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THE RIGHTS OF THE CHRISTIAN
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THE RIGHTS OF THE CHRISTIAN

John 1: 9-13; Hebrews 13: 10-15; Revelation 22: 14,15

H.W.K. I thought we might take account of certain rights that belong to Christians, that are theirs to be claimed. In each of these passages of scripture one of these rights is spoken of. In the first it is the right to be the children of God, in Hebrews the right to worship God as having an altar, and in Revelation 22 as washing our robes we have a right to the tree of life. These rights would be the rights of Christians in an exclusive way; they do not belong to everyone in the world but to persons who have a link with the Lord Jesus. These things are there to be taken up and claimed. Men are claiming every kind of right that is conceivable in the world at the present time - employers' rights, employees' rights, equal rights: you could list a number of things that men would claim to have a right to. But the rights that we have read of in these scriptures do not belong to men generally; they are the property of Christians. I thought the Lord might help us as we look into these rights that we might have a desire to claim them; they are our property if we have a link with the Lord Jesus.

I read from John 1 first because of a certain line of ministry that came out in the 1960s that was not quite right as to the thought of being born of God, which led to the matter of the young children being given the right to come into fellowship without moral exercise. I suppose most of us would have a judgment of that line of ministry although I do not know that it has been taken up publicly in a reading. I thought the Lord might help us as we are together to see what is involved in the thought of being born of God; that is, there is a certain moral exercise that persons go through to be able to claim the right to be children of God. It was said in the 1960s that as we are born into our family naturally we have a right to eat at the table, and as born into the family of God we have a right to partake of the Supper, which was confusing. One would seek help from the brethren here - we are thankful for the elder brethren with us who would have light as to the truth and who can open up this passage of

scripture in John - as to the thought of being born of God and coming into the divine family and finding our place there and enjoying the claim that we have to the family of God. What a family it is! The family known as the assembly would be in the greatest place of favour in regard to all the families named of the Father; not belittling the families of God that have preceded down through the dispensations, every family of God answering to the light that has been given to it in the testimony. They have a link with the Father; God is the Father of every family including the dispensational families that have preceded this family. But it is our privilege to be in the greatest of the families, and the greatness is ours because of the link that we have with the Lord Jesus as receiving Him. Everything is based on that, the reception of Christ. Our right is established on that basis in John 1. I think it would mean that we have come under the lordship of Christ, that a family emerges and is developed which is pleasing to the Father.

A.B.P. What is the difference between born as mentioned here and new birth?

H.W.K, I think that new birth as set out in John 3 would be more initial. It would be the personal work of God in the believer that is there through the thought of God apart from any moral development on the side of the believer; it would be sovereign. Being born again would suggest that a person has answered to what is there in them as sovereignly given in new birth by God, and as Christ comes on to their view they accept Him as the provision of God and in that way they begin to develop in regard to the thoughts of God as to His family. It would incorporate the thought of new birth but it is a more advanced thought. Born of God would include new birth but new birth is strictly initial. What would you say as to that?

A.B.P. What you have said is commendable. Would you say something about receiving Him.

H.W.K. I think it goes beyond the thought of just receiving Christ as Saviour and would mean that you receive the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, the anointed Man of God, the One that would effect

everything for God, and you would place yourself under His authority; and therefore you begin to think in line with the thoughts of God and develop into a family in which God finds His delight.

G.D.W. Does this word 'right' suggest power? It is more than just a right as the world would look at it; the word '*exousia*' would seem to suggest that.

H.W.K. Yes. It would also suggest that we have a claim to something, a right to take it on and claim it for yourself.

C.S.E. In two of the scriptures read, before we get into this matter of the right, there has to be something on our side: "as many as received him"; then in Revelation "Blessed are they that wash their robes". What would you say about the preparatory work on our part, if I might put it that way, in order to enter into the taking of this right?

H.W.K. I think first of all it would involve that we receive Christ as Saviour; that would be answering to the work of new birth in ourselves. God has sovereignly worked in each one of us from His own side, and as Christ comes on to our view through that work we have a link with the Lord Jesus; that is, we have faith to receive Him. "God has dealt to each a measure of faith" (Rom 12: 3) I think would be sovereign, and your faith reaches out and accepts Christ as He comes on to your view. That would be what is initial in receiving the Lord Jesus. But then the thought of receiving Christ in John 1 goes beyond that; it would be total subjection to the Lord Jesus and His authority. That is what enables you to develop in the things of God, to think Godward, to think of what pleases God the Father. I think the Lord Jesus sets it out in John.

G.H. This idea about tiny children coming into fellowship was not right because of what we have in John about being born of God. John's gospel stresses the moral side which is important in relation to this matter.

H.W.K. That would answer to what Mr Elliott said; there must be the moral side that precedes, otherwise children do not have a right.

G.D.P. In Matthew's gospel the Lord says to the Pharisees and Sadducees "Produce therefore fruit worthy of repentance. And do not think to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children", chap 3: 8,9.

H.W.K. Just so. It requires the operation of faith in ourselves and the reception of Christ; that is, God has provided Christ for us and we receive Him, and as we receive Him we begin to grow in the things of God. It is all based on that.

S.E.H. Is Simeon in Luke's gospel one who sets out this thought of receiving Christ? It says "he received him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord", chap 2: 28. He acknowledges Lordship as he receives Him.

H.W.K. That would be the thought exactly. I think Simeon had in his soul the light of all that Christ would be to the people of God. Therefore, as we have been taught, Simeon provides the sterile conditions that are ready to receive the Lord Jesus when He comes on the scene. His arms are there, you might say arms that have been affected by God for the very purpose of providing conditions that would be a suitable environment. We will see in Revelation 22 how the tree of life is always linked with a right environment; the garden of Eden is the environment for the tree of life, and the holy city also. I think the saints together under the headship of Christ provide an environment to receive the Lord Jesus. Simeon provides that environment so that he had arms available for the Lord Jesus to come into, provided sovereignly by God.,

C.G. You mentioned about being born of God. In 1 John 3: 9 it says "Whoever has been begotten of God does not practise sin, because his seed abides in him and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God". There, being born of God is linked with deliverance from sin, and that is an important thing to lay hold of, is it not? We cannot do it in the flesh; it has to be begotten of God. It goes on to say "In this are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil. Whoever does not practise righteousness is not

of God, and he who does not love his brother". There is a distinction which is manifest.

H.W.K. I am sure there would be a link between 'begotten of God' in John's epistle and 'born of God' in John's gospel. It is a similar thought.

E.E.H. I was thinking of the point that you brought in about Simeon. That gives us a sort of key. Simeon came into the temple by the Spirit. John 3 goes on to that: you must be born anew first, and then you must be born of water and of Spirit; that has to come in and it precedes chapter 1. Chapter 1 is greater and is an additional thought. You see how the Spirit comes into it. We want to see what initially happens, that is the operation of God by the Spirit in the soul; that is fundamental. As the Lord says, You must be born anew; and then He gives the additional thought, You must be born of water and of Spirit to enter into the kingdom. That is prior to chapter 1, as you said, which is leading on to a further, greater thought, is it not?

H.W.K. Chapter 1 helps you to see that the thought of the family of God is generative, that is it proceeds from God.

E.E.H. New birth is from God too.

H.W.K. Yes, but you might say chronologically why did not chapter 3 precede chapter 1? You have to see what John is getting at in the first chapter - the beginning of everything for God. Genesis 1 is different, it is the beginning of the world in relation to time, but in John 1 it is the beginning of everything for God; in other words there was a beginning in Christ which laid the groundwork for things to proceed in persons Godward. And that is what John is getting at in his first chapter.

A.B.P. The reference "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light appears in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not" (vv 4,5) would be in direct contrast to receiving Him, which would be the light being received, and our being illuminated by that light, would you say?

H.W.K. That is the point exactly. So that John first tells us that there were those that did not receive the Lord Jesus. He said "The true light was that which, coming into the world, lightens every man. He was in the world, and the world had its being through him, and the world knew him not". The world did not receive Christ and His own did not receive Him. Then John says that there were those who did receive the Lord Jesus and as receiving Him there was a certain right given to them; that is, they had a right to be in the divine family, because this family would hold everything for God according to the thoughts of God. It is a wonderful right that we have, beloved brethren; let us lay claim to it.

J.A.P. Mr Darby helped us very much, that in John's gospel things were settled immediately. In the other gospels the rejection of the Lord comes at the end. I was wondering whether that does not mean something for all of us here, young and old. Are things settled with me about Christ or am I going to wait till the last week of my life? Is it settled now that I am going to be here for Christ, that He has the right of way in me? "In him was life, and the life was the light of men".

H.W.K. Everything was settled for God in John because of the Person that came on the scene, the Person who was God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. "It was God that came into the created sphere to dwell with men and to hold men in such a way in Christ that a family could emerge and begin to develop in response to the Father.

A.B.P. Do we have an expansion of this in John 9? The Lord speaks of Himself as the light and then He spat on the ground and made mud of the spittle and anointed the eyes of the blind man.

H.W.K. What sight would be given! I think it would be an answer to the verse you read in John 1.

A.B.P. Then the works of God being manifested in him would be the indication that the light had been appropriated, because when he speaks it is the expression of light. And he received the Son of God - "And who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" (v 36).

H.W.K. I think it would be exactly what is set out in chapter 1.

D.T.H. Do you understand that this right to be the children of God is conferred automatically after the reception of Christ in the soul or is there some further action the believer needs to take?

H.W.K. I do not know that it would be automatic. I think that moral qualifications would be seen in the person, that they would exemplify in themselves that they are a member of God's family. I suppose that we could automatically claim the right to be the children of God but it is moral, and not everyone can just claim it because they say I have received the Lord Jesus. I think we show it in our actions because of it being a moral right.

A.B.P. Is it not intended to stimulate holy boldness in the person?

H.W.K. That is the desire in looking into the thought of the rights that are there to be claimed. You have a right to claim it for yourself. Let us claim the right to be the children of God, the right that we have to be of the divine family. We love the Lord Jesus and honour Him and hold Him in our hearts and are subject to His lordship. God says, You have a right to be My children. Let us take it up and claim it.

G.D.P. The Lord says "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham", John 8: 39.

H.W.K. That is the point; we are on the line of faith answering to the call of God. God has desires for us. He sets out the standard that would relate to His family and we are subject to Him.

E.E.H. Then God is the great operator. It says "born ... of God"; that is, God's work is there. I think to understand this thought in John 1 it is good to go to John 3, as you did, because this is an advance on John 3. Not everything is put in one scripture for us, we have to look into other scriptures, do we not? I think the illustration we had from Luke is good, Simeon receiving Him in his arms; that was a man in whom was the Spirit. Now to apply that to the subject you are speaking about, children breaking bread has to do with God's work in the soul and the reception of the Spirit. The Spirit is given to every one that obeys Him. So to break bread we must have

this initial work in us, the Spirit's operation in us, before we can really appreciate Christ to receive Him.

H.W.K. I am sure what you say is good. Linking the reception of the Spirit with the receiving of Christ would seem to sanction the thought that we have received Christ if we have the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is not given just to anyone; God reserves to Himself the giving of the Spirit. It is not automatic; the Spirit is given to persons who have Christ in their heart. The Spirit did not force Himself upon the scene that was in chaos, and in His sensitive feelings He would look for what is receptive to Christ and the work of God. Therefore as a person receives the Lord Jesus there would be the groundwork laid in them for the receiving of the Spirit. God would immediately see that and sovereignly give the Spirit to such a person.

E.E.H. "Born of water and of Spirit": it all has to do with God.

H.W.K. It is important to see that what follows the thought of claiming to be children of God is that we are not born on the line of nature but according to the mind and will of God. It is a spiritual and a moral thought.

G.D.W. The word "Lord" as used by Simeon is God as Despot. Subjection seems to be involved in this. It is a committal, is it not?

H.W.K. You marvel at Simeon, a man divinely prepared to welcome the Lord Jesus. John the baptist welcomes the Lord Jesus and points to Him as being greater than himself and who Christ would be, the Son of God; but Simeon is there in simplicity in the appreciation of all the knowledge that preceded as to God's thoughts in regard to Christ, that Christ would come on to the scene and would be the anointed Man who would effect everything for God, the One that the Father Himself would provide in blessing for men. Simeon is in the knowledge of all that, and as the Lord comes before him he is able to embrace Him; he embraces every thought of God as he takes that holy Babe in his arms.

A.B.P. That would be light, would it not? I have been very much impressed with the fact of what Simeon did. The impression seems to be conveyed that, as he received Jesus into his arms, light

flooded into his soul, because his reference to the nations coming in for blessing before Israel is obviously revelation.

H.W.K. It was revelation. Where did he get that thought? There was no such thought before that.

E.E.H. I go a little further than your thought Mr Parker. What is said about him is that he came into the temple in the Spirit. That is Paul's ministry, is it not? And it was revealed to him by the Spirit that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ. The light is there but the Spirit is with it. What I want to show is that in this idea of being born we must consider the Spirit entering into it.

H.W.K. I am sure that that is right. Sometimes we think that just because this event preceded Acts 2 that the Spirit was not working in the way that He is working today. But because the Spirit was not here as an indwelling power does not mean that the power of the Spirit was not on persons giving them light. You take Old Testament persons: the Spirit came upon them as the source of light from God.

E.E.H. Joshua was spoken of as "a man in whom is the Spirit", Num 27: 18.

H.W.K. Therefore Joshua is the one who is able to lead them into the land. He had the light of the land as relating to the thoughts of God.

E.E.H. So that to break bread one must be in the light of the Spirit and have the Spirit.

H.W.K. I would just seek to bring that before us as linked with John 1, the importance of the thought of being born of God, that there must be the moral work with us, there must be subjection to Christ in every phase of our lives before we can answer to the desires of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread. I am not trying to discourage the children whatsoever but seeking to encourage them to form and establish a link with the Lord Jesus, receiving Him fully into their hearts and being subject to Him. Therefore I think on that basis they would have a right to take up every claim that belongs to them.

E.E.H. If they have the Spirit.

H.W.K. Exactly, the Spirit would be the seal.

S.E.H. Is being born of the Spirit different from receiving the Spirit?

H.W.K. What would you say as to that Mr Parker?

A.B.P. I think the reception of the Spirit is a distinctive matter, because that involves something on our part. God gives the Spirit, and I have felt that the teaching in Romans underlies this. In chapter 5 the Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts, He is working with us; but it is not till the eighth chapter that you have the details about the reception of the Spirit.

H.W.K. I think the seal of the Spirit would be that there is that in the believer in his links with Christ that the Spirit can claim for God, which He can seal in that sense as acceptable to God. The Spirit therefore would begin to serve as the source of power to hold the believer in that relationship with God.

A.B.P. Is it not so that it is not until the soul in Romans has a link with the Man in the glory that the truth as to the Spirit being power to walk comes in? The deliverer is not the Spirit, the deliverer is Christ, and the Spirit is retiring until Christ has His proper place and a link with Him in the glory, and then He comes into prominence.

E.E.H. All that you are saying about Romans is a matter of teaching. The work of God takes place in us and then something comes out of the person. We cannot say, one, two, three, something happens; the stroke of God can bring about something in a person. That is what happened to Saul of Tarsus - a stroke! When we are dealing with the teaching that is another thing.

H.W.K. I think what you draw attention to is very helpful. In John 3 our attention is drawn to the single, personal operation of God in new birth, that God acted sovereignly on His own behalf for Himself according to His thoughts and purpose for man in new birth. But then the thought of progress comes in which is the person moved by God's sovereign action in him that helps him to lay claim to the provision of God which is in a Person, the Lord Jesus. Then as we receive the Lord Jesus we have a right to everything that God would

hold available for us. I think the greatest rights are linked with the family of God; that is, God has a certain family here which is able to operate for Him in the scene of Christ's rejection. As being subject to the lordship and headship of Christ we think and move for God here.

R.C.H. Is it not good to be reminded that "he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day", Phil 1: 6?

H.W.K. You can rest on that, that the answer to God's work will come out in persons. God has provided the means whereby man can go on in His great thoughts. God does not just have thoughts and hope that man will be brought into line with them but He provides the means and the power for us. As Mr Hoyte has been stressing, the reception of the Spirit and being subject to the Spirit are needed, because that is the power for us to be brought into line with the great thoughts of God. So that we will go on to finality and completion; it is a sure thing because God is able for it. We are weak (we prove that all the time, how much we fail) but God is not weak, and the Spirit of God is not weak. God has provided us with the greatest source of power in this dispensation, the Spirit's dispensation. Therefore what comes to light is the greatest of the families, as Mr Raven taught, the inner family, not divine but the nearest to Deity. Why? Because of Christ being revealed in our dispensation. It is a favour to us. Christ was not revealed in any previous dispensation. Therefore previous families would be limited by the light of the testimony of God that came out in their dispensation. But light as to Christ and sonship has come out in our dispensation; therefore being born of God is exclusive to the dispensation that we are in. Let us lay claim to the title, beloved brethren, and come into the rights that are ours as the family of God.

O.L.L. The Lord said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14: 6. Everything starts from Christ. And He said "those thou hast given me I have guarded, and not one of them has perished, but the son of perdition", John 17: 12. So all is from God's side through Christ.

H.W.K. Yes, exactly; that is the thought in John 1, that there is a beginning that never existed before. Why? Because God has been revealed in fulness in the Person of the Son.

B.T. Do you think the enemy would confuse us as to these matters. It is quite clear that we should not give the emblems to babies, which we were doing, but what we were also doing was receiving persons into fellowship who had not confessed the Lord. You may remember that that was a great soul experience that we used to look for, confessing the Lord.

H.W.K. Just so. I think the Lord would help us as to adjustment on that matter, that there must be a moral result seen in us. If we receive the Lord Jesus it will be seen, it will not be hidden. How is it seen? I think separation from the world is one of the things you would look for in the believer. Christ is rejected from the world's system, He is not wanted here, He has been put to death. If I have received the Lord Jesus am I exhibiting the qualities that Christ exhibited when He was here which would turn the world against me?

G.D.W. There is a certain element that does not have a right. How does that fit in? I was thinking of those who do not have the right, who serve the tabernacle. Is that the religious line?

H.W.K. It would no doubt refer to that and perhaps what is natural too. Hebrews usually sets out the truth by way of contrast, and you have a contrast here; those that have an altar and those that have no right to the altar. An altar would be a place provided whereby God is to be worshipped and sacrifices made to Him. The thought in Hebrews 13 is that there is an appreciation of the provision of Christ from God as the supreme sacrifice, so that we have the sense of the sacrifice in ourselves, and therefore the groundwork is laid and we can worship God according to His own thoughts.

A.B.P. Is that why it is a food altar before it is a praise altar?

H.W.K. I would think that; it would be our appropriation of Christ. It is a little different thought from John 6, feeding on Christ as coming down into the world. Here the thought of the altar would be our

appropriation of Christ as the provision of God more on spiritual lines.

A.B.P. I thought that it may be presented that way in Hebrews because it says "of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle", indicating that the priest feeds on that portion of the sacrifice which is designated for the maintenance of the priesthood, and that comes first. Then the offering of praise would be the other side.

H.W.K. Someone may have a right to place bread on the table but that does not mean that there is the appropriation of the Christ inwardly in the eating. What is needed is that we appropriate Christ as being the supreme sacrifice provided by God. I think we have the groundwork laid for response to God in worship according to God. God does not want man naturally in his intellect and ability to worship Him; if God wanted that He could have provided a robot that could have had all the known means of communication. Think of what man is coming out with now in the field of electronics, the computers that men are inventing that can do anything. God could have provided a robot that could have worshipped Him in perfection, every word would have been in perfect order. But God wants man in responsibility having a heart and mind and soul to think for Him; and in thinking for God we receive what God has provided in the supreme sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It places us on a ground that is not common with the feelings of men. Men may have desires and ability to worship God but they do not have the right because they have not, as Mr Parker suggested in the eating, rightly appropriated Christ as the gift of God. ·

E.E.H. That is excellent. I think that what the apostle is speaking about is Christianity. The tabernacle here would refer to the Jewish altars. Hebrews gives us the Old Testament conditions but Paul sets forth what is in Christianity. So when he says "We have an altar" he is speaking about Christianity over against the Jewish altar that they had, and persons can praise God, as you said, in the light of Christ's death, His being risen and His exaltation.

H.W.K. Just so. The Jewish altar would be a physical thing, and if the thought of the altar was a physical thing, every professing Christian could come up to the altar, the place where God is to be worshipped, and worship God. But that is not the thought. It is the contrast here; the altar is a moral one and it is what you provide in yourself that is the altar. It is your appreciation of the thought of sacrifice which is acceptable to God, and it is what enables you to come into the divine presence and worship God. That is you have the right, you have an altar; other persons do not have a right to it on a natural basis. You have to distinguish between the natural man and the old man. There are certain fine qualities that come out in persons naturally that are God given. Take the young man that the Lord looked upon: it says He loved him (see Mark 10: 21); there were certain fine natural qualities that came out in the young man. But when it came to receiving the Lord Jesus and leaving everything here, he had large possessions: he was not ready to give them up and receive the Lord Jesus, and accept the authority and claim of the Lord Jesus in his life. But the old man refers more to what is corrupt, what is dominated by sin that cannot come into the presence of God and that God would hate. We have to distinguish between them.

G.D.P. Did Peter catch the thought when the gentiles were brought in in the Acts? He said "Who indeed was I to be able to forbid God?" Acts 11: 17. They had every right just the same as Peter. It seems to be in connection with food there, does it not?

H.W.K. Every man is put on a common platform before God. "God is no respecter of persons" Acts 10: 34. Men will say, Why does God hate persons and love others? They speak of the universal love of God and that God loves every man the same. That the provision of God for every man is the same is true, reconciliation is available to the whole world through the love of God. God loved Jacob and He hated Esau; it is because of what comes out in man.

C.G. How would you connect the thought of the right to become the children of God and the promise in 2 Peter 1: 4 by which we become

partakers of the divine nature? You have rights in one case and promises in the other.

H.W.K. I think you could link the thought of the divine nature with being born of God; that is, it is generative in that way; it is what proceeds from God, the nature of God that comes out in the believer as you are born of Him; that is, you are thinking and acting for God, you are not thinking on natural lines. Sonship is through adoption but children by birth; that is, each one of us is born into a certain family and we think according to the channel that the family moves in and is led in. And it is so with the family of God; as we are born into the family of God through receiving Christ and being subject to Him we begin to think on the lines of that family. Therefore the thought of the divine nature is seen operating in the family of God.

C.G. We were speaking of having the Spirit. I was wondering about Galatians 4: 6,7: "But because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So thou art no longer bondman, but son; but if son, heir also through God". The note says 'God himself has made us heirs'. That would be a family idea, would it not? And what about sending out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts?

H.W.K.. That would be the thought of worship; that is, we respond to God as Christ responds to Him, we say "Abba, Father". What would you think about that?

A.B.P. I think Galatians is on an entirely different level. It is the Spirit crying Abba, Father in the believer there because they are all wrapped up in what is legal and the Spirit is helping to get them out of it.

H.W.K. There is the need of the Spirit's help there.

G.D.W. It says here "let us go forth to him without the camp". There is a certain line of things we have to leave, is there not?

H.W.K. Yes, we go to Christ where He is. Where is He? He is outside the camp; that is, He is not in the sphere of man's profession.

A.B.P. It is very interesting that the moment he speaks about the altar which we have and certain others have no right to eat of, implying that we have, he immediately stresses what we are not allowed to eat, so that we will have a right base in the moving into our right, do you not think?

H.W.K. Just so. Because the great right here is to worship God; that is to be held on ground that is acceptable to God. I think that is the thought of an altar. I suppose if we looked up the word 'altar' in the dictionary it would probably say that it is a raised platform on which persons offer sacrifice to God and so on; as Mr Hoyte has been drawing attention to, what the Jewish altar was in a physical sense as providing approach to God; but with us it is not what is physical. We should get beyond the thought of what is physical (the world lays claim to what is physical because it does not require spiritual eyesight to see what is physical); this is linked with what is moral. The work of God in the soul through the reception of Christ and the gift of the Spirit brings us on to a spiritual view of what is acceptable to God. We must take into account at all times the holiness and righteousness of God, what is due to Him, and we cannot bring anything before Him that is not acceptable to Himself. What is acceptable to God? Christ is acceptable to God, and as we are in Christ we are on a level of things that is acceptable to God.

D.T.H. Is that seen in verse 14: "We have not here an abiding city, but we seek the coming one"?

H.W.K. Yes. We are looking for the finality of everything; that is, what will be perpetually held for God. That would be the thought in the holy city in Revelation.

A.B.P. I thought that the reference to those beasts, the bodies being burned outside the camp, would be to accomplish just exactly what you have been saying, that we have to think of the rights of God and of what has been removed by God in the death of Christ so that only what is of Christ is to have access to the altar.

H.W.K. Exactly. What comes at the altar you might say is what is suitable to worship God; it is what is of Christ in the believer that is

acceptable to God.

B.T. Mr Darby in one of his letters said - I suppose he was referring to the translation of the Bible - he did not like to meddle in others who are also studying the Bible but he had the feeling that some were not called to the work. I just thought of that in relation to what you were saying about what is on a physical or computer basis.

H.W.K. We have to be very careful to see that what is of nature does not intrude into the things of God. Someone has said, I think it was Mr Raven, that man is capable of beautiful conceptions and sensibilities but there is always that which is of man connected with it; and the danger of that is the human mind and what it is able for. We need to keep ourselves constantly near the Spirit of God so as not to let the human mind enter into our meditation and thoughts relating to God. We must always keep before us the glory and greatness and righteousness and holiness of God. Then the Spirit comes in as an abiding source of power to help us to be in line with every great thought of God.

J.A.P. I think what Mr Taylor brought up is practical because it brings it down to our assembly matters. We have "deputed messengers of assemblies" (2 Cor 8: 23); that is, certain persons were called to do certain work, and that was not to be interfered with by someone else. All that brings up, Am I in my sphere? Am I doing what the Lord Jesus wants me to do? I know that is not your main thought but the point is that you establish your right; if God has sent you forth to preach the gospel you can show that right. Is that not so?

H.W.K. Yes, because God gives you the right. It is the work of God in the believer apart from any other influence and source of power coming to light. God will equip you with what you need to serve Him. We do not want to go beyond what God gives us, or stay behind what God gives us; we find our place in the body as we are subject to Christ as Head, and we find how light is given to us. The light is opened up as we are near to the Lord Jesus; we answer to the light and then grow on the basis of that.

R.M.C. Do we see the working out of this in Samuel weaned, brought up, we might say, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? There was spiritual growth there. It says he "grew before Jehovah" (1 Sam 2: 21). and later that he "grew, and Jehovah... let none of his words fall to the ground", 1 Sam 3: 19. That is a wonderful constitution to have. We want to see that encouraged in our young people, that there is an evidence of spiritual growth year by year as it was seen in Samuel.

H.W.K. I think you would look for that in young people - you watch them. We do not want to be hard on the young people; I am not saying 'no penalty'; that is disastrous; but we want to seek to lead them. We should be able to do that, to help them along, to see that they make progress in the things of God. Then I think you will find that there will be the evidence in them that they are children of God, and then you encourage them to move on, to relate themselves to the Spirit of God, to read the Scriptures, read the ministry, lay claim to everything that God has given you. He has given you Christ, He has given you the servants, He has given you the ministry, He has given you the saints. You lay claim to all that and begin to find your place in the family of God; you grow and begin to establish a right not only to be called the children of God but you establish a right upon which you can worship God and respond to Him.

G.D.W. When you speak of service, I was just thinking about Elisha who wanted a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, but there was a condition through which he might have it; you might call it a right in a way.

H.W.K. He laid claim to it, he took up the right that was his. And that is what one has in mind in this reading, to encourage the brethren to lay claim to the right that is theirs. Why should we not be maintained in power at the close of the dispensation?

G.D.W. Elijah says "if thou see me when I am taken from thee", 2 Kings 2: 10. Is there something in seeing Christ as risen, seeing Him as the Man in the glory, that would affect us and make us serviceable?

H.W.K. I think that would be right, to get Christ on our view as the Son of God. He is the anointed Man, the One that does everything for God at the present time. Therefore we must establish a relationship with Him and we do that by receiving Him, coming under His lordship and authority.

G.H. This matter of human rights is coming into prominence the world over. It makes you think, What about God's rights and what about my favour and my right through Christ by the Spirit to enter into these things - what belongs to me through grace and through Christ?

H.W.K. These rights that belong to believers are exclusive; others cannot lay claim to them.

A.B.P. It is a wonderful thing to see intimations in Scripture that the choicest things that God has in His heart are particularly available in a day of small things.

H.W.K. All based on the reception of Christ.

A.B.P. You were referring earlier to the activity of the Holy Spirit and I suppose the book of Judges is as prominent as any book in the reference to the Spirit of Jehovah coming upon persons.

H.W.K. It was needed at that time.

A.B.P. The evening oblation seems to have a place too, as though the oblation to be offered on this altar would be prominent in the day of small things at the end of the dispensation. It is called the holiest of all the burnt-offerings (see Lev 2: 3). It is a sharing with God His feelings about Christ.

H.W.K. I think all that would be linked with the thought of "we have an altar". It would be the sense of the sacrifice being found in us, the appreciation of all that Christ is to God. Therefore I think it is on that basis, as we love Christ as God loves Him, that we can rightly respond to God in worship.

R.M.C. You used the word 'exclusive'. I believe Mr Raven referred to that, stating that he had no objection to the using of the word 'exclusive' provided that it brought in the moral side.

H.W.K. You mean we are not Exclusive Brethren?

G.D.W. That is washing our robes, is it not? Is the moral side a question of separating from iniquity and keeping clean so that we might have a right?

H.W.K. We must keep clean. That is what I thought in regard to the tree of life. It comes into the Scriptures as a primary thought of God. God does not introduce the thought of the tree of life until there is an environment that is suitable to it. He does not just bring it in to a forest, you might say, that is in ruin.

A.B.P. It is remarkable that it was not received.

H.W.K. Well, if man had eaten of the tree of life in sin he would have been maintained eternally in sin. God guarded that great thought by the flame of the flashing sword so that man in sin does not have a right to it and cannot partake of it and be maintained eternally in sin. The guard to the tree of life is a provision of God.

A.B.P. It would seem that man ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and did not eat of the tree of life.

J.A.P. This matter about washing is very instructive because we all get our clothes dry cleaned and most are being very intent on being clean and right, which is all right, but now what we are speaking about is, How am I going to be clean morally before God and in my relations with the brethren? What do these garments refer to here?

H.W.K. I think it is what is outward in the believer - the garments would suggest that. A garment usually is something that distinguishes the person. Those that said "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt 21: 9) cast their garments on the way; that is, everything that distinguishes me personally must give way to Christ. If I am a believer in the Lord Jesus my garments would show that; what is inward would be seen expressed outwardly.

A.B.P. The garment of Jesus was unique, woven from the top throughout (see John 19: 23). It is how we appear before persons, is it not - what is public?

B.T. Lawyers today advise criminals of their rights; that is another form of rights that is exploited to the detriment of justice and it is not connected with washing robes either.

H.W.K. No it is not. It is just whatever a man can conceive in his thoughts humanly. Take the social systems of the world: how far off men are socially in their thoughts from the thoughts of God. Men think that the nice things accepted in the social systems of the world must surely be acceptable to God. What are they? They are not acceptable to God because they are conceived by men in sin who do not think rightly for a holy and a righteous God. Our thoughts are not God's thoughts; we have to see that naturally they are not. We think on the lines of nature as we are governed by what is of nature, but as we find our place as children of God in the divine family we begin to think according to the divine nature, we begin to think for God in a channel which is in line with the great thoughts of God. Christ always thought for God, He did always the things that pleased the Father; every thought of Christ was pure and holy. That is what you find especially as you read the gospel of John. If you would like to establish right relationships with the Father, read the Father and Son relationship set out in John's gospel. You will find how the Lord pleased the Father; in every moment of Christ's life here incense went up to God, His thoughts were pure and holy. And as we receive Christ we are brought into kinship with Him in such a way that our thoughts are on the level of His thoughts.

G.D.P. So in that connection the gates would be important. A person coming into fellowship would come in through the gates as amongst the brethren and not as of a certain family in the fellowship.

H.W.K. The gates are linked with what is administrative; that is, the rights of God are held and the standards of God are held. We do not lower the standards of God in times of conflict or crisis. There is a tendency with us to do that to hold the brethren, to hold to numbers, but the rights of God stand, they are unique. The holiness of God demands that His rights be maintained.

A.B.P. As one who supported that error I am very thankful for the extensive way in which this is being referred to. I was caught in that thing and I supported it.

H.W.K. I did too, I thought it was quite commendable, the simplicity of it, that if you are born into a family you have a right to eat everything in the family, that the little children without exercise, without moral exercise or experience, could just reach out and take of the loaf.

A.B.P. I referred to 1 Corinthians 10: 3; "all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink", but I have judged that before God and I am thankful that the thing is being discussed.

G.D.W. I know quite a number of young people who did start out in that and then, after the events of the early 1970s, became brightly converted and confessed the Lord for the first time. That kind of experience shows the utter necessity of the gospel having its effect on persons to come into it vitally.

H.W.K. I think we lost many of our young people and families through this error that came in amongst us; there was not any meditation or felt need of a real living link with the Lord Jesus. Therefore a certain line of shallowness proceeded with the young that did not bring them to grips with the truth. I say that with humility because we have all been through it and faced it together, not seeking to suggest that one had a judgment of it and the brethren did not. God would help us at the present time not to fall into error again. There is the need of guiding the young children to form a living link with the Lord Jesus early in their lives; you would look for that. You are cast upon the mercy of God first of all for your children; it is through God's mercy that any of them are preserved. If we have any children with us it is only on that basis. Thank God for His mercy, but at the same time you look for your children to have a link with the Lord Jesus.

G.D.W. So you are not calling attention to a tabernacle system but to Jesus.

H.W.K. Just so. The tree of life suggests to me Christ as One that is to be fed on and appropriated constantly by us, and we grow by it. It is the provision of God. The primary thought of God is that Christ should be the centre of His sphere of activity, but there must be right environmental conditions. Men are speaking about environmental conditions in the world, and conditions that are not conducive to life and growth - polluted air, smoke, water that is not palatable, everything that would militate against life - men are seeking to bring in conditions that are conducive to life. And it is so with God, that before you can have Christ as the centre of the activity of God there must be the environment that is receptive to Christ. So I think Christ as the tree of life is found in the sphere of eternal life, the paradise of God.

O.L.L. Is that why the Lord said "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except any one be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God", John 3: 3.

H.W.K. Yes.

A.B.P. That matter of environment is very fine. Mr Darby had a sense of it;

'Where deceiver ne'er can enter,
Sin-soiled feet have never trod;
Free, our peaceful feet may venture
In the paradise of God' (Hymn No.206).

That is where the tree of life is.

H.W.K. It is different from John 6 which is feeding on Christ down here; the tree of life in the paradise of God is feeding on Christ where He is. I think that the thought of the tree of life in verse 2 of chapter 22 is greater than in verse 14. Verse 2 is the thought of eating, the fruit of the tree of life being eaten by those that are in the city, not the nations. The nations are healed with the leaves but the fruit is exclusive for those that are in the city, the saints that are there in the environment that can rightly appropriate Christ as the tree of life.

A.B.P. Is that when the environment down here has been adjusted?

H.W.K. Just so, everything would be under the perfection of Christ's rule, under the dominance of Christ.

C.S.E. One of the key words in Mr Raven's ministry is 'atmosphere'.

H.W.K. One of the things for life - rule, light, atmosphere.

C.S.E. We would like to provide an atmosphere so that our young people can grow up into it and appreciate the things of God.

H.W.K. That is the sphere of eternal life. Where is it found? Among the saints. Where else can our young people find it? Where every one loves the Lord Jesus and has fully received Him and is subject to Him there is an atmosphere provided that is conducive to growth, growth in the divine family; and Christ is there as the centre, He is the source holding us all together. Our gaze is fixed on Him. No opinion is set against another opinion; all is brought to centre upon Christ the tree of life in the midst of the garden.

C.C.G. I was wondering whether Mary's state would enter into what you have had in mind? She followed up Christ continually and the moment came when she could lavish what she had upon Christ.

H.W.K. Yes, all that she had. She was able to accumulate and, as the Lord was before her, she releases it on Him. That is very fine.

J.A.P. "The house was filled with the odour of the ointment", John 12: 3. That would be the atmosphere, would it not?

H.W.K. That would be the sphere of eternal life, what was fully acceptable to God. God would smell it. Take Noah's offering: God smelled it. Noah, I suppose, was in line with every thought of God as he would feel the need of a cleansed earth in order that every thing in the earth would be responsive to God.

G.D.W. The full environment was there; the bow in the cloud and the seasons are all to be regulated.

H.W.K. And then the clean offerings that Noah took would suggest the thought of the environment, that Noah knew instinctively what would be acceptable to God and he would offer on that line.

I suppose there are other rights that we could have read of in the Scriptures but one thought of these three rights that belong exclusively to the believer and are there to be claimed by us.

BROOKLYN NY

26 March 1977

Key to initials

R.M.C.- R.M.Coulter, Philadelphia; C.S.E.- C.S.Elliott, New York;
C.C.G.- C.C.Gill, New York; C.G.- C.Greenidge, Plainfield; D.T.H.-
D.T.Hawkins, Plainfield; E.E.H.- E.E.Hoyte, New York; G.H.-
G.Hesterman, Plainfield R.C.H.- R.C.Hesterman, Plainfield; S.E.H.-
S.E.Hesterman, Plainfield; H.W.K.- H.W.Knauss, Indianapolis; O.L.L.
- O.L.Linton, New York; A.B.P.- A.B.Parker, New York; G.D.P.-
G.D.Pfingst, New York; J.A.P.- J.A.Petersen, Plainfield; B.T.-
B.Taylor, New York; G.D.W.- G.D.Ware, New York

BRETHREN, ELDERS AND FATHERS

J.Mitchell

Exodus 4: 13,14; Acts 20: 17-21; 26-28; Nehemiah 8: 13-15

What I have upon my spirit, dear brethren, is to say a word of encouragement on the thought of the brother, then the elders, and then the fathers. In Nehemiah the word is the chief fathers. There are all stages of growth amongst the brethren. John, when he writes his epistle, takes account of every stage of growth. He writes to the children and has a word for them, he writes to the young men and has a word for them, and he also writes to the fathers. Let none of us here therefore think that we may be too young or too old for the ministrations of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every one of us is of intense interest to Him. We know in the family side of things that we are all equal, each one has cost the Lord exactly the same, cost Him His precious blood. So that from the viewpoint of the family there is no one any more important than another; each one is equally valued by Christ. How wonderful that is! In the scene of testimony, in the sphere of responsibility in which we are, there are certain measures, measures of growth, and there are certain furnishings, so to speak, which the Lord has left in the assembly in view of what belongs to Him in a difficult day being cared for. How wonderful that is! Those who are a little younger should not feel out of that because, at any rate, you are the recipients of the care of what the Lord has left in the assembly. Nevertheless it may please Him to leave things here a little longer. Who knows? Who can say as to that? - although of course the general feeling I believe among the spirits of the brethren is that we are right at the end of the dispensation. But the question of time is in the Father's hands, and as long as we are here there will be persons needed to care for what belongs to God on this earth in the testimony in the midst of all that is opposed to it, as it was opposed to Christ.

So we need these things - the brother (that is we need one another), and the elders, and the fathers or the chief fathers. We

should be very thankful that the Lord has furnished us with these elements in some measure, recognising as we do that it is a broken day and there will never be any return to what was pristine among the saints. Nevertheless the moral qualities of certain things go through and we are thankful that they can be seen in some measure among the saints in the days in which we are. Thank God for these days when the Lord is helping the brethren, helping the brethren possibly in a unique way that may not have been experienced before, as circumstantially the saints have been brought into a character of dependence upon God, dependence on Christ and dependence upon the Spirit that may not have been known before. The Lord has taken away things that would hinder this character of dependence, and what is being experienced is the unlimited resources in love on the part of Christ to maintain His own in the scene of testimony at His own level despite all the difficulties. But in doing that He uses persons such as these, He uses a brother and He uses the elders and He uses the fathers.

When we think of a brother we always remember John in the way that in the hardships in which he himself was he can in mutual feelings and solicitude and concern for the saints write "I John, your brother", Rev 1: 9. What it is, dear brethren, to be a brother! To be a brother is in a certain sense the greatest niche that any one can fill. It must take character from the blessed relationships that we have with Christ, as He could say, "go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God", John 20: 17. But as another has said, brethren of Christ bears on the glory of love's elevation up there, while brethren of one another bears on the responsibility of love's affection down here. So we need the brother in the circumstances down here, and the thought involves mutual affections and the mutual carrying of burdens together. How important that is, dear brethren! As the scripture says, "Two are better than one", Eccles 4: 9. How some of us have been made to realise this in a way that we may possibly not have realised it before. Here Moses, although not exactly up to the greatness of what God had in mind, is providing the opportunity for

God to bring in the thought of the brother. When Moses says that he could not speak, God says "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother?" And He goes on to say, "And also behold, he goeth out to meet thee; and when he seeth thee he will be glad in his heart". If we read on we find that when Aaron goes out to meet Moses he kissed him. Think of the mutual feelings of affection that came into expression at that meeting! It says of the Lord, when He came in amongst His own in that chapter from which we have quoted, "The disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord", John 20: 20. When they saw the Lord, what gladness that was. I think too, dear brethren, as being here in the sphere of responsibility where things have to be carried, where things have to be done, where the rights of God have to be stood for, where we have to go through some rigorous matters, we are glad in our hearts that there are brethren with whom we can carry things, with whom we can work things out, who can assist in the mutual affection that is so necessary in the fine balancing of the truth in the way that things come out. You remember that, when the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian saints, he adds the thought of the brother. We see how necessary that great thought is. Very likely the brotherly idea was missing in Corinth. How could it have been there when there were schisms and parties and feelings against one another and brother persecuting brother even to court? Brotherly feelings would have been absent there. How sad it is if brotherly feelings are absent in a locality. Let us hold to the bond of the brotherhood and let us value one another for the features of God, features of Christ in one another, so that we may mutually carry things together. It is not a day for one at the present time. It is a day for the brethren generally and mutually working out things together. You can see that in the way in which brethren serve together. How important that is, particularly among the Levites! Here it is "Aaron the Levite thy brother". There should be that brotherly spirit and the mutual help and encouragement and working together having the same judgment. It may not be that we always say things the same way. Peter had his own way of saying things. Peter does not exactly, for instance, speak of the assembly. Paul speaks of the assembly. Peter speaks of the spiritual house. But they were both

at the same thing. What a brotherly link there was between Peter and Paul! There was a link there that stood the test of an extreme difficulty and you can see how their links together in the glory of the truth were able to hold the situation together. So it is important that we develop this thought of the brother amongst us. Let us value one another. We have not chosen one another. I have not chosen the brethren here and they have not chosen me. We have not chosen anyone. God has chosen us, and He has chosen us that we can work things out together, and the Spirit of God is among the saints developing this great feature of mutuality and the features of Christ in one another so that the thought of the brother should be an easy one to work out in our midst. So what these two men, Moses and Aaron, were in the testimony together! Think of the number of times in the scripture that these two are referred to, Moses setting on a great apostolic line in the way that it is set out in Paul, and Aaron setting out the priestly feeling side. Aaron comes on to view when what is priestly and what is marked by affection is required for the drawing of the brethren into the truth. We need this, dear brethren; no one is capable in these days of carrying things through on his own.

The only one who has been proved capable of carrying through on His own is the blessed Lord Jesus. Therefore in the working out of things under Christ we need one another. How we need to value and make room for one another, and cherish what there is of God and what He may have placed in one another. It may be somewhat different but the great aggregate is what is in mind in view of the best coming into expression, everything necessary furnished so that the assembly may be well served, that the rights of God may be stood for. These men stood together in difficult times. They supported one another. They supported the truth, each of them in their own practical lives, but then the important thing is they supported one another. So I appeal to every one, no matter how young, you can always be a brother, you can show brotherly feelings. How attractive it is to find brotherly feelings, the kind of feelings that can get down alongside the saints, that can enter into their exercises, that can

enter into their joys and share them, can enter into the sorrows and share them, can pray together in a mutual way, the kind of feelings that lift you up when you might be a bit low. How valuable these things are, dear brethren, and the Lord has placed this feature amongst us. My exercise is that it might be developed even more amongst us so that the saints may be well served in these difficult times in which we are.

Now I say a word about the elders. We oftentimes refer to the elders at Ephesus. What there had been at Ephesus was very choice. Paul had laboured there, longer than in any other place. That is because, I think, there was so much to bring out there. He says here that he had not shrunk from declaring to them the whole counsel of God. So here we have a man that is imbued with the greatness of God's thoughts in regard to the assembly, great mystery which has come out in our times - Christ and the assembly. As he says later, when writing to the Ephesians, "I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly", chap 5: 12. It was the great thought that Paul had, and he laboured among the saints with the result that there was an expression of what he laboured for in Ephesus. While there was departure from it, the Lord having to say in the book of Revelation "that thou hast left thy first love" (chap 2: 4), the fact is that as the result of Paul's labours at Ephesus there was a concrete expression of the glorious truth of the mystery there. I think Mr Raven says that the epistles were needed because of declension among the saints. The truth was there in a practical way at Ephesus. What a wonderful state of things there must have been in that city! It was because of the labours of this man and those with him. He speaks in this chapter of his labours. That is always a model for us. As patterned after Christ, if we labour in any measure among the saints in the way that Paul laboured, we labour with the great standard in view of Christ and the assembly. This mystery, he says, is great. Then Paul was going to leave there, and as leaving his feelings for the saints come out and he wants to leave them in good hands and therefore he calls over to him the elders of the assembly. I think that indicates, dear brethren, that there is that element there that can be trusted

with the greatest things of God. Now it is a great challenge as to whether I am among that kind of persons. When Paul writes to Timothy he speaks to him: "Let no one despise thy youth", (1 Tim 4: 12), indicating that what was lacking in age in Timothy is to be made up by moral qualifications. I think some one asked Mr Taylor why Paul took up a young man, and he said, I suppose it was because he was the only person available. Therefore when we think of elders let not the young men exclude themselves, if at least it can be in the way of exercise even now, so that you may develop into what is reliable in the way of experience with God and things can be trusted to you. And let those of us a little older be concerned that there may be moral capacity and spirituality with us that the Lord can entrust things to. So here he calls over these elders. Earlier on he had ordained elders; that was part of the confirmatory ministry of Paul that there should be elders in every place to look after the rights of God and the interests of Christ in the places in which they were. Evidently in Ephesus they had these elders, they could be located and be called over. Not that you would point to certain persons at the present time and call them elders; as we said at the beginning we are in days of breakdown, and what we should be concerned about is that the moral features of these great thoughts should be seen in us without necessarily claiming anything or drawing attention in any way to any individuals. Paul calls them over and says "Wherefore I witness to you this day, that I am clean from the blood of all". What a service was the service of Paul! While on the one hand he is setting out that he himself was clear, I think there might just be the indication in it that the elders were to take up their service in this character. Think of completing a service and being able to say that I am clean from the blood of all, for I have not shrunk from announcing to you all the counsel of God. Paul did not go seventy-five per cent of the way, or even eighty per cent or ninety per cent of the way; he announced to them all the counsel of God. And there was an answer in Ephesus that was commensurate with the ministry that he gave. Now he is saying to these elders that the responsibility is upon them as to how they serve the saints, as to how they hold them, whether they hold them to this great high level of what they

are for God. He says "Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers, to shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own". That is, I think, the greatest thought of the assembly - the assembly in the mind of God, what it is for God Himself. O that we viewed things a little more from God's side! viewed the saints in our localities as to what they are for God, what they are to God, what it has cost Him that He might have them for Himself, that this may enter into our feelings in our service among the saints in our local meeting, dear brethren. It may involve the practical side because here Paul spoke about his hands, the way that he served, and about his tears and about the way that he moved in and out among them; he spoke about every house. When Paul went into these houses he would always be influencing the persons with whom he came in touch in relation to the greatness of Christ and the assembly, and the greatness of the assembly as being the dwelling place of God, what it was for God. O that our conversations, dear brethren, and our influence on one another may be more on that line so that the saints may be held in the divine thought for them and that they might always be kept up to that level and never descend below it. Of course I realise that we are, as we speak, in the kingdom, and the kingdom things must be worked out and there is need to go over those things as well, but in going over them let our approach be from the standpoint of what the assembly is for God, what it is as the assembly of God, as he says here, "which he has purchased with the blood of his own". That is the greatest thought of the assembly, it is the highest thought you could possibly have, and that thought governed the service of Paul. And not only that but he wished the elders to maintain the saints at that level. Now it may not be your privilege to serve in ministry, but it certainly can be your privilege to take some responsibility, however large or however small, for the saints in the place in which you are. There are not too many of us these days and there are certainly never too many to take responsibility, there are never too many to take up the things of God in the places in which we are. Let every one here then see that we are committed to caring for the saints at

this great high level, at no lower level than this, holding the saints as to what they are in the divine thought and what they have cost God.

Now I just refer to the thought of the chief fathers. Fathers are a very valuable asset in the assembly; somewhat like the elders, you would expect them to have experience with God. I think there might be just that little touch of the family side with the fathers more than with the elders. How great it is, dear brethren, how needful to develop that side amongst us! John is a family man; his gospel brings out the truth of the family, and in his epistles he develops the thought of the family in days when the official side, as we speak of it, had broken down. John reverts in the power of the Spirit to the family side of things, and I believe that is what we can see developing, if we have eyes to see it among the saints in these days. May it go on and develop more, may there be more affection for one another, may there be more regard for one another, may the thought of these holy relationships be developed in a deeper way with us so that we might enjoy one another's company. I think it is a great thing for the young people to enjoy the company of the saints. What is fatherly amongst the saints will promote that, it will promote an atmosphere of affection which can be enjoyed. They might not understand all that is going on. It is not exactly necessary for them to do so. We pray that if the Lord leaves us here and they grow in the things of God that they will understand what is going on. But it is a great thing at any rate to enjoy the atmosphere among the saints. That in itself will cause stability in the souls of the young people. Let us be exercised then that what is fatherly might be coming into expression. The fatherly never repel. A father, of course, has to discipline. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that. It speaks about God as the Father of spirits and the way in which discipline is exercised, but that is not the main line of the father. The main line of the father I think is family affection and the providing of an environment in which the saints can grow in the truth, in the true knowledge of God. But then here it speaks of the chief fathers, and that may be another thought. It may be in advance of the thought of the fathers, and I think, dear brethren, there is a great need for the

chief fathers at the present time, and a great need too to make room for the chief fathers. The setting in chapter 8 is that the children of Israel were in their cities. What a wonderful thought that is! How we would crave at the present time for the whole universal position that it could be said of the saints that they are in their cities! that is, that they are settled with regard to city principles, to the rights of God in cities, that they are settled in regard to the responsibilities in the testimony. How important that is! that every one has found their place in the testimony set out in the thought of the assembly of God in Corinth. God is known in that city. God has a foothold there, and the fact that God has a foothold there involves that He is going to overthrow everything that is opposed to the truth in that place. How important then cities are! You find that the persons here are settled in their cities. They are not restless, and there is a great voluntary movement forward in relation to the truth. It is not a question of a trumpet calling the saints together in chapter 8; the saints come together of their own volition and ask for the words of the law to be read. What a great thing that is! What a state among the saints that there is a genuine desire for the truth and the saints come together out of real affection for the truth and for the word of God and to hear what God would say to them. And there is a long meeting as we know, (not short meetings in those days), and there must have been a large number of them and there were those who were able to help, and there were those who were able to read and there were those who were able to give the sense. What a mercy that is! Think of the divine provision in that environment that there were persons who were able to give the sense. And then there was the response Godward as the result of it. That should always be the result if there has been help in ministry. If I have been helped as I sit under the word of God it should always result in something returning to God. Then you find that there is joy. There was weeping as they took account of the great departure from the truth, as they were affected inwardly as to how far they had departed from the truth, but in the main the answer was in joy. Now that I think is the setting. What an encouraging set of circumstances it is! And I believe that the Spirit of God is working to secure that character of things among the saints

at the present time; and who would say that He has not secured it? I have no doubt that He has secured it, and I think what He would be working for is that it should be deepened. Now it is in that setting that we have this second convocation. The chief fathers come together that they might "gain wisdom as to the words of the law". Things were more weighty perhaps on the second day than they were on the first day. That always raises a challenge. We do not wish to be exclusive in any way but would I be among those who would be able to be present on the second day? Thank God for any measure in which there is spiritual capacity among the saints in these days for the development of the truth. The result of their coming together in this mature, developed way is that there is a great accession of light. I say an accession of light bearing in mind, of course, what we have often been taught that the truth is not exactly recovered to us. The truth has been there all the time and we are recovered to it. So if we say an accession of light what we mean is that there is a great development in the way of recovery of the saints to the truth. I think we have a right, dear brethren, to look for that in these days, that there may be some fresh unfolding of things. Not that it has not been unfolded before because all that will come out has been out before in the beginning of the dispensation. But there may be some fresh recovery among the saints in the way, if I may be allowed to use the expression, of an accession of light amongst them that may cause joy and liberty and glory among the brethren. So that the result here is that they look into the scriptures and find that the divine thought was that the brethren should dwell together in unity; that is what it really means. But at the same time the feast of tabernacles is the crowning feast in the old economy. It is the touch-stone of everything, and one does not need to be very spiritual to see that we are in days when the Spirit of God is putting the crowning touch not only in accession of light but in the way of experience among the saints. The result here is that what is really the touch-stone of the order of things in the old economy is entered into in a way that it had never ever been entered into before. How wonderful that is! I believe, as I say, that we have a right to look for that kind of thing, but I would repeat that it does involve this

atmosphere among the saints. You cannot leave it to the chief fathers and say it is their matter. Of course in the second day it is their matter but the first day comes before the second day; so those of us who are not chief fathers would nevertheless be concerned that we might fit into our own place on the first day and provide what is basic in the way of environment in which the chief fathers, as under the hand of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, can develop in spiritual capacity in the enquiry into the truth and the bringing in of that which will, so to speak, cap the dispensation in which we are. Well, there is much in this, dear brethren, that I find very attractive. One may have to speak of it in a certain sense abstractly. One has always to regard one's own measure in speaking to the brethren. But nevertheless I think I can see something exceedingly attractive in it and something that should exercise our souls that we may, as I said, be providing the atmosphere on the first day so that the chief fathers can come together in the enquiry in a developed and a mature way in the truth, and that we too may develop in a mature way into these great thoughts so that the saints may be helped into the very best. May the Lord bless the word.

MAIDSTONE

26 February 1977

MOTHERLINESS

J.S.Gray

1 Samuel 1: 9-11, 24-28; 1 Kings 3: 23-28; Judges 8: 18, 19 to "sons of my mother".

I seek grace to say a word as to the continuance of the testimony and the motherly feelings which are necessary in view of that. We do not know how long the Lord may continue the testimony; maybe He will come today. How our hearts are waiting for the moment! But until He comes God would continue the testimony, and I think that we are to see what is needed to continue what is for God's pleasure down here, as I believe Hannah in principle could see. She takes up exercise in a secret way, perhaps because of the conditions which existed, but also in spite of the conditions which existed in a public way, the priest sitting upon the seat by the doorpost. Hannah felt things in secret, but along with her feelings she knew what was needed. She was not given to bemoaning conditions without having a judgment of the need. She knew that, if the priesthood was to be maintained according to God, a man child would be needed. If there is to be the continuance of the service of God until the Lord comes, a man child is needed, dear brethren. If there is to be the continuance of the prophetic word, a man child is needed. Men are needed in our day. If there has been failure in priesthood, and if there has been any lack in what is true in bringing in the mind of God, what Hannah represents is the line on which the truth will be maintained. I do not confine what I have in mind to the sisters, although they especially have to do with the children amongst us, and I do not have in mind only the young, but the objective of securing a result for God in the saints as we all take up maternal exercises on God's behalf.

So to Hannah the thing was lacking and she was exercised as to bringing it in. She had had reproach publicly but that did not turn her aside from her exercise with God. It says "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to Jehovah, and wept much". Dear brethren, there is always an outlet if there is exercise of soul: there is always

an outlet in prayer. How much comes to light as the fruit of prayer and secret exercise with God! Then it says "And she vowed a vow, and said, O Jehovah of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thy handmaid, but wilt give unto thy handmaid a man child, then I will give him to Jehovah all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head". She took up unreserved committal to what was needed on God's behalf for the continuance of His service and testimony. Not only does she take it up on her own behalf in that she committed herself, but she commits the child to it too. "I will give him", and then "there shall no razor come upon his head", involving that she took up responsibility that the man child, as given by God, would for her part be preserved in sanctified committal to God's interests and His pleasure. How much need there is for that at the present time! She says, in speaking to God, "O Jehovah of hosts". You might have said to Hannah, Where are the hosts publicly? She had God's view; and we do well to feel the sorrow of brethren who have been lost to the testimony for the moment. But Hannah is saying, I am taking it up for myself, and will undertake for the child too, that there will be committal to all that is needed in view of the continuance of the testimony. Well, beloved, there will be fruit on that line. There will be fruit from the sorrow and the secret exercise. How are things in our localities? You say, We are few, things are not what I would like them to be. Well, bring something in, dear brethren. Let us bring something in through having to do with God. Let us commit ourselves. Let us begin with ourselves and take up this committal before God. The thought of a contract is involved in this, I think, that she gave herself to it without reserve, without recall. Let us take on responsibility, so far as we are able, for the secret exercises which are needed to bring in a man child. Persons are needed. Hannah was a woman. What could she do herself? But then, she saw what the need was, that a man child was needed, and she took the matter up in prayer before God and He answered her. We find that the fruit is seen in that she brings the boy to the house of Jehovah and says "For this boy I prayed; and Jehovah has granted me my petition which I asked of him. And also I have lent him to Jehovah: all the

days that he lives, he is lent to Jehovah". And it even affected Eli! "He worshipped Jehovah there". Think of that! Beloved, God is able to secure results in a substantial way in the continuance of His testimony as we take up exercise with Him in secret as to what is needed. What is needed is that the young should be brought in, that a man child should be made available for the testimony, and as we take up - those of us who have households and children - exercise with God as to baptism, and also what involves greater exercise, the maintenance of accord with the truth of baptism in our houses, there will be in principle, as God helps us, the preservation of a man child. So that we Who are parents should have in mind that God 's service is to be continued, and God is able to give what is needed for that.

When we come to the scripture in Kings the element of life was already there, the child was already there. There had been two, but now one was dead and one was living. May the Lord exercise us, beloved brethren, that there should not be allowed any departure which will cause that which potentially would be for the prosperity of the testimony to be lost. What comes out here, of course, is that the motherly feature is brought to light, through Solomon's wisdom, in the yearning of the woman over her son. So the son has come in now, but how do matters go forward from that point? There is to be, beloved brethren, yearning, yearning in feelings and affections over our young and over every element of life so that all might be held for God. We may feel that the conditions in the world are such that there are allurements in all directions, but I believe that as there is this yearning, as there are true maternal feelings and instincts present, there will be the preservation of life according to God. It says "Then spoke the woman whose was the living child to the king, for her bowels yearned over her son, and she said, Ah, my lord! give her the living child, and in no wise put it to death. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine; divide it". What a spirit! Not the spirit of a mother! Beloved, we can be thankful for every expression of a true maternal spirit among the saints in view of the preservation of the life which there is, and in which we rejoice and which is potentially for the pleasure of God. Let not the murderous spirit of

the world have any place with us. That is the spirit which has no regard for life. It is all around. Let us take up exercise that these maternal instincts may be found in us. The Lord would help us as wisdom. The scripture says that He "has been made to us wisdom from God", 1 Cor 1: 30. If there is a problem as to the preservation of life among the young we ought first to be clear in our own minds and judgment, and exercise with God, as to what is needed. Let us see that a man child is needed, and preservation of what is living is needed among the saints. God is looking for it. But as we have a right judgment of the need, the Lord will give us wisdom as to any problem. Let us yearn over the saints, over all the saints; let us take up exercise as to the preservation of life so that what is for God is maintained. Here in Kings I suppose it would issue in what comes to light in the house and is thus to be for the pleasure and service of God. The Lord would exercise us that that should be before us and that nothing which will in any way interfere with spiritual life is allowed. As having a judgment with God of what is needed the maternal spirit would say, If things are not attended to now, how will they be later if the testimony is left here? So it is no wonder that the maternal spirit is the spirit which is productive of life, of what is needed for the service of God, and then is the means of preserving what is spiritually living amongst the saints. There was no doubt, from the answer, as to who was the mother, and it will be manifested, but may it be manifested in results which are according to God, that the maternal feelings and instincts which bring in and preserve life among the people of God are found amongst us.

In Judges I simply touch on this matter from the standpoint of suffering in the testimony. Gideon says "What sort of men were they that ye slew at Tabor?" I think the context here would imply that there is suffering connected with the testimony publicly. Dear brethren, how do we act under pressure? I speak to myself as to my brethren. How do we act when there are sufferings or pressure? What is it that comes out? The product of Gideon's mother is that he had brethren who were like him. "As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the sons of a king". Oh beloved, God is intent upon

forming the saints after Christ. He is to be our ideal. He is to be the One who is before us: His precious maintenance of all that was for God's pleasure in perfection. What kingly features were manifested in Him, especially in suffering! Think of Him taking up the conflict in John 8, what dignity and glory were manifested! The answer of these men, their testimony as to Gideon's brethren was, "As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the sons of a king. And he said, They were my brethren, the sons of my mother". Now that was the secret, beloved; that was what had brought about the formation which was manifested under pressure and obviously had made an impression upon these men in the sphere of conflict. I would seek simply to draw all our hearts into the exercises which lie behind these things so that Christ should be formed in us; so that not only should there be found amongst us what is after His order in liberty and life and joy in the things of God, but that in our public testimony for God there should be no difference, that there should be, as the fruit of these secret relations with God, the expression of that which, as in Gideon's brethren, resembled the sons of a king. Oh beloved, the saints are dignified in the mind of God, but then we are to come out in expression in the public view, so far as any impression is left upon men, as the product of inward formation and secret exercise with God. We do not, I think, get anything else, or certainly not much more, about Gideon's mother, and it is not that the secret exercises are to be made public, except that the product of it, the result, is seen. The exercises of the saints are largely secret with God, yet their result is seen, and the result I would suggest will be seen in that which is for God on the line of continuance. As with God, we would be exercised that the testimony should continue on the level on which it has been maintained, the divine level. Things have been handed down to us and we are entrusted with the precious things of God in our day. Let us hold them in life. Let us take up the responsibility of the service of God and the prophetic word, the bringing in of God's present mind. Let us take it up in exercise with Him, for though the exercise itself may be secret the results will be seen if they are true, and then in the testimony publicly there will be

no denying that, as the Spirit of Christ is manifested by the saints, it is the product of our being with God.

That is all I had to say, beloved brethren. I feel much exercised as to the maintenance of depth in our secret relations with God, brothers and sisters alike, so that what is needed for the testimony, and living conditions and a right spirit publicly, should be maintained for the pleasure and glory of God. May God bless the word.

LONDON

18 June 1977

THE CHILDREN'S CONFESSION

It may not be realised that in the Scriptures things that are good are confessed to more than things that are evil. Moreover, even when sins are owned up to, the result is forgiveness and blessing, the rare exceptions proving the need of forsaking as well as confessing them. As believers on the Lord Jesus Christ the shed blood "atones" for our sins by giving a perfect and eternal 'cover' for them. Also, on repentance, our sins are "remitted" in His name which means that they are 'sent away' because they no longer belong to us, Jesus having borne them. But by confession to God against whom we have sinned we know that they are "forgiven" and discover new depths of love in His heart. What a Saviour Jesus is!

In the New Testament we read of "the good confession" made by the Lord and also by Timothy. Jesus, being God though in human form, could bear witness to His own Person. Timothy however confessed the name of the Lord before many witnesses some of whom no doubt taunted and persecuted him for it. But he had an honour that you may have in confessing Him before men. Jesus said, "I also will confess him before my Father who is in the heavens". What a large number of names must echo around heaven every day! During the persecutions of Christians in Rome they had to "confess with their mouth Jesus as Lord" before the judges. In God's searchless ways it may have meant suffering for them, but salvation of their souls.

Confessing the Lord is also a means of bringing others into salvation. One night at Gibraltar a Christian soldier was on guard at one end of a rock-tunnel. He was thinking about the joy of having been redeemed when suddenly he was challenged by an officer for the password. "The precious blood of Christ" he answered without realising it but, immediately correcting himself, he gave the required word. The officer, amazed, passed on but the words had echoed right down the tunnel to a soldier standing guard at the other end. He was under conviction of sin and thinking about his own misery

but he found peace through that text of scripture. What does it mean to you?

J.C.Evershed