up in thanksgiving, for that might be what the Spirit is leading you in.

J.T-n. I see what you mean; you would be in liberty. Nevertheless if there are many there and if there is anything spiritual in what you started others will take it up and go on with it, will they not?

E.C.B. Yes they will: but we are inclined to institutionalize the alternate singing and giving thanks, that if brother A gives out a hymn brother B should get up, but there is nothing wrong in a brother giving out a hymn and, as soon as it is sung, getting up and giving thanks for the loaf. He would not do it every week - it could become clerical - but there is nothing wrong in it. We should be in the liberty of the Spirit so that we know what to do at any time in the service.

C.S. Should we remember that "the letter kills, but the Spirit quickens", 2 Cor 3: 6?

E.C.B. Yes, that is right; I am sure you find at Peterborough that the Spirit does quicken. Do you feel that any area of the truth is closed off from you because you are not very many?

C.S. Not a bit.

E.C.B. Exactly. Do you have a bit of the truth shut off in Spaldwick?

M.J.P. Not at all. What we have been speaking about is a practical matter, of course.

E.C.B. Yes, but the fulness of things is still there because there is one Spirit amongst us in order that the Lord is recovering the sovereignty of the Spirit amongst us in order that the saints in a latter day may be brought into an enjoyment that many of them have never known.

F.N.S. Would it be right to say that if we have been baptised into one body by one Spirit, one of the objectives is that the body might function? It may be that the hand does two things consecutively, but the point is that the body is to function as under the direction of Christ.

E.C.B. That is right; and function means function. It may be that sometimes one contributes a lot to a meeting by sitting silent, but that is not a normal function of the body for the functioning of the body requires activity.

G.T.P. Spontaneity in that sense is very important, and it works out in somebody doing what is needed, does it not?

E.C.B. Yes, you do not do it out of the sense of it being needed. You may realise afterwards that it was needed but, if the Spirit is there, He will activate what is needed because He knows what is needed.

H.J.T. Is it "According to the working in its measure of each one part", Eph 4: 16?

E.C.B. Yes, that is that the parts are working.

A.N.T. Is it the practical working out of keeping "the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace", Eph. 4: 3? Where the Spirit is operating there is no division, there is unity and development in the truth and Christ is glorified, the Father is glorified.

E.C.B. Yes; keeping "the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace" means, I think, that there is already something organic there. You cannot just put a lot of Christians in a room together and say, Now you keep the unity of the Spirit; there must be something organically amongst them. That needs to be brought into activity, perhaps it needs watering in order to bring it into activity, and then, having been brought into activity, it is to be maintained in power.

A.K.T. Would you be free to say something as to authoritative ministry?

E.C.B. It is not a difficult expression in itself because anything that comes from the Spirit is authoritative. What is needed is for us to discern the Spirit in it, and it is what the Spirit is in that is authoritative. It is not my saying it or someone else saying it that makes it authoritative, although you take account of the spiritual substance of a man who says a thing; and if there is a man with recognisable spiritual substance you would not lightly challenge what he says, but he may not always be right, and the authority in ministry is in the Spirit who gives it power.

W.McK. So that as the Spirit has greater scope amongst us we would become more venturesome - in the truth, I mean. You start

reading a book like Daniel, as you said; you would hesitate to do that if the Spirit had not liberty.

E.C.B. Well, you would. If you approach Daniel without the Spirit you will get into intense arguments as to whether there is one week or a half week to come, and into an intellectual debate about it. The Spirit will steer you through that kind of thing; you may not get the definitive answer but you get light and help on it and something to carry away and to reflect on that will come into use next time that kind of matter comes up.

A.A.B. How far is the Spirit limited, if at all, by the state of a person?

E.C.B. Well, as to Himself, the Spirit need not be limited at all because He has a power that can overthrow any other power; but often we are in a state that hinders the expression of what the Spirit would bring out. It is like a stream which runs along, and sometimes it gets a little slow, bits of grass fall into it and perhaps one or two stones, and in a little while there is quite a dam being built across it, out of very little things and the ground beyond it is getting quite dry. Then you knock the obstruction out of the way and find that the stream again flows in its full force.

A.A.B. A great deal - in fact everything - depends upon our apprehending the Spirit objectively.

E.C.B. It does indeed. We need not refer to areas in which that truth is implicitly challenged but I think it is of critical importance that we keep always before us that the Spirit is to be known objectively.

A.A.B. The recovery began through the sovereignty of the Spirit and it will go through on that.

E.C.B. It will, and I feel a great sense of revival in the present day.

It is not just that contention is no longer there, but there is something positive I think, and perhaps other brethren feel too, that there is more sense of revival in the present day than when it was talked about so much.

T.B. Is it that God loves variety? I was thinking of the personalities that He is producing in the lovers of Christ.

E.C.B. I am sure that is right, that God does loves variety: that is why in His operations the Spirit has produced so much variety at the present time. I think what I have said is true, that most of us can remember a time when there were a number of distinctive personalities amongst us. That did not hinder the ministry; in a sense it added to it. While none of us wants to become idiosyncratic or peculiar, I think that the Lord will develop personality which, because it is the result of the Spirit, helps the furtherance of the ministry.

D.E.B. These words in chapter 12 verse 11 are very attractive, are they not; "to each in particular"? It is as though the Spirit is surveying the material that He has to work with and is dealing with persons one by one; in each there was some work accomplished.

E.C.B. Yes, I think it connects back with John 3, that "The wind blows where it will ... thus is every one that is born of the Spirit". We could not predict who the Spirit is going to work in, but He knows in particular who He is going to work with. He, having started sovereignly that work in them, they have grown up and been converted and so on; and now He divides "to each in particular as he pleases". I think this should greatly encourage every individual saint that the Spirit has a personal interest in him.

ST ALBANS

17 March 1973

COMMITTAL TO THE WILL OF GOD

J.Renton

Luke 22: 39-46; Genesis 40: 14, 23; 2 Samuel 17:15-18 (first part); Esther 2: 21-23.

I desire to speak about how at times certain responsibility falls upon us: certain matters involving the will of God may lie on any one of us to do. If we are faithful God can use us in a certain situation.

We need to see that, while God works out His purpose and His counsel, He is never disappointed and He is never taken by surprise. We were speaking last night about one of the names of God being The Same; no matter what comes in, no matter how the enemy attacks, God is never surprised, He is never taken aback, He is never disappointed and everything will go through according to His mind. God is never diverted by what happens; He always has the initiative and proceeds with it in spite of anything that might come in to hinder. Now that is God's side of every matter. Along with that there is our side. At some time any one of us might find himself or herself in a position where something depends on that one to do, and God would count on such a one to act rightly in those circumstances. What I have to say ought to encourage anyone who finds himself or herself in a certain situation. The test is whether in that situation I am going to be committed to the will of God or whether I am going to fail Him.

Now we begin with Luke 22 because we find the Lord Jesus Himself in a certain situation. We find Him in a situation, dear brethren, where everything depends on Him - everything. The weight of responsibility on the Lord Jesus in this section who could estimate? The whole matter of the will of God, the whole purpose of God and all His counsel, all His plans depended on the Lord Jesus in this situation in which He was. We could not of course think of the Lord Jesus failing and yet we are to admire, we are to adore our Saviour who was in this position where everything for the glory of God and everything for the blessing of man depended on Him. So it

says, "he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and having knelt down he prayed". Think of the perfect dependent manhood of Jesus! He is presented here as the dependent One who counted on His God. What a faithful Servant He was! We need hardly say that, we all know He was, and yet to view Him in this situation would encourage any one who finds himself in any position of responsibility. What responsibilities lay on the Lord Jesus at this moment.

He is facing death, He is facing the bearing of the judgment of God, He is facing being forsaken. Satan is bringing his power to bear against Him. Think of the Lord Jesus in that situation, and He is there in perfection. He was a real Man and yet God's purpose was as safe in the hands of the Lord Jesus at this moment as it ever was. All that God had planned for the maintenance of His own glory and for the blessing of every person in every family which has been secured and will yet be secured depended on the Lord Jesus at this moment. He was facing the matter of God's will. "Having knelt down he prayed, saying, Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me". The Lord Jesus is in perfection shrinking from what faced Him. We all know what it is to shrink from what faces us in certain situations but that would not be perfection, but it was perfection in the Lord Jesus.

Who He was, the kind of Man He was must necessarily shrink from what faced Him. And yet would He flinch? He said, "but then, not my will, but thine be done". Then it says, "an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him". Think of the Lord needing strengthening at this moment. It shows, dear brethren, the reality of His manhood. He was a real Man here and the whole responsibility of carrying through the will of God depended on Him. I say again, God's purpose, God's plans were as safe in the hands of Jesus at that moment as when these plans were made or at any moment in the history of eternity and time, all God's purposes were as safe in the hands of the Saviour in Gethsemane as ever they were. What a perfect Man He is, what a model for us, what a subject for our contemplation, our adoration! This would give us strength: to see the Lord Jesus in the perfection of His dependent manhood facing a

situation where everything depended on Him. It would strengthen us to face some little situation, some little difficulty that confronts any one of us at any time. You can see the intenseness of the conflict here: "an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him.

And being in conflict he prayed more intently. And his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down". This is manhood in perfection. This is manhood in conflict such as we shall never know, the depth of which we shall never know, for it is our Lord and Master in conflict here. Then it says, "rising up from his prayer" - rising up from the depth of conflict, rising up from that depth of anguish in which He was involved in Gethsemane, "rising up from his prayer, coming to the disciples, he found them sleeping from grief". Oh what a model we have, dear brethren, what a Man, what a blessed, perfect, dependent Man that we need to get our eye on and keep our eye on to encourage us to face any situation whatsoever! We need to be formed in this kind of manhood, and we will be as we contemplate the Man we desire to be formed after, and the Spirit will help us in that formation. There is a need at the moment for manhood of this kind. We were speaking in the reading in 2 Peter 1 as to certain features: "in your faith have also virtue"; these features are features of manhood according to God. Think of what virtue there was with Jesus here! Was there not faith? Was there not virtue in His faith? Was there not courage when He rose up from His prayer and moved forward to be the victim, to undertake all that the will of God involved at infinite cost to Himself - rising up from His prayer He proceeded! What a blessed theme of contemplation we have in the Lord Jesus!

Now we come to this incident in the book of Genesis. The situation spoken of here involved this cup-bearer. He had received certain benefits from Joseph, he knew Joseph, Joseph interpreted his dream and encouraged him. Joseph gave him a message of peace and you might say he was the means of preaching the gospel to him. Joseph gave that man glad tidings which he was glad to receive. And Joseph asked one thing from this man, just one thing.

He said, "Only bear a remembrance with thee of me when it goes

well with thee". He makes a request: Joseph says in effect, 'I have preached the gospel to you, you are going to be liberated; you had a vine before you, your head is going to be lifted up and you will be restored to your office'. That was glad tidings for this cup-bearer because he was troubled. Joseph says, "Only bear a remembrance with thee of me when it goes well with thee ... and make mention of me to Pharaoh". Had not this cup-bearer reason to have Joseph in his heart and to look for an opportunity to bring Joseph in? Have we not reason to, dear brethren? Have we not reason to think of the Lord Jesus and all He has accomplished for us? Have we not reason to look for opportunities to bring Him in? Instead of that it says, "the chief of the cup-bearers did not remember Joseph, and forgot him". That is our frailty, our weakness, our self-occupation, our self-interest. Instead of looking for opportunities to bring him in, the cup-bearer did not remember him and forgot him. How ungrateful! Can we put ourselves in that position? Can we see how ungrateful we have been? Have we not arrived at how unfaithful we have been?

Now, this cup-bearer was the necessary link between the situation which arose and the introduction of Joseph. Joseph was unknown and it was the cupbearer who eventually was the link, who was the means of introducing Joseph to the critical situation which arose in the next chapter. Pharaoh dreamed a dream and there was no one to interpret it; and as far as Egypt was concerned no one knew about Joseph except the cup-bearer who ought to have been the link but he did not remember Joseph and forgot him. But he comes to it; he comes to it in repentance. When the situation arose and there was no interpreter, this chief of the cup-bearers remembered about Joseph and was the means of introducing Joseph into the critical situation. How valuable to know the true Joseph in this day, the interpreter, the One who makes all things clear! We were speaking about the Lord Jesus as Head, source of wisdom, love and power. There may arise locally a situation where there is need to bring in Christ. We read, "Then spoke the chief of the cup-bearers to Pharaoh, saying, I remember mine offences this

day". He becomes the means of introducing Joseph who takes over the whole situation. Instead of calamity he takes over the whole matter, explains it all, and takes charge of it all, and becomes the great administrator of food in the land of Egypt. He explained about the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine. I have no doubt we have had seven years of plenty in the history of the testimony in the ministries, and we are now in the seven years of famine, but whether you are in the seven years of famine or the seven years of plenty makes no difference if you know Joseph.

There was as much available under Joseph in the years of famine as there was in the years of plenty. The fact is the famine became the means of bringing Joseph into pre-eminence. As long as there were seven years of plenty Joseph was the administrator and he laid up the grain, but he became indispensable when the years of famine came and the word was, "Go to Joseph" . The cup-bearer seems a very flimsy and very slender link, and yet through repentance he became the means of the introduction of Joseph to the whole situation and the whole situation changed. He was not like our Lord and Master in Luke 22, he was not marked by perfection, very far from it. Two full years elapsed before a situation arose when he remembered about Joseph. It reminds us of our own frailty, our own unfaithfulness, how unfaithful we have been, and yet a certain situation has arisen in which we can have some part, and we are privileged to have some part, in the introduction of the true Joseph.

In 2 Samuel we can see that being in a certain situation where the will of God is involved does not necessarily depend on age or experience because here a maid is a link. It is "the maid" whoever she was, some unnamed young sister who becomes the link between Hushai and David. There was need for a link there to fill its place and it was seen in this little maid. There was a little community with the ark in Jerusalem, secretly, where Absalom reigned publicly, and the link between that community with the ark in Jerusalem and David in rejection was the maid. It says that Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by En-rogel for they might not be seen to come into the city. This has been spoken of as a kind of secret service; secret things

are going on about which the enemy knows nothing. It is always a comfort to realise that the enemy, Satan, is a creature and has certain limitations. He is not almighty, he does not know everything. There are certain things he has not the capacity to understand or appreciate. Think of Job for instance. All Satan could see about Job were his circumstances and his possessions and his health. He did not know what reserves God had in Job. Therefore Satan acts in the circumstances thinking that that is all that matters, but there was depth in Job which came to light and which Satan had not the capacity to appreciate. The mysterious links in affection that the saints have together Satan does not understand. The work of God in the believer Satan does not understand and does not have the capacity to appreciate. Now that is a great comfort. He knows what we are in the flesh because he has had a hand in producing that. It was the poison of the serpent instilled in to Adam and his wife that has marked the whole race. He understands that all right.

He understands how the flesh reacts to certain situations, but he has not the capacity to understand the work of God, and motives and desires according to God. Therefore there are certain secret things that proceed that Satan does not have the capacity to understand or appreciate, and that is always a great comfort to have before us. So there is a certain secret order of things in Jerusalem that Absalom knew nothing about, and that secret order of things in a few in Jerusalem was a means of the overthrowing of the whole Absalom power. A link was necessary in this chain and a little maid was that link - a young person. Hushai needed to send this message to David, Hushai was in Jerusalem, one of this little community we were speaking about, and David was in rejection, and the priests' sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, stayed by En-rogel, they might not be seen in the city; but the maid took the message, the maid formed that link. Now dear young believer whoever you may be, I would like to encourage you to be committed to the will of God, to be committed to what is right, to be committed to the promotion of the Lord's interests here. Things may look dark and confused but I would like to encourage every young person here to have some part

in the Lord's interests at the present time of whom the maid is an example.

Now I have only a few words to say about the book of Esther. It is a very interesting history. Mordecai is found sitting at the king's gate, that is, to use Christian language, he was standing by the rights of Christ. Whatever happened, Mordecai sat at the king's gate, he was faithful there. Two men sought to lay hand on king Ahasuerus, and because Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate he learned of it and he told Esther the queen, and she told the king in Mordecai's name, and the matter was investigated and found out and they were hanged on a tree, "And it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king". That little statement is of all importance: "it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king". It forms an important link in this book. Then it was forgotten about. There is a certain lapse of time: the first verse of the next chapter says, "After these things king Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him". But before Haman the enemy of the people of God is established, this regarding Mordecai was written in the book of the chronicles before the king. The fact that this was written in the book of the chronicles before the king became the means of the overthrow of the whole Haman system. It seems to be a little incident, and it was forgotten about, but if you read the history you will find that it is afterwards referred to. I have heard this book spoken of as a drama, but it is real life. It is not a drama out of any man's imagination, it is a drama which actually happened, and many things like this have happened in the history of the testimony. Haman is promoted, and Haman has his way; you would think that Haman is just going to remove the Jews from the face of the earth, so much power is given to him, but before he is advanced a certain thing was written in the book of the chronicles before the king. Haman made the gallows fifty cubits high. Who were the gallows for? For Mordecai who sat at the king's gate. Who was hanged on the gallows? Haman who made the gallows. How did it come about? Because the king could not sleep

and he sent for the chronicles and he read about Mordecai. He said, "What honour and dignity has been done to Mordecai for this?" It became the whole turning point in the history. I want to point out that some little incident that might appear insignificant, where somebody is faithful, becomes the means that God uses to overthrow the power of the enemy.

I think all this should encourage us. No incident is too small, no expression of faithfulness to God is too small. God takes account of every one of them. You may remember that the Lord said regarding His disciples, "ye are they who have persevered with me in my temptations", Luke 22: 28. Let us be like Mordecai, be committed to sitting at the king's gate. Let us be jealous for the Lord's rights in His absence. Who is jealous to provide conditions suitable to Him down here in localities? The Holy Spirit is. I say without hesitation, the Holy Spirit is committed to the maintenance of the Lord's name and the Lord's pleasure here in His absence, and He will encourage and help us to fill out the part that belongs to each one of us in the history of the testimony while we are still here. May the Lord help every one of us.

BROOKLYN NY

12 May 1973

THE COMING OF THE LORD

A.J.E.Welch

1 Thessalonians 4: 15-18; Philipians 3:20, 21; Revelation 22: 17.

The coming of the Lord, our glorious lover, has often been referred to as the great hope of the church; and I reflect sometimes on the need to get back to this great matter for the assembly, that our immediate hope is the coming of the Lord Himself. No company in our time could rightly claim to be the church, though seeking in love for Christ to maintain fully church character, church features, and church hopes. I have an impression that the hope of the Lord's coming has been in some respects dimmed. The Lord would re-awaken it by some presentation of Himself, by some touch of His unique love upon us. He, the Lord Jesus, is coming for us. He is coming, too, to take up His rights, to resolve everything, to leave no question in the universe unsettled. It is this same Jesus whom we love that will do that. I want to be very simple about this because it is a very simple yet holy matter. Are we ready for the Lord Jesus to come and receive us so that we may be as the word is, "always with the Lord"? Have we any expectations here that would stand athwart our hearts longing for His coming immediately? I would say very simply, after what the Lord has graciously given us, that I would like to be at the Supper again, but I would not want to allow even that to hamper the expectancy of His coming. Think of the glory of His Person who for us has already accomplished all that needed to be accomplished, to the point that the very next thing for us is to go to be with Him. Note the point that may have been observed as we read, the emphatic "*we*" of 1 Thess 4: 15; alongside of that, we have the emphatic "*our*" of Phil 3: 20. That is, we can rightly regard ourselves, company-wise, as part of the great throng that is in the expectancy of His coming. Such are not claiming to be anything, not claiming ecclesiastical status of any kind, but just expectant that the Lord will soon come.

These verses in Thessalonians are one of the remarkable parentheses of Scripture. Sometimes a three-day meeting is a notable parenthesis in our lives and experiences, presenting something which as of God is complete in itself, and which is intended to have a peculiar and powerful bearing upon us. The Spirit seems to inject something to mark off His own authority, His own way of asserting divine truths. We have several of these parentheses which may seem in a sense to interrupt the unfolding of ordered teaching, but which reflect the rights of the Spirit to bring in something peculiarly precious and pungent in its immediate bearing upon us. What an assembly this was! How quickly these persons whom the apostle is addressing had taken on the precious truth! He had been there three Lord's days. How remarkably things had come into formative evidence in Thessalonica! May we be continually prayerful that this quickness of answer to what the Spirit asserts may be characteristic of us; it should not take long for things to take root downwards and bear fruit upwards. We long that something may bear fruit upward from these days together, that this may be quick and fresh and full, and that God may have something to take account of which really reflects the devoted and unfailing character of the service of Christ and of the Spirit amongst His own. So verse 15 refers to "we, the living, who remain"; there will be such who will remain until the coming of the Lord. It is a wonderful point to think over that it is not merely a question of what He will raise from the dead; there will be persons living who remain. What does that mean? That the testimony is going on to the very moment when He comes. Are we ready for that, to carry forward the testimony to the coming of the glorious Person Who is its subject? The testimony which began at Pentecost in the Spirit is to be sustained in the power of the same Spirit until He comes. What else is before us? Have we any other object? Much loved young people, have you any other objective? Is something standing between you and Christ as to His coming? Are you putting off the day when you really come into fulness of relationship with Jesus? Are you just going on with things in a certain sameness and putting off the wonderful character of real, intimate, strong, personal and assembly relations with Christ? Are

there any formal Christians in this hall? Is this glorious matter, to any of us, merely profession? Forgive the bluntness of the questions; because His coming is so near we ask plain questions. Is anything for you deferring the coming of the Lord? Do you want it to be delayed an hour, or a day, or a month, or ten years? Would you defer it, young brother, young sister, longed-after and prayed for by many? Or will you come into what this hope characteristically is?

He is presented here as Lord. Is He dominating the situation in your life? Are His interests your prime interests, because they are His? These points all come home to us when we realise how close His coming is. Are there any unsettled questions, any matters that have been in your mind some time and have not been resolved? Is He not able to resolve them? He is perfectly able to resolve them - but am I reluctant to have them resolved? The Lord would have everything resolved in view of His coming. Exactly what will happen is so plainly presented; it is not just a general reference to the fact that He will come, but the sequence of events is remarkably disclosed to us, clearly and specifically. "The Lord Himself, with an assembling shout ... shall descend from heaven"; it is the shout of final victory. What a shout that will be! Oh, to hear that voice!

Does it not thrill your hearts to think of it? It is an assembling shout, not a dispersing shout, or a deafening shout, but an assembling shout, to bring all together finally with no possibility any more of being anything but together. What kind of bearing does this have upon us now? The Lord is going to assemble us with this shout. Are we ready to relate ourselves to one another rightly, and fully, and immediately? Will this assembling shout, when it comes, need to break down some barrier between someone and myself, in relation to Christ? All these matters arise. How will the Lord find me when He comes? Am I out at elbows with my brethren? All these points come to mind as we think of the assembling shout. The Lord would have it so that there is no barrier of resistance to be broken down in this final assembling. If the coming of the Lord is the immediate hope of the church, as has often been said, this would leave nothing unresolved, unsettled or just unclear. The enemy is trying to hinder

the Lord's glorious course amongst His own by introducing matters which seem to be unresolvable; but He will show us, as we really cherish His mind, that no matter is unresolvable. I might stand in the way of a matter being resolved, but the Lord is just bringing in the voice of power by way of appeal, to set things immediately right in view of His coming.

Divine power is suggested in the archangel's voice. The actual creature conditions will be dealt with; the Lord is able to deal with the actual physical conditions and overcome everything that might stand in His way. That brings divine majesty into the matter. "The dead in Christ shall rise first ..."; the order of things stated. Nothing is going to stand in the way. This is a divine decree. There is very great comfort in this scripture for all of us who have lost some we have loved. It is a majestic touch, that the dead in Christ shall rise first. Not a single one will be lost sight of. There will be myriads, but not a single one will be missing!

"Caught up together" is a word to be noted - an Ephesian word. We are not speaking of something abstract but something actual in the created order of things. It is for us to encourage one another with these words. We do not encourage one another with thoughts of our own, with things that might be exaggerated, but with gloriously stated scriptural thoughts as to what is actually about to happen. It is what we expect, what we long after, to go to be with Jesus. Do you want something else? Is there something in the present moment that exceeds this? He will gather all those He cherishes in view of God reaching His end, His rest, His cherished portion in what He has secured. The point in this first scripture is a wonderfully simple statement of what is about to actually happen, and this would encourage us. The Lord is going to do things meticulously according to the divine plan, in victory, peculiarly so in relation to the *assembling* shout. The idea of assembling has reference to what answers to the heart of Christ.

In Philippians, this love letter, "*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens". That is to say, our associations of life relate to what is up there. It carries us back to what was spoken of

yesterday, that our names are on record up there. Do I want any name on record down here? The point is that "our commonwealth has", not 'will have', its existence up there. Our associations of life relate to a heavenly Christ. Am I going to join an association, as men speak? What a word this is (v.20)! Am I looking for advantage somewhere else? Do you, true believer, want your commonwealth anywhere else? It has its existence in the heavens. We have a remarkable link with the heavenly order in the gift of the Spirit, in the presence of the Spirit in the assembly. I trust we have found some experience of that in being together in the past two days. The link with what is up there is in the service and presence of the Spirit here, a prime matter with us at the present time. God's glorious Son is up there. Think of His receiving up! What a welcome He received there. Will He receive a welcome in your heart as He comes, in the Spirit, tomorrow? These matters are to nourish our spiritual constitution as to Christ and the assembly, as to the glorious divine economy, as to the inheritance God has accorded us, as to what may be known while we remain here in limited circumstances until the Lord Jesus comes. Our commonwealth is up there.

We were speaking this morning of frailties and the Lord's gracious priestly service as to frailty. This is a condition in which frailty cannot come, what is incorruptible. The Scriptures speak of life and incorruptibility being brought to light through the glad tidings. Can we get our minds away by the Spirit, dear brethren, from what is subject to failure and subject to contamination and defilement, to these things that never fail? Think of Christ where He is. No stain shall ever touch that glorious Person where He is. Think of the assembly as a divine concept, which nothing can contaminate. In the assembly the service of the love of Christ is sustained constantly, in the washing of water by the word, that there may be an answer to Himself amongst us. He would keep things as love would have them to be, in incorruption.

The Lord is able to subdue all things to Himself. He has that power now. Let us realise what power in the hands of Christ means; it extends to our whole condition being changed. What a wonderful

reference this is to His condition, and then to what our condition will be! Are we thinking deeply enough of this divine reality, to get some impression of what is about to take place, even to the point of our whole condition being changed? Our individuality will remain; Paul will be Paul, and John will be John, and Peter will be Peter. The individuality will go through. The personality according to God is going to find its place there. Think of what will be there in myriads of saints, in a condition that befits the sphere and circumstances in which they will be. We may well think of 1 Cor 15: 52 - the change that is going to take place. The One who changed Paul on the road to Damascus is the One who is going to change us finally. It is fitting that I ask myself, am I a subdued person as under Christ? Am I a person of unsubdued will? These are searching questions, but they fit the quality and character of this scripture. Is there anything unsubdued in me? Am I going to wait until this moment to come into real submission to Jesus? The Lord would affect us and bring us into the current of this love letter, as it is called, which Paul wrote to the Philippian saints.

Revelation 22 is at a very interesting juncture where the Lord has dealt with everything, when all the powers that have stood against Him have been brought down; all the fruits of love's labours are depicted for us in the city which came down, in John's view, for the glory of God. We have final conditions here. Think of One who is able to resolve every moral matter, the absolute ability of the Lord to resolve every moral matter in the universe. His blood has been shed; blood and water have flowed from His side. It is most strengthening to our hearts, in the midst of testing conditions, to reflect that the Lord is going to bring it all into termination in a way which is absolutely right. It is majesty, it is dignity, as He comes into things. It is to keep us on the right level in our outlook. May we realise the power in the assembly that is able to secure everything for the pleasure of the blessed God! Shall we not say "Amen; come, Lord Jesus" (v 20). His coming here is a very wide thought: He has terminated everything that needs to be terminated, and has brought in everything that relates to the divine pleasure eternally. Shall we

not say, as living in the scene of His suffering and humiliation, "Come, Lord Jesus"?

But here it is the Spirit and the bride who say, Come. This wonderful passage was used when the matter of the Spirit and our relations to Him was so distinctly before us. How faithful this service has been! Think of how we have known the movements of the Spirit in the short time some of us have lived in the course of this glorious testimony. The Spirit now directs our affections towards that Person, our glorious lover right through. He is seen in this book in judicial garb and activity, but He is the same glorious lover, the lover of the assembly; His love is a unique love, and He would awaken in our hearts, in respect of the whole moral course, this cry, "Come"! He is the One who is able and will effect all.

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THE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

An interesting verse of Scripture, Deuteronomy 32: 11, describes how the eagle stirs up its nest when it is time for the young birds to fly. The thorny twigs from underneath the eyrie then make it uncomfortable for them to stay. But also the mother bird hovers over the fledglings and even takes them on her wingfeathers so that they should learn quickly how to fly by themselves.

All this helps to explain God's ways with us, His children. Even when quite young we may have disappointments, illnesses or things at school which trouble us in a way which perhaps only our Father, who sees in secret, knows about. Therefore, like the eaglets, we learn that we have a life of our own to lead.

Then, like the hovering of the eagle, we are shown through godly believers how they use the power of faith to maintain their spiritual life. Older persons can look back and see how much they have been influenced by this without, perhaps, knowing it.

God's compassions fail not and, for His own sake, He is able to carry us and bring us to Himself on eagles' wings. This word-picture is, I suppose, the fastest means of creature travel - faster even than a cheetah or a galloping horse!

If a young eagle does not open its wings it has, of course, no power to fly. Thus, if we do not use God-given faith, we shall lose the joy of life in Christ Jesus. Do you realise that the power you have in the Holy Spirit is as great as God's purpose for you?

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