

A
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HUSBANDRY

2 Chronicles 26: 10; Genesis 2: 8-10; 1 Corinthians 3: 6-9

A.B.P. I have been struck with this comment in regard of Uzziah that "he loved husbandry". Why such a thing as that should be mentioned leads us to consider the sense of values that Ezra had as he wrote (for we believe it was Ezra who wrote the Chronicles), tracing the history of the work of God and viewing things from the standpoint of what was recovered from Babylon. He was privileged to see and have part in that recovery and was able to give us its history. He writes not merely in a historical way but pursues the main line that God brought through and in doing so gives us this interesting comment that Uzziah loved husbandry. Uzziah in the main did what was right. Latterly however he was lifted up in his heart and forced himself in the service of God and was smitten with leprosy. Up to that time however his history was commendable and it is said of him that "he loved husbandry". It does not say that he loved cattle although he had much cattle, but he loved husbandry. It is a feature that the Lord will support in the day of recovery.

To open up what is in mind I have suggested Genesis 2 and also Paul's reference to husbandry in his letter to the Corinthians. If the Spirit is free amongst us, something should open up and develop which will be of help.

J.M. Will you tell us just what you understand by husbandry?

A.B.P. It is set out pre-eminently in God. The Lord Jesus could say "I am the vine, and my Father is the husbandman", John 15 :1. It relates to skill and care in the development of vegetation or planting, having growth and fruit in view. It has to do with placing the saints in proper relation to local responsibility and privilege, and nurturing them and seeing that they grow and become fruitful. There are various exercises connected with it. The Father purges the vine in view of it bearing fruit. Adam was told to till and to guard the garden. It had already been planted and watered. At Corinth Paul planted and Apollos watered. What we have set out in Genesis 2 is like the

embryo of the truth, the planting and causing to grow, then the watering and then what flows out from the garden. The garden is not the terminus exactly. The sounding out from the assembly of the truth of the testimony in the glad tidings is important. At Pentecost the preaching did not commence until the assembly was formed.

J.M. In John 17 (v 12) the Lord Jesus says, "Those thou hast given me I have guarded, and not one of them has perished". Would that enter into it?

A.B.P. Yes. Naturally, we are inclined toward what is military. We like to think of David the great warrior, and of his exploits, which is all right in its place, but there is something relating to husbandry which, I think, has a very important bearing on the prosperity of the local company.

A.A.B-n. Does it imply the idea of labour – "The husband must labour", 2 Tim 2: 6?

A.B.P. Yes. It was not intended that Adam should be negligent nor that he be overworked. Earning his food by the sweat of his face was because of sin having come in. Paul says that he planted and Apollos watered. This would suggest responsibility for husbandry in relation to a local company. Although Paul was in Thessalonica only three sabbaths he knew he left behind in that locality a garden which had been planted and watered but into which he feared the tempter might come. I think he had in mind the garden in Genesis 2 and what had been planted in Thessalonica when he said that he feared "lest perhaps the tempter had tempted you and our labour should be come to nothing", 1 Thess 3: 5. Evidently he considered the local company at Thessalonica as the establishment of a garden according to God in the midst of idolatrous chaos. He had linked their souls by the Spirit with the Father. Thereby the provision was made for the river to flow into the garden. Also there was the word of the Lord flowing out from Thessalonica "not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith which is towards God has gone abroad" (v 8). Husbandry is not front page activity. The gardener never gets headlines in the papers, yet there is something

that results from his steady labours and the increase that God gives. If there is to be fruit for God, with every tree bearing fruit, there needs to be "patient continuance of good works" Rom 2: 7.

H.F. John was referred to as one of the "sons of thunder", Mark 3: 17, He refers to the garden in chapter 19: 41. Would he be looking for fruit as he wrote his gospel, conscious of the breakdown but that God is still looking for fruit?

A.B.P. I would think so. He says "These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in his name" , John 20: 30, 31. His gospel has in view the development of features of life. Unless life dominates a garden it is no garden really. Life expresses itself in beauty, in fragrance, in fruitfulness, as well as in many other ways.

Jn.M. Growth and building seem to be often connected, do they not?

A.B.P. Remarkably so. "Ye are God's husbandry, God's building". Then Paul speaks of himself as a wise architect, as though he would stress the feature of construction.

Jn.M. Does that suggest that the permanency of what the building speaks of would be maintained in life?

A.B.P. I would think so. Paul was not satisfied that the mind should rest only on the construction idea, because that does not give the idea of life. When he refers to the temple in Ephesians he indicates that it increases to a holy temple in the Lord.

A.A.B-n. Is it significant that the tree of life is in the midst of the garden?

A.B.P. Yes, that is the idea. When Eve diverted she said that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in the midst of the garden. When Christ ceases to be our centre we are exposed to the enemy. The tree of life had been available for appropriation but mercifully man had not partaken of it. Had he done so, having sinned, it would have been a terrible thing. The garden was planted in Eden eastward. That is not exactly the presence of God. The

river flowed out of Eden, suggesting what flows out from God. The garden was eastward, denoting that it was toward the sun-rising. All God's thoughts looked forward to the incoming of Christ. But the river flowed from Eden into the garden to water it, giving us a very basic principle of the way in which life amongst the saints is sustained in freshness.

T.M. Conditions in Eden were very favourable but conditions in regard to Uzziah were not so favourable. Had you something in mind as to that?

A.B.P. The chaos of Genesis 1 had to be met before the garden could be planted. Thessalonica was a sphere where Paul was persecuted, where idolatry prevailed and religious hatred animated the general population so that Paul had to leave the city. What was accomplished in the short time he was there is amazing. When he writes his first epistle he speaks of the saints there as "in God the Father" (chap 1: 1), indicating that the flow from Eden was coming into the garden. And he speaks also of the report that had gone out from them, which was like the river being divided into four main streams, and the testimony going out from them in a remarkable way. We do not have today the conditions provided for man at the beginning, save as we are linked on with what has gone before. "Others have laboured, and ye have entered into their labours" John 4:38.

T.M. It says of Uzziah that he "dugged many cisterns" in the desert, as if the idea of water would be prominent with him.

A.B.P. There is a figure of dry, barren conditions being made fruitful through the work of the Spirit. The cisterns suggest the availability of the water-table. The river flowing out from Eden suggests the free flow of the heart of God in a ministry by the Spirit. Then there is the idea of the early and latter rains indicating refreshment from heaven. It would be a real exercise to dig cisterns. That may relate to the labour and skill with which it is possible to make contact with the work of God in persons, bringing the Spirit's work into evidence.

Husbandry normally does not employ irrigation; that is necessary where the needed water is not available.

J.M. In Colossians 1 Paul refers to their bearing fruit and growing. Is that the result of husbandry at Colosse?

A.B.P. As far as we know, Paul had not been at Colosse, but someone had laboured there. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was that they may be "rooted and founded in love", Eph 3: 17. It would seem as though the basis for verdure and fruitfulness is "love amongst yourselves", John 13 :35.

A.A.B-n. You are speaking of the local assembly and conditions in which life can manifest itself and growth proceed normally. God provides the good ground but would the growth imply a certain atmosphere?

A.B.P. Yes. Mr Raven taught us that there must be suited conditions for life. There must be atmosphere, sunshine and refreshment. These conditions are experienced as we are together; individually we either contribute to or detract from those conditions. Peter speaks of living stones, such stones do not grow, exactly; life in them is seen in that they move into place: "to whom coming", 1 Pet 2: 4. The idea of husbandry is that you look for growth. You plant and till the ground expecting something to mature and develop and bear fruit to God. A vineyard provides what makes glad the heart of God and men.

H.F. Why do you think so much of the garden comes into the Song of Songs?

A.B.P. I suppose from the stand point of growth and increase to provide what is pleasing. The lilies are referred to, and the spices; and then the north wind blowing upon the garden, for discipline may be necessary are to develop flavour. We know that with certain nuts the frost gives the final ripening touch; but generally speaking the conditions for growth in garden life would be warmth, sunshine, tilling. Tilling of the ground is important to preserve the moisture, otherwise the plants may lack moisture. You break up the top soil to

prevent cracking of the surface and evaporation of sub-surface moisture from the water-table.

A.A.B-n. All that would imply skill. Paul laboured in Thessalonica, in Ephesus and Corinth, and his feelings and skill were engaged.

Once the ground is prepared the moisture must be preserved so that the Spirit would be free and the growth come into evidence.

A.B.P. The preservation of the water-table is as important as the rain. Watering may suggest the Spirit's ministry, which is precious, but if there is surface watering only the roots develop near the surface, there is a shallowness which is not good. If the soil is hard and impenetrable the roots cannot get down to where the moisture is. Good soil is needed; we must be "rooted and founded in love", Eph 3: 17. Where such soil is available the roots can go down and get the benefit of the water-table. If we are living on what we get in the meetings, and not maintaining our inward links with the blessed Spirit, we will get nothing directly from the Scriptures by the Spirit; our roots will not be deep and we may be easily turned aside in times of difficulty.

J.M. It says in Proverbs "Much food is in the tillage of the poor", chap 13: 23. Getting something for ourselves involves labour in the way of tilling, does it not?

A.B.P. That is what we are trying to say. The poor may not be able to buy their needed food and may be dependent on what they can develop in their gardens. They labour with a view to getting an abundant result from their labours. If we feel our poverty we shall seek the help of the Spirit; we will send our roots down that there may be growth and development with us.

A.A.B-n. A good root-structure is necessary. The water-table is sub-surface water toward which the roots go for moisture. It would be touching the Spirit, but on our side it involves exercise to get down.

A.B.P. The figures which we have typifying the Spirit are abundant – wells, springs, rivers, lakes and seas, but this matter of the water-table, I think, is very little understood. Some years ago a man who had to do with the provision of water for various cities mentioned that

in Israel the water-table is probably the lowest of any known part of the world.

J.M. This expression 'water-table' is a new one to us: perhaps you will say more about it.

A.B.P. In the farming areas plenty of snow during the winter is desirable for when it thaws in the spring the water is absorbed into the ground. Sometimes the spring thaw is very sudden, causing floods, but the ground, generally, is benefitted by the absorption of the water, providing ample sub-surface water or watertable.

Conditions therefore are good for crops when there has been plenty of snow and a slow thaw. The water-table keeps the ground moist, the roots work down to get the moisture and the crops can withstand longer periods of dry weather.

J.A.B. The scripture in Chronicles speaks of husbandmen on the mountains and in Carmel. It would not be normal for what you are speaking of to be found in higher places, would it? Will you say why the mountains and Carmel are mentioned in connection with husbandry.

A.B.P. Vines, particularly, grow on hillsides. In some places the hillsides are terraced to make them useable for that purpose. I think that the point is to contrast this area with the general verdure of the lowlands where the cattle graze. The hills would suggest that the working out of these things is not on the level of human thinking but a more exalted phase of truth a level which is above the ordinary mind.

J.A.B. It would mean extra work and skill to practice husbandry on the mountains.

A.B.P. It is much simpler to grow wheat on the prairies where the land is flat and one can plough for a mile without turning. But what is in mind, particularly in the passage in Genesis, is individuality.

Brethren together are not just a mass but persons each of whom has a distinct and individual spiritual personality. What skill would be used by Jehovah Elohim in planting the garden eastward in Eden!

He would have specimen plants and all set in relation to one

another to let them be seen at the greatest advantage. We should be able to recognise the distinctive character of the work of God in one another. It is a test to us as we come together on Lord's Day morning. We sit down in the meeting room and look round at the brethren; you link on with the work of God. We are not just a congregation. We come together *in assembly* which means that we are found together in one entity. Our link with one another is with the work of God. So we should know one another and the work of God in one another.

J.S. It refers to every tree pleasant to the sight and good for food. Are they two aspects which we would make the most of in one another?

A.B.P. Yes, there would not be one brother or sister that you do not want to see there. All are pleasant to the sight. If we have feelings against one another we are not pleasant to the sight. As I look round on the brethren I say to myself, I know that brother is real, he has stood in critical times, there is a firm work of God in him and I can link on with that. Another brother comes in and I think to myself, he was very unsteady for a while but the Lord reached him and touched something in him, and he has gained through the experience; I find I have a link with him. It is thus that you can esteem each of the brethren better than yourself. You find that there is some feature of God's workmanship which has been developed far better in him than it has been in you. So that esteeming others better than yourself if not mock modesty, it is a real thing. And once we do it, and link on with the distinctive work of God in one another, the atmosphere and the fragrance of the garden which is delightful to heaven develops.

H.F. Is that the condition into which Christ can come and be found in His uniqueness, like the apple tree among the trees of the wood?

A.B.P. I think so. I think that is the way to it. It is not just what a brother may say in the meeting, it is what he is. Of course what he is will find expression in what he says and it will carry weight, and will encourage and help the brethren.

Jn.M. The Lord says, It is my garden, "I am come into my garden", Song of Sol 5: 1. That is very encouraging, is it not, the result of all the exercise and the tilling? There is due recognition of what God has done but the Lord claims it as His own.

A.B.P. Paul planted, Apollos watered but it was God who gave the increase. Paul did not say 'my garden' in Corinth. It would be distinctly the Lord's garden; and when under the Lord's direction Apollos went to Corinth he did not root up what Paul had planted and say that they should have been planted elsewhere. He recognised the skill of the planter and furthered the work by watering. Paul laid the foundation which is Jesus Christ: "For other foundation can no man lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ", 1 Cor 3: 11. Then Apollos came. Watering may suggest that he ministered as to the Spirit. One servant was not offsetting the work of another.

After Apollos left Corinth there would be no brethren saying, Paul ministered here extensively but Apollos thinks differently from the way he does. What Apollos ministered would stimulate and cause further growth in what Paul had taught.

Jn.M. Each would leave his own particular impress.

J.S. There was no question as to the result of Paul's labours in Corinth, but evidently they were not maintaining the idea of husbandry; some were neglecting it. Would those households to whom Paul refers be maintaining the practical matter of care and husbandry?

A.B.P. The household of Stephanas had addicted themselves to the service of the saints. They not only invited the brethren to the house and gave them a good meal occasionally but undoubtedly they were devoted to the maintenance of spiritual life amongst the brethren wherever they could. What Paul wrote in the first nine verses of his first epistle was not *merely* abstract. It is abstract in one sense; but there was a concrete expression of it in Corinth though submerged by much fleshly activity.

J.M. What we have in chapter 13 is said to be like a picture on the wall, yet there was evidently love there in *some*. He says to them at

the end of the book "Let all things ye do be done in love" (1 Cor 16: 14) as if there was that element there that could be taken account of.

A.B.P. Undoubtedly there was. Benjamin was but a lad; he was not a dominant figure in the family like Judah and Reuben and others; but matters in Genesis 43 could not be worked out without Benjamin. Benjamin was at Corinth but he was not in prominence.

Paul knew Benjamin was there; it was his link with Corinth. And he knew the Lord was there, He was there judicially. The fact that many among them were weak and infirm, and a good many had fallen asleep, was very encouraging to Paul because it was the evidence that the Lord was there. The bush was burning but it was not being consumed.

H.F. You have related some of this to Thessalonians. When Paul desires that God might wholly sanctify them, and that their whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless, is that like the keeping of the fruit? After the tilling the fruit comes, but it must be kept for the divine pleasure.

A.B.P. That is interesting. It is very fine when things remain with us. Fruit in its season is right, but there is such a thing as preserving, like the raisin cakes, so that in season and out of season the sweetness is available.

A.H. Do we see fruit in Acts 13, in the working of the men there so that the Spirit is free?

A.B.P. Yes. For a whole year Paul and Barnabas taught in the assembly. That would be like the nurture and care of the husbandmen, and the fruit would be seen in that they were called Christians t here. I think that fruit, in a general way, bears upon the service of God.

A.H. The freedom of the Spirit would be based on the links that they had with one another, would it not?

A.B.P. Yes, the Spirit said, "Separate me now Barnabas and Saul". They were bound together spiritually in such an intimate way that the Spirit has to say "Separate".

A.A.B-n. The company (Acts 21: 1), including women and children, from whom Paul had to tear himself away, would indicate a condition of this kind, where love is in evidence, particularly in attachment to the vessel of the testimony.

A.B.P. Yes. What would the children know? It would be instinct with them but the brethren would know that the hands of Paul had laboured and that day and night he had served in every house. Who of us can say that we have been in every house of the brethren in our locality? It is easier to do it now than it used to be because we do not have so many houses. Evidently Paul did not miss a house and it would seem that he wept in each one of them. With what sympathetic understanding would he help with the problems that were faced householdly. Paul would enter into things in detail with them and would weep with them over their problems. And when he would leave, although their faces would still be wet with their tears, they would say, What a wonderful time we have had! Their roots would be finding depth in the soil of love. What a service he rendered! No wonder they wept when he left.

Grangemouth

2 May 1974

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RESPONSIBILITY AND GRACE

D.R.Freeman

Matthew 11: 20-30

This is a very striking passage, often read and quoted, but a very solemn one because the Lord Jesus is facing the fact that the places where His great works were done had not repented, they had not received the word which had come from God, "God.... now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent". Acts 17: 30. This command has gone out in God's mercy because, if repentance is enjoined, it is part of the glad tidings; God has opened a door of repentance for the gentiles and there is great blessing in repentance, in turning to God from a way of self-will and a path of sin. Whatever your history may have been, God is ready to help you to face it at this time because of the One who can give peace and joy to your soul, the Lord Jesus, God's beloved Son. So the gospel concerns Him; and the command to men, because all of us are responsible, is to repent and believe the glad tidings. But these cities had not repented; and there are many cities in North America which are responsible in regard to what has been preached and ministered in them. How great our responsibility therefore! We are responsible for what we have heard. The Lord Jesus brings this home to one of the churches that He writes to; they are to remember what they have "received and heard, and keep it and repent", Rev 3: 3. We have heard much and our responsibility is commensurate with the light God has been pleased to give us concerning Himself and His truth.

But there is no answer here. What does the Lord Jesus do in the face of this - a very solemn picture indeed? He compares these cities where His works of power had been done with others, and those works were not bringing in distress of God's judgment to men but rather relieving them of the dreadful effects of sin which He felt in His spirit as He moved in and out amongst men on the earth to which He came. I need hardly say, for surely we recognise it, that the One who was here in such wondrous grace was none other than the Creator of the universe, God over all, blessed for evermore, but

He was pleased to come in amongst men as a lowly Man (as He speaks of Himself) to relieve them of all the effects of their sin and departure from God. We have the history of man's departure in the Bible; what a history it is! From Genesis 3 onwards we see the progress of sin and of departure in the world, but we see, too, the way of salvation and how certain persons escaped; and how you too can escape from what is inevitable otherwise, the wrath and judgment of a sin-hating God. God must judge sin and there will be a judgment day; the Lord Jesus refers to that. You say, I thought Sodom and Gomorrah were judged. Yes, those cities were overthrown. We know what happened, only Lot and his family were saved; and then his wife was turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back to a world that came under God 's judgment. Those cities were already judged but what about the persons in them? They will be raised at the second resurrection to be judged before the great white throne - a solemn thing that those persons have their responsibility to God. The final judgment has not yet come; the cities have been overthrown but the Lord refers here to a time which is yet future. Men may not believe it but this is God's word and is true, that every man must give an account of himself to God. Those people who lived in Sodom, those wicked, dissolute persons in that city, must give an account of themselves to God. This comes close to you and to me. How can we face Him? How can we stand before God when His rights in judgment are exercised? That is a day yet future. The Lord Jesus says it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and for Tyre and Sidon in judgment-day than for these cities of Israel where He had preached the gospel. How favoured we have been in this part of the world! Yet think of the solemn character of this judgment when God's salvation was so near based on the simple principle of faith and repentance towards God, and yet the opportunity was lost and men refused and turned from the God who continued to beseech them and to seek to compel them to come in that His house might be filled.

Well, God is desirous of your blessing and that is why you are here. I do not know what has prompted you to come but we have

the Scriptures before us, God's word, and we want to make way for the Holy Spirit of God bringing in conviction to the hearts of men.

You have to do with God, God who made you, God who loves you, God who gave His Son to die for you. This is the One of whom we read, the One whose precious name is Jesus, the One whom God has set above all and to whom He has given power and authority.

He will soon exercise it, solemn thing, in relation to the claims of God in judgment, but today is not the judgment day; this is the day of God's grace. You could not have come in at any more favourable time; today is the wonderful day when glad tidings are preached: "Behold, now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation", 2 Cor 6: 2. God is ready to work repentance in your heart and to give you light as to the knowledge of Himself. We have His word in our hands and many of us have received wonderful blessing through believing that word and receiving the One of whom it speaks. We have come to know Him and to love Him. We love to speak of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ. How much He has done for us; what grace is His! It is a day of grace, a wonderful day. The day of judgment is not to be an extended matter; it is God's strange work, but He will do it. It is a solemn thing that men expose themselves to the inevitability of wrath; indeed we read that men treasure up to themselves wrath in the revelation of the righteous judgment of God (see Rom 2: 5). God is righteous and will judge in righteousness. All judgment has been committed into the hands of the Son but He is ready now to be your Saviour and to relieve you of every burden. So the Lord Jesus rejoices, even at this time in the presence of those who had refused Him, because there were others who were going to accept Him. And I hope every one here is among that number over whom the Lord Jesus can rejoice. It says "There shall be joy in heaven for one repenting sinner", Luke 15: 7. How much joy is in the heart of Christ as He takes account of the simplest and feeblest, whoever you may be, coming to an appreciation of Himself and letting Him take control! You and I are just like that sheep in the parable in Luke 15 that went astray; there is no difference because all have sinned. We are not setting ourselves apart and saying we are different from others; each one of us has

sinned grievously but we have proved the preciousness of His word "Her many sins are forgiven", Luke 7: 47. Oh, how precious it is that forgiveness can be known because the Lord Jesus has died! It has cost Him so much that grace might be administered. Sin's judgment must be met, the Lord Jesus Himself had to die. Do you scoff at the story of redemption, the story of the One who came so low and went to Calvary's cross, submitted Himself there to God's judgment upon the tree that you might be eternally absolved, righteously discharged with no liability remaining and be freely forgiven? So, not only is repentance preached but remission of sins, in His precious name.

And what is more, God delights to forgive. We have a very poor impression of the joy that is in God's heart as He blesses and offers blessing to men. He wants it to be appreciated, He wants you to know His love, and His love has been expressed in the gift of Jesus and is now available to you so freely. The Lord Jesus has done everything that this blessing might be yours and that the Father's pleasure might be accomplished. You can do nothing to deserve it yourself but simply accept what God offers, accept His word and believe in the One whom He has sent, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now in glory. Death did not detain Him, but He bore the curse, death and the grave that were our due. On our account, it says, He was made sin that we might become God's righteousness in Him (see 2 Cor 5: 21), that we might have a portion before God which nothing and no one could ever disturb or destroy. Jesus lives for ever in God's presence; He was dead, He died for us and rose again and is alive for evermore. And now what is He doing?

He is rejoicing in what He has to offer through all that has been delivered into His hand. So the Lord Jesus rejoices as He praises the Father and speaks of these things. What are "these things" to which He refers? He says "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes". It shows that we must become different from what we were if we are going to appreciate divine giving. We have to change our minds if we are to receive these precious things. There is nothing like the forgiveness of sins,

free and full absolution through the blood of Jesus. His blood has paid the debt; without the shedding of blood there is no remission (see Heb 9: 22). The Lord Jesus died, sin's judgment was borne, His blood was shed, the price was paid and now you and I by believing can go free.

But note that we have to do with Him as He invites us here to come to Him. These babes can do nothing for themselves but they let another undertake for them. Are we prepared to do that?

Naaman, a great general, thought he could do something to become clean for he knew he was a leper and would die because he was a leper: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die", Ezek 18: 4. Sin was upon him and death too, this was very evident; but there was someone who had faith, the little maid, who said that if he were before the prophet he would cure him (see 2 Kings 5: 3). What remarkable faith! So he goes, but he wants to secure the blessing another way than God's way. There was only one way and that was by going down, humbling himself because he was a sinner. There is no blessing apart from the cross, you must come to that spot, a consecrated spot indeed, where God's Son suffered and died for you. May you find peace on this sure foundation that nothing through time or eternity will ever disturb. It is the basis for God's blessing towards you: "His foundation is in the mountains of holiness", Ps 87: 1.

We see God's foundation in the depths of Calvary's cross, and secured too through the One who is now in glory's highest height.

What grace it is that righteousness should be available to the sinner! Are you not ready to take it? Naaman would have had the blessing but he would have retained some honour for himself. He expected a great show at his conversion, that the prophet would wave his hand over the place and cure him of his leprosy. He knew he was a sinner but he was not prepared to take the prophet's word, God's way, to secure the blessing; but eventually grace prevailed. That is what we want grace to do today. Grace is ready to justify the sinner, to lead us to Calvary, to give us an appreciation of the Saviour, it may be for the first time, as the One who loves us and gave Himself for us.

Many of us have come on to this wonderful ground. "Having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ", Rom 5: 1. My peace depends on Him and nothing else, not on any merit of mine, nor on any virtue that I possess more than another but solely on the atoning value of the death of Jesus. "We have peace" it says, solid peace which the devil cannot touch. "We have peace towards God" because of His righteousness. His righteousness is towards us, He wants to account us righteous, to justify us, to cleanse us. There is only one way to come into it and that is by simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a way that the youngest can understand, a way that does not minister to the pride of men. These babes whom the Lord Jesus speaks of here are persons absolutely dependant on Another. What is more helpless than a babe if it does not get looked after? It will die. Jesus is the One who can do everything for us if we come to Him. We can do nothing for ourselves. We are deep-dyed sinners, every one of us. Oh, we have little sense of our indebtedness to Him! So we must come the divine way. The word to Naaman was that he was to plunge himself in the Jordan seven times and the promise that he would be clean was sure and certain. God's word gives you certainty, man's word gives you uncertainty. You may listen to many speakers among men diagnosing the problems of society and propounding possible solutions but God's word gives you certainty about what you need most, the need of your precious soul. Where would you be without a Saviour? What if you die in your sins? What would you do without Him, the One who came to seek and to save the lost? Will you go on without Him today? I believe the Lord may be pleading with someone here in relation to their need. You may never have heard His voice in these accents before but they are words of grace and tenderness, for there is no voice like the voice of Jesus. It was the voice of Jesus that Paul heard at his conversion not bringing in condemnation, great sinner as he was. There was no greater sinner than Saul of Tarsus persecuting God's people, compelling them to blaspheme, but Jesus spoke to him words of grace and tenderness and was ready to bring him to rest. The way he was going without Him was hard but the

Lord presented Himself to him as the One who was able to undertake everything for him and give him a righteousness in the presence of the blessed God. How great the gospel is! How precious the Saviour of whom it speaks! We are to come to know Him and what is in His heart, the One who gave Himself for us.

Consider that poor woman in Luke 7 who came to Him; she had a need, she knew what it was to be burdened with sin but she knew One, too, who would not turn her away, indeed there was a welcome there. How pleased He was to see her when He was in that cold atmosphere in the house of the Pharisee, a selfrighteous man! She came to Him with an appreciation of Himself, the One who could relieve her of all her guilt and would not turn her away in her need, and she heard words of grace and tenderness from the lips of Jesus. How He delights to speak thus: "Thy sins are forgiven... Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace"! How many wonderful examples we have in Scripture of persons who come into blessing through coming to Jesus!

The Lord is speaking here of grace, of revealing the Father. That is not God in judgment. All judgment is committed to the Son, the Father judges no one (see John 5: 22). So the Lord here is delighting to praise the Father as He takes account of those who cannot do without Him. That is what babes are, those who cannot do without Jesus and who realise their need of Him as God's provision for them. Wondrous gift of divine love! So He speaks of revealing the Father to them, that is, God known in grace. One of the first things that we learn as Christians is that God is for us and that we are in relationship with Him as Father. The apostle John, writing to those who had believed, says that he had written to the little ones because they had known the Father (see 1 John 2: 13).

And that is what the Lord Jesus wants you to know and how wonderful His grace and patience and tenderness are. What a wonderful appeal this is! The word 'come' belongs to the glad tidings. As to His Person only the Father knows Him; this does not mean that we cannot come to know Him, but in this sense no one knows Him but the Father because of who He is in the glory of His Person; - yet

He is Man, truly Man. He speaks of what He is, what His heart is: "I am meek and lowly in heart". Is it not wonderful that God has chosen to attract us to Himself through this blessed Man, through One who became like ourselves, sin apart, that He might win our hearts and draw them away from this poor world to Himself? The Lord Jesus is pleased to reveal the Father to those who are poor sinners who have put their trust in Him, who have accepted God's word and God's way of salvation. He is ready to meet our needs, He has pleasure in making the Father known. The invitation goes out: "Come to me". He is the one Mediator between God and men, "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all", 1 Tim 2: 5.

You must come to Him for blessing, there is no other way; "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened". There are many things that may cause us to be laboured or burdened; we may think we have to attain a certain standard, we may be depressed with worsening conditions in the world but the Lord Jesus has the answer to them all and He gives the Christian a wonderful hope in the knowledge of His near return. Many of us are waiting to see Him.

What a wonderful moment it will be! We have heard His voice in grace speaking peace to our souls but He is soon going to come and take us out of this poor world to be for ever with Himself. He has gone to prepare a place for us, that is, for the babes; He has done everything for us. Oh what wonderful things divine love has done!

We are going to enjoy them eternally with Jesus and enjoy them with one another, too. His offer is a real one: "Come to me". He is speaking as Man here, the One who died for us, the One who is ready and able to relieve us of our burdens. "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest". This is a sure promise. No one else can give you rest but Jesus, whether you need it in relation to your sins or your wanderings. He died that you might be brought home safely to Himself. You belong to Him by creation's rights; He would make you, so to speak, doubly His as you acknowledge His redemptive rights, the rights that He has established over you in dying for you. Have you acknowledged those rights? There needs to be a movement on your side, He has come, He has died, He is now in glory and the work is finished, but

on your side you have to move in faith. Are you ready to believe on Him and come to Him now? The appeal goes out: "Come unto me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest". It is not the preacher who gives you rest, he can only point you to Christ, to the One on whom believing you will receive blessing and rest. So why not move in that way? It means coming down, like Naaman, and obeying the word, falling down on your knees and having to do with Jesus. Oh the blessing in so doing! We want reality through the preaching. It is not sufficient to hear the word but we need to obey it, answer to it and come to Christ. That means coming to Him in the faith of our souls, calling upon Him. One of the shortest prayers in Scripture is "O God, have compassion on me, the sinner", Luke 18: 13. God answered that man's prayer because it says that he went down to his house justified. God wants you to have the assurance of justification, that is, that you are righteous in His sight, not because of what you have done but because of the worth of the Lord Jesus Christ and the atoning merits of His precious death on Calvary's cross for sinners. So it says he went down to his house justified. That was the answer to his prayer. Many of us can remember the time when we had to do with God in reality for ourselves, and I would encourage the youngest here to pray to God. You may say that it seems foolish or even futile. Do you really think that God does not take account of you when you kneel down and tell Him the truth? He surely does. What joy there is in heaven over one sinner that repents! It may be a little boy or a little girl. As the Lord Jesus speaks peace to your soul what peace He will give you! "Come to me, all ye who labour" - O, how we have found it and find it over and over again! - "all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest". What precious words they are, the words of Jesus, word of grace!

He says furthermore, "Take my yoke upon you". This is the Christian path. He may leave us here a little time until He comes and you may be worried about how you are going to get on in the world. There is only one path for the Christian, which makes it very easy, and that path is the will of the Lord. What a happy path it is!

We do not want to stray from it but to be kept near to Him and with His people. The Lord Jesus rejoiced in the path that He trod here for the Father's will, yet it involved the cross for Him on our account.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me"; not only is He our Saviour but He is our Model too, we can learn from Him and He teaches us. There is only one way of coming into blessing, there is only one way of being in this world rightly and that is in accepting the yoke of Christ. I wish we had accepted it more and were more fully committed to Him. How much He has done for us and yet we still want our own will! He has prepared a home for us but He says, There is My yoke here. He has something for me to do in the little time that I am left here. We do not know how long it will be but there is His yoke: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart". How suggestive these words are! It is the happiest thing for a Christian not only to begin well but to go on well. If like Naaman we have gone down to secure the blessing, and God has helped us to do that, we need to be preserved in that way, for He "gives grace to the lowly", Jam 4: 6. God will preserve us in the company of the lowly because the Lord Jesus is the One who is meek and lowly in heart. These features are depreciated in the world but God is going to fill His universe with all that speaks of Him of this blessed Man in whom He delights; and those features are to be the joy of our hearts too because the Holy Spirit given to us will secure the same features in us as we are engaged with the One in whom they are seen perfectly, in whom they shine for God's glory.

He says "I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls". How valuable that is, how men would give money for rest!

They go away on holidays, they have wonderful package tours to secure some kind of satisfaction, but right here in this busy city of New York with all the stress and strain of the business world you can know this rest which many fail to find in sunnier climes, this rest that Jesus gives; He says "Ye shall find rest to your souls". So it may be a dingy office, the company may be difficult but, if I have the Saviour with me, it is sunshine and I can have wonderful times with Him.

We would like to give you some impression of the joys connected with the Christian pathway that brighten all the drudgery that may seem to occupy our lives here. Some of us may think that it is an endless round of housework, for instance, and these things burden us, but the Lord Jesus says "Ye shall find rest to your souls". That He says "My yoke is easy" does not mean that He overlooks things that are contrary to Himself but that for us it is the best path, He has the best things for us and His way is best. David, a believer in the Old Testament, who knew the forgiveness of his sins, says regarding God "His way is perfect", 2 Sam 22: 31. That is something that we have to learn; and God helps us to come to it that His will is good and acceptable and perfect (see Rom 12: 2); and God will make our way perfect. What a wonderful thing that God makes your way perfect as you submit to the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ! He is ready to serve you; not only has He died for you but He is thinking of you all the time even when you are asleep. We were reading about Jacob yesterday; God was thinking about him as he lay there asleep and gave him to know that He loved him and was ready to help him and be with him on the way that he went.

So the Christian pathway is a wonderful pathway. We may have suffering but His yoke is easy. Saul of Tarsus was an unhappy man as a persecutor of Christ but in suffering for the name of Jesus – and how much he suffered - what joy he had! It says that he rejoiced in sufferings for those he served: "I rejoice in sufferings for you", Col 1: 24. The Lord had said to him "it is hard for thee to kick against goads" , Acts 26: 14. Young people are inclined to kick and to rebel but the Lord commends His yoke to us, it is easy, and He says "my burden is light". He is not putting heavy things upon us, He is bearing our burdens. This is what love has done, He has charged Himself with our care. How wonderful it is just to submit to the Lord Jesus, to accept God's way and to take His yoke and to learn from Him as coming to Him and then to prove the blessedness of His yoke. There is no other pathway for the Christian. Do not be misled by a tawdry substitute; there may be substitutes and they may seem very like the real thing but you want the real thing. And this is what

we set forth in the gospel and commend to you. Paul could commend the real thing: "I would to God, both in little and in much, that not only thou, but all who have heard me this day, should become such as I also am" - he had the real thing - "except these bonds", Acts 26: 29. He did not desire his bonds for any one else; he accepted them from the Lord Jesus and proved that His yoke was easy and His burden was light.

May the Lord touch our hearts! May you be brought to the saving knowledge of Himself and find rest in Jesus, and know increasingly the blessedness of His yoke until we see Him face to face, for He has bought us, saved us, called us and drawn us to Himself, and will serve us continually until we are safely there. For His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

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COMPETENCY

E.C.Burr

2 Corinthians 3: 5; 1 Corinthians 3: 9, 10; 2 Timothy 2: 1, 2

I should like with the Lord's help to say a word about competency. It comes into the scriptures read and into other scriptures as well. No one giving an address can, in the compass of their own capacity and of the time, exhaust the concordance on any subject, but one would look for some thoughts that might leave an impression on the brethren. I expect we all feel continually, perhaps especially today as we think of circumstances and problems and issues that we know of, the need of competency.

As we said in prayer there is One who is competent for every thing. The Father loves Him and gave everything to be in His hands because He knew that He could trust Him with everything. We remember how Mr Taylor sen speaks - it must have been just after a presidential election - of the people of this country having installed into office a man whose qualities they knew; he goes on to say that God has installed into office a Man whose qualities He knew. God knew that the Man He had installed into office was competent for everything. There is no exigency that can arise in all the things that God has established in Christ that Christ is not competent to deal with. It is as true now as it was when He was on earth that He has done all things well: nothing that He has done needs correction or adjustment. If we have any backward view of time in eternity it will be to see that everything that Christ has done has been done well.

As we look back - as the hymn (No 299) says, 'With Him look back on all the way; To learn the meaning, at His hand, Of every deed in every day' - we shall also learn 'The grace which God our Saviour showed' and shall look back and see that things that we thought were problems and difficulties have been worked out in the wisdom of His own hand and in the care of One who is doing all things well at the present time just as He was then. I do not think you could believe that "all things work together for good to those who love

God" (Rom 8: 28) if you did not believe that the Man into whose hands He has given everything was still doing all things well. And He is doing all things well. It may not appear so to us; we have many problems and exercises.

The Lord has not exactly taken us into current problems while we have been together in these meetings - perhaps that is a sign of His grace and it is certainly a sign of His mercy - but He has led us round things that would help us in regard to present matters. In all these matters He is still doing all things well. We may think we see the fumbling of brethren, the fumbling even of local assemblies, but we know that He does all things well and nothing happens that is outside the competence of the One into whose hands the Father has given everything.

Therefore if we are to increase in competence we need more of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ so that things may be done well as they are done in His Spirit. Difficulties and problems occur, we have things that confront us in our own localities, and each of us knows its own locality best. Maybe we sometimes think that we are confronted with a situation in which there is something that is bound with chains, and then it breaks out again and has to be bound again - He is competent to have it sitting and clothed and in its right mind.

We may think that we have a situation in which all had been spent on many physicians and it has grown worse - He is competent to set persons free in the sense of forgiveness and establishment and restoration. We may think that we have every bodily disease and weakness in a moral sense - He is able to heal every one of them; He is competent for everything. This is the level on which God is working out things at the present time.

Now Paul in 2 Corinthians had complicated and difficult things to deal with, problems that in themselves were simple yet it took great difficulty to bring the Corinthians round to it. You would have thought that if a man had someone else's wife the whole of the assembly of God in a place would have risen up to deal with it in a moment. Not so at Corinth. Paul comes in there and he has to write with severity, in the power and the competence that he has an

apostle, bringing in orders as to how things are to be dealt with.

That power does not exist today. We are not in circumstances where apostolic power in one man can dictate what is done assembly by assembly; but competency is not gone, and Paul in the second epistle says "our competency is of God". I will not now go into the question of being new covenant ministers; what I am anxious to bring out of 2 Corinthians 3 is that competency is of God, and there is no power that is effective unless it is the power of God. The power of man will do many things. Through the skills that man has, and especially the mental and dialectic skills, he can bring in argument and conviction and persuasion by very many different means. There are men who are very easily able to understand the makeup of other men; these men on the whole are dangerous because they can sort out the characteristics of another man and play on them so as to bring about the result in the other man that they are seeking after. This is not the competency that is of God.

That competency takes up things as God sees them in their whole environment and totality; "our competency is of God" excludes every other power and argument. When God has spoken, competency has been expressed. When man has spoken there may be argument, and persuasive argument: but wait till tomorrow and somebody with more argumentative skill will come in and turn the whole situation round because the thing is of man and not of God. When God has spoken there is finality.

What we need to learn beloved, especially in circumstances out of which confusion and difficulty grow, is that it is only the competency that is of God that will be effective. Many means may be sought, many arguments may be used, many instruments used, instruments ranging from the fountain pen to the telephone and from the duplicator to the transatlantic cable, but unless the competency is of God the result will not only be lack of advantage but it will tend to be disastrous. Therefore let us get back in to the sense that the competency which is of God is available at the present time. God has not left the assembly of God in a place without the competency of God. This is something which was established years ago in the

ministry of beloved Mr Taylor sen. If you look over his ministry now, how much you see that you could have said of him (humbly as he would have accepted it) "he is a prophet, and will pray for thee, that thou mayest live", Gen 20: 7. I say that carefully because we do not want to flatter even the memory of men, but in fact you can go to that ministry and find an answer to nearly every problem that arises in our day. But one thing that the Lord gave him to say is that there is enough in each local assembly to deal with its own problems. The assembly characteristically has the competency which is of God. God does not need the ability of man as such in the local assembly; He uses men because the Spirit does not just make sounds in the air, He speaks through some body. Would that each of us was so directing ourselves and our state that we were more available to the Spirit as a means of His speaking through us rather than our own minds and our own ability.

But the local assembly is so equipped by God that the competency of God is there. Therefore it is not possible for a problem to arise in a locality which the locality cannot itself resolve.

It may be that, in these days of weakness and brokenness, some help from elsewhere, if it is available and if it is under God, could be brought in to assist, but someone coming in from outside cannot bring in a judgment in the place to which he goes. All he can do is to leave the brethren in that place with the competency which is of God so that they come to express the judgment of the assembly of God in a place. I cannot come to Philadelphia and express assembly judgments here. Why? I am not local. The Lord has given enough capacity in this local assembly, and in London, Plainfield, New York, Cleveland, small localities like that where there is the light and the maintenance of the truth of the assembly, that competency of God is there. Anybody coming in from outside place to do what is right according to the competency which is of God.

I am impressed that Paul takes no other ground in Corinth. He is an apostle, certainly; bondman of Jesus Christ, certainly he is that too; if he speaks to "called saints" he is conscious of being a called saint, but the ground that Paul takes is "our competency is of God".

You will have learned from the Acts already that if it is of God you cannot fight against it (see chap 5: 39). And anyone who is seeking to overthrow competency which is of God has also to face the other scripture; "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?", 1 Cor 10: 22. If the competency which is of God is in operation then none of us is in the end competent to resist it. Maybe we shall be able to interfere with its progress for the moment.

Daniel, as we know, prayed three weeks before he received an answer because it was interfered with on the way; but at the end the divine answer comes through and the competency of God must prevail. Therefore the first thing we would arrive at, beloved, is that in each of our places we are going to make way for the competency which is of God and not just for the opinions of men. There have been opinions expressed which have the authority of Scripture. Paul twice says "I give my opinion" and that has come down to us as Scripture. But if I give my opinion I submit it to the brethren in the light of the temple, and in the light of the knowledge of their having the Spirit; and if what I have expressed as my opinion has the competency of God it will persuade comes in as a help in order to rally what is of God in the one who is with God; if it does not have the competency of God a little child who has the Spirit could overthrow it. Therefore let us get back to the competency of God in everything we have to do. The things we have to do that are the most problem are the administrative things. Few of us know enough about the truth to be able to answer every question about the truth; it is astonishing though how many think they can resolve every administrative question just on their own. The question is, Is your competency of God or is it of man? Is it zeal? Zeal is right in its place; it is like the cutting edge on the tool that is needed for the conditions, but zeal alone may in the end prove to be a broken reed - you can put a certain amount of weight on it and in the end it bends under your hand. And there is a certain reed spoken of in scripture, "that broken reed, upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it goes into his hand, and pierces it", Isa 36: 6. That is often the characteristic of zeal - you lean on it and it pierces through your hand.

Now we come to Paul in 1 Corinthians 3 where he does not actually use the word 'competent', but nobody would call an architect wise who is not competent. For instance, someone might try to put up, say a meeting room, and unless they have the strength of the walls properly related to the weight of the roof the thing will not stand up and the man will be shown to be incompetent because he was not wise, and he will be shown to be unwise because he was not competent. Now Paul is not speaking about building meeting rooms in Corinth. He is saying, I am a wise architect or "master-builder" (A.V.). That is to say Paul was competent in things which relate to the structure of things for God in the city to which he was writing. He was not just a wise architect in relation to Corinth but also in relation to Ephesus. I do not think he built on a different design and scale for Ephesus. Maybe the building at Ephesus was seen to have more beauty and more in it than what Corinth actually appeared to have but by the time Corinth had been cleaned up and the evil had been judged, and what needed to be put out had been put out, I think you would have discerned that in Paul's mind the architecture of Corinth was intended to be the same as the architecture at Ephesus. But Paul is a wise architect and he is competent.

Now we are not so much concerned in our day with the building of things. Things were built in Acts 2, the Spirit came and filled the house and then sat upon each one of them; and from what was established in the Spirit then things have come down to our day.

They have come down over centuries of difficulty, centuries which Mr Taylor sen refers to as a great gap in assembly history, and they have been carried through.

But, beloved, we did not start anything. We, if we are in anything, are in the final stages of what the Lord has in His testimony on the earth; we are in the recovery of the truth. We have not therefore to set about an architectural exercise on what local assemblies ought to do. We have light as to that from the Scriptures. What is needed most often is the service of a wise master-builder and therefore a competent person in regard to the maintenance of the building in its local manifestation which was put

up in Acts 2. The house was there and it was filled and what has been needed ever since is maintenance. It quite impressed me the first time that I went into my own office - and there were people there who were responsible for what goes on physically in the building - on the wall were the plans of the building. Now if any modification needs to be made, if there is any question of extra weight being put on the floor, or a wall being taken down to knock two offices together, what do you do? You go back to the original plans and you can see from them what is possible within the structure that you have to deal with. Equally if you want to find out why the drains do not work you can go back to the original plan and you need as much competency in the man doing the maintenance as you do in the original building.

So a wise masterbuilder and a competent one does not go for the saw of division when what is needed is a brace underneath; and he does not go for the chopper when what is needed is the sand paper. Nobody ever produced smooth wood just by chopping away at it.

Some people are very expert and I know that antiques that have been made with choppers are prized for the chopper marks; but things that have been smoothed according to God do not bear the chopper marks any longer, they bear the sign that the right tools have been used in the circumstances that existed. I believe, beloved, that we have got into the habit of too easily reverting to dividing tools when what is mainly needed are tools that will hold things together; and it may be that if we were more familiar with our spiritual tool chests we would be more successful in our local assembly because otherwise we tend to leave marks all over the furniture which are not approved by the Master of the house. Therefore let us see to it that the competency of the wise masterbuilder is entering into our maintenance activity, and if we really want to know what maintenance is needed let us go back to the original plan. Let us not think that we can redesign the whole thing, it is too late in the history for that. The original structure was built with the competency that is of God; who am I therefore to try to alter that structure? The Lord has committed to me in my place, and to you in your place, responsibility for the maintenance of the structure.

Beloved brother, take it up. Beloved sister, when somebody

competent takes up the right tool in a place do not push on his elbow or anything like that, it tends to produce scars in the structure that should not be there. If somebody competent with the competency of God is doing something, let him do it. If the wise master-builder is saying, I have cemented those things together and it will take about a week to stick, leave them to stick, do not come and test during the week how strong the joint is. All these things are homely by way of illustration but I think you can see the point, take the right tools and let competency which is of God work with the tools so that the right result may be produced. Ministry is available to enlighten us as to what is in the Bible, but in the Bible itself, you get first of all the plans of the original structure, and if you want to do anything competent you must go back to the plan of the original structure. Therefore, beloved, let us be wise, let us go by the right textbook, let us be sure that the Bible is the textbook; and let us go back to it in the Spirit, the great operating power, the greatest lubricant for competent tools that there has ever been, the power of the Holy Spirit working competently so that damage is not done to the structure which even the person trying to repair it valued and yet brought in a degree of ruin to it because he was not going by this book. Therefore let us be sure that we are learning to be wise, not bringing in amateur, inexperienced attitudes; as it is well said, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. What we need to do is to increase in knowledge: not just knowledge in our heads, not just knowledge that can quote chapter and verse from some book but the knowledge that is related to wisdom so that we know precisely what to do in the circumstances that exist. If you need time to go and look up the Scriptures do not let anyone push you off the need for time. Wait on the Lord. It is far better to wait on the Lord an extra two or three days than it would have been to raise Lazarus the moment he was missed - the glory of God would not have been manifested. The great thing, beloved, is to learn wisdom and competence from the Man who does all things well.

Well, that I say in regard to the general course of our responsibility. I would like however to add a word about "competent

to instruct others". The first thing is that nobody is competent to instruct somebody else unless he knows how to do the job himself.

Therefore a need with us, especially if we are in what I have described as the parental generation - if we are the generation before the last in 2 Timothy 2 verse 2, if we are faithful men competent to instruct others also, that is to say in the generation before the others also - the need is not only that we be faithful but that we be competent ourselves. That involves two things: first that you are competent in the job. Many of us would have to look back and say that we have had opportunity for a great deal of spiritual education, perhaps over fifty or sixty years. We went right through primary school; and then spiritually, did we go on to college? Did you think that, when you had learned a bit, it was worth trying to find things out at a deeper level and on something more profound, and did you then put in a few years of college spiritually? I do not mean at the nearest university but a college that is in your own bedroom where you can get down before the Father who is in heaven and pray about the word. Go to the college that is on your own premises and find out something there and deepen in the word of God and the knowledge of God. "The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God", 1 Cor 2: 10. If you want a spiritual college education you will find it in the Holy Spirit. As we remarked yesterday, the Father teaches, and the Son teaches, and the Spirit teaches; God Himself teaches. Have you learned to get out of the primary level of things and into the depths of God? Hebrews raises that very question: "leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ" (Heb 6: 1), as if we graduate from primary school and go on to something else.

Hebrews itself points the way to things that are very profound; it needs someone who has been to college spiritually. Many of us are content with a primary education spiritually; many have left their college education, their graduation spiritually, to very late in life; but the Lord would allow us to increase our competence quickly, not by zeal but by devotedness. So you become a man who knows the Scriptures, who knows the truth, who knows what truth applies to a particular situation and who does not get out the hammer when the screwdriver is needed - a competent man.

So that is the first thing, to be competent to do the job yourself. Then the second is that you have to be "competent to instruct others also". And the older brethren here will not think me unkind, I trust, if I say that there is evidence that the competence to instruct others is something that may have been rather lacking. You may say, It is a very difficult class I have, they do not sit still, they come in late for their lessons, when we are singing they talk; you may say all this goes on. But your competence to instruct others also involves first of all the ability to secure discipline in the class. No teacher is effective if he cannot secure discipline in the class. Now who is competent to instruct others in the principles of the house of God? One of the principles of the house of God is that you do not come in late, and you do not talk when you are singing a hymn; this is the house of God and you do not have private conversations during the singing of the hymn. Somebody should be competent to instruct others also in little details like that. So that you get a class that is not just sitting petrified, it is sitting interested but disciplined; that is quite a primary need. But then you may say, This class is rather difficult, they do not even seem to have learned first principles, hardly anyone knows the multiplication table let alone logarithms, and I cannot get anywhere with anybody. Beloved, is the lack of competence with the class or in the instructor? The only question Paul raises is that you be competent to *instruct*. I think that means that you must be able to handle the class so that the instruction carries through. As one thinks of the beloved young brethren in this country and in our own country, for a large part I see uninstructed young men and young women. I do not yet see in every place young people growing up, in regard to whom I would commit myself, saying that when they are a bit older they will be competent as wise architects. I see features of it in some but where I would like to lay the responsibility is on those who should be instructors. I do not charge the young people who are still in the spiritual sense in class, but what I would like to raise with us who are older, both brothers and sisters is, are we competent to instruct others also? One thing that will be needed to be a competent instructor is that your example testifies to what you say. To take just a simple illustration, it would be useless for me to stand

up here and say a lot by way of instruction about the ill effects of hard drinking if someone came round to the house and saw me spend the evening doing just that very thing. Your example has to confirm what you say. It was a disastrous comment on somebody when it was said to them, Your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you say. Therefore, beloved, let our actions confirm what we say. There will be a great deal of competent instruction in men and women whose example is such that they scarcely need to say anything. And there will be no profit in the next generation, who should be instructors, if there is not the committal by way of behaviour to the truth. All this raises the point with us as to how much we really value the recovery in which we have part. Do you want it to continue until the Lord comes? Will you be content if, after you have died, your children come along as far as they can and then give up? Or do you want a testimony in the light of the assembly here until the Lord comes? If you do I think you will have to start instructing others also, to start soon and be competent when you do it. It would be useless to have brought up a class that felt that the only tool that could be used in the assembly was the saw; it would be a terrible thing if a generation grew up that thought the only tool available was a dividing one. Yet there is enough in the history of the 1960s to make anyone in the next generation think that if trouble arises it should be chopped off. Is that not true that as you look back over the 1960s you think that the first tool to reach for is a dividing one? What is needed is those who have the power to heal. Paul in the end will not have instructors in Corinth but fathers. Who is competent to instruct others also like a father? Who? Ask yourself, who would you sooner entrust your children with for instruction, someone else or yourself? If your answer is not 'myself' then you have not sufficient confidence in the work of God in yourself or in what you yourself believe. Therefore the best instructors will be fathers. The best of the next generation will be those who have been brought through in fatherly care, so that what was committed from Paul to Timothy and to faithful men is preserved in another generation who have learned from their fathers how to be competent in the things of God. So, beloved, as we look around what we see is

the need for competency. Oh! the disasters of incompetency! Think of the 1960s, if I may refer to them again, when incompetent things were done and the result has been that when the saints came to repentance about them they had to go back and, as far as they could, put them right; but some things were done by incompetent workmanship that can never be put right as far as things here are concerned. You look back and you see it, and you know that incompetent workmanship has produced disastrous and scarring results. The thing is, beloved, whether we are going to be more competent in our own day. There are few enough who seek to walk in the light of the assembly. What we would desire is the skill that comes from the competency that is of God so that every matter in the assembly of God may be determined on that basis and not on the basis of the mismanagement of men.

May the Lord help us. I grow increasingly in a feeling regard to the next generation wondering how they are going to be brought through. I trust in the Lord just as you do, I pray for them just as you do, but Paul seems to me to underline that there is a need or competent instructors if the truth is to go on. If we need to do some homework let us do it, if we need, to improve our own skills let us do it, but let us care enough about the recovery to want another generation in which things are going to be carried through competently until the Lord comes.

PHILADELPHIA

29 May 1972

LOOKING ON JESUS

Hebrews 12: 2

In heaven above,
Jesus is there, a scene so fair,
A scene of love.

There glories shine,
That He has won, God's blessed Son,
A work divine.

'Tis only He,
In glory bright, shall fill our sight,
Him we shall see,
And in that gaze,
God's glory too, shall fill our view,
Seen in His face.
Oh may our sight,
Fixed on Him there, for ever share
This deep delight.
In joyful rest
The soul is stilled, the heart is filled
And all is blest.

A.J.Gaskin
ABERDEEN

THE CHILDREN'S BREAD

These words were used by the Lord Jesus during a beautiful incident when He healed a little girl belonging to an enemy nation. It was after a long journey - perhaps ninety-five miles - from Jerusalem and made, I expect, on foot. Jesus had left the Jews who had no faith in Him, and had come to a distant land where He found a mother who had "great faith". She proved that God had mercy even for her little daughter and herself.

The life of faith must be maintained by food and the familiar word 'bread' is often used in the Bible. Possibly there are more varieties of it in the Scriptures than we have for our daily bread at home! For example, the manna eaten by the children in the wilderness is called the "bread of the mighty" although it was itself so small. This means that if our spirits feed on Christ who was once a humble Man here we shall keep strong.

As the "bread of God" Jesus had come down out of heaven, available to the whole world. He spoke of Himself as the "living bread" and the "true bread" because many and even religious people had been trying to feed their souls on ceremonies and other lifeless things. It is one of the very many promises that by feeding on the "bread of life" the believer will never suffer hunger.

Older children will have heard of the "shewbread". This was a sign, always before God, of Israel as the whole twelve tribes. For us the teaching is that God's purpose to have pleasure in His people, now a heavenly one, never changes. As serving Him we must feed also on this, the 'bread of the presence'.

Young people at Corinth who heard Paul's epistle read out probably wondered what "unleavened bread" meant. It would be explained that leaven means evil. Since Christ as Passover Lamb had been sacrificed to save them from judgment, they must give up all evil things and be sincere and truthful. The believer finds it a feast to think on "whatsoever things are true"; do you?

J.C.Evershed