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THE WAY OUT OF CONFUSION

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1 Corinthians 14: 33

What Paul had been speaking about in this chapter relates immediately to order, as we would say, in the meeting. It was already customary in the day in which Paul was writing for the saints to come together with opportunity for one to speak after another as the Spirit moved one and another, a kind of meeting that we nowadays speak of as the meeting for prophetic ministry, and Paul was concerned as he wrote here to indicate to the saints the necessity of order in such occasions. It is perfectly clear from earlier chapters that there was quite extensive disorder among the saints in Corinth even as they came together for the meetings. You can find in chapters 10 and 11 the environment in which the Supper was taken and see that there were elements of disorder even there: certainly the way in which things proceeded would have appeared very disorderly to any of us, given the knowledge we have and the experience we have of the way in which the saints gather together in the meeting for the Lord's interests, for the service of God and for enquiry into the truth. No doubt there are parts of Christendom where this verse might well be read with that meaning in the present day, that believers who gather together, many of them quite earnest in regard to the gospel, might still necessarily be reminded that God is not a God of disorder but a God of order and of peace as in all the assemblies of the saints.

But I think that what Paul says in the verse that I read was not merely something directed to the actual state of things in the meeting in Corinth but, as he so often does, he brings out a statement that he regards as universally true. He brings it in to meet a certain practical condition, but he brings it in as expressing a truth which is already well formed in his mind - as people say about expressions sometimes, a truism - something that he knew to be true anywhere.

Of course if we study Paul's epistles we can find that in many

different places there are statements that clearly are an expression of the truth as known to Paul brought in for particular purposes but they would have been the truth anyway.

I therefore want to say something in regard to this, not in the sense of order in the meeting - very little needs to be said about that. There was a time when things could effectively have been said about order and behaviour in the meeting. One thing that I have remarked (and I do not say this as echoing any critical view of the saints in the past in this country) is the way disorder in the meeting has virtually disappeared. I refer for instance to times which are within my knowledge when you would find young people at the back of the room talking to each other during the meeting, misbehaving during the singing of hymns, young people, and perhaps older ones too, talking to each other instead of singing. I do not say these things critically; I remark on them as elements of disorder which thank God have disappeared, and that is a very good thing.

But I wanted to say something a little more widely as to God not being a God of disorder. It says "God is not a God of disorder but of peace". It will be readily understood by the brethren that all God's activities after the beginning of Genesis relate to His not being a God of disorder but to the way He has indicated out of confusion.

The way out of confusion is really the opening up of the whole of Scripture once disorder and sin had come into the world. I think it is always of value to us to apprehend the way in which God has not only prescribed but has Himself demonstrated the way out of confusion. That is something for us all to cling to. Many of us find that there is confusion in our own lives - there is a way out of that confusion. Some find there is disorder and confusion in their families - there is a way out of confusion. Sometimes we find there is disorder even in practical experience in the assembly - there is a way out of confusion.

I just want to refer to the beginning of the way in which God has shown a way out of confusion, because I believe the way God operated in the beginning indicates the way out of confusion and the way by which that may be discovered at the present time. In

speaking of this, and saying that God is not a God of disorder, is not to say that God may not sometimes allow disorder to arise in order that we may learn something through it and by it, and that above all we may learn something more of the activities of God Himself through what He has allowed. We do have to bear in mind that whatever happens God has allowed it if He did not arrange it. There are things that God arranges, there are things that He allows, and it is an aspect of the omnipotence of God that what He has not arranged He has allowed. He does not allow the interference of others in any matter, least of all in matters concerning His assembly, but He has allowed them to arise, because it is perfectly clear that God, being who He is, could prevent any matter arising if He did not intend something to be learned through it.

Now the beginning of Scripture brings out for us a scene of very great disorder. Genesis begins "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep". There you have confusion. I am not now going into the way in which that confusion had come in, but there was confusion. Things in the second verse of Genesis 1 are not as they were in the first verse: confusion had come in. It says immediately, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters"; but then God acts, and I think His first act is an indication to us of the way out of confusion. God says straightaway in a scene of disorder and confusion, "Let there be light". God does not immediately say, This is the way out of the disorder and the confusion - He has no man to speak to. He does not immediately work so as to rearrange an ordered scene. The first thing that God brings in to a scene of confusion is light. We will learn elsewhere in the Scriptures characteristics of light. One is that it makes everything manifest: "that which makes everything manifest is light", Eph 5: 13. The first thing that God brings in therefore, if a way out of confusion is to be arrived at, is light. If we are ever conscious of confusion, beloved, whether it is personal or family-wise, household-wise, in business or in the assembly, wherever it may be, the first thing that is needed to open up the way out of confusion is light. Let

us therefore beloved, if we are conscious of confusion in any circumstance, ask God for light, and let us begin with light.

Sometimes we begin by asking God for the ultimate solution but, as I hope I may be helped to show, He does not do everything at once.

But the first thing that God brings in is light. Therefore let us seek light, let us learn to seek it. We know where light is; the light of God now is in Christ, the light is in Himself; "if we walk in the light as he is in the light", 1 John 1: 7. Therefore I suggest to the brethren that if there are any circumstances in which there is confusion the first thing to seek is light, not opinion or personality, or any of these things which so easily become the first thing to us, but light; and I reiterate, the characteristic of light is that it makes everything manifest.

Now many of us would recognise that easily in our ordinary circumstances. Let us take an illustration: we are here, right opposite the fire station. If there is a fire after dark they take the engines to the scene as quickly as they can and while they are getting the ladders out someone brings in light. In practically every fire after darkness you will find the engines there with searchlights on. Or something happens in the house where things are dark - it is necessary to speak about these things in relation to the dark - and the first thing you say is, Have you a light? Let me have a torch. If something goes wrong, or something is lost in the house, someone says, Would someone put the light on, then we could find it. These things are instinctive to us in our environments and in our circumstances, and what we could learn from practical experience we practise very little in matters that relate to what is spiritual. Many of us look for the way out of confusion with the light as it were still off, and we grope in the dark and seek this way and that way and are still in the dark. The first thing, beloved, that God brings in is light; therefore let us ask God for light. Let us ask God to illuminate things, let us ask Him to show us the character of things as they are. "That which makes everything manifest is light". Of course when the scene is lit up you may find it is not as you thought it was. You go into a dark room and feel your way around and try to find something

and you knock against some piece of furniture or something like that. When you put the light on you say, O, I had forgotten the room was like that. Beloved, our spiritual situations are often like that. We stay in the dark and bump against this and against that, whereas the light would show us the way straight through and we need not bump into anything. The first thing that God brought in to show how He would bring things out of confusion was light. And I suggest to the brethren that the first step out of confusion is light.

Now things progress. I am not going very far into Genesis (actually if I had the capacity for it I could go right through the Bible showing the way in which God has brought things out of confusion) but I have four particular things I want to speak about. The next thing we find is that confusion has come into a scene where everything was perfect and in order, that is in the garden where God put man. Light had come in; not only had light come in but the scene had been ordered. You could say in a homely expression that the disordered scene had been tidied up by God's hand in creation, everything was in perfect order. There we have the garden in which God had put man and the woman, and then the enemy, Satan, entered in and brought confusion into that blessed scene. Think of that! Think of the, one might almost say, impertinence of the enemy to seek to and to succeed in bringing confusion into that scene which God had seen as very good. He brought confusion in by sin. You can tell there was confusion; there was at least confusion of face because man could not face God. Man was in the garden and God came down in the cool of the day to speak to him, and man hid himself among the trees of the garden and he took fig-leaves and made aprons. Why? Because confusion was there, man in confusion of face did not have the capacity to stand before God.

And what does God bring in to resolve the confusion that was there? In type He brings in the death of Christ. It says He made coats of skin and clothed them. We know well, we have been taught so often, it has been so often preached from, that the making of coats of skin involves the death of the animals in question, and the use of the skin in order that persons may be clothed. Beloved, once

God has brought in light His way out of confusion is to take persons back to the death of Christ. He will bring in light and will then take you back to the death of Christ. The way out of confusion, beloved, still lies in the death of Christ. I doubt whether there is any way out of confusion that is not in measure related to the death of Christ.

The way out of confusion for man was in type the death of Christ, not only sacrificially on account of sins and sin but providing the means by which man could be clothed and have the capacity to stand before God in the perfection of what suited God. We may wonder in our day about their being clothed with coats of skin, but they were what God made and they must have been perfect for their purpose because they came from God's hand. If there is confusion God will take us back to that day. In measure we come back to it at the Supper every Lord's day. What does it say to us about the death of Christ? One thing that we should be perfectly clear about is that the Supper is an occasion at which there is no confusion. All persons are there in the light of the death of Christ, but they are there in the fellowship of His death; there is no confusion at the Supper rightly, persons are there on the basis of the death of Christ and in the fellowship of His death, they are there in the light of the communion of His body and of His blood; there is no confusion at the Supper. You can tell that that is what Paul was working at in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, that there would be no confusion at the Supper. One does this and another does that, one takes his meal first and another is hungry, the situation was confused. Paul says "it is not to eat the Lord's supper" (chap 11: 20), but he also says "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of the Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of the Christ?", chap 10: 16. The death of Christ and its present bearing on us, beloved, is the way out of confusion. It ends everything that I may be attached to personally that I may hold very dear; all that has gone in His death. At the Supper you are beyond personal relationships. Of course we are delighted to come with our families and children, those that in His great goodness God has brought through to the present time and whom we can sit down with at the Supper. How much we miss those who are absent! How

much that speaks to us of confusion as well! But the Supper leads you out of the confusion which natural relationships so easily lead us into; it is one means of God bringing us back to Christ's death as the great resolver of confusion. We come by way of His death. Of course His death speaks not only of what He has done in providing a basis on which God can forgive sins and where we experience redemption through His blood, but it speaks also of the way in which in His death He has died to the whole order of things here, the world and worldliness, the world and its looseness and permissiveness, the world in all the different attractions that it has for young and for old. If you read the daily papers what you will find is not that people are being shocked by the sins of the young - they are shocked by that - but they are being shocked by the sins of the old as well. Let us not think that sin and failure is the prerogative of young people; it marks old people as well. But the death of Christ is the way in which God brings us out of all that moral confusion as we learn its bearing upon us, the death of Christ delivering us not merely from sins and their power but delivering us from the world and everything which characterises it in the present day. And, beloved, the more we cling to elements of things to which Christ has died, the more we shall be introducing elements of confusion into a sphere where we should not know anything about disorder but we should know the God of peace as in all the assemblies of the saints. Therefore let us go back and see if we have first sought light, and then let us see if we are viewing every confused situation in the light of the death of Christ. Let us look at it in the light of His death. Suppose you could actually go to Galatia. Paul says to them "Jesus Christ has been portrayed, crucified among you", chap 3: 1. Think of that! What difference would it make in a situation? I think there would be a humbling and confusion of face among many, but there would be great deliverance in coming back to the death of Christ and the way God had clothed persons in the light of it; not leading us to make light of sin or of failure, not leading us to make light of what is proper and the right way for persons to walk in this day of public breakdown and confusion, but leading us to assert more and more that as we gather together the only way out of confusion is that the death of Christ

should have more and more practical effect in us, so that the things that are incompatible with that death and His present life have no longer place among us; they only introduce confusion.

The history in Genesis goes on and various things intervene in the short early part; much history, many years, even centuries are gone over very quickly, and then there is even worse confusion and God comes into the confusion again. There is confusion at the time of Noah. It seems to have some special relation to the sons of God seeing the daughters of men that they were fair. It is remarkable that that should be brought in; it seems almost that it is brought in as a major contributor to the confusion before the flood. Confusion could have been brought about in many other ways. It is a word to us as to the whole bearing of marriage among us, a great salutary word in that part of Genesis, that the sons of God beheld the daughters of men that they were fair. And it is clear that God was against the mixture. And, beloved, we have to be against that mixture. Mr Taylor spoke of mixed marriages as the bane of every assembly. He bracketed mixed marriages and the radio as the bane of every local assembly. The Lord gives us sensitivity about those things, but they seem to contribute to the confusion before the flood. And God comes into that confusion in two ways, and I will speak of them separately. God comes into that situation by way of salvation. What a blessed thing! No one else could have found a way out of the wickedness of the world, yet God finds a way out of it by salvation.

He says to Noah, Build an ark for the saving of your house. The way out of confusion is by salvation; not just, beloved, salvation from our sins, and as I have said before, their penalty - "The soul that sinneth, it shall die", Ezek 18: 20 - not merely that Christ in His death has borne the judgment of God and that we may be free from the judgment of God against sin, but God has provided a way by which, you might even say, you may be carried out of confusion. As Noah built the ark there was a sphere of salvation. That sphere corresponds to what is now to be found in the assembly, a sphere of salvation. Think of the conflict which beloved Mr Taylor had over that element of his ministry that the assembly was the sphere of

salvation. Beloved, it is a sphere of salvation and the way out of confusion; that is, the assembly is the way out of confusion in the present day, and persons will find themselves out of confusion to the extent that they value the assembly. There is very little profit, very little indication of desire to be out of confusion, if we are not finding that the assembly has the principal place in our minds as to things down here. It seems necessary constantly to remind ourselves that there is here on earth that which is in the light of the assembly of God and that that is our sphere of salvation. I venture to remind the beloved brethren that nothing should have priority over our being in the assembly. It is sad to see how readily other things come in and are allowed to have priority over being in the assembly. I do not speak of sickness (I do not need to qualify what I am saying because there are things that sober people do not think) but if we want to experience constantly the way out of confusion we shall indicate that by finding our place and activities in relation to the assembly. I reiterate that nothing should have priority over that. I do not say these things here just because I am in New York; I have said these things at home and I go on saying them, that there are not things which have higher priority than being in the assembly. There comes a time when one has put away the things of a child. A lot of things belong to us when we are children, when we are young, as we grow up and go through the prescribed time of education and then we are finished with them. The things of a child are finished with and you become a man or you become a woman and you become it such as you are, and we do not need to spend the rest of our time acquiring further qualifications and pursuing further interests. The way out of confusion is not by further acquirements of knowledge; it is to find your life in the sphere of salvation which is the assembly. Therefore let us find our life there. God gave Noah a way out of confusion.

There was confusion everywhere, all around him, and God says to Noah, I will give you a way out of confusion - build an ark for the saving of your house. And Noah built it. He took the wood and built the ark and then God acted and the ark was borne up upon the waters and Noah was in the sphere of salvation. I believe there was no confusion in the ark, just as He is a God of peace as in all the

assemblies of the saints. Therefore, the way out of confusion for us is to value the sphere of salvation that God has provided for us.

Value it, build to it, work to it, add your energies to it, bring peace into it, dispose yourself towards peace in the assembly, not by saying, That does not matter, and we can leave that, and that kind of thing (because I shall come on to that) but have peace in that sphere of salvation. It is the way out of confusion in the present day to find your life in the assembly of God as it is available to you.

The fourth thing I want to say is that, parallel with salvation, God's way out of confusion was by judgment. The way out of confusion was by light, and it was in relation to the death of Christ, and it was by salvation, but ultimately in regard to the disordered scene God's way out of confusion was by judgment. Let us not forget, beloved, that ultimately every confused situation is resolved by judgment. God came in in the power of His own omnipotence in judgment and brought in the great flood to cover the earth. The windows of heaven were opened and all the fountains were broken up and the water prevailed on the earth, and everything in which was the breath of life died. That was God's judgment then and it portrays to us God's judgment against sin and evil. I remember it being said that the weight of water on the earth in the flood reminds us of the weight of judgment, the weight of sin that Jesus bore. Think of that.

That judgment has been borne, but God still has judgment as a way out of confusion, and ultimately every situation that is confused is resolved by judgment. God has established down here in the assembly an order of things to which He has for the moment committed judgment administratively. He has not committed judgment as to heaven and hell, and as to life and death, to the assembly; what He has committed to the assembly is administrative judgment that bears on the present course of things. Just as we find in Genesis 8 and 9 that the way out of confusion was by salvation, we find also that it was by judgment; the two things went together, and if some came into the gain of salvation others perished because of judgment. The great thing in these days is to remember that while we desire that none may perish - God desires that none should

perish but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth - there is administrative judgment and it provides the way out of confusion. Ultimately that is what is needed.

I do not go further than that in Genesis because once persons had come to this, that there was a sphere of salvation and that alongside it was judgment, what do you get? You get the earth cleansed and fragrance for God, nothing untoward in the earth at all; at the end of Genesis 8, after the flood receded and Noah was on the earth again, you really get the second verse of Genesis 1, "the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep", put in order. After the flood when Noah came out on to the dry earth you find that there is not darkness on the face of the deep, there is light: things are not waste and empty, there is something going up to God, there are burnt offerings and fragrance: "Jehovah smelled...". What did He smell? An odour of rest. The scene that was waste and empty and with darkness on its face is now put in order, confusion is gone. I do not go further than that because I know that quickly, through weakness of man in responsibility, confusion came back again, but immediately after the flood you have the scene in the second verse of Genesis put right and the confusion taken away. God smelled an odour of rest and the world was in order and the confusion gone, and in a scene that was waste and empty there is something for God that was specially fragrant to Him and reminds Him of Christ in a way that nothing else does. Nowhere else, I think, is the odour of rest - He smelt an odour of rest. God finds that the confusion is gone. But it had been arrived at, beloved, by this means, by the introduction of light, and by the pursuance of things in relation to the death of Christ, and by the bringing to light a sphere of salvation, but ultimately by judgment.

God did not give Noah an ark to live in for the rest of his life; He did not say to Noah, Now, Noah, the world is very confused: you go and build a house somewhere in such and such a place and you live in that with all the confusion outside. The salvation and the judgment were part and parcel of the same operation. Beloved, let us not try to separate them, let us not think that we can have a

sphere of salvation if we will not have judgment. We shall soon lose the whole sense of salvation if we lose the sense of judgment. And ultimately God resolved confusion in the earth by judgment. To those who listened to Him He gave salvation. There is a sphere of salvation too today, a sphere known to us. We have to be careful because people listen to what we say. We speak of experience in the assembly of God but in order to protect things against those who try to say, You mean such and such when you do not, we say that we walk in the light of the assembly of God. We walk in the light of that sphere of salvation and we know that sphere even if the whole of it is not available to us, and thank God that we know the blessedness of it. But alongside it, and in a sense what preserves it, is that there is judgment. I repeat this, that ultimately what resolves every confused situation is judgment. God, as I say, has committed to the assembly administrative judgment. It is only by judgment - and assembly judgment is a clear thing - that situations ultimately are clarified and confusion removed. There should never be doubt whether this is a judgment or not: that only adds to confusion; but God has left in that sphere of salvation a means available to it of removing confusion.

As I say, the result of God's activities by the incoming of light, and by what speaks of the death of Christ, and the sphere of salvation and the operation of judgment, was that He had a scene, you could almost say, put back in order, if I might just use that expression, but really it was a renewed scene. "The earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep" but at the end of Genesis 8 that situation is adjusted and all confusion gone and there is just a man and his house for God, all that God had in the scene. But, beloved, it was enough because God smelled an odour of rest.

Paul says explicitly that "God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints". And I believe, beloved, that "in all the assemblies of the saints", if we will only grasp for it, there is light, there is the knowledge of the value and efficacy of the death of Christ in its fullest aspect and bearing, there is salvation and there is judgment. Where these things are known we shall find that confusion has been removed and we shall know

the God of peace in all the assemblies of the saints. May the Lord help us to think about these things for our profit for His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

8 April 1978

PROMISES

J.C.Evershed

John 6: 45 (part) "And they shall be all taught of God"

The promises in the Bible are numbered in their thousands. There are at least ten vital ones on this column from which I have read, such as "he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst at any time"; and "him that comes to me I will not at all cast out". All those are precious promises and we need to read the Scriptures to look for them because God has given them at His own word. What has been read is one of the most precious of them, at any rate it has come before me as such at the moment; that God has charged Himself with our education. What a God we have, to educate such as we are! the same God who wipes the tears from every eye. The tenderest of mothers might leave a tear that will dry on with a salty mark; it says of God that He will wipe away every tear. And I do not think He is any less careful in the education of His people, for it says "And they shall be all taught of God".

I desire therefore to speak a little about the school of God. It is what is called a comprehensive school and is all the better for that because it means that we are all in it together. The benefit of that is that we can and do learn from one another, even from little children.

What would you have thought seeing the twelve great apostles standing round and looking at a little child whom the Lord drew attention to and set alongside of Himself? The Lord was using this child to teach them something of vital import, that they should not be so concerned with their own importance but rather that they were being educated to serve the Lord and needed to have a humble and lowly spirit. We can learn from those who are older also. God's school is a boarding-school as well without any holidays. That is a good thing too because we are all always in it, and do not let us forget that. We might overlook it from time to time. God would educate us on Saturday mornings as well as any other time or day.

It would be difficult to say, I suppose, at what age we go into God's school. What might be more important would be the fact that a time comes when we are aware that we are in His school. Paul the apostle was set aside from his mother's womb, so that God had His eye, as we say, on him right from that very time, but it was a long while before he, as Saul of Tarsus, came to realise that God had undertaken to work in and educate him. In his case it was to train him quickly for a very great place in the divine system, greater of course than you and I have; but then think of the favour and the honour of a place at all in the divine system. God's education is in view of making us fit for that and for the time when what He has accomplished will come out in a setting which will add lustre to the great and glorious day when the Lord is in display. It would be easier, I suppose, to say the time when persons leave school, some at a very great age. Why is that? Is it that God's ways in education are not yet completed? That might be so, but another reason why they are left here for so long is to teach us the twin lessons of patience and thankfulness in which we often get rather low marks. So I say this for the encouragement of those who are older that they need not say, Well, I suppose I am a slow learner, or God's ways take a long time with me. God has His own timetable in these things, but let them take courage that they are left here as monuments to His grace and in order to show out in themselves the maturity of His work and education so that others who follow may see the things worked out in persons. That is the great objective of God's education, that things should be seen to be completed according to His pleasure in persons.

God uses a number of means in educating us. We all know, and the scripture tells us categorically, that nature itself teaches us (see 1 Cor 11: 14). Nature does not only teach that elementary lesson that if a man have long hair it is a shame to him and if a woman have long hair it is a glory to her, but many other things as well, more than I could possibly enumerate or know even. It is a principle that everything in the old creation in some way, if we are intelligent and enquiring enough, will teach us something in new

creation. Who would have thought for instance that a she-ass could give us a lesson in fulfilled responsibility? When God opened the mouth of Balaam's ass she said something to this effect: Thou hast ridden on me ever since I was thine, and have I ever disappointed thee? Balaam had to say, No. He had to admit that his ass had fulfilled her responsibility to him. Well, that is something in the old creation. You may say, how am I going to fulfil my responsibility? I will tell you. Fulfil the righteous requirement of the law by walking according to the Spirit. The scripture (Romans 8: 4) refers no doubt to the whole scope of the law and in a way even more. The righteous requirement, what God is looking for from us, we fulfil by the indwelling and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The old version of the Bible said that the law was our 'schoolmaster' up to Christ; it says "tutor" now, which means more 'guardian' I think. Of course where the scripture comes in in Galatians it has a setting which is especially to do with the Jews because Paul says, as a Jew writing to gentiles, that the law was our tutor up to Christ. In other words there was an immaturity with the Jews and they had to have a law to observe; God in His goodness gave it to them. It set out to a large extent His own moral qualities, but was not intended so much for that but to be a perfect rule for man, As we know, the Galatians tended, if not to put themselves under the law as such, to put themselves under what scripture says is the "principle of works of law". I do not suppose there is anyone here at whatever stage of education, who has not said to him or herself, Now I am going to try and keep God's law. In a way it would not be a bad thing to attempt. It would lead to disappointment, and I know very well by my own experience that that kind of thing does. But then what is the value of it? The law was a tutor up to Christ, but when Christ came liberty was known, not liberty to fulfil the will of the flesh (and I do not mean by the will of the flesh the things gross and obviously evil) nor just the will of man. The will of the flesh in Galatians is the will of the legal flesh that wanted by ordinances and services and tastings to ingratiate itself with God and to improve self. But "the principle of works of law", an expression used a number of

times in the epistle to the Galatians, written to gentiles like ourselves, shows the danger of our putting ourselves under law. No doubt it has its educational value, and I expect there are very few of us in the course of our Christian experience who have not been under that principle, or even under the law. We become worried and upset by it because it disappoints us, and the reason is that its centre is always 'self'. We might say it is God's law and I want to keep it, but then it is always you who are trying to keep it, and it has a baneful influence.

We learn much from the man, as we call him, in Romans 7. I do not think there could ever have been a real man in Romans 7 because there could never be anyone whose desires were wholly right and whose practice was wholly wrong, but there is with us all a mixed condition. I would not allow that this is the normal thing in God's sight, but we find it in practice with ourselves that there are right desires and we are disappointed because there is not the power to maintain and keep them. That man came to it that the law was perfect and the commandment holy, just and good. Mark the order - holy in God's sight, righteous because it has to do with equity and everything that is due to everybody else, and good because of its guidance to the persons to whom God gave it; so that there is nothing wrong with the law. The principle of law leads to what is beggarly and Paul had to take issue with the Galatians because of that influence. But the law was the tutor up to Christ; it took care of the persons in view of Christ coming in. When the time of liberty has come, the heart, the soul, has a fresh object. I have no doubt that those who, like David, loved God's law had God as an object though all the time feeling that they were not able to do what they wanted to do. Now God has given power in the Holy Spirit whereby His righteous requirements should be fulfilled in us. The apostle was not the only one; we can put ourselves in the 'us' who walk not according to flesh (which would be the principle of law) but according to Spirit. Have we reached this stage in our education, that we have a new object before us? Christ being in heaven the Spirit has come and we have received the Spirit so that we have power to maintain what is right and good towards God.

Scripture also says that the grace of God bringing with it salvation, teaches us. Is that not a wonderful thing? Think of being taught by someone who says, Now I am not only teaching you things but I am bringing you the means to learn them and answer to them. The grace of God will give you the very means, just what you need, to answer to each particular lesson. And it is for all men too. We speak to one another as a few here representing more still whom we know definitely as the people of God. But all these things are for all. Someone said to Mr Raven, I understand, All these things I suppose are for all Christians; he said, These things are for all men. The question is whether we are ready to be taught by grace. You may think it sounds a more lenient teacher than the law, but make no mistake, grace does not overlook wilfulness or anything of that kind. In fact it brings salvation in order to save us from that. I have discovered that the worst possible thing I can do is my own will; that is of course the will that would be contrary to God's pleasure. What God's education aims at with us is that our wills should be brought into line with His, so that obedience (which would be right and good) is not with a contrary will but our obedience is with a will to do what He wills. That is what came out in Jesus; what Peter brought forward in the beginning of his epistle as to being sanctified unto the obedience of the Christ. You say that is a high standard of things; well, God works to a high standard. He must do because it is His own standard, although He comes down to where we are and educates us in view of it. So the grace of God comes in and it teaches us. We have to abandon something first, abandon fleshly lusts and things of that kind. As a believer you will give a sigh of relief and thank God you can abandon those things and have the power to do so. They exercise a certain attraction but as we refuse them we find that that attraction does not have its hold. I will not say it vanishes because there is always with us a condition which is liable to failure, but then as we refuse evil it loses its power. Then Peter says we should live soberly, righteously and piously. Mark the order again, it is the opposite way round - soberly as to what we are ourselves (we have to watch self); righteously in connection with those we have to do with and observe their rights; piously you might

think would come first, but the great thought to which all leads is that we should live a godly life. I do not doubt that all who are here are on this path and many well advanced on it too, living piously in this present evil world.

When we were children at school we were not encouraged to look out of the window as it might distract us, but God has given us a window in our school to look out of, very much like the window in the ark - right at the top. Paul wrote these things to Titus and he would pass them on to the Cretans where everyone was a liar, and all lazy persons, even as their own prophet said. Titus must have been educated under Paul for a service like that, and to tell them about living piously. Perhaps they came to it more quickly than we do; we do not know. Sometimes people taken up out of depravity make far better progress than we do who are settled in amongst these things all our lives. Nevertheless it is a time of quick education, and he would be able to say to those persons and to us that we can look out for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. God would encourage us to look for that. So it is not a time only of a toilsome education but all the time we are looking for the day of display when God will show what He is doing and accomplishing now in the hearts of men and women and children. We have spoken of persons going on into old age; we do not speak of doing so ourselves but what we look forward to is the Lord's coming. We were reminded not long ago that if we say the Lord may come tomorrow we are wicked bondmen, and we are putting off the coming of the Lord. A remark like that detects what is really uppermost in our hearts, whether we really are looking and longing, and not only waiting, for the great and glorious appearing. The rapture is to come first, but in the way in which the Scriptures put it the two can be viewed as one. The Lord will transform our bodies, and those who are in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of God; they will come forth and we shall all be changed. We know the terms of these things, but let us be looking forward to the appearing when the Lord Jesus will be glorified in all those who believe. There will be something distinctive in each. The world speaks of mass

education but there is individual education in God's school; it says "they shall be all taught of God"; personal attention is given to each one, and there is corresponding discipline that goes along with it. There is not exactly punishment in His school but rather discipline. Perhaps it is too much to say there is no punishment, I would not altogether say that from my own experience, but in the principle of it anyway it is not punishment but discipline. In other words it has a forward look and not so much a backward look. It looks forward to what God will produce; therefore His discipline, whatever it may be and however painful, has reference to what He will achieve in us and educate us to for His own pleasure.

Now we cannot do better than to learn from the Lord Jesus Himself; in fact He said do so. What a Lord we have! He did not just say "learn from me", which is very attractive, but He said something else first: "take my yoke upon you". Now have we the consciousness of that? That is a very definite thing and not something that can be shaken off. I cannot think in that setting that anyone who took the yoke of the Lord Jesus on him or on her would ever be restive in it. So it is a definite committal; and He does not say, I will put it on you. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me", Matt 11: 29. It is something deliberate on our part and something to be maintained in the spirit of our souls; so we are associated with that lowly Man and it would be a form of companionship in our pathway here. He says "and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls". The whole matter of education is really bound up with our links with the Lord. Mary was sitting at His feet. Martha was serving, which was very good, and I have no doubt that from that incident Martha learnt how to serve even better than she had done, but the Lord said Mary had chosen that good part which should not be taken from her. That was the part of sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His word. The whole setting of discipleship is one of education, so that all the time the disciples were with the Lord they were being educated in one way or another, even if it was only by having to study a little child. If also He was making known to them the things concerning His Father it was all for their education.

In their case all those things which might have appeared to us to be dormant in their history with the Lord sprang to life when the Holy Spirit came and indwelt them and we have Peter and John being able to say "look on us", Acts 3: 4. They said in effect, It is not silver and gold that you need, but look on us and have what we can give you; in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaraean rise up and walk. Think of what was imparted by Peter! Now we too are being educated to impart things. They were not just learners, although no doubt they were always learning, but they came forward in the beginning of the Acts as graduates in the school of God, able to draw attention rightly to themselves and exercise the power of impartation from one to another. We do not have sign gifts now but I do not think the power of impartation has by any means lapsed. We know it because we receive help from one another. We do not receive merely by way of knowledge, but it is something that has led to formation in us which God has been pleased to show us and demonstrate in someone else.

The Spirit teaches too: "*he shall teach you all things*", the Lord said, John 14: 26. What a guarantee that was, one of the greatest promises in the Bible! As things come along that we need to be taught, I believe that by the power of the Spirit God would bind them on us so that they are lessons we learn. Think of learning by the Spirit who "has taken his abode in us", as James says! chap 4: 5. I like that expression; it is not just that He has come for a moment or on trial. The point in the writer's mind was that He has found it congenial to come and abide in the believer. Do you feel that that would be so with you, that He has found it a suitable thing to come? He will not leave, I know; but He may retire as to His activities. I am not concerned so much with the negative side of things; that is all met by positive ministry. Persons may fall out of the practical enjoyment of the testimony and of assembly life and may fail in some way, but the great thought is that He has taken up His abode in us because He finds material with us whereby we may be educated into God's things.

Following the sentence I read it speaks of learning of the Father: "Every one that has heard from the Father himself, and has learned of him, comes to me". Oh to be taught of the Father! The apostles were taught of Him on the mount of transfiguration. What lesson did they learn? They learned to hear Jesus. The lesson was, there is My beloved Son, hear Him. So that in a certain sense God's education goes full circle; it begins with Christ and it leads to Christ. It brings us to Christ - another valuable promise - "Every one that has heard from the Father himself, and has learned of him, comes to me". So that learning of the Lord is the ultimate in our education, and the ways of God with us are in order that we should be conformed to the image of His Son to which we have been predestinated. May we reach it the more, not in a time to come, but now and here for the Lord's Name's sake.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

27 March 1976

THE CHILDREN'S FREEDOM

The first words spoken by God when Adam was put into the garden of Eden were "... thou shalt freely eat". At the very end of the Bible the last appeal is to everyone who thirsts to come and drink "the water of life freely". We thus learn that it is the desire of the Creator that mankind should have liberally all that is necessary to maintain life in the body and especially spiritually. Our part is to receive everything with thanksgiving and in "freely addressing him", according to the Scripture. His bounty as Creator and as our Father thus returns to Him in the name of the Lord Jesus as the rain is drawn up again to heaven by the power of the sun.

We know, however, that Adam disobeyed God's word as to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and thus became a sinner, as also all men, women and children, his vast family. Whether people believe this or not, it is 'thralldom' - an ancient word meaning the opposite of 'freedom'. Sins are committed because persons are sinners. However, by the obedience of "the one man Jesus Christ"

in being made sin at Calvary's cross, the many who have faith in Him receive the free gift of righteousness. The Holy Spirit within the believer gives power to reign in life even in the weak natural condition in which God's wisdom has left us.

As to actual sins the provision that God has made is as great and free as that for the sinner himself. Through the conscience He has given us we become aware of a burden from which we cannot free ourselves by good will or good deeds. Self-will is bondage, not liberty and it is good if at an early age children are concerned about their sins. Many years ago a blacksmith had to go into prison for his misdeeds and was bound with a great iron chain. He felt sure that he was strong enough to free himself somehow. However on examining the chain he could find no flaw since it was one which he himself had made and he boasted that his work could never be broken! But if someone had taken his place and borne his punishment then he could be free. The glory of the glad tidings is that Jesus has died for us and therefore the believer will never come into judgment for his sins, all of which were foreknown at Calvary. Can you say with myriads of Christians "Christ has set us free in freedom"?

J.C.Evershed