

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

WHAT IS UNCHANGEABLE

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Romans 1: 1-7; 5: 1-10; 8: 12-17

P.M. I wondered if we might get some help in enquiring as to the kingdom of God. If we are passing through a scene of lawlessness with evil on every hand and the will of man operating, it is important to establish our souls in not only the doctrine, but the experience of the fact that the kingdom of God is here. God has established His right over us in redemption. Man fell from the appreciation of God's right as Creator, although it still remains, but He has established over the believer a right in redemption. He has a right over each one of us. It is important to be kept in the appreciation of that. He has exercised His right through the establishment of His kingdom.

The apostle begins immediately with "God's glad tidings ... concerning his Son". We may get some impression, as we enquire, as to the greatness of God's Son. As come of David's seed, there is the kingly line established, and He has been "marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness". The establishment of the kingdom is for the blessing of men. God is establishing His rights over man, and it is for man's safety and for his blessing and for his joy. These passages may help us to come to appreciate that in some measure. We come into it through the "obedience of faith". We may get some help as to what the "obedience of faith" involves. We often speak of obedience, but the "obedience of faith" is important. I wondered if in chapter 5 we get the resources that are available as we come under the sway of the King. There is resource available. "The love of God is shed abroad" while we are passing through difficult circumstances, "tribulation ... and endurance, experience". It is a great comfort in the day in which we are. Then in chapter 8 there is power available and we need the experience of these things, not only resource, but power, power to be here responsively for God. We might touch on these things: I know they are basic and perhaps we might prefer to aim a little higher, but I had an impression that the Lord would help us to touch bedrock. We

sometimes have to come back and take stock of where we are. This enquiry might help in that regard.

R.D.P. It has been said that the kingdom underlies the assembly. Very often we find that it is in kingdom truth and appreciation and experience that we falter in our assembly matters, so it is a very good line to follow.

P.M. It is helpful to draw attention to that. We might get help to concentrate our affections on the fact that God has established His King. The Psalms begin that way: "And I have anointed my king upon Zion, the hill of my holiness", Ps 2: 6. God has established His King. He has found such pleasure in Him that He has exalted Him, established a whole kingdom centred in that blessed Man for the blessing of man and for the practical effect of the moral sway of God in the souls of men.

D.B.B. In Solomon's kingdom things were under control and there was a wondrous supply, but the reference is, "Happy are thy men!", 1 Kings 10: 8. It brings in happiness as we accept the kingdom, does it not?

P.M. I thought we might come to see that. Some of us may have had an impression that the kingdom meant only we were subjugated, but there is much more than that. The kingdom brings out the glory of the King. That is how Paul begins here. We come into it through the "obedience of faith", but everything in the kingdom is for our good, for our blessing. By the operation of the "obedience of faith" man comes to appreciate all that God is towards him in the fulness of His favour.

D.B.B. I was thinking that. The modern trend is that you each have your own mind and you can see the *unhappiness* that that brings in. If only we could realise that the kingdom is for us, but as we come into the gain of it, it brings in great happiness.

P.M. Yes, because everything is there from God's side for man. What you touch on is important. We are in a day of free expression and the egoistic man, but God is bringing man into blessing through subjection to the One in whom He finds such infinite delight. There

has been one man who has perfectly satisfied God; His Son perfectly satisfied Him, moved here in holiness, righteousness, every detail of God's operations so fully expressed in Jesus. God has been manifested in flesh. The blessed God has found such delight in that Man that He is bringing us into relation with Him through the "obedience of faith".

R.D.P. There is scarcely a glimpse of the kingdom of God in the kingdoms of men, is there? Even where there is rule by one man, it is usually a tyrannical rule. We cannot learn anything of the kingdom of God from the kingdoms of men, I would think. Would you help us on that?

P.M. Well, we learn it here as we look at God's King. Perhaps we might keep in our minds as we proceed: "And I have anointed my king upon Zion". God has His King. What a King! In the tyrannical reign of men - and we see it perhaps in the Middle and Far East of this world - the despot has himself before him. It is not for the benefit of his people. He amasses great wealth to himself. But God's kingdom is a kingdom of supply and outpouring.

J.McK. What precedes the verse you quote in Psalm 2 is that "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the princes plot together, against Jehovah and against his anointed" (v 2). I was thinking of what has just been said that far from learning from them, we see how the exaltation of man politically is actually contrary completely to what God is doing.

P.M. It is important, both in relation to the subject we are pursuing but in relation to practical matters in our lives and in our local companies, that we do not take our bearings from what is of man. The establishment of the household as apart from the family in the world is not of God. We take our bearings from what is of God. Do you think that the appreciation of the His King is really to regulate the whole of the believer's life?

J.McK. So the last verse of the Psalm is, "Kiss the Son ..." (v 12). It is an affectionate recognition of the greatness of the Person, is it not, the key to everything that God will do and has done?

P.M. “Kiss the Son”: it is the full, beneficent display of all that God is in one blessed Man and that for our blessing and to secure our affections and hold them for God.

G.R. Is it affecting that this is the only kingdom in which the King has died for each one of His subjects? That ought to affect us every day.

P.M. That should. The One who is spoken of here as “come of David’s seed according to flesh, marked out Son of God in power”, has died to secure us, to bring us in on the basis of redemption. That should affect us. We have been “bought with a price”, 1 Cor 6: 20. That is easy to say while we are sitting here on Saturday morning, but let us never lose sight of it on Wednesday evening, or whenever it is that we may be on our own. We have been bought with a price. We are not our own. We have been secured and in the light of what we are speaking of, we have been secured to take up our part in the kingdom that takes character from the One who has given His all.

D.J.W. This expression “marked out” involves that the kingdom is distinctive. Left to our own wills, we fall into what is man’s will, which is very levelling and is a very low level, but “marked out Son of God” is God elevating man according to His thoughts. The kingdom involves moral elevation.

P.M. And takes its character from the distinctiveness of Christ, “marked out Son of God”. Think of the distinctiveness of God’s Son, apart from all that had come in before - Moses and David and Solomon, great men as they were in their time - here was One who was “marked out Son of God in power”. The greatness of the King is to affect us, that He is great enough to give character to a universe eternally for God. He has been “marked out”.

W.McL. I was wondering if in giving character to it is why Colossians refers to “the kingdom of the Son of his love” (chap 1: 13). Is that a connection with this?

P.M. That is helpful. We have been “delivered ... from the authority of darkness, and translated ... into the kingdom of the Son

of his love". Why did God do that?

W.McL. To satisfy His own love.

P.M. Yes, that He might have a whole order of man satisfied in the enjoyment of what Christ is. There is no satisfaction in the world around us. Young people may think it looks bright, but behind the bright lights is the darkness. But God has "translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love". He has found His delight in that blessed Man and He has brought us to share in that joy that He might become everything to us too. I think we come into it through the "obedience of faith". We might just get some touch as to that.

D.J.W. Do you think we are to prove that the power has not diminished? I was thinking of Matthew's reference, "And his fame went out into the whole of Syria, and they brought to him all that were ill, suffering under various diseases and pains, and those possessed by demons, and lunatics and paralytics; and he healed them" (chap. 4: 24). That is the character of the kingdom. It is not that things are slightly improved or made better, but that the whole character is transformed. That power is still here in the kingdom.

P.M. Yes, God has established something that was never before. It is not a modification of what was in Israel. That would never satisfy God. It might have satisfied Israel, but it would not have satisfied God. But God has established something that is entirely new because of what Christ's, because of the moral perfection, the excellence of His Son. He has established a whole kingdom in relation to that blessed Man and the power is still here in the kingdom. That is 1 Corinthians 4, is it not? - "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (v 20). It is still here.

D.J.W. Could you help us as to how we plug into that power?

P.M. I thought we might come to the moral road in our enquiry. You cannot get to the end without starting at the beginning. I think you come into it first through the "obedience of faith".

R.D.P. I was going to ask about that. Does Romans give us the way of the "obedience of faith" and show us how the believer comes

into it? You never get a rates bill from the kingdom of God, and a prison sentence if you do not pay it. He works through the *hearts* of His subjects so that there is a movement of heart: the compulsion of the kingdom of God is in the affections of His people. I wonder if Romans gives you in that way the “obedience of faith”.

P.M. I thought that. With Israel it was, “This do and thou shalt live”. It was an outward obedience. We may sometimes settle for purely outward obedience but that is not God’s thought in the kingdom. It is not conformation to an outward order. It is “obedience of faith”: it comes from within, that God is securing the moral being of man. He is establishing His right over man and securing his moral being through obedience of faith. He has given that gift, faith itself.

R.D.P. And His lever is the Man that we are speaking of. The lever always upon the hearts of men is Christ, is it not?

P.M. “/ have anointed my king”: let us just see the blessing that there is in the recognition of God’s king. ‘I have set Him here’. Nothing will overthrow Him. Kingdoms will fall and empires will crumble, but God’s king remains. God has established a moral sway in the souls of men because He has a Man who is infinitely delightful to Himself.

T.W. He could say, “I have been born for this”, John 18: 37. He was born to be a king.

P.M. He was. He is “come of David’s seed according to flesh”. There is no question as to that. The royal line has come right down. But in addition to that He is “marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness”. The One who came in according to David’s seed was morally equal to be the centre of God’s kingdom.

T.W. We need this basic truth. Would you help us as to what you opened with as to the kingdom being here?

P.M. Well, the Spirit is here. “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy

Spirit", Rom 14: 17. The Spirit is here. The moral sway of God is established through Christ where He is and the Spirit is here.

T.W. So we need to give place to the Spirit so that He can show us the gain we have of being in the assembly. As was said, the kingdom is seen in the assembly really.

P.M. It would help us and preserve us from the spirit of democracy in the assembly because the will of God and the sway of God is established in man through the King and through the presence here of the Holy Spirit.

P.J.H. It says in Romans 6, "For when ye were bondmen of sin ye were free from righteousness" (v 20), but the kingdom has brought us into a sphere of righteousness?

P.M. It has and has it not delivered us from bondmanship to sin?

P.J.H. Bondmanship to sin really gives us this democracy idea, does it not?

P.M. Well, it would lead to that. We sometimes think there is greater liberty in doing what I want to do, doing my own will. *That* brings me into bondage, but coming under the sway of the King brings me into the blessing of the liberty that belongs to the sons of God. It is a wonderful experience because all the fulness of God's love is towards us, and the power that is resident in the Spirit is available.

J.McK. Something preceded faith with Abraham, did it not? - the divine call.

P.M. That is important. We might ponder that for a moment because the call came from the divine side. It was not just that Abraham opted for this, as man might speak of it. God specifically called Abraham, and He has called each one of us, and He had a purpose in view in the call. One thing that comes out in Abraham's history is that when God committed Himself to Abraham, Abraham committed Himself to God. "And he believed Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness", Gen. 15: 6. Now, God has

committed Himself to us in redemption, but have I committed myself to God in the acknowledgement of His kingdom?

J.McK. The greatness of that call was calculated to deliver Abraham from all these things you are speaking of, what was democratic, what even affected his own family. It was paramount over every other claim. And as you say, God made it, and it was in obedience to that that faith came into evidence.

P.M. Whilst Abraham was tested sorely, more than any of us, what comes out of his experience was the dignity and princeliness of a man who moved here with God.

J.McK. One of the characteristic expressions in Hebrews as to it is, "counting that God was able" (chap 11: 19). That is really simple faith, is it not?

P.M. That is the "obedience of faith", is it not? The "obedience of faith" is initial, but it continues in the believer's experience with God that as you say, he counted that God was able. Do I have faith, living, vital faith, in God today? Do I believe that He is able?

K.M. I was thinking of what the Lord says in relation to the queen of the south. She must have had quite a system there: she was quite a dignified person, no doubt. But there was not sufficient there for her so she took a journey, as the Lord said, "from the ends of the earth", Matt 12: 42. It must have been a good distance she took - no doubt in faith - to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but there was far more there than what she ever thought of.

P.M. Yes, "Happy are thy men!" Think of what she witnessed, not only in the king but in the subjects. She saw the kingdom in operation and she realised immediately that there was blessing in coming under the sway of God's king. She saw something that she had not experienced before. There is an inward operation in the believer that gives character to what comes into expression outwardly. The outward subjection to Christ comes from the fruit of what the Spirit does within.

J.C.G. It is very helpful to go over this ground. Would you say that the calling of God not only elevates the saints but helps us to respect one another? Immediately following the calling, we have “beloved of God”, and then we have the introduction of “God our Father” showing that God has inherent love for those He calls. This would help us to respect one another, would it not?

P.M. That is most important, I think. If we criticise what is of God in one another, we are really criticising the One whose work it is. We need to be sober as to that. I think actively taking our part in the kingdom would help us to bring our minds and thoughts under control, that we might respect what is of God.

R.D.P. I was wondering about thoughtfulness. It seems to me that persons who come into the gain of the kingdom are thoughtful persons. We seem to be in a world where everything is done by impulse without much consideration for the outcome. Abraham after being called and going out and coming into the land of Canaan, seemed to have an impulse to go south and ends up in disaster. I was thinking in the week that the whole process of the mind of the believer is important. We need to be thoughtful persons.

P.M. That is searching, because most of us have quite busy lives and perhaps not very much time given to contemplation and weighing things as they appear before God. But what you refer to is important.

R.D.P. Abraham went down into Egypt. The famine did not drive him into Egypt; the famine came after he moved. Why did he go that way? He had come into the land; he had built an altar; there was a certain establishment; and then he suddenly does something completely opposite. I suppose we recognise that trend in ourselves. There is much record in the scripture - Mary for example pondering in her heart and soul and mind. It might be a word for us, especially when we are younger, to be more thoughtful as to the whole situation as to where we are with God.

P.M. I think so, and use the time that we have in that regard. Driving along you can be thoughtful. Use the time we have! Tape

recorders take away the time available for thoughtfulness. I do not want to make much of that, but just be careful because the believer is secured for the moral sway of God, secured for the blessing of God. His whole outlook and manner of life is now changed.

I wondered if in chapter 5 we might get some sense of the resources that are available because we have “the love of God ... shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given so us”. We might get some touch to as to being “saved in the power of his life”, that there is resource through the present activity of the Spirit and through the place that Christ has, living where He is before God. But the believer’s life is taken completely outside of this sphere.

T.W. That would be a resurrection sphere, would it not?

P.M. Yes, and ascension, because if we are “saved in the power of his life”, it is not only saved from wrath. You get the two aspects in Romans 5. If we are “saved in the power of his life”, we are living in the life of Christ. The Spirit that is in Jesus where He is, is the same Spirit that is in the saints. That is a wonderful thing to contemplate.

D.J.W. Is that the same, as John puts it, as abiding in Him? “The power of” is in brackets: “we shall be saved in ... his life”. It takes you really on to John’s line: “If ye abide in me; for without me ye can do nothing”, John 15: 7,5.

P.M. It may be good to touch on that because the believer’s life requires, if one might speak carefully, the present experience of being united to and abiding in Christ. All the resource that the believer has is in that Man, where He is. It is not exactly as if supply has come to a desert island miles away. All the resource is available because my life is in His. “Because I live”, He says, “ye also shall live”, John 14: 19. Living in the life of the Man who is there at God’s right hand is a wonderful thing. There is an interesting footnote in 1 Corinthians 6, that the Spirit that is in Jesus is the same Spirit that is here in the saints. What do I know of that? (See Note to 1 Cor 6: 16).

P.J.H. Is it striking that the testimony of a believer is related not so much to the country but to the king. They “were first called Christians in Antioch”, Acts 11: 26. They would not say he is a Welshman or an Englishman: he is a Christian because it was observed that he is like the king.

P.M. They came out in the features of Christ. I think it links with what has been said as to our abiding in Him. Unless ye abide in me, the Lord says in John, ye shall bear no fruit. How often some of us, when we have been younger, have struggled to bear fruit. We have sought to do it from what we are ourselves, but fruit comes from abiding in Christ. Is that right?

P.J.H. I was much struck recently reading about the conversion of Charles and John Wesley. Apparently they had been preaching quite successfully and then they came to an acknowledgement that they could do nothing by striving themselves. They had to come to salvation in Christ.

P.M. Well, our resource is in Him by the Spirit. This epistle would help us, these early chapters, to see how much we owe to Him for everything. We have “been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God”, we have been reconciled, and now in chapter 5, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us”, because, “we being still without strength ... Christ has died for the ungodly”. Think of the fulness of the supplies that are coming from God Himself in Christ and in the Spirit to sustain the believer in the midst of a scene in which Christ has been rejected! The setting of this is to help us because we are passing through tribulation, dear brethren. What tribulation there is! You might say there has never been a moment like it, “tribulation ... endurance ... experience ... hope”. These things are to work in us. They are not just things that we are to struggle through, but they work. They produce a result and I think the result centres in living in the power of His life.

J.McK. Reference has been made to the healing power of Christ when He was here as man. We also get the incident in

Matthew 17 on the mountain top when it says that Jesus touched them. Would you connect that with being “saved in the power of his life”? The background is that “some of those standing here ... shall not taste of death until they shall have seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom”, Matt.16: 28. And then they see His face shining as the sun, and then they get the experience of His own touch. I wondered whether it links with Paul’s teaching, that something comes from Christ to sustain. That is “the power of his life”, is it not?

P.M. That is helpful: the power of the life of the Man who has been glorified.

W.McL. Does that link with ascension?

P.M. Well, it is where He is. It is not that we are saved in the power of His life that was here; we are saved in the power of His life where He is, that that Man, *His life*, not exactly His position, but His life, all that He is in His affections, in His wisdom, in His headship, in His supply, is available to the believer. We come into it through the “obedience of faith”. This is a wonderful thing that in the moment in which we are, everything is available to encourage us, but it is coming from that source.

B.B. I have been struck earlier in the meeting that God can do what He likes in His kingdom. I know it is a slightly different setting, but the verse that sprang to mind was in Daniel where it says “the sovereignty ... shall not be left to another people”, Dan 2: 44. Do we have to recognise that? God can do what He likes, where He likes, when He likes.

P.M. That is helpful because, through the kingdom, God exercises His own will. He is the only One who can do that. Even in the affairs of men He exercises His own will. The heavens do rule in the kingdoms of the world. God can do that, but He exercises His will for the blessing for men. That is a wonderful thing to contemplate and in the exercising of His will, He brings with Him all the resources of His love. How much is for us from God Himself as we come into it through the obedience of faith.

D.J.W. Is that the force of this expression that comes in several times in this passage, “and not only that”? There are several lines that consistently run through Romans. One is reckoning, which links with what was said as to thoughtfulness. Another is “therefore”, that one thing builds upon another. But the other is this “and not only that”; there is a line of encouragement, do you think, as we take these steps in faith? It speaks in one chapter of “the steps of the faith ... of our father Abraham”, Rom 4: 12.

P.M. We often speak of Paul’s superlative language in Ephesians. This is Paul’s superlative language in Romans. It is as if he brings out one thing after another. The apostle would say, Is that not enough? “And not only that”, God has come out in even greater blessing. When we are young, we may get the impression that the kingdom is against us. Let us go away from these occasions with the impression that the kingdom is for us! Everything is for us as we come into it through the obedience of faith. We get nothing in Christianity without obedience, but it is the obedience of faith. It is a moral inward working in the believer that brings Him into the gain of this.

R.D.P. I was thinking of what has been asked about how we get plugged into this. You sometimes can be attracted to some outward expression of Christian life and you feel perhaps you might like to be there, but you must begin at the beginning. I was thinking of Mary. She says, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him”, John 20: 13. It is almost as if it was part of herself. It was not just some interest that she had. She says, “They have taken away my Lord”, and it was as if part of herself had gone. We get, as you say, through the obedience of faith, the light of God, the attraction for Christ. There is no short cut to the experience of the fulness of Christian blessing. On the surface we might enjoy parts of the Christian fellowship, for instance, but it will only be a shallow appreciation unless we have begun at the beginning. Would that be right?

P.M. I think so. I think it is important, because even our appreciation of the fellowship and the circle in which we are able to

walk, if the centre of it is not God's King, the appreciation of that fellowship will deteriorate into something that will lead to moral corruption. It must have its source and centre in God's King. The fellowship is for our blessing, for our encouragement. It is a circle in which a completely new order of life can be enjoyed and appreciated outside of this world, but if the centre of it is not Christ, it will end in moral corruption.

M.M. The emphasis in chapter 1 is on the glad tidings, is it not? It is the full presentation of everything that is in God's heart for men.

P.M. Yes, that is helpful. You mean that the glad tidings is the full outshining of God's thoughts for men as to Christ.

M.M. Yes, perhaps we need to be deepened in our appreciation of the full expression of what is involved in the glad tidings.

P.M. I think so. We are tested when we seek to take up the service in the preaching. Paul speaks of "the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ", 2 Cor. 4: 4. Let there be glory in the glad tidings! From God's side there is" God's glad tidings, ... concerning his Son ... Jesus Christ our Lord". What an outshining! You might say that all that is in the heart of God is encompassed in His glad tidings to men.

D.J.W. Are these two boasts, in verses 2 and 3, connected therefore? "We boast in hope of the glory of God", is that we are looking ahead to a day when things will be established, but we realise that we are living in a world where that is certainly not true and that brings you to where you "boast in tribulations". I would like some help.

P.M. It is helpful to link those two. I had not thought of that, but Paul was standing here, boasting in hope of the glory of God. Think of the fulness of all that is expressed from God Himself! We are boasting in hope of the glory of God, but then he says, "And not only that, but we also boast in tribulations". Can we say that? A young sister said to me recently, 'I have come to give thanks for the small and restricted circumstances in which I was brought up'. I think that is something of this character, that something of the work of God

was formed in difficult circumstances and we come through to boast in tribulation. Why? Because we know what the object in it is. Tribulation is not something that comes in through man's failure only. It is what is ordered of God in the circumstances of the believer to bring him to the appreciation of what we have in Christ.

J.B.I. Is that over against the fear of man? It is very practical, not to be ashamed because of the hope that we arrive at. Is that something we all need to arrive at in our experience?

P.M. I think that is helpful because if we confess the Lord's name before men, the whole power of the kingdom is available to us. You are not standing alone. You may stand in the open air, you may confess His name to colleagues in the office; you are not there alone. The whole power of the kingdom is there. What a comfort that is! We may sometimes feel as if we are alone and despised, but all that is available in Christ glorified and here in the Spirit is behind the believer as he stands in faithfulness to Christ. It is a wonderful thing.

R.D.P. I have often wondered what this boasting would be. Is it in the inward confidence of the believer's soul? You would not publicly boast in tribulations. You would not go around saying how much you had suffered and so on. Is this something that is in the secrecy of the believer's soul?

P.M. I think so. It is between himself and God. You look round a room like this. We know a little of what the saints are passing through, but there is so much that no-one knows. Yet behind it all there is the individual's link with God that forms this boasting "in tribulations": not boasting through it, but boasting "in tribulations". What are we boasting about? What is our stay? What is our source of supply while we are passing through testing times? What is the source from which we are drawing? We are drawing from a world of supply outside this one, which will sustain us as we are moving through it.

R.D.P. I was thinking of Paul in Timothy where he says, "for I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim 1: 12) and he has confidence in

the deposit being kept and so on. He says, "I am not ashamed". He was really boasting "in hope of the glory of God" and he was boasting "in tribulations". It was not that he used the word but it came out in the expression of his life. Is that right?

P.M. And the tribulation is to form us, is it not, that there is something that we can trace back to God's ways with us? His ways may be in discipline. Discipline in itself does not form a man. It may harden a man. You see a man pass through discipline; if he does not go through it with God, it hardens his spirit. But discipline in itself, as used of God, is to bring man to the appreciation of the fulness of supply that is available.

M.M. So there is a sequential development of the work of God in these verses here, is there not?

P.M. You had better open that up for us.

M.M. Only just to see how it is put: "endurance, experience ... hope". Is that a sequential development of the work of God that would be leading us to the appreciation of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit? You have emphasised the presence here of the Holy Spirit. Do you think we need to appreciate Him more?

P.M. Well, I do. Think of the fulness of what is enclosed in this verse "and hope does not make ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us". How wonderful that is! It is wonderful in itself that the Holy Spirit has been give to us, but His activity is so wonderful. He is shedding abroad in our hearts the love of God. It is not only initial. He does that. I remember it being said that when God established His right in a man through the obedience of faith, all the resources are there. It is like God establishing a beach-head in the war zone: all the resources are immediately brought in to strengthen the position, and God does that in the believer. All the resources of His love are immediately brought in to strengthen the position that He has secured in the midst of enemy territory and He does it by shedding His love abroad by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit

continues to do that. It is not something that happened forty years ago. It is to be a present appreciation so that the believer begins to live in the love of God.

D.J.W. What does it convey to you? The sentence would have been understandable without the word “abroad”: “the love of God is shed ... in our hearts”, but he says, “shed abroad”. What does that convey to you?

P.M. There is no dark corner left untouched. Go on.

D.J.W. I remember being affected by it years ago as being liberal. The word “shed” conveys that, but I like what you say, there is no dark corner. It involves that the heart is open to receive it, does it?

P.M. It does and the believer can move here as satisfied, with a heart filled with the love of God. We need the experience of it. We have it here on the page of Romans 5, but let us be exercised to have the experience of it, that the resources are there.

T.M. I was thinking just now when you spoke of these verses 3, 4 and 5, tribulation, endurance and so on, of what has been said that these things work *for* us. It is not easily acceptable sometimes, but it was said that as you find that God’s love, by the Spirit, is being shed abroad in your heart, you will prove that these things are really working for you.

P.M. That is a word for us. Let us prove it. I fear the danger for myself that, because we know the verse of scripture, we may think we have got it. But let us be exercised that we may prove the working of it in our hearts! It will stabilise us in the scene in which we are. In Romans 8, I thought of the presence here of the spirit, “the Spirit of him that raised up Christ from among the dead” dwelling in the believer. Think of the greatness of the power that was present in the raising of Christ from among the dead, the Spirit of Him is dwelling in the believer, and the result is that he becomes a worshipper.

J.McK. Does Psalm 84 bring the two passages together? - "Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a well-spring" (v.6). So there is more room for the Spirit as a result of what the saints pass through in the way of discipline.

P.M. It gives a certain elevation to the discipline, does it not? Discipline is not to wear us down; discipline is to form us to become deeper in our worship to God. If God has established His right over man, as He has through the kingdom, He has done it in view of a response to Himself. He uses His ways in the implementing of that, that there might be a depth in response. If we only had light without experience, there would be shallowness. There would be little for God. Let us be exercise that the light be matched by the experience and that there might be an answer to God Himself as a result! - "whereby we cry, Abba, Father".

T.W. Formation should be seen in us: that is a wonderful testimony.

P.M. And occasions like this are not for information; they are for formation. We may be content to go away with the information as to the scriptures. One's exercise is to go away with a measure of formation!

BIRMINGHAM

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Key to initials

B.Bodman, Bristol; D.B.Bodman, Birmingham; J.C.Gray, Dundee; P.J.Herbert, Newport; J.B.Ikin, Manchester; J.McKay, Woodstock; W.McLean, Grimsby; K.Marshall, Rotherham; M.Matthews, Birmingham; P.Martin, Colchester; T. Moulden, Worcester; R.D. Plant, Birmingham; G. Richards, Malvern; D.J. Willetts, Birmingham; T.Willetts, Rotherham

WHAT IS UNCHANGEABLE

Paul Martin

Psalm 71: 1-3; Matthew 16: 13-18; 1 John 3: 7-12

I desire to say a word as to what is unchangeable. We are in a world where everything is changing, as one writer could say, 'Change and decay in all around I see.' How true it is! The believer has a wonderful resource as he knows One who is unchangeable, not only unchanging. It would be sufficient confirmation if God was unchanging, but He is unchangeable. You get a reference in Hebrews to the "unchangeableness of his purpose" (chap 6: 17), and the unchangeableness of Himself. It is impossible for God to change. He does not need to. He is God. He is greater than every circumstance. That is a comfort in the circumstances through which we pass, that God is greater than them all. He orders and allows things to bring out the unchangeableness of His Person. We could go through the history of His ways with man, if we were able, and see how unchangeable God has been. He has not thwarted by what the devil has done. He has not had to change His ways or His purpose. His purpose is unchangeable. He has continued with His purpose. How great God is! What feelings have entered into His dealings with men in order that He might continue with what could not be changed. He says as to Israel at one time: "I have nourished and brought up children; and they have rebelled against me", Isa 1: 2. Think of God bringing up children! A good many here know what it is like to bring up children, but God brought up children and they rebelled against Him. Did He change? He could not. He was unchangeable. In the bringing up of our children we are to learn from God. The farmer learns from God. It says He taught the plougher (See Isa 28: 26): he learns from God. He has not changed His ways in ploughing. You say, farming is different today. But God has not changed His ways in ploughing. He turns over the ground just the same. We may be passing through a difficult time, but God is turning the ground over. He has not changed His farming. He cannot change.

We might just look at that in Hebrews, because it is important. It says, "Wherein God, willing to shew more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his purpose, intervened by an oath, that by two unchangeable things, in which it was impossible that God should lie, we might have strong encouragement ...", Heb 6: 17,18. Think of God intervening by an oath to bring you and me the assurance of the unchangeableness of His purpose! When He swore to Abraham, He swore by Himself; there was nothing else that was unchangeable. In what God was about to do to Abraham, taking him out from a world of cities, setting him in a tent, God was showing to that man that there was what was outside this scene that could never, ever, change because it had its source in God. Oh, dear brethren, we are passing through circumstances in the world and even among ourselves where there is much that is changing, but there is what is unchanging and could not change because it has its source in God. If God changed, dear brother and sister, the cause of His changing would be greater than God. It could not be. He says, "For I Jehovah change not, and ye, sons of Jacob, are not consumed", Mal 3: 6. What He does, it says, "it shall be for ever; there is nothing to be added to it, nor anything to be taken from it; and God doeth it, that men should fear before him", Eccl 3: 14. Oh it is a wonderful thing to come to an appreciation of the fear of God in a right sense because God is carrying through in His purpose what is unchangeable!

John wrote from the enjoyment of being in the bosom of Jesus and he begins his gospel with what was in the beginning that had not changed; he begins his epistle with what came into expression and it had not changed. John relies on the One from whom every resource was available to sustain him, even at his darkest hour. In the book of Revelation, the Lord shows to him the history of the church. There must have been moments when John's heart must have been thrilled with what would yet come in, in the history of the church, Philadelphian love - think of John looking at that as the Lord spoke to him! And then afterwards the Lord has to tell him about Laodicea and He Himself was outside. The whole

public profession was lying in lukewarmness, in indifference to Christ, but immediately, it says, “a door opened in heaven”. There was a throne, unchangeable, and there was the rainbow around the throne, unchangeable; there were the elders falling down to do homage, the One sitting upon the throne worthy of it all and He was unchangeable. In the light of the utter ruin and breakdown of the church publicly, John has a view of what would never change and he has it in the One who is sitting upon the throne. We need that, dear brethren. We tend to look so much at the breakdown, at the departure: we feel it and we carry it. Let us carry it before God, as has been said, as ‘broken-hearted churchmen’, carrying before God the shame of the breakdown, the shame of the departure, but let us keep our eye also on what is unchangeable, that God Himself is carrying through the unchangeableness of His purpose and He will not alter it. He does not need to alter it; He has it already; it is established. If God says that He is going to do something, it is done. The One who inhabits eternity has operated in time to give effect to His purpose.

I have read in these passages because we are to prove something ourselves of that unchangeableness, the stability that comes into the believer’s soul through his dependence on the One who is unchangeable. The Psalmist here says, “Deliver me in thy righteousness, and rescue me; incline thine ear unto me, and save me”. He was passing through a difficult time. Who of us is not passing through circumstances that at times we would not have chosen? He says, “rescue me ... save me. Be to me a rock of habitation”. There is only one source of stability at the present moment as there has been through all God’s dealings with men, and that rests in God Himself. He says, “Be to me a rock of habitation”. Where am I living? Where are you living? You say, Well, you ought to know; you live in Colchester. But where am I living morally? “Be to me a rock of habitation, whereunto I may continually resort”. There is One to whom we can resort and find nothing has changed, who has not been affected by breakdown.

Young people, and those of us who are perhaps not so young, let us develop in our knowledge of and links with God in this respect! It is not only a place to flee to when there is trouble, but a place to come from, to move out in testimony, to move out amongst the saints, a resource, yes, but a place of habitation. "Be unto me rock of habitation". You say everything is falling to pieces; even amongst the saints there is breakdown. Are you surprised? We should not be surprised. We are saddened by it, but let us not be surprised! Stability is in God Himself alone. We shall come to it in a minute: there is stability in the assembly and stability in the work of God, but there is not stability in man. In our responsibility, our only resource is in God Himself - "Be unto me a rock of habitation, whereunto I may continually resort".

"Continually resort": I am searched by this, dear brethren, because how much time do I spend in the divine presence? The Lord Jesus, the great model for us, spent hours, nights, in prayer. Think of the wonder of that perfect relationship between Himself and His Father. At one point He says, "I knew that you always hearest me; but on account of the crowd who stand around I have said it", John 11: 42. Think of the perfection of His relationship with His Father, moving here as a dependent Man, in Himself the Creator of the universe, but moving here as a dependent Man, counting on the Father. He says, "The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to succour by a word him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed", Isa 50: 4. You marvel; you can only worship in the presence of One Himself, so perfect and yet dependent on the Father, even to give a word to one that was weary. What a perfect example for us! He lived in the enjoyment of His relationship with the Father. He said, "... ye shall be scattered, each to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me", John 16: 32. Think of the secret enjoyment of that relationship which the Lord Jesus had as Man. How He valued those years in manhood here as the dependent Man! The Psalm says, "I said, My God, take me not away in the midst of my days!",

Ps 102: 24. He enjoyed those years, found pleasure in circumstances He had never been accustomed to, found pleasure in depending on the Father and in communing with the Father. How perfect a model we have! You can understand the Psalmist here saying, "Be to me a rock of habitation". Let me prove the unshakeableness of what there is in divine Persons!

He says, "Be to me a rock of habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress". I would like to ask my younger brethren, and myself, where is your strength today? Where is your stability? Where does it lie? It does not lie only in the company. I could be present in the company and not be enjoying, not having a part, in what God is doing in the company. I could be present and be completely unrelated to what God is doing in the company. If God is not my strength and my rock, I will not be conscious of what He is doing in stability among His saints. Dear brethren, let us be strengthened in our individual links with God Himself and prove that what He is set to carry through, He will assuredly do! He will not turn aside. He does not need to. He has everything established already in Christ. It is there. He will never need to turn aside. May we fix our eyes upon the Man in whom everything is centred for God's pleasure!

In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus is speaking of the assembly. He says, "on this rock I will build my assembly". You say, that was in the Lord's time; it was seen in the apostles' time; but it is not seen today. Is it not? Divine Persons have not changed their thoughts as to the assembly. The present activity of Christ has not ceased in relation to the assembly. The presence here of the Spirit has not been taken away. The assembly is here. Can we locate it? We can locate the qualities of it, the features of it, that are seen here in testimony. They can be seen. The most wonderful thing that divine Persons have formed is the assembly. Is it just a few brethren? No, it is not! I would say to each of us, Ask the Spirit of God to give you a view of what the assembly really is, apart from the breakdown. He will do it. He will open on to your view the glory of this vessel against

which hades' gates could not prevail. They have tried. The enemy has been set for two thousand years to overthrow the greatest vessel that has been formed in divine ways. He has been set right through the dispensation because he wanted to rob Christ of what was for His own heart, but He has never succeeded. Hades' gates will not prevail! What assurance it gives in the soul that God's thoughts as to the assembly will go through! The Dark Ages, was it still there? Yes, it was there, maybe not appreciated, but maintained in souls who were faithful to Christ. It was there. In Philadelphian days, was it there? Yes, you could say there was little question. We come right to the close of the day and we are publicly in Laodicean days. Is it still there? Yes, it is there in its moral character, its features are seen in the overcomer. That is where the expression of it is, but God's thoughts as to it have never changed. The presence of the Spirit here remains. What is unshakeable, unchangeable, will finally come out in display; not in the circumstances in which it is seen publicly today, in smallness and outward weakness, but as a glorious vessel, a vessel that will shed its benign influence over the whole earth: "And the nations shall walk by its light; and the kings of the earth bring their glory to it", Rev 21: 24. Think of the greatness of what will come out, the features of it being formed in the present moment in the saint, the one who has made herself ready soon to come out in display. What a vessel!

And you and I, dear brother and sister, have a part in it. It is unchangeable and unshakeable. It is not what men see; it is God's view of it. "On this rock I will build my assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail ..." It will go right through and become finally the dwelling-place where God will tabernacle with men. What a wonder! Think of John seeing that right at the close of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. There on his view this wondrous vessel that has been the object of the enemy's attack but which will become the dwelling-place of God and you and I, I say again, will have our part in it, and we have our part in it today. Today is not the day of display. It is a day for faithfulness, a day for holding fast what we have. The Lord would strengthen us to do it, to "hold fast what you hast, that no one

take thy crown", Rev 3: 11. Let us be exercised that the features of the assembly should be in expression in our local companies in a greater way and that the glory of Christ as the One who is the only object of the assembly should become the sole object to each one of us in our gatherings together. He the wondrous object that will fill the heart of the assembly eternally, her blessed and glorious Head from whom now she is deriving everything. Let Him be the object as we assemble at every occasion! He alone is worthy! The features of the assembly will be maintained as we are drawing in the Spirit's power from the One who is the Head of it. May we be strengthened in it, but strengthened in the assurance that it will never be shaken: "hades' gates shall not prevail against it".

I come now to 1 John because there is what is in the believer that is unshaken. It is a remarkable passage in John's epistle. It says, just before where we started to read, "Whoever abides in him, does not sin". "Whoever abides in him": that places a responsibility on us. But where I read in verse 9: "Whoever has been begotten of God does not practise sin ...". You say that is impossible. Is it? Scripture does not present impossibilities; Scripture presents what exists. It is a great thing to lay hold of that, in reading Scripture, God is speaking to us not just of truth, blessed as that is, but of what exists. "Whoever has been begotten of God does not practise sin, because his seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God".

I would like to just touch briefly on this because it is important for us. Each one of us who has come into the enjoyment of the forgiveness of our sins, justification, reconciliation, through the "obedience of faith", as we had earlier, has been begotten of God. When God has begun a work, He has formed a work in us that is of Himself. It does not draw from what we are, nor from the circumstances in which we are. It comes directly from Himself. It is of God. Have you found that work in yourself? You say, I fail often. Even the man that wrote this failed too. But it does not alter the fact that in John, and in each one of us, there is that there that is unable

to sin. The work of God is incapable of sin. "Whoever has been begotten of God does not practise sin".

I touch on this because it brings out the stability of God's work in the individual. It brings out the necessity of experience with God in each one of us that we might not only recognise what God has done in us which is entirely of Himself, but that we might further it, and in furthering it, we may be conscious of what is of God having the predominance in our own souls. These things are real. I am not speaking of doctrine only; I am seeking to speak of what is real and of what the believer has within himself, what is incorruptible and what is unchangeable. It is of God. He has begun the work. It says, "he who has begun in you a good work will complete it ...", Phil 1: 6. God will do that. But the seed is there and the seed is pure because it is of God. As it is made way for, and the Spirit would help us in the discerning of it and in the strengthening of it. As it is made way for, it will increase. But the seed is there and it is of God.

Now, it manifests itself in many ways. John in these chapters helps us to identify it because there is that in the believer that immediately answers to God, immediately answers to the presentation of what is of God. There is an immediate answer in your own soul, and that is the work of God that has been begotten of God in the believer. Our brother reminded us in the reading of the necessity to have our minds occupied with divine things and the Spirit would help us to keep our minds clear, to keep our "mind on the things that are above ..." (Col 3: 2), to exclude things that do not further what has been begotten of God. The Spirit would help us to do that so that what comes into expression may be stable and what is truly representative of God.

That is what is in view. His work will be perfected. That work will be perfected: "he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day". There is no doubt as to that. One might say carefully that God will reach the measure of His work in each one of us according to His own thoughts for us. God will do that. That is God's side and God will carry through His thoughts. But our responsibility lies in verse 6, "Whoever abides in him, does

not sin". There is an answer to what God has done in the believer that finds its satisfaction and its source in Christ where He is.

I have touched on it briefly and I trust, dear brethren, it may stimulate exercise with myself as well as with us all, that we may locate, and strengthen by the Spirit's power what is unchangeable in ourselves because it is of God. We have been created, it says in Ephesians 2, "For we are his workmanship", - God has worked - "having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them" (v 10). The character of the work is manifest in the way we walk, in the way that the believer walks. It says again in John, "He that says he abides in him ought, even as *He* walked, himself also so to walk", 1 John 2: 6. There, coming into expression, is what is of God in testimony and it is here and it is real and it is unshakeable and it cannot pass away because it is of God.

Young believer, and those of us that are older, just let the truth of it, let the reality of it, rest in your soul, that God has done something. He has operated. He has put in His seed and what He has done cannot ever pass away, cannot change. It remains and cannot be shaken because it is of God. What God does remains. Wonderful stability it brings to the soul because God is unchangeable! He has not only brought into expression what He delights in - He has done that - but He is greater than what He has brought into expression. He is greater than it all and He gives character as the unchangeable One to all that He has done for His own pleasure. May we find our appreciation in it and our stability in God who has done it, for His Name's sake.

BIRMINGHAM

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