

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

THE FEAR OF GOD

MINISTRY IN EDINBURGH

(i) CHRIST'S EPISTLE

(ii) "HE WROTE ON THE GROUND"

(iii) DIVINE WRITING

MINISTRY IN LONDON

(i) THE LAW OF GOD

(ii) THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

THE FEAR OF GOD

Robert Taylor

Malachi 3: 13-18; 4: 1-4 (to “servant”); 1 Peter 1: 17-23

These scriptures make it very plain that God is to be feared. It is something that increasingly is becoming lacking. Laodicea did not fear God: she had grown rich and was independent. And that is the state of things that is abroad today. It may well creep in to our own hearts to be independent of God, to lose the fear of God. He has been made known in grace as Father in all His love, and yet He is to be feared. We sometimes offset that and say it is not a slavish fear but Scripture is plain that God is to be feared. The scripture says of the Lord Jesus that He was "heard because of his piety" ('in that he feared' (A.V.), Heb 5: 7. We often say that we know God hears us.

Well, it says of the Lord that He was heard 'in that he feared'. God may not hear us, not that I would put any doubts or discouragement on people praying, but there is a reason why the Lord was heard in that instance. It was 'in that he feared' or "because of his piety".

In these scriptures you can see God hears and His eye is on them that fear Him. The Lord said that too, "Fear ... him", Matt 10: 28. That is what it says about certain notable persons in Scripture, that they feared God. Nehemiah says of one that he was "a faithful man and feared God above many", chap 7: 2. What a commendation to have in a world such as that in which we are of lawlessness and independence. Joseph says that too about himself. He says, "I fear God", Gen 42: 18. It is a good answer to give to persons when they ask why we are not doing this or that, why we do not even speak their language, do not go where they go. "I fear God". God honours that and here He is honouring persons in a day such as we are in when people say, what is the advantage? You will get people saying that to you, Why be so strict? Why do you go to so many meetings? Why do you need to do this? Why do you not go there? That is the day in which we are. Well, the answer is that we fear God. We honour Him in that sense and God honours those

that fear Him. In Malachi they were saying there is no point in it, like the days that we are in, when people are saying all these things: the scripture says, "Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another". They lived on different principles. Their life was coloured in that they chose to walk in the fear of God, chose to tread a separate path because at the end of the day, the Lord says, the most that men can do is kill you; that is the extent of what they can do, but after that God has to be answered. He says, "Fear ... Him who is able", to destroy both body and soul in hell. His rights extend beyond death, beyond the grave. These people were walking as fearing God and God "heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared Jehovah", not persons that were intelligent and bright and knowledgeable, but think of Him writing down those names! Think of God writing down your name and against it He puts those words, 'he feared Me'. What a commendation, as I have said! And that is how God was writing this book, "for them that feared Jehovah". The day of judgment is coming, of which Malachi is speaking, and God is writing up this book, as it were, and He sees certain names there that are spared the judgment because they feared Him. They did not walk in the way that the rest of men lived. They were not driven by the principles of the world. And He spared them "as a man spareth his own son". Think of God looking down on the saints like that! What pleasure He has in the midst of the day we are in, that there are persons who walk in His fear! So He says about them, "And unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings". He gives to persons that fear His name the light of another day, and that is a great governing principle that we walk in, the light of another day. This day is fast declining. The world in which we are and its system is fast going on to judgment, but God says, "And unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and leap like fatted calves", persons that have been enriched in the light of another day, able to go against the stream in the fear of God, irrespective of what men may do or of what things may seem publicly.

Peter in writing to the brethren reminds them that things are in God's hands, not in man's hands. Irrespective of what has come in in the breakdown and the confusion that exists publicly, and the love of the many perhaps having waxed cold, things are in God's hands.

Peter is encouraging these saints as to that. And now he says, if you call on the Father, remember that He is God, all majesty, might and power belong to Him. To know our Father is God is a wonderful thing to remember and to lay hold of. That God is our Father is true and speaks of the wonderful blessings, the resources of His love and of His care He brings into the relationship, that He is a Father to us.

But that Father is God, and that means that He is to be revered. Peter says, because of that you "pass your time of sojourn in fear", knowing that to Him belongs the last word. Men may misunderstand grace. It is a day of great licence, a day when we are apt to take licence, dear brethren, but remember that the Father is God. Peter says if you are invoking Him as Father, you are to "pass your time of sojourn in fear", not in slavish fear, as we say, but in reverence as to what is due to His name, that He has the last word. He is writing His book of remembrance of them that fear Him. Think of these dispersed Jews being in that book! Peter says, "knowing that ye have been redeemed". Redemption is not just something that would free us from our sins and our guilt, but redemption has in view relationship. When we speak of redemption, we go back to Ruth and she was redeemed to be the wife of Boaz. She was not just redeemed to remove her Moabitish history and live differently, but she was redeemed to be the wife of Boaz. So redemption has in view that we are brought to know God as our Father, and we know the grace and the love of that relationship; but we walk too in the light of His majesty and His greatness and to Him belongs the last word.

So it says, "ye have been redeemed" from vain conversation, handed down from your fathers, from worldly principles and things, and worldly customs, to walk as the redeemed. The redeemed should have a very deep appreciation of the Redeemer. Ruth must have adoringly looked on Boaz all her days. He who had the right of

redemption was not able, but think of Boaz stepping in, taxing His own resources, you might say, but still able to do it, to remove the burden and the load that she might come into the liberty of being a true Israelite. She comes into the genealogy. That is what redemption brings us into, a great line of royalty, and I think that is what marks those who fear God, that they are walking on a royal line. If you acknowledge that your Father is God, it means you are a prince. You walk as a prince, not as ordinary men. There are some persons who have the devil for their father. What a solemn thing, sons of the devil. It speaks of some like that in scripture (see Acts 13: 4), a warning to us as to what men are under, but persons who invoke God as their Father are walking in this precious light of redemption in princely steps. They are exhibiting the features of the family showing that they fear God when they are tested by circumstances.

In these verses Peter goes on to encourage them as to the glory of what they have been brought into by the blood of Christ, showing the extent of His love for us and the favour He would bring us into. It says, He "has been manifested at the end of times for your sakes, who by him do believe on God". You are thus brought into a system of grace, of liberty and life and blessing, "who by him do believe on God". Joseph said, "I fear God". He walked in the light of that, the ruler of Egypt, the man who could have had everything he wanted in that country. He says, "I fear God". May we be helped, dear brethren, to walk in the joy and the liberty of what we have been brought into and yet walking, as Peter speaks of it here, passing "your time of sojourn in fear". It means we are not doing what we like, but we are walking in the principles of the kingdom. It says, "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom", Ps 111: 10. Intelligence comes through fearing God.

Well, here it is all shining for us in Christ: "Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth". We are coming into these things, not toeing the line or obeying rules, but, in the fear of God, we are led into a circle of blessing, a circle of love. It says, "that your faith and hope should be in God" and then you are brought into this circle

of the brethren, "unfeigned brotherly love, love one another out of a pure heart fervently". Peter goes over these things that the saints were to enjoy in that broken day. May we be helped to be living in the fear of God in the circumstances that exist today, in the liberty of loving the brethren fervently, and of knowing God and the blessedness of being His sons, walking before Him in all the light and the liberty that is ours in a broken time when there is departure all around. May we be encouraged in loyalty to One who has brought us at such a price for Christ's Name sake!

KIRKCALDY

22 July 1997

MINISTRY IN EDINBURGH

(i) CHRIST'S EPISTLE

Jim Gray

2 Corinthians 3: 1- 3

I would like to say something about the epistle of Christ, or Christ's epistle: it is commended here. The word epistle is archaic to us at the present time; 'letter' would be more appropriate, so that the young people can understand. When Paul was writing the epistle he was speaking about the saints in Corinth. There are things that would be commended for us to read, for example, the Scriptures.

God would commend the Scriptures to all of us. Every scripture is divinely inspired. That is a statement in the Scriptures by the Spirit of God, profitable for us, for the believer. In every matter whether in assembly matters or in our practical walk in life, the Scriptures stand out paramount. Then there is ministry; we might be commended to read ministry, and that would be important too, because ministry has come through the power of the Holy Spirit as of God. It is not inspired exactly as the Scriptures are inspired; they stand alone in the books that we have. Ministry would prove to be of value to us, it is of God.

This is something else. This is the epistle of Christ and he is speaking about persons. Paul says "ye are our letter, written in our hearts". What is formed in the Corinthian saints is written in the heart of all, "known and read of all men". It would be known and read of all men as Paul moved amongst men, or amongst the saints. Then he says "being manifested to be Christ's epistle ministered by us, written, not with ink, but the Spirit of the living God". There is something in persons that is worth reading. It is in a local company. It is quite something to take account of ourselves, each one individually as expressing what is of Christ. When Paul went to another place, He spoke well of the Corinthian saints, because he had an impression of what Christ had done in that company. That would be true of each one of us: we move out of our locality, we

would be able to speak well of the local brethren, because of what they are, "Christ's letter". There is really a letter there written by the Spirit of the living God. It is a remarkable statement that, "the Spirit of the living God". In the time in which the apostle wrote there were idols and they could effect nothing. We read that in the Psalms, an idol can do nothing, Ps 115. But the living God can write in our hearts. I think I could say, without contradiction, that the Spirit of God has written in the heart of everyone here tonight, He has written Christ in our hearts. Our histories have formed us after Christ, by the Spirit of the living God, but there is distinction in each one. There is a speciality that attaches to you as an individual and to me, which is not after the flesh but after the Spirit. What a wonderfully productive and formative matter it is to take account of the local brethren as the epistle of Christ. You take account of their histories.

They belong to the approved, the saints with whom we walk; I am not saying that exclusively, but I say it from the standpoint of those who have named the name of the Lord and withdraw from iniquity, proved themselves approved. They have come through exercise, ecclesiastical and moral exercises. This is not to eulogise ourselves, but to bring out the glory of Christ. There are persons who treasure that Name, "let him that names the Name of the Lord, withdraw from iniquity", there are persons who treasure that Name. We are amongst those persons who treasure that name, the name of the Lord. We have taken a certain step in our histories, 'withdrawn from iniquity'. All the exercises that entered into that! We sought a place where we believe the Lord can come, "calling on the Lord out of a pure heart". The moral exercise that goes into the maintenance of that, no duplicity. Paul was showing here to the Corinthians saints, in the section in which we have been reading in chapter 3, that there was not duplicity with them. But he has an impression of what God had done in Corinth. Just persons like you and me, persons who work and seek their living in the city of Corinth, Paul saw that God had brought them to light. We have come to light as a people selected by God. It says in Acts 18 "I have much people in this city" (v 10). They were a testimony in the early church, the Corinthian saints, things are said about them that are not said about others.

That does not mean that it would not be true of the other localities, but Paul draws distinctions. But what was in my heart was to draw attention to the work of God here, the work of God in each of the saints; as I think of one and another, I think of a history with God.

How the brethren have arrived at where they have arrived. It is often said that we are thankful for those with whom we can walk.

We surely are thankful, because everyone with whom we walk has come through exercises, some of which have been deep, and the Spirit of the living God is writing in their hearts. Christ has written there, the love of Christ constrains, something has brought us out to where we are. It is the love of Christ that has constrained us.

I want to encourage us all, and the young people here tonight, to see that there is that in them that is written, not with ink, not on tables of stone, but in your heart. It says "the fleshy tables of the heart", that means that they are impressionable. God has given you a heart that is impressionable, through moral exercise. You come to Christ as your Saviour; it began there, the exercises of having your sins forgiven. That heart of stone that once I had has been broken down, becomes a heart in which God can reign. What a joy to divine Persons to have those upon whom they can write. When we are unconverted our hearts are like stone, they are not impressionable for the things of God, but conversion brings about a change, a change through divine operation in your soul. God has wrought in your soul, in new birth, wrought in your soul to bring about a change in your spirit. John chapter 3 speaks about the new birth that takes place, the Spirit operating in a mysterious way in your soul, then you come to Christ and you come into touch with a Man in the glory, a blessed Man who captivates that heart of yours. You receive the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a matter that is! Treasure both, the forgiveness of your sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is in view of writing something.

What is written conveys the thought that it cannot be effaced, it cannot be destroyed. There is that written in your heart that cannot be destroyed. That is a great comfort. Whatever the way may hold for us, what is written by the Spirit of God, Christ's epistle, will go

through to eternity, housed in a body of humiliation - we were reminded of that in what we sang - soon to be housed in a body of glory. It is Christ's epistle, it is a manifestation of another kind of man, not what you and I are after the flesh, but what we are after Christ, and I say again it is in everyone in this room. Let us take account of it, it greatly enhances our appreciation of one another, the value of one another, each one has been a personal writing of the Spirit of the living God. God has come near to us to write in our hearts. It is Himself that has done it, the Spirit of the living God.

What He writes must be in relation to life. What He writes in our hearts is manifested by our quickened affections for Jesus, quickened affections for Christ. That is why we are drawn here tonight; it is not mandatory, it not exactly what is obligatory, that has drawn us here tonight; it is a desire to be amongst persons who are Christ's epistle, drawn to one another because Christ's epistle is here. It is good to keep that side of things, keep the dignity of Christ's epistle before us, because it enhances our appreciation of the saints, and particularly the appreciation of the saints locally.

We go away to another place and we carry that with us. It is an epistle written in our heart, as Paul says they were written in his heart. They were there in the local place, but they were written in his heart, wherever he went he could only speak of what he knew of them, and he spoke well of them. Despite all their idiosyncrasies, all their failures, there was something there that was Christ's. Let us hold on to it. It will help us in matters locally, it will help us in all the matters of assembly life and in our secular life too, but it will help us in assembly life in our relations with one another, to grasp hold of Christ's epistle. It goes on to the matter of the new covenant, because the love of God is displayed in that, because persons in the gain of the new covenant, and a new covenant minister, as Paul brings out, are in the gain of the love of God, and of the love of God expressed in the saints. These are but a few thoughts that I had in mind, particularly the matter of Christ's epistle, that it may be appreciated by us.

(ii) "HE WROTE ON THE GROUND"

Allan Brown

John 8: 1-11

This is another writing by Jesus, two writings indeed. I think it is intended to affect us that the same Lord Jesus who has operated with each one of us and has had to do with us has written indelible things in our hearts. It is the same One who came here and was found in the lowly conditions in which we read of Him. He is confronted here with a case as to which there was no possible doubt. The guilt of this woman was beyond dispute, the law said she had to be stoned, but Jesus, "having stooped down, wrote with his finger on the ground". We were affected this past Lord's Day morning, where we were, with the stoop; I do not know whether this scripture was referred to, but we were certainly affected by the thought as to the Lord having stooped. We need to be softened in our hearts; to think of the way that Jesus has gone, to meet us in our need because our guilt was beyond dispute. The law demanded that we should die, stern justice demanded it, but Jesus, having stooped down wrote with his finger on the ground. "His finger"; I am impressed with that. Elsewhere it says "if I by the finger of God cast out demons." John brings out particularly Who this person was, His deity. Think of Him writing on the ground, think of every step that He trod, of the footprints that He left. We sometimes sing, 'We love to trace Thy footprints'. I believe that wherever He went, whatever He did, you could see the finger of God in it. What a life was the life of Jesus!

He spoke not a word; it says "they continued asking him". Then He says "let him that is without sin among you first cast the stone at her". That is to bring conviction, and He says no more. The Lord has a way with us, He conveys something and leaves it with us. I think I could say that from my own experience. The Lord leaves you to work things out. He said no more and again "stooping down, he wrote on the ground". There was a day in the life of Jesus

when the divine finger was pointed to the cross. I think we have been taught that the second stooping and writing refers to the fact that the Lord Jesus went into death. Who can measure what He undertook for us! There is great poignancy about the silences here.

The Lord is very economical with His words. He speaks very briefly; it says, they continued asking Him but He spoke very briefly and then stooping down, he wrote on the ground the very earth upon which we walk is the earth upon which he walked, and on which He wrote and on which He took the road that led to the cross, to death, with all that that involved for God, and all that it involved for us.

What can man say to this, what can religious self-righteous man say to this? They having heard that, went out one by one, beginning from the elder ones until the last, and Jesus was left alone and the woman standing there. This, I think in principle, introduces the spirit of the new covenant which has been referred to already; "neither do I condemn thee". We cannot say much about this woman, we have no evidence that much came of it. The woman here is not so much the point, it is divine movements in view of blessing. Whether she got the benefit or not we cannot say, but the glory of the new covenant shines through when the Lord says, "neither do I condemn thee". What a wonderful sphere we are brought into! This is our day, this is our place. How affecting to think that the Lord has gone to such lengths and stooped so low, so that a place might be secured for us so that we can be brought into an area of blessing.

When you go on in the epistles, you find that there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. These are further features of the truth and how wonderful are the blessings that flow out of the new covenant! May our hearts be touched by the thought of how the Lord has stooped so low, to write such indelible things that affect everyone of us, will affect the world to come, will affect the eternal day, all secured through what He has done. May our hearts be encouraged. For His Name's sake.

(iii) DIVINE WRITING

Jim Brown

Revelation 3: 12

In a sense the words spoken previously refer to writing which produces an internal effect in us. The work of God in each of our hearts is wonderful, but there will come a day when what has been written internally will have external expression. "Jehovah will count, when He inscribeth the peoples" (Ps 87: 6). How fine to think of God writing up His people who will populate the heavenly regions, and in doing so, drawing attention to Christ. God can count and inscribe because of these stoops to which we have had reference. I suppose in John 8 when the Lord wrote on the ground, He was obliterating everything that stood out against the woman. Colossians speaks about "having effaced the handwriting in ordinances which stood out against us" Col 2: 14. That woman stood before her accusers, the handwriting in ordinances stood out against her, and she was open to condemnation. But the Lord Jesus stooped down and wrote, and the handwriting in ordinances before which she fell short was erased. Wonderful work of the Lord Jesus! So that we are brought into this great realm of favour, our hearts made malleable and flexible, able to bear the divine writing.

First of all, of course, we rejoice because our names are written in heaven. Blessed divine handwriting that has written our names in the Lamb's own book of life! "Rejoice that your names are written in the heavens" Luke 10: 20. Every one of us from the oldest to the youngest, as trusting in His finished work, can lay hold of that wonderful assurance, that our names have been written in the book of life. Nothing can erase that writing, nothing can efface our inscription there: it is written deep in the power of the blood of the Lamb. That has secured it for the divine pleasure eternally.

The exercises which we go through in our wilderness experience, and in our personal histories with God, create conditions in which the divine writing can take place. But there will come a day

when it says "he shall go no more out". That is the overcomer; "and I will write upon him the name of my God". Think of the Lord Jesus Himself actually writing upon each overcomer, the name of His God. It suggests the accolade of divine approval: the emblem of our acceptability before God, by virtue of what Christ has done. Second Corinthians 1 verse 20 says that "whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea and in him the amen, for glory to God by us".

That will come out in glad display eternally, and the proof that every promise of God has been secured for His glory in Christ will be demonstrated in the writing upon us of "the name of my God". God will be able to claim us as His own and proclaim to a universe that we are His and for His glory. Nothing will be able to disturb the wonderful relationship which we have with Christ's God. "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God", that is Christ's God, "and your God". His God is our God, and that Name, the name of Christ's God, will be written upon us. What a wonderful prospect and incentive that is.

Then "the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven". The city will be the aggregate of all on whose hearts in time divine writings have been made; and it is God's. But Christ will write upon every overcomer the name by which the city is known by God. How fine to bear the identity of the city of Christ's God. How near the new Jerusalem is to God!

Revelation 21 brings that home to us. It comes down from heaven from God, and it has the glory of God. Think of the glory of God being substantially in that wonderful city, and the Lord Jesus, in writing its name upon us, will indelibly and publicly assert our title to citizenship there.

But then too, "my new name". What delight that fills us with. Who can tell what that name will be! How many titles the Lord Jesus bears! But His new name suggests something fresh and distinctive, the Father's love and appreciation no doubt entering into it. By and by it will be revealed to us because that new name will actually be written upon us. How wonderful to contemplate that!

Christ's new name, written upon every redeemed saint who has

overcome down here. And it will be in external display. It is as if God would say, I am going to place on every overcomer My own token of the glory and the preciousness of this One to Myself. That is a wonderful climax to divine operations that there will be something externally secured which God can claim as His own, and of which He will not be ashamed, but rather will come out in glad display. The universe will see it. As the redeemed in their bodies of glory walk about the heavenly places, they will be an eternal testimony to the substantiality of divine workmanship and the delightfulness of Christ as Man to God.

May our hearts be freshly encouraged by this wonderful idea of divine writing. He has erased the handwriting in ordinances which stood out against us so that we can be at home where He is loved, and in some way be the manifestation and expression of the triumph of God's operations in men. For His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

22 July 1997

MINISTRY IN LONDON

(i) THE LAW OF GOD

David Hutson

John 14: 21; Romans 7: 22; Romans 8: 2-4

I suppose we would all readily admit that there is room for the improvement of state among us - and, of course, that comes home to the one who speaks as much as to any - because what there is collectively depends upon what we are, each one of us. I have been struck by a reference in ministry that the lack of understanding of the element of law leads to moral decline and looseness. We sometimes speak of matters named among us as legality, but perhaps that arises from a lack of understanding of the element of law. That is, we are not set free from the law of sin and of death, from the demands of the law, in order that we might do as we will, though it is true that we are not under law but under grace. But grace brings us into the kingdom of God, and the very fact of it being the kingdom of God involves, as has often been said, the moral sway of God over the soul, and that implies that we are under regulation or, in a sense, it might be said, under law; not the ten commandments but, as Romans speaks of it, the law of God: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man". Then it speaks again of being set "free from the law of sin and of death", but that is by "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus", so that we are set free in that way from one law by another law. So we are to be regulated according to the law of God and what suits Him and what is becoming in His house, again, I suppose, connecting with what Paul says as to "how one ought to conduct oneself in the house of God", 1 Tim 3: 15.

But I read first in John's gospel because it comes home to us as to the measure of our readiness of accept law in the sense of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and how much it really is a gauge of our love for the Lord Jesus Himself. He says, "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me". That is,

that the evidence of our love for the Lord Jesus would be the keeping of His commandments and, as we know, the beloved apostle Paul says as to what he writes, although specifically in relation to what he was writing to Corinth, but applying generally to his writings, "that it is in the Lord's commandment", 1 Cor 14: 37. So we see generally around us the neglect of the ministry of Paul, as we often speak of it in the profession, and in that we have to include ourselves and test ourselves as to how much we regard it in its detail, for as neglect comes in it produces moral decline and looseness and evidences a lack of genuine love for the Lord Jesus.

But here He says, "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me". What an example we have in the Lord Jesus Himself! When the apostle speaks of certain things in detail, applying to us individually in the eleventh of first Corinthians, he says, "Be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ", 1 Cor 11: 1.

How wonderful that the Lord Jesus Himself could say prophetically, "Thy law is within my heart" (Ps 40: 8), how He was here Himself in a pathway of obedience and subject to the will of His Father. He who as to His Person had the right to command and who could speak and it was done, yet was here in lowly manhood in perfect obedience to the will of His God and Father. And I believe when He said prophetically that "thy law is within my heart", although it is typified, as we sometimes say, by the commandments being put into the ark, yet it was more than the requirement of the letter of the law, but it was all that was pleasing to God and according to His will so that nothing here that the Lord Jesus did or said, or thought indeed, was ever contrary to the will of His God and Father. How blessed to have Him before us and, as we have been reminded in our readings together about the manna, to feed upon Him in the way He was here in that lowly pathway of humiliation! What an example for us to feed upon in order that we might be set free "from the law of sin and of death" and that we might be here as subject to the law of God.

So it speaks here of the cost at which it has been secured for us: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and

for sin" - that is 'as a sacrifice for sin' - "has condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit⁹. Well, the righteous requirement of the law would be simply the pursuit of righteousness. That is the first element of the pursuit together in which we are found in fellowship and able to experience what assembly life is in these days as following after "righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart", 2 Tim 2: 22. They would be such as love Him and evidence their love for Him by having and keeping His commandments. As John says, "... let us not love with word, nor with tongue, but in deed and in truth", 1 John 3: 8, so it affects us practically in every relationship. As has been said, righteousness is the maintaining in integrity of every divinely appointed relationship. Perhaps the one in which there is much test in the world and among us, maybe, is the relationship which Paul sets out in the eleventh of Corinthians before introducing the Supper, that is the simple relationship of man and woman in the chain of headship, that the woman's head is the man, the man's head is Christ and Christ's head is God. But the detail of it and the way it is worked out and expressed is given in that chapter, so that the woman is to appear before God as covered, as it says.

We would not think of sisters appearing before God, as coming into the assembly, without their heads covered, and yet that is also connected closely and distinctly to the fact of having their hair cut.

Some sisters do not think twice, it would appear, about having their hair cut, and yet they would think it absolutely unsuitable to come into the assembly with their head uncovered. Yet the two are connected and these are things which all enter into the matter of the recognition of law and what is the divine requirement and what is suited to the assembly. It is significant that it enters there into the teaching of the apostle immediately before opening up the fact that he had received from the Lord Jesus instructions as the Supper itself, those which we value so much and that which we partake of as an evidence of, and public committal to, the fact that we love Him.

And as He says, "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me". These things are to be guarded among us,

these relationships, as I have said, the relationship of man and woman. In Christendom around us in the churches they are set aside but let it not be so in any sense among us! May we be concerned that we maintain what is due to the Lord in these things as legitimately subject to Christ, as Paul could say, although set free from the law and its demands in the way that it was imposed upon Israel, which they could never keep and which we could never keep, but we have been set free from it at such cost to God Himself in the death of His Son so that we might be here as governed by "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus".

Well, one feels the burden of these things, beloved, and I am sure it is shared by many, but in view, as I have said, of the improvement of the state among us generally, and in this I am not speaking just of the sisters, but brothers in the exercise of headship should ensure that these things are maintained in their households and so we seek help from the Lord in view of things being more suited to the Lord when He comes in and that there might be more liberty among us. That is another matter which is of concern to us in all our gatherings, especially in relation to approach to God in our hymns and in our prayers. Well, may the Lord help us that there might be more for His own pleasure and for God's pleasure as we gather together - in His Name!

(ii) THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

Eric Burr

Philippians 2: 1-5; 2 Corinthians 13: 11-14

I was thinking about the "fellowship of the Spirit" or, as it is translated in Corinthians, "the communion of the Holy Spirit". The idea of fellowship has much place among us and in any reference to fellowship there is always what I could perhaps speak of as a negative side. Any fellowship anywhere implies that some are in it and some are not and, therefore, the very idea of fellowship has a kind of boundary idea in it. We have to dwell from time to time on that aspect of things and it is necessary that we should. It is right that the principles of fellowship should be insisted on, right that we should maintain them, right that we should be exclusive of what is not according to Scripture, not according to the truth that is in Scripture, that we should have these things in our minds continually. It is helpful also to bear in mind the old saying that, if you are in fellowship, anything you do or anywhere you go takes with you all those who are also in fellowship. That is a fairly simple thing to bear in mind: it is very easy to forget. It is very easy also to say it does not matter this time, but that saying which I quote is true and it is well to keep it in mind. But it is not that aspect that I wanted to refer to.

What Paul speaks about in these two scriptures the communion or fellowship of the Holy Spirit. I refer to it because it speaks to me at least about the bond that we have together as having the Spirit. As our brother who has spoken began to speak, he spoke about our need for addressing ourselves to the state among us, and it may be that one aspect of the state is that we should have close regard to the nature of our bonds with one another. There will be no enjoyment of fellowship unless our bonds with one another are actually appreciated. The fellowship of the Spirit does not mean that you go to the same meeting. It may do and it may be that in that meeting you can enjoy it. It does not even mean that you are breaking bread with certain people. The

communion of the Spirit is something inward and something that you realise in touching it, perhaps without anything being said at all, and you know that you have a bond with someone else who has the Holy Spirit. That is not surprising, of course, because Paul says elsewhere, "There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph 4: 4) and therefore you would feel a bond with everybody who has the Spirit. I am sure that many have found that one of the most refreshing things is, as we might say by chance, to come across another believer who will say something to you about God or Christ or even the Spirit Himself and you feel that inward bond that you both have the same Spirit, the Spirit of God.

These things are very blessed. They help us, as Paul goes on to say, in these verses in Philippians in esteem for one another. You do not just say, Here comes old so-and-so. Here is someone with whom you have a bond in the Spirit and someone with whom you should at any moment be able to enter into the experience of the communion of the Holy Spirit. These things make fellowship in a positive sense of it very real, and in one way, they are the only things that do. The communion of the Spirit is what makes the experience of fellowship real and there are many substitutes for it but none of them is effective. Doctrinal agreement does not of itself create a bond. Acknowledging the same things does not of itself create a bond. It may help to, but the reality of our bond - if I borrow from Paul elsewhere, "the bond of perfectness" - is the communion of the Holy Spirit.

That touches the question, of course, whether each of us realises that we have the Holy Spirit. It would be amazing really if there were a believer on the Lord Jesus in relation to the forgiveness of their sins who did not know that they had the Holy Spirit; yet I have spoken to brothers amongst us and they said it was a long time before they realised they had. Perhaps we need more simplicity, but the inward side of things for its working depends not on mutual acquiescence in the same things: it depends on the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Now you have the Holy Spirit and I have the Holy Spirit. I trust everyone grasps that, that they have the Holy Spirit, and that creates a bond between us. It is not a natural bond. It has been proved historically that natural bonds are frail. They can come under test and they break. They can come under test and it is found that the bond that was purely natural did not stand the strain, but the communion of the Holy Spirit will always stand the strain because there is there dwelling in each believer the power of what is divine.

What gives rise to the expression of the divine nature in persons is that they have the Holy Spirit, and the communion of the Spirit is a bond that cannot be broken. I am afraid it can be interfered with because we allow other things to prevail over it: we allow what is natural to prevail over it. You hear sometimes, even amongst us, even in the small company which we are, criticism of one another and aspersions about one another which are setting aside the reality of the communion of the Holy Spirit. It would be much better if we dwelt on that side of things and found that it is a necessity for us in this day of small things that the bonds which are in the Spirit are the bonds which hold us together and which become exclusive. Paul goes on here to say, "each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves". The tendency to criticise other people is often a sign of a feeling of short-coming in myself. We need therefore, to get back to this foundational ground of what the reality of our bond with one another is, that is, that it is the communion of the Holy Spirit. And because there is only one Spirit, this bond is unbreakable. Could we let it come to the surface more? Could we let it become more natural among us, that the communion of the Spirit is what binds us together?

Paul writes to the Philippians about this and having said "if any fellowship of the Spirit", Paul says, Let this mind be among you. It is not exactly that it is in each one of you individually, but let this mind be among you. The mind that was in Christ Jesus, let it be among you! If there is an area where the communion of the Holy Spirit is known, it would not be difficult to recognise the mind that was in Christ Jesus. It is not exactly - although perhaps you would say it

has to be - that it is in each individual, but it is among you. It is as if the Lord came in, Jesus stood in the midst, and the mind that was in Christ Jesus was there among them, there manifested among them.

These things are very blessed. I often wish that I had more experience of things that I sometimes speak about. Perhaps you do too - wish you had more experience of the things that you can see the truth of in Scripture, and you can speak about them, and you wish that they were more real, so that you found a bond, a different kind of bond from the natural or from what people may appear or things that are according to the flesh or things that are according to nature. It surprised me sometimes that people even found me difficult to get on with. Beloved, it is not the mind that is in Christ Jesus. Perhaps it surprises you if people do not get on with you.

You think, how could anyone not get on with me? But, beloved, that is the first man and what is needed is the communion of the Holy Spirit and Paul, in effect, says there are these other things too, these other things that he has referred to in this scripture. He says, "If then there be any comfort in Christ ... if any bowels and compassions", and so on, but I dwell on this, "if any fellowship of the Spirit", then "let this mind be in you" and it will find an easy way in, that mind among you.

I have referred to the close of 2 Corinthians because I have often thought that Paul has had a great deal to adjust in the Corinthians epistles. The adjustments and the putting things right in the first epistle are all well-known to us. Things went on in a Christian company that you could hardly believe. The first epistle brings that out. The second epistle is in a certain sense looking at things improved, looking at things different, but at the end of the second epistle, Paul has to say to himself, I am afraid of these Corinthians that what was there when I wrote first is still there, and he is afraid that it might even be worse; but then at the end he says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all", as much as to say, if those things are there, Corinth will be safe, because these things in themselves are exclusive. I am not saying they are exclusive to

particular people, but they have the effect of excluding, and they have the effect of excluding evil and the communion of the Holy Spirit is a great power for the exclusion of evil.

I just refer to these things, beloved. I hope I have not gone too far and trust that what I have said has been simple, but I believe that the communion of the Holy Spirit is the great key to binding us together. Paul says love is "the bond of perfectness" (Col 3: 14), but the communion of the Holy Spirit itself can only be a bond of perfectness as well.

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