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ENCOURAGEMENT

2 Corinthians 1: 3-5; 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-18; 2 Corinthians 13: 11-14

A.M. I wondered whether today we could speak about encouragement. If you go to any prayer meeting in any locality you will hear it in almost every prayer, the request for encouragement.

Often this is in relation to an individual, someone maybe who is particularly in need of uplifting, someone who has had sorrow come into their circumstances or who has been bereaved, or who has simply become a bit confused in their thoughts and needs uplifting.

Maybe it would be a supplication as to encouragement for a locality, or regarding a specific exercise, but you will very often hear encouragement asked for. I have been thinking about this a little because I do it myself, and I sometimes have wondered whether I simply ask for encouragement because I do not really know what else to ask for. Encouragement is needed in almost every circumstance today.

The first scripture we read speaks of God as the “God of all encouragement” – I have heard recently in quite a few meetings the brethren speaking about there being a lot to discourage, but I feel that there is more to encourage, and I think that God, according to this scripture, is the God of that encouragement. He is *not* a God who discourages. I think that should be quite clear to us. He tests His work, He tests us, tests our committal, tests in our lives the very detail of the work that He is doing, and He has a right to do that. He delights to do this because mostly the end of that exercise is glory to Him, but He is a “God of all encouragement”. I wondered whether we could look in the first scripture at ways in which God encourages us because I think He does it in a very broad way.

In the second scripture, the responsibility comes to us. In Corinthians, God is the “God of all encouragement”, but in Thessalonians it is, “So encourage one another”. We might have a look at the responsibility upon us to take up those words of the apostle: we have a responsibility to encourage one another in

whatever way we can. The beauty of this scripture is that it applies to all. There is no one in this room, not a Christian anywhere, of whom it could be said that they could never encourage someone else.

In the scripture at the end of Corinthians, the apostle gives some beautiful impressions, but the one right in the middle of the passage is, "be encouraged". I wondered whether we also need to allow ourselves to be encouraged. Sometimes we perhaps put things in the way, but God would desire that all of us are to be encouraged. That would be one of His key purposes of our being here today that we should be encouraged. Let us not put anything in the way that stops that.

E.C.B. That is very helpful to us all because in principle it is a simple thing for us. What I am enjoying I can share with you, what gives confidence to my faith I can help you in. Why was Hebrews 11 written but to encourage one another?

A.M. One thing about encouragement that this first scripture tells us is that if we encourage in any measure, it comes from the encouragement that we have received ourselves. I am not going to be able to help someone else if I have not proved it first. If I have had any dealings with God, and we would credit every one here with having had some dealings with God, there is a measure of encouragement that He would desire that I would use it.

E.C.B. What you have just said goes with something that occurs to me as to whether we could not use our own experience with God to help one another in that experience. I think there is a very great reluctance among us to talk of personal experience with God.

A.M. I wondered whether we would come on to that in the second scripture, specifically as to how we do encourage one another, but the experience with God is what we have here. Paul is writing the second epistle to the Corinthians and he speaks of having received encouragement himself. He had written to them in the first epistle and he had to say some serious things, but he has received encouragement himself and he is able to impart the benefit of that. I

wondered whether God does that, and as He speaks to us in whatever way, in circumstance, or in an occasion like this or in our own lives, it is with the intention that it may encourage.

E.F.W. The knowledge of God would include very much the “Father of compassions”.

A.M. It is very interesting to me that that expression comes first.

Mostly we think of encouragement for those who have perhaps fallen from the level of enjoyment that we perceive, so we think of encouragement as wanting to bring a brother or a sister back up to the level of current enjoyment, but I wondered whether that is included in the “Father of compassions”. God Himself does that.

We also can sympathise, we can draw alongside and the compassion conveys that, but encouragement it seems to me goes beyond that. Mr Stoney says as to encouragement that it is an exhortation to inspire continuance. For the children it means that encouragement is more than just a quick word while you are passing in the corridor, encouragement is an exhortation to inspire continuance. That word “inspire” lifts what we pray for on a Monday night, or what we desire for our brethren, to a new level altogether.

D.J.H. Is it remarkable that the word that is used – “compassions” – involves feelings; that is, the Father feels with us and for us in the circumstances in which we are. If we are to encourage one another it is to be on that line as entering into one another’s circumstances and feelings in a feeling way.

A.M. I think that is absolutely imperative. How would we ever encourage someone else if we have not the compassion first? A restatement in a cold way of something that may be very true and very good will not do that. That is not how God operates. As “the Father of compassions”, He has them. I was thinking when I was looking at the scripture and contemplating that Name there that “underneath are the everlasting arms”; there are the compassions first of all, and it may be the encouragement has sometimes to wait.

D.J.H. I suppose “Father of compassions” has in it the thought that He is the source of compassion and if we are to encourage one

another as having proved what He is, then we can find that He is available to all in the same way.

A.M. I like what you say about Him being the source of it. From Him flows the compassion for us. It did in the first place for our original condition; from Him came the compassion and it continues. I wonder whether we should just have a greater sense that as the “Father of compassions”, He owns them; the Father owns the compassions that are known and felt and guides them, but then when we have entered in sympathetically, or He has entered in sympathetically, He would say sympathy alone is not enough, now what are you going to do?

D.J.H. That is very good, so it has in mind moving forward.

A.M. Yes, it encourages us in all our tribulation.

D.J.H. It does not exactly leave us where we were but progress is in view.

A.M. I wondered that about the word ‘inspire’. If something really inspires you then you want to move forward, you want to grasp it.

P.J.W. The prophet Isaiah says, “The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to succour by a word him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as instructed”, Isa. 50: 4. Do you think that is the secret – having our ears opened morning by morning that we might know then how to succour by a word one that might be weary?

A.M. That is really why I read the scriptures in the order that I did because I think if we are not hearing that word and hearing that encouragement from God it would be very difficult to do anything else ourselves.

P.J.W. I wondered whether we see it perfectly in the Lord Jesus Himself when here, whoever He came into contact with would have been encouraged?

A.M. I wondered whether that is one of the foremost ways in which God encourages us, and that is to show us the Lord Jesus. I think

you referred last weekend in Birmingham to the fact that all we really need to do is show Christ to the saints and there will be encouragement. We would desire that from today, but in our own lives, do you think God would show us Christ?

Q.P. The Lord Jesus says, "He that has seen me has seen the Father" John 14: 9. This was expressed in its fulness in the life of Jesus.

A.M. Both of these things were, compassion and the encouragement. In that regard I think of the leper that was cleansed. The compassion that came in there from the Lord for his condition was followed by "go, shew thyself to the priest", Matt 8: 4. There was encouragement to go and do something, to move forward. That is my impression. There are those who are able to teach, and we are very thankful for them, and learn from them, and we need to take that teaching and the sympathies of the Father for our circumstances, and then all of us can be encouraged.

E.C.B. So that encouragement is much more a matter of life than of doctrine. I think that is important and it tests us as to how much the reality of life is with us. You can encourage people a bit with quotations, but what really encourages them is what is real to me.

Since you are speaking about the Father, how real is the Father to me?

A.M. It says here, "through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged of God". If that has been proved in any way, if that encouragement has come into my life – the note speaks of other words such as consolation, we have spoken of inspiration and exhortation – all these things prompt you to life, prompt you to action. These are *doing* words, they are words that make you want to do something.

D.H. You sometimes hear the expression, 'needs encouragement'; tell us how we set about that? Is it what God is to us?

A.M. It links with the second scripture. I often say, so and so needs encouragement without really knowing what I mean, and that is really what started my exercise. What that sometimes means to me

is that I do not think that they are at the level that I think they should be, and that is poor, that is a very low view of encouragement. I think what God has in mind here is that if someone is to be encouraged, there is to be a furthering of His work in them, so that in a week since we last partook of the Lord's Supper, (we are about to do so again tomorrow), in those seven days, how much further have I been encouraged in my knowledge of God compared to what I had last week? When we ask on a Monday night that someone should be encouraged, I think we should have the greatest of God's thoughts in our hearts for them, and not a lower level.

E.C. I notice that Mr Darby says in his note that the word for encouragement could be 'cheered'. That is a good word. I have often wanted, in writing a letter to a brother sending a gift, another word instead of encouragement which we are always using, but 'cheered' is a good alternative. The Lord Jesus lifts up the hands that hang down and He can do that through one and another amongst us as we encourage, or cheer, one another.

A.M. I think that is a positive word to use. The ability to cheer one another is so vital. Let us not have a lower thought of encouragement, let us be set for the cheering of God's people. God Himself does it as He sets Christ before us. We come into a meeting and then one and another brings in impressions of Christ; how else will we be cheered save that we have a heavenly view. All of us in this room know that in the world around us there is precious little to cheer anyone – it is dismal and disheartening and it is discouraging. The prince of this world would discourage in any way possible, he is not prescriptive. But, God is the "God of all encouragement" and one way He primarily uses, is that He uses the saints.

E.C.B. It is connected with building one another up. The object of encouragement is that I should feel that my structure in relation to God and to Christ by the Spirit has increased as a result.

A.M. I think so; it is what God sees in us, the view He has of us. In one sense He has the final view, but He also sees the testimonial view. He sees how active we are in His testimony and again we

were helped last weekend that we should see in one another (but primarily in myself) what God is seeing. Does He see me active in His work and progressing?

A.A.C. I suppose this is something for this dispensation. It is not something that we shall need in heaven, because there will be no need of encouragement in that day, but it is something we can prove God in today. It is something which applies to all of us, is it? We may look at a brother who is very evidently in the good of his links with the Lord, God could encourage that brother too. In a sense there is no limit to where God would take us through this, is there?

A.M. I think it applies to absolutely everyone, I cannot believe that there will be anyone in this room who would say that they did not need encouraging, or that they could not encourage someone else. I think it is something that God wants to see operating and active. It builds up. The apostle himself uses those words about his ministry being for building up, not overthrowing.

D.A.B. I was thinking of Bartimaeus, they say to him, "Be of good courage, rise up, he calls thee", Mark 10: 49. I wondered whether it is in your mind from these scriptures that, if God is the exclusive source of encouragement, we are challenged as to how much in our intercourse with one another we bring God Himself and Christ Himself into the hearts and souls of one another.

A.M. I take the challenge myself as to that. Being a salesman I speak a lot and the question is how much is about the things that are of heaven, the things that come from God Himself. It might be a challenge to us as to how much we do speak to each other about the Lord's things. It is very easy to maybe spend the time, even on a day like this, maybe even in the interval, speaking of other things. It would be a great thing if all of us spoke, even in this interval, to another brother or sister about Christ.

E.C.B. That would be a very great advance among us. Does not the same apply to the Supper? What are we talking about immediately after the Supper?

A.M. I take the challenge to myself; I think, as you say, that when you have been dealing with the things that are of the highest level, how could it be that two minutes afterwards you are at a far lower level?

D.A.B. I was thinking that if we think about society in general, including the society that this company represents, it is much more comfortable if everyone is happy. People get uncomfortable if someone is miserable or down, and they come under a certain pressure to pull themselves together and be like everyone else.

There is nothing positive provided thus far, but the Christian fellowship has this exclusive source of courage. It is the currency of Christian fellowship that no other society has. The Christian family has it as well, but we ought to value this resource. It ought to make this company different from what it might otherwise be naturally?

A.M. I think that, and we have the greatest privilege in having all of us together in whom, maybe all, there is a work of God. What an opportunity that gives us to exchange and to trade impressions of Christ. The young people would know this in particular that, if they tried to explain what they did over this weekend to their friends at school, they would not understand at all.

D.A.B. They would especially not understand why they enjoyed it. That is maybe something that they cannot articulate, but they feel included in something that is beyond what the playground or the classroom could ever give them.

A.M. I think there is an onus on those who are older to ensure that the children are included in that. I looked through the directory of names and numbers of the brethren, and it may be interesting to know that about thirty two percent of the names there are under twenty; that is a great responsibility. Nearly a third, (and I dare say in this room, probably even more), are under twenty years old. What a responsibility that is for us who are a little bit older, and some who are a lot older, to be able to speak to them meaningfully about the things that we enjoy the – “God of all encouragement”. That is for everyone.

D.A.B. Can you now say something about why the Lord's coming is presented as a source of encouragement?

A.M. The apostle is very specific here: he says, "So encourage one another with these words", that is not general, but "*these* words". He has just related specific detail – maybe the most detail we get anywhere about the Lord's coming – in terms of encouragement, I do not think that there can be anything more encouraging at the present time than keeping the reality of the coming of the Lord Jesus before everyone.

P.M. Is it affecting the way he speaks of the Lord in these verses – "the Lord himself", "to meet the Lord" and "thus we shall be always with the Lord"; there could be nothing more encouraging than those three references, could there?

A.M. I noticed that and I think that is absolutely key here. These words include, "the Lord himself", no one else; He does not send an ambassador, He does not send an angel, (there is an angel, but He does not send him), but "the Lord himself". I think that links with the work of God in my heart because that will begin with attracting me to Christ.

D.J.H. The word is also included, "we, the living who remain", that is that it is not to be looked at as a future event, but as something which is imminent and might be at any time. I was thinking of the detail of the words, "we, the living who remain".

A.M. It is "the living"; let us encourage one another actually to be living. How is that seen? How is that expressed? We remain, we know we are alive, but are we simply alive in the morass of our daily life? Our lives are so busy, but are we living to God?

H.A.H. That is another link with 2 Corinthians 5, "they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them and has been raised" (v 15).

A.M. That is why I wondered whether the exhortations to one another need to inspire us to continue in our testimony here. If you are speaking to someone about something that is living inside you it

is effective. I was thinking of the woman in John 4, who immediately went into the city and what was springing up in her inspired her to speak to others and they went to Christ. Do we do that?

H.A.H. In a certain way John gives us the life that would maintain us in the enjoyment of Paul's doctrine.

A.M. I think it would, because we do need that as well. In my exuberance for the subject, I am not unfeeling as to those who are passing through particularly difficult circumstances. There are those who are passing through difficult times. There are such in this room, and not only are these current circumstances, there are those, and this is often on my heart, who maybe for the last thirty five years have been bearing sorrow and loss in their lives, and in their families. These things God knows – "the Father of compassions", He knows that – but above all that, there is what is current that God would give us for our encouragement.

H.A.H. I thought when we spoke of a word every morning; it says in Lamentations, "his compassions fail not; they are new every morning" (3: 23). I often think of it in relation to what comes along, there are the traumas of one and another losing loved ones, but the thing continues and there is what is needed every day. His compassions enter into that.

A.M. We are left here for a reason. We have been speaking locally about this, that we are left here for a reason and the primary reason is that we should be here to serve God. What a thing it would be if we could all exhort and inspire one another that in the service of God we are that much more living and brighter. Our testimony would increase, as a result of that.

E.C.B. Encouragement goes beyond compassion. You can show compassion by 'patting someone's head' but that leaves them where they are. The purpose of encouragement is to take people a bit further along. It is interesting in 2 Corinthians 2 as to the man who had been involved in all the sorrow in the local assembly Paul says, "shew grace and encourage, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with excessive grief" (v 7).

A.M. Sympathy of itself we can perhaps all show and there are some who are particularly able to do that and draw alongside, but if someone has *really* suffered (and we have had much suffering in the very recent past and it is still very real), most of the time we do not really know what to say. Sympathy is quite difficult, but to draw alongside spiritually as well as maybe naturally, is very encouraging. To enter into something, we do not need to know every single detail, but to encourage we simply have to talk about how God has encouraged us, and everyone can do that.

P.J.M. The matter of compassion interests me. Paul speaks about it because he experienced it in his life. He had not been a compassionate man, and his persecution of the church was an indication of that, but what he heard was a Man who had a purpose and plan for his life. That Man in the glory said, "it is hard for thee to kick against goads", Acts 26: 14. I would not have said that in the circumstances if I had met Saul of Tarsus, but the Lord actually felt the circumstances. He does not dwell on it, He touches on it, and Paul is able to speak about the God of all compassion, He is able to speak about the Lord Jesus. We spoke of Bartimaeus; he knew that he was safe, "he calls you". Jesus was known as the compassionate One because He was the son of David. It is an important thing, that when David took up that discarded bondman, when he was after the Amalekites, he showed him compassion and kindness. I think it is important that by a word, by a gesture even, a hand on the shoulder if we cannot say anything, that actually we feel very much for the place that the person is in.

A.M. I think so, and when it is one of your brethren it is particularly encouraging. When you know that someone is praying for you, when you know that it is someone who has entered into the presence of God to supplicate for you, then the compassion and the encouragement becomes real, because it is not based on what is down here. There are some people who are naturally sympathetic and that is good, there are some people who are a little harder or a little brasher, but that does not necessarily mean that in heavenly

things they cannot enter into those realms and supplicate for you and thus encourage you. You may never actually know it directly.

D.A.B. Do you think it is right to draw alongside somebody if you have nothing to bring? If someone is in a hole, company in the hole is not much comfort. I was thinking of what Paul brings in for these Thessalonians, and the man on the Jericho road; they had something to bring that was not confectioned out of the misery that the other person was in but belonged to another order of things all together.

A.M. Just sympathising with someone's problem does not do anything, but then again, I am not sure that a Christian never has anything to bring.

D.A.B. We come with things and then leave them in their packaging because we are not accustomed to using them. The Samaritan was confident in his remedies as if he had used them before.

A.M. I think that links with the impression as to being more active in our conversation with each other. One of the awful legacies of the 1960s was the inability of brethren actually to talk openly to one another. I say that very feelingly and carefully, and not in an accusing way, but there is an inability to speak openly, particularly about the Lord's things. There is a younger generation now who are used to talking to each other and communicating far more even than my generation. Our young brethren have far more to do with each other than they did in my generation or the generation before and the links are being built up. I am not suggesting that that is all on a spiritual level, but what I am suggesting is that there is a greater openness. They love and enjoy each other's company and (this has been a particularly recent noticeable feature) they enjoy coming to meetings such as these.

D.A.B. They would be very sorry if any of those links were broken and they need to be encouraged to see that it is the Lord and His things that will provide the cement for them. They should bring that in to give the relationships that they enjoy so much the security they need.

A.M. I do think particularly for the young people that they should not under-estimate the encouragement they can be to those who are older. To hear a young brother on his feet on the Lord's Day morning, or praying on Monday night, or even just praying for the preaching, or to have someone come up after the reading and say, I did understand some of that, but I really did not understand this bit, can you explain it? That is very encouraging and it seems to me to be happening more and more.

E.C.B. And it is of vital importance that nobody spoils that. The thing that will spoil it most easily is the spirit of legality.

A.M. Yes. As it says here, "we, the living"; the letter kills.

A.P. Everything that we need down here is available to us in our knowledge of divine Persons.

A.M. I am glad you say that because one of the other things that God uses in His way of being the "God of all encouragement", is the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, to refer to the woman in John 4, it was springing up. I think that if the Spirit's power is made way for then there will be that living feeling. You can tell when someone is living when they are on their feet.

D.A.B. I do not disagree with what has just been said, because God is the source of it all, but it is very interesting in relation to Saul of Tarsus that, with the transaction incomplete, the Lord hands the work over to one of His own to finish, and indeed the final stage of it is in the Christian circle.

A.M. I think the area in which we are, in fellowship in particular, (much wider of course with other Christians too, we are able to exchange there, but particularly with those with whom we walk in fellowship) the opportunity is there to encourage almost at every turn. I would like to grasp that more because we very quickly descend to, 'have you heard the trouble about' and that does not encourage.

J.S.H. We are exhorted elsewhere to "have your mind on the things that are above" (Col 3: 2). Sometimes we may not feel the ability to

speak to one another, but if the person can see that I have my eye on the things above, and my testimony here is because I have my eye on the Lord, then that would be an encouragement in itself would it?

A.M. I think that is a great encouragement and that is one of the reasons why this example is used here in Thessalonians, “the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel’s voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven”. Where is everything for my blessing now? It is in heavenly places. You might say it is here, there is what is for my blessing amongst the brethren, of course, but they are heavenly people, their characteristics are heavenly. I would love to be able, and I maybe cannot do it single-handedly but through the power of the Spirit, I would love to lift everyone’s gaze to look at the One who is about to come and take us to glory. I think that would encourage us more than anything.

A.G.S. It is very interesting the way the Lord spoke to those on the way to Emmaus, “he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”, Luke 24: 27. How that inspired their hearts!

A.M. That links with what has been said as to the Lord Himself. If we ever move away from the Lord having the central and the first place then we are into trying ourselves. The big problem at Corinth was the mind of man. In circumstances that test us and try us, whether it be a bereavement, whether it be a circumstance at work, whether it be amongst the brethren, the first thing I try and do is use the mind of man, try and overcome it in my own way. It *must* be “the Lord himself”.

R.W.F. You have just mentioned bereavement – is it interesting that the scripture says, “and the dead in Christ shall rise first”. What has caused sorrow for one and another is going to be remedied and that will be before we go to meet the Lord in the air?

A.M. That is of the greatest encouragement for us and that should truly inspire us. We become a little bit accustomed to talking about that, the resurrection of those that have been taken before and the

catching up of those who are living who remain, it should really lay hold of our hearts, as to what a momentous time that will be. It will remedy everything that has caused grief before.

E.F.W. Is it of interest that the shout is “an assembling shout”? It is really a shout that would bring everyone together.

A.M. And it is His shout. There is the sound of the archangel’s voice, there is the trump of God, but, “the Lord himself, with an assembling shout”. He is going to call everyone. We often hear in the preaching that it may be the last preaching you hear, that the Lord may come today; how real is that? Does it show itself in my face and in my demeanour? If it does that will encourage without my even saying anything.

D.A.B. I suppose one thing we may speak about in glory is the last preaching we heard. Maybe the preaching becomes a commonplace thing, but there is a positive side to that, that this might be a preaching to treasure. Should we approach every preaching as if it is a preaching that might be fresh in our ears as we enter into eternal conditions?

A.M. Yes. I used to get quite annoyed that usually at the end of the Lord’s day, especially if there has been a fellowship meeting, the children go particularly mad after the preaching (and you cannot really blame them for that), but the preaching is something that God is doing only for a time, and the last one we hear we will speak about. I think that extends to other occasions. I think it particularly extends to the Lord’s Supper. If we were to celebrate the Lord’s Supper as though we were celebrating it for the last time before we were about to be in glory, what a magnificent thing that would be.

Mr. Stoney exhorts us to speak to our brethren as if the next time we shall meet we shall be in glory. That should mean something to me.

R.W.F. In connection with the behaviour of the children, what comes into expression is what is pent up. Pent up feelings are suddenly released. Do we look at the preaching that way? Do we understand that God’s feelings are released in the preaching by the preacher

and we are to feel what is released and find encouragement and joy in it?

A.M. I am sure that many preachers in this room have often felt the experience that heaven is listening with the greatest interest to what is being said.

I.A.M. I wanted to ask whether you thought of the gathering at the end of Malachi, (I know it is a different setting) where they spoke, “they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure” (3: 17), and later on we have, “And unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (4: 2). What could be more healing than the view of the Lord coming for us.

A.M. I think that, and I do think that that is why the apostle says here, “So encourage one another with these words”. You might think that in some circumstances there are almost no words that are sufficient, but there are events and things that God is going to do; that He is doing, but also that He is going to do that are absolutely immovable. They *will* happen, they are certain and if we can feed on those I think that brings a lift into the soul.

P.J.M. The certainty is underlined at the end of the next chapter, “He is faithful who calls you, who will also perform it” (5: 24).

A.M. “He ... will also perform it”. That encourages.

J.W. I wondered whether the importance of the Spirit’s work which you referred to earlier would bear on this. The Lord says of the Spirit, “He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you”, John 16: 14. The Spirit is able to give the power and give effect to these wonderful things that we are speaking of do you think?

A.M. I think that exactly links with the final scripture at the end of 2 Corinthians. The word here is “be encouraged”. I think that making way for the Spirit, allowing Him to speak of Christ, as surely He always will, is one way that we can allow ourselves to be encouraged. We do put blocks in the way. We sometimes refer to persons as those who just want to be miserable; we speak of

persons who are 'cup half-full or cup half-empty' people. It is either half-full and it is nearly there, or it is half-empty and running out. I think the Christian should always be a cup half-full person, there is always more to learn, there is always more room for the Spirit to show us the glories of Christ. Paul says at the end of these two quite lengthy epistles, "For the rest, brethren, rejoice" and then "be encouraged".

B.H.C. Do we need to be elevated as to our place before God? I was thinking of the mountains and how we need to be exercised to be lifted above things that would hold us and detain us here and to be encouraged, put ourselves in the atmosphere of encouragement?

A.M. We have to put ourselves in the way of it. This reference here to "be encouraged" is surrounded by things that will help you to be encouraged, "rejoice; be perfected; be encouraged; be of one mind; be at peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you". It is surrounded by things that help us individually and as a local meeting to be encouraged that these things are there.

D.J.H. It seems to be that it would help in the general state and condition of things in our localities, the fact that it follows, "be of one mind", being "at peace", "the God of love and peace shall be with you". Although encouragement and encouraging one another is an individual matter yet it has its bearing on the whole of the local company.

A.M. I am glad you bring us to that because the reference here is, "For the rest, brethren, rejoice". Let us allow ourselves to be encouraged. Things come in that lift up – sometimes a brother gives out a hymn that is entirely inappropriate, or so I think, but it may be absolutely appropriate to encourage the rest of the brethren. We may have been waiting for that young brother to give out a hymn for a long time. That is what it will do, it will encourage all that he is starting to find his place and he feels that he is at liberty with his brethren.

D.J.H. What you say indicates that it is not a great task, but to encourage one another, even a young brother taking part for the first

time in itself is encouragement; there is nothing beyond the reach of any of them.

A.M. I am aware that maybe we have put the emphasis on the young a little too much, but I am keen that they should feel as much a part as any of us in the fellowship. There is an onus too upon those who are older, that when they take part and when they speak to the younger too, that they allow them to be encouraged.

D.A.B. This is cross-generational; we speak about the level of communication among people and some of those media and forms of communication older people do not use, but the Christian circle is a place where age does not count and one of the biggest stimuli to elderly and infirm brethren would be the interest in them taken by the young, which the young would find very freely reciprocated.

A.M. Sometimes people do not talk to one another because they really do not know what to say. They feel inhibited, or not quite sure, but you can always talk about Christ. You can always talk to someone who is a couple of generations different from you, you can talk to them about Jesus, talk to them about the work in your soul and how you found it and almost always you will find a reciprocation.

Q.P. When the Lord Jesus speaks about His coming Himself He says, "Yea, I come quickly" (Rev 22: 20), but then there is an answer, "Amen; come, Lord Jesus". Would that link on with this to be encouraged that there is answer to Him at the present time in the saints?

A.M. I think that, and I think again that the things around in this verse point towards that, "be perfected" – where else would that come from but from a divine source, from the Spirit's work bringing about what is for the divine pleasure. This encouragement of allowing ourselves to move on and grow in the wondrous things that God has for us seems to me to be key.

P.J.M. There is a spiritual level of communication; we read that spiritual things are communicated by spiritual means (see 1 Cor. 2: 13), but the communion of the Holy Spirit would perhaps imply something that is not necessarily spoken but you know that you have

a bond with that person and you benefit from their company. Do we need to seek out company from which we gain something spiritual?

A.M. Yes, I think the last verse has three things in it that refer back to, “the God of all encouragement”. There is the “grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit”, as you say these things may not be spoken. The communication is not necessarily spoken but it is felt and proved and it brings about a solid, substantial result. All these things are operating so that the body of the saints are collectively encouraged together.

P.J.M. Going back to the list, “rejoice; be perfected; be encouraged; be of one mind” and then it says, “be at peace”. Would you say something about the peace?

A.M. I think it is very difficult to be inspired or encouraged if you are restless or disturbed. I think it is very difficult to move on. If you are disturbed or worried about something you tend to stay in the same place and you do not move on very fast and it is disruptive. It stops encouragement. Mr. Stoney’s reference is that you inspire someone to continue and to go forward. I think that is what the Spirit would do and peaceful conditions would allow that. That would start in my own soul. If there is not peace there, if there is something that is outstanding between me and God I am not going to be very good at being encouraged myself nor encouraging someone else. That then extends to the company.

E.C.B. Does that verse not imply how simple it is to improve the state of a place? These are all simple expressions – we can make them fairly difficult if we want to and have a deep reading on them – but to improve the state of a locality is one of the simplest things, make it better by one man.

A.M. There is something again in this list that is cross-generational, there is something in this list which is within the grasp of everyone.

G.N. I suppose the answer would be to be under the influence and authority of Christ that these conditions might be known for each of us to be under His sway?

A.M. I think that, and I think more that it is important to see it demonstrated that in my locality the first place is held by Christ. He has that first place. Now, I do not mean that He never has been previously, and I am sure it is always the case, but to see it demonstrated in contribution and in relationships between the brethren, that actually Christ does have the first place.

A.A.C. Could you touch for us on the result of encouragement? Having been encouraged puts me in a responsible situation, does it? I was thinking of the ten leprous men.

A.M. Yes, “where are the nine?” I think we come back to where we started that being encouraged is within the scope of every one of us. I do not believe that there is a Christian, that is, someone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is sheltered by His blood, who has not been encouraged. It might have been a long time ago and they might have lost the joy of it, but there has been encouragement and therefore it is within the range of everybody to have been encouraged. As you say, the responsibility then is, “that we may be able to encourage those who are in any tribulation”. There is a responsibility upon us to do this.

E.C.B. Have we not all been encouraged by contact with believers with whom we do not break bread?

A.M. I have been.

E.C.B. Very much so, and it is preservative as well. I was wondering whether the scripture does not underline for us that the assembling shout would make us encouraged at the present time in our own smallness with how vast the amount that the Lord actually has on the earth.

A.M. Yes, “we, the living” is not sectarian, it is all those who have placed their trust in Christ.

E.C.B. I am not altogether sure that in the New Testament there is any idea of sectarianism.

A.M. That is encouraging for us to see what is available; therefore this thought of encouragement and the ability to encourage extends

far beyond our own circumstances. Mr. Stoney speaks as to the prayer meeting in that respect and he says we might be limited by what we pray for by our own knowledge; our own knowledge of a circumstance, or our own circle in which we move. We might be limited and therefore we can only pray to a certain point, *but* our desires beyond that can be as wide as God's desires. They can extend right out. That is perhaps why so many of us brothers use the word 'encouragement' in the prayer meeting. We do not know exactly what to ask for, but we know that God can encourage and He will.

A.McS. We even pray that persons can escape from the ruin of Christendom; that is the whole point in the second epistle that the holy place must be preserved. I was greatly encouraged in seeing the last verse, bearing in mind what Mr Taylor has said, no matter what happens and much has happened, divine Persons keep the key places in the economy and that is a great encouragement.

A.M. That comes back to what we said earlier, that these things are set, the divine economy. That is maybe quite advanced for some of us to approach and to understand, but the fact is that it remains, it is not disturbed. God does not discourage, He does not allow disturbance, so if there is disturbance I have brought it in. God remains.

S.E. Is the result of encouragement seen in John 4 where the woman was encouraged by her circumstances? She would not have expected encouragement from a man who she named as a Jew. Eventually she says, "Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done: is not he the Christ?" (v 29). Sometimes we get encouragement from sources that we do not expect.

A.M. I think so, I think the results of encouragement are far beyond what we can understand. I think if we are set to encourage we will probably never see all the results of what we have done. Likewise others do not know how much they have encouraged us sometimes. That woman had a one to one contact, the Lord spoke to her, but she went into the city and then there were others.

R.W.F. One of the greatest means of encouragement is to bring souls in touch with the Lord Himself, as in John 4, “we have heard him ourselves” (v 42). There is perhaps a limit to what I can do but to come to the Lord and hear Him, to receive His words, that brings encouragement, and is guaranteed to do so.

A.M. If we can bring someone back into contact with the Lord, or maybe even for the first time, you could say that that is the encouragement complete for that time because then the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is there. How wide can that go!

E.C.B. Maybe in John 4 the well of water was already springing up into eternal life and she went into the city in the gain of that.

P.J.M. The disciples got the word from the Lord as to the field being white to harvest but she actually did something about it.

A.M. She did something about it and against a background which you might have thought that was not the place to which she should have gone. She went back into the city to speak about a Man. That was really not what anyone who knew her would have wanted to hear her speaking about. But she went in, and there must have been something about the way she said it, what she said, her demeanour, her manner, that inspired those people to go out and seek Christ for themselves. What a great thing that would be to do that.

P.J.M. She changed her position, she had left her water pot by Jesus, a silent testimony to the fact that she would be back. She no longer belonged in the city morally, she belonged with the Man who was the Christ. It is very important for us if we are going to encourage anybody, that we ourselves are certain. There is certainty here, it is an uncertain world, and I can say, I know where I stand in relation to the One who is the Lord.

A.M. I think that is probably a good point to finish on, that we stand in relation to Christ. We are heavenly people, not because of what we have done, but because of what He has done and that in itself should be enough to encourage us.

LONDON

21 January 2006

Key to Initials

D.A.Burr, London; E.C.Burr, London; B.H.Clark, Tunbridge Wells;
A.A.Croot, London; E.Croot, Dorking; S.Eagle, Dorking;
R.W.Flowerdew, Sunbury; D.Hawgood, Bexley; D.J.Hutson, London;
H.A.Hutson, London; J.S.Hutson, London; I.A.Mitchell, London;
G.Napthine, Colchester; P.Martin, Colchester; P.J.Mutton, Walton on
the Naze; A.Poore, Cumnock; Q.Poore, Swanage; A.G.Smith,
Bexley; J.Walkinshaw, Bexley; P.J.Walkinshaw, Gillingham;
E.F.Woodford, Dorking

MINISTRY MEETING

(i) STRETCHING OUT

Iain Mitchell

Philippians 3: 12, 13, 20

A very simple impression, confirmed somewhat by what we sang in the hymn, as to what Paul says as to “stretching out”. In our hymn we sang as to our pathway in the wilderness and in one sense we can see that that is true. Our pathway is our life here going about doing our daily tasks, but in another sense we are in something which is mapped out for us by divine Persons Themselves in relation to what They might have in mind for us. I recall that when one and another is taken it is said that the work of the Lord is finished in him or her, which would imply that while we are here there is a work that is going on, there is a work that is developing. I feel often for myself that days go by and spiritually I might not have made any progress but then we know also days that go by and we are thankful that we have made some progress. It led me to read these scriptures which have been before me over the last few days as to what Paul says about obtaining this prize and being in possession of it. He says, “Not that I have already obtained the prize”, but it is something that he is looking for. You might think that someone like Paul had so much experience, what he went through in his life, what he experienced with God, that he would have already obtained possession, but no. So much more is it for us then to reach out in our wilderness pathway here, “Not that I have already obtained the prize, or am already perfected; but I pursue”. In one sense we are not like the children of Israel wandering; they were led by Jehovah in a pillar of a cloud and in a pillar of fire, but there was that time of wandering. In a sense we are not like that, we know what it is that we are stretching out for, so the test for all of us is, are we stretching out for it? Do I stretch out? I humbly have to say that many times I do not, but do we reach out for what is in the second scripture, where I read, “*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens”.

What a wonderful commonwealth we have. It has often been said

that if I have an inheritance in a foreign country I would want to find out as much as I possibly could about that inheritance. We have a commonwealth which is so rich that even the tiniest glimpse of it thrills our hearts. May it be that we stretch out to gain more of the reality of our commonwealth in the heavens. As we have often said, it is not there in the heavens waiting for when we get to heaven, it is available to us now. It is there and it will be there when we are with the Lord, but the wonderful thing about Christianity, as we very well know in this room, is that what is available to us, is available to us *now*. We are given a little power and the help of the Spirit in order to reach out for these things. “*Our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour” – how we await Him!

I think the reference to ‘Saviour’ here refers to the way that the Lord Jesus is Saviour all the way through right to the end, past the article of death, which may be before us, or especially the Lord’s coming for us, He is the Saviour all the way through. He will “transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory”. Think of that! He already has that body of glory: He was here on the earth, He took a body here and as passing through death, remaining a Man forever, He is in that wonderful condition now, but we will not see Him in the conditions in which we are now, and part of His work as Saviour is to “transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory, according to the working of the power which he has even to subdue all things to himself”. What things will be subdued! There will be many things subdued so that all things will come into conformity with Him, but may it be for the present time, while we are waiting for that time, may we wait for it more, be more conscious of it, but while we are waiting in the present time may we just be encouraged to stretch out. We are in the wilderness, we are in the present condition and we suffer in it to that extent, but we have more of a guide than the children of Israel had in this wonderful dispensation that we are in – we have the guide of the Holy Spirit, the guide of the Lord Jesus, He will be there with us. He is here with

us now, and He will be there to guide us all the way through. May these words just encourage us.

(ii) THINGS NOT SEEN

David Hutson

2 Corinthians 4: 17, 18; Acts 11: 22-24 (“... and of faith”)

Our brother has referred to our looking towards the goal and I have been thinking much of this reference to looking not “at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen”. As has been said already, we are in wilderness conditions, but we are not to be occupied with them in the sense that they would hinder us in the pathway to which our brother has referred, but we are to look at the things that are not seen, “... but those that are not seen eternal”. I thought of it as pondering what the things are that we can see that are not seen. This scripture has often come to us and we have thought of those blessed realities that are spoken of in the Scriptures. It says, “have your mind on the things that are above”, Col 3: 2. They would be things that are not seen but they are where the Christ is. Our brother has referred to the way that He is coming and then it says, “we see Jesus” (Heb 2: 9), not seen by natural sight, but nevertheless very real to faith. I have also thought in relation to what we had before us on Lord’s Day as to our position – this wonderful relationship that we are brought into – as sons. I think it was said that if we really realised this, and took account of one another in this way, what unity it would promote among us. That would be a question then of what we see, what we see in one another. There are things that are not seen by the natural vision which are to be seen in persons. For instance, regarding the man in Lystra, it says Paul “seeing that he had faith to be healed” (Acts 14: 9); there was something there that he saw, not with his natural sight, but it was something which was there, very real. Paul saw it and reacted in relation to it.

I read of Barnabas in that regard because it says, “seeing the grace of God”. What he saw was the persons there who had been affected by the word of those “announcing the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus. And the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord”. It does not say that

Barnabas saw all the people who had been converted, but he saw the grace of God. There was something there that he saw, the result of the grace of God, but it was finding its expression in those persons. One thought of the word when David was chosen, having been left outside, how even Samuel at first thought that Eliab was the man of God's choice, but the word to him was "man looketh upon the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh upon the heart", 1 Sam 16: 7. I was thinking of that in relation to the question that was raised as to how unity could be promoted among us. Surely it would be if we look at one another from the divine view point and see one another according to what is not seen to the natural eye. We see something in one another which would be in accord with the way in which God sees us as in Christ and, as in that blessed and wonderful relationship of which we were speaking on Lord's Day, the greatest relationship into which a creature could be brought in relation to God Himself, "sons of God". Can we look at one another as seeing one another in that way? Of course these things will be seen and our brother has referred to the time when these bodies will be changed and transformed according to the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then sonship will be seen in reality and we shall actually see the relationship in which each stands to God Himself.

Now it is not evident, although there should be some evidence in one another's countenances that there is something there which is different from the man in the street, something which is very real because of this relationship, persons who have the Spirit of God's Son. Can I, I say it for myself as feeling challenged by it, look at the brethren, as looking upon what is not seen. If we were all to be doing this, surely what unity it would promote among us, and we need help in this. Barnabas was a man "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith". It is what we would see in one another as we count upon the Holy Spirit to help us, and what we would promote in one another.

Faith also lays hold of that which is not seen but nevertheless is real. Our brother has spoken of what is real, "*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens" (Phil. 3: 20), how real it is. Faith lays hold of it and by the Spirit we come into the gain of it. We are able by the Spirit and by faith to look upon one another as seeing

what is not seen by the natural eye so that we might hold one another and see one another as God sees us and surely if we were all on that line, what unity it would promote and how it would be for the promotion of the unity of the Spirit so that we might be, “thinking one thing”, Phil. 2: 2. May the Lord help us, in seeing what is not seen, not only seeing it in an abstract way in relation to what is heavenly and “above” but actually seeing it in the brethren. As we do this I am sure unity and love will be promoted among us and relationships will be as they should be. May we be helped in it. In the Name of the Lord Jesus.

(iii) SECRETS

Alan Croot

Proverbs 15: 3; Matthew 6: 4, 6

We have spoken of things which are secret. What our brother has spoken to us about that we reach out for, what we possess, and what we have made our own, are not necessarily visible to others. It is something which is secret, it is something which is ours. I was struck over the weekend by the way in which everything that is truly mine is not visible to others. Everything that I have, which others can see which may be regarded as mine, actually belongs to God Himself, but what I have which is truly mine, no one can see.

I find this verse in Proverbs very exercising. There is a side to it which is very attractive as we consider that Jehovah, God Himself, looks down upon this world seeing all that is good; that which He delights in. There were things which He delighted in from almost the beginning of scripture, but right through the Old Testament times there were things which He delighted in. You may say there was not one thing which was after His own heart which He did not see. Jehovah saw everything, His eyes are in every place, there was not one good thing which Jehovah did not see, which He did not appreciate, there was nothing missed, there was no action done in kindness, no action in love, no desire after the heart of God which was missed, Jehovah saw every one. I love to think of Jehovah as God looking down upon the Lord Jesus as He was here. Man saw in the Lord Jesus what was good – “but this man has done nothing amiss”, Luke 23: 41. It was evident to one who hung there by the side of the Lord Jesus, but think of the gaze of God looking down upon Jesus – “the eyes of Jehovah are in every place, beholding the evil and the good”. Think what He found there in the Lord Jesus, every aspect of His life, every moment, every thought, every motive, all of it (in one sense, apart from His actions which were outward), was in secret, but God saw it. There was nothing there which was missed.

For myself this scripture is very exercising, because Jehovah's eyes are in every place. How much am I conscious of this? How much does this govern me day by day in what I think about and what I occupy myself with, because Jehovah sees it all? Nothing misses His gaze: every hour lost, wasted, Jehovah knows about, it is apparent to Him. Also every moment spent in yearning and in reaching after what our brother has spoken about the Lord Jesus, He notices, He knows it. We have been taught that even a groan, even a sigh, He takes account of, He knows the cause of it, He knows what lies behind it, His compassion is there, and everything is visible to Him.

In Matthew we have, "thy Father who is in secret" and "who sees in secret". The world does not know Him as Father. I was not here on Lord's Day but have some impression from what our brother has said as to the wonderful privilege of relationship that we have. It is not something which is seen by the world around us. The relationship that I have with the Father in one sense is secret. I trust maybe there are opportunities where the evidence of it, and the joy of it would be in expression, but the experience of that relationship, is something which is in secret, and the Father treasures it. What is here is that which takes place in private with the Father, not something which is visible to others. The alms – those good deeds which maybe all of us would like to think we do – the Father sees them all and He would like them kept there, He encourages us to keep them there in secret. In prayer, how much can be achieved and how much can be lost through lack of prayer, but it is something which is done here in secret, "having shut the door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father ... will render it to thee".

What a wonderful privileged relationship we have with Him. I love what our brother brought before us that, as we see in one another something which is not visible with the natural eye: it is as if the Father who sees in secret would share with us something of that vision which He has, that we may see what He sees; that we may share something of that vision of that which is attractive to Himself.

The Father would even give us of that vision that we may be able to

see in one another, something of that goal which lies before us, something of the attractiveness of that which the Father sees and the Father treasures, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I have found delight”, Mark 1: 11.

I do not have any more to say save that where my thoughts were running connected with what we have had already, and there is something very precious here, something very precious which is hidden which the Father sees, and He would give us something of that vision to encourage us on; to encourage in that next step as we run the race, with the goal in view. Whilst in one sense we would never say we have achieved it, yet this is not a race without light at the end of the tunnel, it is not a race where the finishing line is ever far away. The Father would keep the goal before us, as He would encourage us in our growth and our pathway here, to treasure that which is peculiarly precious to Himself – “he who sees in secret”. May He bless the word for His Name’s sake.

LONDON

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