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THE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT IS COLLECTIVE LEARNING SKILL

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THE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT IS COLLECTIVE

Acts 20: 28-30; Exodus 28: 15-22, 29, 30; Number 2: 1, 2, 32-34

D.J.W. I am sure the saints all enjoy their individual links with Christ. There is something very special established when the believer is converted and comes to Christ. I have been impressed lately with the fact that what is collective is far greater than what is individual.

There is what is synergistic in the company of the saints-that is there is more than addition as we are together but multiplication.

The brethren will bear with me, because several have heard me say it recently, but I have been impressed that the Spirit of God gives us so many different figures in scripture of what is collective. If I can just enumerate some; first, “my assembly” which involves stability, then “the house of God” which involves dwelling, “my brethren” which involves what is kindred, “the flock” which involves a living order of things, “the family” which implies moral character, “the temple” which gives light, “the body” which implies unity, “the bride” which particularly implies affection, “the garden” which is the way the saints complement one another, then we get “fellow citizens of the saints” or the city which involves what is foundational and glory, and lastly I could refer to the “army of heaven” which involves what is military which comes into Revelation (19: 14). If the Spirit of God gives us all these different titles it must be that what is collective is very important for the saints. I am sure that we prove this as we come together.

What I suggest in these passages read, the references to the assembly of God, and the tribes, is not what the collective aspect is for us, but what it is for God. How precious to take account of this reference, “to shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own”, a very touching expression involving that the purchase was by One who was intimately and affectionately bound up with the One who gave Him. There is something deep which you cannot put into words. There is an expression which comes into scripture quite a bit – John presents it particularly – that is “his own”, for example, “having loved his own

who were in the world, loved them to the end”, John 13: 1. It implies a certain bond and intimacy that is very touching. But here we have “the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own”, which gives us some impression that the assembly of God is for God Himself.

I read, therefore, in the book of Exodus because the breastplate is inseparable from the ephod and on it is this glorious breastplate of judgment. We have four rows of three which is not, as the onyx stones that are on the shoulder pieces, according to their birth – which I suppose is John’s line as to the family of God, children of God – but rather as it says at the end of verse 21, “every one according to his name shall they be for the twelve tribes”. It seems to me that these four rows of three represent the local assemblies. It is the breastplate of judgment on his heart, when he goes in to the sanctuary”, as if the Lord Jesus is bearing us collectively in our local companies in the sanctuary as before God. How precious that is to lay hold of!

In Numbers it is the military setting but we get the same idea; we get the four sides of the camp, north, south, east and west and there are three tribes on each side. It seems to me that there is a very close link between the way the tribes encamp around the tabernacle and the way these twelve stones are borne on the heart of Christ in the presence of God. That may, perhaps be suggestive for us to speak over together.

A.J.E.T. We were thinking how what is synergistic stands to this collective side in the way of what is for God as well as what we enjoy, because that is what you are taking up, what is for God. He gets more through the collective side than what comes individually, precious though that can be.

D.J.W. It takes us beyond the area of duty. I think it would help if we could get just some inkling of what it is for the saints seen as a collective entity as before God. It is so precious to Him – “which he has purchased with the blood of his own”. We would touch the area of enjoyment and have an appreciation of divine feelings for us.

A.J.E.T. Then, along with that, the appreciation of divine working in the individual, in one another, would help along the line of that which is for increase beyond what is individual to what is collective. So the affections are flowing towards one another in regard of each one's part in this?

D.J.W. Yes, I am sure that is so. Mr Taylor used to say when brothers asked him a question after the meeting, 'If you had asked it in the company I might have been able to answer it'. What is working by the power of the Spirit is what is unified amongst the saints.

R.W.F. Would you tell us more about the approach on the part of Luke to the assembly of God by way of reference to the flock "wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers, to shepherd the assembly of God". It would remind us of John's ministry and Peter's. Say what you think is the meaning of that approach, "the assembly of God".

D.J.W. I think one thing that marks a flock is that it is very vulnerable. While there is an expression of what is living and vital in it, I think there is also what is very vulnerable. A sheep on its own has no defence, it immediately runs to the flock for its protection, and that is why I read the two verses that follow it, because it seems to me that the devil is set against what is collective. The apostle says, "for I know this, that there will come in amongst you after my departure grievous wolves, not sparing the flock". That is serious enough in itself, but then he adds, "and from among your own selves", and he is addressing the Ephesian elders. Think of that, the top stone of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, "and from among your own selves shall rise up" a divisive element. How we need, therefore, to be watchful. If the flock is so precious should we not be careful that nothing of an element of what would spoil would come in?

R.W.F. It is precious not only to us, but more particularly it is precious to God. The reflexive word is used for purchased.

D.J.W. He has expended a lot on us. Think of what it meant for Him to part with that which He could speak of as His own, that which was

so precious to Himself. Psalm 16 says, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places" (v.6). He had found what was enjoyable amongst the saints and what was enjoyable in His relationship with the Father, and that had to be interrupted in order that this vessel might be secured.

D.A.B. Is it of interest that when Paul is looking forward to how things are going to continue he uses the figure of the flock, which John also uses for the same purpose, to show that the unity you have in mind will not be preserved administratively, or even apostolically or by anything official, but by something more organic and spiritual?

D.J.W. That is helpful. To us, when you look at a flock, you can hardly tell any difference between one sheep and another, but a shepherd knows. I remember my uncle counting his sheep and he would say, there is one missing, and he would say, I know which it is. He valued that sheep so much. It seems to me that the flock involves what is living- "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly", John 10: 10. I think that if we touch anything together it needs to be what is vital and living.

D.A.B. At the end of Timothy where Paul is also discussing what will happen when pressure comes on the unity of the believers, he does not propose to Timothy to erect an official defence against that but, "do the work of an evangelist", 2 Tim 4: 5. The thing seems to be softer than anything official would allow.

D.J.W. We live in the day when what is official has totally broken down so that if there is anything to continue it is on the line of what is unofficial. Shepherding is very much an unofficial service. He had called the elders over and, you may say, this was the last direct influence Paul would have in regard of the Ephesian saints. I trust the saints do not look at Ephesus as representing something unattainable. It seems to me that whilst Ephesus was the acme of Paul's labours, what has been is a proof, as Mr. Raven used to teach us, of what can be. I think we should lay hold of it that we

should not lower our sights from the fact that the Lord wants what is Ephesian in character today.

R.B. Do you have any thoughts as to why it is that the assembly of God needed to be purchased?

D.J.W. I suppose it takes us to Matthew 13, “the kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hid in the field, which a man having found has hid, and for the joy of it goes and sells all whatever he has, and buys that field” (v.44). I do not know that I could add to that.

M.J.W. It is very interesting in Exodus that it is in the context of the Passover that the idea of the assembly and the congregation first come into view, which is significant in what has been asked. It is in connection with the Passover that the assembly, that individual before God, and the word congregation are both used in the same chapter (see ch 12).

D.J.W. The first reference is always significant in regard of any matter and it seems to me that individuals are redeemed. The assembly was never redeemed because she never belonged to another, but the idea of purchase gives us the idea that it has cost something. If God was to have an assembly it was going to cost Him something and the beauty of the verse is that the cost was the blood of His own, that is that the death of Christ was a necessity and it was the death of such a One. That is what the verse implies; His blood was the purchase price.

A.M. Does it link with the counsel of God – “for I have not shrunk from announcing to you all the counsel of God”? I wondered if the idea of purchase links with the idea of counsel.

D.J.W. We see how quickly what was inaugurated in the creation of man fell under an encumbrance and it must be if there is to be anything particularly for God that that had to be met. But as you rightly say it belongs to the idea of counsel, that is that it is the working out of God’s ways. I think it is very significant that this title is used, “the assembly of God”. It seems to me to convey extreme dignity. You come in amongst the saints and it is not somewhere where you can be casual because it is an anointed vessel and it has

great dignity. There is great dignity that marks the company. What is casual has no place. If you consider what we have read as to the tribes, it is interesting that there is what is counterfeit even in regard to what is tribal, because Esau had twelve princes, as if the enemy imitated what God had in His counsel and purpose. I think what we see as we look at what is tribal is that there is that which is so valued by Christ Himself that He bears it up in the sanctuary. We would therefore have some sense of the value of this glorious entity spoken of as the assembly of God.

P.J.W. Is it helpful in that way that Paul uses the same expression as to a local assembly, “the assembly of God which is in Corinth”, 1 Cor 1: 1? I wondered whether that would link on with your thought as to what is local.

D.J.W. Very much so, and he begins that epistle to Corinth, “the assembly of God which is in Corinth ... with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”, so that you get the idea of the four that we get on the breastplate, four by three. I suppose the four involves what is universal. Later on in Corinthians Paul says, “if any one think to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor the assemblies of God”, 1 Cor 11: 16. Paul was speaking to Corinth but he had in his mind all the assemblies. There was to be dignity, beauty and glory marking every local assembly.

J.W. Would the thought of purchase emphasise God’s exclusive right to it?

D.J.W. Yes. The word is “the assembly *of* God”; it is His. We often think of the assembly as Christ’s bride, and that is right, but there is this other side, the assembly is the assembly of God and it is in that vessel that there is glory unto the age of ages (see Eph 3: 21). It is the assembly of God that is used in eternal response Godward. What dignity therefore must mark such a vessel.

J.W. So, the exhortation to shepherd the flock would be in view of that, that it is God’s property.

D.J.W. In the following verses it speaks of how he had done it, and that is an example for us. He is laying out here a very strong appeal.

In using such language he is elevating the local company to the view of the elders. We may look around our local companies and say, we are just a few and that may be true, but does it have the character of one of these stones, does it glisten on the breastplate of Christ? If so, then it is a very glorious and dignified vessel.

T.H. Can you say something as to the divine purpose of the local companies?

D.J.W. I think Ephesians 3 gives us something of the purpose of God in securing the assembly, that there might be an eternal response according to the level which He Himself has purposed.

D.A.B. The precious stones were the only way in which the people had entrance into the holiest. The ordinary people could not go in and that, from one point of view, is a severe limitation in that system. I thought it was interesting that the only symbol of the people going in to the immediate presence of God was these precious stones.

D.J.W. That is interesting because of this reference, which is very touching, to “the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart”. They go in, not technically, but because they are there as held in Christ’s affections. Think of the priestly character of Christ in the dignity of taking the whole twelve tribes in the setting of what is universal into the sanctuary.

D.A.B. I was thinking of what has been said – they become exclusively God’s. To use this expression, they become His own. The Lord uses that expression in John 10, “he has put forth all his own” (v.4). Without taking away from the distinctive place which the Lord Jesus has, which Paul speaks of at the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians, they become precious in the same way that He himself is to God.

D.J.W. Every assembly is distinctive. We see that in this section, these four rows of three. I suppose we have to go to Numbers to see the names in a tribal way, but every one in the type had its own link with Christ. Every one is a precious stone but they are all different – one has a green hue involving what is fresh, another a very pale blue which involves what is heavenly, another a red hue

which involves the element of suffering. Every local company is distinctive. We have lived through a time when there was a levelling of things, when every assembly had to do everything exactly the same, and so on, but I think what you see on the breastplate is that every local assembly was so formed according to the divine intent that it was unique and special in itself and had a glow that Christ appreciated and could present in the sanctuary before God, for His pleasure.

D.A.B. Someone had each of these stones and sought it as part of the offering of which the tabernacle system was constructed. Is it in your mind that in the places where we are we should have a substantial and formed impression of what the company is to God, that Christ would carry in before God?

D.J.W. I think it is very wholesome to contemplate the very movements of Christ as He went. The very structure of the breastplate of judgment would be a thing of beauty. It speaks of artistic work, gold, blue, purple and scarlet. That is what our local companies are, they are artistic work; there is another expression that is used, "enclosed in gold shall they be in their settings", as if there is the glory of divine handiwork in each one, in its own setting.

The Lord has not set the assembly in Birmingham the same as He has set the assembly in London or Sunbury; it has its own distinctiveness, but it is set in a setting of gold. When you come to the tabernacle in Exodus it is the top stone where you get things without any sense of breakdown or failure. It is there for our contemplation of the divine standard of workmanship in which we are to view our own local companies. It is from that level of things that we are to labour, work and appreciate.

R.W.F. What is the force of the word "judgment" used here, "the breastplate of judgment of artistic work"?

D.J.W. I take it is a reference to the Urim and Thummim that is put into it. In one scripture they could not make a decision until the priest with the Urim and Thummim came in. I think what it implies is that there is nothing that should remain unresolved, there is light and

perfection. It takes us beyond the sphere of breakdown and failure with which we are so familiar, to the divine viewpoint where we can see the local assembly in its abstract character which is bearing substantive features of Christ.

R.W.F. Paul writes to the Philippians about judging and proving the things that are more excellent. Is that part of it?

D.J.W. Very much so, and that is an interesting reference. It means that you are handling what is excellent so that you judge and approve the things that are more excellent. Something has a higher degree of excellency than another.

R.W.F. In the Acts Luke records that one locality was “more noble” than the other (see Acts 17: 11). He was not dismissing the other, he was saying one was nobler – that is this kind of judgment, what is more excellent?

D.J.W. I have to ask myself how do I get on in relation to these things. It is all right seeing it as a picture, and we must start with the divine ideal, but then I have to work it out for myself. So he is calling over these elders from Ephesus and saying, shepherd the assembly of God, “which he has purchased with the blood of his own”. He says, there is the standard, you have seen how I have acted, I have given you an example, now work it out for yourselves. That is the test, working it out. Thank God we have divine resource to work it out.

T.H. So these things are very beautiful to us, they would be very beautiful to these persons who had these things upon their hearts, but would it help us to remember that it is “before Jehovah”, that the beauty is before Jehovah. I was thinking as to the purpose of God-“in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises” as in Psalm 22. That is as a result of what goes before, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (v.1). Is not the whole matter very precious before Jehovah that the purpose of God would be involved in these things.

D.J.W. It is a very profound Psalm because it gives us the reason why we have the three hours of darkness and that moment of

intense suffering, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ... thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel” (vv. 1,3). The sanctuary is a very holy area and that was the reason for such intense suffering for Christ, that the basis may be laid so that in divine righteousness we can be presented into such a sphere and sustained there on the heart of Christ. Not sustained by mere outward form or anything of that nature, but sustained on the heart of Christ. We are held there in a system of love.

M.J.W. I did not really follow what you said about the breastplate of judgment. Were you suggesting that as far as God is concerned every matter is resolved?

D.J.W. It is a great thing to get things from the divine viewpoint. There is an aspect of the assembly where there is no breakdown. It is not easy to grasp but I think we need to spend time to grasp it. The type is Genesis 2, He built the woman and presented her to man. That was before sin came in so it is a type of the assembly without any past history and without failure or breakdown. I think the idea of these stones is that it is the local company in their glory apart from the element of breakdown, that can be presented on the heart of Christ, in the sanctuary as before God.

M.J.W. It takes a little bit of time to focus the mind because a lot of the difficulties that we have are very real and are used by the enemy to spoil. You might say you are living in ‘cloud cuckoo land’ to say that these matters are resolved, yet it appears that they are not, but what you say is helpful to take an abstract view as Paul did when he approached the Corinthians.

D.J.W. I fully go with what you say, but does not the Lord give us every Lord’s Day at the Supper an experience practically that you are touching a sphere of things locally amongst the saints where as the brethren of Christ, the bride of Christ, the sons of God, there is no failure or breakdown? You and I touch it every week as if the Lord would remind us that these things are practical but they are real. It is not ‘cloud cuckoo land’, the Supper is real, that is practical

and it takes place every week and we touch something which is beyond the sphere of breakdown.

D.A.B. So the adjacent reference to the heart of the high priest is very fine. It often used to be said that 'the heart of a Man beats in heaven'. Here we have the very centre of a divine system for God, a living heart. That is seen in connection with the breastplate of judgment. It seems to bring home what you are saying that at the very centre of things there is perfection. If we linger too much in the outskirts of the camp where the problems are, we would never come where this priest serves, and therefore our view would not sufficiently cover what he sustains before God.

D.J.W. But what was the point of all those camps, the military bearing of things? If from twenty years old and upward, these persons were taking on responsibility and had to share their side with two other tribes, what were they doing? They were protecting the camp. What is military is not an end in itself, it has in view the maintenance of the service of God.

D.A.B. I would like to suggest that it was protecting them as well. The order round the camp was radial and you might say the influence of what you have spoken of in Exodus at the very centre, which was sustained before God in living power, was supposed to extend its influence to the extremity of the tents, was it not?

D.J.W. Yes. So, in the testimony in the wilderness, which is what we are looking at in Numbers, things are vulnerable, as in Acts 20. "Will come in amongst you after my departure grievous wolves" – "from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things", things are vulnerable but there is a divine provision in which everything can be protected. There is the Urim and the Thummim available to us to resolve every difficulty.

D.A.B. You will never draw away a disciple after yourself if you have a grasp in your affections of the place that the saints have before God.

D.J.W. Quite so. It is very solemn, but the root is always in persons. I remember an address with Mr. Maynard where he read, "that no

one take thy crown" (Rev. 3: 11). He said, when it says "no one" it means no one, and that is it is persons who will lead us astray. I think that was a valuable word to us.

J.G. In his speaking to the elders Paul, before he comes to the anticipated breakdown says, "Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock", does that suggest that he was going to maintain the universal and wide view of all that God has for Himself in spite of what breakdown would come in?

D.J.W. I think so, "wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers". The Holy Spirit is the key to these things. The local company is set as it pleases the Holy Spirit, for its furtherance and protection.

J.W. These stones are enclosed in gold. Is that significant?

D.J.W. I think it is. It reminds me of what Paul says, "messengers of assemblies, Christ's glory", 2 Cor 8: 23. The messenger was of an assembly which was Christ's glory so that the assembly is like this stone in its socket of gold, Christ's glory. Every local assembly reflects the glory of Christ in some way.

R.H.B. How do the stones on the breastplate contrast with the earlier part of the chapter where the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod had six tribe names on each? What is the distinctive presentation of this in comparison with that?

D.J.W. I think the two onyx stones with six names on each is what John says, "nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God", John 1: 13. They were there as the subject of divine handiwork and in that sense you can look round on the local company and everyone has been purchased for the same price, they belong to the same family.

But then you come to them being set together, which I think it is referred to at the end of the section, as tribes (which is very significant), it says, "every one according to his name shall they be for the twelve tribes". I think it is directing you to the local company and the way it has been put together. Our brother referred to the first reference to the assembly in contrast to a congregation, but the first reference to a tribe is also interesting because it is in Genesis

49, "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them; and he blessed them: every one according to his blessing he blessed them" (v. 28). So the first introduction of the idea of a tribe is in the atmosphere of Jacob blessing his sons. So the breastplate is an atmosphere of blessing that the saints have when taken into the sanctuary as held by the affections of Christ. That is most attractive.

J.W. Is the thought of the twelve tribes that of God's view? They were not always practically together, in fact there were times when enmity came in, but does this give us God's view of it?

D.J.W. Yes, and that is confirmed by the fact that the twelve tribes are in the wilderness and God does not lay them aside but carries them through. Even Paul speaks of "our whole twelve tribes" (Acts 26: 7), as if he carried forward this idea of what was tribal, what was collective, because of what it meant to God. I am trying to get over that there is something excellent about each one of these tribes because of what they were for God.

R.J.F. I was thinking as to the "enclosed in gold", but it also says, "in their settings". It is not just that the settings are of gold, but "enclosed in gold shall they be in their settings"; it is a full expression.

D.J.W. It is not their settings in the sense that Sunbury is rural, and somewhere else may be very industrialised. That is not the idea, it is not what the tribe is in its outward bearing, but it is its setting according to God's view in His great purpose. Oh that we might get something of that elevated view of the saints!

R.H.B. Would the connection you made with that as to the messengers of the assembly, Christ's glory show that every service that is connected with the local assembly is to be influenced by what you are bringing before us, what it is as belonging to God? So that in that example it is not simply a question of transmitting money from but A to Z but that the love of God should be conveyed, the feelings of God. It calls for a priest to do that; it is not simply a matter of

administration, it calls for someone in divine sympathies to convey what is given in a way that is suited to assembly giving.

D.J.W. What you are expressing is a spiritual idea; it is to convey the love and fellowship of the saints amongst other things; so the basket is on the table. There is far more in a gift that comes from the collection of the saints than the mere value of the currency.

R.H.B. One of the earliest crises among the saints was over distribution of money and the qualification of those who were to attend to it was men full of the Holy Spirit. It was not that they had book-keeping experience, or accountancy qualifications, but it was spirituality that was needed. We never hear of that matter again. It was a matter that could have troubled and split the brethren, but it was put into the hands of spiritual persons who viewed the local assembly in its relation to what it was to God.

D.J.W. I think what it involves, speaking practically for the young people, is that sometimes you have to stand back and go up the mountain and take a view of what God has in a local company.

Some of us can go back to our teen years and realise how much we mocked the brethren, emphasising their idiosyncrasies and so on and making a lot of them, and missing the fact that in that brother or sister there is a work of God which should shine in its excellence.

Suddenly it begins to dawn on you as you take a long-range view, 'this is God's handiwork, this is what God has worked out in my local company and I have a bond and a link with every one of them'. How precious!

R.W.F. It is a great day when a soul begins to get a divine view of the saints. I notice in the verse that you did not read in Numbers 2, when God through Moses was giving directions it says, "And for those encamping eastward toward the sun-rising there shall be the standard of the camp of Judah" (v.3). It is a great thing when the divine view dawns on us.

D.J.W. And it is interesting that later on in Numbers we find Balaam and that is the view he is given. I suppose the children of Israel at that time never knew a word of what he said, but what comes

through in the description is, “and the shout of a king is in his midst” (see Num 23: 21).

D.A.B. It is interesting that when the heave-offering was sought the types of stones were not specified – they were just told to bring stones (see Exod. 35: 27) – but in the heave-offering there were these twelve which seemed to be exactly what God was looking for in size and shape, so that there was among the people of God something that was wholly in sympathy with God’s highest view of His people. It would be fine if that was developed among the brethren in some way.

D.J.W. How are you suggesting that that works out?

D.A.B. Following on what has been said, we need to be exercised. We might say, our meeting is not as good as theirs or we might even venture to say, our meeting is better than theirs, but that is not the divine view. There was a harmony about these twelve stones that spoke of something very spiritual among the people of God.

D.J.W. It is interesting the way it is put, “the first row; and the second row ... and the third row ... and the fourth row” as if they are put into threes. In each case there are three tribes together – Judah with Issachar and Zebulun, Reuben with Simeon and Gad, and then Ephraim with Manasseh and Benjamin and then lastly Dan with Asher and Naphtali – you get the impression that they were carried into the presence of God in a neighbourly kind of way. We thank God that we have neighbours, we have brethren not far away at Worcester and Malvern and so on. It is almost as if he would say you can be neighbourly in the way you work out divine principles for the protection and expansion of what is for God. The exercises of the elders in Ephesus would begin to spread. For instance, the epistle to the Colossians was to be read to the Laodiceans.

J.W. Mr Darby said, If we do not get God’s view of the saints we will either accept a lower level for them, or be unduly critical of them. I wondered whether that bore on your exercise? To get that view we must be near Christ.

D.J.W. I like the reference to “wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers”; it is what the Holy Spirit has set in the local company.

There could be nothing of this standard of things apart from the activities of another divine Person. We are supported on the heart of Christ, the affections of Christ permeate the position, but the power and freshness in vitality is dependent on the gift of the Holy Spirit.

D.S. In 1 Timothy 3, I think the number of qualifications for a servant is six, but the qualifications for an overseer are fourteen. Would that bear on us? If we desire to be an overseer we would need to have a view of the assembly as God sees it.

D.J.W. That makes us feel the responsibility of such a task, but it says, “if any one aspires to exercise oversight, he desires a good work” (1 Tim 3: 1). You have to see that it may involve what is onerous, but on the other hand there is blessing connected with it, as we saw from Jacob’s blessing of his sons. The atmosphere is one of blessing. That is what we have to have in mind if we serve the saints.

R.H.B. In Paul’s letter to Corinth, was he not conscious of the place that they had in the heart of Christ, “jealous as to you” (2 Cor 11: 2).

Reference has already been made to the opening, “the assembly of God which is in Corinth”, 1 Co. 1: 1. There was much there that was inconsistent with that, but in his dealing with it and his handling of the saints there, was he not ever conscious of the place that they had in the heart of Christ?

D.J.W. That works for both the individual and what is collective.

When you come to Romans 16 Paul can say something as to each one, even if it is simply the fact that he ‘was in Christ before me’, which may connect with the two onyx stones on the shoulder pieces.

R.W.F. You used the word military in connection with Numbers 2, say more about that.

D.J.W. That is the aspect presented in chapter 1. Verse 2 says, “by the number of the names ... from twenty years and upward, all that go forth to military service”. I suppose that connects with what Paul speaks of to Timothy as to “a good soldier of Jesus Christ”, 2 Tim 2:

3. It is interesting that when you come to what is levitical, the service is in relation to the sanctuary, and the levitical system is from thirty years to fifty years. It involves more what is refined. When you come to what is inside the element of responsibility and quality is there, but when you come to military service, it is from twenty years old and upward, as if everyone one of us can come into that. We were speaking during the week as to being a good soldier of Jesus Christ and it occurred to me, when are we enlisted as a soldier? When do you get your uniform?

R.W.F. It is not through any effort of ours to achieve some qualification. I was thinking of Acts 20, "wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers". We have spoken of the qualifications of an overseer, but 'the Holy Spirit has set you'. Do we become qualified as we give full place to the Spirit?

D.J.W. Conversion is one thing, "bought with a price" (1 Cor 6: 20), but scripture presents further steps, you are enlisted as a soldier, you sign your papers, as it were. That is our side, committal. God has from His side provided every element that is needed for salvation, and that is very wonderful, but then the immediate question is, what is my response? What is my committal? I think that relates to the enlistment, but it is not something I do voluntarily, but something as under a sense of obligation.

M.J.W. Do you get your uniform before you put it on? When do we put the uniform on?

D.J.W. I was not very old before I had to act in a military way, because I had to face the working out of separation. These are practical things.

R.W.F. You have to be able to demonstrate that you can walk in step. It is possible to think that no one else is walking in step, but one has to learn to walk in step. That is one of the aspects of the military angle of approach here in this scripture. What is military is not necessarily what is war-like. God desires us to be moving together whether it is within the locality, or with neighbouring localities, each in its own right.

D.J.W. The fundamental thing is that we are protecting what is for God. It may mean that you have to take up the defence of the testimony, but you do it because you value the sanctuary for God. You are protecting the tabernacle.

C.B. Does that link with the beginning of Numbers where it speaks of those who were “summoned of the assembly, princes” (Num 1: 16); Mr Darby’s note there is ‘those who were habitually called to undertake the matters of the assembly’. Does that strengthen what you are saying?

D.J.W. It is interesting that they are all named, they are personalities. I think it all connects with the idea of what is distinctive. I think we need to elevate our view and see that our local companies are marked by what is distinctive.

J.W. Do we put the uniform on when we confess Jesus as Lord – show our colours in that way?

D.J.W. I had wondered about that. There is a protection in it. The uniform is enlisted for us in Ephesians 6, “the breastplate of righteousness ... helmet of salvation” (vv.14-17), and it has often been said that there is no protection for your back, so it is no good running away from things, because you would be vulnerable. You have to stand and face the enemy.

D.A.B. There was an age limit, military service was unavoidable; it was no good a teenager saying, I do not want to be twenty. If you know you have to take responsibility, then you would prepare for it, you would be ready and you would qualify in the way in which we have been speaking. But you might find yourself in a conflict at the age of twenty for which you were not prepared. It would be a fearful thing to be in a conflict unready.

D.J.W. I suppose Paul’s letter to Timothy largely opens that up in regard to how you prepare for it, “Have an outline of sound words”, 2 Tim 1: 13.

T.H. He also says, “each one was for the house of his fathers” (Num 1: 44). It is that also important, to be able to trace our genealogy?

D.J.W. That is interesting because that was the conflict in Nehemiah's day, persons who had a mixed genealogy were stripped of their duties because they could not show their pedigree. I suppose that is for our day how matters are worked out in detail. I do not think you can start working out the detail until you have the concept. It is no good starting to build a house unless you have the plan to work to.

A.M. I was just wondering as to the inside. Do you think it is important, our households in relation to the testimony? It says, "shall encamp every one by his standard, with the ensign of their father's house". It is a military setting, but you have your ensign, you are under the ensign of your father's house, holding the truth of baptism.

D.J.W. It involves you raising the flag. I suppose in the working out of it, you appreciate what has come to us in the recovery. In one way you could say, what Mr. Darby opened up as to the truth as to the body of Christ our head in heaven and so on, is a flag you can raise up. Mr Raven opened up the truth relating to the individual's blessing in Romans and then Mr. Taylor brought out the truth of the assembly. All these are flags that you can raise up and they are standards that you can work to.

A.M. But the working out of things involves what is local. There is no mention of the ensign in the last section you read, it is only the standard, the standard for each local assembly.

D.J.W. It says, "And the children of Israel did according to all that Jehovah had commanded Moses: so they encamped according to their standards, and so they journeyed". Divine command regulates the whole position and woe betide us if we get outside the area of divine commandment. There is something attractive in the way in which every camp is set.

SUNBURY

18 October 2003

Key to initials

C. Brodie, Ealing; R. Brown, East Finchley; R.H. Brown, East Finchley; D.A. Burr, London; R.J. Flowerdew, Sunbury; R.W. Flowerdew, Sunbury; J.S. Gray, East Finchley; T. Harvey, East Finchley; A. Mair, Cullen; D. Smith, Bexley; A.J.E. Temple, Sunbury; J. Walkinshaw, Bexley; P.J. Walkinshaw, Gillingham; M.J. Welch, Sunbury; D.J. Willetts, Birmingham; J. Wright, Havering

LEARNING SKILL

David Willetts

Luke 12: 41-44; Acts 19: 1-9; Exodus 35: 30-36: 1; 35: 25, 26

This passage in Luke 12 has been before me. The Lord says, “Blessed is that bondman who his lord on coming shall find doing thus” – that is he was giving food to the household. The Lord’s coming is imminent – I think we all would subscribe to that, but the question is, how will He find you and how will He find me at that moment? Do you think we can just coast up to the last finishing line? Is that the idea of the race? We are all running the race (1 Cor 9: 24). Are we just going to take our ease and coast up to the finishing line, or are we going to be exercised as found as in this passage. It is interesting that Peter says to him, “Lord, sayest thou this parable to us, or also to all?” Clearly the parable is to you. How old are you? Twelve, fourteen, the word has its application to you, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, the word is to you. It is interesting that when Paul addresses Timothy he says, “Till I come, give thyself to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Be not negligent of the gift that is in thee, which has been given to thee through prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the elderhood. Occupy thyself with these things; be wholly in them”, 1 Tim 4,15. I would like to encourage you, beloved brother or sister, to occupy yourself, but to occupy yourself with the Lord’s things. There are plenty of things in the world that you can legitimately be occupied with, but this word to Timothy is, “Till I come”. That is a connection with the passage in Luke 12, right up to the last moment, “give thyself to reading, to exhortation, to teaching”. I suppose the question is whether you have found what work the Lord would have you to do. I do not think the Lord has in mind that you should be a passenger. I think He has something for you to do, and if He has given you something to do He wants you to do it wholeheartedly, He wants you to put your energy into it. You say, I am only a young person, there is plenty of time. I doubt it, I think we are at the end and there is but a short time.

I want to speak a little by way of encouragement – as you look round the circle here there are brethren getting older. Who is going to take on things if the Lord leaves us here? When Pentecost came and Peter stood up with the eleven, what did they see? There were twelve men united in their testimony as to Christ, and I do not think one of them was over thirty. That may be profane history, but it has its bearing on you. Are you going to commit yourself to the Lord's things early? I think the Lord has a very special interest when persons are converted at an early age for the simple reason that they are not encumbered with a history of things in this world which they may have to unlearn. They have fresh, verdant, ardent affection for Christ. Mr Ron Plant's father often used to say, to know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to serve Him. Have you not found that, young brother, young sister, that you really appreciate what the Lord has done for you? He could not have done more, but I want to ask you, What have you done for Him? There is no shortage of need, but I would like to encourage you to commit yourself to the Lord's things. It may be that the testimony may continue a little while and there is a necessity for those who are younger to take on something of the burden of things.

I ask you another question, do you think in this day that there is any shortage from the divine side? What I want to speak about is skill. There is a good deal of shortage of skill nationally, and they are worried about it. They say we do not have the resources to train people, and companies say, it will cost too much to train people.

That is not true in the divine system, every single resource is available, the cost has been paid and the Spirit of God is here. A divine Person is here, resident in the assembly and in that Person everything that you could ever need is vested. The question is how you relate yourself to divine resources. I point first of all to Moses. It says of Moses as soon as that inclination began in his heart to serve his people, "it came into his heart to look upon his brethren" (Acts 7: 23), the result of which, perhaps being a little unskilful in his movements, he flees from Egypt, and what does he do, "he sat by the well", Exod 2: 15. Do you ever to do that, do you ever set

yourself to be in communion with the Holy Spirit? “He sat by the well”. I think we should take time to sit by the well, to commune with the Spirit of God; it will not be long before He will find something for you to do. The very next verse says that the daughters of Midian came along to water the sheep and he finds that there is something that his hand could do and he did it with his might.

The other person I would point to is Rebecca. It was clear that typically the Spirit of God knew of her habit to go to the well to draw for the household. Do you do that, make it a habit to commune with the Holy Spirit of God that you might have the wherewithal to water the saints? Tuesday night comes, the ministry meeting, the meeting for ministry of a prophetic character, are you exercised to come with something for the saints? Have you something that you can refresh the saints with? The reading comes, do you depend on what others bring or do you come as a contributor? If you have an exercise to serve the Lord, the Lord will provide what you need. It will not be easy. One thing you will find in God’s ways if you are to serve the saints is that you will come in for a great deal of discipline. Look round the company here and I am sure you can see that there is a good deal of discipline. We have the book, Discipline in the School of God. God’s ways with every one of those that Mr. Stoney enumerates are different, God’s ways with me are different from His ways with you, but if you are exercised, He will see to it in the wisdom that He has that you will be suitably disciplined in order that you might serve the saints. You say, If I serve the saints I might go beyond my measure. I would say to you there are probably nine who do not come up to their measure for every one that goes over their measure. I would like you to come up to your measure. God has given you light, He has given you some impression of Himself.

You say, I do not have gift. Are you sure? Have you not an impression of Christ? Can you not lean on the Spirit of God to open up that impression you have and make it available to others? You have what is unique, your impression of Christ is not mine, neither is it the same as that of anyone else in this room; that is something that

is uniquely yours. He wants you to share it with others and He will develop that gift.

One of the things that the Lord wants is for you to be developed in your gift, hence I read these other scriptures. What has Acts 19 to do with me, it refers to Paul? I will seek to show you. We referred to the twelve men who the Lord used so singularly at the beginning of this dispensation, young men. What training had they had? Where did they get their skill? They came out as like Christ because they were the product of His handiwork. Thirty years experience? No.

Three and a half years. That is all they had in close association with Christ. I think that is very special, to think what God can do in the soul of a believer in three and a half years. What have you done for the last three and a half years? Have you had to do with Christ?

Have you been near enough to Him? Have you pondered the way He does things? ... He has done all things well (see Mark 8: 37).

Everything that came up against the Lord found its solution in Himself, there was nothing too difficult for Him, but what impressed Mark was not just what was done, but the way it was done. There was a certain impress, a certain stamp on the way He did things.

Mark would say, I did not do things very well when I set out in service. Does the Lord write him off? No, He uses him to write one of the gospels. He writes the shortest one full of pungency and method.

I turn now to the reference to Paul, "And entering into the synagogue, he spoke boldly during three months", a very short period of time. Paul was labouring amongst the Ephesian saints, and it says, "reasoning and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God". He was dealing with what was basic, and if we serve the saints we need to have an outline of what is basic. The first thing said is "reasoning": I do not think you can have 'persuading' until you have 'reasoning'. Persuading takes us immediately to Romans; the mind is dealt with extensively in Romans. You have eleven references to it, more than in any other book in the Bible. You come in the conclusion of that to, "I *myself* with the mind serve God's law", Rom 7: 25. That is, you come under

the influence of Christ in the way of service and your mind is controlled. The epistle to the Romans, I think, is a book we ought to be more familiar with, it used to be taken up much more amongst the saints than it is now. I think it is a book we all need to be grounded in. He says, "What shall we then say to these things?" (Rom 8: 31).

The light is being presented to you and entering into your heart through the eyes of faith. "What shall we say then?", what is your response to the outshining of God in grace? I think when you answer that in yourself you will come to this beautiful word, persuaded. Paul speaks of that too in Romans, "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord", Rom. 8: 38,39). That is a wonderful thing to be persuaded of. Are you persuaded of that? It does not matter what enters into the testimony, whether it is angelic, or whether it belongs to the depths or to powers, nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. So you come intelligently to this point where you can be persuaded of certain things. What has come to you as light becomes formation in your soul and it is as if a conclusion is reached in the epistle to the Romans. In chapter 9 he goes on to Israel and the way things affect Israel; it is as if he would reach a conclusion in persons who were persuaded.

Was that the end? It says, "But when some were hardened and disbelieved, speaking evil of the way". Bear in mind that this is just three months, a concentrated time of education for these twelve men. You can be sure of this, if you set yourself for what is for the Lord that the devil will be active, he would seek to undermine any exercise you may have to get the teaching and to be occupied in reading and in the understanding of it. It says, "speaking evil of the way before the multitude, he left them and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus", He moved them into a new area of things because He was attracting them away from any influence that would spoil what God was doing in the company. I

trust, as we said in the reading, that every one of us has in mind that we should have Ephesian conditions as our objective, as nothing less would suit Paul and nothing less should suit us. The school of Tyrannus, is not harsh rule. Tyranny has become to mean that today. A tyrant was a person with absolute rule and that is one thing that is fundamental to the enjoyment of the kingdom and to the understanding of the kingdom. The kingdom underlies the assembly and all its teaching, and the reasoning and persuading comes as the basic teaching to that. It says, "in the school of Tyrannus", it means that my will has to go. The absolute rights of another, Christ, have to be owned by me and bowed to. If you get a company in which that is so, where everyone is there as under the absolute rule of Christ, there would be no difficulty as to the teaching. I think what you could write over this passage is that skill was given to Paul.

Is that going to continue? If so, how? In 2 Timothy Paul says to him, "cutting in a straight line the word of truth" 2 Tim 2: 15. How do you learn to cut a straight line? You take your pencil and rule and you mark a line down; you take your saw and you begin to cut. The way you cut a straight line is not to take your eye off the line. That is a most important thing in Christianity, to keep to the scriptures and to keep to the principles of Christianity as seen in Christ. Never take your eye off the standard and the pattern. You are not using a power saw; it is not switch it on and go quickly through it. You do not come into Christianity just in a moment. It means exercise, you have to pull the saw handle up and down, you have to apply yourself to it. It does not just happen. If you are going to take on the light of the truth, if you are going to understand the scriptures, if you are going to understand how one facet of the truth bears on another and is interwoven, it means you have to apply yourself. You have to cut in a straight line the word of truth and you have to use the right tools. It is no good using a blunt saw. It is no good using one with the wrong number of teeth. What it means simply is that you have to use the tools that God has provided and I suggest that they are the Spirit of God and the scriptures. You must lean heavily on the Spirit of God

and keep your eye upon Christ and that way you will cut in a straight line the word of truth.

I read in the Old Testament – there are Bezaleel and Aholiab, two interesting men. It says in the earlier chapter, “And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge, and in every work, to devise artistic work”, Exod. 31: 1-3. God had given these men a skill with all-round ability. I think it relates very much to the twelve apostles to whom we referred earlier. Ephesians 2 speaks as to what is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (v.20). I think Bezaleel and Aholiab were typical of the twelve apostles, they laid the foundation of things.

Notice this, “and he has put in his heart to teach, he and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: he has filled them with wisdom of heart”. I think the idea of teaching is that what was in the apostles in principle was to come down to our day. Paul speaks again to Timothy of this line of things, “And the things thou hast heard of me” -that was an apostolic line of things – “in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also”, 2 Tim 2: 2. You can see how what God had in principle in Bezaleel and Aholiab has come down to us on the line, not exactly as gift, but more on the line of faithfulness, persons who have laid hold of the truth and made it their own. But that word, “competent” involves skill, “to instruct others also”. I wonder, young brother, young sister, whether you will take your place as at the feet of those who are competent to instruct to learn the good teaching. We have a lot of it written down for us which makes it easy, you can go through the books of ministry. You say, I am busy. Yes I know, so am I, but you have to make time, even if it is only ten minutes or half an hour, make time to pray, make time to spend with the Spirit of God, but make time to make the ministry that God has given in His faithfulness to the assembly your own. The light of the recovery is there on our bookshelves. Are you going to leave it there? I daresay you have most of the ministry in your

house, do you read it? I am not just referring to the young brothers, I am referring to the young sisters as well. I read the verse in Exodus 35, "And every woman that was wise-hearted spun with their hands", so the sisters come in and I would like to encourage the sisters. If in the Lord's ways He gives you a husband and you have children, it will be largely your lot to spend time with your children, and one of the things they will need is teaching. If you do not have the teaching, how can you teach them? Here they were, women who were skilled with their hands, where had they learnt that? I think they had learned it in the presence of God and they had applied themselves.

You say, in the wilderness, where did they find time, they were journeying, busy with their flocks etc? How do I find time to do these things? Ask the Lord and He will show you. Just try a few minutes and I think you will find that you will soon find that you will want to spend half an hour and when you have spent half an hour you will want to find a bit longer. I am trying to encourage the young people. How did I start to read the ministry when the brethren encouraged me to? I picked up a book by Mr Stoney and read a bit, just a page or so, and I got something in my soul. Mr Stoney gives you a little story to illustrate the truth and suddenly you become interested.

Then instead of that book you pick up another, and you pick up the scriptures and you find that the pages of the scriptures mean something to you. I would like to encourage you to commit yourself to the teaching because what will be needed are persons who are able to open up the truth to the saints. May you be found occupied in these things until He comes. It says, "to devise artistic things: to work in gold, and in silver, and in copper, and in cutting of stones, for setting, and in carving of wood, to execute all artistic work". I love to go through this chapter and allow my thoughts to go over what these things suggest, such a variety of things. You say, I do not know what I can do for the Lord: let Him find it for you. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it, and you will find that He will find something else for you to do, and you will find that you will develop in skilfulness in the handling of God's things.

I have no more to say, but I would like to encourage my younger brethren, that it may be that the Lord in His wisdom may leave us a little longer here and the needs of the testimony are that someone has to take up the exercise to teach the saints. It may be the brother next to you or the sister next to you has been totally uninterested in what I have said, but are you? If you have an interest, foster it and go to the Lord and let Him develop it into something with you that you might be useful to Him. May I remind you of what it says in that verse where we started, "Blessed is that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find doing thus". There is a blessing related to it, there is a blessing related to reading the book of Revelation and there are other blessings, but this is one of them, "Blessed is that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find doing thus". May He help us in these things. For His Name's sake.

SUNBURY

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