

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 39

June 1976

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Numbers 8: 1-26

C.R.B. It seems instructive that the direct sequence to God speaking to Moses from this wonderful place of grace "from off the mercy-seat which was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubim" is the matter of the candlestick and then the Levites. This would show how the whole principle of the service of God in the liberty of sonship is to proceed from the knowledge of God. A brother was referring on Tuesday to the matter of gifts, and the Levites are seen here as being given, and given in relation to the firstborn sons being ransomed. God in relation to the preciousness of the blood of Jesus is claiming persons for His service, but is bringing them forward in the spirit of unity and the spirit of dignity as firstborn. This would be related to the Levites as given from among the children of Israel to Aaron and his sons. That would be directly related to what the Lord is doing as operating from His own place as "ascended up above all the heavens", Eph 4: 10.

A.B.P. You carry forward the thought of the firstborn. The Levites were taken instead of the firstborn. Does the thought of the firstborn ones carry through in relation to the Levites?

C.R.B. Yes. The way it is brought in here is to liberate the children of Israel to draw near to the sanctuary; that is the purpose of the giving of the Levites. It really brings out that if we are to be maintained in the liberty of approaching God, it is as this principle of the firstborn and of the Levites marks us in our own spirits and beings.

A.B.P. Does the selection of the Levites relate to their devotedness in a time of crisis? Is that a qualification that should be seen with Levites? The very fact that the Levites were located immediately around the tabernacle would indicate that they have a special place in the defence of the testimony.

C.R.B. According to the book of Samuel God sovereignly chose them whilst the children of Israel were still in the house of Pharaoh in

Egypt, but the faithfulness of the Levites in a time of crisis showed how right God was in His choice; they morally qualified as showing that God's choice was, as it always is, justified.

J.A.P. Where is that reference in Samuel?

C.R.B. 1 Samuel 2: 27: "there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, Thus saith Jehovah: Did I plainly reveal myself to the house of thy father when they were in Egypt, in Pharaoh's house, and choose him out of all the tribes of Israel, to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar...?" I do not think that comes into the historical account of the book of Exodus, but in a time of breakdown later God brings out that his own sovereign choice was there; and Samuel comes in on the line of recovery to show that God maintains His original thought. It will be maintained on the standard of the candlestick.

G.D.P. In Mark's gospel it says, "And he goes up into the mountain, and calls whom he himself would", chap 3: 13. Would that link on with the thought of sovereign choice?

C.R.B. Yes, and it goes on "And he appointed twelve that they might be with him"; that is the principle of the Levites. They are given in relation to the spirit of unity, but the whole of their service is dependent on their nearness to Christ. So that the actions of the Levites here, involving purification and all the searching exercises connected with that, are in relation to the candlestick, which is really Jehovah speaking. When Jesus spoke, it was Jehovah speaking from above the mercy-seat.

E.T.M. In that scripture in Samuel the note suggests the upward line: 'go up to', "to offer upon mine altar".

C.R.B. That is the normality of the way God works. In the very midst of one of the worst breakdowns in the history of the children of Israel, when everything seemed to be going from bad to worse in Eli's day, God comes in through a man child and secures this upward line, which flows through to the whole service of song being introduced under David.

E.T.M. Mr Darby was prophetic in his outlook and feelings; he said 'That way is upward still' (hymn 12). I suppose he expected that to carry on to the end.

C.R.B. Just so. We are expecting to go up together at any moment actually, but spiritually that is to be our experience all the time.

A.B.P. Is there a sequence in the reference to the character of divine speaking, then the lighting of the candlestick, and then the Levitical service?

C.R.B. Yes. Mr Taylor sen said "it would seem as if all the communications were on that principle after Moses experienced what he did in Numbers 7" (N.S. Vol 61, p.119).

A.B.P. Does not Peter bring it into Christianity?: "If any one speak - as oracles of God", 1 Pet 4: 11. That would be this kind of speaking, would it not?

C.R.B. Yes, I think so. The candlestick being brought in at once as the divine standard of light would show that the working out of the matter of the Levites and the service of God and the testimony is only supported of God as it is in keeping with the divine pattern. You were referring earlier to one of the kings bringing in brazen shields instead of the gold shields (see 1 Kings 14: 27), but you could not bring in a brazen candlestick. The brazen shields were not right, but a brazen candlestick would not be right at all. The candlestick would give us an impression of the fulness of what has come out in Christ personally. When He said "I am the light of the world" (John 8: 12) was that not really the candlestick here? "The Word became flesh", John 1: 14.

A.B.P. In answer to the question, "Who art thou?", He said, "Altogether that which I also say to you", John 8: 25. That would be the light that had come out through His speaking, shining on the candlestick to disclose its beauty.

C.R.B. And the shining of the candlestick would ensure that we are preserved on this upward line.

E.T.M. The Spirit of God seems to delight to focus on the candlestick; it is mentioned four times in first four verses.

C.R.B. It does not go into the detail which we have elsewhere and yet it is in absolute accord with the divine mind, because it says "according to the form which Jehovah had shown Moses". This was the direct result of what, God showed Moses on the mountain.

A.B.P. So that ministry should really be testimony as to Christ, He personally being in heaven but the testimony being rendered here in the power of the Spirit.

C.R.B. The service of the Spirit enters into that in a detailed way because it involves the lamps and the oil, and also the snuffers in the working out of it; but it is peculiarly the service of the Spirit of truth as drawing attention to the fulness of the revelation of the divine mind in Christ personally.

S.D.K.R. In Isaiah 11 it says "And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall be fruitful; and the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah" (vv 1,2). I wondered if the Spirit of Jehovah resting upon Him is like the lamp, the top, and then there were three branches coming out of each side - the moral excellence of the Lord Jesus.

C.R.B. The Spirit seems to delight to draw attention in the prophets to Christ as the Branch. It comes in again in the days of recovery in Zechariah. There seems to be a certain link with Christ as the root and the offspring of David. As the Branch He comes in to ensure the working out of every detail of divine counsel, but then the Spirit of Jehovah resting upon Him brings in all the resources that are needed in the testimony. Days of breakdown are not intended to bring out weakness but to give God opportunity to show what infinite resources He has available to us in the Spirit.

S.D.K.R. Would that be confirmed in Zechariah where we get the lamp-stand in a day of revival and recovery? In the footnote it says

there are seven lamps and seven pipes to each lamp (see chap 4: 2).

C.R.B. You mean the principle of perfection is always maintained?

S.D.K.R. Yes, and adequate power in the Spirit to maintain the testimony in a day of breakdown.

C.R.B. And it works out by way of enlargement in the hearts of the saints, because one of the features that marks Zechariah is that they were emptying the gold out of themselves. It is love finding expression in a way which is fully in accord with the divine glory. The liberty of sonship is something which is normal to Christians.

A.B.P. Would there be any analogy between the seven golden lamps and the way Revelation brings in seven times "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says"? The seven assemblies are like the sphere of the Spirit's service.

C.R.B. And the Lord moving amidst the seven golden lamps?

A.B.P. Yes, and the presentation of Him at the commencement of each letter. It is the ministry in the power of the Spirit that is drawing attention to Christ and endeavouring to correct departure in the saints in view of overcomers reaching the true light that should be shining.

C.R.B. The Lord presents Himself to each assembly in the particular feature of glory which is directly related to what needed either help or strengthening in that local assembly. So to each of them He says "I know" as conscious of just what was needed. He presents Himself as fully in touch with what was proceeding in every assembly, and He brings in just what was needed to bring that local assembly to what was His own thought for it.

G.D.P. Last week we were noticing the footnote to the word "lightest" - 'cause to ascend'. It is an upward thought from this exalted position of ascension - He who has ascended up above all the heavens.

C.R.B. God always works from the top. Our natural minds always try and work from the bottom. As God works from the top, the

response is to the top.

E.E.H. Do you think that, in his first address, Peter was the lamp shining over against the candlestick? He focuses the attention on that glorious Man: "God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ", Acts 2: 36. That was an instance of the lamp shining. It is intended to light up the candlestick; the Levites are intended to be in relation to that.

C.R.B. So whilst Peter and the others from their own experience could witness to the fact that Christ had actually risen from among the dead, they were dependent on the witness of the Spirit as having come down from heaven that He had been made Lord and Christ. The Spirit was functioning directly through Peter as drawing attention to the exaltation of Christ. Everything that was going to follow from that moment until the rapture was to proceed in the power of the Spirit under the touch of a Man who had ascended up far above all the heavens and had been made Lord and Christ.

J.A.P. Following Peter's ministry a Levite was affected. It says "And Joseph, who had been surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is, being interpreted, Son of consolation), a Levite, Cyprian by birth, being possessed of land, having sold it, brought the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles", Acts 4: 36,37. That is a fine thing when the Levites are affected by ministry of Christ, as it would seem here in our chapter: it begins with Christ and then the Levites are to be affected by that.

C.R.B. And that man was a good man who was caught up in the spirit of giving; he not only gave himself (which is the first thing of course) but he gave what he had. The spirit of giving is not to be limited to the special collection; it is characteristic of persons who are affected by the giving of Christ. A great line of preservation in the testimony is to be kept as honouring the preciousness of the blood of Jesus and all that flows out of it.

E.T.M. Do you think then that the spirit of Barnabas in his giving would be like the two olive trees? I wondered whether emptying the

gold out of themselves does not suggest a certain liberality. It is acting like God in response to the light that comes from God.

C.R.B. As that spirit was found with Barnabas he was given a distinctive place in the testimony, because he was used of God to bring Saul of Tarsus into activity. The fact that he later failed reminds us of how we need to be preserved, but he was obviously recovered in due course. The way that Paul refers to him shows that he was fully back in the service.

E.T.M. It would seem as though there was a continuous extension of that liberal way of giving. So he would seek out the best for the saints to respond to God in the way that God has come out in Christ.

C.R.B. He had some impression of what the Lord had in mind in the distinctiveness of the gift entrusted to Saul of Tarsus. He was in the spirit of giving himself and so he got some impression of what had been given by Christ and the distinctiveness of Paul as a man who was going to complete the word of God.

E.E.H. Tell us something about the purpose of waving these Levites before Jehovah: "And thou shalt bring the Levites before Jehovah; and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites. And Aaron shall offer the Levites as a wave-offering before Jehovah from the children of Israel".

C.R.B. Christ would always be the perfect waveoffering. The thought of a wave-offering is that you can dwell upon some impression of what Christ means to the Father. It is not only what He was here as the heavens opened and the Father's voice was heard, but what the Firstborn is to the Father at the present time. We were referring last night to the glory of the Firstborn in the very presence of the Father and yet the wonder of divine love is that we are able to be alongside Christ, associated with Him in His glory and at home in the presence of the divine glory. Do you think the thought of the wave-offering here in connection with the Levites means that we are to take on something of the feelings of Christ as to the pleasure of the Father? Christ served as having in His heart wonderful thoughts

in relation to arriving at what was pleasing to the Father. The wave-offering would show that the saints are taking on something of that.

E.E.H. I thought that the act as they were waved before Jehovah was pleasing to Him. It is not so much the Levites lighting up the lamps but it is for Jehovah's pleasure.

C.R.B. Yes; we must have the candlestick first. It is wise to cling to what beloved Mr Raven said: 'the Lord is where the truth is' (Vol.5, p.123). We cannot reverse that. If you try and find out where the Lord is and ignore the question of the truth you will get into trouble. The great matter is to find where the truth is being held and then you are sure the Lord is there. You must have the candlestick first and then you can be sure of the divine presence supporting you.

J.A.P. Peter is careful to say "by faith in his name, his name has made this man strong", Acts 3: 16. That was the truth; it is not in our power but in the power of that name.

C.R.B. And that immediately directs an person, who is prepared to make way for the truth, to Christ where He is at the present time. "His Name" involves Christ exalted, but what is maintained here by the power of the Spirit is in keeping with Him.

A.S.H. These Levites were available. Would you say something as to the process through which they had to pass before they could enter into service. There was the water of purification from sin, and cleansing their garments and various things they had to pass through.

C.R.B. The first section would remind us of the Spirit of truth in relation to the candlestick; what follows would remind us of the Spirit as the Holy Spirit. If we are to find liberty in approach to God it is only in the power of One who is infinitely holy, the Holy Spirit. These purifying processes have to be operating amongst us all the time. It is not that we go on according to our own will for six days in the week and then prove ourselves in view of taking part in the Supper. "Let a man prove himself" is to be marking us all the time. We want to be always morally under the touch of the Holy Spirit, who would

remind us of the penetration of the word of the cross, so that we are always ready to go into the presence of God.

A.B.P. Passing the razor over all his flesh - we may only do it in self-judgment where the beard is rather stiff, but this is over the whole flesh; every part of the body has to have every expression or every issue that comes from the flesh removed.

C.R.B. Does it bring out the wonderful way in which the Holy Spirit helps us not to be occupied with ourselves but to be able to judge ourselves and all that flows from what we are according to the flesh. The hair would speak of what has its source in the flesh. The Spirit helps us to judge all that and to find that it has its roots in the flesh which can never please God. But the result of it is that we get through to some fresh appreciation of Christ as the wave-offering.

A.B.P. So that you would assume from what is said that this is only done once; it was not a continual thing.

C.R.B. That would be so. Yet in working it out with ourselves we find that we constantly have to be coming back to this judgment.

A.B.P. Would that not be like the maintenance of the judgment?

C.R.B. Yes, just so.

B.T. I was struck with a word in the preaching last Lord's day that the Lord was not vindictive. I suppose the razor should go over us in that respect because that is something we may not easily judge. We might say, That brother was very bad and still is, and there may be some vindictiveness there too that we could judge.

C.R.B. That is important. The whole setting here is in relation to the death of Christ typically. The more impressions I get of the death of Christ and the more I marvel at the mercy which has brought me into the liberty of approaching God, the more would I be preserved from going beyond God's judgment of anyone else. We would be very careful how we judge anyone else and we would seek to be with the Spirit in the way that He would value His own work in everyone. If we value the work of God in one another we shall not unduly dwell on features that may need to be corrected, but we shall dwell on the

positive character of the work of God. You cannot be vindictive if you are looking that way. You may find something in someone that may need to be judged, but you find in yourself either that thing even more fully developed or certainly the possibility that it could be. The word of the cross would keep us very humble and prevent us from being vindictive. Is that right?

B.T. Yes. There were those around the cross who deserved to be judged, yet the Lord was not vindictive.

A.B.P. The principle of a homoeopathic doctor's treatment (if I understand it rightly) is to fortify and strengthen the body so that its own healing capacity and quality may be developed; the body does the healing. Is that not a great thing if we can bring about in persons not just a do-and-don't system but bring in the positive side so that the constitution is built up and is able to deal with irregularities and evil.

C.R.B. The Samaritan pouring in the oil and the wine was not giving homoeopathic doses but it resulted in the man being restored. He was only half alive before but he became fully alive when he was cared for in the inn.

A.B.P. There are some treatments where you have to get over the disease and then you have to get over the effect of the medication. But when Peter was adjusted on the mount there was not any sequential problem at all, his soul was filled with glory.

G.D.P. "Each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ", Eph.4: 7. Would that link in any way with the wave-offering - the appreciation of the saints?

C.R.B. Yes, I think so. It brings out that what is of God is the way in which what is for God is to be maintained by every one of us. It is no doubt instructive that in Ephesians 4 the apostle, after referring to the giving of grace to each one, says "Wherefore he says..." as though he is directly connecting it with the freeing of captives. But in the Psalm, what precedes the freeing of captives is "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, thousands upon thousands", Ps 68: 17. The saints really are chariots of God, preserved because grace has

been given to each chariot to be maintained in movement. Although it would seem that it did not function in practice due to the frailty of the flesh, the service of God was intended to be carried through the wilderness in powerful movement in chariots of God. It does not seem that Moses had any pattern of chariots, but David had the pattern of the chariot of the cherubim of gold, as though God was going to preserve the principle of powerful movement in relation to the flowing forward of the service of God in song. In 1 Chronicles 28: 18,19, reference is made to "the pattern of the chariot of the cherubim of gold, which spread out their wings and cover the ark of the covenant of Jehovah. All this said David, in writing, by Jehovah's hand upon me, instructing as to all the works of the pattern".

A.B.P. There is the mercy-seat; the cherubim were a part of it, fashioned out of it and overshadowing it. Would the chariot be like the seat of God's government?

C.R.B. Yes, I think so. And does it involve what is upward, because it comes in again in connection with Elisha seeing Elijah go up by a whirlwind: "the chariot of Israel and the horses thereof", 2 Kings 2: 12. Is that the principle of the chariot which is going to carry up everything, not according to man's standard but according to God's standard. The cherubim were of gold.

A.B.P. It seems to me that the idea of the chariot relates to the seat of government, that it is not simply a quiescent matter but something in active and powerful movement.

C.R.B. It will be seen in the millennium in one Man judging the habitable earth in righteousness (see Acts 17: 31), but seen eternally in the day of God, for God always retains what is according to His own supremacy.

J.A.P. The Levites would never forget this matter of cleansing. That is where there has been departure, when we got away from that line of things. The next thing was "And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tent of meeting; and thou shalt gather together the whole assembly". That is another matter we need to be encouraged in,

getting together, to honour the assembly whenever convened and to be there. A Levite would take the lead in that.

C.R.B. That is important. Levites here of course are somewhat distinct from the priests but as they get nearer the land the priests and the Levites become pretty much identified in the book of Deuteronomy, so that a Levite would take on the power to consider for God in every circumstance. That is to mark us, both as priests and as sons. As we consider for God, God sees to everything else; the main matter is to consider for God, and it is to be by maintaining in the spirit of unity what is of God. The name Levite would remind us of the need of unity.

S.D.K.R. Would the Levites as being offered as a wave-offering be linked up with Christ Himself? I was noticing in Leviticus 8: 26,27 it says, "he took one unleavened cake, and a cake of oiled bread, and one wafer, and put them on the fat and upon the right shoulder; and he gave all into Aaron's hands". The note says about the wave-offering that it is more 'consecration'. Would the service be taken up by the Spirit in the spirit in which Christ served and the energy of that service?

C.R.B. So that it really involves the formation of Christ in us. When difficulties had come in among the assemblies of Galatia which would have hindered the service of God, Paul brings in that his own exercise with God was that Christ might be formed in them. We have been instructed that that is a collective reference, that the assemblies of Galatia would be recovered to the true liberty of sonship as Christ was formed in them collectively. What is going to result in the maintenance of liberty amongst us according to God is that Christ is formed in us collectively, that is the working out of the truth of the body of Christ in actual spiritual formation.

S.D.K.R. And would Christ be formed collectively as we are occupied with Himself and His own sacrifice and how pleasing that was to God?

C.R.B. That seems to be why in this chapter God connects it back with the day "that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt". Every

household of the Israelites was to have the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and every firstborn lived only on the basis of the preciousness of the lamb that was slain. The result is that the service of God is secured on the principle of the firstborn had died there would have been no service of God.

S.D.K R. So it says "the assembly of the firstborn", Heb 12: 23.

B.T. You cannot think of waving anything else but Christ before God, it would be an affront.

E.T.M. That would synchronise with the thought of worshippers. The emphasis, as you know, is on worshippers, persons are more pleasurable to God than the service that is being rendered.

C.R.B. Would worshippers "in spirit and truth" (John 4: 23) be the working out of this chapter?

E.T.M. I wondered about that. It seems to focus on the character of persons that are before God.

A.B.P. Is not the waving intended to attract God's attention? With these persons who had the razor pass over all their flesh, and had gone through this procedure, there would be something for God to take account of that would be distinctive. It would be a test to us if we felt that we were being waved before God. What would God find in us?

H.C.MacG. The wave-offering is what God sees and the other offerings perhaps what He smells. They are both delightful.

C.R.B. Might it come out in spiritual experience in a meeting of this character? It is not limited to the service of God on the Lord's day. As we may be helped together in the light of the temple to speak over the perfections of Christ, what Christ was and what Christ is to the Father, we might be conscious in our own spirits of the thought of the wave-offering, that God is pleased. So that we come to the end of the occasion as worshippers in spirit and truth, as having taken on something of the character of the waveoffering itself.

A.B.P. In principle would it be seen in Barnabas taking Saul and presenting him to the apostles?

C.R.B. That would be in some sense the special distinction that Barnabas had as a result of the feature of giving which marked him, after the presentation of the truth.

A.B.P. He could tell the apostles how Saul had seen the Lord in the way, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. These were features of a totally changed man, such a difference from what he was when he started on the way to Damascus.

E.T.M. Should that not be an encouragement to us in this day when there is such brokenness and confusion? If, by selection, the saints were to have the best in the beginning, it ought to be the same in the end.

C.R.B. The presence of the Spirit here ensures that it will be the best.

BROOKLYN NY

11 April 1974

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GOD'S THOUGHTS GOING THROUGH

1 Corinthians 1: 1-9; 5: 7,8; 10: 14-22; 11: 23-26

W.L. I wondered if we might get some help together to see how God's thoughts are going through. They will go through. We can encourage and comfort ourselves in that. I read from Corinthians that we might see that God's thoughts are going through in local assemblies, not only in individuals but set out and going through to the end in local assemblies. Someone might say, There is no assembly in Corinth now. That is perfectly true. But there is an assembly here, in this place and there are local assemblies in other places. Why there is no assembly testimony in Corinth and in many other places would be something to exercise us, but our main concern would be that there is a local assembly here and in the places where we reside. At the beginning of Luke, John the baptist drew the attention of some Jews to the fact that "God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham", chap 3: 8. So God is going to see His own thoughts through. As we know, in the first nine verses the truth is set out abstractly, but it goes right through to the Lord's supper, which is the bridge between the wilderness and the land, as we have been taught.

J.M. We have just begun reading this epistle locally with that in mind, that the truth is going through in local companies.

W.L. As we were saying, there is now no local meeting where Corinth was. We think of the history on the Continent, where Mr Darby laboured for so long; these things are all in the Lord 's hands. What we go on with is that there is a local assembly here. Then we do not forget what is universal. Paul says "with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours". That is a comfort.

A.A.B. All these places have the same attachment to Christ and to one another. Does what you have mentioned as to God's thoughts going through in a place indicate that what is collective and what is

for Christ is to be maintained? If the Corinthians had maintained Paul's injunctions there would still be a gathering at Corinth.

W.L. It is incumbent upon us to maintain what is for God. Our responsibility is to see that God's thoughts are maintained at their highest level. God is not lowering His standard to accommodate anyone. He is going to maintain His standard. The trouble at Corinth was, as has always been the trouble since then, that features which marked that city (a city of wicked idolatry) were infiltrating the assembly. It is the same in our day, but it is our duty to see that what marks the world around does not find its place in our local meetings or in ourselves.

J.M. The expression "the assembly of God" involves that, does it not? It is a dignified idea.

W.L. That is a fine expression: "the assembly of God". We know, of course, that we approach the Corinthian epistle through the side of things that Paul gives to Timothy as to the broken day, but we do not take our bearings from the breakdown; we take our bearings from God's thoughts. There is a fine expression in Acts 18 (v 22): Paul "saluted the assembly". Perhaps he had that in mind here when he refers to "all that in every place". So far as I recollect, there are almost twelve meetings referred to in that chapter (Acts 18), Corinth being one of them. Paul, as we know, brings in this idea of saluting persons in chapter 16 of Romans. I think that is one lesson the Lord has taught us very forcibly: to view all the brethren with respect and esteem.

A.A.B. There is a dignity in "those sanctified in Christ Jesus", saints by divine calling, called out of the world. You have been speaking about what marked Corinth; they had been called out of that. This is presented in an abstract way but it is nevertheless real. Paul means what he says here.

W.L. He does indeed. The assembly of God stands in complete contrast to everything that is down here. There is no link between the assembly of God and the world. It is composed of called-out persons. When we come into an atmosphere like this we leave the

world behind, every feature of it. We shall see in chapter 10 that Paul teaches us that the believer cannot do what he likes in the world, and in chapter 14 that the believer cannot do what he likes in the assembly.

R.S.R. So Paul, in going to Corinth, did not add anything to the architecture. He wrought as a tent-maker, which would be over against man's ideas.

W.L. Paul did not regard the worldly Corinthian side of things at all. What he was concerned about was "the assembly of God which is in Corinth". That was Paul's main occupation. Other things would not be of much interest to Paul.

J.Sn. Do you think it was the truth substantially in persons in Corinth that gave the apostle, warrant for using this designation "the assembly of God"?

W.L. Yes, we are to be persons who are characteristically such. We know we cannot claim this formally, we are not suggesting that; but let us be the thing without claiming it, and conduct ourselves in the dignity of it.

W.S. It is what God can claim in any place, not our claim. Mr Darby said that if we are separated to the truth, God may morally regard us as the assembly of God in a place.

W.L. It is important to see that, that we do not need to claim the thing; but if it is there, it is there, and it can be recognised by heaven. To say otherwise is really an affront to the Spirit of God, because that is His mission, to maintain what is down here according to God's highest thoughts. We might see certain significant features here. Paul introduces himself as a called apostle of Jesus Christ, but alongside of that he brings in Sosthenes the brother. Now brotherliness is a very important feature in any local meeting.

A.A.B. Would it be the brotherly touch along with the authority of the apostle?

W.L. In Exodus 4 God said to Moses "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother?" (v 14). These things must go side by side. These

relations we should value very highly. In a local meeting it is a question of relationships, persons who are in holy relationship with one another and in holy relationship with God. That is what constitutes the assembly of God morally in any place.

J.S. Does not the Lord refer to that: "By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves", John 13: 35? It is one of the main features of the testimony, is it not?

W.L. That is very important. Publicly everything is in ruin, but that does not alter the fact that there should be the testimony you speak of. It must be seen. That is the point here in Corinth. It is not our privileges in the heavenlies in Christ, it is what we are in responsibility down here. People should be able to take account of the relationships of the saints together.

J.M. As well as the abstract side, there is what is concrete. While, as you say, we cannot claim anything, the thing is there.

W.L. In Genesis, where they *began* to call on the name of Jehovah after Enosh was born (meaning 'weak, mortal'), it would be the dependent side. Here, "calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" in our places would be our dependence upon Him for what transpires, and for the prosperity of our local meetings.

R.J.C. It says in that section in Acts that "the heart and soul of the multitude of those that had believed were one", chap 4: 32. I wondered whether dependence on divine Persons makes us more dependent on one another, and that helps in the working out of things. The kings at Corinth would not be dependent persons. Was that really where the disruption came in?

W.L. These relationships are maintained by persons who compose the local meeting. If the enemy has been at anything, it is to disrupt relationships between brethren in local meetings.

A.A.B. So the truth has to be laid down (the side of the apostle) but the working out of the truth depends on these brotherly links being maintained intact. The expression of that makes the truth attractive

and you have a sphere of eternal life, of which others can take account, and indeed could be drawn into.

W.L. The truth is not worked out abstractly. It is worked out subjectively, together, in the light of these most blessed relationships that are altogether apart from the world. Then Paul brings in this touch "with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours". If ever, dear brethren, there was a day when we need to call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ it is today. In 2 Timothy we know that initially the word is to "every one who names the name of the Lord", chap 2: 19. That would be more a question of profession; but then it goes on to "those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". That would be sanctified persons.

D.L.S. It links with Matthew 18: "gathered together unto my name", (v 20). In that section in Matthew there are persons who are "agreed on the earth". They are really calling on His name, are they not?

W.L. We did not go on to verse 10 of 1 Corinthians 1, but Paul exhorts them "that ye be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same opinion". A king is determined to have his way but persons who know these brotherly features are prepared to submit themselves to one another. That is how the truth is worked out locally.

R.J.C. The least esteemed in Corinth were working out the truth as to the assembly.

W.L. We have had to revise our values. Paul saluted the assembly. They may be insignificant persons in the eyes of the world and perhaps they have been insignificant in our eyes, but to get the divine valuation of the brethren is a very real exercise.

J.G. Does the viewing of the saints from the side of these verses help us in respect for them? Paul says "I thank my God always about you, in respect of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus". He is viewing them from the divine side. It helps in respect when he has to come down to the practical matters that work out in the book.

W.L. To get a valuation of the saints in the presence of God is really a very important exercise.

J.G. Although it is abstract from one point of view yet when the letter was read to Corinth it mean something to them that Paul had regard for them in this way, before he touched other matters.

W.L. He saw, in some at least, that there was the answer to what was in God's thoughts for them, and he was labouring to get them all round to that.

A.A.B. What would you understand by "the fellowship of His Son"? Is it more than what is local?

W.L. I think so. The expression of it would be local as well as universal, but it has a very wide bearing. We could not limit it, but we have been called into that. Our duty is to be faithful to it. God is faithful to it. That is the point of this verse. It is not exactly God's faithfulness to us, it is God's faithfulness in regard to His own thoughts about the fellowship of His Son.

A.A.B. Therefore the title "Jesus Christ our Lord" would bring in His authority.

W.L. And that must be maintained in every place. It is not that we are going to fall into any arbitrary application of things, but it is as we are each one exercised. Fellowship is a mutual thing, partnership. It is not that I impose my will on you, or you impose your will on me. It is that we are both persons who have our faces set to maintain what is due to God, proper to the dignity of the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

R.S.R. A right understanding of this would preclude every other fellowship and association of men as quite beneath us.

W.L. It is an exclusive thought, and persons who have been called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord have the greatest possible dignity conferred on them.

R.S.R. Throughout the epistle we should carry in mind these two expressions: "the assembly of God which is in Corinth" and "by

whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord".

W.L. In spite of what may have come in at Corinth Paul maintained this attitude towards them right through the whole epistle. That is what they *were*. In chapter 3 he says "ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (v.16); in chapter 5 "according as ye are unleavened" (v 7). These are great abstract thoughts and Paul was seeking that they in their conduct might be consistent with them. The dignity of things must be maintained with us, no matter how few or how many we are. We have the greatest privilege possible to have been called into the fellowship of God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

H.F. Do these names of the Lord, "our Lord Jesus Christ" and "Jesus Christ our Lord", involve also an appeal to our affections? There is dignity in the idea of "the assembly of God" but how have we been called into it? Is it not through this same blessed One? "The name of our Lord Jesus Christ" would give us a desire towards His name and His memorial as Isaiah speaks of it (see chap 26: 8).

W.L. Earlier he speaks of them having been enriched "in all word of doctrine, and all knowledge... so that ye come short in no gift", but he finally makes an appeal to their affections. He teaches us in this epistle (chap 13) that no matter if we have all these things but have not love we are nothing.

D.L.S. It is really what God has done, He has called. He has done this for Himself, for the working out of His own thoughts.

W.L. It is important to see the bearing of this verse. It is what God has done for His own pleasure and He is going to be faithful to that.

D.L.S. He is not going to lower the standard of that fellowship.

W.L. We should see that from this epistle. He is not going to lower His standard to accommodate anyone; and His standard is to be maintained in local meetings, no matter where they are. I believe that is the most important exercise of the present time, to maintain God's standard according to His thoughts, not according to how we

think things ought to be. Then the Lord's supper is partaken of in a proper way, and that opens up the gateway to the whole service of God.

J.M. An understanding of this would cut out any idea of different fellowships. There is only one fellowship.

W.L. That is the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now the test for us is, are we consistent in our conduct with it?

J.G. There is a verse in 2 Timothy 2 which would challenge us in the same way: "if we deny, *he* also will deny us; if we are unfaithful, *he* abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (v 13). It is a feature that belongs to divine Persons.

W.L. God is going to see to it that His own thoughts are going through, although any one of us may fall by the wayside.

T.M. Verse 8 says "who shall also confirm you to the end". Do you think we should look for divine approval?

W.L. That verse goes on to say "unimpeachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ". We should be exercised, in our local meetings and as individuals, that we should be unimpeachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

W.S. The standard is one thing, the answering to the standard is morally greater. God is looking for the answer. You cannot be a testimony for God in any place unless your testimony is blameless.

W.L. That is why we read in chapter 5 and chapter 10. "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, according as ye are unleavened". That is the standard, but Paul is saying, Be sure that by your actions you are according to that standard. We are responsible to be in our places as God would have us there. What is the value of our testimony otherwise?

A.A.B. "The unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" would have to be maintained constantly by us. Purging out the old leaven would be done in a certain way. The new lump is in view but it is "according as ye are unleavened".

W.L. I thought we should see in these passages that no matter what Paul has to say to them he constantly brings the standard before them, as if to say, God is not going to depart from that. In spite of your state and what has come in by way of failure and break down, God is not departing from His thoughts. Now Paul is saying to them, This is the way to be practically in keeping with these thoughts.

R.J.C. Is that why he uses the word 'celebrate' here? He raises the standard and then appeals to the saints to rise to that. He does not just say 'keep the feast' but "let us celebrate the feast", as if, in realising what the divine standard is, we are happy to enter into this passover.

W.L. That raises another challenge. Are we on the line of celebration, in ourselves and in our meetings? Or are we so bogged down by one thing after another that has happened? Naturally that would be so, but we can celebrate.

R.J.C. Perhaps in the past there was an attempt to reach divine thoughts legally. Divine thoughts are still there but we should set out in our affections to reach them.

W.L. God is appealing to our affections in this day of promiscuous affection in every way, even religiously. Christ our passover has been sacrificed. That affects the heart of any true believer.

J.H. In 2 Timothy 4: 20 it says "Erastus remained in Corinth". Does that have a bearing on what you are emphasising, that the faithful, devoted element and the working out of things in the local position would go down to the end?

W.L. These persons are spoken of as examples to us of persons who were prepared at any cost to be for the Lord in places where they were local. It is a great need today. The Lord is appealing to the affections of all of us, old and young, to be here for Him.

A.A.B. Do you think that the feature of transparency in a locality is something that is maintained in this way? So that right relations are preserved amongst the brethren.

W.L. I have often been impressed by the reference in Revelation to the company that stood upon the sea of glass (see chap 15: 2). Nothing could be hidden there. If our conduct is in keeping with God's standard there is nothing to hide.

A.A.B. This is a feast, not a fast. Joy comes into it. It would no doubt cost us something individually, because suffering comes into it, but it is a celebration. In the company collectively there is joy.

W.L. I am sure we have touched something of this celebration, especially recently, as we see God's thoughts and get into line with them.

Chapter 10 is a great preservative chapter, bearing on the holy area of the celebration of the Lord 's supper. It teaches us that the believer cannot do as he wishes in the world. He cannot link on with things in the world. There is a clear barrier between the believer and the world. Here is another appeal to our affections: "the communion of the blood of the Christ". There is a link between that and what we had in chapter 5: "our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed". These things are to touch us in our affections and to make us answer in our responsibility.

D.M. In the Gospels the passover is linked with the Supper. Here there are chapters intervening. Is there something to understand in that as to the passover and the celebration? Certain exercises hinder the two coming together. It says "And as they were eating" (Matt 26: 26), as though they were marked by sincerity and truth in view of the Supper.

W.L. The flesh is the trouble. The Israelites had to eat the passover with bitter herbs (see Exod 12: 8); it was to teach them that the flesh in them was no different from the flesh in the Egyptians. Chapter 10 here is the great preservative chapter so that things should be right for the holy celebration of the Lord's supper.

H.F. Herbs bring out the fact that I needed such a Saviour, and yet would they not bring out the savour of the lamb itself?

W.L. It would bring the preciousness of the lamb and the savour of it into relief in contradistinction to the bitter herbs.

H.F. You spoke of the triumph of God. God is happy with a people delivered out of Egypt. There is to be no return to Egypt.

W.L. There can be no return to it. The sea came back again. The Egyptians were dead on the sea shore. In the hymn we sang there was a reference to the Spirit being with us throughout the night (no 288). In chapter 11 Paul speaks of "the night in which he was delivered up". We are in very dark conditions, and we break bread in the wilderness in the midst of these very conditions. We know that the Supper is the link between the wilderness and the land, but we actually break bread in the wilderness.

D.L.S. In chapter 10 he speaks too of idolatry. It is just what characterises the whole scene around us, religiously and in every other way: darkness, as you say.

W.L. What fellowship has light with darkness? (see 2 Cor 6: 14). All around are these night conditions. How morally dreadful they are! How physically dreadful they are! Think of the attempts being made in this country, which has been one of the last bastions of outward preservation of the Lord's day, to throw all that overboard: *the night* in which He was delivered up.

J.Sn. Is that an encouragement for us in days which are dark and difficult, morally and in every way? Would it remind us of the darkest time in the history of the race, that time when He was delivered up?

W.L. In one sense there never was a darker day than the time when Christ was crucified. Here it is "the night in which he was delivered up". That was the betrayal. We learn from the Psalms how the Lord felt that - "mine own familiar friend", Ps 41: 9.

J.Sn. However dark things get, you are reminded of a time when things were darker. That is practically a help to us as to how things are going through. Things were not finished because He was delivered up. Things have gone through from that point.

W.L. This reference is made in connection with what Paul received from glory. Paul had the presentation of the Supper distinctly from an ascended Christ. One thing we can be thankful to God for is that all through these centuries, through all the breakdown, the Supper in its purity and simplicity has been preserved to us.

J.S. To refer again to the night, the Lord said "this is your hour and the power of darkness", Luke 22: 53. Paul would have them get a moral understanding of what that was, so that they would understand what this hour would mean in a positive sense. Love's hour, is it not, the time of the Supper?

W.L. That is my exercise. What a lever to the soul of a person in whom there is a work of God: "This is my body, which is for you". Elsewhere it is "which is given for you", Luke 22: 19. Here it is for our appropriation.

D.L.S. Is the Supper then the key to the means by which God's thoughts are going through in a collective way? I was thinking of what you referred to in chapter 1, "the assembly of God". The Supper would link with that as a representation of the assembly, would it not?

W.L. The great thought of God is that the Lord's supper should be maintained, and everything in the economy of local assemblies (we break bread locally) revolves around and flows out of the Lord's supper.

J.B. Would the Spirit be jealous of conditions being secured in view of the Supper?

W.L. The Lord is in heaven and the Spirit is down here. He has served so long and so faithfully in view of the maintenance of these conditions. Our hearts should go out to the Spirit of God in thankfulness for the way in which things have been maintained.

W.S. "Which I delivered to you". This had happened previously but something had come in in between. Think of all Mr Taylor sen's ministry as to the Supper and the assembly and what has come in in between! The Lord would bring us back to the fulness of it.

R.G. Will you say something about remembrance coming in twice here? Remembrance is more than just the formality of partaking of the Supper, is it not?

W.L. We are not remembering failure when we come together at the Supper. "For remembrance of me"; it is Christ that is the great object.

J.M. The darker the night, the more the need for the remembrance. Any suggestion as to giving up the Supper is not according to the truth.

W.L. No, it is of the enemy. The references to the bright and morning Star, the Sun of righteousness arising with healing in His wings, come to mind, over against the "night in which he was delivered up". What a day it will be when it is no longer remembrance but the actuality of His presence!

GRANGEMOUTH

19 January 1974

Key to initials

J.B. J.Boyd Airdrie; A.A.B. A.A.Brown Grangemouth; R.J.C. R.J.Campbell Glasgow;

H.F. H.Fentiman Grangemouth; J.G. J.Gray Edinburgh; R.G. R.Gray Saltcoats;

J.H. J.Harthill Glasgow; W. L. W.Lamont Cumnock; D.M. D.Melvin Kilmarnock;

J.M. Jas.Munro Grangemouth T.M. T.Munro Grangemouth; R.S.R. R.S.Renton Edinburgh; D.L.S. D.L.Stewart Edinburgh; J.S. J.Spinks Grangemouth J.Sn. J.Strachan Dundee; W.S. W.Somerville Coatbridge

DEVOTEDNESS

W.Lamont

Luke 9: 5 1-6 2; Acts 9: 1-8; 2 Corinthians 11: 2,3

I should like to say a word about devotedness. It is a relatively easy thing to speak about, but it is much more difficult to *be* devoted. There is a great need in the testimony today of persons who are devoted, that is, persons who commit themselves wholeheartedly to the things of Christ. That challenge comes to each of us. I believe the Spirit of God would challenge each one of us in his own heart: Am I wholly devoted to the interests of Christ down here? Oh, dear brethren, He has fully given Himself! Think of the great types in the Old Testament, particularly in Genesis 22, where in effect God says to Abraham that your son will be spared but my own beloved Son will be delivered up. We have the figure of the ram there, "a ram caught in the thicket by its horns" (v 13), a great type of the Lord Jesus as devoted to the will of God. What an example! a blessed Man who was here entirely devoted in every moment of His life, day and night, to the will of His God. These are very interesting things to pursue in type, and to see the perfect antitype in the Person of Christ Himself - that ram could not go free.

Then there is the type of the Hebrew bondman who says "I love my master, my wife and my children, I will not go free", Exod 21: 5. Even if he could have gone free, as he could have done, he commits himself unreservedly and says "I will not go free". Think of these two types, the one who *could* not go free, and the blessed Man who, in type, says I *will* not go free. Why? Because He loved His master, His wife and His children. The spring of devotedness is in the affections. I believe that where we are most defective is in our affections. There is plenty of intelligence, plenty of knowledge, but I believe today the Lord is appealing to our affections. In the addresses to the churches in Revelation, one thing that stands out above all else is the sense that the Lord Jesus is appealing to the affections. There is a great need today for young brothers and sisters, especially those who have a household, and for all of us, to

be completely devoted to the interests of Christ in the places where we are local. As I said, the great example for us all is in the Lord Jesus Himself. "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will", Heb 10: 7. It does the soul good to contemplate that blessed Man in all His wondrous perfection. Then the test is for us.

In Luke 9 there are persons with different motives and different views of things. The Lord Jesus speaks to them and says "Follow me". I think the Lord is saying that to us today. What He is saying is simple; Christianity is very simple; there is nothing complicated about it, it is very simple when the affections are right. That is the key to everything, dear brethren. When Christ is our object the problems recede and everything is in proper perspective as you have your gaze fixed on the blessed Man who fills the presence of God. In this passage in Luke He was going towards Jerusalem, His face set steadfastly. Now, in our time, He is in the presence of God, for us. As we move about, come to meetings, do our daily toil, how often do we pause and consider that there is a Man in the presence of God? That settles everything, to know that there is a Man in the presence of God who has been through death, has shattered its power, has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father and is seated in the presence of God, crowned with glory and honour. That is triumphant! We ought to live our lives and move here in the light of the fact that there is a Man in heaven, in the presence of God, and the Spirit is down here to make that good in the way of enjoyment to every heart.

The Lord here in Luke 9 steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. What was in view there? What awaited Him there? Betrayal, suffering, rejection and crucifixion - that is what awaited the blessed Saviour in Jerusalem. Yet He steadfastly set His face to go towards it. We do not know what lies before us, dear brethren. But the Lord Jesus moved forward here in the full knowledge of what lay before Him. He knew He was going up to Jerusalem to be delivered up, to be crucified. He knew He was going to die and yet He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. What an example of

complete devotedness! Devotedness with Christ was no partial matter. Some of us may think we can devote ourselves on the Lord's day, devote ourselves on the meeting nights, devote ourselves to go to a fellowship meeting, and then the rest of the time is our own to do as we wish. Oh no, dear brethren, the fellowship of God's Son involves that we ought to be devoted to the interests of Christ every moment of our lives. That is very challenging. I do not think the Lord here is suggesting that anyone should be disqualified, but He is raising the challenge. "Jesus said to him, no one having laid his hand on the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God". I think the question of our fitness for the testimony is very important today. I believe the Lord would challenge every one of us as to our fitness for our part in the testimony here. I know the teaching of it, but the suggestion in it is, How devoted are we, how committed are we? The ploughman keeps his eyes straight ahead, and that is the secret of a straight furrow, not looking back to see what kind of furrow you have made! There is no suggestion of any side alleys, of any diversion - that is no use in ploughing. It must be straight forward. As we have been saying, the great example is in the Lord Himself.

In Acts 9 a great example is seen in Paul, a man who was devoted to the interests of Christ. He could say "I have combated the good combat, I have finished the race", 2 Tim 4: 7. From the time of his conversion to the end of his days he was a man who was totally devoted to the interests of Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself was a perfect Man, and He was devoted in perfection, but we can also refer to persons like Paul and others. Scripture abounds with examples of persons who devoted themselves to Christ and His interests here. We could speak of many, but I chose these passages particularly. "Saul, still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord". He was on a course of things. How many of us have been on a wrong course? Some of us have done things, said things, maybe wrong things, but how dreadful to set yourself on a course! What a distinction in the Lord - He set Himself definitely in relation to the will of God. Paul *thought* he was

doing the will of God and he was going forth breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. It may be that the Lord would arrest us even at a time like this, and speak to our affections and halt us. That is what He did with Saul of Tarsus. He just stopped him in his tracks, as it were. His mind was made up to go on a certain course. Oh, young people, do not set your mind to go into the world. The Lord would use an occasion like this to arrest you, to appeal to your affections. The need for young persons in the testimony is great, young people who commit themselves to the interests of the blessed Lord from their early days until the finish of their course here. Oh that we might convey something of the feelings of divine Persons at a time like this. The Lord yearns after all of us that we might, in our places, be committed totally to His interests. Well, Paul was arrested in his course and he learned obedience quickly. He says, "Who art thou, Lord?" before he even knew who was speaking to him - showing how quickly he was prepared to be subject. If you are going to be devoted to the interests of Christ you must be a subject person. That would link with what we had in Luke, the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is no place for insubject, lawless or rebellious persons; nor is the assembly. We have all had to learn that. Those of us who are older have had to come that way and learn that the kingdom of God or the assembly is no place for the allowance of human will. What trouble the human will has caused! The state of the world is evidence of it, the will of man working as opposed to God, and alas, the history of the testimony too is evidence that, where the will of man has been allowed to work, disaster results. We can be together here as persons who have come under Christ's lordship. That is a fine thing for all of us, young and old, to come under the will of another. It is a searching exercise, especially if naturally you tend to be strong-willed, as many of us are. Saul had to learn that: "Who art Thou, Lord?" From that moment forward Paul was governed by the will of another. It is a blessed thing, not an irksome thing, to come under Christ's lordship. At the beginning of Acts Peter says "God has made Him... both Lord and Christ", chap 2: 36. Mr Taylor sen once said, when asked what "both Lord and Christ" meant, that as made

Lord He is in a position of authority, but both Lord and Christ means that today He is exercising that authority in blessing. If the Lord brings us under His lordship it is in view of our blessing. Think of the blessing that accrued to Saul of Tarsus personally and to countless others as the result of this man coming under the lordship of Christ. He had to learn that he had to be subject, he had to do what he was told. The instruction for him was to "rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do". From that moment on, Paul was entirely devoted to the will of another. He speaks in Romans 7 about being to another. How selfish we tend to be, making everything revolve round ourselves, but how blessed the experience of what it is to be to another. That is devotedness, that your life is to another. Paul says elsewhere "for me to live is Christ", Phil 1: 21. He does not say, For me to live is to serve Christ but, For me to live is Christ. He was not thinking of service. I suppose all the young people will have read that first address by Mr Taylor sen - 'Rejoice because your names are written in heaven' (see N.S. Vol.1, p.1). There are many names in registers down here, but it is wonderful to have your name enregistered in heaven. Mr Taylor draws attention to the fact that it was a greater thing to know the *company* of Christ (not that he was discounting service) than to serve Him. The disciples had to learn that. Paul came to that: "for me to live is Christ" - that was the motive for his living. What an example for us!

I read in 2 Corinthians 11 where Paul is speaking again. He says "for I am jealous as to you with a jealousy which is of God; for I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ". If you are devoted you must have an object. We were speaking of Paul saying "for me to live is Christ"; the definite object before him in his movements was that he should bring others to know that blessed One too, and he served God's people to bring about this condition - "espoused unto one man". Paul's ministry, which has been the challenge all the way down and is the test today, is to the end that we should be "to one man". Is this so with us? Are our affections divided? When we are younger especially, sometimes

we want the world, we want the meetings, we want Christ; we are so confused, there is a pulling this way and that. We have all experienced it, but it is a blessed thing to come to what Paul says: "I have espoused you... unto one man". Oh, the blessedness of coming to know Christ, and that blessed One becoming the chief object of your life. Paul is speaking to a local meeting. I believe the Lord has peculiar delight in assemblies where the saints are together with this object in mind; if I can use the expression, 'devoted collectively' to His interests. It means, of course, that we must first be devoted individually, but what a fine state where there are persons devoted collectively to one Man. The Spirit today is labouring with us to this end. As we are together in our gatherings, as we come together to celebrate the Lord's supper, it should be as together "a chaste virgin to Christ", as devoted to Him. But Paul says "I fear lest by any means", (his language is superb - he does not just say, I fear that the serpent may deceive you, but "I fear lest by any means"). How many means the enemy has at his disposal to deflect us from this blessed attitude of "simplicity as to the Christ". I believe in the recent issues we have had to face the test has been the rights of Christ in relation to local assemblies. That is how the enemy has sought to destroy everything that is for the heart of Christ, by interfering with Christ's rights in a local meeting. We referred in Acts 9 to His lordship. I suppose here "simplicity as to the Christ" and "espoused to one man" would be references to Christ's headship. But His rights are supreme in a local meeting. That is not to exclude other meetings, because, as we read in 1 Corinthians 4: 17, Paul says "according as I teach everywhere in every assembly", Paul is stressing that the principles that govern one assembly apply in every other meeting. The enemy's desire is to get us away, dear brethren, from simplicity as to the Christ, in order that this feature of a "chaste virgin to Christ" should be absent. The way in which we shall be sustained will be in simple devotedness to Jesus, both individually and collectively.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

GRANGEMOUTH

19 January 1974

THE CHILDREN'S FAITH

It was a great advantage to Timothy that from a child he had known "the sacred letters", at that time just the Old Testament. By that means he had learned to believe the God who caused them to be written.

His faith was therefore not feigned, or pretended, but was real. It is true that faith is the gift of God, but we all know - especially children - that there is such a thing as asking for a gift! One of the thousands of precious promises in the Bible is that our Father who is in the heavens will give good things to those who ask Him. Perhaps He tests us to see if we are in earnest but faith comes by taking heed to His word.

We can understand also that knowing the Scriptures brought to Timothy a duty to obey them. How much more so to us who have also the glad tidings about the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. In many countries a 'testament' says how a person's possessions are to be given away after his death. A pious but poor woman in Spain

once read for the first time 'The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' - and wondered if He had left anything to her! She soon found that through His poverty she had been made rich.

When the apostles asked the Lord to give them more faith He told them that the important thing was to make use of the faith that they did have. Even if it is like a tiny mustard seed, being living, it can do that which seems quite impossible. We well know that the Almighty can do everything but the Lord Jesus taught that all things are possible "with God". The importance of this is that we must be in communion, or friendship, with Him to know how to direct our faith.

From very early times people have used a seal to prove their written promise or gift. Each person would have a special mark of his or her own to stamp upon something like soft wax. This would dry hard and show to everyone that his word was also his 'deed'. Whoever believes the gospel takes it as God's word and finds that every blessing in Christ is 'indeed' his by faith. A Christian thus "sets to his seal that God is true", which means that he becomes in himself a further proof that blessing is real and living. Can everyone see this in you?

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