

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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CONTENTS

New Creation

Page 1

The Ways of God

Michael J. Welch

Page 17

Refining

Henry W. Jensen

Page 23

Faith's Resource

John N. Darby

Page 30

NEW CREATION

2 Corinthians 5: 14-21

1 Corinthians 3: 1

2 Corinthians 12: 2 (I know a man in Christ)

Ephesians 2: 10

Galatians 6: 15, 16

MJW It is obvious that I want to speak about new creation. I want to approach the first scripture without rushing into it, because the sequence of the teaching is rather important if we are to get the impact of what the apostle brings in as to new creation. I say that because he obviously feels that the judgement that he comes to in verse 14 requires that the love of Christ should be operational with us in constraining us. It rather suggests that the Corinthians might be hesitant in approaching this, because the verses that follow seem quite radical and yet are essential to Christianity. He says, "For the love of the Christ constrains us, having judged this: that one died for all, then all have died". I wonder whether we view ourselves that way before God, that all have died. Death is upon everybody as the judgement of God because of sin and I think that is the view of this scripture that as far as what we are according to flesh, if Christ died then it proved that all have died. I want to start off from that standpoint because unless we view ourselves in that way, as God views us, as having the judgement of death upon us, we will not get the impact of the blessedness of what is essential for God in new creation.

I expect we all feel rather measured by verse 15. It is in view "that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them, and has been raised". The matter is emphasised by the apostle showing the love that lay behind the constraint. The effect in us is to be "that we henceforth know no one according to flesh".

MJP I am really rejoicing; this is not the first time we have had this scripture read in Spaldwick, and the local brethren will know that many years ago we had meetings with Mr Fred Trussler and he told us that, "the love of the Christ constrains us" is an irresistible drawing power and you cannot fight against it. Would that not be wonderful if we all felt like that today?

MJW It is essential for what it is to bring us to.

MJP Without that love operating in us there will not be a spring. That

is what we need; we need a spring. We need to get into this life, that is what God wants us to enter into, life - "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly", John 10: 10.

MJW It does give us a spring, and to think of the Lord's sympathetic view of us, that He knows that will cut deep because we do tend to live to ourselves, but He would have us constrained by His love so that we should live to Him. If we have not started, let us start now.

DCW So is the one line a necessary pre-requisite to the opening up of something else?

MJW That is exactly what I had in mind.

DCW I was noting that is says, "a new creation", not just 'new creation'. Does that make it individual?

MJW It seems like it, "if any one be in Christ", but the new creation itself is not specified because it is very wide. It will extend to heavens and earth eventually, so it is not just limited to a person; there will be the whole sphere in which new creation will be evident. Say more as to one thing being closed up, because I do not think in ministry and in our exercises we think enough as to the death of Christ as ending one order completely. How glad we are when we are older; it may be a bit of a strain when we are younger to think that all that we are naturally and according to Adam has been removed in the death of Christ, but you get to a point where you are glad it is all gone.

DCW What you are seeking to bring out is that there is no intermediary state, otherwise we are not in the gain of anything.

NJH Did Christ die to bring in new creation?

MJW I thought that was the purpose, and I think that it is very encouraging to think of it.

NJH That is what lay in the love of God, in the love of Christ, because we often just link the new creation over against the old, but the new creation was in the eternal thoughts of God.

MJW It was a necessity for God, part of His purpose and what He intended to bring in for Himself, as well as for our richest blessing. I think that is very helpful.

RDP Is the "all have died" comprehensive, but "they who live", is

perhaps a little more selective?

MJW How do I view you if I do not know you according to flesh any more?

RDP The “all” is not just those who have an interest in Christ, it is all, the whole thing has gone. When Christ died it showed all that was in that one order.

MJW Do you not think that is a wonderful thing? We are very natural in our thinking, and because we live perhaps more in nature and our business than we should, we do not sufficiently realise how wonderful it is for God, and for us, that all that belonged to that order, which was nothing but a hindrance, and certainly was hateful to God (and hence the cross) has been ended judicially for God, and He has what is new before Him. It says, “we henceforth know no one according to flesh; but if even we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer”.

JMcK I am extremely tested by it. The most encouraging feature about this passage is that new creation is of divine origin; “all things” are of God, so that what we find that is positive, we take no credit for because it is God that has done it.

MJW What impressed me was that a new creation was a complete product. It is not like babes in Christ, and a man in Christ, which show that there is growth, but what God has done is complete. A creation is a creation. It is like the beginning of Genesis, and it is complete and perfect. So I might think I need to improve myself, I must do better, but actually if I view myself according to this as in new creation that is perfect in itself. I may be a “babe in Christ”, but what the Spirit of God is getting at in view of God's pleasure is that I should mature, should become a man in Christ.

JMcK What God does, what comes from Him, what has its origin in Him, must be perfect.

BDW In verse 17 we have “a new creation”, the Authorised Version says, “a new creature”. What is the distinction there?

MJW Mr Stoney says that a butterfly is a new creature. It was a caterpillar, it has now become a butterfly; it is a new creature, but it is not a new creation, Vol 4 p12. I think this is something entirely new, something from God, perfect in itself, so that I do not have to worry

about correcting it.

BDW Would creation be a more expansive thought?

MJW Very much so because I think this is very wide. It is a general statement here, “there is a new creation”, because in fact there will be a new heavens and a new earth. The extension of this idea is very wide, but it begins with the believer, or the believer is in it.

Is it a comfort to you to know that all that belonged to me and to Adam's order, which God dealt with at the cross, has gone for Him? If I am a delivered person it is also gone for me. Does that encourage you?

BDW Absolutely, and our failures are left behind; it is all in Christ. That is the thought that is being brought out in these scriptures, “in Christ”. There has to be perfection there.

MJW The apostle is speaking about the new covenant. He would establish us in the knowledge of God's disposition towards us, which is a very wonderful thing, and then he speaks about reconciliation. On the one hand, what God is towards us in His disposition, on the other hand reconciliation is more what the saints are for Him with all the distance gone - the distance removed in the death of Christ, and what the saints are now for Him. And they are for His pleasure; that must involve new creation. It is an essential part of reconciliation.

RDP-r It says, “the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new”. Could you say more about the fact that it is accomplished in that way?

MJW Is that how you live?

RDP-r No, frankly. But I think it is encouraging for us to see that that is how it is viewed from God's side, but I think what you are bringing in is to have it viewed like that from our side.

MJW Exactly. What liberty it would bring us into. It is a new world altogether, “a morning without clouds” (2 Sam 23: 4), altogether of God. It brings us into touch with eternity where everything is new, “all things are of the God ...”.

RDP-r We often think of the limitation that these things might bring upon us, but do you think we should get the sense that this is something which is infinitely better than anything that has gone before?

MJW That is what I hoped that we would feel when reading through this section. Here is something beautiful, wonderful, which is of God and which will abide.

RHB The reference you have touched on already as to “Christ according to flesh” was not obnoxious to God, and yet it had to come to an end.

MJW He is in a new condition. It is not that Jesus is any different; He is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and to the ages to come” (Heb 13: 7), but there is a different condition. It is not a different Christ.

RHB I wondered whether the focus in the passage is on the state of flesh and the state of new creation, and that He is not in that condition. He said to the woman in resurrection, “Touch me not”; she was about to embrace Him as she had known Him, but He was to be known differently, John 20: 17. I suppose as far as we are concerned it is not only the gross features that sin has wrought in the flesh, but it is that condition of things, even with things which we might admire.

MJW His condition is a wonderful subject for consideration. I think what you say is helpful, because the whole order has gone in the death of Christ, and even the condition in which He was has been closed up in view of the glory of redemption.

RHB Is it in your mind that this involves a committal on our part, “the love of the Christ constrains us”, and then a judgement is made? It is a spiritual deduction from the contemplation of the fact that He died for all. What is the significance of that before God? And then a committal to it on our part; the love of the Christ is the leverage in the soul to be committed to that.

MJW It would be a great thing for God and for us if we did commit ourselves to this. We may have to say that we have not been sufficiently in this. The question is whether today we can say that from henceforth we will, with the love of the Christ as the constraining power, set our minds on this because what is in view is this wonderful order that is entirely of God and will yield for His pleasure. As we have said, it was in His purpose to bring in.

RDP There is no flaw in new creation. Was the first creation marred in that sin came in? Man spends his time trying to make things perfect, and to overcome the effects of sin. Christ took part in the flesh and blood condition “sin apart”, Heb 4 15. I suppose what God saw in Christ

was perfection in that condition.

MJW The prophet went to the potter's house and saw the vessel marred. Even man in innocence did not really fully answer to God's thought. With Christ everything was perfect, but He is no longer known in that condition of flesh.

HTF Does it bring out the cost to God, the fact that He did not have Christ any more according to flesh because there was no flaw in Him?

MJW "For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever", Ps 49: 8. Christ in that condition is no longer; that order of things has been given up for ever by God.

RHB This passage is very exercising because we would not only be reconciled to God if we were in the good of it, but we would be reconciled to one another. There would be no difficulty amongst us in personal relationships and the like if we knew no one according to flesh.

MJW How does it work out? You are three dimensional, you are as I have always known you, but I am not to know you according to flesh. It rather suggests that there are features in you, which are of Christ and to which I would attach myself.

RHB Do we start by being aware of this in our own souls, that through having heard the gospel and having received the Saviour, having received the gift of the Holy Spirit we become aware of the stirrings of something that we did not get from our parents, we did not get from nature? We got our physical appearance, our tastes and character naturally from our parents, but you become aware of something in the soul that did not come along that line. I wondered whether it is important to locate that, without being introspective in our own souls. Then, as locating the work of God in our own souls we develop an eye for it in one another.

MJW I hope all the youngsters and children were listening to what you said as to whether they have these stirrings. Mr Raven says, 'New creation has taken place before we have much apprehension of it', vol 7 p165. As young persons commit themselves to the Lord Jesus and embrace Him in faith and receive the Holy Spirit, the stirrings should be stronger. How do you know whether you are in Christ or not?

AM I think what you have been saying proves a great assurance, the fact that our tastes and our desires change. I was thinking, "all

things have become new”, it is as if the person goes through but there is what is totally new.

MJW The identity goes through.

RW The hymn relating to new creation says:

“All things new,” our eyes look upward (Hymn 37)

MJW It has been suggested today that you should look horizontally as well and see new creation.

RW We cannot do without either.

MJW Exactly. The person is in Christ when they reach out in faith to the Saviour and they receive the Holy Spirit. That is the beginning, the new thing. You become conscious, maybe slowly, of new tastes, new desires, and a judgement of things that you have done - there are the stirrings of something new. These are being worked out by the Holy Spirit to form you practically after another Man. This is why “in Christ” is state, and not just standing. We need to keep in our view that what God has done is entirely new and fresh. It is a complete thing. The new creation is a creation, something that God has done and it is perfect in itself. It is standing in the sense that I have related myself to the Head, and that God views me in relation to that, but “in Christ” is state because the features of another Man are coming to light in me. What the Spirit will do is shed abroad in our hearts the love of God, Rom 5: 5. That great formative principle of the love of God links with the new covenant. Paul was ministering here to establish the saints in the disposition of God towards them which is unchangeable. The new covenant was worked out between Christ and God and established for ever. The love of God is towards the saints and reconciliation involves that all that brought in the distance has been removed in the death of Christ, and what remains are the saints for God's pleasure in new creation.

AM New creation and the work of God is a substantial thing. It is not just something that we can regard as an element of the truth; it is something substantial in the soul of the believer.

MJW It is you. The person is in it.

NJH Divine love is the controlling influence of this whole new order. It must be linked with the divine nature in the person that is taken up, and that person's relationship with other believers. Divine love must be the controlling influence.

MJW The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts and the believer is going to be formed in that divine nature. They have then the ability to love the saints, love God, love Christ, love all that is of God. What a wonderful principle love is.

NJH That is John's first epistle, "If any one say, I love God and hate his brother, he is a liar, chap 4: 20. Divine love is the great influencing power of this new relationship, this new state, in which we stand.

MJW The proof that you love God is that you love your brother, 1 John 4 :21. That is very testing. Are we not responsible to display the features of Christ, because it is Christ that is in view? "In Christ" involves that everything takes its character from Him; He is the Head. If I live to Him I should become like Him.

KM Is it interesting that, in the illustration that you mentioned earlier as to the chrysalis and the butterfly, it is necessary for that chrysalis to embrace the sunshine in order to develop into a beautiful butterfly. I wondered whether we need to keep ourselves in the sunshine of the love of God, and the love of Christ, to keep our eye upon Him. Is that the way in which we appreciate divine love and become formed by it, become like Christ ourselves?

MJW That is right, but what we said was that this was not exactly like the caterpillar and the butterfly, it is a new creation. Keeping in the sunshine is nonetheless true because that is the great formative principle of what is new because God is love; everything He does must be love. Mr Raven even said that the lake of fire was a necessity of His love, vol 18 p118. The idea of the caterpillar and the butterfly was that that was a new creature and not a new creation.

KM I think that is right, and I think it is right to use illustrations of nature because nature teaches us.

MJW If you saw a butterfly trying to get out of its chrysalis you might say I would like to help it, but actually in the effort of breaking open the chrysalis it strengthens the butterfly so that it will come out ready, formed and strong enough. Is that not true spiritually too? I may find the flesh very strong, we do when we are young, but as we grow in this order of new creation, from a babe upwards, and we mature, we then have strength to throw off, by the Spirit, all that belongs to the old.

KM I think it is very fair, and I think we need to be helped to throw off the travails and trappings of the flesh and all that belongs to it in order

that we might be more here in this scene to shine. Moses's face shone having been in the presence of God. You can tell a person who has been in that because of their countenance. It is a person who looks up with confidence, and also his face shines.

DJW Is it significant that it begins with, “the love of the Christ”, not the love of the Lord Jesus? In Ephesians 3 it is, “the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge”, v 19.

MJW That is the love which is going to flood the universe, “the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God”. What a love that is.

DJW There are phases where we learn the love of Christ. We learn it in what He has done for me, we learn it in what He has done in removing what is objectionable to God, but the love of the Christ is what it is in its essential essence in its quality and perfection. It is the bond between His body and His bride; it is the highest level you could possibly have of the love.

MJW Is it the highest level of love?

DJW It has been said that the expression is astronomical, and if you think of the sun there is nothing that surpasses it in its warmth and strength.

RWF Are we to understand increasingly that new creation is a very expansive thought. If we think of the old creation and its variety and abundance we wonder at it; how much more new creation. It is something we should set ourselves to explore and enjoy.

MJW It is exhilarating to do it, as we explore. The Lord Jesus is not a creation and the new man is a creation. What is in Him is infinite, and there will be great width in new creation. It is a very expansive thought and that is because it is of God like the old creation.

In connection with that, it is not just the objectionable features in the flesh that have gone in the death of Christ, but that whole order, because we find our natural way of thinking is a hindrance, and we can view things in a natural way. I find that quite a test as to whether the mind has been renewed, and we can throw off that which is not wrong in itself, but which can be a hindrance to what we have spoken of as this wonderful expansive scene of new creation.

RDP This begins with a judgement, “having judged this”, it does not

say that they who live no longer live to themselves but, “they who live should no longer live to themselves”. We mentioned the Holy Spirit; younger people here may think, how does this work? It involves judgement. It involves that the sun has shone on you to such an extent that your whole thinking process has changed, you are thinking in a different way. We are creatures of the earth, we are marked by gravity, if we try and jump off we come down to it again, that is what we are. There is dimension in the Holy Spirit that is greater than that. The matter of judgement is important. All these basic epistles involve judgement and the mind; it involves the way that we set ourselves. It is the love of God that warms us into that environment.

MJW We are so affected by the love of God, and may we be! This can be a prayer from all of us, that we may appreciate the love of God in a greater way because it will get something from us in return which will help us to make this judgement. A lot of basic things involve the mind, “reckon yourselves dead to sin”, Rom 6: 11. It is a question of the mind, a question of me setting my mind and committal in this direction, but under the influence of the love of God. I think that is beautiful.

RDP I thought that: the chrysalis is in the sunshine, and then the butterfly emerges - perhaps we should stay in the sunshine more spiritually and maybe the warming influence of that would help us in our thinking away from what is limited to earth and what belongs to it.

MJW It produces a generous state in the believer, the love of God. All ill feeling is removed. There is an expression people use in the world, “the person is all heart”. In a certain sense that is right. The divine nature would produce a holy and righteous love in you, but you have to make a judgement. It is not that it is a warm, soft, cuddly thing without any edges to it.

RHB You have gone over the teaching but the first verse referred to is intensely practical, “having judged this: ... that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them”. That is a massive change. To be delivered from self as an object in my life, what I want, what will suit me and my tastes, and instead to live to Him to devote one's life to Christ. I feel limited in being able to speak of it, but the man who wrote these words knew what he was speaking about. He lists in other epistles the things that he could boast of according to flesh and they are impressive; they would have distinguished him as a man, but people would have said, "What a waste that Paul, who had all those

advantages, instead pursued a course that for him resulted ultimately in the loss of his liberty'.

NJH It only took Saul of Tarsus three days to cover most of that ground. Our brother referred to the writer of the epistle, who is a delineation of what can be arrived at spiritually in a soul where this ground was covered in three days.

MJW What you are saying is that we should not say that perhaps it will take forty years. It is something that, if we gave full rein to the Spirit and to the love of God, we might get the gain of sooner. It is said to be eleven days' journey.

NJH That is Deuteronomy 1: 2, but Saul of Tarsus was shorter than that. It shows what is possible in the mind of God. We have to arrive at what God has effected and what God's thoughts are for us. We are slow to get to His side.

MJW I am sure that is the problem. Do you not think that under the influence of the Son we shall all get there quicker?

JCG God has confidence in His own creation; it says, "God as it were beseeching by us". He is looking for the state to be expressed. Like Peter's confession, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16: 16); that was his state, it was coming into expression in him. There is a difficulty often that we do not express what is true of God in us; we tend to revert to other side issues.

MJW Have you not felt in your own history, you have perhaps been under the ministry of a spiritual man and you think, 'I would like to be like that'? Paul would have given you that feeling. He was so much like His Master, "a man in Christ". You would say, 'I would like to be like that'. "We entreat for Christ"; think of the power that would have.

RWF Does the second paragraph of the next chapter give us an example of a man who is in the gain of new creation, "Our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians, our heart is expanded", 2 Cor 6: 11? The ground had been cleared after the first epistle, and then he says, "let *your* heart also expand itself". It was very attractive because it was a presentation in Paul himself, not merely an exhortation or a line of doctrine.

MJW "Our heart is expanded. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your affections; but for an answering recompense ... let

your heart also expand itself". I am sure the Corinthians would want to give Paul this recompense, and I think it did operate in them under the love of the apostle and the love of Christ; their hearts did expand.

I hope everyone has the point that new creation is a complete thing and the beauty of it is that all that belonged to Adam and his order, whether it was obnoxious to God or whether it was just because it belonged to that order, has been taken out of the way. All the distance has been removed in the death of Christ and what remains is this new order, "all things are of the God". I do want to emphasise that. If we think of ourselves, we are not to think of ourselves as that little bit of work of God in me, but to think of ourselves in new creation. I may be a babe, I may be advancing from that, but it is not a question of improving the old. Let us get rid of that idea. If I love the Lord Jesus, and I have the Holy Spirit, God would view me in Christ, after another order of man altogether, and those features, if we go on rightly, will be formed in me and that is real and it is perfect in itself.

I read the scripture in Ephesians which gives the whole picture, "For we are his workmanship" - is that not lovely?

JMcK As to the man in John 9, the Lord says, "that the works of God should be manifested in him", v 3. How do you put that alongside what you have just said that new creation is in itself perfect and complete?

MJW Do you not think it was with that man? Was he not part of the divine workmanship already?

JMcK I thought that he was a demonstration of what we have been speaking about, "the works of God should be manifested in him". We need to realise that God's work is not simply historic, but it continues. Even in the natural creation it needs to be maintained, and God does that.

MJW Christ upholds "all things by the word of his power", Heb 1 3. What maintains this order then; is it the Holy Spirit? I think what you say is helpful. It says, "we are his workmanship"; that is concrete. That is real. It would have been in Ephesus, "we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus". What a wonderful thing to think of the saints as created. They have been created for good works, so that the works of God are manifested in the believer. We are His workmanship. The work goes on in a practical sense, that they have been created for good works. They cannot say, 'I thought of doing this and that'. God

would say, 'I thought of it before you did, and I prepared that you should walk in these ways'. It is the expression of what has first been established and then maintained.

JMcK It is a fine moment in the history of the believer when he discovers that what is of God in his soul corresponds with God's purpose.

MJW That is wonderful. I think that is another very important line. The two things have met; the work of God in him, and what God intended from him, have been realised and will continually be realised.

RJF Do you think the progression from the babe to the man is not because the work is changed but the apprehension within that person of the work has grown?

MJW I read in ministry that you do not connect growth with new creation (FER vol 14 p250), but in another sense it must be so in our apprehension because a babe grows from a babe to a man.

RHB I always thought that the work of new creation begins in new birth as John speaks of it, before the person may be aware of it, but then John goes on to speak of those who are "born of God"; that is that they are recognisable as the work of God has come into expression in them. I suppose in a sense the reference in Corinthians to them being babes and not being able to speak to them was a reproach to them because they had had great advantages and help, and yet they were carnal, they found their interest and taste in what was fleshly rather than what was spiritual. Had it been in what was spiritual there would have been what belongs to the full grown man.

MJW The ideas are a little different, new birth and new creation. New creation is a thing that has come out, through God's power, come into being. It is not exactly through birth. Adam was a man, he was not a baby, he was a man, new creation is something that is entirely fresh and I would have thought it was a slightly different line from new birth.

RHB One is typical of John's ministry, which speaks of the family, whereas new creation is Paul's presentation of it; so we need to keep with the presentation that you have chosen.

MJW Is there growth in new creation, is there development?

NJH Born of God involves a moral being that you receive from God and I think that side involves growth; you get born again in 1 Peter 1: 23,

but new creation itself is always perfect in itself. I think I would keep the idea of growth apart from that. Whatever measure they may be, I think it is perfect itself before God.

MJW It is very difficult to say much more.

NJH I would not like to separate, but one is very much a moral thought and the other is a spiritual thought.

RJF I was not trying to suggest that there was growth in new creation, but more that we grow through our apprehension of what God has done.

MJW There must be something like that that happens because how does a babe in Christ become a man in Christ?

RJF We speak about the physical creation and the sun is what illuminates that and provides its energy. In new creation it is the love of God expressed in Christ that does that. We cannot take that all in at once, we could never do that, but our view of it will expand through experience.

MJW It will depend very much on our apprehension and our going in for it.

RHB Does this passage in Ephesians bring out that it is for God? Our blessing is involved in it, but “we are his workmanship having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared”, and it is in the context of God displaying the surpassing riches of His grace. The passage in Corinthians raises the question of our committal to it, but does this passage bring out the divine pleasure in what is formed in the hearts of God's people?

MJW It links with what we said earlier that the death of Christ involved that this order of things should be brought in for God and for His eternal pleasure. How wonderful that is.

NJH It must be with Christ and in Christ.

MJW In Colossians and Ephesians quickening is brought in, which means made alive in His life.

NJH Naturally we would not accept death, but we are quickened as with the Christ and then we are raised up together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. You are on solid ground then linking it with Christ.

MJW You must have Him in view all the time. He comes onto view immediately with reconciliation. As soon as He came into the world God had another Man before Him and He has never ceased to have that Man before Him, and we should not either.

The final scripture in Galatians it is a new rule. We cannot say there is no regulation or law in Christianity: “by this rule”, the rule of new creation. I would like to be in the gain of it. I think that Paul lived in this sphere all the time; the view he had of the saints, every view he had was according to the law of new creation. Then he brings in this touch as to the “Israel of God”, he had been speaking to people who were perhaps legal and trying to get their righteousness from the law, he had to help them as to that, but he brings in this touch that there is such a thing as the “Israel of God”, that is, Israel according to God's real desires. Why should it be brought in in Galatians?

JMcK I was thinking that there is a distinction between the simple action of divine power and the action of divine affection that results in family.

MJW It is John's line and Paul's line.

JMcK New creation is the simple action of divine power. God acts from His own side and is supreme in it, but as to family we are born, and we develop in an area where divine love is.

DJW Going back to new creation, how does the expression “workmanship” come into it?

MJW “The work of thy fingers”, there is great detail, Ps 8: 3.

DJW Workmanship seems to convey the idea of skill. It says in Genesis 2 (we referred earlier as to the man being complete) when He makes the woman, He formed the woman, divine workmanship, skill.

MJW Adam must have thought of that when he saw Eve with her beauty as she was as brought to him, His workmanship. I think viewing things just in a natural sense the creation of man and woman is a wonderful thing, but if you view it in the new, how much greater, especially looking at it in the assembly, “we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works”.

I hope the young people will remember the salient points that I have made about the death of Christ, and all that belonged to the old being removed, both what was contrary and also what we might think of

as acceptable, all gone and something new that is perfect in itself and entirely of God remains. As you are a believer, and you have the Holy Spirit, you are in it.

RDP-r What do you mean by the “Israel of God”?

MJW It is an interesting reference, because he was writing to people who had returned to the law for their righteousness, and yet he would assure them that it does not mean that Israel is not going to come in for blessing. There is such a thing as the “Israel of God”, and it would involve again new creation, the new order of things that the “Israel of God” would find their place in. I think it is an exceedingly skilful touch by the apostle, as though he was reinstating Israel spiritually as formed by God for His pleasure and it will join in that wonderful chorus.

RDP-r I wondered whether it would link with everything that was under the control and rule of Christ? I was thinking of Israel as God's chosen people and Christ as God's exalted Man, all under His control.

MJW Yes, very good.

Spaldwick

14th June 2008

List of initials:

R H Brown, East Finchley; R J Flowerdew, Sunbury; R W Flowerdew, Sunbury; H T Franklin, Grimsby; J C Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; K Marshall, Rotherham; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; J McKay, Witney; R D Painter, Yeovil; R D Plant, Birmingham; M J Picton, Spaldwick; R Walker, Spaldwick; B D White, Spaldwick, M J Welch, Newport; D C White, Londonderry; D J Willetts, Birmingham

THE WAYS OF GOD

Michael J Welch

Job 1: 1-3, 13-22; 2: 7-10; 3: 1

James 5: 11

Jonah 1: 1-17; 2: 10

Genesis 14: 13, 14

Hebrews 12: 9-11

I have been told that Mr George Ware said, 'In the ways of God there are four things that God has in His mind: 1) that you should get the benefit from the discipline, 2) that you can help somebody else in the same circumstances, 3) the place that you will have in the millennium, and 4) the place that you will have along with many others in eternity'. All those things you are being prepared for now, they are calculated in God's ways for those four reasons.

I repeat these four things: the ways of God are for you yourself; then that you can help somebody else when they are in similar circumstances, to help and comfort them and tell them your experiences; then your place in the millennium (who knows, you may be responsible for ten cities, and the things you have learned in this life in the ways of God will be able to assist in that great day where the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah will cover the earth); and finally for your place in eternity. You are being prepared for all those things. Think of that when the ways of God are hard upon you.

Mr Alan Bellamy said in a preaching that none of us is converted apart from the ways of God. Job is an example. Is he like a 'fair weather' Christian? When things are going right Job is a happy man. I know that feeling only too well; things seem to be going well, I seem to be prospering in my soul. Job was a great man, and obviously blessed by God, and for someone to have all those things that he had was an evidence of God's blessing. He had become complacent and self-righteous and when these terrible things happened to Job he was touched to the quick. I speak feelingly; I would say that my experience is that the things that have helped me most in my soul are the things that have touched me most deeply, things that I would not welcome, and yet if I look at them I have to say that in them was the greatest blessing I had for my soul.

Job was taken off balance. First of all the thing that he said when it all happened was remarkable, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away". There was a deep core of integrity with Job. He was

a great man, and the work of God in him was very real. When these pressures came upon him his reaction was a right one, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away". But Satan said to God, 'Just go a little bit further, you have taken away all he has, all his family and all the things he has, his animals, his servants, but touch him in his body and see what happens'. So Job had the awful botch; imagine the scales over his body. He had to get a potsherd to scrape himself with. Even then, his wife said to him, "curse God and die". I wonder whether in the ways of God she thought of what she said then, because that found her out too. The ways of God find us out, but that is the very reason for His ways with us. He finds things out and they become exposed to us and we learn to judge them. That is how the ways of God are used for our conversion. Job's wife was cut to the quick; she had lost all her family - maybe her daughters were spared because at the end of the book it says that Job had twice as much of everything else as he had at the beginning - but what Job's wife said is recorded in the Scriptures, and I am sure she regretted having said it. This is a good illustration of what I am saying, that the ways of God find us out. Job was an upright man, he was a righteous man in his own eyes, a man of integrity, and yet God saw that Job needed to be converted, he needed to understand the depths of wickedness, or opposition to God, that that there were in himself, even though he was such a man of integrity. It says, "Job opened his mouth and cursed his day" - you may say it is all very negative, but it is not, because a man of Job's quality would think about the reaction that there was and he would see things in himself that he had never seen before. He says, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes". Can you see how the ways of God are used for our conversion? It is not just the word - you might say you are stretching the scripture because it was Elihu's ministry that really was the help. It was, but the catalyst for it and the things that brought it all to light, and brought to light Job's and his wife's state were the circumstances that occurred.

What does James say about it? James must have been a very feeling man - how he writes Job up, "Ye have heard of the endurance of Job" - think how he writes Job up - "and seen the end of the Lord". I think that is a wonderful thing - God has an end for you and me, He has a purpose for you and me. It is not going to be all trouble. Hebrews speaks of an "afterwards". God, if He brings in discipline, has an end in it and He full of tender compassion and pitiful. Let us remember what James could say about Job, with all the terrible things that happened to him. In anything that happens God has a purpose and He has an end in

view that will be for His glory and for your blessing.

I read about Jonah and it says, "And Jehovah prepared a great fish" - the ways of God are all designed, I think extraordinarily designed, fitting you perfectly, suited to your failures. I know that the things that in the government of God I suffer because of the things I have done in my history are perfectly suited, so that in those things in which I failed I maintain self-judgement. I know that in myself. How wonderful is the skill of the blessed God in His discipline that He brings in what is exactly suited, not only to keep at bay what naturally would mark you, but to bring in what would be for your blessing. What I think is interesting about Jonah is that this fish was prepared - can you imagine being inside a fish for three days and three nights with no water there? You could breathe, but it says, "The weeds were wrapped about my head" (chap 2: 5), think of that experience. Jonah was not sitting in a comfortable seat with the windscreen in front of him and steering wheel and guiding the fish as to where it would go. He had to go where the fish went, and that is like your discipline. Maybe you have to care for a loved one, maybe you have a difficult child. You have to go where the fish goes, you have no control over the circumstance, you are in that circumstance, you cannot control it, it will control you, just like Jonah's fish. God prepared that fish. You are in these circumstances, you do not like them; I am sure Jonah did not like it, he had no control of the fish, suddenly it would go one way, then another and then up - just like the ways of God with us, seemingly rough. Had God forgotten Jonah? No, and He does not forget you.

A Holy Father's constant care
Keeps watch with an unwearied eye, (Hymn 138)

He did not forget Jonah. Before Jonah had been through this experience he was a wilful man. Job was a self-righteous person; I suppose we are often like that, either self-righteous or wilful, and the ways of God find us out, but they find us out so that we may judge what we find in ourselves, so that we may get help, and so that God will bless us. It says, "Jehovah commanded the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land".

I read about Abraham and his trained servants. We sang that in our hymn:

Thy word, Thyself reflecting,
Dost sanctify by truth,

Still leading on thy loved ones,
 With gentle, heav'nly growth.
Thus still the work proceedeth
 (The work begun by grace)
In each, made meet, yet training ... (Hymn 78)

We need training. When I serve, I say to the Lord, 'I want to be a good servant for You. I want to say what You want me to say'. There is training involved in that. It is very humbling to serve, but I think that is part of the training, that we all are in God's school. There is a book by Mr Stoney, 'Discipline in the School of God', vol 13. We are all in that school, and we are all being trained, whether it is for our own benefit, the benefit of someone else, our place in the millennium, our place in eternity, we are all being trained.

I would like to mention that some children do not pray before they go to bed; parents do not pray with their children before they go to bed. I am not trying to make anyone feel awkward; all I am raising it for is that normally you would teach your children that as they go to bed they pray, you pray with them, or they pray on their own. It is a good training. It says of Timothy, "from a child thou hast known the sacred letters", 2 Tim 3: 15. That is another good thing, to read your Bible. Mr Walkinshaw used to say that the morning read is very valuable. Read your Bible, young person; become accustomed to it; it is most interesting. A young person said to us locally that it is ever so interesting, it has love stories, war stories, all sorts of interesting things in it. That is true, the Bible is a most interesting and instructive book and you should get to know it. But also a great thing is to speak to God, speak to the Lord Jesus, speak to the Father. I remember reading of a pastor, he made a list of all the things he wanted to pray about and stuck them on the top of his bed, and before he got into his bed he would say to God, 'Them's the things I want to ask you for' and just touched the list on the back of his bed. That is not right; you want to have a relationship with God. God loves to hear you, loves to hear you call Him 'Father'. I love to take that Name on my lips. I relish that, as I speak to God, I say, 'Father', with all the depths of affection that it contains -

A Holy Father's constant care
Keeps watch with an unwearying eye.

Call Him 'Father'. The Spirit cries that. We are sons of God through faith. It says, "because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his

Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father” Gal 4: 6. Say it! It is a question of relationship, and it is a very blessed thing. In the morning, dear children, say to God, 'Father'. Tell Him everything, tell Him your deepest needs, bring Him into the simple things, if you have lost your book, or some such thing. Have you ever thought of praying about it? You may have to wait a little while, but it will work if you pray to God to ask Him to help you find something. He will help you.

This is a question of training, getting into good habits and I suppose right throughout your life you will find that is so, whatever you take up. We need training as to assembly manners. I say to those who are younger that you need training in assembly manners. I remember Mr William McKay saying after a morning meeting, that Mr James Taylor said once about somebody that their part was like a beautiful island but it had no relationship to anything else; it was just that beautiful island on its own. I wondered what he was saying, but what he felt was that maybe someone's part in itself was all right, but it did not bear any relation to the rest of the meeting. That is a good assembly thing to learn about. If brothers speak, not to be mechanical, but as you are listening (and that is another part of training) you would link on with what has already been said. In the prayer meeting, do you follow what they say? Do you say, 'Amen'? All these things are training, a question of assembly manners. I think that matter of having an assembly outlook includes that the meeting is not just you on your own and God, but it is a corporate experience, and we should think in that way that our part takes connection from what has gone before and bears some relation to what comes after, not in a legal way, but in a spiritual way. There are all sorts of things like that. I think we need training to have an assembly outlook, that we are committed to what is of the assembly in our local meetings. In all these things, we are all being trained. It does not stop, we are always in the school of God, and you will find throughout your life that there are things you have to learn about assembly manners, “how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house”, 1 Tim 3: 15.

Abraham had trained servants, three hundred. Think of the power of the man, and think of how those people would be trained in faith, when things came upon them they could trust God. A brother reminded us of the hymn attributed to Mr Darby:

Thus ever on through life we find
To trust, O Lord, is best;
Who serve Thee with a quiet mind

Find in Thy service rest.
Their outward troubles may not cease,
But this their joy shall be -
'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on Thee'.

If you look at the scripture it is almost verbatim, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee", Isa 26: 3 AV. That is another thing you have to be trained in. Problems come along, you take them to God, but do you really trust Him, do you really think He can bring you through? It is another bit of experience. When problems came along for Abraham's trained servants they would have turned to God. He was a great man of faith, and he would have trained them to take things to God and trust Him.

I read in Hebrews because God always has an end in mind in His discipline with us. It says that we must not faint, and that is easy to say, "shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they indeed chastened for a few days", that is our parents, "as seemed good to them; but he for profit, in order to the partaking of his holiness". Think of that high calling that you have, to be a partaker of God's holiness. Mr Raven says that these experiences will help you in the sanctuary, that is the most holy place (vol 8 p330). These experiences that are in view of the partaking of His holiness will serve you well in the sanctuary. He also says that you are holy as God is holy (vol 15 p56). "Partaking of his holiness", what a high calling that is. But, that is the end in discipline, "to the partaking of his holiness". It says "But no chastening at the time seems to be matter of joy, but of grief; but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it". I do not fully understand that, but I think it means that when discipline comes along it finds out things in you which you judge, and things become regulated in your life, in your relationships with God. That is the "afterwards", it yields that, it is a peaceful fruit. Things are regulated by those that are exercised by the chastening.

I can tell you simply that I hesitated to speak about this subject, but I thought the brethren would understand the spirit in which I speak to them. In the presence of the discipline that they have, these scriptures would bear on them for their encouragement.

May God bless the word.

Spaldwick

14th June, 2008

REFINING

Henry W Jensen

Malachi 3: 3; 10

John 21: 1-17

Phil 3: 3-10

I would like to say a few words about the great matters of deliverance, devotion and dedication. The Lord is working with us all, constantly, through a refining process so that we come into the gain and good of deliverance, and so that we might be here in devotion to Himself and dedicated to the service of God.

I read in Malachi to indicate how God is set upon this matter of refining His people. Malachi was written at a time when there had been great departure from God; and even the sacrifices that were made were not acceptable to God, and He was indicating in this chapter where we read that He was going to come into this matter. He was going to come in and bring about a change, and He was sending a messenger on ahead. I suppose, in a sense, it relates to the coming of Jesus into manhood. It also relates to the day yet to come when the Lord will come and everything will be purged and changed, and He will sit as a refiner. What a time that will be, when the Lord comes publicly and the purification takes place publicly. All the impurities in the whole system in the world will be dealt with by the Lord Himself, as a Refiner. This applies to us and that is why the prophecy of Malachi was written, to apply to the people of God, that they realise that God is looking for what is pure in His people. He is looking for a refined product that will answer to His desires and answer to His love. He anticipated that as a result of this refining they would "offer unto Jehovah an oblation in righteousness". and while this applies to Israel in the context, I think we can make the application to ourselves. The refining process that goes on in our lives here, and in our circumstances too, is all calculated that there may be an answer to God in righteousness and an answer to His wondrous love.

I thought that what we read in John 21 showed the wondrous grace of the Lord Jesus in this process of refining. He knew what gold and silver there was in Peter and in Nathanael and in these persons that went out fishing. He knew what gold there was there as was the result of His own work in them, and there was precious silver. But they went off to fish and I suppose the gold and silver were just submerged for the

time. It is like ourselves, you know; we take up an independent course of things and forget about the things that we have just had revealed to us. You see, the Lord had come in amongst them on two occasions already since His resurrection and in the first occasion He breathed into them. How intimate the Lord was with His own! Peter received the breathing of the Lord Jesus, and John did, and Nathanael did.

Thomas missed it. Oh, it is a sad thing to miss the Lord's breathings, especially when He is seeking to imbue us with His own Spirit and that was what He was doing in John 20. He came in amongst them and said "Peace be to you" (v 21), and eight days later He came in again in wondrous grace, held out His hands to Thomas, and said, "Bring your finger here and see my hands; and bring thy hand and put it into my side", v 27. What grace on the part of the Lord Jesus. What refining was going on with Thomas and he came to it and confessed Jesus as "My Lord and my God", v 28. But here, in spite of the fact that He had been manifested to them in these distinctive ways already, the Lord in grace was prepared to manifest Himself a third time. "This is already the third time", John says. Mr James Taylor said this is an appendix to John's gospel (vol 6 p92) - what a wonderful appendix, to see how the Lord in grace was prepared to come into this circumstance of independence on the part of this little party. It may sound legitimate - to go off to fish - and it may have seemed that way, but Peter had left that work at least three years before. He left the ships, the nets, everything. He and Andrew along with James and John had left it, so why go back to something you left?

I read in Philipians because Paul never went back to what he left. He left it off and he discarded it and he realised it was under the refining hand of the Lord that he had been delivered from it. Deliverance is a wonderful thing and, I believe, the Lord continues to work with us all the time to bring about more and more on the line of deliverance. We need to be delivered from sin, the world and self. I suppose that covers almost everything the Lord is working out in our lives, to be delivered from these things so that we might be devoted to Him.

I did not read on in John's gospel because it is a long passage, but the Lord was working towards devotion in these men, devotion to Himself, especially devotion in Peter. A little further on from where we read He says, "Follow thou me", v 22. That is the devotion the Lord is looking for, and think of the wondrous grace towards this apostle who

was to be so important under the Spirit's hand in just a few days, when the Spirit came. I suppose it was only about forty days? Peter went off to fish and led the rest with him but the Lord was prepared to work with him further to refine what was there and bring about devotion, and I would say to help him to see that he was delivered from self, and from the world, and from sin. So the word says the Lord was on the shore: "early morn already breaking, Jesus stood on the shore" - He knew where they were as He knows where we are all the time, which is something for the young people to remember. The Lord knows where we are all the time, in all our circumstances. You go off to school and He knows that, and when you come home from school, the same. You go off to business and He knows that, as He is watching us all the time. Think of the wondrous grace and glory of that, the Lord taking account of His people and the circumstances in which they are. He knows when we are independent too, like these disciples were, and sometimes He arranges it so we get nothing out of it. That is what He did here. Here they were casting the net over the side of the ship, over and over, all night long and nothing happened. Not one fish in the net! How often He has to do that with us, to show us that He is in charge and we must depend on Him. There He was on the shore asking "have ye anything to eat?", and they had to say "No", nothing to eat. He had asked them that when He came in amongst them according to Luke 24, "Have ye anything here to eat?" and they had something, "part of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb" (v 41, 42), and so they could give Him something. The Lord is always looking for some answer to His own desires from us, but here they had nothing. How solemn that is! Someone has said 'all negatives, night, nothing and no'. How they were tested but all this is in view of their refining. Jesus was refining His own and John recognised that it was the Lord. He was the one who had leaned on the breast of Jesus, the one who had been the most intimate with Jesus. He was the one who could immediately detect that this had to be the Lord. You might say it was so simple, they should have all known it. The Lord said "Cast the net at the right side" and it became evident immediately that the fish had gone right into the net. It had to be the Lord, as it is the very thing that had happened in Luke 5, when Peter was asked to draw right out into the deep. The very same thing! How the Lord is prepared to repeat Himself in His grace towards us so that we eventually get the point, eventually realise who we have to do with. How beautiful that is! So John realised it immediately. It seems that Peter had to be told that it was the Lord. Thank God we have brethren who sometimes remind us

that we have to do with the Lord and that the Lord is speaking to us. That is what John did - what a fine service that was. Peter realised how naked he was. It is another negative you see, 'night' 'nothing' 'naked' all these 'n's' in the presence of the Lord. When they come to the shore the Lord does not rebuke them. He says simply, "Come and dine". What grace, what wondrous grace!

What I want to lead onto is the probing of Peter. They were all there and they all got the gain of the probing of Peter. The rest of them did not go home before Peter was probed. They were all there, and I suppose it was in view of Peter particularly but also the company because everyone was there, to get the gain of how the Lord was handling matters and refining His work in this beloved apostle Peter. So he is probed concerning his love and attachment to Christ three times over. The third time Peter is grieved about it and I suppose I would have been too, but the Lord keeps on. He keeps on until He gets this commitment from Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I am attached to thee". We have often been reminded of the way Peter finally spoke. The word 'knowest' indicated that Peter realised that the Lord had a different kind of knowledge of him in this third time as Jesus is probing him. It was sufficient; now the Lord can tell him what is going to transpire in the day to come when he is old - is that not fine? Peter has the knowledge from the Lord Jesus of what would transpire at His death when he would glorify God in his death. How fine that is! But in the meantime He says, "Follow thou me". The Lord is working toward that end with all of us - is He not? - devotion to follow Him; and how often we need the refining process to probe the depths of our attachment to Christ. How deep is my attachment to Christ? How firmly is my heart linked with the Lord Jesus? It is always a test, is it not? I think it is quite often a test that the Lord brings us in our circumstances and in our affairs, or wherever we feel the Lord probing us. It may be in the meetings when we are together, but it is all in view of bringing to light the silver and the gold. They are put there by His own work. What a work had been done in Peter already, what a work had been done in John, what a work had been done in Nathanael and these others that are mentioned here, Thomas called Didymus, and the two sons of Zebedee (that is James and John) and two other disciples. We can put ourselves in there, two others - I suppose I would have gone with them too if I had been there, as that is my inclination - to do things with other people. There are two others, anyway, and they are all being refined by the Lord Jesus. The silver and the gold were there and it was

soon going to be apparent that all the silver and the gold on the earth were in these disciples and the others that were with them in the upper room. That is where the gold and silver were, that the Lord had been refining both during His life and through death and resurrection.

Well, I read about Paul because I think he illustrates so fully the results the Lord is getting at in this matter of refining. He indicates what deliverance had taken place with him. If you read the epistles that Peter wrote you can see what deliverance had come about with him. You can see the devotion that was there with him, too, in writing those two epistles. What dedication he had to Christ as a result of what the Lord had been doing in his soul, working out in his soul, this refining process. But Paul expresses it in relation to this great matter of deliverance so beautifully in Philippians 3. He says he had had his trust in certain things and in that he indicates that he was, you might say, head and shoulders above so many even among the Jews, and even blameless as to the law. Think of that! A most remarkable matter to say that but I suppose it was true - blameless as he never contravened the law at all. Yet he persecuted the assembly and he says that. But he says "what things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss". That is deliverance. It is wonderful to be delivered from the things you might take the greatest pride in. You might have the most accomplishments and natural abilities, and so on - well, discard them! Discard them and count them loss on account of Christ. I did not read the whole chapter - wonderful chapter that it is because it goes on to devotion. Deliverance first, and then he says, "surely I account also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all, and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ". What wonderful devotion on the part of the apostle. No wonder the Lord was prepared to reveal such wonderful things to him concerning the truth of the assembly, concerning the worship of God, concerning the things we have been conversing about in the readings, things that are available to us now. Here is a man fully delivered from sin, from the world, from self, and devoted to Christ. He goes on to speak about this great matter of having fellowship. He says, "to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead", v 10, 11. That is dedication. What dedication in the soul of this beloved apostle, dedicated to reaching in the fullest extent the things available through the resurrection of Jesus. Then he goes on to admonish others

to follow him, to be followers of himself, and he says (I did not read all this but it is very important), "I pursue, if also I may get possession of it", v 12. You say, 'Did he not have possession already?' Well, he indicates there is still more to reach out for, more to be devoted about, more to dedicate himself to and then he says, "Brethren, / do not count to have got possession myself; but one thing - forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue", v 13. What a wonderful word that is to 'pursue', and as you read on in this chapter, he encourages us to pursue. How much there is to pursue in Christianity. Paul speaks that way to Timothy. He says in the first epistle there are certain things to pursue, and in the second epistle he says it again. He says in the second epistle, "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". 2 Tim 2: 22. That means we can do that jointly together, pursuing those things: righteousness, faith, love and peace. Pursue them! Mr Taylor said pursue faith because it may get away from you (vol 81 p382), and that is what Paul was doing here. He says "I pursue, looking towards the goal", v 14. What a goal it is: "for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." Then he puts it on us. Someone asked about this word 'perfect'. "As many therefore as are perfect", v 15. Paul has in mind full grown persons to be devoted like himself, delivered, and devoted to Christ; and he says, "As many therefore as are perfect, let us be thus minded". It is a remarkable word Paul uses - minded - he uses that in Corinthians too, the word *minded*. Your mind is a faculty, but he says *minded*, which means the bent of your mind is this, "and if ye are any otherwise minded, this also God shall reveal to you. But whereto we have attained, let us walk in the same steps. Be imitators all together of me, brethren, and fix your eyes on those walking thus as you have us for a model", v 17. It is a wonderful thing that a man was delivered like he was from sin, the world, and self, devoted to Christ, maintaining that he had not really fully reached the prize, that he was still pursuing, stretching out and pursuing. Yet he can say, 'Be imitators of me. That is what I am doing and you do the same'. What a devoted man he was, what a refined believer Paul was. Think about how the Lord worked to refine His apostles. No doubt in each individual case the Lord worked personally with each one to bring about the silver and gold that would be so valuable in the testimony. Paul came later, and the Lord was still continuing to work from on high and that is what He is doing now. He is not here with us as He was with the twelve; He worked with them personally, right while He was here, refining what was here for God.

But now He has gone on high and Paul is a perfect example of the way the Lord can work from on high to bring about a refined product where there is gold and silver for His glory and praise.

I trust that we might be encouraged, dear brethren, to pursue and walk in the same steps, be imitators of persons like Paul, be formed by the refining process that comes into our lives and see it in others, see it in those persons there on the shore with Jesus, as they could see what the Lord was doing with Peter. We can see it in others, can we not? Our dear brethren are going through deep exercise, and discipline. It is a refining process the Lord is working out. You say, 'Well, can I get the good of that for myself, what the Lord is doing with so and so?'. Let me take it to myself and see how the Lord is seeking to bring out this precious silver and gold that will be for His glory and will be here when He comes. This chapter goes on to His coming, and we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. It says "for *our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory, according to the working of the power which he has even to subdue all things to himself", v 20, 21. That is what we are all looking on to and what a refined product there will be in the assembly when the Lord comes. Is that not wonderful, think of that! The saints all having been through the refining activities of the Holy Spirit here and the Lord looking from on high, to refine the gold and silver in the souls of the saints, the work of God in its lustre and glory for His own praise when He comes.

May the Lord bless the word.

Grimsby

8th June 2008

FAITH'S RESOURCE

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Genesis 8: 20-22

If we think about what happens on the earth, we may be astonished at the patience of God. When He created man, sin entered into the world. He drove him out of Paradise and sin multiplied. After having called Abraham, He chose the people of Israel; priesthood, and royalty; all are unfaithful. The way in which man abused everything God did in his favour, and spoiled all that He established, did not hinder God persevering towards him. What has He then in view in persevering and being patient in spite of it all? From the beginning to the end the object is **Christ**. God's patience bears with His poor creatures, for He can rest in Christ.

Faith answers to those thoughts of God; it grasps them and understands God in His ways. Without doubt the heart suffers in the midst of evil, even if circumstances are difficult, faith is at rest. It waits. It grasps God's thoughts by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit acted so that a Jephthah, a Jonathan and many others were waiting on God, so that He might use them. By the Holy Spirit, faith answers in the heart to God's thoughts. It embraces their extent from beginning to end. It knows how to wait and, in a way, it is not less than God Himself. At the same time, it puts us in our place, for it waits on God and is persuaded that God knows what He has to do. It leads to activity, as soon as it is certain that God wants us to act. Then the highest mountain becomes a plain. Moses holds up his rod; Israel enters into the sea. There is no more sea, the obstacle is gone, for faith thinks like God.

God bears with all the evil man can do, for He has Christ's glory in view, and that that glory will become more glorious after all that seemed to nullify it. It is the same for us: we know that God will glorify Jesus and that all the efforts of Satan will only make Christ's glory spring up in a brighter way. Joshua and Caleb were faithful in the midst of unfaithful Israel. They bore the consequences of that unfaithfulness of the people, but with the certainty of entering into the land of Canaan, where the others should not enter. It is the same with Elijah, and, at the end, he went up into heaven in a whirlwind. It often happens, in God's ways, that faith must undergo, even maybe in chastisement, the consequences of man's sin; but in that faith waits with God, for it knows that God will glorify Himself, and it is satisfied. This can happen to anyone, like Noah or Paul. Faith thinks with God, otherwise it cannot think like God, for God thinks from above and we think from below. It is from above that God presents and manifests His thoughts in Christ. God's counsel in Christ sustains, if I can so express myself, patience in God. What leads to God bearing and blessing instead of cursing is the

sweet odour which comes up from Noah's sacrifice, a type of Christ's. It is here (v 20) that we see the **altar** for the first time.

God repented in His heart that He had made man. He can create and destroy. This has nothing to do with His gifts which are without repentance. There are many things which God created which He does not want to retain. He repented that He had made man and destroys him. But here we find a new thing: **the altar**. God smelled a sweet odour and said in His heart, "I will no more henceforth curse the ground on account of man", v 21. As long as the earth remains, that sweet savour will have continual efficacy. The order of the earth will not cease whatever man's sin; that is the heart of God. His affections are occupied with Christ, with the sweet savour of His sacrifice, and He acts towards the world in virtue of that fragrance. He can impose chastisements of various kinds, but nothing will deny the virtue of His Beloved's sacrifice. He acts towards the earth in virtue of that sweet odour. What a thing for us to know all that moves God's heart! The Bible reveals it to us. When God's perfection meets something which answers to Him, He accepts it and it is the perfection of the cross. Faith leans on that, it knows the heart of the One who gave His Son. From the beginning, God had Christ in view, and that is why He bore the sins which were before the cross, Rom 3: 25.

Salvation is in one sense something which is to come, which we do not yet have. To accomplish that salvation God acts towards us, in virtue of the sweet odour of Christ's sacrifice. If God says, "I will no more henceforth curse", faith knows on what He bases that upon. It thinks with God as to sin. It knows that all that He will do towards us, despite all our failures, will be in virtue of the satisfaction which He finds in the sacrifice of His Lamb, of the One who was made sin for us, so that we may become the righteousness of God in Him.

God is occupied with one thing, with Christ. I know that He must act according to that. I enter by faith into the thoughts of God and this sanctifies me. He does not act only with past sins atoned for, but according to the value of the sacrifice to God. Through all, my faith counts on God and on His heart. I meet difficulties, the church even is in ruin; but, whatsoever happens, we count on God in Christ and our heart goes on, filled with joy and assurance in His communion.

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