

A
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Contents

PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH GOD

VICTORY

PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH GOD

Exodus 33: 17-23; John 1: 14-18; 21: 20-23; 19: 25-27

J.McK. I think it is clear from the testimony of scripture that God has in mind that man in this dispensation, in the light of an accomplished redemption, should know what it is to live in direct relations with Himself. It has always been in His mind, but the present moment and the privileges proper to it facilitate the nearness in a way that earlier dispensations could not. I wondered if we could stimulate one another as to enjoying that nearness a little more than we do. Christendom has an imposed hierarchy which is of man and as a consequence has introduced into the lives of many believers a degree of remoteness in relations with God, which causes uncertainty, difficulty and sorrow. If we focus our attention on God's objective, to have men in direct touch with Himself, the Spirit will help us. Job, in chapter 9, says, "There is not an umpire between us, who should lay his hand upon us both", (v 33). As wrought on by God, Job felt the need of that. New birth having taken place, God would cause us to feel it too. Often, however, we stray from it and thus even the enjoyment of what is collective in an external sense might take away from the awareness in our own soul of our having a personal link with God.

We would speak of two men - Moses in the Old Testament and John in the New. It has often been said that John's ministry is a continuation of the ministry of Moses and I think, if the brethren ponder that, it is a very fruitful area. One of the things that Moses, as the first writer of the scriptural record, brings out is nearness to God. We read in Exodus 33 where God says to him, "there is a place by me." He knew God already, but God is inviting him to take a near place in relation to Himself.

In John's gospel, we have the distinctiveness of what comes in in the Person of the Lord Jesus - "an only-begotten with a father." It shows the way that God has made Himself known in the Christian dispensation. That is to find an answer in persons, and John is a

sample man. He took up a close relationship to the Lord Jesus personally - "the disciple whom Jesus loved" who could lean upon His breast and was in His bosom. I think he is a man whose character gives us an indication as to how we should be in the testimony of God in the last days. In chapter 19, the Lord gives him responsibility for one who himself was very near to Jesus. Thus, if we are helped in our own personal relationships with Christ, we shall be effective in the care of others. Do you think that would be a framework for useful conversation?

J.S. I think it is a very important thing for us. Do you think the way that God has taken to put Himself in relation with man would help us in that, to feel that we can be so near to God and have this personal, direct link with Him?

J.McK. Indeed, and that makes Christianity what it is. God in His own Person has drawn so close. But nearness was always in God's mind. Was it not in His mind as drawing near to Moses, that Christ should come? He actually moved within Moses' range in the burning bush and Moses was attracted to look more closely, not at a phenomenon exactly, but at what God would disclose through it and it was in God's mind at least a type of what would be fulfilled as Jesus came in.

J.S. I was thinking that, in that way, we have the type and we have the example in John. It is a great matter to realise that we are actually in the day when such close, direct relations are possible.

J.McK. And not only possible, but vital. If we are to be preserved in the truth, we need a conscious awareness of a link with God. I am not in any way writing down the benefits of fellowship - the brethren will understand that - but what comes before that is an awareness that we have to do with God, not at a distance, but in an intimacy of affection and abiding relationship that will go through into eternity.

J.N.M. That is John's point of view. In John 1, it is beautifully informal - "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father." Paul often presents the official side. He says, "who is image of the invisible God", Col 1: 15. We might get caught up on the

organisation or the official side as if that alone were Christianity, so John sees the only-begotten in the bosom of the Father and that to him is everything. It is not official at all. It is the family, the divine family, and our favour is that we have been called into that.

J.McK. Exactly, so God has drawn near in the attractiveness of close relationships. Moses could not have known that save, of course, that he wrote Genesis 22. He testified in that beautiful chapter that "they went both of them together", (v 6). You see how Moses' writings and John's ministry come together. There is a testimony in Moses to a close relationship and that comes into full view as the economy is disclosed at the beginning of John's gospel.

J.N.M. And Moses was on the mount of transfiguration, was he not?

J.McK. Yes, he was. He reached the highest level.

J.C.G. Do you think that something of the closeness of the relationship comes out in the expression that Jehovah uses, "I know thee by name"?

J.McK. It is an interesting and very personal reference, is it not? He says, "For thou hast found grace in mine eyes", that is, Moses was already conscious of divine favour. And God says, "I know thee by name", that is specific interest in Moses personally. We are not speaking about Moses in this passage as a type of Christ. He is a type of the believer and, as such, he is of great interest to God Himself. Moses has already come a long way with God. The whole history of the exit from Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, the traversing of the wilderness, the experience of divine patience on the way, all lies as a background to this passage. But at this point Moses says, "Let me ... see thy glory." There is something drawing the man as if there is an infinitude in God, the God who had blessed him, the God who had been so much to him in circumstances of difficulty, that he wants to know more of Him.

J.A.G. He spoke with him "as a man speaks with his friend", (v 11). That is very intimate and trustworthy. The Lord Jesus takes up that language in John 15 verses 13, 14, "No one has greater love than

this, that one should lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends ...". There is nothing very official about that.

J.McK. There was a directness between Moses and God that was almost unique to himself. I think we have been taught that the holiest was never barred to Moses. The high priest went in once a year, but entrance was never barred to Moses. There was a directness in his link with God that was outstanding. When persons dared to speak against, him, God says, "Mouth to mouth do I speak to him ..." (Num 12: 8), and earlier in Exodus 33, it says, "And Jehovah spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend", (v 11). You can see how Moses, in an outstanding sense at the beginning of the Bible, epitomised the nearness that God had in mind for man.

A.McK. It says in Psalm 90, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations", Ps 90: 1.

J.McK. I wondered about that Psalm. It is "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God". A very extended view comes into that Psalm. It says, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth ... from eternity to eternity thou art God", (vv 1,2). I think there is an indication in that from this near place of direct relationship with God comes the extended view of what God has been and of what He will be. We can see how that extends to John in the New Testament. Who gives you the longest view in the New Testament? It is John, is it not? He goes back furthest in his gospel: "In the beginning was the Word ... ". He reaches back before Genesis 1 and he reaches forward, giving a view right on to the day of eternity at the end of the book of Revelation. What scope he had in his view! I think that is a consequence of a close link with God Himself.

R.T. God dwelling among them and they serving Him is in view in this section. Moses feels a need that, if God was going to be served and dwelling, there should be a definite impression of His glory.

J.McK. Would you think too, an abiding sense of a place of favour with Himself? So that God says, "there is a place by me". I think it

has been said (and it is helpful) that the knowledge of God was never intended to be entirely an objective thing. God says, If you are to see my glory, you are to see it from a place of conscious relationship.

J.N.M. The dwelling of God amongst them was something that had to be secured, maintained. It was by Moses' intercession, but would that have an application to us? Something not to be assumed?

J.McK. It requires a moral condition and there is nothing to preserve moral conditions like the awareness of God's presence. I think Mr Darby says (and I was arrested by it recently when reading some of his letters), speaking of Abraham, that it is important to realise that Abraham was not only called into separation; he was called to communion. I think that links with what you are saying, that fundamental to a moral state that God can bless is a sense of direct relations with Himself. That makes a demand on the conscience and affects all that we do. So that these men began to live as coloured by their link with God, did they not? Moses says, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place". He did not say the tabernacle had been their dwelling-place; He said that God Himself had been that. Thus the first of Scripture writers bears testimony to the fact that man is to know direct relations with the God of the universe.

J.S. Do you think the way that we receive the gospel and come into the sense of favour - "this favour in which we stand" (Rom 5: 2) - and from there work things through experimentally, is the means by which we come to know God, as you say, not only objectively, but subjectively by these experimental exercises?

J.McK. So that His glory begins to shine. Moses at this time was in wilderness circumstances, but the glory was equal to that; the glory that shone in the wilderness is the glory that is equal to its own place and if God helps us through the circumstances of need which the testimony at the present time involves, then it is to fit us for the area where the glory is unrestricted.

J.S. We go through exercises in our souls and in our circumstances and we learn God in that way. These chapters of Romans, five, six,

seven, eight, you can see how we can develop in the knowledge of God. His glory comes before us, do you think?

J.McK. The believer then begins to represent God. You cannot represent God unless you know Him. That is a simple statement but how true it is!

J.N.M. There was an interesting situation. As you say, Moses had access to the most holy place at all times, but there is something else that we do not often speak about, and that is that it would seem that God planned that at the time of the evening oblation the people should have access to Himself, not going formally into the tabernacle, but there at the time of the evening oblation, He would draw near and speak to them. That must be something very special. What do you think it means?

J.McK. I do not know. The evening oblation is a precious touch as to Christ's humanity. At the end God will have what answers fully to the manhood of Jesus.

J.N.M. It is seen in Daniel's day where it says, "the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, flying swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation", Dan 9: 21. I wondered if there would, or could, be something of the spirit of that about us in the day in which our lot is cast.

J.McK. We were reminded recently that the evening oblation was nothing to do with Babylon's calendar; it related to Jerusalem's calendar, it relates to God's purpose, and what He Himself will secure. It is wonderful that, in spite of all that is in man, God's prime thoughts will go right through.

J.N.M. It is also very small and simple: it is a lamb! It is not the bullock of the burnt-offering. It is just, could we say, Jesus as God enjoyed Him?

J.McK. That is fine.

A.McK. Is it connected with His saying, "I ... will cover thee with my hand" - a very close, personal touch?

J.McK. "I ... will cover thee with my hand, until I have passed by". He must have been aware that God was very close to him. I think we should be aware of that too, that we are having to do with God Himself. The way that this is carried through into the New Testament is deeply interesting. What is impressing me today in respect of Moses is that the man who began the writings as we have them in Scripture and in respect of John, the man who concludes them, the emphasis is the same. Both emphasise the directness of man's link with God. So there is some sense of divine triumph that at the end of the dispensation, (I suppose some three thousand years had elapsed between the writing of Genesis and the writing of John's gospel), there is testimony that God will secure in men an answer to His greatest thoughts in intimacy in spite of all the failure that has intervened.

N.J.H. What is your thought as to the rock that is with God?

J.McK. "There shalt thou stand on the rock". In Exodus 17 God stood on the rock. That is typical of the death of Christ and there is the smiting that the waters should flow. God took His place on the rock, but this is a different suggestion in that God said, "There shalt thou stand". It is new standing for man in the presence of God, as divinely provided.

N.J.H. I was wondering if it was Christ on God's side with God. 1 Corinthians 10 is the rock which followed them: it was Christ on man's side, spiritual drink, for instance. I wondered if it was a view of Christ with God. What do you think?

J.McK. It is interesting to consider God's view of Christ. Often we become uncertain and things become blurred in our experience because we begin to depend on our view of things, but I think what you say is fine that God has provided the rock and he says to Moses, "There shalt thou stand"; but He also says, it is "by me". It is not that Moses is to be set up in any sense in independence but he is to be conscious of a close link with the God who has brought him into blessing. I think that links directly with John's gospel.

R.T. It would almost seem as if God waiting on Moses to make this request, would it not? God was ready for it as soon as Moses made the request.

J.McK. Is that not stimulating? The God who has wrought in us knows what the instincts of His own work are and that we shall see are after Himself. I noticed a very interesting reference in ministry the other day. Referring to the prophet Amos - "For thus saith Jehovah unto the house of Israel: Seek ye me, and ye shall live. And seek not Bethel, neither go to Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought" (Amos 5: 4,5) - we were warned that there is a danger with us of seeking significant things in the testimony, Bethel and Gilgal, claiming things in a public sense that had to do with the way that God has acted for His people historically and resting in that, whereas the word of the prophet is, "Seek ye me" and that is how the instinct of the work of God will lead us. We do not seek only an external link with the testimony; we seek the God whose testimony it is.

R.S.R. Why the prohibition to see God's face? God says, "Thou canst not see my face; for Man shall not see me, and live".

J.McK. It is a testimony to the difference in the dispensation, is it not? When we come to John's gospel, the revelation is complete. In the Old Testament light was shining but it becomes brighter and brighter until the full glory burst on to our view as Jesus comes into the scene.

R.S.R. So the Lord could say, "Handle me and see", Luke 24: 39.

J.McK. Yes, and John in his epistle says "that ... which we have seen ... and our hands handled, concerning the word of life", 1 John 1: 1. What came in in Jesus was substantial; it was real: and these men were affected by it. The prime testimony to it in chapter 1 is that He is "an onlybegotten with a father". My impression today is that if that is the way in which God has made Himself known in the dispensation, that is the character of the answer He is looking for in the hearts of men.

J.N.M. That is, it is on the basis of love.

J.McK. Yes, it is simple and yet profound. The disclosure simply of divine power could never have had such an effect. God has come near. It says, "as of an only-begotten with a father". The brethren know the teaching of these things. The first reference in verse 14 is a simile, that is, it is "as of an only-begotten with a father", a relationship already known in the human family, God coming within man's range that in Christ they might apprehend something that in some sense they would appreciate in the way of intimacy of affection.

E.D.S. So is it available to us in the "shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", 2 Cor 4: 6?

J.McK. That is the unrestricted shining. There are no clouds, nothing is hidden. We are in the dispensation characterised by the full outshining of God. Divine power is active that the light of the revelation shall be formative in the souls of men. If you think of John the evangelist as the New Testament speaks of him, his character is more prominent than his service. Is that right?

E.D.S. That portion in Corinthians, "who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth" (2 Cor 4: 6), is to come into witness.

J.McK. There was nothing in the vessel to prevent the shining forth. The vessel becomes transparent in that sense.

J.S. Do you think the characteristic reference "the disciple whom Jesus loved" would bear out that his character was more prominent than his service?

J.McK. It is what I was thinking of. He enjoyed love.

J.S. Do you think he would have learned it in the bosom of Jesus? It says, "the only-begotten Son" who is in the bosom of the Father": that involves His present place in the Father's affections. Do you think we are to know direct relations in a current way in that sense?

J.McK. Yes, the bosom of the Father, as we have been taught, is the place into which He came in view of the greatness of the declaration.

C.K.R. Verse 17 contrasts what is given by Moses and what subsists through Jesus Christ. The focus now is clearly upon the glory of what was come out in the Son.

J.McK. Yes, in Moses there was a testimony to the truth: "the law was given by Moses". In itself the law was perfect, but, as we have often said, it effected nothing; but when we come to Christ there is the substance: "grace and truth subsists". There is the substantial quality of what God has sought form men in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C.K.R. I was thinking of Moses - the glory of the mediatorship is valuable, is it not, in the whole divine system? While we may think of it in one sense as official, yet it is Jesus who became the Mediator in order that man might come into relationship with God eternally.

J.N.M. Say something, please, about the Lord contemplated, speaking of verse 14.

J.McK. It is a fine expression: "we have contemplated". The Lord Jesus actually was close to them. I fear sometimes that we become so accustomed to the truth that we do not allow the greatness of it to impress us. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us": there were many who said that. If we read Luke's gospel, we see the many persons with whom Jesus came into touch in the days of His flesh, but how many were contemplators? I think that is part of the challenge you raise. John was a contemplator. He was not always active. I think sometimes we are prone to be active rather than to be in the attitude of taking account of the glory. John was there on the mountain, selected along with Peter to get a glimpse of the glory, and Peter had to say something. He was adjusted later about what he said: but John, as far as the record goes, did not say anything.

J.A.G. Do you think Peter's account in his epistle is some evidence of his contemplation, how he is able to enlarge upon that experience and bring out the glory and beauty of it?

J.McK. I think he reached it: "such a voice ... we heard uttered from heaven, being with him on the holy mountain", 2 Pet 1: 17, 18. But

John was perhaps more ready in his affections simply to contemplate while he was there.

J.N.M. Would you say this is what is proper to the time when we are with the Lord after the Lord's Supper?

J.McK. Yes, we take account of a relationship unique in the whole universe of God, and a relationship which remains - "the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father" (v 18). We 'might tend to think of it as something that related to the time when He was here, the days of His flesh, but it is something that remains and that we take account of and wonder at.

A.McK. And it is in parenthesis: "(and we have contemplated his glory ...)". This may have been a long time after the Lord had been on high. You referred earlier to John writing at the close of his long life. He had had a long time to contemplate these things, had he not?

J.McK. Yes, and, no doubt, they had matured with him. I think we should be seeking the Spirit's help that things mature with us and develop so that although we have early impressions - and we thank God for them - we look for development in our knowledge of Himself and that not simply as objective, but as something which will give actual tone and character to us.

J.Sp. So when "they abode with him that day" at the end of that chapter, it would have given them some opportunity to contemplate His glory.

J.McK. Again, that was not an official matter. It was where He dwelt and we are never given any geographical position for it, so those who were found subsequently were not taken to the place where Jesus dwelt; they were taken to Jesus. I am sure this is all in line with the teaching of the man we are speaking of and I think he corresponds in the New Testament to what Moses was in the Old. He enjoyed divine affection and acted in the light of it.

R.T. There is emphasis in John 1 on the Word: "And the Word became flesh", all that is known of God and all that is expressed of

God came into that condition for our contemplation.

J.McK. Yes, so that is how the Person became known among those who loved Him. They learned that He was the Word. The gospel begins by saying, "In the beginning was the Word ... ". The Person who was close to them was "in the beginning". The immensity of it needs to stir our affections freshly so that we begin to develop in affection for Christ and learn to live in relation to Him.

J.A.G. It makes what is mediatorial exceedingly attractive, and that gives colour and character to God's house. It makes it a wonderful place to live in.

J.McK. So you have the sense that John enjoyed that link, and when Peter asks the question in chapter 21, "What of this man?", The Lord says, "If I will that he abide until I come, what is that to thee?". There is a lesson for us in these things.

J.A.G. How does "the mystery of piety" bear upon this? I am thinking of your exercise that we should all be consolidated individually in our links with God.

J.McK. In Christ, "God has been manifested in flesh". Is that what you are thinking of? So there has been something in a man that disclosed what God had in mind. There is something in the true believer that is to answer to that so that piety should come into expression in our lives. That is what we referred to just now as character. John is not so much concerned about service, but what shines is his character.

G.B.G. Linking on with what was said as to the parenthesis, it says, "(and we have contemplated...)". If it had said, 'we contemplated', it would have been historical, but "have contemplated" is not simply historical, is it? It is more continuous, not at one particular time.

J.McK. It needs to be. I feel so limited as to what I can take in of these things but their greatness is what attracts. It is what draws you in affection. You may say, Well, I will continue to be occupied with this, and you find that you grow closer to the Person with whom you are occupied.

G.B.G. So we see results in both these servants of whom you are speaking. Moses has been said to be morally the greatest man in the Old Testament. Do you think that was the result of his nearness to God? We see in John the result of his nearness to the Lord Jesus. That is what God is looking for and there will be result if this is the case.

J.McK. I think so; so John is often referred to in ministry as a 'reserve man'. I do not disagree with that, but I would put it to the brethren that he is a mainstream man. I do not think John is simply a man who comes in when others have failed. I think he indicates for us how the main line of what is of God is to be preserved in the last days.

J.S. It is interesting that when Peter raises the question about him, John is just following. That was characteristic of him, keeping near to the Lord.

J.McK. Peter says, "What of this man?" suppose we learn something from that. The Lord's servants are directly responsible to Himself.

A.McK. Do you mean that the mainstream goes on although there is public failure away from the Pauline teaching?

J.McK. It is very interesting that John saw the failure publicly from what Paul's ministry introduced.

A.McK. It says, He "dwelt among us", but the footnote says, 'tabernacled'. That is a lowly condition, is it not?

J.McK. Yes, it indicates, as was said earlier, a simple, direct relationship, 'tabernacled among us'.

J.N.M. It should affect our hearts that when what was set up officially under Paul collapsed so disgracefully, God brought to light something that was not a solution, but as you say, the family side of things in John, something that was infinitely precious and, in fact, has cast into the shade the failure of the official public line. God has fallen back, if I might say so, on something that is greater. That should affect our hearts, should it not?

J.McK. And something that related to His own primary thought. God introduced the family and God will have it and will have family affections enjoyed by persons like John.

G.A.B. Going back to Moses in Numbers 12, Jehovah says that he might speak by a vision, or a dream to one, but he says, "Not so my servant Moses", (v 7). Other disciples might need something more explicit, but John seemed to have that close understanding with the Lord as to what the Lord's mind was about things.

J.McK. Yes, he had understanding with Him. It was as if, because he was close enough, the Lord's mind as to things would be easily attained or secured by John. It is something we need to cultivate.

J.A.G. The Lord loved him, "the disciple who Jesus loved". It is on a par with Enoch - "has the testimony that he had pleased God", Heb 11: 5. There should be that with us.

J.McK. So that in anything we undertake, we are conscious of the Lord's favour. I refer to Mr Darby's letters again because I find great help in them. He says, as you are concerned about serving others, work then, but do not work outside the area of your own communion. That I find a tremendous test, but it is as you say that the sweetness of your link with Christ is giving tone and colour to everything that you do among the saints. He became known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved".

J.A.G. And the recovery to Paul's ministry has been on this line.

J.McK. Yes, the line of affection rather than the line of administration.

J.C.G. In the consternation that there was among the disciples at the Supper, Peter could refer to John, because he leaned on His breast. It was that confidence he had and Peter made a sign knowing that John was in such relationships with the Lord that he had intimate knowledge of what He was saying.

J.McK. Peter must have had a great respect for John's place. He knew, did he not, that John was closer to Jesus than he was

himself? He knew that in certain circumstances, John would get the answer more quickly.

J.C.G. It bears on the help that came in in relation to contemplating His glory. Evidently this had been a practice, or characteristic feature, of John and that is what you are seeking to encourage us in, is it?

J.McK. I think my exercise is that John shows us how we should be in relation to Christ in the last days.

T.C.M. When the Lord says, "If I will that he abide until I come", does that support what you are saying about the character of the man, that the Lord is intent that it should go right through until the time when He comes again?

J.McK. Yes, the word "abide" has often been referred to as one of John's characteristic words, but the Lord here uses it of John himself. "If I will" - everything is subject to the Lord's will - "that he abide until I come". The Lord had an assessment of the sterling quality of what was in John in the way of committal of affection to Himself and He really rebuked Peter because He say, Well, that is my matter. 'I have a link with John that is distinctive and that is going to go right through'.

J.S. Would this be an incentive and an encouragement to us just simply to seek the Lord's company and enjoy His love?

J.McK. I think so. The sweetness of a personal link is something that is very attractive. I would like to know more of it. I do not suggest this as being in any way an example of it but feeling the need of it, and I share that exercise with my brethren that we might draw one another into more direct awareness of our link with Jesus.

D.S. In John 7 the Lord says "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink" (v 37). Do you think John was drinking all the way through?

J.McK. Yes; he was well refreshed, was he not? I think he would have been a man who was consistent. One of the things we need, if I refer again to my own exercises, is consistency. Mr Darby says,

Consistency, thou art a jewel. It is rare, but I think John had it as "the disciple whom Jesus loved", so that when we come to the situation in chapter 19, he was a man that could be trusted.

J.N.M. I suppose the Lord's mother would be the most precious person to Him on the natural line, but not only that, in view of all that she had passed through and was to pass through; she would be exceedingly precious to Him because of all that was coming upon her and the way she had been spiritually, the way she had followed the Lord's life from His birth onwards. That is the person whom He commits to John.

J.McK. I suppose these two persons, John himself, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and His own mother were the two distinctively who had the closest personal links with Jesus. The Lord does not put them together before those personal links with Himself have been fully proved and experienced. I think that is important, that we are well-nourished first in our link with Christ and then He can set us together. What is collective flows out of the direct links we have. I think that is demonstrated here: so the Lord takes account of it: "Jesus therefore, seeing his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, says to his mother, Woman, behold thy son".

G.B.G. Nearness of relations with divine Persons does not lead to independence, does it?

J.McK. It does not. The reality of the presence of God will destroy any seeds of independence because we are set together. As we were saying just now, we are part of the divine family and if we find difficulty in our relations with one another, that difficulty must be traced to a weakness in our enjoyment of our links directly with divine Persons.

J.S. Persons were standing by the cross of Jesus. What do you think we can learn from that?

J.McK. Well, there is nothing for the flesh in this position.

J.S. I was just thinking of the need to be true to Him in this connection. I think you said earlier that John was trustworthy. As

the cross of Jesus has its place with us, do you think we have a ground for our relations together and to become trustworthy?

J.McK. It is the cross of Jesus and they stood by it. They are not in any sense turning away from it. Jesus had acquired such a place in their affections that in spite of the fact He was rejected of men, has been hung upon a cross and is leaving the scene, these persons are standing by. Amongst them we have John of whose character we have been speaking. He is standing there and Jesus sees him.

J.A.G. It is a very practical thing, I suppose, for John to take Mary into his home. He would have to move things around a bit and accommodate her.

J.McK. Yes, and he did not take long to decide to do it. It says, "And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home". These are new relationships set up in the light of the cross of Jesus.

J.N.M. I suppose in terms of the times she would be an old woman, would she not? '

J.McK. She would, but what a treasury she was.

D.S. And John would have been a young man.

J.McK. Yes, the age difference would have been considerable, and that would have brought about certain practical tests, reminding us of the patience we need with one another. But these persons both had a distinctive link with Christ and therefore their relations together were not difficult.

D.S. She would be very precious to John. She was a store-house of all that Jesus had done of the thirty secret years which are still secret years, but how John would love to hear about them!

J.McK. Mary started early: she kept these things, it says in Luke's gospel, in her heart. There is a link with John: she was keeping things not in her mind, but in her affections, becoming a treasury spiritually as conscious of her direct link with the one who is so great according to this gospel.

G.A.B. As well as taking her to his home, he evidently saw that she was taken to the upper room. Do you think all that wealth in these two persons was deposited in the assembly for the benefit of all?

J.McK. I think so, so that we are tested in these days as to whether we can accept responsibility for one another, as to whether we are ready for that. I think mature affection for Jesus will qualify us to take responsibility for our brethren. We would handle them with deep affection if this was the background to how we were placed together.

C.K.R. Would they touch eternal life conditions together? It is the way practically to come through to it, to appreciate it and then it stays.

J.McK. These were new relationships. It was different from what it had been before. Is that right?

C.K.R. They had come through different exercises and now they are brought beautifully together under the influence of the cross and the work of the Lord Jesus and attachment to His Person.

J.McK. And they are brought together in a way that would not disintegrate: it would be permanent. We need to be related to one another in this way, not in a tentative sense, an abiding relationship - "Behold thy son ... Behold thy mother".

N.J.H. They did not go to Mary's home. Mary went to John's home. Why is that?

J.McK. I do not know. You tell us.

N.J.H. The Lord's brethren, no doubt, would have been there in some way if he had gone back to Mary's home. It is evidently a relationship which John wanted to cherish and continue here in fellowship together.

J.McK. Well, what produces the relationship is the Lord's initiative. It was not John's choice; it was not Mary's choice. So we do not choose whom we are in fellowship with, but we are together because we have a link with Christ. It has often been quoted to us that absolute consecration to Jesus is the strongest bond between

human hearts. That is what we have here, John on the one hand and Mary on the other: complete consecration to Jesus, the strongest bond between human hearts.

J.A.G. It is called the "way of more surpassing excellence", 1 Cor 12: 31.

J.McK. That is fine: Paul showed it to the brethren.

DUNDEE

19 April 1997

Key to initials

G.B.Grant, Dundee; G.A.Brown, Edinburgh; J.A.Gardiner, Aberdeen;
J.C.Gray, Dundee; N.J.Henry, Glasgow; A.McKay, Brechin; J.McKay,
Witney; J.N.Mather, Dundee, T.C.Munro, Grangemouth;
R.S.Renton, Edinburgh; C.K.Robertson, Glasgow; D.Scougal,
Edinburgh; J.Spinks, Grangemouth; E.D.Steedman, Grangemouth;
J.Strachan, Dundee; R.Taylor, Kirkcaldy

VICTORY

John McKay

Romans 12: 14-21; 1 Samuel 25: 23-33; 1 Kings 1: 28-40

I would like to say a word about the spirit of victory as it shows itself to the believer. We have been engaged in conversation together with the great matter of direct relations with God and a person who is thus conscious of being close to God Himself is deeply concerned that his conduct, his attitude and his character, should be in keeping with the God whom he knows.

Thus these verses coming as they do at the end of Romans 12 are a real challenge to us: "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good". I believe that is how we should be in the testimony until the Lord comes. How much we have received! How much wealth God has poured in in the way of good! I think we should be in the testimony as living out the things that have been entrusted to us, thus not being occupied with evil, far less being overcome by it, rather overcoming it with good.

So this chapter begins with what is acceptable to God: the body secured, the fruit of redemption, the teaching of the gospel underlying all that we have in this passage. The word is addressed to those who have been secured on the ground of God's glad tidings and the effect is that the body is offered as "a living sacrifice" and it is "acceptable to God". It is a fine word that it is "acceptable to God". We often consider what might be acceptable to the brethren. That is a right exercise too. Asher in the Old Testament was exhorted to "dip his foot in oil". "Let him" do it, the scripture says, and "Let him be acceptable to his brethren", Deut 33: 24. Oh, if any of us causes concern to our brethren, there is a way of changing that situation, there is a way of making a difference! The Spirit is available in order that there may be a change, no longer a concern but acceptable to the brethren. But what is greater than that is that the sacrifice is "acceptable to God".

So how should we be in the testimony as aware that we are "acceptable to God"? Paul's words are very explicit. Where we began to read, he says, "Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not". That is the way in which God has come out towards us. He has come out towards you and me in blessing: He has come out in grace. What He is looking for is that persons who know Him should represent Him rightly in the scene of testimony by being in a like attitude of blessing, a blessing that does not discriminate for God's blessing in this dispensation is toward all. Can you be like that? What a question that is? Of Isaac, in the book of Genesis, it says, he blessed Jacob and Esau. He blessed them both. In Esau the flesh had come out in its worst features : the scripture refers to him elsewhere as a profane man, a man who relinquished precious things for present advantage. What a man Esau was! Nevertheless of Isaac, type of heavenly Man, it says, he blessed Jacob and Esau. "Bless" and curse not". I believe we are tested as to whether we can be in the same attitude as God as representing Him in the testimony until the Lord comes.

It goes on to say, "Have the same respect one for another, not minding high things, but going along with the lowly ... as far as depends on you, living in peace with all men". That is, there is something inoffensive in the life of the believer. He is going on with what is of God. The God whom he knows has not been surprised by the challenge of evil. The God whom he knows has risen above it. As the hymn writer says:

Evil's challenge, long permitted,
Met by Thy supremacy,
In Thy ways was wisely fitted
To display the Trinity.

How has God met the great challenge of evil? He has met it by the outshining of Himself. A tremendous thing! God has not been taken by surprise, but has risen above the whole matter in view of securing His own thoughts in blessing for men. We are greatly challenged as to whether we can be with Him in that. Can we be in the testimony as holding fast to what is good? The Lord's words to "the rest who

are in Thyatira" are "but what ye have hold fast till I shall come", Rev 2: 25. He did not lay other burdens upon them, did not lay upon them the recovery of what had gone before. He did not lay upon them the repair of what was around them in Christendom at the time. No! He says, "but what ye have hold fast" and I think that is our responsibility that we hold to what is good in the presence of all that is around that is deteriorating. Let us not be diverted to other things! The power went out of the Reformation when the activities of men like Luther and those who were greatly helped of God in those days became negative. Their activities became a protest against what was evil instead of the simple assertion of the truth and that was the point at which the power went out of it. I am concerned lest we should err in that direction. It may be that we rightly have a judgment of things. God would help us to have a judgment of everything in Christendom. But then everything in Christendom is not within our remit to deal with and although we may have a judgment of it, I believe our prime function indeed our responsibility, is to be in the truth as expressing and holding fast to what is good. Thus representing the God whom we know we are not overcome by evil - the believer should never have to give place to evil. He knows the God who has resolved the whole moral question in the death of Jesus. "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good".

That is why I have read these other passages, to speak of them briefly. In 1 Samuel 25 we have a situation where David, a man who had been used in God's testimony, is in danger of erring from the way. What you are thankful for in such a situation is a person like Abigail who is acting in the way that we have spoken of. The result of her activity is that evil is overcome by good. The situation is met positively. I wonder if we would be more effective in recovering our brethren if we were more positive in our attitude towards them. How many there have been who have missed their way! How many it may be, even at this time, are attached to things that are unseemly, unsuited to them, below their dignity. God would help us in our feelings about persons in whom His work is, persons who belong where these rich privileges of which we have been speaking today

are enjoyed. Our feelings should be towards them positively. Thank God for Abigail in this passage! She represents assembly quality as emerging against a dark background. She was married to Nabal. You might say the condition publicly was a poor one. In this passage she says "Nabal is his name, and folly is with him". She has a judgment of the whole situation and the way the rights of Christ typically have been disregarded in it. She has a judgment of that, but she is not dealing with it. She is not dealing with Nabal. God would deal with Nabal in His own time but what Abigail is concerned about is the recovery of David. Can you be like that? I believe we should be concerned in regard of the recovery of our brethren. David is on a course here that ultimately would have damaged what was precious to God in the testimony, and Abigail moves, and what comes to light in her movement is great resource. It says in verse 18, "And Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves and two skin-bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched com", and so on. She had an immense store of what was good and she was going to use that in view of the full recovery of David. Thus a situation which could have resulted in damage can result in healing and in the full recovery of a man who had been anointed of God. What she says is very interesting. She comes to David and speaks to him about the blessing, "And now this blessing which thy bondmaid has brought to my lord let it be given to the young men that follow my lord". The resources are available to meet the situation. She is not condemning. She is active in the promotion of what is good, going on to say, "for Jehovah will certainly make my lord a lasting house". What a fine statement to make! David is not in the main course of the testimony at the moment. David is straying from the way and yet she says, "for Jehovah will certainly make my lord a lasting house" as if she would draw David from the ebb and flow of conditions publicly and bring him to what is consistent in relation to God. In recovery, God would draw persons who have strayed into a line of self-pleasing and relate them to what is sure and what will continue for His pleasure in these days, "a lasting house; because my lord fights the battles of Jehovah". She had not forgotten what David was in days previously. Let us not

forget what our brethren have been. God remembers it, as He said to Israel, "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth", Jer 2: 2. Abigail says, David, You have fought the battles of Jehovah, not your own battles. You have not been promoting your own point of view or seeking your own ends. You have been in the testimony as fighting the battles of Jehovah! Abigail reminds David of this. Can we remind persons of what they have been? What history there has been and how much we have been through together! God does not forget and we should not forget. It may be that we can promote what is of God in our brethren by a reminder of what has gone before.

"And evil has not been found in thee all thy days". What a statement! She was referring to the purity of the work of God in this man. We have a right to regard what is of God quite apart from everything else and if the work of God is in a person, that person really belongs where God's presence is realised and where divine blessing is fully proved. "Evil has not been found in thee" - an abstract statement, you might say, over against the chequered history that Scripture records. Nevertheless Abigail is holding on to it with the tenacity of faith. Can we have faith in regard of the work of God in the souls of others and realise that they belong to the great things in which God Himself is proceeding in these days? "And if a man is risen up to pursue thee and to seek thy life, the soul of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living". She is speaking to David now of what is collective and she is speaking of his soul being bound in relation to it. We have spoken a lot today about what is individual and it is very important, but then God would draw us and hold us together in relation to a living condition of things which is of Himself. And it says, "And it shall come to pass, when Jehovah shall do to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning thee". We have often said that Abigail is the product of Samuel's ministry. She knew what had been said about David and she is reminding him of what God had said through his servant that included him. This is the way to revive the work of God in persons and to bring them again. We will not bring them again by a protest. We will bring them again by the revival of what is of God in their

souls but only as we ourselves are walking in the truth of it. So as Paul says, we are not to be overcome by evil, but we are to overcome evil with good. It is a test, but I believe the Lord would help us in it.

In 1 Kings 1 the background is dark. We have a situation where David is old, what is responsible according to God in the testimony has become weak, and the result of it is the uprising of what is rival, the uprising of Adonijah, a man who said, "I will be king". We are speaking not simply of an individual in this passage. We have rather a picture of the general condition in the testimony. Clearly there is the uprising of what is anti-Christian around us in the world today and what has given place to it is the failure of those who should have cared for things according to God. As part of Christendom we need to accept the sorrow and responsibility of the failure. We cannot isolate ourselves. What is more, we need to know what is going on in the area of the profession around us. The Lord expected the disciples to know. He said to them, "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?". He expected them to know, indeed expected them to feel it. Thus He expects us to be aware of what is happening as what is of anti-Christ raises its head in these days. Ultimately God will deal with matters. According to Thessalonians the Lord Himself is going to annul it. Paul's language is very assuring "whom the Lord Jesus ... shall annul by the appearing of this coming", 2 Thess. 2: 8. Tremendous language, speaking of what will yet take place as God deals with the challenge of "the lawless one".

But the principle of these things exists already and it is a question how the present situation is going to be met. The answer is the enthronement of Solomon. The answer is not to attack Adonijah. How many there have been who have missed their way testimonially because they tried to deal with the problems of Christendom, struggled with some of the unsolved questions, became totally occupied in a negative sense with the disaster that has happened to the testimony publicly and have gone astray. But the answer to this situation is first the anointing, and then the

enthronement of the true Solomon. Are we active in this? Can I appeal today that we should actively distinguish Christ? Nathan the prophet comes into it; Benaiah the son of Jehoida, Zadok the priest, Bathsheba, all are engaged in this great matter. Bathsheba recalls the promise already made that Solomon should be king and David responds by saying "call me Bathsheba". As she is in the king's presence David gives directions. "And the king said to them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon". Beloved brethren, let us be active in the distinguishing of Christ in these days as the positive answer to what is rising around us in Christendom! We shall gather tomorrow and the purpose of our gathering will be to remember Him. That really is the divinely given opportunity in the sight of the whole universe to declare our loyalty to the Man whom the world has rejected but whom we would love to distinguish. I trust all of us will participate in the great privilege. If any here are not actively remembering the Lord Jesus, grasp the opportunity! It is a great privilege and it is until He comes. This is all part of the overcoming of evil because there is a testimony in the Supper to the complete overthrow of the world's system, because what we are doing is distinguishing another Man! The woman at the end of Matthew's gospel came into the house of Simon the leper and she anointed Jesus. As far as she was concerned, He was the Man that was going to control everything. Ultimately Christ will control the universe. The mystery of God's ways is that He will head up all things in the Christ, but thank God for those who, like that woman, are distinguishing Him already! Are we doing that together? What they do here is a united action. They anoint king Solomon. "And Zadok the priest took the horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, Long live king Solomon! And all the people came up after him". What a recovery there was! Perhaps if Christ had more place among us, we would see more recovery. May it be that as Christ has a greater place a distinguished among us those in whom God's work is may be more readily drawn to the place where He is honoured.

So it says, "And the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them". Now, Adonijah is left for the moment. The principle of God's judgment will be unfailing, particularly in regard of what is rival to Christ, but for the moment judgment is deferred. Adonijah is not dealt with until later, after the death of David. While David is alive, Adonijah remains and largely the situation in Christendom is left unchanged, but the power has gone out of it. What happens here in the anointing of Solomon is that the whole matter is met according to God, and met positively. I trust we shall be encouraged. There is much to hold on to that is positively good and I am deeply concerned that we should not only hold the truth but express it, particularly to our brethren who might be seeking their way. May we know how to represent God to them, overcoming evil with good, and thus draw them into the area where the God whom we know and love is known in His glory, even in these days of public breakdown. May God help us! For His Name's sake!

DUNDEE

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