

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 202

January 1990

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the original paper copy was incorrectly numbered No 203

Edited and Published by:

E.C.Burr

50 Red Post Hill London SE24 9JQ

KEEP THYSELF PURE

James Renton

Hebrews 9: 13,14; 2 Timothy 2: 22; 2 Peter 3: 1; 1 Timothy 5: 21-25

It is in mind to speak about purity. We go through the world where there is plenty to contaminate, even in the religious world: one of the great needs at the present moment is purity.

I would like to illustrate these scriptures which I have read from women in the New Testament. The first speaks about a pure conscience, which we see in the woman in John 4. The wherewithal for a pure conscience is presented in the scripture read in Hebrews 9, "how much rather shall the blood of the Christ, who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God, purify your conscience from dead works to worship the living God? " The righteous basis has been laid by which we can have a pure conscience, which is a very important thing for every believer. In John 4, which is one of the most beautiful incidents in the New Testament, we see how the Lord Jesus in His conversation with that woman presents first of all the attractiveness of what is in God's mind in the gift of living water. He gains her confidence, and her interest in such a blessing as living water, and then He raised matters which affected her conscience.

Things that were not on her conscience He raises with her, not to get her depressed or unduly occupied with her history, but to clear her history and to set her up with a pure conscience. He goes into her history as, dear brethren, He would go into every one of our histories. "Go, call thy husband, and come here." (John 4: 16) raises the whole matter. What had not been previously on that woman's conscience, the Lord put on her conscience to clear her conscience.

We arrive at and maintain a good conscience by self-judgment, and let us understand what self-judgment is. It is not the judgment of self to satisfy self; it is judgment of self to God's satisfaction. The woman arrived at a pure conscience to God's satisfaction. She said "Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done". She did

not say, Come see a man to whom I told all things I had ever done.

That would have been to her satisfaction, but she said "Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done". She knew that everything was cleared, everything was out, because He had undertaken it. Self-judgment is not judgment of self to satisfy self.

Self-judgment is judgment to God's satisfaction. The woman saw herself as the Lord saw her. Self-judgment involved that we see ourselves as God sees us.

That is how we arrive at a pure conscience and how we maintain a pure conscience: "purify your conscience from dead works to worship the living God?". Did not that matter of the worship of God come into the conversation with the woman? "The Father seeks such as his worshippers." Who would such be? They would at least be persons who had a pure conscience, who saw themselves as God saw them with everything cleared to God's satisfaction. How that is needed at the present moment! I believe that all the difficulties that arise and continue among us are due to the lack of self-judgment, having judgment of ourselves to God's satisfaction. It is elementary, but it is most important to have and maintain. Hebrews 4 indicates the process of this judgment: "For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than a two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It is a very inward process. "And there is not a creature unapparent before him; The word of God brings us to Him; "but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 2: 12, 13). We have to see ourselves as God sees us.

It has often been said, and it is very true, that the most difficult person for me to judge is myself. I have known men who had a pretty good judgment of everybody else except themselves. It is easier to judge others than to judge self. We tend to be easy on self. The woman said "Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done" she had come under the scrutiny of the Lord and everything was clear to His satisfaction. May this be true of everyone of us.

If we had and maintained this pure conscience what a wonderful company we would be. Such persons would be in unity, would see eye to eye, have the same judgment as God has. May it become attractive to everyone of us! It becomes attractive as seen in that woman. She went out in testimony to the very men whom she would likely know and who would likely know her. Her testimony was effective for they came to know the Lord for themselves. They believed not only because of her word, but because they had come to the Lord themselves. True testimony would result from persons who have this pure conscience.

Now there is a pure heart, and that relates to the affections. In 2 Timothy it says "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". Paul writes to the Corinthians and addresses them as those who call on the name of the Lord, but in times of public ruin, such as we are in and which 2 Timothy visualises, Paul adds "out of a pure heart." I believe we see the pure heart in the woman in Luke 7.

Jesus was invited to the Pharisee's house and no doubt felt the cold atmosphere, but she brought the warmth of affection that the Lord appreciated. He did not find it in the Pharisee. He does not find it in mere profession, He finds responsive affection in pure hearts. She was a woman in the city, publicly known as a sinner, but she gave herself in response to the Lord Jesus. She washed His feet with tears, wiped them with the hairs of her head. It was herself fully committed with a pure heart in response to the Lord Jesus. She was one who loved much; she had a pure heart. Think of that house, the coldness, the indifference of it; so it is with mere profession today.

How the Lord Jesus values persons who have a pure heart! – "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. May we all be concerned, dear brethren, to have this simple reality of purity of affection for our Lord Jesus Christ.

How important is attachment to the Lord Jesus with a pure heart as that woman was. The Lord said to her, "Thy faith has saved thee, go in peace." (Luke 7: 50). She is not named. Her name could have been Faith or Peace but whatever her name was – the

Lord said of her, "Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace." The Lord said also, "Her any sins are forgiven; for she loved much; How he values a pure heart! The bridegroom says "my love , my dove, mine undefiled" (Song of Songs 5: 2). You can see it in principle in that woman, not long on the Christian way, but in reality with a pure heart. May we continue in simplicity, dear brethren, with purity of affection for the Lord Jesus Christ!

In 2 Peter we have a pure mind. In his first epistle Peter speaks about the pure mental milk of the word; "as new-born babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word " (1 Peter 2: 2).

That, dear brethren, is to feed our minds. Our minds need food. If our minds do not feed on pure food our minds will be contaminated.

Our minds are always occupied with something. I suppose the most important faculty a believer has is his mind. What kind of food do we provide for our minds? In the world around us there is abundance of food for the mind, but we need to be delivered from all such food and value the pure mental milk of the word. We need to feed on pure food to maintain a pure mind. The pure mind is illustrated in Mary of Bethany; "Mary... having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word." (Luke 10: 39). She was feeding on pure food which would build up and maintain a pure mind. Our minds, I emphasise, need food. We are always thinking of something, the mind never inactive when we are awake. The responsibility is in each one of us as to what kind of food we provide for our minds. There is an abundance of pure food in the scriptures which would build up and maintain a pure mind. When we think of all the contamination in the world around us, how valuable is pure food! The ministry that we value is pure food.

I am not so sure about literature that is sometimes attractive to our young people. It may be more readable than the ministries that we value, but I can commend to everyone here the pure food of the ministries that the Lord has been pleased to give us in abundance in the recovery of the truth. Our brother referred to about 200 volumes. Is that not sufficient for us? Do we want any else? The mind needs food, and there is enough in the scriptures and ministry which has

been accredited and the ministry which the Lord is giving currently.

Mary of Bethany as a result of feeding on pure food became affectionate, but also intelligent. The Lord said "Suffer her to have kept this for the day of my preparation for burial." The Lord had taught His disciples about the Son of man suffering, going into death and rising again but they were not sufficiently interested. They understood not the saying; they did not follow it up; they were not interested in the suffering side; but Mary of Bethany is accredited with having understood what the Lord was saying in that time. We ought to be in the current mind of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will not come about without feeding our minds with pure food which is available in abundance for every one of us. May we be concerned, dear brethren, to have a pure mind! Think of what it means for the Lord Jesus to have persons here who have a pure mind to whom He can communicate what His mind is at any given moment. We read in 1 Corinthians 2: 16 "But we have the mind of Christ." By means of having the Holy Spirit we have the wherewithal – I hesitate to say it – to think as the Lord Jesus Himself thinks. What capacity we have in the spirit of our minds!

In 1 Timothy – a very interesting scripture – we have "Keep thyself pure". We say this sometimes to young people and, of course, it applies to young people. How important it is to keep themselves pure, to keep their bodies pure! I am not minimizing the importance of this word to young people, but the context would indicate it is not only for young people. The writer says, "I testify before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels" – how solemn he is in his testimony – "that thou keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by favour." This keeping thyself pure is being without prejudice. Young people can have prejudice, but so can older ones. Prejudice and preference are two matters to which we are all susceptible: "keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by favour." These two matters of prejudice and preference are often what hinders us in knowing what the mind of the Lord is. Then he says, "Lay hands quickly on no man, nor partake in others' sins." Then verse 23 is obviously a parenthesis; "Keep thyself pure. Drink

no longer only water, but use a little wine on account of thy stomach and thy frequent illnesses." Verse 24 obviously links with verse 22; "Lay hands quickly on no man, nor partake in others' sins." verse 24; "Of some men the sins are manifest beforehand, going before to judgment, and some also they follow after." In between, there comes, verse 23; "Keep thyself pure." I believe the emphasis is, keep thyself from wrong influence. This applies not only to young people, but applies to elderly ones too. "Lay hands quickly on no man"; do not commit yourself too quickly. Keep thyself from wrong influence. We are all susceptible to wrong influence. This was written to Timothy and he is mentioned in this epistle as having youth – "Let no one despise thy youth" – for he would be younger than some of his contemporaries, but he was to have moral power and authority.

There were at least seven kings of Judah who were good kings, helped of God, some in a remarkable way, but they failed when they were old. This is a word, therefore, for those of us who are older. Beginning with Solomon, what a bright start he had! What a wonderful king he was! He had wisdom, given of God. What happened to him when he was older? He took 700 wives. That was not very wise, was it? They influenced him; they turned his heart at the end of his life. We need to keep ourselves pure when we are old. "Keep thyself pure. Drink no longer only water, but use a little wine on account of thy stomach and thy frequent illnesses." If we get weak in body, old and feeble, we are more liable to be wrongly influenced. It seems to me that this verse 23 comes in in that context. Then Asa, a good king who was greatly helped, was characterised by dependence on God, but at the end of his life he ceased to depend on God, but depended on the king of Syria for help. Jehoshaphat was a commendable man in many ways, but he made alliance with the ungodly. Joash, another good king, began as a young man and while Jehoiada the priest was alive – when under right influence – he was commendable and helped of God. Jehoiada died and Joash began to be wrongly influenced by princes. Uzziah was marvellously helped, but later he presumed to take up matters

for which he was not qualified and became a leper. Hezekiah began a wonderful recovery in his time and was a pious king, but later he succumbed to the flattery of the men of Babylon. Josiah was a great man who set on a great passover; there was no such passover since the time of Samuel. Think of the help Josiah received from God.

Then what happened to him? He tried to interfere in a matter that was not his responsibility. Dear elder brethren, Keep thyself pure. Brothers and sisters, Keep thyself pure. It is a word for all of us.

We are rightly concerned about our young people. I am a little more concerned about elderly ones who know the truth, have taught us and instead of uniting they tend to divide the brethren. That is a greater concern. We may have been greatly helped when we were younger – I am addressing older ones, and I am one of them – but let us continue in humility and dependence, and keep ourselves pure. Nehemiah consulted with himself. David strengthened himself in Jehovah. his God, the God he knew. Nehemiah had intimacy with God, he often appeal to God. He is in touch with God. In consulting with himself he would be acquiring the mind of God. I have no doubt Mary of Magdala in John 20 was keeping herself pure. She had one object to the exclusion of all else.

Dear brethren that is all I have to say. I say to young people and to older ones, keep thyself pure for the Lord's own sake. Amen.

PLAINFIELD

29 May 1989

SAVED BY GRACE AND POWER

Andrew Burr

1 Kings 19: 9-16; Ephesians 2: 4,5; 1 Peter 1: 3-5

This scripture in Kings has been in my mind since the earthquake last week. We have heard of fire, wind and earthquake in recent weeks. There have been occasions when God was in such things.

Mount Sinai is an example. Exodus 19: 18,20 says there was a tempest and "smoke ascended"; "the whole mountain shook" and "Jehovah came down on mount Sinai". One could say that God was manifested in those elements. Here in Kings we have the same elements – the wind, the earthquake and the fire and it says very expressly that Jehovah was not in them. But He was in the "soft gentle voice". It is natural to us all to believe that people can be driven into the presence of God by a manifestation of great power.

The children of Israel at Sinai show that that is not true, because it says that, while in the presence of God manifested in that fearful way, they "declined the word being addressed to them any more", Heb 12: 19. Far from being driven in godly fear to heed the word of God, they disbelieved, and they turned to idolatry.

Here in Kings we have one of the greatest prophets that there has ever been. God in faithful grace shows us that Elijah was unchanged by the manifestation of divine power on its own. He observed the wind, the earthquake and the fire and he has to say exactly the same thing afterwards as he did before. This manifestation of divine power was calculated, as I hope to show, to reassure him, but his heart of unbelief was untouched. It is very interesting that a man like Elijah should be used to portray such a remarkable thing. Of course, one might say he was disobedient.

God told him to come and stand on the mountain – to expose himself, so to say, to this manifestation of divine power – but he appears to have stood still in the cave. One might say that he took refuge in circumstances: instead of casting himself upon the power of God he chose to make circumstances his refuge. Imagine even

such an arch-prophet as Elijah marked by doubt and unbelief in relation to the power of God! What more could God have done to prove his power to Elijah? And yet Elijah is unchanged. He is not like Job, who says in the presence of the power of God: "I will lay my hand upon my mouth", Job 40: 4. Elijah appears not even to acknowledge what he has just experienced.

These observations bring me to the scripture in Ephesians which states a wonderful principle – "ye are saved by grace". It does not say Ye are saved by power, although God has the power to save, but "ye are saved by grace". The note says that it is not exactly that we are saved on the principle of grace – we are saved on the principle of faith – but the passage says "ye are saved by grace". It is as if grace is the agency that God uses for salvation. I remember a brother who often used to tell us here that "the hardest thing for the heart of man to accept is divine grace". How true that is! Yet, beloved, every one of us has been saved by that very means – the display of divine grace. "The grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared", Tit 2: 11. That is, it has taken form and expressed itself. It has been embodied in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe it is represented by the "soft gentle voice". Another brother recently said that he was sometimes led to wonder just how hard his heart could be. I echo that, and yet, beloved, it is grace that has won my heart. Grace brought me to Christ and, so far as I am anything in God's things, grace has done it. I believe, beloved, that God would give us a fresh impression of the saving power of His grace. It would help us with one another and with souls generally to remember that it is not the force of anything, such as argument or the telling points that we can put across; it is not the ability to convict and condemn in the presence of the truth, but it is by grace that we are saved. How inadequate an expresser of divine grace I feel! How cast upon God Himself we are to bring in that element that is able to save, not only for the unbeliever but also even for those who already know and stand in relation to God. I believe it would help us to be patient. God was very patient with Elijah. He was very gracious with him, and very

tender; He waited on him. He does not dismiss him or condemn Elijah although he was astray. God was true to Himself and worked on the principle of grace. We all have opportunities to express grace in dealing with one another and other people whom we meet. How much easier it is to try and convey an impression of divine power, or divine authority, or divine conviction! These things are right, of course, but Paul says "ye are saved by grace". Would that all of us had the skill to give grace room to save! I believe that the Lord might help us.

Now, all this leaves the question, why was it that God manifested His power so wonderfully? Was it for nothing? Was it simply to teach the negative lesson that He was not in those things? It says, "Jehovah was not in the earthquake". Consider what has just happened in America – the earthquake and the wind too, the damage caused and so on. Everybody gets very occupied with these things. But maybe God allows the disaster to pass before He speaks. He may not necessarily speak to people in the disaster but He might speak to somebody after the disaster. People are so taken up with the disaster itself; then the soft gentle voice of divine grace speaks afterwards and they miss it. The noise of the world and its Babylonish system comes back into their lives, and God's speaking to them – not in power but in His grace – is missed. Thus people go on without learning the lesson.

These things have a lesson: the display of divine power has lessons. That is why I read this passage in Peter, because it says "who are kept guarded by the power of God". It does not exactly say that we are saved by the power of God but we "are kept guarded by the power of God through faith for salvation". That scripture takes nothing away from the verse in Ephesians. Ye are saved by grace stands by itself. Peter is writing to people who are already saved by grace and he brings in divine power in its place – we "are kept guarded by the power of God... for salvation". If we are to walk in the present enjoyment of what grace has secured for us and secured us for, then we need the power of God. It is expressed to us in the person of the Holy Spirit, but it is also expressed to us in all manner

of other ways. The power that raised Christ from among the dead is towards us who believe. The "us" are those who are already saved by grace; but then the wonderful experience we can have of the power of God keeps us guarded so that what we have by grace we may walk in and stand in the enjoyment of. I believe that was the lesson that God was teaching Elijah. It was not a question of his salvation; that was secure. He was in God's hands but was worried about the course of the testimony. He was anxious about his own safety. He was concerned about how he would fare if he stepped out of the cave and God was trying to show him that He would keep him guarded by His power for salvation.

These are simple thoughts, beloved, about topical occurrences as you will see. I am greatly impressed by the need in my own heart, in my own life, to give grace its place; and then also to learn to confide in the God of all grace, that His power will keep me guarded unto salvation.

LONDON

24 October 1989

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

John Welch

Philippians 3: 8-14

These words are the words of a man who is living with an object; that object is a Person. We say it reverently of Him on account of who He is, but his object is a Man in heaven, no less. He would make it plain in this scripture and in many others, that that glorious object has afforded for him total satisfaction. He does not need to add a thing to this marvellous object of that life which he lived; Christ fills the vision of his soul – Christ. As he says of Him in his own words in verse 8: "Christ Jesus my Lord". I wonder how many persons in this room could take up those words just as they stand inscribed in the scripture. I wonder how many persons in Grimsby could take up these words just as this scripture presents them. Some perhaps would say, I am a Christian. Thank God if they can say that, but what does it really mean to be a Christian? Just what this verse presents – "Christ Jesus my Lord"; that deep conviction wrought in the depths of a soul not just the working of the mind, but something far deeper, an experience in personal history of what there is for your gain and blessing in this glorious Person.

The writer of these verses had been at enmity with the Lord Jesus to the extent of laying hold of His disciples to prison or to death; he had been, as the scripture itself says, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord", Acts 9: 1. This is the writer of this scripture, Paul the apostle. And following in his plan of campaign – for such it was – he secured letters to religious authorities in Damascus, having in view to follow this dastardly purpose of apprehending, for punitive action of some kind, the disciples of the Lord. But as he drew near to Damascus the Lord Himself stopped him, appeared to him out of heaven, came out of heaven to appear to him. What did He do? Strike him down as deserving of the extreme penalty? No, He stopped Him with a question, with no forceful measures: "Saul, Saul, why dost thou

persecute me?", Acts 9: 4. That is what he was doing, persecuting those who belonged to Christ, he was persecuting the One to whom they belonged – Christ. But the questioning voice came – "why dost thou persecute me?". I believe the questioning voice is coming towards many this afternoon – "why" – if you have left the glorious Saviour, the Lord Jesus, out of your life thus far, "why"? What has He done for your damage? Nothing. What has He done that you might be blessed with forgiveness of sins, justification, peace, the gift of the Spirit? He has done everything in view of that for you, everything. He has a right to ask these questions, and a right to secure by way of answer from any and every soul in this room, and indeed any and every soul anywhere, an answer. The potent word in this question is "why" – a conscience searching word. If you have lived a life which ignores the claims of Jesus, why should this be?

He has a right to seek a reason and to receive an answer; in the long term He has a right to every man, and the time is soon coming when every one shall bow the knee and confess Him Lord. If you have just lived a life without Christ you will not be missing then. It is a solemn fact, but it is a fact, and why should there be resentment of His raising questions, when, as I proceed to show, He raises them in view of your being brought into the very best that life with Christ as object can afford – the very best? Why do you evade these questions? Why do you turn aside your ear? Why? What have you to fear by answering the question of most intimate concern to you from One who seeks nothing but "your peace and blessing and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Why should you avoid a question from such a One? This beloved man whose writing I have read was searched out by that question; in consequence he came into blessing, assurance, security of soul, power for a new life in the gift of the Holy Spirit; a life of which Christ, a Man in the glory, is personally the object. Saul came into that, but it is all towards you that you may come into like matters, tasting in so doing what a God of love we know, what a God of love it is that speaks to you, what a God of love it is who spared not His Son to secure you.

All these things are blessedly true, but you can consider this beloved man, Saul of Tarsus, see what he went through, and how he writes now of what he has lost. He had been a great personage in a certain sense even in the religious order of the day, an eminent personage – it is all gone. The things that he counted for Christ loss; how graphic the language is but how meaningful! He counted them to be but filth – reputation, pride of position, self-indulgence, all these things; we could name many such features as the scripture does. He counted them to be filthy; he has a new and glorious interest, its whole centre and character in heaven, in Jesus, Christ the object of his heart; and what is more, though related to it, the object of his life. If something presented itself that did not make way for Christ in his soul, he would say, No. He learned to be definite: "I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" – the excellency of the knowledge of Him. What fine language in a positive sense! O, what it is to taste the excellency of it! Many of us here this afternoon could speak of that with deepest feeling, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. There is nothing like it; a poor dark world that rejected and crucified Him has nothing to offer, nothing that stands comparison with the One whom they crucified, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And why was He crucified? He was condemned to be crucified by men through hatred for Him, but as He went to the cross and suffered, laid down His life on the cross, shed His precious blood on the cross – He did this for you. You may object and say you have just said that men condemned Him to be crucified, Yes, they did, but behind this was the wise and wondrous hand of God, for He went to the cross by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Who had you in mind for blessing, and Who would lay the basis of the blessing in a way that no power could challenge. The basis of blessing is a right basis, for God has not passed by those sins of yours; He has not just passed them by, He has provided a settlement, a just settlement for them in the death of His Son. He spared not His Son but delivered Him up for us all. Have you found

the gain of that? Have you come into the blessedness of your sins all forgiven, forgiven because Jesus the Saviour bore them, not only at the reproaching hands of men and the vicious violence against Him, but He suffered under God's mighty hand, because it is God that your sins have offended; the effect of those sins of yours was against God. It is with God that the matter must be settled, and that is just exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, going into the suffering, bearing from God divine judgment, sustaining divine anger. You may say what extra ordinary language to use, but the gravity of what was effected on the cross is just the answer to your need as a sinner. The measure of your need as in your sins is seen in what transpired at the cross by which God, the blessed God, is sending forth glad tidings this day. He is just appealing to you about it, as to the immensity of what divine love has effected, and effected, we would say simply, by the most drastic measures. What could be more drastic than the pouring out of divine judgment upon One who as to Himself was innocent of sin? You were never innocent of sin and you desperately need that which alone the Lord Jesus can furnish, the settlement of the guilt of your sins.

Well, all this manifestly had affected Saul of Tarsus, not all at once maybe, but he has Christ before his heart as the One who endured untold suffering on his account. Is Christ before your heart as the One who endured untold suffering on your account? Is He?

You see, the divine thought is that that glorious Person who has suffered so much for you should assert His claim to have you for Himself and fill you with an impression of His glory, the glory of the Saviour, the glory of His place as made both Lord and Christ, the glory of His Person, God's beloved Son, the One who has met death by going into death and broken its power, and come forth from death, God raising Him even from the dead, from the grave. These are things which are quite outside the ken of man in everyday affairs, but they are vital things for me and for you, for every man and woman and young person, if they will but listen to God's glad tidings. Here was a man who did this on that road to Damascus, and who speaks so feelingly of where he now stands in reference to Christ. "I

pursue" – "Not that I have already obtained the prize"; that is to say he is not assuming anything unjustly, but he says, "but I pursue, if also I may get possession of it, seeing that also I have been taken possession of by Christ Jesus". That is the key point that he reached – he had been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. The glory that shone from heaven in that glorious Person shining into his soul has given him an impression of the claim, the undeniable claim, that the Lord Jesus has for him. Have you ever thought of that claim, the depth of it? There is no other can claim you with the same justness of claim as the Lord Jesus. I can say that quite without challenge for no other has laid down his life for you, no other has shed his blood in respect of your sins, no other has been raised from among the dead that you might stand justified in God's sight – no other. The claim of the Lord Jesus is total, and here is a man who accepted it. "I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" – "the calling on high". That is, God has a place for you up there with His beloved Son. This touches the vital present character of Christianity, that you have a place where Christ is, inasmuch as He has laid claim to you to have you for Him self, and your interests shall be centred up there while you remain down here, pursuing, that is going forward with Christ as object, living a life not in any sense based on human conceptions of life, but knowing a life which has Christ, God's beloved Son, as its centre. This is God's thought for you. This is what the writer of this scripture pursued, the prize that he pursued, but what a prize to have One before your soul, before your gaze, before your life, who loved you to the extent that what He affected for you is the measure of it! He would claim you tonight, and you cannot refute the justice of His claim, nor can you in any sense cast question on the immense positive character of the blessing into which you come – forgiven, justified, enjoying peace toward God, knowing the precious gift of the Holy Spirit: all these things. Is it not just that He should just claim you for Himself? Maybe He has asserted that claim before for you; if not, He would assert it tonight, and what is in view for you as affording an answer to that claim is the fulness of blessing which this beloved writer so manifestly enjoyed. It is for you. It is not in any

sense for him only; he is presenting the precious truth of Christ in glory, the glad tidings relating to that, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He has all this in His mind and in His heart to be known in the experience of men and that is where you come in tonight. That is where you come in as coming into the fulness of this blessing.

Well, dear friend, read this scripture through again; read the whole chapter if you will, and will you not find that the scripture is full of the conviction of a soul that has had to do with God, had to do with Christ, and now is set that Christ is the living object in heaven in an order of life pleasing to God, of which you shall know the fulness and blessedness through that precious gift of the Holy Spirit? May this portion be yours – Christ as object, the Spirit as your resource for life. For His Name's sake.

GRIMSBY

31 July 1988

HAPPY PATHS FOR THE CHILDREN

Just as there are safe and also dangerous paths for us to walk along in town and country, so is it with our minds and our souls. Scripture speaks of "the right paths of the Lord", so that in following Him there is much for our enjoyment. One of these paths would take your mind's eye to see a bramble bush in flames but not burned up; another would show you thousands of people going dryshod through the Red Sea; yet another would lead you to see a brass serpent lifted up on a pole. God was here on earth in the Person of Jesus and His presence did not bring final judgment, but grace; the Red Sea was dried up just enough for God's people to be redeemed from their enemies, while the brazen serpent is a type of Jesus crucified, being salvation to all who look to Him.

Another way is a well-trodden one, as the scripture reads "Ask for the ancient paths, which is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls". One of these old paths is the way of the fear of God – not to be afraid of Him, but to desire each day to do His will, then "the fear of God shall be your treasure". I expect that you have learned the Shepherd Psalm where there is comfort in treading the paths of righteousness. Isaiah wrote that, "a highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness" and the obedient believer, having the Holy Spirit, is set apart for God's pleasure, and is himself – or herself – a signpost to all on life's highway.

Sadly, "there is a way that seemeth right..., but the end thereof is the ways of death". This way is called 'self will' and although it has its apparent attractions, it leads only to regret and bitterness. Happy is the traveller on this road who hears and heeds a warning voice behind him saying of the right path, "this is the way, walk ye in it". On which path are you?

J.C.Evershed