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Contents

THE ASSEMBLY

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

THE ASSEMBLY

Matthew 13: 44-48; 16: 13-18; 18: 15-20

J.S. I thought we might get some help together in considering the assembly. In chapter 13 we get some idea of the Lord's valuation of it in the treasure "for the joy of it goes and sells all whatever and buys that field." His heart was set on the treasure. Then this "merchant seeking beautiful pearls; and having found one pearl of great value, he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it" would speak of the assessment the Lord Jesus has of the uniqueness of the assembly, and the valuation He puts on it. The further thought of the seine seems to be worked out from that standpoint. The three parables go together. In chapter 16 we have an impression of the assembly as the Lord regards it, as "my assembly". I thought it was important to see the way that the revelation Peter from the Father of the "Christ, the Son of the living God" enters into the thought of assembly personnel, so that the Lord identifies Peter as suitable material for it. In chapter 18 we have "the assembly"; it is regarded in its own dignity. We might say, How is that going to be found or worked out in a day such as ours, a broken day? The Lord makes provision for that when He says, "Again I say to you"; it comes down to "two of you", two of the assembly, or "two or three ... gathered together unto my name" - such persons - so the matter is still workable. It is very fine that divine thoughts have not to be given up because we are in a day of small things. We might get some help to see how this great matter of the assembly is in mind. It is really the greatest thing outside divine Persons, and it is a wonderful privilege to be called to have part in it in our day. This is what we have been secured to have part in, and I think we are to see the greatness of this vessel.

A.McK. It is very important to speak over these precious things. In the first you get the idea of what is precious: it is a treasure; then the idea of the pearl: he is "seeking beautiful pearls", not only what it is itself, but intrinsically. It is an entity: it is beautiful. These things are worth going over.

J.S. We get some idea of the value of the assembly to the Lord Jesus and the expenditure He is prepared to make to have it. Both the treasure and the pearl involve expenditure on His part. We have often been reminded that he "sells all whatever he has" is expenditure in a current sense. In regard of the pearl he "sold all whatever he had", which would refer to what is historical. It is to bring out the value of these things to Himself.

M.G.W. Is this a view of things from the top, from the divine side? We have ruefully to look around on our day as we see what expression there is of the assembly. But this is the Lord's view of it. Can you help us on that?

J.S. I think it is very important that we get our ideas of divine things not from the breakdown but from the Lord. These three parables were His parables. Matthew 16 and Matthew 18 are His words and it is important that we get a view of things from that standpoint. If we look at what is around, I think we would have a very disjointed idea of the assembly, a very feeble idea of it, but it is good to get it from the Lord's standpoint.

M.G.W. This came out because when He went into the house, some asked Him to explain the parable about the wheat and the darnel. There is what is real and what is not real, and that is what exists down here. The Lord explained that, but then He went further to give them this particular view from His side of what is down here as precious, and so precious that He was prepared to give up everything that He had.

J.S. They went into the house and the disciples enquired. It is a fine thing to have the opportunity to go into the house setting where you can enquire. The Lord opened up what He had in mind and finished in verse 43 saying, "He that has ears, let him hear"; then He adds something more. If we are in an enquiring attitude and hearing what the Lord is saying, listening to what He is saying, I think the Lord would be very happy to add something that is according to His own thoughts.

J.N.M. This first part of the simile as to the treasure has something mysterious about it. Have you any impression about that?

J.S. What are you thinking of when you say 'mysterious'?

J.N.M. The treasure is hidden. The pearl on the open market is seen there in all its beauty for whoever might be able to afford it; this pearl was "of great value". But the treasure is not like that. In fact, he does not buy the treasure specifically; he buys the field, that field in which the treasure is hidden, and that is the first simile. What do you think of that?

J.S. I think it would bear on how what is valuable is brought to light. He buys the field. The Lord has an area where He can operate. He has a right to operate in it and to bring the treasure to light. I suppose it would refer to how the Lord operated, for example in the Acts. The apostles went to certain places and found a work of God going on. That is the treasure, is it not? In Corinth, for example, the Lord says to Paul, "I have much people in this city", Acts 18: 10. Maybe it did not look like that. It was hidden when Paul went there, but it came out as a result of the ministry.

R.G. Is the hidden treasure the contrast to the mustard tree? It was a grain of mustard seed - and see what it has become in the public view - but this is what the Lord values, what is hidden.

J.S. The mustard tree is what the kingdom has become publicly, what it has become in the hands of men, and over against that you have this hidden line of things because really the assembly involves mystery.

A.McK. This is like Balaam's parable. If we looked into the tents, there would not be much to encourage us, but we get the divine standpoint, and then we get the thing opened up.

J.S. So it is important to have a view of things from the Lord's side. We learn then to discriminate as to any mixed condition.

A.McK. Unless we get some view of the Lord being glorified, we can hardly take this in. It is a mystery, but we need to get our view

cleared away to see the distinctiveness of the Lord in glory. Then you get the idea of the beauty of the pearl. Is that right?

J.S. The matter is being worked out from the standpoint of Christ glorified and the Spirit's operations going on down here. The Lord is saying, This is what I really have in mind, this treasure and this pearl.

J.C.G. The reference to "a man" is stressed: it is "a man having found has hid", and then "a merchant". The greatness of what God had in mind with men would be in mind in these types. God had in mind that Christ should be the centre of all things but that the assembly with Him in it.

J.S. It is helpful to see that. God could not work with angels in view of this. It is men who are being secured to have part in it. I think the reference to the Lord Jesus as Man is helpful to us. He has come into manhood and He is showing us that He values in manhood what will answer to Himself, what is being secured from among men.

A.B. Is that why Paul speaks about "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2: 2) as he comes to Corinth? I wondered if that linked with the hiding.

J.S. It would mean that every other man has to go out of sight. What he brought to light at Corinth was of this treasure character, which the Lord greatly valued. It is good to think of the saints in local settings in that way. The Lord regards them as treasure.

M.G.W. Would the idea of treasure be that it can be a great variety of very precious things, very brilliant things? Do you think the Lord would help us to recognise that variety among the saints and in the localities of the saints?

J.S. The Lord puts a value on it. I think that is the great point. As you say, you think of what the Lord has in localities and the Lord puts a valuation on that.

M.G.W. It is remarkable it refers to His joy. That is very precious, the feelings of His heart at securing something like this. He must have it for Himself.

J.S. There is joy for the Lord in it. You think of the expenditure there has been, the expenditure on each one of us in a company such as this, and what is intended is that the Lord should have joy.

G.B. Publicly the days are very similar to those at the end of Malachi, but there were those thinking upon the Lord's name and they are spoken of as "a peculiar treasure", chap 3: 17.

J.S. It is very encouraging for us in days of small things that there is something of the treasure character maintained. You might say, Well, you can see this in Pentecostal days or in Paul's days, but we are to see it coming down to days such as ours; the Lord still has this treasure.

G.B. I was thinking too that it is His possession: 'my own possession' (see note, Malachi 3: 17). That is how we are to think of it.

J.S. A peculiar treasure, which the Lord has for Himself. I think that is the importance of these two similes, that the Lord has something that He values for Himself.

A.McK. Later on He says, "my assembly".

J.S. It is a fine thing to think of something that the Lord values for Himself. So much has been lost sight of publicly as to this; there is so much that is manward, but let us get hold of this thought that the Lord has something that is precious to Himself.

J.N.M. All three are really similes as to the kingdom of the heavens. It is interesting that Hebrews speaks of the tabernacle, a worldly one. That would cover the whole of Moses' Judaistic system, but what the Lord is introducing is different. One might say, what goes into heaven is going to put its stamp on something that is on the earth. The influence of heaven is going to imbue something on earth and that must be very different from an earthly tabernacle.

J.S. The kingdom of the heavens has that in view. These operations are proceeding from heaven to secure material of this character. It is very fine to lay hold of that; what is on earth is to be brought into correspondence with heaven's thoughts.

J.A.G. Would what is administrative be in mind in this? He speaks about "the kingdom of the heavens". It is the rule of heaven. Why does He speak about "the kingdom of the heavens"?

J.S. I think it is how these operations would proceed from heaven, the administration, if you like, in view of securing material which will be incorporated.

J.A.G. What comes to mind in the pearl is "a helpmate, his like", Gen 2: 18.

J.S. An entity, is it not? - "one pearl". The assembly is unique: there is no other. It is wonderful to think of such an entity that Christ would regard it in that way, something that answers to Himself, that corresponds to Himself. This is what we have part in.

J.A.G. It makes you think about the city and the versatility of the assembly.

G.B.G. You spoke about the Lord valuing the assembly. What is it the Lord values in the assembly?

J.S. I think He values what answers to Himself.

G.B.G. I think that is good, and do you think the Lord appreciates that the assembly has only one Man before her, only one Person before her? In the local setting, Paul says, "I have espoused you unto one man", 2 Cor 11: 2. The assembly has only One before her.

J.S. It is important that the assembly is preserved in purity of affection for Christ. We need to have one Man before us if we are going to answer to Him in the light of the assembly.

G.B.G. The Lord values that, that the affection is for Him. The assembly is not for others, is that right? It is not for the glory of man as it is in the public position.

J.S. Genesis 2 has been referred to, where Adam says, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh", v 23. He is really saying, It is myself over again.

R.G. Is this worked out in fulness in Paul's ministry, one whose ministry was heavenly in character right from the outset? The Lord

said to him, "Why dost thou persecute me", Acts 9: 4. It was what was hidden, do you think, in one sense, but what was precious, in the other, for the Lord's heart?

J.S. It is interesting that the Lord immediately directed Paul to go into the city, and he was there with the disciples certain days. He would find out about the "me". He had seen something of it before, no doubt, in Stephen and others, but he would find out about it in such a way that he would be incorporated in it.

A.McK. We used to be told that the assembly is formed in suffering but will be displayed in glory.

J.S. The thought of the pearl would involve that. In Revelation, you get the idea of "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (chap 21: 9). I think she is formed to correspond to that holy Sufferer.

J.C.G. The administration that flows, therefore, in the assembly reflects what Christ has in mind Himself, and it is interesting that later when the Lord tries to elucidate whether the disciples understood these things, He says (Matt 13: 52) that "every scribe disciplined to the kingdom of the heavens is like a man that is a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old." Do you think the administration, therefore, becomes positive as we have Christ in glory before us? The positive side is in view of helping forward. It is not exactly any hindrance, is it?

J.S. I think it would come out in regard to the seine. It says, "which has been cast into the sea, and which has gathered together of every kind, which, when it has been filled, having drawn up on the shore and sat down, they gathered the good into vessels and cast the worthless out." Do you think we might get help from what the Lord's objective is in the treasure and in the pearl to see what can be gathered into vessels?

M.G.W. Could I ask further what there would have to be in the way of deliberate calculation on the part of a man like this, of a merchant? There is something that he must secure and he must calculate what he would have to sell, and what it added up to was that it was everything that he had. What do you say about that?

J.S. It just shows the extent of His valuation of it, that this meant so much to him. The assembly means so much to Christ that that is the extent to which He is prepared to go. He would hold nothing back in order to get the assembly for Himself as the "one pearl of great value". It is the valuation He puts on it.

J.N.M. Would there be some allusion, perhaps, to the death of Christ as foreseen in divine purpose apart from the sin question?

J.S. The pearl is what it is according to divine purpose and it involved the Lord going into death to secure it. What He might have had in creation! What He might have had in Israel! But He was prepared to go into death, to lay down His life for it.

A.McK. Mr P Lyon told us once that the fish were put into vessels to die.

J.S. I think we need to learn that.

A.McK. So that in all the working out of these things there is to be moral correspondence in what is being wrought out to-day, in various small companies it may be. There is the dying on the one hand, but then there is the glory of what is precious to Him. They put the "good into vessels".

J.S. The worthless are left aside at this point. We did not read the verse where He goes on to final judgment. That is not in mind. But "they gathered the good into vessels". I think the Lord is looking for something in local assemblies that corresponds in quality with the treasure and the pearl.

G.B. The bondman had a mark put upon him, his ear bored through. He would carry that for ever.

J.S. That shows his valuation: he would not go out free, his master, his wife and his children meant so much to him.

In chapter 16 the Lord brings out this thought of "my assembly". I think it is good to see how this is arrived at. He brings up the question as to who persons are saying He is, and then He says, "But ye, who do ye say that I am? And Simon Peter answering said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." I think in order to be

rightly in the assembly we need some impression in our souls of what the Lord Jesus is as "the Christ, the Son of the living God". Peter had it by way of revelation, but I do not think we look for a fresh revelation. I think we would want to have it by the Spirit.

J.N.M. What does it mean?

J.S. The Christ would mean that here is One who can operate on God's behalf and can do things for God, from God's point of view. And as "the Son of the living God", He opens up a new order of things, a living order of things.

J.N.M. What you say is helpful because all these others, Elias and Jeremias and John the Baptist, are good and good enough, but they were all dead. However much spiritual genius these men had, they have passed, but the Son of the living God is alive.

J.S. They are dead, so there is no response in that sense. Even if they had still been alive, they would have been eclipsed.

A.McK. "*Thou*" is in italics: "*Thou* art the Christ". That is the One who can do things in the anointed way for God.

J.S. It is good to get some impression of Christ on God's side. Our souls should be established in this. He is not Christ operating on our behalf. This is operating from God's side to accomplish things for God.

J.N.M. We have to come through to that in relation to the assembly. We speak rightly of its links with Christ and what it will be, but in the ultimate the assembly is for God - glory to God "in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages", Eph 3: 21.

J.S. I think it is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" who is capable of bringing that about.

M.G.W. How would this happen to Peter? How would he get this revelation?

J.S. I do not know. Peter would know, but whether anybody else would know, I could not tell you.

M.G.W. I began to think about it in relation to the treasure. You often feel there is a real treasure among the saints, what is there because persons have been spending time in the presence of God and have been getting impressions of Christ from the divine side.

The Father does these things. He reveals it to those who spend time in His presence. They want to know about Christ. There must be a real treasure among the saints of divine impressions because they are people who are spending time in the presence of God.

J.S. It is quite clear that it did not come on the line of flesh and blood: "for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens" so that, as you say, it is important to have to do with divine Persons. Peter had this revealed from the Father, but I do not think we receive it in the way of specific revelation. What was revealed to Peter became church property, and I think we would come into the gain of it by the Spirit.

J.A.W. Does the fact that he is called Simon Barjona, show that he has to go through this depth of suffering, moral death? You mentioned that in relation to the pearl. Do we have to go that way to get some impression of this?

J.S. I suppose Simon Bar-jona would refer to us in our histories and the things we go through in our histories, and that may involve suffering. Then the Lord identifies something that is different from that. He says, "Thou art Peter". When Peter comes out with his exclamation, the Lord says, "And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter". That is referring to the spiritual side of things in Peter.

J.M.M. There is a strong element of contrast here, is there not? Reference has been made to the fact that the Lord asks first of all as to who men say that He is, and it is not that; and then He says, "for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens." This is something radically different. In our readings in Dundee we have seen the significance in Matthew 9 of new wine in new skins and that is different from anything that has gone before. I wonder whether there is a use of the contrast here to emphasise how different things are.

J.S. It was different from what men said He was. There is a good deal of speculation as to the Person of Christ among men, but we need to come into the current of divine thoughts and to understand what is altogether new. Then we become suitable spiritual material for the Lord's building.

A.McK. In Matthew 4 the Lord says, "I will make you" (v 19), and then Peter immediately follows Him. Obedience would be important if there is to be formation.

J.S. I do not think we get anywhere in divine things apart from obedience. Obedience is really a principle of blessing.

J.A.G. When He said "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona" - that is his responsible name - does that show that he is rightly in the kingdom of the heavens and in a suitable condition for this revelation? While it is sovereign, in his responsibility he is equal to it.

J.S. The Lord would take us on as we are answering to His thoughts for us in a responsible way, and He will lead us further into what is spiritual, do you think?

J.A.G. A wonderful revelation! I wondered if "the Christ, the Son of the living God" bears upon what the Lord says at the end of John 17, "I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me" (v 24) and relates to "the Christ, the Son of the living God".

J.S. I would think the reference to Him there would be as the Accomplisher of divine counsels. He is bringing in this order of things, this spiritual order of things in the assembly that answers to that, do you think?

J.A.G. I thought the Christ was the title, the anointed One, who does accomplish divine counsel.

J.C.G. Do you think that definiteness of confession is an indication that the Spirit of God is working in the souls of assembly-minded persons? "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*": there is something that is clearly a stamp of the Spirit about a confession like this. Early in his gospel John speaks of "who have been born, not of

blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God", chap 1: 13, and it clearly has this stamp when Peter makes this confession? Should we look for that more?

J.S. And do you think, coming down to each one of us, that we need to be assured that we have some impression of Christ in this way in our souls?

J.C.G. That is what really evokes the Lord saying, "Blessed art thou ...". The Lord is linking on with the will of the Father, that the Father has been operating, and it is quite clearly what is of God coming to light in a person. We should be sensitive as to that, do you think, to see what is of the assembly?

J.S. So the Lord names Peter, meaning 'a stone' here. He identifies him as assembly material.

M.G.W. We have something here of enduring character. There is nothing very solid, not much rock, about the confusion of thought as to John the Baptist, Elias and Jeremias.

J.S. The 'stone' corresponds with the rock, so He says, "and on this rock I will build my assembly". What the assembly is being built on is secure. It is Christ. Peter represents the kind of material that can be incorporated.

J.A.G. In the building, the Lord building the assembly, does He bring out, therefore, spiritual personality in the living stones? There is personality in Peter, "Thou art Peter". Nobody else is Peter.

J.S. Quite so. Do you think Peter has laid hold of this idea when he writes in his epistle about coming to the living stone: "To whom coming, a living stone", 1 Pet 2: 4?

J.A.G. That "hades' gates shall not prevail against it" brings out the superiority of this kind of administration and this kind of personality.

J.S. This is the Lord's building. Man has nothing to do with this. It is what the Lord is doing in a spiritual way. Hades' gates can bring up all that they can muster against it, all the wisdom and power and whatever it may be, and the Lord says, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it."

D.D. Hebrews speaks about "the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, and not man" (chap 2). Do you think that would bear on this?

J.S. It is the Lord who has done it; it is "the true tabernacle", and the Lord is saying here - "I will build my assembly". He is possessive about it. This is "my assembly" He is saying; this is what I am doing.

J.N.M. I have wondered if John 6 might help us as to how we come into it more. The Lord says, "Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal and we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God" (v 67-69). That is not just Peter. That is the saints and it is, as has been pointed out, what they came to; it is not what was revealed to them. It is what they came to by studying the Lord, and that was the sheet-anchor that held them when the rest were going away. Is that not very important, that particular setting?

J.S. I think so, and you will notice how it is put there, "we have believed and known". There is a very definite idea in that. Peter says, "thou hast words of life eternal". I think he was conscious of what the Lord could communicate and work out in connection with that, because with divine Persons things are not just left in words and concepts, so to speak. They work in relation to that to secure a result in answer to it.

J.N.M. I think that passage is very important and helpful to us because there was a crisis in the testimony there and a lot were offended; yet they had continued with them, I would gather, for quite a time, thus far. When the teaching in John 6, which is much more demanding, came in, they said, Well, we did not just expect this. We have known all about this in our own histories. And then you say, what will hold me? Once again, of course, it is the Lord Himself, a manifestation of Himself and His indispensability to you, even though things are not what you thought they were going to be.

J.S. So John was shown the public breakdown of the assembly. What did he do after that? He wrote a gospel about the Person of Christ. That is what will hold us if the going becomes difficult, that

we cling to the Person of Christ. That is why I think it is so important that we get this impression of "the Christ, the Son of the living God".

J.N.M. That is right, and that is John's gospel. That is his impression of Christ. I think what you say is extremely interesting.

J.C.G. So the stone character that the Lord refers to in relation to the work of God in Peter is very valuable, is it not? That is really what saved the day in John 6. Do you not think it goes back to what the Lord says in relation to the type in Genesis 2, "This time it is bone of my bones ...", v 23. It is as if He is finding that there is something according to the divine purpose which is actually coming to light and standing for Him which He can call "my assembly". That is very important for us in days when there are so many opinions, as you said earlier.

J.S. So the Lord says, "Peter" and he names him, 'A stone'. He is saying, You correspond to Me. You are in correspondence with what I am looking for, and, therefore, you can be fitted into the building. I will recognise you as part of "my assembly".

G.B.G. Paul, the one who is given the truth as to the assembly in a special way, begins with an appreciation of Christ, does he not? He had the Son revealed in him (Gal 1: 16). Do you think that would hold Paul? As he says in Galatians, he did not get that in any way from flesh and blood; it was similar to what is in this passage. It was not flesh and blood; it was the Father. Paul had an appreciation of Christ. Is that where we are all to begin? Is that your point?

J.S. That is just the point I would like the brethren to carry away from this meeting, that it is essential if we are to be in the assembly vitally to have a view of "the Christ, the Son of the living God", to have that firmly in our souls.

J.A.G. To the Lord, do you think, Peter is saying this? I was thinking of what has been said about John 6 because the Lord's answer to that is "Have not I chosen you the twelve? and of you one is a devil", v 70. That must have pressed upon His spirit and He feels He can impart what is upon His spirit to them. There is a receptivity there that is of God.

J.S. We want to be persons of that kind. They were faced with the saying, "This word is hard", v 60. Well, let us not give up! Things may seem rather beyond us at times. The Lord and the Spirit would help us to reach out to it, and I think we do it through a sense in our souls of the greatness of Christ.

A.McK. So Peter could sleep in the prison and then, as being obedient, he was led and the iron gates opened. That is what we are looking for in occasions like this, that we are getting something in the way of a stimulus so that we are not unduly concerned about the iron gates.

J.S. I suppose it would be an illustration of the working of hades' gates there, but you can see that the Lord's hand was over the whole matter.

I wondered if we could just touch on chapter 18, "the assembly". I do not want to go in on all the detail of this section, but what is particularly in my mind is the expression "the assembly". You might say, Everything has gone to pieces. Where will you find this? You will find it among the "two or three". I would not go to the cathedral in Brechin to look for this.

R.G. I was thinking that there has only been one assembly; there will be only one assembly. It is "the assembly ... which he has purchased", Acts 20: 28.

J.S. It comes down to how it operates in localities, does it not? The Lord looked down the dispensation to a day of small things and He says, "Again I say to you ..." You may have difficulty locating it, but you will find it where there are two such persons, two assembly-minded persons.

R.G. "Thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name" (Rev 3: 8). It was coming out there in smallness, weakness, insignificance, but it was "the assembly" in character.

J.S. The Lord recognises what was there. We were referring earlier to the thought of how heaven comes into matters and it says, "it shall come to them from my Father who is in the heavens". The direct

connection there is between heaven and two assembly persons on the earth is interesting.

A.McK. You would find it as you would follow Paul's ministry in the recognition of what he said that "the things" he wrote to them was "the Lord's commandment", 1 Cor 14: 37. We cannot play fast and loose with Paul's ministry, can we?

J.S. We need to recognise the value of Paul's ministry; so much breakdown has come in because many have turned away from Paul. The way of recovery is set out in 2 Timothy 2 for every believer.

A.McK.Jr. What is the difference between "my assembly" and "the assembly"?

J.S. The thought of "my assembly" is the Lord's proprietary rights in relation to it. It is His assembly. It is a matter what He would do with it. It is not for someone else to take it over. We have had experience of that, of another man taking over the assembly, but He is saying it is my assembly. "The assembly" is to bring out the dignity, the august character of the vessel by itself.

A.McK.Jr. Would it imply in any way the confidence that the Lord has in the assembly?

J.S. I think it would. He is saying, virtually, The assembly can stand by itself.

J.A.G. Normally it is in the current of the Lord's mind and of what heaven is thinking about.

J.S. You have something more to say.

J.A.G. If the assembly is going to speak, it must say something. This person is to hear and is to listen. He is not to speak or do anything else, but there is something very much worthwhile listening to.

J.S. So we have the idea of something being told to the assembly, and the assembly hears from that point of view. Then he is to listen to the assembly. That is very important that there is something in a place that is in the current of the Lord's mind and would convey

something that is according to the Lord's mind. That needs to be listened to.

J.A.G. "Wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption" (1 Cor 1: 30). The "wisdom from God" is in expression in the assembly.

J.S. It is not wisdom from men. Corinth might have had plenty of that, but "Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God ...", is divine wisdom, the kind of wisdom that comes down from above.

J.N.M. It is very helpful to me the distinction that has been made over the last fifty or seventy years between what we call the care meeting and the assembly. What do you say?

J.S. I think it is a very important distinction, but you say something more about it.

J.N.M. Persons get their eye on the multitude of things that are said, and sadly often there are things said in care that should never be said. When the assembly speaks, that is another matter. Firstly, of course, those who speak as gathered in the light of the assembly would need to be very careful and conscious of the Lord's direction, would they not? One would expect there would be far more power; power to keep out what should not be there and power to lead a person to see things from the divine point of view.

J.S. I think that is important and we have proved that if we make way for the assembly, there is something additional that you do not get in a care meeting and that is why I have approached it this way. The Lord says first of all, "my assembly": He shows us what is precious to Himself. When He says, "my assembly", let us be careful what we do with it! Then He says "the assembly": this is an august vessel; there is nothing else like it in the universe. Do we believe that? That is the truth, dear brethren, that there is nothing else like this vessel in the universe. Outside of divine Persons it is the prime thing.

R.J.G. I was just thinking that this points out the authority in the assembly.

J.S. I think that authority is not in any person in the assembly: it comes from the Lord because it is operating on the Lord's behalf.

J.A.G. It is wonderful grace that the assembly is made available to this person. We do not have assembly meetings to withdraw from persons. That may happen, but the grace and power of the assembly is supposed to - and it does, of course - touch the work of God as the person there is in selfjudgment.

J.S. It is the vessel of divine grace. There is so much grace in one brother, more grace in two or three, but in the assembly you have grace in its fullest extent. It is interesting that it says, "if he will not listen to them". It does not say that as to the individual, but "if he will not listen to them" and again, "if he will not listen to the assembly". That is, it becomes evident that a person's will is operating. Well, that is a very serious thing if will is manifesting itself against in the expression of such grace.

J.A.G. Everyone has the utmost confidence because if it is bound on earth, it is bound in heaven. There are no questions asked about it.

J.S. Heaven is operating according in this way. What I would like to finish on is that this matter comes down to two or three. We might be accustomed to thinking of the assembly as requiring a large gathering. You get the idea of an august company, a huge gathering of notable persons perhaps, but the Lord brings this down to two or three.

D.D. So in Proverbs "The heart of her husband confideth in her", chap 31: 11. Do you think that would show how the Lord speaks here that He has confidence even in the two or three?

J.S. So "Her husband is known in the gates", v 23, that is, in the operation of the assembly He becomes manifest.

R.G. When the Lord was here there was wisdom manifest, conviction manifest, power manifest. These things are all

manifested still in the assembly, whether it be only in two or three walking in its light.

J.S. That is important, two or three walking in its light. What are we going to do in a broken day? Are we going to do just as we would like to do? No. We operate according to the light of the assembly. We acknowledge humbly the smallness, the breakdown, but we cannot give up the light that is to govern the actions.

A.B. Is that what is involved in "two of you"? and then we have "two or three"; the character of the thing is there.

J.S. I think that is the point. It is not two persons of any kind, but "two of you", two persons of this august vessel.

J.N.M. The in-breathing of Christ in John 20 has to be taken along with this. At the in-breathing by Christ not more than ten, out of the twelve apostles, were present.

J.S. You mean it was a broken condition of things. That corresponds: it means that things are still to be carried out according to His mind and as empowered by His spirit.

J.N.M. It is the character of the ascending Man that is imparted to the disciples so that the things you have been speaking about are not glorious impossibilities. That character has been imparted to the broken number, but does it not put a great responsibility on us to see that we are operating within this area?

J.S. I think what was referred to earlier is right, that if persons have to be withdrawn from, what is in view is recovery. That is what would be ultimately in view.

J.N.M. What has struck me in 2 Corinthians is that Paul knew the current state of the man who was disciplined. It seems as if the brethren in Corinth did not know what his current state was, but he did. Is that not an important responsibility for us too?

J.S. It is very interesting that he says, "But to whom ye forgive anything, I also", 2 Cor 2: 10. That is, he is not going to operate ahead of the local assembly. I think we need to observe how the

local assembly is operating in relation to matters, and even Paul says, "/ also". He puts himself after the local assembly.

J.A.G. And he says, "it is for your sakes in the person of Christ".

J.S. He is operating at this level, is He not?

J.A.G. You get the impression that the Lord was waiting on them. The state was known, the priesthood knew the state, but Corinth did not know the state. They had to be helped to forgive the man because there was a possibility that he might be consumed with excessive grief. The priesthood would surely have known that the man was repentant.

J.S. They were slow to deal with the matter in the first place and then they were slow to recognise the repentance of the offender, but they came to it. Paul did not set them aside. He operated through the local assembly: "... to whom ye forgive anything, I also."

BRECHIN

5 December 1998

Key to Initials

G.Bailey, Edinburgh; A.Buchan, Peterhead; D.Duthie, Aberdeen; G.B.Grant, Dundee; J.C.Gray, Dundee; J.A.Gardiner, Aberdeen; R.Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; R.J.Gardiner, Aberdeen; A.McKay, Brechin; A.McKay,Jr., Brechin; J.M.Macfarlane, Dundee; J.N.Mather, Dundee; J.Strachan, Dundee; J.A.Walker, Dundee; M.G.Wood, Dundee

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

A.J.Gardiner

1 Corinthians 7: 39; Numbers 36: 5-7; Amos 3: 3

It is abundantly clear that a believer marrying an unbeliever, is not to be contemplated for a moment. The second epistle to the Corinthians says, What part has a believer with an unbeliever; what communion has light with darkness? When God first brought light into this scene, He saw the light that it was good, and He divided the light from the darkness, and called the light Day and the darkness Night. Believers are sons of light and sons of day, unbelievers are of night and darkness. There cannot possibly be any community between the two. One not having the Holy Spirit has no capacity to enter into the things of God.

It is most important to recognise that a believer is the Lord's absolutely. Scripture says, "whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14: 8), and it is an affront to the Lord's right over us that, for instance, a believing woman should enter into marriage with an unbeliever and thus place herself under the authority of an unbeliever, and it is unthinkable that a believing man who is intended to hold himself and his house for the Lord, as having been baptised to the Lord's name, should enter into partnership with, and bring into the matter of influencing and ruling his house, one not subject to the Lord. Hence, there should be no question that for a believer to enter into marriage with an unbeliever is absolutely contrary to the mind of God. It brings in an unholy link which ought never to be contemplated by a Christian.

But the matter is sometimes more subtle when the thought is for one who has the light which has been recovered by the Lord for His people, to enter into the marriage bond with a Christian who is not practically walking in that light, and it is in that connection I have read the three scriptures.

The first brings in the point of view of the rights of the Lord in the matter, the second how it affects the saints, and the third how it affects the two concerned. In the first passage the apostle is dealing with the case of a sister who has been widowed; but the principle holds good whether for a sister who has been widowed, or a sister who has never been married, or a brother - they are free to be married to whom they will, only in the Lord. He stresses that the matter must be regulated by this consideration, "only in the Lord". "In the Lord," as I understand it, involves more than being merely a believer, it means that there is the practical recognition in what is being done, of the rights of the Lord. The Lord Jesus has a sphere here on earth where His name is owned and His rights are practically recognised, and that sphere is described in Scripture as "in the Lord". In these days in which we live, the Lord has intervened sovereignly by the assertion of what is due to His name, saying to the saints, "let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity". He has brought in by this means a sphere of recovered truth, and maintains it by virtue of the authority of His name, and some, through grace, have part in it, to the end that God should not be robbed of what is due to Him from the assembly, and that the Lord should have the portion due to Him from His assembly. How can it be said that a believer is marrying in the Lord if he deliberately links himself with one who, whether it be in ignorance or not, is not in fact practically moving in relation to what the Lord has brought in and established on earth?

As we withdraw from iniquity, and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart, we find ourselves in a position where the truth has been recovered, and where there is the maintenance on earth of all that God is looking for from the assembly, and the Lord is preserving that by means of the power and authority attaching to His name. How can it be said that the marriage is in the Lord if one who is outwardly in that sphere, who by the position taken up has acknowledged that he recognises what is due to the Lord's name links himself with one outside that position, one who identified himself or herself with features of the

religious world, which definitely flout the rights of the Lord Jesus, and definitely displays the Holy Spirit? We need to bear in mind that this injunction "only in the Lord", is part of the epistle at the end of which the apostle says the things he writes are "the commandments of the Lord". It is not an optional matter. In the verse following the one read the apostle give something which does not rank as a "commandment", he gives his own judgment as a spiritual man, but in the verse read he is laying down the great principle that marriage must be "in the Lord" When we come to the passage in Numbers, the point raised there was as to the marriage of certain sisters, daughters of Zelophehad, who belonged to the tribe of Manasseh, and the chief fathers of the tribe were concerned that they should not marry outside their tribe, because if they did so their inheritance would be lost to the tribe, it would become merged in the inheritance of another tribe, and I believe we need to take account of that fact also. There is an element of sovereignty in the position occupied by those who have obeyed the injunctions in 2 Timothy 2: 19-22, and are in consequence separated from what is inconsistent with the Lord's name. All believers, alas, have not done so, and as a result all are not in this position. Such have, however, some portion in the inheritance, they enjoy the knowledge of God in the way of piety, they have their interest in the gospel, there are certain features of the inheritance which they enjoy, but there are those to whom it has been given, in the grace of God, to enjoy the greatest privileges that belong to the assembly, and that is our inheritance to be prized, and if anyone having a part in that inheritance links himself or herself with one who has no part in that particular feature of the inheritance, they will find the inevitable result is that what they have that is distinctively theirs becomes merged in something less. The truth cannot be maintained at its height and in purity where there is an unequal link, but what is greater will tend to sink down to the level of what is lower, and the Lord does not want that. Moses said, "The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well ... Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry". That is to say, if we have part in the choicest features of the truth and the greatest privileges of Christianity, let us see to it that we hold it dear

and cherish it. If we enter into any link, especially marriage, with one who has not a part in these things, the inevitable tendency will be for that which is best to be hindered and for such a one to drop to the level of that which is inferior.

In the third passage the Spirit of God raises this important issue: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" What is marriage but a walking together of two? What is there in it for the two concerned if they are not really together in it? As Peter says, "heirs together of the grace of life". If a brother or sister who has the light and privilege already referred to, enters into a link with one who has not this light, *the only basis of agreement will be that of surrendering the truth*. I would urge that brethren should bear this constantly in mind, and as opportunity occurs, seek to present these things to those younger, for it is impossible for two to be agreed and walk together in an unequal yoke of this sort, except on the serious basis of surrendering that which is most precious. Think what it would mean for one who was in the enjoyment of Christian fellowship, to enter into this link with a partner with little or no real interest in these things. It would result in the most precious things being excluded from the home as regards any joint participation in them; the prayers together could not possibly take account of the divine interests as rightly known; the saints could not happily be received to the home, for there would be no basis of communion with them. Hence the Spirit of God would leave the word with us: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

It may be that someone here might think the seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians warrants unequal yokes, where it says, "what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" That is not the case at all; the sixth chapter of the second epistle makes that clear. The scripture in the first epistle contemplates the case of those who were married before conversion, and one of the two gets converted, and then there is grace from the Lord to go on in the position if the one unconverted is content to remain with the one converted. It is brought in to urge the husband or the wife who has been converted

after marriage not to leave the wife or husband, as the case may be, but in no way warrants a believer entering into an unequal yoke at any time.

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