

# **A WORD IN ITS SEASON**

**SECOND SERIES**

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**No. 154**

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**“TO WHOM BELONGEST THOU?”**

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## **THE CHILDREN OF GOD**

**John 1: 11-13**

**1 John 3: 1-3**

**Philippians 2: 14-16**

**1 John 5: 1-5**

**Romans 8: 16-17**

**JL** My exercise, beloved brethren, is that during these days together we might be helped to inquire into some of the spiritual relationships that God has been pleased to bring us into. I thought in this reading we might first of all consider what we are as the children of God. In chapter 1 of John's gospel we see how we are divinely conferred with that entitlement through believing on the name of the Lord Jesus - marvellous privilege granted to us. In John's epistle it is rather presented from the point of view of the favour - a divinely given favour because it is the Father who has given it to us - that we should be called the children of God. In the epistle to the Philippians I thought we might consider some of the practical features that are looked for amongst the children of God in the sphere of testimony here, governing our conduct in a world of adversity but where, as yet, as the children of God, we are privileged to be under divine influence as we move around in testimony here. In 1 John 5 the setting is quite different, but one where we are given to appreciate that we are begotten of God and come to love and value those who are begotten of God, involving the circulation of love and affection in the family that we are brought into. It is a very great privilege to be brought into the heavenly family that we have our part in through grace, and love is clearly a prominent feature connected with the family. God introduced family thoughts.

I am especially interested that we should pursue inquiry in relation to spiritual relations, but there are natural relations too which God introduced. These have to be respected, though in any case death brings in the termination of these and when those of us who are amongst the living are taken to be with Christ, then these terminate entirely. The spiritual relations go through. In Romans we might find encouragement in seeing the link between the Spirit of

God and our own spirits as children of God. It is a very wonderful thing that there should be an affinity established between the Spirit of God and our own spirits, and affections being brought into harmony with the activities and interests of the blessed Holy Spirit.

I regard the subject of the relations that we may inquire into as prime thoughts of God, and we do well to be occupied with God's prime thoughts for they go through; they do not terminate. They were in the mind and heart of God ere time began and they will remain when time has ceased to be. One would trust that we might be encouraged in our times of enquiry to be helped as we look into these things. I believe there are two features that largely characterise ministry: one is that we should be occupied with the purpose and mind of God for us, and the other is that we should be exercised about the practical results which that should produce among us. It may be if the Lord continues to guide and help us in our inquiry that in the later reading we might take up the subject of the brethren of Christ, and I had thought we may go on, if the Lord helps, if we are left here for a further day, to look into the relations involving the man and the woman, clearly leading our hearts to Christ and the assembly. Finally, perhaps as the top-stone to relations and relationships, we may consider sonship and our link with the Father, the wonderful portion of the saints who are set together to form the assembly. Perhaps we can commence in this reading with enquiry in relation to the place of the children of God.

**KDD** It is fine to think that God's original thoughts come right down to our day, do they not? You would have in mind that there should be that which is for Himself. What you have brought us to begin with here as to the spiritual relationships is something that He desired from the very beginning, did He not? He desired to be near to man.

**JL** Yes, that would be an important thought that He has introduced them in view of His own pleasure. If we, through marvellous grace, are privileged to be brought into them and find our place in such a family as it has pleased God to bring us into, then clearly it is a happy portion for us, but we have to think of what God has had in mind for His own satisfaction. I think that would surely be before us

in our enquiry together because John gives us to understand that this whole subject concerning the children of God is not one that is “of blood, nor of flesh’s will, nor of man’s will, but of God”.

**RG** It is a fine thing that we have a right to be called the children of God. What do you say?

**JL** It is a divinely accredited entitlement that has been given to us. That is the only way that such a right could be obtained. How ever could any of us elect ourselves into the divine family? That would be a clear impossibility. I think it is to God’s honour and glory that He of Himself has been pleased to take us up. Divine sovereignty would enter into that.

**MJK** Does the thought of children of God bring in the thought of obedience as well?

**JL** Yes, that would clearly be a feature connected with it. I think we begin with a sense of the privilege of being granted such an entitlement to be in the family and the favour and blessedness of it, but then the whole subject bears on practical features that have to be seen among the saints, and that would involve obedience in relation to the will of God, would it not?

**MJK** It is a feature that belongs to children, is it not? It brings us into keeping with the mind and thought and will of God.

**JL** Yes, God is a God who is due that honour from our hearts. He is a holy God and is entitled to exert His will. What we are speaking of today includes the outshining of the wonderful purpose of His love. All these things would prompt our hearts to give honour to our God who has so blessed us, and would promote the feature of obedience with us. I think it would be normal in a household, even in the natural relations, that there would be a readiness for the child to obey where there is love in the family.

**SWD** Would we see this in the gospels in the life of Jesus? He looks around in a circle at those sitting around Him and says, “for whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in the heavens, he is my brother, and sister, and mother”, Matt 12: 50. Is that the idea?

**JL** Yes; at that time He was bringing out something of the moral characteristics of those who belonged to the family, was He not? Yes, I am sure that is right.

I think it is an important feature in relation to our subject of enquiry that these moral features should be found with us in practical answer to the spiritual privilege that we are brought into. We perhaps begin at the top then see how things work out in that way. The gospels help us too to see what the Lord was looking for and delighted in in those that had been given to Him.

**DMW** You mentioned that we begin at the top. Does the thought of derivation come in here, and also representation?

**JL** Yes, that is a good help. I was thinking about that line of derivation, and that links with this expression here in v 13, “of God”, taking us back to God as the source. It is good that we should think of the children of God as characterised by what has been derived from God Himself, and nothing therefore of blood or flesh’s will nor of man’s will, but it should be clear that what is represented is truly of God.

**DMW** I think it is very practical, because children would know when they go out of the house that they are representing what is in that house, and the parental side of things enters into their own behaviour and demeanour, does it not?

**JL** Yes, all that enters into it. It is good to grasp the point first of all about derivation, and to see that this is God’s mind, and it came from God’s own heart and was proposed by Himself, and has not in any way been contributed to by man’s will or flesh. We are born as it says, “not of blood, nor of flesh’s will”. These things are important and what then comes into expression should be seen to be of God in the family.

**DMW** It is very wonderful to see there could hardly be a greater thought on our side than to bear something of God’s own character as we move about among men.

**JL** I come back to the point of derivation and it is an important thought connected with v 13 here, “who have been born, not of

blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will"; and then comes the positive comment, "but of God".

**DMW** I am just struck by the attractiveness to heaven of what represents God here in His people, persons who are born or begotten of God Himself. Quite wonderful, is it not?

**JL** I think it also calls for respect for one another. I have that in my mind, and trust we will be helped to carry that in our affections so that we should have true regard for one another as belonging to such a privileged family. Relationships have to be worked out in a horizontal way in keeping with what has come down vertically, if I can put it that way. What is of God should find expression among ourselves in a practical way.

**APD** Would you say that receiving Christ is important, involving our affections?

**JL** That is really the starting point here in one way. From God's side it is entirely of Himself, but then from our side it is very evident that the privileges entered into are by those who had received Him and believed on His Name. It is important that it involves receiving Him into our affections, having a place in our hearts for the Lord Jesus. That must be such a delightful feature then under God's eye in relation to His children, those that love Christ and would honour His name.

**APD** He must have felt His rejection by His own people. And all the more precious the affection of those that love Him, do you think?

**JL** So in that respect this is like a new family brought onto the scene. There had been the children of Israel but as a nation they had rejected Christ. They had not received Him into their affections but now we have the introduction of a new family - the children of God, those that are derived from God and have received Christ into their hearts. It is wonderful that there should be an answer there in returning love to God Himself. Surely, love becoming operative in our hearts where Christ has a place, begins to form and characterise the children, would you say?

**JKK** His Name was given by God. It is "believe on his name", but His Name was given by God. Is that the derivation that you are



talking about? There is a connection there that is outside of this world.

**JL** Yes, there might well be a connection. I had not sufficiently thought about that, but the message was, “thou shalt call his name Jesus”, Matt 1: 21. That was His divinely appointed name. How fitting that we should have respect for that name. And God grants the gift of faith to enable us to believe on that name. We spoke earlier about divine sovereignty, and that all enters into this opportunity to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus and receive Him into our hearts. We can see how we are entirely being brought back to what is of God. We owe everything to the activity of God in love towards us; we generated nothing! We are speaking of derivation and what has been brought about or generated, but it did not come from our side at all, “not of blood, nor of flesh’s will, nor of man’s will, but of God”.

**PWH** Paul writes to the Colossians, “As therefore ye have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and assured in the faith, even as ye have been taught”, chap 2: 6, 7. That is a picture of children, “even as ye have been taught”.

**JL** Well, I have no doubt that all enters into the scope of the thought, but the starting point is a good one - receiving Christ into our affections - and that entered into the quotation you made from Colossians 2.

**PWH** Yes, I do not think you can be properly taught without first receiving Christ into your affections.

**JL** No, because you cannot produce spirituality from the flesh, and you cannot put spirituality into the flesh. So it can only be what is of God and begotten of Him that could answer to what is presented by God in Christ for us.

**RNH** Simeon received the Lord Jesus into his arms, Luke 2: 28. It speaks about “the child Jesus” (v 27); He came in as a little child but there was no reduction of who He was by reason of what He became; but He set out moral features in His obedience as He was growing up as a child and a young man.

**JL** Simeon is a beautiful example; I am glad of your reference to that, insofar as he illustrates so beautifully one who received Christ: “*he* received him into his arms”. That is a remarkable record, giving us to see the way that love and affection for the Lord Jesus came into expression so early – “received him into his arms”. It is a very great thing to have a place for Christ in our hearts. How much that means to God whose desire it is to bless us and bring us into the enjoyment of all these family relationships. It is very clear in my own mind, however poorly I might express it, that love is essential to the family, and that comes out in receiving Christ. That is the answering affection beginning to emerge in our hearts - receiving Him, and believing on His Name.

**TRC** I wondered whether it is really a demonstration of the heart of God, that when those that had a right gave up that right, God moved in relation to ourselves. Those that received Christ had this blessing bestowed upon them, that they come into this blessed relationship with God Himself.

**JL** You spoke about the heart of God. I was thinking a little about the feelings of God expressed by Isaiah the prophet when he says on God’s behalf, “I have nourished and brought up children; and they have rebelled against me“, Isa 1: 2. Think of the feelings of God’s heart - a family being brought up and they turned against Him. Now we are speaking about what is entirely of God, with a sovereign work there in the heart, and a preparedness to receive Christ into the affections, and a willingness to believe on His Name, a family emerging so pleasing to God.

**AML** Could open up the expression, “to them gave he the right“, and the blessedness of having had a right, for each believer?

**JL** Well, I thought it was a divinely conferred entitlement: you could not give yourself that right; you cannot appoint yourself into a family. A child does not have that prerogative; the child is born into the family. God Himself has given us that right, and this is the way that the right has been obtained, from His side sovereignly working in that it is all for Himself, but from our side receiving Christ into our affections and believing on His name, giving us the entitlement to

speak of ourselves as belonging to the children of God. Had you more in mind?

**AML** I wondered if it would be right to link it with Romans 8, “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God”, v 14. Would it be part of the blessing and enjoyment of sonship?

**JL** It underlies it. I think we are at the starting point in the sequence, if I might speak of it in that way, of these relationships, beginning with the children of God. That is basic, as brought into the family, to the rest of the relationships.

I wondered if we might see that in some way as enlarging on the thought of affection entering into what is being secured in the family from the passage we read in 1 John 3, “See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God” - a divinely given entitlement in the last scripture we read, but now the privilege of being called by that description, flowing from the Father’s love.

**RNH** Did the Lord Jesus proceed that way with His disciples in John’s gospel? He refers to them as His children. He gradually opens up the knowledge and the affection of the Father to them, “the Father himself has affection for you, because ye have affection for me, and have believed that I came out from God”, John 16: 27. Does that underlie John’s writings?

**JL** Yes, I am sure it does - those that have capacity to take in the appreciation of divine affections. Children value and appreciate it when they are loved. That is true of the natural relationship. How much more so of the spiritual relationships, so that we should come to really appreciate the warmth and love of the Father’s affections. There is something very delightful about this verse which I love to read over. “See what love the Father has given to us”. Where would you see it?

**MTH** Do you think this is a beautiful expression of the inherent characteristic of God - God is love? This is a wonderful expression of that love, that “what love the Father has given to us”. There are several scriptures that we can think of like this that “God is love” (1 John 4: 16), which is an objective statement, but as “given to us”

makes it subjective. I appreciate what you said just there, “See what love”. We can take account of the subjective outflow of this expression of God’s character.

**JL** We do not want to be unwise or have thoughts that are too high of ourselves but I have to say that looking amongst the saints as I came in today I had the impression, “See what love the Father has given to us”. We are sitting here among some of the children of God. May the Lord preserve us from thinking too highly of ourselves but may we take account of what the love of the Father has brought about and not ignore it, and thus value and appreciate one another.

**PWH** Why is it the children of God and not the children of the Father?

**JL** Sonship is largely connected with the Father. And we will get help as we go forward looking into that, but “the children” is connected with God and we take the thoughts as they are presented in scripture. I have no doubt we will get help looking at the special relationship that the Father has been pleased to take up with His sons.

**PWH** It is the Father that calls us the children of God. The Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God; it is linked with the Father’s thoughts.

**JL** He is pleased to express His affection towards us in that way, a Father who loves us, “See what love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God”. For that reason, as the children of God we have liberty to speak to the Father, we have an appreciation of the Father’s care, we give God thanks as Father for that care, and we have freedom in the enjoyment of the affection of a Father’s love for us. These things are a very great comfort to our hearts.

**APG** The children are objects of affection but they are also objects of care, are they not? “For he cares about you”, 1 Pet 5: 7. “I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters”, 2 Cor 6: 18. That is to those who are being faithful down here, is it not?

**JL** It is a very great thing to come to appreciate the Father's love and the Father's care. I have to say that I very often go over that verse in Peter where he says, "he cares about you", even if I am a bit forgetful at times, or become careless. Such is the Father's love that He cares for me. That is a comfort to us, day by day. We cannot do without the Father's love and care, can we?

**APG** It says here, "the world knows us not, because it knew him not". We are in an adverse scene as Christ was. The Lord knew that care when He was here, did He not? We are misunderstood and as strangers here, are we not?

**JL** If I go back to the point about seeing things, "See what love the Father has given us". I will not see it as such in the character of the world because what is in the world is not of the Father; indeed, it is enmity against what is of God. So, where will I see the evidence of the Father's love here? I think in a special way it is to be found in the happiness of love and circulation amongst the children of God, those that are the peculiar objects of His care. God cares for all men, but the Father has established this wonderful link with His children here. Our brother earlier inquired about the expression not being precisely used 'the children of the Father'; we have to take scripture as it is presented to us; that is our guideline and we do well to keep to scriptural expressions - there is a preservative in that as well. If we get too adventurous in our language we will go astray.

**RBH** For the receiving part, what we were receiving was a light that came into the world, John 1: 9. Without light you cannot see. So, this seeing what love - it says you have received the light that shone, the light that came to earth, the light that "lightens every man"; but all did not see it. It was available to all but all did not see it. Israel were blinded; we do not want to be blinded.

**JL** No; your point about light is an important one, and takes us right back, in a way, to the beginning, faith bringing in light into our souls, from God. But I think at this point we have proceeded a little further and we are able to see the love. Love is more than light. God is light, but God is love. That is the very nature of God. Clearly the light that has shone has brought us into the light of the knowledge of the love of God as revealed in His own beloved Son: "See what love

the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God”.

**AML** Does John really involve this in his comment that “the Father Himself has affection for you”, John 16: 27? He was really in the enjoyment of it himself.

**JL** Oh yes, there is no doubt about that. He could not have been in the bosom of Jesus without in turn learning of the Father’s affection. He would learn of the love of the Lord Jesus there, and clearly spoke of that in Revelation when he said, “To him who loves us”, Rev 1: 5. But he must have learned of the Father’s affections too.

**APD** This thought of children is not diminutive, but would involve maturity, would it?

**JL** Yes, there are two words for “children” used in John’s epistle. One is where John is referring to the little children and special features that were characterising them and needed for them, but this is rather the thought of being children of the family, is it not? What was your own thought about it?

**APD** Just that the thought of maturity would be seen in the children, would it not? They have been taught and have grown up. There are features there that would indicate that they are mature.

**JL** Yes, it is not a thought of lack of development at all, or lack of growth even, in that respect; it is just the privilege of belonging to the family.

**DMW** The Lord could say, “Behold, I and the children which God has given me”, Heb 2: 13. I was just struck with the mature thought of the family, divinely given favour to be there responsibly in love.

**JL** I think that includes the thought that in the children given to Him there was something that could be worked with, that was of God. There was material there that bore that feature of maturity, but a readiness to take in what the Lord would reveal to their hearts, and speak to them about, that could find an answer in their affections, do you not think?

**DMW** I think so, and the Lord, as it were, gives the lead in it. I just wondered about that, because it says, “Beloved, now are we children

of God, and what we shall be has not yet been manifested; we know that if it is manifested we shall be like him”.

**JL** What is your thought about the reference there to “now are we children of God”?

**DMW** Nothing of man entering into being born of God: it is the initiative of God Himself to have a family. We cannot enter into these things without faith, and yet we have faith in view of the manifestation so that as we are known we shall be. Faith links on with that, does it not? But in the meanwhile these features come out in the family: persons that are taught, persons that follow the Lord, persons that love one another, persons that know one another in the circle of love. I just wondered if faith does not come into that somewhere. The manifestation that is spoken of here.

**JL** Well, the manifestation is a future thought, is it not? It is in a way, at that point, when faith and hope have ceased to be because the time of the manifestation of the saints in their bodies of glory, like Christ's body of glory, will be leading us into final and eternal conditions. That is what will be made manifest, will it not? We will be made entirely suited to be with Christ eternally, conformed to His image, even as to our bodies. But there is something very cheering about the fact that, “**now** are we children of God”; that is what we are here and now. Is that right?

**DMW** Yes, and you cannot add anything to that, or take away anything from it. It all comes to light in the circle of love, the family circle. I just wondered if the Lord saying, “Behold, I and the children which God has given **me**” suggests that it is all going to come to light, but it is now known in the circle of love.

**JL** Yes, I think it is good to use that expression ‘the circle of love’. That is what the Lord enjoyed really in the company of His own. We might say that at times it appeared He almost credited them with more than we might have been inclined to credit them with, but He regarded them as given to Him of God, to whom He could impart all these wondrous things concerning the knowledge of the Father's love for them too.

**RG** We are children of God here in time. The thought of children does not go through, as far as I understand it. What you said as to the manifestation clearly showed that a change takes place.

**JL** Sonship is the eternal thought and takes over in prominence, but we never cease to be of the family. So, it ceases to have prominence and, in that respect, it is important that we see that it has a special bearing as the children of God on the present time. That perhaps takes us to my next point and that is how we appear as children of God *now*, in the scene of adversity here. When with Christ in glory and the bodies of the saints have been manifested to be conformed to His, the thought eternally is really sonship, is it not? Does that answer your inquiry?

**RG** It is good for the young ones to understand the teaching. I am glad that you have brought that out.

**JL** Someone once asked Mr Taylor, 'Is sonship just one step higher than children?'. He said, 'No, there is nothing higher than children as far as the thought goes', vol 2 p60; also vol 48 p87. There is a special dignity and favour attached to sonship, but what could be greater in one way than to be the children of God as belonging to the family? To go back to your point about the idea of children of God not going through into the eternal sphere, it is not that being in the family or of the family is ever in any way terminated, shall I say, it is rather that the expression ceases to have prominence because of the change of circumstances and the excellence of the favour of sonship? We will come to that perhaps in a later reading and see that it will be our eternal enjoyment.

**RG** Family relationships go through and we are thankful for that, but there will be many families. The family of the firstborn ones will be unique.

**JL** Altogether so.

**RG** Amen.

**JL** Nothing of God's prime thoughts will ever be terminated; they go through. That is why I thought we might occupy ourselves in these readings with God's prime thoughts because they were in His heart



before sin came in, and they will endure and remain for His glory when time has ceased to be.

**DMW** It is striking me as the enquiry proceeds, what we shall be - that involves all families being named of the Father and the firstborn ones having a unique place; so the family thought continues, but children of God has its primary application now, here, in representing God; that is my understanding.

**JL** Yes, that is just what we have been saying. And sonship in relation to our privileged place eternally is what will then come into prominence, is it not?

**DMW** Mr Taylor did also say that there is no greater thought than sonship (vol 60 p453), but, as you quote, there could be nothing higher than being derived from God Himself, the family thought.

**JL** Yes, that is what he did say; that is quite right. The practical bearing then of being the children of God at the present time comes out in the passage we read in Philippians 2, "Do all things without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God". That would all bear on the importance of the present force of being children of God, would it not?

**TRC** In John 1, He gave us the status that we are brought into as children of God. That is what God gives us as we receive Christ to be children of God. In the epistle, were you bringing us on to the experience that we are loved of God, and now as knowing the experience of children of God that comes out into expression?

**JL** Yes, in the scene of adversity and testimony here. That was largely the trend of my thought and it is important then to see that we exhibit something that is of God, down here as the children of God. Our brother made mention earlier in the reading of two particular thoughts: derivation and representation. This would include now the way that God is represented here in the conduct and characteristics that are seen among us as children of God in the scene of adversity, would you say?

**TRC** The children become like God; the features that we see in God Himself and have been made known to us come out in

expression in the children, do they not?

**JL** Yes, we might say reverently that the family characteristics begin to be seen in evidence here. May they be seen more! I thought it appropriate to read the section in John's epistle first because if I have come into the enjoyment of the love of the Father, and if I have taken account of that word, "See what love the Father has given to us", then I am not going to be a murmurer or a complainer, am I? Hopefully I will be preserved from a critical spirit. These things are all important. "Without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God".

**MTH** That was different from Israel, was it not? They were particularly marked by murmuring and complaining; yet one of the prophets says in the words of Jehovah, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos 11: 1), using similar terms of those same people, and yet they were particularly marked by murmuring and complaining.

**JL** Do you think that murmuring and complaining was in large measure due to the lack of the true knowledge and appreciation of God in their hearts?

**MTH** I have been thinking about that reference in the prophet because, of course, those terms are used of Israel. I particularly like the progression of your scriptures because one of the things that immediately differed is that His own received Him not. And so, starting from that point, and working through as we have, we see the difference, the separation to use that term: Israel was a child, God loved him - he is called a son there - but they did not receive Him. They murmured; they complained; there is a clear difference, and I think it emphasises all of these points you are making; the reception of Christ means that we should be more like Him too. I think that is key to all of this.

**JL** Yes; I think all that helps because we might say in that respect there was a clear sequence of events made manifest in the gospels concerning those that did not receive Christ into their hearts; they became complainers. Instead of believing on the Name they were

protesting until it came to the point, "When will he die, and his name perish?", Ps 41: 5. They wanted to get rid of that Name. But by contrast those that God had given to Christ were really constituted with hearts that were ready to receive what the Lord would impart. Instead of complaining there was a receptive area there for what was of Himself. My exercise now is for that to be seen in practical expression. Are we witnesses to what we have so favourably been brought into?

**DTH** The Lord says in John 17: 24, "I desire that where I am they also may be with me". How conscious are we of the Father's love not only for Christ, but the Father's love towards us? That is what the Lord wants us to enjoy. These epistles by John and by Paul all begin with an expression of love as coming from the bosom of the Father. It is a good thing even in the care meeting if we bring into expression what the Father has given us.

**JL** It is profitable to bring it into every meeting. Why ever should I forget the love of the Father?

**DTH** "Grace to you, and peace from God our Father", Phil 1: 2. They do not say when you come into the meeting, 'Here comes trouble!'. There is something bringing in grace and peace from God the Father; that is the solution.

**JL** We just have to challenge our own hearts about these things because it is manifestly evident that the enemy has been very successful in the days we are in, not only amongst saints but in the world in a general way, in disrupting family relationships to the utmost that he can.

**DTH** And assembly relationships. The beginning of 1 Corinthians is "the assembly of God which is in Corinth", v 2. You will never know the joy of what the assembly is unless you know something of the conscious joy of sonship.

**JL** That is true. I am thinking particularly of the relationships that God has been pleased to introduce and the enemy has been set against that to disrupt them. And it has had its sad effect, but where the love of the Father is known and Christ received into the affections there is a wonderful result, and a practical result. That is

my exercise about this passage here, “without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children”.

**APG** Satisfied persons do not murmur. We can think of the Philippians as satisfied with the Father’s love and their heavenly portion; we think of them as heavenly but down here, do we not, but they were satisfied with that? They would not murmur; they were satisfied.

**JL** That is just exactly my point. It leads on to a sense of inward happiness. I should rather say, it *springs* from a sense of inward happiness in our hearts, does it not? And it serves us well to make things simple. I want to know what you think about this word “simple”. That “ye may be harmless and **simple**”.

**APG** Does it mean just having one thing before us? Singleness of eye, only having Christ before us, as our Object.

**JL** That is just it. That helps greatly.

**AML** That would be linked to your earlier reference, “let this mind be in you which is in Christ Jesus”, 5. It is really the simplicity, is it not?

**JL** Yes, very good. In that respect, it is not simple in the sense of what is immature and undeveloped but it is singleness of outlook, and unity of thought on account of having Christ and the mind of Christ among us. All this is connected here very remarkably with God’s children. It all bears evidence in a practical way that we are children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation. There are two lines here: there is a crooked generation and there are the children of God.

**KDD** You can see somewhat of what you have been saying in the ones that were here when the Lord was here – “they recognised them that they were with Jesus”, Acts 4: 13. It was something not only that they were with Him but their way of life would have indicated that they had been with Him.

**JL** That is excellent, I appreciate that remark. That helps in bringing out the point that it did become manifest, Even persons

who of themselves might have tended to be critical could not but admit that here were character and moral features that bore evidence of them being in the company of Christ - true children of God.

**TRC** There is a dignity attached to the children of God. I wondered at the question that Gideon raises, "What sort of men were they ... ?" (Judg 8: 18), and the answer was that they were like Gideon was, "each one resembled the sons of a king". I wonder whether that would link with what our brother brought out there, that there was a dignity, they were recognised. Do you think the children of God have that dignity too?

**JL** Yes, I think according to God's mind that would be entirely so, and therefore it searches our hearts concerning the measure in which that is seen to be so practically. Some of us are retired, others of us are at work, some are children in schools, and we move about in all our respective spheres, wherever we may have to be, but do we manifest what is proper to God's children? That is a very practical thing in our daily lives, is it not? Do others who come in contact with us perceive that there is something there that is of God and not of a crooked and perverted generation, though we are moving amongst those who are characterised by that?

**TRC** I wondered that. We live in a world where people demand their rights but a child of God knows that he has a right to be a child of God and he does not have any other rights.

**JL** I think it is just so beautiful to remind ourselves again that this springs from having Christ in our affections. Our brother made reference to that earlier, receiving Christ into our affections. I can see that that greatly contributes to the lack of murmuring and complaining, and brings about a real satisfaction that helps me in turn to come out like Christ here.

**APD** In the reference our brother made to Judges 8, in verse 19 he says, "sons of my mother". Does that refer to the moral character of persons?

**JL** That is very good. You are thinking perhaps in one way that title would connect with the father in the family, but the moral features

connect more with the mother? I think that is very good and just bears on the point we are speaking of now.

“Irreproachable” - that is an important feature as well, so that there can be no reflection - I am not very sure how to put it carefully enough - but no reflection against God in any way in what comes out in His children. The features seen in them are irreproachable; they do not warrant critical comment, but they express what is of God that does not bear reproach.

**DMW** I am wondering if “simple, irreproachable children of God” marks persons with unmixed motives. The apostle says he had “no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how” the saints got on, Phil 2: 20. The contrast is to seeking our own things and the things of Jesus Christ, v 21. Would seeking “the things of Jesus Christ” set us in our proper orbit as the kind of man who was dignified here?

**JL** Yes, very good. The more we are engaged with these things, the more we will find inward satisfaction from the present joy of them and move suitably in the scene of adversity here.

**RNH** As to, “in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation”, does it show the confidence God has in His work, in His children? In the beginning, He put man in responsibility and he failed, but as children of God, God has confidence in His own work; do you think, that comes to light in the testimony?

**JL** And I think it is constantly influenced too by the grace of God. Our brother very helpfully made mention of the beginnings of Paul’s epistles and the ends of Paul’s epistles where so much is continually made of greetings in grace, and the grace of God forms us in our affections too, does it not? It helps us to come out like His children here. The apostle Paul was constantly wishing that for the saints in all the various assemblies that he communicated with: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you”, 1 Cor 16: 23.

Perhaps we should look at the passage in Romans 8. I was interested in the reference there to “The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God”. There is an affinity there with the Holy Spirit Himself. No doubt we will have more to say on

that same subject when we come to the thought of sonship, and the sons helped in responding Godward and towards the Father with suitable expressions, but it is a characteristic feature of those that are the children of God that the Spirit of God has a place there. I do not think we can truly be considered as born of God without the Spirit of God having a place in our affections. The term “born anew” in John 3: 3 is slightly different in that that is the early sovereign work brought about by the Spirit, but when we come to the thought of born of God, and the children of God emerging, there is something substantial there bearing evidence that the Spirit of God has a place of influence over our own spirits.

**PWH** Could you help us in relation to the thought of potentiality for growth in the children of God? I wonder if God has that in mind - there is potential for growth? I agree with what has been said about being mature, but I believe that this scripture here in relation to the Spirit, and then the side of suffering, brings out how we might grow as children of God.

**JL** Yes, I think that is a good thought. If the Spirit of God has a place in my affections and is active there, something must be developing and that would link with your thought. There is the potential because of the affinity between my own spirit and the Spirit of God for growth to be emerging. Reference was made to grace in Paul’s greeting to the saints - and Peter uses that expression too, “grow in grace”, 2 Pet 3: 18. These things bring about development in the children of God in features pleasing to God.

**DTH** One of the features of the children of God is suffering. It says here, “if indeed we suffer with him”; there are consequences. It is clear in my mind that if we are identified as the children of God, there is a witness to the sufferings of Christ.

**JL** Yes, and it is almost presented in the way of a privilege - a privilege granted to those who belong to the family to be here suffering meantime for Christ with the glory in view. The sufferings always precede the glory, do they not?

**DTH** Yes; it says “if indeed we suffer with Him”.

**JL** Yes; we had no part in the atoning sufferings, and we make that abundantly clear for all our young people here. Those sufferings were Christ's alone. But the sufferings involved for the saints moving in the features and spirit of Christ here in the testimony do involve present suffering.

**DTH** If you confess His Name, you will suffer for it.

**JL** Yes, but you will be honoured and blessed of God for it. That becomes known in practical experience.

**DTH** Yes. Paul says "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us", v 18.

**JL** Yes; he was well able to speak of it and perhaps no one suffered like him in the scene of the testimony here. He perhaps knew above others what the sufferings of the Christ meant but he rejoiced to have his part in them.

**DMW** So there is such a thing as suffering love that comes out in the family. The passage in Romans 8 seems to exhort to faithfulness to Christ during His absence and that way having communion with the Spirit in it - suffering with Christ. So that faithful love is a companion of suffering love it seems to me, and what an encouragement it is that we get the witness of the Spirit inwardly in that exercise.

**JL** Yes, those thoughts help. I would like to know more myself about this affinity in relation to my own spirit with the Spirit Himself. "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God". You can see how that bears on what we were speaking of in Philippians because if I am murmuring or reasoning or grumbling then that is not produced by the Spirit of God. These things are no evidence that there is this affinity or this witness that the Spirit itself is with my spirit, but then if my spirit is in harmony with the Holy Spirit what would be the evidence or the witness that would come to light?

**DMW** In the context it seems suffering comes to light in the acceptance of the same position that Christ was in in suffering. Again, it is not atoning sufferings - it is suffering because of faithfulness, and love - faithful love and suffering love.



**JL** Yes, I think the first part of the witness is that we *are* children of God. It is seen practically that that is what we are as we act and speak like children of God and honour God here. In doing so, and as loving Christ then, as a consequence suffering will be involved meantime, will it not? But the prospect of the glory is in view.

**DMW** So my spirit is *myself*. Is not the idea here that my spirit is in harmony with the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God? And therefore that merges with the family thought of rightly representing God in the family.

**JL** There is an interesting link with John 4: 24 where when the Lord was speaking to the woman He said, “they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth“. That is not spirit with a capital ‘S’; that is spirit with a small ‘s’. It is my spirit functioning in harmony with the Holy Spirit, and the answer now is not only in a preparedness to suffer, but to be for God in a worshipful and responsive way, would you say?

**DMW** I like that - worshipful and responsive. It seems to indicate that there is one line that the Holy Spirit is on. And if my spirit is myself then that is what is going to go through as formed by the Spirit of God.

**JL** It is good to cling to that point you made - one line. The Spirit is not promoting diverse lines or multiple lines - one line. That comes back to the word again in Philippians - “simple”. Things become clear where my spirit is in harmony with what is of the Holy Spirit Himself.

**APD** The sufferings of the present time are in our spirits mainly, are they not? We do not know much suffering physically at the present time, but we can feel things in our spirits, with the Holy Spirit; is that right? You can certainly suffer and be with Christ in the sorrow.

**JL** Well, it is manifestly evident that none of us here in the room today have suffered martyrdom, and we are not accustomed to that sort of thing in this country, but some of our brethren do, in other lands, and we are not to forget that either as forming part of the body. We suffer in our spirits too as we bear feelings in regard of all these things for those that are passing through these

circumstances. It is all part of the present sufferings, is it not, that we carry in our spirits?

**MTH** So to connect with Philippians, “irreproachable” does not mean that we will not be in reproach. I was thinking of the scripture in Peter’s first epistle - it connects with this thought - that “as ye have share in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, that in the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exultation. If ye are reproached in the name of Christ, blessed are ye; for the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you”, 1 Pet 4: 13-14. I think what we are speaking of in this scripture connects well, “share in the sufferings of Christ”, but in that reproach the Spirit of God is again connected with that.

**JL** Yes; I would fully agree with that. I think that explains it much better than I could have when I was thinking about that verse. I wondered if it is rather the thought that I do not cause reproach to come, and just as was said of the Lord prophetically, “They hated me without a cause”, John 15: 25. Reproach came upon Him that was thoroughly unwarranted, but He Himself was holy, harmless, irreproachable, was He not?

**JKK** So, are these sufferings for God as over against personal sufferings?

**JL** I think what we are given to consider here is actual sufferings, borne in our spirits, at least if not more so, in the scene in which we move now, with the glory in view. I think these are really testimonial sufferings. We have made it clear that we have no part in the atoning sufferings but we do share, as the apostles and saints have always done in their various measures, in the sufferings of the testimony here, do we not?

**JKK** I appreciate that. We are to present ourselves a living sacrifice which gives some expression to that, I think, but again, the view here is that it goes outside of what I am personally. There are things that I experience, but the view here is to bring us into relation with God Himself. I was thinking of the way that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. If we are not moving in relation to Him and His thoughts then there is no witness that could be there.

**JL** I think the context here is that the inheritance has not been fully taken up yet. It says, “if children, heirs also: heir of God, and Christ’s joint heirs”. The saints do not fully come into the scope and fulness of the inheritance until Christ takes up His. Meantime we are in circumstances where there is reproach because Christ is in rejection. I think we feel that in our spirits and the spirit of God would help us in bearing these things, and taking our place as true children of God here with the hope of glory before us.

**AML** Is it significant that this chapter even includes the comforting word “the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness”, v 26? Would that include the testimonial sufferings? And the variety of the sufferings that the saints go through?

**JL** That helps. Even if I am weak in filling out these features, think of the Spirit of God graciously helping me.

**At three-day meetings in Calgary**

**5<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

## **Key to Initials:**

T R Campbell, Glasgow; A P Devenish, Edmonton; K D Drever, Calgary; S W Drever, Calgary; A P Grant, Dundee; R Gray, Calgary; R N Hesterman, Beachville ONT; R B Hill, Toronto; M T Holland, Calgary; D T Howie, Edmonton; P W Howie, Edmonton; M J Klassen, Aberdeen; J K Knauss, Indianapolis; J Laurie, Brechin; A M Lidbeck, Aberdeen; D M Welch, Denton

## **“TO WHOM BELONGEST THOU?”**

**Jim T Brown (Edinburgh)**

**1 Samuel 30: 13**

**1 Chronicles 12: 18 (to “Jesse”)**

“To whom belongest thou?”. It is a question posed in the glad tidings; it is relevant to every man, woman, boy and girl. Some day God will require an answer; everyone will have to give an answer to that question. The answer of this young man, of whom we have read, was full of pathos; he said, “I am a young man of Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick”. Was there a more pathetic picture? Born in Egypt, yet the servant of a master, who was an Amalekite, who had deserted him because he was sick, and had left him without food and water. Could there be a more hopeless picture, a more vivid warning of what might befall those who seek satisfaction in this world’s temporary pleasures? But the glory of the glad tidings is that there was hope for this young man, and for anyone like him. You can belong to Jesus! He died to save you; He paid the full price of your redemption at Golgotha: “For the redemption of their soul was costly, and must be given up forever”, Ps 49: 8.

Psalm 87 refers to those who, like this young man, were born in Egypt. “I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon among them that know me; behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia: this man was born there”, v 4. Rahab means Egypt, and what an awful outlook it is for those who remain morally there. Every man in one sense has been born in Egypt, born in sin: “by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”, Rom 5: 12. But then, through the work of Jesus, we can find our origins in Zion. “And of Zion it shall be said, This one and that one was born in her” (Ps 87: 5), born in Zion. What a contrast to Egypt! How wonderful to trace your spiritual birthplace to Zion, founded deep in the sovereign mercy of God, enveloped by the warmth of divine grace. Your birthplace there can never be undermined.

But this man said, "I am a young man of Egypt". The reality is that Egypt is ruined. Pharaoh's own bondmen told him, "dost thou not yet know that Egypt is ruined?", Exod 10: 7. Yet still Pharaoh persisted in his ruthless path, unyielding to the divine word, expressed through Moses. How solemn it is for any to reject the pleadings of God in grace, as set out in the gospel. God says, "I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which saith, My river is mine own, and I made it for myself", Ezek 29: 3. Satan lays claim to this poor world. What it must have meant to the Lord Jesus when He said, "the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing" (John 14: 30), a world He had created, yet presided over by Satan. What sorrow for the Lord Jesus to utter these words. So Pharaoh, in his arrogance, says he made it for himself. How awful to think of Satan shaping the lives of men and women, acquiring them for his own satisfaction and for his own pleasure.

But the attractions of Egypt will soon wane and ebb away. Isaiah 19 tells us that "the streams of Egypt shall be diminished and drain away", v 6. What deterioration there is in the world around us. The atrocities, the abuse, the overthrowing of standards and undermining of institutions, long cherished. But you can be sure that the rivers of this poor world, with all their tainted pleasures and pursuits, will soon be dried up because "the ruler of this world is judged", John 16: 11. Isaiah says, "the fishers shall mourn, and all they that cast fish-hooks into the Nile" - that great river of Egypt - "shall lament", chap 19: 8. How these hooks, plunged into this world's dark waters, have lured and ensnared men for generations. See the addictions, the allurements, catching and entrapping men, without power to escape. But there is hope: the gospel is the means of salvation.

What a sorry picture this is! Not only were this young man's origins in Egypt; he was also "a servant of an Amalekite". One thing leads to another and the situation becomes even worse. What does it say in Exodus about Amalek? "For the hand is on the throne of Jah", Ex 17: 16. The awful arrogance of it! What insolence that Amalek would seek to challenge the very rights of God and to

obstruct His work in men's hearts. His attack continues for "Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation!", and God will assuredly prevail. This young man's master was an Amalekite. He was under the domination of a man who used him for his own purposes and when that purpose was served or he ceased to be of use, he abandoned him. He told David that his master had left him because he had fallen sick. Deserted and hopeless, left without even food or water: could there be a sadder sight? How cruel the world can be. Sick perhaps he was with the excesses of Egypt, intoxicated with its allurements and charms, and left to his own devices, with no one to help. What a plight! Who could save him? None but the Lord Jesus Christ, the true David. It says that "he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, for three days and three nights". He was sick with no one to help him or provision to sustain him. He could do nothing for himself.

There were another three days and three nights, unequalled in this world's history, and that was when the Lord Jesus lay in the heart of the earth, Matt 12: 40. There were three unparalleled hours too. What significance the numeral three has in the Scriptures. There were three hours, when from the sixth to the ninth hour, there came darkness over the whole land, and when the sun was darkened, Luke 23: 44, 45. One often ponders that. There would be the ploughman, ploughing the field, and men going about their work, and then, at noonday, darkness enshrouds the land. What must they have thought? Ah, in these three hours God was forsaking His well-beloved Son in order that the basis for redemption should be laid and the way opened up into heaven for guilty sinners. He suffered to deal with the awfulness and vileness of sin. In these three hours, He bore the unmitigated wrath of God. The Lord Jesus bore it all, the full weight of God's holy judgment on account of sin, without one iota of alleviation, and He exhausted the judgment, blessed be His Name! His soul was made an offering for sin, Isa 53: 10. Can you contemplate the fact that the soul of the Lord Jesus was made an offering for sin?

Wonderful the work of Jesus, that not only did He bear the judgment of God, but He died and shed His precious blood on the

cross, He who came “not by water only, but by water and blood”, 1 John 5: 6. The Holy Spirit would emphasise the efficacy of the blood. Without the shedding of blood, there could be no remission, no remedy for guilty sinners like this young man, like you and me. What a remedy it is - the forgiveness of offences (Eph 1: 7), every one of them! “God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us, (we too being dead in offences,) has quickened us with the Christ”, chap 2: 4-5. He “so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”, John 3: 16. Through the work of Jesus there is “propitiation for our sins, but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world”, 1 John 2: 2. “*He* is the propitiation for our sins”, His was the blood, and His was the work of atonement.

Where was the hope for this young man, a product of Egypt with an Amalekite for his master? But the glory of the transforming power of the glad tidings is that he was transferred typically to another Master. He moved from the master who had dominated his life as under sin to come under the influence and authority of another Master, one who speaks to us of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a change! No more the unrelenting toil as under our former master, but now happy subjection to the Lord Jesus, who says, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”, Matt 11: 30. What a wonderful Master He is. What resource He makes available: they “gave him bread, and he ate; and they gave him water to drink, and gave him a piece of fig-cake and two raisin cakes, and he ate, and his spirit came again to him”, v 11. The reviving power of Jesus, how glorious it is! They gave him water to drink. Isaiah 21 says, “Bring ye water to meet the thirsty!”, v 14. That is what God does in the glad tidings; He brings water to meet the thirsty soul. Then bread to relieve the hunger pangs of three days and nights without food. The Lord Jesus is the Bread of Life (John 6: 35), the One “who comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world,” John 6: 33. How precious that the Lord Jesus Christ, having come to a rejecting world, has the capacity to satisfy the desires, the longings, of every living thing. He opens His hand and satisfies “the desire of every living thing”, Ps 145:16. So they “gave him bread, and he ate, and they gave him water to drink, and gave him a piece of fig-cake ... ”; what resource



there is for the needy, what mercy and grace for the sinner, the cleansing power of His blood to wash his sins away.

Then too there is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Himself said, “whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever”, John 4: 14. A young man as this, as met by the Lord Jesus, the true David, would never thirst for ever, would never be hungry again. This young man may have filled himself to excess in Egypt, laboured under the domination of an uncaring master, and he had fallen sick. But now he is cured and satisfied as coming into contact with David - for us, the Lord Jesus

So David asks, “To whom belongest thou?”. There was no doubt about Amasai’s answer: “Thine are we, David”. He was one of David’s men now, I suggest, one of those who were of his flesh and bone:

Thine are we, David,  
And with thee, thou son of Jesse.

He belonged to David.

David was anointed king over Israel at Hebron, 2 Sam 2: 4. What a wonderful moment it is when the Lord Jesus is crowned in our affections. Hebron stands in contrast to Egypt. That scripture we referred to in Isaiah 19, speaks about the princes of Zoan being fools. It says that the counsel of Pharaoh’s counsellors is become senseless, v 11. How acute scripture is in its judgment of Egypt and all that pertains to it. Then we know that Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt, Num 13: 22. Hebron surpasses all that Zoan can provide. In principle, this young man now becomes linked with Hebron. He would be among those, I suggest, that anointed David at Hebron, and he could say, ‘Now David is my master, David is my lord. My origins now are not of Egypt, I am not now a young man of Egypt, I belong to Zion I was born there’. Egypt and Babylon and the nations commemorate their great ones. Indeed it was sought of old to preserve the Pharaohs and the great personages of Egypt by embalming their bodies after their death. That may be of historical interest but serves no moral purpose. It will never have any living, vital outcome; but those born in Zion will never die. Mr

Darby says, 'Zion boasts of her heroes', Synopsis vol 2 p147. Your faith is bound up with a Man who lives, and lives for all eternity.

What a contrast therefore between Zion and Hebron on the one hand, and Zoan in Egypt on the other. What pertains to Christianity will never die; it is eternally living because it is centred in the Lord Jesus Christ, who Himself is God, but who came, in the glory and perfection of a Manhood which could never be surpassed, to accomplish the whole will of God and to lay the basis for redemption. So the believer becomes a possession of the Lord Jesus. It says again in one of the prophets, "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine", Isa 43: 1. Never from His grasp can you be loosened. The wonderful verses in John 17 speak of, "the men whom thou gavest me" (v 6), "I kept them in thy name ... and not one of them has perished, but the son of perdition".

David says to Abiathar, "Abide with me ... for with me thou art in safe keeping", 1 Sam 22: 23. What assurance is there! What encouragement for the soul: as we follow Christ, we are in safe keeping. Paul says to the Philippians, "I have been taken possession of by Christ Jesus", Phil 3: 12. As conscious of that fact, he said, "I pursue looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus", v 14. What a glorious prospect. For that is the prize, being with Christ for all eternity, and there we will enjoy the fact that we will be His possession forever: "Jehovah thy God hath chosen thee to be unto him a people for a possession", Deut 7: 6. How precious to think of the collective aggregate of the work of Christ, bringing together every blood-bought saint, to become a people for a possession for the gratification of God's own heart. Ephesians speaks too of "the redemption of the acquired possession", chap 1: 14. By and by, the whole aggregate of His work will come out in glorious display. 2 Corinthians refers to the One who "has anointed us" and "sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts", chap 1: 21-22. When God seals us it means He takes us as His possession. Nothing can interfere with that seal, the divine stamp which signifies that you belong to God, and nothing in this poor world can ever interfere with the reality of that fact. We look forward to the day when, as part of the acquired possession, we

will be for the glory of God eternally; but first, the gospel requires that we answer the question, "To whom belongest thou?". Every one of us has to do that. Let us turn away from the influence of another master, from Egypt's pleasures, as the hymn asks,

Art thou weaned from Egypt's pleasures?

(Hymn 76)

Then, as coming to the Lord Jesus and becoming His possession, you can experience the blessings, the sustaining grace and the satisfaction, which He alone can provide.

May we enjoy it freshly, for His Name's sake.

**Sidcup**

**10<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

# NUMBERING OUR DAYS

**G Allan Brown**

**Psalm 90: 1-17**

**Philippians 1: 18-23**

This is a remarkable psalm, possibly the first one ever to be written. Most of the psalms were written in the time of David and Solomon and their contemporaries, but this is “A Prayer of Moses”: a prayer. The fact that it is the ninetieth psalm does not take away from the fact that it was probably the first one to be written. It speaks of the greatness of God and His essential being as the One who inhabits eternity. It is not that eternity ceased, but God, who *is* love, to express His love, made that dip down into time and created man in His own image and likeness, having in view ultimately that Christ should appear and the whole universe be patterned after Him. All this was to take place in time.

What this psalm brings out is the relative shortness of time, some thousands of years perhaps, maybe millions of years; we do not know. Scripture tells us about six thousand years at least, but the shortness of our own lives here, our pathway here, is emphasised. “From eternity to eternity thou art God”: what a God we have! I was encouraged to read this from the hymn we sang, thinking of what God has in view, a universe of bliss, populated with persons patterned after Christ. What a scene it will be!

The whole vast scene of glory will display  
That fulness in a quickly-coming day  
(Hymn 293)

Sin having come in, man had to return to the dust: we know that only too well. The psalm speaks of how the grass springs up and flourishes in the morning and in the evening it is cut down and so on, but the verse that laid hold of me particularly was verse 12, “So teach us to number our days”. If we think of the vastness of eternity, what is human life? The Lord may come at any time, of course, but even at the most “threescore years and ten”, or perhaps

a little more, but it is all “labour and vanity, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away”. That is the mortal condition in which we are.

So we do not have all that many days, even at the longest, and I feel challenged, dear brethren, in saying this. More than challenging anyone else, I challenge myself as to each day. Can it be numbered in the divine calendar? What does it mean for God, for His pleasure, for His service, for His word today, in your life, in my life? What was there yesterday? Lord’s day, of course, is special, but every day: “So teach us to number our days, that we may acquire a wise heart”. This is very testing, dear brethren. I cannot say too much about it except to raise the challenge as to how our days are spent. Of course, we have lots of legitimate matters to attend to. Work has to be done, and education, and family affairs and such things have to be attended to; but then it says, “And let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands”. Whatever we do, let it be in the dignity of the anointing! Let us learn “to number our days”!

I turn now to Philipians because I think you see in the apostle Paul an example of one who is numbering his days. He is in prison and uncertain as to what is going to happen. He might be condemned to death very soon; he does not know. But he says, “for I know that this shall turn out for me to salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”. Every day, every moment of every day, “the supply”, boundless, endless “supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” is available. The apostle is making use of it. He could say, “For for me to live is Christ, and to die gain”. He would rather have died: he says so. It is as though the Lord had given him an option. He says, “what I shall choose I cannot tell. But I am pressed by both, having the desire for departure and being with Christ, for it is very much better”. Who of us would not want to be with Christ? It could be your portion and mine tonight. The Lord could come and take us all to be with Himself tonight, but whether it be that way or whether it be through falling “asleep through Jesus” (1 Thess 4: 14) to be with Him “is very much better”. “But”, he says, “remaining in the flesh is more necessary for your sakes” (v 24); so he was prepared to live on in service, but always numbering his days

and drawing upon that infinite, endless “supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”. What a thought!

Beloved brethren, this is available to you and me and, as we number our days, may there be something for the pleasure of God, something for the delight of the Lord Jesus, something too for the blessed Holy Spirit as He indwells us, and finds His promptings are being fully responded to! That is how our days are to be numbered in view of that glorious day when our sojourn here will be completed and we will enter into that wondrous day of which we have sung when

Thy greatness, Lord, the universe shall see.  
(Hymn 293)

I trust the Lord may bless the word.

**Word in a Meeting for Ministry, Grangemouth**  
**16<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

# THE WORD OF THE CHRIST

**John K Knauss**

## **Colossians 3: 16-17**

I was thinking of what our brother has just brought before us in relation to movement. There is something that works in us that causes us to move; and this expression here, “the word of the Christ”, is what would motivate us in relation to following in that pathway.

There are two elements our brother has brought before us - there are movements of grace and movements of love. The character of the Lord's movements was centred in relation to what belonged to His Father. What a tremendous thing to take account of - “the words of God”, John 3: 34. The delight to the Father's heart is what our brother brought before us. These words that are given to us (John 17: 8) should characterise us. We should allow them to have an effect upon us. I think that is what is meant by letting the word of the Christ dwell, and dwell in a rich way, in our hearts. The effect of the precious words that come from the Lord Jesus changes us, and they motivate us to do things that are different from what this world would bring before us. The effect in what is written here is an outward one. It causes us to teach; it causes us to admonish one another. It brings forward the feelings, the psalms, the songs, the characteristics of the experiences that we go through because they are based in relation to One that has accomplished everything. They are based in relation to One that God has His full delight in. And those words, dear friends, would cause us to help one another. They would cause us to encourage one another, build one another up, and to strengthen one another.

This world is a difficult place, but these words are great enough to overcome everything, because He has overcome everything. It says, “And everything, whatever ye may do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus”. And, dear friends, I think that is a preservative. The character of what motivates us is also what

can protect us. It preserves us from the state that is around, the character of what this world is. And I say this as much to myself as I do to anyone here, that if you can rightly say you can do something in the Name of the Lord Jesus, you will be blessed in it. If you find that you cannot do whatever is before you in the Name of the Lord Jesus, you should not do it. What a preservative character that is to strengthen us and build us in relation to the things that are for our eternity.

Our place is secured in the heavens. It is centred where He is, and the blessedness of His words will never be taken away; because that is the place where He is. The blessedness of being kept in that Name and doing things in that Name would lift us up, would build us up, and would strengthen us in view of everything that is before us.

May we each be encouraged for His Name's sake.

**Word in a Ministry Meeting, Calgary**

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