

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 275

February 1996

Contents

DIGNITY AND HUMILITY

TRANSFORMATION

NO REPUTATION

DIGNITY AND HUMILITY

Philippians 2: 5-11; Luke 1: 39-56; 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

J.McK. The hymn that we have sung confirms an impression that we should speak of manhood according to God and certain qualities that attach to it. As we have often said the manhood of Jesus was such that no particular quality predominated, the fine flour was consistent, and its fineness did not allow any particular quality to become dominant. But I believe there were certain qualities in Christ that were of particular import in a world that was contrary. I refer first to dignity, and second to humility. These passages might form a framework for us to speak of those qualities. They are ingredients that are becoming increasingly scarce in the world and their scarcity is adding to the problems that men confront day by day. There is lack of dignity and humility in every sphere, men struggle with the consequences. I think it is also true that in man's world dignity and humility are incompatible. They seldom come together. But in God's world they are inextricably linked. Thus in Philippians 2 we have testimony as to the One who came down, and what marked Him as He came down. Then we should consider how that is worked out in the saints, particularly in Mary and Elizabeth at the beginning of Luke's gospel, persons who were brought together through divine operations and who in humility acquired a dignity that only God could confer. Then we read of David, his humility is evident. He was not even present as they gathered until as brought in he is given the place of distinction which God destined he should have. Then his brethren, although rejected, are retained, forming the circle in which typically Christ Himself is distinguished. I hope that these scriptures might give a framework from which we can speak about this together.

P.M. In the beginning of Luke it says, "*He shall be great*", chap 1: 32. Was there that inherent in Himself that gave character to the features you have spoken of? And was there not also His communion with God and with the Father that shone through the lowly pathway of Jesus?

J.McK. The expression "*He* shall be great" is not comparative. It is not *He* shall be the greatest, but "*He* shall be great" and surely dignity, according to God, attached to Christ in a way that it never attached to any other. But God had in mind as making man that he should be here in dignity as representing Him, did He not? So that in Philippians 2 the expression, "having been found in figure as a man", v 8, is, as we have been taught, not a reference to humiliation but to dignity. It refers to Christ coming in, to His own movements. None could compel Him. None could impose such movements on Him, but He came in Himself. To be found here "in figure as a man". God had something on the earth in Christ that He had never had before, the fulfilment of what was in His mind in bringing Adam in. He was a "figure", scripture tells us, "of him to come", Rom 5: 14. Never had there been dignity like this before. For the first time there stood upon the earth a Man who fully answered in detail to every thought that God had about His greatest creature.

G.N. Would you connect the thought of dignity with what is upright? I was thinking of Moses in relation to the holy ground on which he stood, he was to loose his sandals.

J.McK. We always need help as to the spirit of reverence. I think we would be helped in a reverent approach to Philippians 2. It is one of the jewels of scripture. It is remarkable that Paul who never met Christ according to flesh should enter into such detail, giving us the choiceness of the quality of what came down into the area where men were, in Christ. Certainly the quality of uprightness was evident as Jesus came. It says God made man upright.

E.O.P.M. Locally we were looking during the week at John 19 and the dignity that was there in the Lord in such outwardly humiliating circumstances impressed us right through that chapter. As we know in John's presentation, the Lord goes forth bearing His own cross. Dignity in the Lord was always there in whatever circumstances He was. In the world it tends, as you have indicated, to be associated with characteristics that are natural to man, seeking power and greatness, but in the Lord it was inherently there even in the midst of such humiliation.

J.McK. Mr Darby uses a remarkable expression. I think it is in the Synopsis referring to Leviticus 2. He refers to the self-abasement in Jesus that never faltered even when forced to confess His divinity. That links with John 18 when all came against him, when the combined forces of evil arraigned themselves against Him who was none less than the Son of God. What meets that situation is the truth that He is the I AM. 'They went away backward and fell to the ground.' Nevertheless the quality of self-abasement was there. As far as we are concerned humility, as Peter tells us in his epistle, needs to be bound on: as far as He was concerned, it was intrinsic in His nature as coming into manhood.

E.O.P.M. Can you help us then, not only to contemplate the Lord Jesus Himself, but how those features should be seen in us. Naturally it is not there with us and I like what you say as to these two things being linked in spiritual manhood because without humility we could hardly expect to walk here amongst men or among the saints displaying the characteristic of dignity, could we?

J.McK. I think the word, "let" in this passage is very interesting: "... let this mind be in you." The Spirit of God is here and His operation would bring about in the saints, as occupied with Christ, what corresponds to Him. "... Let this mind be in you." There is a power that will work towards that if we let it but, as you say, the flesh in its arrogance tends to show itself in human ability, a feeling that we are adequate for things - even among the brethren a tendency to feel that you know the answers, having read the ministry, you know what it says and you feel equal for a situation. That is not humility according to God. The Spirit of God is striving that there may be something that corresponds to the manhood of Christ: "... let this mind be in you."

P.J.W. John the Baptist saw these features in Jesus when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God." It says, "And, looking at Jesus as he walked...", John 1: 36. In Proverbs it says, "There are three things which have a stately step, and four are comely in going", chap 30: 29.

J.McK. That movement which John saw was in itself sacrificial. We see how the sufferings of Christ never detracted from His dignity. The altar according to the Old Testament was anointed seven times, suggesting that even as going through the intensity of suffering in view of His death and then at the time of His death, the dignity of Christ was never absent, and yet humility was there at all times.

D.E.R. We can understand dignity and humility to some degree as regards manhood but would you say more about it as regards the second stoop of the Lord in Philippians 2, into death itself?

J.McK. It says, He "humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death." Death had no claim on Him and therefore He had power over it. For Him to submit, to become obedient and to go that way, involved the humbling to which this scripture refers. He submitted to it on our account. The whole matter was vicarious but He went into it as dependent and in a humility that was exemplary. What were you thinking?

D.E.R. I was thinking along those lines, the dignity of the Lord as going right into death itself: that would be the import of the scripture upon us that, not only should we be found here as dignified and humble, but that we should be prepared to accept the pathway, our death with Christ, so that we should be found marked by those same features as Himself.

J.McK. The extent of His obedience has often caused us to wonder and, linking with what was said, the spirit of reverence links with wonderment. We learn to have our affections drawn out to the Person who came this way. "Subsisting in the form of God", what can we say as to that? It reaches into a condition before time, into a past eternity. What can we say as to it? He "emptied himself." That is, He divested Himself of the glory that belonged to the realm of deity and He came into circumstances of limitation in order that he should be an example, par excellence, for such as ourselves.

J.R.S. "A bondman's form" would particularly provide opportunity for this dignity to be displayed. It is contemplated, for example, that a

bondman should "say distinctly ", Exod 21: 5. That should be one element of that dignity.

J.McK. Yes; say distinctly, 'I love', so that what governed Him in the pathway of service was an affection that was unmixed. The difficulty with us often is that our feelings and affections become mixed. His were totally pure. He came here in view of doing the will of Another. His committal was real. He was "found in figure as a man" and He took "a bondman's form" and He took "his place". No one else could take that place. It was a place divinely destined for Him, but He took it in the liberty that He Himself had in view of God being glorified in the scene where the awful challenge of sin had caused so much dislocation and disruption in the human family. God found in Christ the answer to His great thought as to man.

P.M. Does His laying aside his garments (John 13: 4) bring out the dignity in which He served as a bondman?

J.McK. It is there as if for the moment He put aside all that would relate to personal glory in order that the intimacy of direct relationships with His own in lowly service should be realised.

J.W. Did you have more to say as to "subsisting in the form of God"?

J.McK. The expression is very wonderful; it is "the form of God" over against "a bondman's form". The contrast is there in a very wonderful sense and we see the reality of the condition left and the condition all subject to God's will. But you help us.

J.W. You said earlier that in divine things the thought of dignity and humility are inextricably linked. I wondered whether "subsisting in the form of God" and then "emptied himself" was a demonstration of that?

J.McK. Because all relates to the same blessed Person. If He humbled Himself, the glory of who He was underlay everything. It was He that did it: it was not men that did it. Men sought to do it. At the cross men sought to pour scorn upon Him and to humiliate Him.

But as others have said, He had already humbled Himself. Glorious Person!

T.F. You referred to the Synopsis. I believe Mr Darby emphasises that it was as God that He emptied Himself and as man that He humbled Himself. Do you think it helps us to preserve that distinction that scripture makes?

J.McK. So that what we have here is a Person who because of who He was must always be characteristic by dignity, but He was the same One who humbled Himself and became obedient even unto death. That is to provide an incentive for us because our affections should be drawn out to Him. Mr Darby spoke of the true Christian as humble because he is no longer seeking good in himself, adoring the One in whom there is nothing but good. The affections are drawn out to Christ and that delivers me from myself because I have an object outside myself which is entirely superior.

D.E.B. We need to see the distinction between dignity and formality. We often would put on some cloak of formality to make a pretence of dignity. The Lord maintained His dignity, but I think He was never formal, was He?

J.McK. Man's dignity is often false. True greatness according to God needs no cloak of distinction. It carries its own qualities and that is true not only in Christ but in the saints.

D.H. I was thinking about what you were speaking to me of recently. We saw some cedars and you indicated that a mature cedar, suggesting dignity, has a top shoot which is bowed, giving a suggestion of humility. I wonder if that would help. It speaks about "His bearing as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars", SoS. 5: 15.

J.McK. Yes. It helps greatly showing that what we are saying is confirmed in creation. Humility is thus not inconsistent with dignity. It was true in Christ and I believe it is also to be true in the saints.

D.N.S. Is it of note that John's gospel refers to the dignity of His Person, including the "I AM"? It also says, "And he went out, bearing

his cross", chap 19: 17. The gospel records that He bears "his cross".

J.McK. That shines through in John's gospel, so that He does things Himself. As we have said, this movement downward could never have been imposed upon Him, but He brought into manhood something that had never been there before. He was totally for God's pleasure. I think these women in the beginning of Luke's gospel follow the course of this spiritually. It is interesting that Luke who companies with Paul wrote this gospel and we can see how he brings out in it something of the qualities that marked Paul's ministry. Paul himself, I suppose, was qualified to write about the Lord as humbling Himself. Paul had been brought down on that Damascus road, suddenly arrested by "a light above the brightness of the sun", Acts 26: 13, and brought down to the earth. So that one who once was the embodiment of opposition against the testimony became changed and what shone through in him were features of the humanity of Christ. He is referred to as "Saul, who also is Paul", Acts 13: 9, not that he was simply called it, but he is Paul, that is little. Luke had companied with Paul and what he has in mind is that persons should be set in assembly relations with one another. I believe that this quality of humility has a particular force in our relations together. Thus Peter says, "bind on humility towards one another", 2 Pet 5: 5. There is no area where the arrogance of the flesh shows itself so much as in our relations with one another. If we are not careful they become abrasive and totally out of keeping with the manhood of Christ. So Peter says, "Bind on humility" and he says "all of you" do it.

G.C.B. I was thankful that you drew attention to that scripture. As we read in Philippians 2, it is "each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves", v 3. It is testing, is it not, but it is clearly right. Only thus will I be the least or nothing.

J.McK. Paul is not writing off the view you have of yourself as a subject of the work of God, but he is saying "each esteeming the other as more excellent." It is a question of distinction in quality, is it not? So there is a respect due from us to the saints as persons in

whom the work of God is. That comes out clearly in Elizabeth and in Mary.

M.J.W. Do you think the presence of the Holy Spirit - we have not referred to that in relation to Christ - is essential in relation to what you are speaking about? You might say there is dignity innate in a person because of the presence of a Divine Person. This cannot be worked out in us apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit. In Christ the fine flour was mingled with the oil.

J.McK. The anointing was for public testimony. The mingling involves the constitution, the quality of manhood that was there. It comes back to the question as to how this is reached in persons like you and me. "Let this mind be in you": there is power in the Spirit that will work towards it. Those who have helped us in the truth have had a humility of spirit which, I believe, we ought to emulate. I was reading in Mr Darby's letters the other day: he was writing to a brother encouraging him to go to a certain place and he said, I will come also and will be your Timothy. Think of the ability that J.N.D. had! The capacity for exposition and for pronouncement as to the truth and yet he said to another brother, I will come and be your Timothy. I believe we have something to learn in this that as we become humble ourselves, we begin to regard the qualities of others with greater respect. These women were brought together because God had done something in respect of each of them.

E.O.P.M. I suppose at the Supper in a special way we see the saints in their right setting as God sees them. I have often thought that if I could only be helped to maintain my view of my local brethren, those I break bread with primarily, at the level at which I see them on Lord's Day morning, it would help me both in humility and in esteeming the others and then this kind of conversation, this kind of intercourse, this outgoing of heart seen in what Mary says, would become normal in my Christian experience.

J.McK. Mary is not instructed to move into this area. The communication comes to her and it is very wonderful. Immense things were in prospect, but if God is moving in our days, great

things are in mind and it is a question, I think, of challenging ourselves as to whether we are available for them. The result of the communication is not that she goes as a recluse into secret, but she immediately moves into the area of the hill country: "And Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah", v 39. It is interesting in the Old Testament that the three cities of refuge on the land side of the Jordan were in the hill country.

G.N. Does the hymn-writer help us when he speaks of the Lord "Reserving nothing save the right to love" (hymn 318). There should be no reserve with one another, should there?

J.McK. These two were drawn together by reason of the fact that both had totally surrendered to the will of God for them. Mary says, "Behold the bondmaid of the Lord: be it to me according to thy word", v 38. In that attitude and that spirit she comes into touch with Elizabeth and immediately there is an affinity between them which is most attractive. I think it has been said as to this passage that it contemplates assembly relations at a time when Israel was failing in the praise. Zacharias had been made dumb for a season. So far as the nation of Israel was concerned all was dead and before God gets the response from His earthly people, He will reach something in the area of the assembly that is of the quality that He Himself seeks. Luke who accompanied with Paul presents these women as drawn together on this basis.

D.F. Does the calling have that dual effect in the consciousness of humility that we have been called to this high calling and at the same time dignify us in seeking to maintain what is proper to that level among ourselves?

J.McK. Yes, I think so, so that Mary's words are very wonderful. She says, in verse 48, "For he has looked upon the low estate of his bondmaid; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For the Mighty One has done to me great things". Is that not fine? Here is a person who knows that God has done something in her that is great and yet she says my estate is a lowly one. I think you have dignity and humility there and it is a blend which in

Christianity portrays under the eye of heaven what is characteristic of the humanity of Christ.

D.E.R. If a secret experience with God, working out things with Him, is with you and me, our conversation together will be, not exactly about ourselves, but about God and what He has done.

J.McK. The effect then in influence upon you will be to bring out the best. Verse 41 says, "And it came to pass, as Elizabeth heard the salutation..." - that it was a salutation is interesting, inherent respect was there - "the babe leaped in her womb". Elizabeth later says, "leaped with joy", v 44. Now, that was the effect that Mary had upon Elizabeth. Often, in the energy of the flesh, we bring out the worst in one another, but Mary as conscious that God had had to do with her and that the Mighty One had done in her great things had a very positive effect upon her sister.

D.E.B. It says she "entered into the house of Zacharias" Is her recognition of the order of headship to be noted? She could have bypassed him but she recognises that it is Zacharias' place of authority and influence.

J.McK. Zacharias is key to this situation, is he not? He was not equal to the message initially and certain governmental limitations came in, but later he is fully recovered, making his pronouncement as to the name of the child fully in accordance with God's will. I think what you say is right that a person affected rightly by divine action is respectful in every sense: whether it is a man's house, or his personal affairs, whatever it is, he is respectful to every institution which is of God.

P.M. Just say something to help us: here were two persons who were going on rightly. When matters arise among us as they do sadly from time to time, can we still meet them in the spirit of lowliness?

J.McK. Do you know any other way of meeting them? It is only thus that the work of God in its purity can be brought into light.

P.M. Is there not skill in appealing to the work of God in one another as these features become characteristic in myself?

J.McK. We will speak shortly of David. David shone in the spirit of Christ that he manifested towards Saul. Saul was at that time hostile to him and the word is very attractive as Saul is brought to the point where he says, "Is this thy voice, my son David?" 1 Sam 26: 17. I think that answers your question that the spirit of humility is in David as one consciously anointed. It is the only way of meeting any situation according to God otherwise what we are doing is meeting the flesh with the flesh.

P.J.W. Is it seen especially with Abigail? She moved in humility but with dignity and saved the whole situation.

J.McK. She had a great deal of wealth in moving: she was not without resource. She brought in what was necessary and restrained David at a time when his own energy would have resulted in damage.

P.M. These qualities going on together in the believer would ensure that we never lower the divine standard, it is maintained in a way that is representative of Christ.

J.McK. Every feature of life according to God relates to Christ. I read a remark recently as to Hebrews 11 where we have that great variety of names, the family of faith, to the effect that it is variety in life, anticipative of the incarnation. I think that is a wonderful thing. As we read through the Old Testament and see all these men - Abraham and Moses and Joseph and David and all these others - under God's eye, it was variety in life, anticipative of the time when Christ would come.

J.R.S. Do you think there is instruction for us in the detail of what Mary says? The first part is to the Lord, and then she speaks a little of her experience with God and how He has operated, and then the greater part of what she has to say is what God is doing in His sovereignty in Israel.

J.McK. Do you mean verse 51 onwards, "He has wrought strength with his arm; he has scattered haughty ones in the thought of their heart"? That is she is conscious that God is acting against the proud. Peter says that too, does he not? "For God sets himself against the proud...", 1 Pet 5: 5. And she, as God having had to do with her, has the whole thing in perspective. I think as we allow and are subject to divine operations our perspective changes.

J.R.S. That remarkable touch which you have brought in as to God anticipating in the variety the freshness and the pleasure there would be to Him in the incarnation – God would prepare for that and Mary would understand that preparation in the way God is clearing the scene in His operations with Israel, do you think?

J.McK. The same thing is applicable to Luke 1. The babe had not yet actually been born and yet what is worked out in these women is nothing short, I think, of the humanity of Christ, something that answers in its characteristics and qualities to what pleased God.

D.F. Is "in the Lord" a dignified suggestion?

J.McK. In submission to Christ every knee shall bow.

D.F. It precedes the assembly. It precedes assembly life and consciousness and experience at its proper level.

J.McK. So that we are in an environment of great advantage in the assembly. Let us not lose that. These persons did not have the full advantages that we have because the Holy Spirit is now here. We are in an environment of great advantage, the Spirit of God being here, operating and bringing into view qualities divinely accredited and those in whom the testimony of God can be preserved.

D.F. Would it not be right to think that "life and incorruptibility" is not a development, but is "brought to light", belongs to the sphere that is proper to the assembly?

J.McK. That is right so the work of God in its intrinsic character goes right through.

G.S. Did Paul find that as he came into Philippi, those qualities in the women that were gathered by the river? It says of Lydia that she

was a seller of purple. It would emphasise possibly just these qualities and what opened up there was precious under the eye of God in relation to the way that He had directed the apostle.

J.McK. I think so. Paul was able to introduce the truth of the Lord's humanity as He did in Philippians 2 to such a company. I think Paul's writings are shaped according to the kind of material with which he was dealing in each place. So in Corinth he writes in a different way from the way in which he writes to those in Philippi and it is a tribute to what he found there in the purity of God's work that he is able to bring in those precious touches of which we have read.

R.H.B. Is the thought of dignity in your mind connected with the thought of our calling? These women were called to have a special part in relation to the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of the Lord and they move in the dignity that is becoming. Is not the enemy's constant effort to cause us to lose sight of what we are called to be so that we act in a way that is beneath it?

J.McK. That is very important and the Spirit operates in relation to that. If we need dignity, the Spirit is available. Elizabeth here is said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit". In a sense that was before the time. You can see how Luke as having been under Paul's influence is giving a touch that anticipates what would yet be, but, he says, that is what happened to this woman: she was "filled with the Holy Spirit"; so that the Spirit would operate in relation to what you are saying, the divine calling at its height maintaining the saints in a way that not only pleases God, but calls attention to itself among men, because I think the anointing has a public bearing.

J.W. Have you something for us as to the practical import of what is being said? Much of what we have said bears on what God has done in a sovereign way. Can you help us as to how we can have our part in it?

J.McK. I think as we have relationships with one another, we do so as persons who are conscious that God has already acted in us. So if it is necessary to speak to my brother about something, I do not draw near and begin to criticise or to emphasise the differences

between us. The way to help is to call attention to the great things that God has called us to and the wonderful things that, in His mind, we are to share together.

T.F. The Lord in the way He spoke to Martha at Bethany shows what you are saying that it was the way He did it. We still need faithful words with one another, but it is the way that it is done.

J.McK. We can speak faithfully to one another and at the same time convey that we all belong to what is very great under the divine eye. These women were united because the Spirit of God had had to do with them and if He has had to do with me and you, we have more in common than there is divergent between us so that we begin from that point of view and seek to hold our brethren in relation to the great thoughts of God.

J.W. I was going back to what you said as to "let this mind be in you"; would it help us to contemplate these things more in quietness before God before we act?

J.McK. Can we allow the Spirit of God to operate in us? I find that very testing because we are limited as to our capacity and knowledge of things. But can we allow the Spirit of God to do something? Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit; Mary, as we have been taught, is not said to be filled with the Spirit. She represents a person in whom the work of God itself has come to maturity and she makes what others have referred to as a calculated contribution to the service of God. These two things are necessary in formal assembly relations: first that we are aware of the sovereign action of the Spirit causing an immediate and spontaneous result and response; and as a consequence of personal relations with Him we are able to compose something that makes a contribution to God's praise. I think, "let this mind be in you" is a strong appeal to allow the Spirit of God to have more place with us.

T.H. Would what we have before us in Philippians "obedient even unto death" - "let this mind be in you"; relate to the obedience we also see in Mary. Would this lead to dignity? She was obedient to what was heavenly: "be it to me according to thy word".

J.McK. She was submissive in a complete sense, but she was also very conscious of the greatness of God as she says, "the Mighty One has done to me great things". That is a fine title of God, is it not? - "the Mighty One". It delivers you from any sense of your own smallness.

K.J.S. I am very interested in the idea of the mind: "let this mind be in you". Is that the thinking faculty? Do you think we think enough when we are among the brethren?

J.McK. That is a challenging word. Mary pondered these things and, no doubt, that had something to do with the quality of her response. I think what you say is right, that we probably do not think enough about the truth. I have a feeling we become accustomed to the truth and therefore it loses its real impact upon us.

K.J.S. In Acts 16, Lydia who has already been referred to, is a beautiful testimony to the way the work of God operates. Then Paul was shortly afterwards thrown into prison, and the immediate reaction on my part would have been, Well, everything is up, but the Philippian jailor and his household were to be saved and Paul must have thought the thing through, do you think?

J.McK. The need therefore is to be with God step by step, results do not always appear immediately. We should speak about 1 Samuel 16 in that context because for Samuel this was a real experience. "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul...?" I think this may help as to how abnormal circumstances may be met. If Luke contemplates normal relationships among the brethren in view of the assembly; in 1 Samuel 16 things are different. Saul is in power. There is a great tide running against the testimony, but, as God says elsewhere, "I have found David my servant...", Ps 89: 20. The truth of that is about to burst on the experience of Samuel, so God's word is "... Fill thy horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons". When he first arrived, David was absent. It links with what you say, the results do not always appear immediately.

E.O.P.M. Is the heifer a good thing to have with us if we are not sure of what we will find and what the reaction will be? In the context in which we are speaking, it suggests that if I am in a situation that I do not fully understand, even though God is directing me a certain way, if I keep in the spirit of what is sacrificial and the area of the death of Christ, even if I begin to be mistaken, as Samuel was, I am in an area where I can be easily and quickly adjusted.

J.McK. Well, we must never be far from the death of Christ and what it means. His death means our eternal blessing, but it also means our present salvation and is the means of our preservation in the area of God's testimony currently. But I think Samuel had to go through this experience. "And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, Jehovah has not chosen these". It seemed that the whole exercise was going to be a failure.

A.M. God said, "I have provided me a king". Samuel was brought this way to see what God had provided for His own pleasure.

J.McK. The answer to God's desire is there in David. He is, of course, a type of the Lord Jesus. God says, I have found him and my desire is to bring you and to bring all the brethren into the secret of what I have found. But the process involved in that is the elimination of seven fine young men.

D.E.R. Is the setting aside of the first man something that needs constantly to be maintained with us in order that God's Man of His choice should be exalted, should come before us?

J.McK. Think of the experience of these seven. Samuel was there with the horn of oil, yet nothing is proceeding and every one of them has to be effectively rejected awaiting the coming of David. "There is yet the youngest remaining, and behold, he is feeding the sheep". Surely an evidence of the quality of manhood that we have been speaking about. The word is, "Send and fetch him; for we will not sit at table till he come hither".

D.E.B. Is not one of the dangers with us promotion and then promotion of my friends and favourites. They are both inhibitive of

the enjoyment of these conditions into which you are seeking to bring us.

J.McK. I think that is right so there needs to be the complete absence of what is political. You referred to that in saying that it may be my favourite that I feel should be promoted. We may have certain affinities, and special affinities within the fellowship are not of God. The depth of the lesson here is that each person has to learn rejection. I believe that we need to cultivate the quality of humility among the brethren. It is not only needed in the scene of testimony. It shines out there because of its distinction and the absence of humility in man's world. But let us cultivate this quality of humility among the brethren. I think it will deliver us from many snares. Let me not think of myself above what I should think. Let me be humble in the presence of the great things that God is doing amongst His people.

B.E.S. The heifer as a sacrificial offering comes into Leviticus 3, not so much Leviticus 1. It is the prosperity or peace-offering, is it not?

J.McK. You mean that Samuel would move with the intention of improving relations among the brethren?

B.E.S. Things were in a very poor, low state here in Israel and they would never get any better until there began to be an appreciation of what God had done for them, would they?

J.McK. Exactly, and the way that is reached practically is first by total displacement. And then every one of these seven is retained to form the circle where one man only is distinguished. It is very beautiful.

R.H.B. Does the "meek and quiet spirit" that Peter refers to which is an "incorruptible ornament" and "in the sight of God ... of great price", is connected with "the hidden man of the heart", 1 Pet 3: 4 bear on what you are saying?

J.McK. It does. The more I feed on Christ, the more my secret occupation is with Him, the more I will be reduced in my own view. Who could be exalted in the presence of the lowly Jesus, the Christ

of the gospels? We know Christ, of course, as exalted in heaven. It is the same Person who knew humiliation here. Who could be exalted in mind and outlook in the light of that? We are tested, and yet the place of humility is the place, I might say, of special resource. We have referred to Peter often in this reading. He says in chapter 5 of his first epistle, "God sets himself against the proud, but to the humble gives grace", 1 Pet 5: 5. I think the place of humility, dear brethren, is the place of special supply.

P.J.M. God's choice is, of course, justified on the field of battle, where Saul's thinking ultimately is to clothe David in the accoutrements of a warrior, but David steps out unclothed, save in his normal garments, but he had the shepherd's bag with him. Everything that he used was what he had used before, and what he speaks about was not what he could do but what God would do. He had delivered him from the lion and the bear. Does he manifest dignity, which is, of course, despised by Goliath but a dignity which has its root in the humility of man before his God.

J.McK. That is a good illustration of what we are saying. David was humble in the conflict so that afterwards Saul says "Whose son is this young man? 1 Sam 17: 55. That in itself is a very interesting question.

G.N. Was what was genuine displayed? It says, And the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward". Would the Spirit work with what is genuine?

J.McK. I am sure that is so, thus in the life of David you can see how the characteristics of the Spirit of Christ are worked out.

G.C.B. Why did you draw attention to that question, "Whose son is this young man? "

J.McK. There is the idea of divine generation as the qualities of the work of God are allowed to show themselves in the saints. Whose son is he? It becomes a relevant question. Where did this kind of manhood come from?

P.M. Mr Darby says in that same passage you quoted on Leviticus 2 that these features came into expression because He was with God, His God.

J.McK. Yes, the lowly Jesus, in communion with His Father He walked here upon the earth. He is to be before us as a model and as our affections are drawn out to Him the Spirit of God can form something that corresponds to Him in the saints now.

COLCHESTER

15 July 1995

Key to initials

R.H.Brown, Barnet; D.E.Burr, Redbridge; G.C.Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; D.Fentiman, Liverpool; T.Franklin, Grimsby; T.Harvey, Barnet; D.Hawgood, Bexley; J.McKay, Woodstock; A.Martin, Redbridge; P.Martin, Colchester; E.O.P.Mutton, Walton; P.J.Mutton, Walton; G.Napthine, Colchester; D.E.Remmington, St Albans; K.J.Samways, Buckhurst Hill; D.N.Smith, Chelmsford; G.Smith, Bexley; B.E.Surtees, Felixstowe; J.R.Surtees, Spaldwick; J.Walkinshaw, Bexley; P.J.Walkinshaw, Gillingham; M.J.Welch, Sunbury

TRANSFORMATION

Ron Campbell

**Ephesians 4: 10-13; Romans 12: 1,2; 2 Corinthians 3: 17,18 ;
Philippians 3: 17-21**

I have been thinking about transformation or change, which enters into each of these scriptures. I suppose, from one standpoint, it is something that takes place in our coming initially to the Lord Jesus and appreciating Him as our Saviour, and having Him as our Object. The glad tidings are not only to save us from our sins, but are intended to convert us, to change us. You can see that in the book of the Acts, in Saul of Tarsus, and in the Philippian jailor and others, that they were not only conscious of their sins being forgiven, but there was a real moral change with them so that they had Christ as their Object, and instead of living to the flesh, they began to live to Christ. I think it is important that we should appreciate the glad tidings, not only as I have said, in the way that they would save us, but that they should have a deep inward effect upon us, and change us thoroughly. Conversion suggests a change through and through; there should be some obvious difference from what persons were to what they are; it should be obvious.

I thought initially of this great system that is available to us, initiated by the Lord Jesus. The One who has "descended is the same who has also ascended up above all the heavens, that He might fill all things;" (v 10). Now He has gone to that place in glory, above all the heavens. He has reached the pinnacle of power, the great place that He was intended to fill - and which He does fill. So He is giving character to a new order of things. Everything in the assembly and in our individual experiences has its origin in the Lord Jesus: everything flows from Him, He is there above all the heavens, and He is filling all things. From that point - He is influencing downwards and using a great system of support that is available to us that we might arrive at God's ideal. Change would be in relation to formation after Christ, and this whole system is set on that we

might all arrive "at the fullgrown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ;" (v 13). What an ideal, beloved brethren! That is God's intent: Christ is God's ideal, and His desire is that we might arrive at the full-grown man, "at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ".

From there, He has given some apostles. It was in the inauguration of Christianity that these gifts were given, but I think it might suggest that even now there is what is authoritative - the Lord Jesus using ministry and our local gatherings in view of emphasising and bringing in what is authoritative. "And some prophets" (v 11) - I think we have some experience of that. However feeble we are we have some experience of the Lord Jesus using persons to bring in what is prophetic, that is, that the mind of God for the moment is brought in giving us direction. The prophet would be with God and would bring in the mind of God - a challenge to us in these meetings for the ministry of the word that there might be something prophetic in it to meet the conditions of the saints at this moment. "And some evangelists" - I think that these are gifts which were given, as I have said, in the inauguration of Christianity, but the work of the evangelist is to continue. We have no specifically ordained persons: we have no apostles; but we have what is apostolic in the sense that there is authority in what is said. We do not have prophets, but we have persons available to bring in what is prophetic. do not have evangelists - designated evangelists - but Paul tells Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. That is the position in which we are at the present time, that we can do the work of an evangelist.

That is intended, as I have said, to bring about change, "with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ;" (v 12). We can have the sense of what is apostolic and prophetic as God's mind comes in, and we can do the work of the evangelist. I believe these things continue in these characters at the present time. It is all "with a view to the work of the ministry, to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ;" (v 13).

Now that must involve change. What we are naturally and what we are after the flesh cannot be worked upon. It involves something in the soul of the believer that can be worked upon, and developed, and progressed, with this great end in mind, to arrive at the full-grown man.

May we be encouraged by these things, however small our conditions might be, that the Lord can use persons to bring in what would be needed just at the present moment to encourage and to help us. The prophetic word in Corinthians is said to be for edification, for consolation, (see ch 14: 3). The word would come in to encourage and help us at the present time, to see what God has in mind, that we "who once were afar off...", (Ephesians 2: 13) as belonging to the Gentiles who had no claim to anything there might be a change in us and we might appreciate what God's end is, that is that we might arrive at the full-grown man.

These other scriptures all speak of transformation. It might encourage our hearts to appreciate what there is for us to go in for and to be occupied with. Romans 12 is the believer having worked out certain moral exercises in his own experience - he brings his members under control, he has his mind under control. It says, "I myself with the mind serve God's law; but with the flesh sin's law", (Romans 7: 25). So that he has arrived at something in spiritual experience or moral history, and comes to the appreciation of the gift of the Holy Spirit as the power to maintain him here in relation to what is of God. The believer has his whole body brought into subjection to the will of God. That is a test, (I find it for myself), that my life might be governed by the will of God, that I might put my body on the altar and be committed - fully committed - to what there is of God in our own souls, and use it in view of the pursuit of the will of God. And he says, "to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service", (Romans 12: 1). The mind is involved in that: "your intelligent service. The renewed mind sees what is in God's mind, that our bodies are available, livingly available, in view of the pursuit of the will of God. He brings in this word of warning: "And be not conformed to this world ...".

How easy it is to be conformed to this world. I suppose the trend has never been so great in relation to the reducing of divine standards and conformation to the world. The enemy would be constantly at us as believers in the Lord Jesus - that we might be conformed to this world. But Paul says: "And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God", (v 2). The mind is a very important faculty, especially in the working out of exercises in this epistle, and our mind are renewed - we think differently, we do not think as persons in the world think. We think as persons who have come under the will of Another and our minds are controlled, so that we might prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. This involves change. The whole bent of our life is different, the way we think is different we begin to think for God. We have put our bodies on the altar and our minds are changed: not to think about ourselves and the pursuit of what might be in relation to the world; now we are set fully in the pursuit of the will of God.

May we see this, beloved brethren, and be encouraged by it, that this change is taking place as we set our minds on divine things, on holy things - in relation to what is collective, what would be in relation to the assembly. We do not get the assembly formally in Romans, apart from a reference in a later chapter but it has often been said that a good Roman can go anywhere. Once we arrive at these things in our individual history, we are ready for the pursuit of the divine interests in relation to the testimony here. This is an exercise for ourselves; we have a certain responsibility. Paul says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God". We have to set ourselves; we have to have our mind on divine things - our minds set in the pursuit of the will of God, with our mind changed from what we would think according to flesh to what we would think according to God, proving the help of the Holy Spirit in it.

In 2 Corinthians 3, it is also our responsibility; it suggests that we do something. It says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, but where the

Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord" (vv 17,18) would suggest what is collective, but it would have certain effects in each one of us. What an Object we have for our affections, to fix our eyes on the glory of the Lord, to have Him before us. What a change that brings in, what transformation! It suggests that we are moving from glory to glory, which involves a certain progress. It suggests a metamorphosis, that is, imperceptibly we change, like Moses who went up the mountain and his face shone. I believe this is intended to enter our experience that we have the Lord before us in all His perfection, in all His glory, that we might be "transformed according to the same image"; that is, we become Christ-like, or we become more Christ-like. That is the great object, the great ideal, as looking upon Him - having Him exclusively before us - we are "transformed according to the same image from glory to glory". What a change; it is constantly taking place: from glory to glory.

Then we have the great final change of which I read in Philippians. In a sense we have no responsibility in relation to that. It is the Lord Jesus who acts Himself. What a moment that will be. The apostle writes of those who mind earthly things, who "glory in their shame" (Phil 3: 19). What conditions there are around us in the world and even in what takes the Name of Christ, the great religious profession, there is no real presentation of Christ, or representation of Christ. Persons "mind earthly things". But the apostle says: "for our commonwealth"; that is our life together. Our associations of life do not belong to what is earthly or what marks this scene at all. "Our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens", (see v 20). What an area in which to have our links, to be with one another in the enjoyment of what is heavenly in character, that which we will enter into fully when the Lord calls us to Himself. But then he says, "from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour" "who shall 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", (v 21). He will subdue all things - His enemies He will put under His feet (see 1 Cor 15: 25). He has the power to

subdue and subjugate every element - He will do that in a day to come - but before that the Lord will transform our bodies of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory. What a change. These earthly tabernacles, these bodies of ours which are weak and feeble in the physical side: but the work of God proceeds in each one of our souls; and the moment will come when the Lord Jesus Himself will "transform these bodies of humiliation into conformity to His own body of glory..." You think of that moment when the dead in Christ shall arise first; then we, who are alive and remain, shall be caught up to be with the Lord" (see 1 Thess 4: 16,17). The Lord Jesus will operate from His own side, He will initiate this: He will set it on. My responsibility is to have my mind transformed and to be transformed from glory to glory - the work of God progressing in my soul; but the Lord Jesus initiates this change: He sets it on; and our portion will be in the enjoyment of our associations with Him in bodies like unto His own body of glory. Oh, the great final thought - Christ's body of glory. He "shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory" (v 21).

What an object we have! What a hope we have despite the weakness here - and we feel it - that moment will come when the Lord will transform our bodies of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory. May we be encouraged. beloved brethren for His Name's sake.

HELSTON

25 July 1995

NO REPUTATION

"Who being in the form of God ... made Himself of no reputation." -
Philippians 2: 6,7

Most wondrous thought! Thou, oh our Saviour God,
Whom e'en the heaven of heavens cannot contain,
Didst stoop to lowest depths; yet o'er that stoop
In all its mighty vastness, its profound
Unfathom'd depths, our souls must fain be mute.
Yet musing o'er Thy pathway, we behold,
Oh matchless Saviour, such stupendous acts
Of grace, and love, and pure humility,
Our hearts o'erflow with praise.
Who but Thyself Would own "no reputation"! would accept
No breath of earthly fame, no word of praise
From flattering lips? Who but Thyself alone
Would deign to be by men o'erlook'd, ignored,
Thought nothing of? yet conscious, all the while,
That glory, honour, majesty, and power,
By right belonged to Thee!
Oh, patient One, Obedient unto death: we hail with joy
The rapturous thought that henceforth evermore
Thyself shalt be th' exalted One, whose name
Above all other names shall homage bear;
Our thrice victorious Lord.

Reprinted from Things New and Old, Vol. XX/I (1879), p.121