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THE EFFECT OF HAVING LEARNT THE CHRIST

THE BROTHER

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

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THE EFFECT OF HAVING LEARNT THE CHRIST

Edwin Mutton

Ephesians 4: 17-32; Luke 10: 30-42

Our brother in his prayer at the beginning of the day confirmed a line of thought when he said that Friday was a gospel day. I suppose every day is a gospel day and I want to say a simple word as to the effect that the gospel has had in your life and mine, whether it has had an effect and whether that is a continuing effect. I think God's dispensation, if it is to be furthered, will be furthered in the same way as it has come forth, and the gospel is the way that God has come out to us, not only generally but individually. The verse that is burdening me is this one in Ephesians 4: "But ye have not thus learnt the Christ", and I would like to raise two questions with every heart here: How have you learnt the Christ? And, what effect is that learning having in your life and your testimony?

I read the whole passage because it gives us the context of what is bad and what is good and what the gospel can do. It is amazing what the gospel can do. Perhaps some of us who are younger have not seen the effects of what the gospel can do. Time was when there were demonstrations of the power of God to turn a man or a woman living in debauchery into something that represented what God was and what He can do. We do not get that kind of dramatic change, especially in the circle in which we move, but it does happen, and every conversion, whether you have been brought up in a Christian household or whether you have been brought up in depravity, is as dramatic as that: "turned to God from idols", 1 Thess 1: 9. Every one of us who has had a conversion has learnt the Christ. That is the question I should like to consider in this address: how have we learnt the Christ? If you had asked Paul, the writer of Ephesians, that question (we get the record in Acts more than once) he would tell you that he learnt the Christ from a voice that said, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest", Acts 9: 5. What a distinctive conversion Paul had! It did not happen all at once, of course. He tells us that too. He tells us that the Lord had been

speaking to him before. He had learnt the Christ in the persistence of those goads that the Lord had put in his way and which Paul had kicked against. He had learnt the Christ in Stephen. What a testimony Stephen was! If men are to learn Christ it is in demonstration in individuals. The testimony now by the Spirit is in men and women like Stephen. Paul had that distinctive touch of a light out of heaven. As he heard that voice and said, "Who art thou, Lord?", he was expecting judgment. He was expecting to learn Christ in the way of judgment. You can almost see him cowering in the road: "Who are thou, Lord?" But the return message was, "I am Jesus". So if you had asked Paul how he had learnt the Christ, he could tell you. If you had asked Peter how he had learnt Christ, no doubt he would have said, I learnt Christ when that hand came out to save me from sinking. I learnt it when I saw His look in the palace of the high priest. Peter could tell you how he had learnt the Christ. If you had asked the jailor in Acts 16 how he had learnt the Christ he would tell you among other things that he had learnt it in two men with bleeding backs who were praising God in singing in that prison. But these persons had learnt the Christ and it had remained with them, and my concern, beloved brethren, for myself and for us all; is that we do not leave the gospel behind.

I do not know if you have noticed the tendency in your life to leave the gospel behind. You perhaps think you are beyond it. But everything that God has - we have been speaking of the way God has come out in this wonderful dispensation - comes to us in embryo in the gospel. Why do you think it is that God allows us to hear the gospel every week? It cannot just be for unconverted people because we get so few into our rooms. It must among other things be that we are kept in the current of how we have learnt the Christ. I wonder whether each of us can identify how we have learnt the Christ. It would be different in every case, the same blessed Man, but every saint has a differing impression. As we sang in our hymn, that is the great end that God has in His dealings with us that we should be like Christ, and there are going to be all these different rays of the glory of the glory that is in that blessed Man. God has Him in His presence now.

'No trait is lost, each beauteous grace we see,
All brought through death to shine eternally' (Hymn 229)

I believe it is right to say that every feature is going to be reflected in some saint; even in the little ones. Think of the myriads of young children who have died and are with Christ. Someone told me the other day that one child under the age of five dies every five minutes in Africa. What is God going to have from them? Think of those hidden years of the childhood of Christ. Do you think God is going to have that shining and reflected in eternity? I think He will. There will be something secured from all this sorrow and sadness and famine that men would call a waste of life. God is going to secure something from it, the rays, the features of Christ, reflected in everything that God has done. God is not a God of waste. God is not going to waste anything that is of Him.

We have been speaking of Christ and the assembly, that wonderful concept of divine purpose and counsel, and every bit of the work of God has its place in it, wherever you see it, wherever you come across it, if it is the work of God, it is assembly property.

There is nothing else being formed for God at the present time. What a richness there is in what God is securing in this dispensation which is in faith!

But how have you learnt the Christ, beloved saint? How have I learnt the Christ and is it doing anything for me? Remember the man who learnt God by being forgiven and he went out and throttled his brother. He had learnt the Christ but he had not put it into practice.

If we soberly considered many of the things the enemy brings in among us, it is a lack of an understanding of how we have learnt the Christ that causes us to falter and stumble in the way we act in administration. Administration is not primarily getting things right; it is keeping things right. Things are kept right in the power of the gospel operative among the people of God. There is nothing outside the gospel. Everything that God has to say to man is contained in the gospel. I suppose you could say the gospel is "all the counsel of God" which Paul said he had unfolded to them at Ephesus (see Acts 20: 27). But then they had not only heard it from him, as we were

saying, but they had seen it in him, seen it in the way he had learnt the Christ. I think it would be right to say that Paul was so distinctively helped because he was kept so constantly in the way that God had met him. We read this morning: "of whom I am the first", 1 Tim 1: 15. I do not think Paul just said that for something to say; I think he meant it. What is more, it may well have been literally true. There must be very few that have been converted from such a history as Paul's. I suppose Paul would have gone into a meeting and he might have had to sit down with a brother or a sister whose relatives, if he had not murdered them, he had caused to be put to death. What a test of the fellowship, to sit down with a brother like that. There is nothing in our brotherly relations which the gospel cannot meet. Think of those brethren in Damascus who had been warned of what was coming and then they see Saul walk into the meeting! I know what I would have done; I would have been very careful about having Saul come into the meeting. I would have wanted a long inquisition. But the power of God in the gospel is self-evident. You cannot mistake it. If a brother is converted, if a sister is repentant, if a young person suddenly gets a touch from the Lord, it is unmistakeable. It has its own credentials. We often say that about the truth. You can speak the truth, it has its own credentials.

You do not have to argue about it. You do not have to put your weight behind it or your teaching behind it for your learning behind it. The truth is the truth. As it says here: "the truth as in Jesus". You will notice these references - it says, "if ye have heard him and been instructed in him" - not about Him - "instructed in him". It is all in the Person. How have we learnt the Christ? I turn now to Luke 10, a scripture we often use in the gospel, and we often apply this Samaritan to the Lord Himself and rightly so. But I want to apply this scripture to show the effect of someone who has learnt the Christ, treating the Samaritan as someone like you or me. The Lord sets it out perfectly. He gives this parable. It may even have been something that actually happened; it does not say it is a parable. It says, "A certain man descended from Jerusalem to Jericho". Such things have happened, beloved brethren, these half- dead states, whether they be in individuals or in localities. They test us. This situation tested three people. It tested the priest, the Levite and the

Samaritan and it tested them as to how they had learnt the Christ. The priest came by and passed on on the opposite side. He did not want to know. He did not know how to handle the situation of a half-dead state. Then the Levite came along. You will notice that he was an official man, a Levite, capital 'L'. He was a man who was curious. He would come and see. He would have let everyone know who was in trouble, but he could not do anything. He passed on on the opposite side. Beloved brethren, sometimes the Lord allows things amongst us, a half-dead state, a person who has been stripped and wounded, and maybe not just an individual, but life ebbing out in a locality. Have we what it takes to deal with that? If we have not learnt the Christ, if we have not carried the gospel forward in our experience, we will have to pass by on the opposite side. We will be helpless. Have you ever felt helpless in a situation? I have. Have you ever felt helpless when trying to talk to a soul, someone at work, maybe, who has lost a relative? Have you ever felt helpless, perhaps even felt like passing on on the opposite side? I was in Scotland last week and we were walking along the road and there was a man lying there, obviously completely drunk and helpless, and my inclination was to walk by. My colleague went up and asked if he was all right, to make sure there was life in him. My natural tendency is to pass by on the opposite side. Why? Because the compassions of God have obviously not taken hold of my heart as they should. Let us apply that to what we find within the fellowship, let alone what we find outside. If we find a state that needs dealing with, are we able to do it or do we just pass by on the opposite side or take a curious interest as the priest and the Levite did? Beloved brethren, the line of what is merely official is a very dead line. We naturally love what is official. It does something for us, gives us an official position. But in the things of God it is an absolute hindrance to things being done.

The Lord made Himself of no reputation. That is the way the Lord served, sat down with taxgatherers and sinners; not the attitude of "I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men", Luke 18: 11. That is something too that tests me. I am sure it tests all of us. You go out into the world and see the depravity that is there and sometimes

in your heart comes this feeling: "I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men". The Lord Jesus came "to seek and to save that which is lost", Luke 19: 10. This is relevant, beloved brethren, to helping each other, helping our fellow-men. This could be you or me in the half-dead state. What is there in the locality that is able to meet it?

Thank God there is always the Samaritan. As I say, although it is the Lord Himself, I wonder if we have learnt the Lord in this aspect.

But then can I be the Samaritan? Can I be moved with compassion and come up and grapple with the situation? Have I the oil and the wine?

Have I the resource to bring in what is needed? Am I prepared to become identified with it? You say, if I do that, it might be thought that I am part of this condition. Well, that is what the Samaritan did.

It says he bound up his wounds. You cannot do that at a distance.

Paul could not get the truth vitally into the Ephesian brethren at a distance, by staying in the synagogue or the hall they may have hired for meetings; but night and day, in their houses, binding up their wounds, bringing in encouragement, meeting their difficulties.

Some things are hard to be understood. Peter said that of Paul's ministry. Paul would make them as easy as he could in the circumstances in which the saints were. He would find their difficulties. That is another thing we need help on sometimes, actually to be free to express our difficulties and exercises to one another. Apollos preached, and Aquila and Priscilla did not suddenly stop the meeting and say, Look, this is not the full truth. It says, "having heard him, took him to them", Acts 18: 26. Sometimes we do not handle one another as God has handled us, not the way that we have learnt the Christ. It is a very good rule of thumb, beloved brother and sister - at least I find it so - that if you want to do something and represent the Lord, you say, now how has the Lord done this with me? How has He treated me when I was in a halfdead state? How long has He waited for me to come round to His thoughts? How many times has He had to put me right? How many times have I failed again on the same point and the Lord has served me? O, beloved brethren, let us not go out and throttle our

brother! Let us think of how we have learnt the Christ and how He has dealt with us!

This Samaritan obviously had learnt the way that God had dealt with him. He did not worry that this was a Jew. He did not take any forethought for his own reputation. He poured in the oil and the wine and put him on his own beast. God has given you something, beloved brother or sister, some understanding, some ability, some gift in shepherding or even as a help. Make it available to those in need! "And having put him on his own beast, took him to the inn". It is a wonderful thing to think there is somewhere we can take persons in a half-dead state, bring them back to the company like Paul did with Eutychus, held him in his arms! That was a very similar circumstance. The brethren there obviously either did not want anything to do with Eutychus or else they could not recognise that his life was in him. They took him up for dead. What a sad thing that is, to leave a brother or a sister for dead. Paul went down and enfolded him in his arms. He would say, I know the way that Christ approached me when I was going on a headlong way. Maybe Eutychus deserved what happened. Maybe he had been sitting by the window and getting further and further away and suddenly he found himself falling out and the brethren could not handle it.

Beloved brethren, if we know how we have learnt the Christ we will be able to handle whatever situation God puts within our locality and handle it in a way that will reflect God and will bring in life. The great exercise in Christianity is to revive persons, to revive life in you and me, to further God's dispensation. God's dispensation was furthered in Eutychus by Paul bringing him back to the company where he belonged. Where he had been useless, where he had been a spectator, where he had been sitting by the window, now he was brought back into the company to enjoy the great things of God.

That is what God intends in Christianity, that a person should be in life, more territory gained for God, and this is the way it is done. The Samaritan brought him back to the inn and he still had not run out of resource and he was able to leave money there so that he could be taken care of.

Now, the sting in this scripture is in the tail: the Lord says, "Go, and do thou likewise". I think in the following paragraph Martha had the "do", Mary was concerned about the "likewise", how she had learnt the Christ. She was concerned to learn the Christ so that she could go and do likewise. There is a lot to be said for going and doing. There is a lot to be done. There is even more to be said for going and doing likewise. If God's dispensation is going to be furthered through you and me it must be as we have learnt the Christ in our own experience, not in someone else's. We can read the books, and the books are very helpful, but what about getting that truth, that light, that experience yourself of the Lord Jesus? It will not conflict with the books. The books will confirm it. The Bible will confirm it. I think it was Mr Raven who said that he received his impressions from the Lord and went to the Scriptures to have them confirmed, and that is the way round. It is the same if you are asked to preach, you young brothers. Get an impression of Christ; the Scriptures will confirm it. The Lord will give you the scriptures. What you need is an impression of Christ. Prepare yourself and the Lord will give you words, He will give you scriptures, but get an impression from the Lord Himself and do not forget the way you have learnt the Christ!

Well, beloved brethren, "Go, and do thou likewise". How have you and I learnt the Christ? If we have any sense - and every believer must have learnt the Christ in some degree or other-then let that remain with you that your testimony and your efforts to further God's dispensation will be on the same level as the gospel that has come to you in the person of the Lord Jesus. May it be so for His Name's sake.

MALVERN

27 August 1993

THE BROTHER

David Willetts

Acts 22: 12,13; Genesis 43: 30; 44: 32-34; 45: 14,15; 1 Chronicles 12: 1-3 (to "Ahiezer"), 16-18 (to "helps thee"), 38-40; Exodus 26: 1, 15-17, 26-30

I have an impression, I believe of the Lord, to say a word as to the features of the brother. There is a negative scripture in Revelation 12, speaking of the devil, where he is called "the accuser of our brethren" (v 10). The enemy is bent upon spoiling every feature that God has introduced. He cannot succeed, but what he can do is spoil the enjoyment of it for you and me. I feel the present time is one in which the enemy of our souls knows his time is short, that the assembly is about to be raptured; therefore he will spoil, if he can, not only the enjoyment of assembly conditions, of sonship and of our place as men before God, but, if allowed, he would spoil our relations with one another.

I begin with Paul. We often speak of the fact that he had an impression as to the assembly when the Lord said to him, "why persecutest thou me?" (v 7), but it is interesting that the Lord sent a pious brother, Ananias, to lay his hands upon him. This scripture says, "And I, in the same hour, received my sight and saw him"; He saw a brother. I believe Paul was profoundly affected by the sight of a brother. I think I can justify that statement because, in each of his corrective epistles, he links with himself either Sosthenes the brother or Timotheus the brother; and when he comes to the great crisis in Galatians he links all the brethren with him. It is a wonderful thing to contemplate that the truth of being brethren of Christ goes through into eternity. Paul seems to me to be profoundly affected by the brother. This does not mean to exclude the sisters, but it is that character of things where we belong to the same family. We get a great deal of teaching in the Old Testament as to the family of Jacob, and it is also interesting that the Lord takes up two pairs of brothers for His apostles. I wonder whether there is not some clue in that to

the value the Lord places on brotherly relations. Now, one thing that marks a brother is affection. In his letter to Philemon Paul speaks of him not only as a partner but as a brother, and as to the runaway slave he says, "receive him ... not any longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved brother" (vv 12, 16). It is a wonderful thing, therefore, to have our relations one with the other on this level as having the same Father. We are born of God. We are born "not of blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God", John 1: 13. That is, the Father gives character to His family. Jacob gave character to his family. The problem with Jacob's family was that they had different mothers, but we have one mother - "Jerusalem above ... which is our mother", Gal 4: 26. We have our origin in the same mother. I think all this would elevate in our minds the truth as to a brother. I do not think it is understood in Christendom. The whole idea of the clerical system degrades the saints to a congregation, so many units, but the idea of a brother involves a horizontal bond that is strong.

So I read that verse in Genesis 43. It is most affecting to me. It says "And Joseph made haste, for his bowels burned for his brother". I think that, beloved brethren, would really be the feature that would cause us to resolve any little difference amongst the saints. It says in Matthew 5: "If therefore thou shouldest offer thy gift at the altar, and there shouldest remember that thy brother has something against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and first go, be reconciled to thy brother" (vv 23,24). There is no suggestion that there is no happy conclusion to that. I believe the Lord would recall us in these days to some of these basic and yet wonderful truths, that the saints have such affection for one another (our bowels burn for one another) that we could not stand to have any distance between any of us. The enemy would love to bring in distance. He does not mind what initiates it, whether it is through personal feeling, or jealousy because of social status, anything as long as he can spoil what is for God. It is interesting, as to Ananias, that we do not get any reference to what his trade was, but we know that Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla in making tents. Think of

that! There was a man who had the equivalent of a university education, a high academic career, and there were two persons who worked with their hands, and they merge perfectly in a trade in view of the Lord's testimony. Apostleship involves authority, involves being sent and distinction of gift, but in eternity all that is done away, and what remains is the brother. Peter, at the end of his second epistle, says, "according as our beloved brother Paul also has written to you", chap. 3: 15. And John says, when about to review the conclusion of God's ways, "I John, your brother" (Rev 1: 9), as much as to say, it is not the apostle exactly that is going to see things through to the end but the brotherly spirit. In Amos where God takes great vengeance against Tyre because he forgot the brotherly covenant, He even says, "I will not revoke its sentence", chap 1: 9.

These things are very sobering but I do not wish to be negative but rather positive. It says of Joseph, "his bowels burned for his brother". What is going to be the solution to discord in the family? The solution was with this other brother, Judah. He effectively takes up John's epistle: he lays down his life for his brethren. He lays down his life for Benjamin in the presence of Joseph and the result is that Joseph cannot control himself. He falls upon Benjamin's neck and weeps, not tears of sorrow but tears of joy. It is wonderful when there is such a happy, holy intimacy of brotherly and, for that matter, sisterly affections at the conclusion of a crisis. Paul is so affected by this brotherly spirit that, though he had never been to Rome, he can give us a whole chapter and say something positive about each one of them, such as, they were in Christ before me, they labour much in the Lord. I wonder what we can say about our brother. Can we say something positive? - "each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves" (Phil 2: 3), not a comparison of negatives but a comparison of positives; so we find something positive that we can link on with.

In 1 Chronicles 12 it is the time of David's rejection. What a time it was when Saul's kingdom was getting weaker and David's kingdom was getting stronger! It is wonderful in our lives when Christ comes into the ascendancy. But Christ is in rejection and

here we have Ziklag, a sorrowful picture. I suppose we have to say that, if we are a witness to anything, we are a witness to the breakdown. Ziklag was a witness to breakdown and yet there is a great rallying point here, some of Benjamin's tribe - that is Saul's own tribe - military men, come down to David and it is interesting, and the reason why I read the section, that the chief of them is Ahiezer. His name means 'a helping brother'. It is a wonderful thing amidst the conflict and amongst the gifted men to find that the brotherly spirit is there, a helping brother. We may not feel we can do much in the local place, but at least we can help. Here is a man who came to David at the time of his rejection and he comes down as a helper. I would like to encourage all the brethren to help one another. Some of us have proved it of late. When things may not be going as well as we would like, we find a brother draws near and helps. The Lord will give you direction as to how you can help.

It is a time of crisis here. It is a military setting, "armed with bows, using both the right hand and the left with stones and with arrows on the bow". It involves conflict at a distance. You may feel that things are beyond you, but here are men who know how to conduct conflict at a distance. "Spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies" (Eph 6: 12) is a thing that we need to be protected against. There is a man here who was a helping brother. I would love to know something of that. In the next section in this chapter, following Ziklag, the children of Benjamin and Judah come to the stronghold to David. Now, David's tribe was Judah, Saul's was Benjamin. You may wonder what is going to happen here. Now, beloved brethren, the only reason a place is a stronghold is because David is there. I would like to encourage the brethren to relate themselves to Christ and that is how we know the strength. Here is a difficult situation where two warring families come together because persons have fallen away to David. David challenges them. He raises the question as to whether they are genuine and whether they are true brethren. He says, "If ye come peaceably to me to help me, my heart shall be knit unto you". "Knit" is a very beautiful word, is it not? Jonathan's soul was knit to David. How wonderful if our

hearts are knit to Christ! I do not think there would be any problem of our being knit to one another if our hearts are knit to Christ. "And the Spirit came upon Amasai, the chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David". It is wonderful when we recognise that we belong to Christ, to fly the flag, as it were, as to that bond which we each have in the local position as brothers and sisters. "Thine are we, David": but he does not stop there. He says, "And with thee, thou son of Jesse". Jesse was the reproachful name. He was forgotten in Jesse's house. He came last in it, but they say "with thee", prepared to be with Christ in His rejection. It is one thing to belong to Christ but are we prepared to be with Him? That is the challenge of our day, to be with Him, to help Him in the great area of things that is under His hand. Soon He is going to take the kingdom in its full sense. We are on the eve of that when Christ is going to reign. O, what a thing it is that He might reign in my heart now! Amasai says, "Peace, peace be to thee!" Wonderful when there is a sense of peace in our souls in the consciousness of being near to Christ. But he does not stop there. He says, "And peace be to thy helpers!" I believe, if we are at peace with Christ, there will be no problem with being at peace with one another. If we come from the presence of Christ to meet the saints, there will be no problem.

Well, the end of the chapter is a very wonderful time. They have come to Hebron "with a perfect heart". We were noticing when we were reading this chapter the other week that not only do they come with a perfect heart but they had one heart. It is like 2 Timothy days. They come with a pure heart, one which has undivided affection for Christ, that would have none other as its object or motive.

You could not fault the affections of those who came to Hebron. It is really Ephesian ground that they come to as having one heart. What a thing that is when the saints can merge in perfect oneness to give Christ His place! The effect of that is, "And there they were with David three days, eating and drinking". There is liberty and wealth. Beloved brethren, is there not liberty and wealth amongst the saints? Have we not proved it these two days as coming

together with Christ as the centre of our affections? The saints bring things - oxen, fig-cakes, raisin-cakes, wine and oil. You will notice that all these things have to be processed; meal has to be ground, fig-cakes have to be made, raisin-cakes have to be pressed. The Lord has worked with each one of His saints so that they can bring food into His house. What a wealth there is! There could not be a better atmosphere. There could not be a better company as the saints are knit together as brethren of Christ.

I will go on now to Exodus 26 because on the morrow we are going to be with Christ. We have spoken of being in the testimony in the place of reproach but now we come to this area of things where the brethren of Christ merge to provide something for God. The first section has these ten curtains. Ten refers to man in responsibility, so man is able to fulfil responsibility, and what it says of them is they are "of twined byssus, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubim of artistic work shalt thou make them". I wonder if we look at our brethren in that way, see something of the twined byssus, which is righteousness, and something of this blue, the heavenly colour, "such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones", 1 Cor 15: 48. It is easy to see the earthly things but can we look at the saints and see the blue shining through? Can we see something distinctive, the scarlet colour? If you found a brother like Saul of Tarsus, you would see what God had done distinctively in a man.

How precious to think of how a man who was insolent and overbearing can come in and Ananias could lay his hands upon him, identify himself totally with him and say, "Saul, brother". There is the distinctiveness of the vessel that was to serve, and yet there is a man there who identified himself with the brother with both hands. O that we might lay both hands on our local brethren, not just be half-hearted in our committal to one another. Then there are these cherubim of artistic work. There is something of the divine glory, something of the truth of God, sustained and upheld in a brother.

You look at a brother and say, He is a brother who is taught in the truth. How wonderful to nestle close to him as the next curtain.

Here it is all woven in and blended together. Is the local company

not tempered? It is blended together. You find there is everything that you need in your brother.

But then, not only are there curtains, but there are these huge boards made of acacia-wood. Again it is a reminder that "such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones". Our origin, beloved brethren, is in the death of Christ. We could never be called the brethren of Christ apart from being on the other side of death.

"Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it abides alone; but if it die, it bears much fruit", John 12: 24. It is in resurrection that the Lord says "go to my brethren", John 20: 17. So our associations are all on resurrection ground. In these boards something of the humanity of Christ is seen in the saints, and they have two sockets of silver, made with that half shekel of the sanctuary. It points to redemption, but there are two sockets: the brother is able to stand alone; he has his own standing in Christ but he is able to stand upright because he is linked to the board next to him. The idea of the sockets at the bottom is hands. There is something firm and strong in the foundation, in the death of Christ.

But then these boards are joined at the top - the heavenly character of brotherly love. So Peter says, "in brotherly love love", 2 Pet 1: 7.

It is like that link at the top. But then there is a middle bar that goes through. I think that is our love in the truth which binds the brethren together and the boards stand up; they provide support to hold the curtains and thus the tabernacle becomes one whole in view of the service of God. We are on the eve of that, beloved brethren. O that our links together may be pure and simple in the bonds of ardent affection so that, as we assemble and look upon the saints, we are quickly able to merge so that as Christ comes in we can move with Him on to His side and enjoy something of being brethren of Christ.

These passages are very full. I have just touched on them, beloved brethren, but that we might just see to our links together and make sure the enemy is kept out because I believe he is very busy at the moment, trying to divide the links amongst the saints. May he be thwarted in his every effort, for the Lord's Name's sake.

MALVERN

28 August 1993

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Ron Plant

Genesis 30: 25; 2 Samuel 11: 27; 12:1-7(to “man!”); Luke 22: 54-62

I want to speak, beloved friends, of the greatness of that love that has been occupying us earlier. As to its extent and its glory, it will take us, I suppose, eternity to explore in its fulness. But there is one aspect of it I would like to speak about in the short while before we leave today, and that is that it is a love that will not let you go. These extended occasions, particularly as we come to the Lord's Day, have always a touch of sadness about them because we have to leave.

We have to go in just a little while to our various places. We will never be able to put this gathering together again. What we have had in this three-day meeting and, I suppose, in all such occasions, you will never have again. Even though we may have taken a few notes, it will not be the same. What we said about the arrangements of the meeting are like the arrangements of His love. But what we have in it is a love that we cannot see. There is something there, God's presence is there, known in its warmth and its beauty, and it reaches into our hearts. The arrangements might not reach our hearts, but we cannot help but feel as we are amongst the saints and as the Spirit of God is free, that there is a certain warmth that is beginning to warm us up. Now we are going to separate from these meetings and we will never put it together again. The same personnel, the same arrangements, we will not see again. Life is like that; it is fleeting. Those of us who are older know that. We can remember times which we enjoyed and we would like to grasp them again, but they are gone. You find that almost before you have fully enjoyed it, it has gone and you are looking back on something that was fleeting. It may be that some of us will never see each other again down here. That is the solemn side. But while we are here at this moment it may be that God will just touch that heart of yours and change your life for ever because, while we have to go, there is a

love that will never let you go. There is a line of a hymn that keeps coming to me today:

'O Love that wilt not let me go'.

Someone was telling me of a young man who was a believer who had grown cold in his soul and he thought he would change his whole life, get away from all his background and all that had marked him, get a complete change - you know that expression, have a complete change - and he obtained a job in the Falkland Islands. He went down there and on the second day his new boss told him that he was a believer:

'O Love that wilt not let me go'.

You could scarcely get any further away than the Falkland Islands.

The Scriptures say, "If I take the wings of the dawn and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me", Ps 139: 9,10. How affecting these things are! Comforting too, beloved. Some of those whom we love and know are out of our reach, even physically. Some of them even though we may know where they live we cannot get access to them, but there is a love that will not let them go. These are very beautiful things, beloved. The gospel is for all. We often present it and rightly so for the unbeliever. There are not many unbelievers here tonight, I suggest, but there may be some. But there are many believers here and it is a very poignant word to all of us here who have known the Lord Jesus per haps for years. All of us know what it is at times to get cold in our affections, but His love will not let us go.

I read about three men, Jacob, David and Peter, all of whom in one degree or another in the sections read had had to do with God, and what we see in them is that, when they failed, they were too precious to God for Him to let them go. I wonder if there is anybody here like that. Have you known what it is to feel that you are unable to go on? When things are rolling in upon you in your business, in our circumstances, in your family, things are coming upon you that I cannot cope with?

There is a love, beloved, that will never let you go. It is lovely:

'Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!' (Hymn 272)

We had that lovely word in the last meeting that what He has begun in us He will complete unto Jesus Christ's day. You say, I do not feel very able, I do not feel very substantial in what I have. If God's work is there He will complete it and He will show it.

Think of Jacob. I suppose it may be an unusual verse to read in the preaching but it represents a point in Jacob's life where God just reached out to him and, as it were, said I am not going to let you go. He was a man whose beginnings were obscure. It is very difficult to find much on positive lines about Jacob as to his beginnings, but there were hints for us to see. Thank God for that!

Those of us who are parents and older ones, let us not look for too much. There were hints. If there are hints in a person's life, you see something and you say, that is fine; there is something there. You say, Well, I would like us to see more progress, perhaps take more part to God publicly. Well, there are some other things beside that, beloved. Jacob was one who loved the birthright. He may not have realised why he did but he loved the birthright. It meant something in that day. The birthright went to the firstborn. The firstborn inherited everything. In our day God is ready to give you everything. Though Jacob may not have fully understood it, he had an appreciation of the birthright. Thank God if there is somebody here like that. There may not appear to be much else, but there is something that holds you in relation to divine things. The birthright for us, I suppose, involves what Christ is in the gospel. I have often quoted that God has given us a right to Christ. To every man, woman and child God has given a right to Christ. How many do not take it. Give them an inheritance, some money, and they would claim it. Jacob was one who had a love for the birthright but was mixed in what he did. He had come to a situation where all his circumstances changed for him and what was planned for him did not work out that way and he flees his father's house - we cannot go into all the details - but God interrupted that flight and gave him an impression of Himself. It was in a dream that he had an impression of God appearing to him. Jacob was sleeping with his head on a stone for a pillow and God

gave him an impression of a ladder set up on the earth and reaching to the heavens and angels were ascending and descending upon it; that ladder was set up in relation to Jacob.

That is the gospel, beloved. It may be that the brethren in Malvern have arranged this meeting in the ordering of God that you might get a touch in the gospel of a love that will never let you go.

Maybe. It may be that most of us will never know it. It may be that when they put the chairs away and the meetings are over, they will never realise that they served something in God's ordering that touched a soul with the greatness of His love in Jesus that would never let them go. Jacob seemed to be a man who wanted to get away from God though He revealed Himself to him. He spent twenty years away, twenty years making his money, twenty years serving a master who was hardly fair with him and changed his wages ten times. Some body said, I do not suppose they went up! Jacob in his turn knew what it was to make money for himself in his own way.

Perhaps there is someone here like that who has been in the environment of the blessing and has gone his own way perhaps for twenty years. One day, through a circumstance in Jacob's life, God reminded him that He was not going to let him go. I wonder if there is somebody here like that who has never been vitally in relation to what is for God, never really accepted and gone in for the fulness of the blessing that God has given you. You may have accepted some of the blessings that Christian fellowship conveys, maybe enjoyed the company it provides and enjoyed the benefits of it, even meetings like this, but never really grasped it, never gone in for it.

One day, when this little boy was born, Jacob looks at it - you would never have believed it - and he says, "Send me away, that I may go to my place and to my country". It might not be that with you, beloved, but He can use and order your circumstances until a special moment in your heart. He might reach out His loving hand and touch you and bring you back to Himself:

'O Love that wilt not let me go.'

He wants you for Himself and He will finish the work that He has begun. With Jacob there were plenty of struggles ahead. There are plenty of things to be overcome, but Jacob is brought at the end to

be a worshipper and he represents something very fine in the believer's history. But I like to think of a love that reached out after twenty years and said, I am not going to let you go. If there is somebody here perhaps who has walked in the shadows near the blessing for twenty years, it may be tonight that word would just come to you; I am not going to let you go.

David is in a different situation. His beginnings were clearer.

Again we do not hear anything, as far as I know, of David's conversion. What we do hear about is that he committed himself early. He became affected by the ark of God at an early age according to Psalm 132. He said, "we heard of it at Ephratah, we found it in the fields of the wood" (v 6). You would remember the history of the ark. It had gone into captivity through the unfaithfulness of Israel and had been carried into the house of the Philistines' God. They had captured it. What a shameful thing that was! Scripture puts it so graphically: "And gave his strength into captivity and his glory into the hand of the oppressor", Ps 78: 61.

They had the temerity to stand the glorious ark of God, speaking of Christ, at the side of an idol, Dagon, the fish god, and when they came in the morning, the god was fallen down broken to pieces.

Finally the Philistines were driven, you may say, to send the ark of God back. Sometimes we think that everything depends upon us, beloved, but what the ark proved there was that Christ can look after Himself. And then, after it came back from the land of the Philistines, it was turned aside and put into the house of Abinadab on the hill and it was there for forty, maybe sixty, years or more, rather neglected. David as a boy had heard about it. Is there anyone here who has heard about the truth, heard about Christ?

Perhaps you have seen something in localities, seen persons who take up the truth of Christ and maybe outwardly it is in rather a poor way. David saw it and he says, "we found it in the fields of the wood", and he committed himself early. What a thing that is, beloved! He committed himself to serve God in relation to the ark and he says, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for Jehovah", Ps 132: 4,5. What a committal, beloved! Have you done that?

Do not be a bystander! Do not just stand on the wayside! Do not just look for weaknesses among the brethren. If you want weakness, I can show you plenty of it. But if there is a heart for Christ, you will not be looking for weakness. What a thing it would be if some young person here would say, I am not going to listen any more to the things that make little of God's people; I am going to find a better place for God. That is what David did. He took up the precious things of God and every bit of his wealth he used to accumulate something for God, to build Him a better place. I wonder if you can do that. You say, My locality is small, it is not very big, there is not very much there, not much knowledge of the truth. O, beloved, commit yourself so that, in the measure in which you can, by the time you pass off this scene there is a better place there than there was when you came. That would be the effect of the gospel.

That was David's early life. But as the years went on he failed. This is one of his most grievous failures. He was a man who had laid his life out for God, a man who had devoted his property - "I have given of my own property", 1 Chron 29: 3 - not exactly the surplus wealth that he had but what was his own he gave to God. It speaks somewhere of part of what he gave as a thousand thousand talents of silver. Who could measure it? Yet there came this time when he failed, and so we see that even the most devoted person can still fail. He fails in the most grievous sin. He lusted after this woman Bathsheba and arranged and planned so that her husband should be put into the front of the battle in order that he would be killed so that he could marry his wife. That is what he did. You say,

How could a man who had devoted his life to God stoop to such depths? That is what we are, beloved. You say, Well, I hear things even amongst believers that seem to be very shocking.

Beloved, there is nothing that could not be done by me, no sin that has happened given the opportunity. The flesh in me is the same. It says here, "And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of Jehovah". You may think you have arranged everything, beloved, so

that no one will know what you have done. Do not leave God out! I do not go into the detail of the parable except that what I wanted to say was that it came as a word to him, not a circumstance now like Jacob, not something that just touched his heart, but there came a *word* to him. I wonder if you have ever had a word. The prophetic word comes in in such a skilful way here because it worked on the shepherd heart that lay underneath the hardness that David had allowed to build up. He said, "the man that hath done this thing is worthy of death"; and the prophet says, "Thou art the man". O, dear friend, what conviction that was! What repentance it set on in David's heart but what it represented was a love that would not let him go. You say, He stooped almost to be a murderer, yes, but that love would not let him go.

Then finally as to Peter. Peter had had a conversion. There is no obscurity about Peter's conversion. He was a fisherman who had spent the night taking nothing. I expect he was a rough sort of man. He spent the night taking nothing. He comes in and the Lord Jesus goes into his boat and He says, "Draw out into the deep water and let down your nets for a haul", Luke 5: 4. Peter says, "having laboured through the whole night we have taken nothing, but at thy word I will let down the net" (v 5). Do you remember the history in the gospel, how the haul of fishes was so great that they could not pull it in? He had to call his partners over from the other ship and both the ships were filled with the fishes until they were sinking. It had a profound effect upon Peter because he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord" (v 8). Have you ever been convicted, beloved, as to your sinful state? It was through a haul of fishes that Peter was convicted. It does not have to be the gospel preaching. I always read out the first verse of the hymn in the preaching because I was first affected in the gospel by somebody who read out the first verse of the hymn. It was not the preaching itself. It can be that. It can be something someone says to you. It can be something someone at work says to you. Whatever it is God might just convict your soul as to your sin. Peter says, "I am a sinful man, Lord". What a lover of Christ he became despite his failings! He was a man who was brash and very outspoken in his protestations of love for Christ and what he would do for Him - "I am ready to go both to prison and

to death", Luke 22: 33 - but when the test came as it may well come upon so many of us, beloved, he not only failed, he failed grievously. The gospel does not come to righteous persons; it comes to sinners. It brings sinners to repentance. Where we have read he denied the Lord three times. One scripture says he "denied with an oath", Matt. 26: 72. The Lord had said to him that it would happen. Yet in this lovely scripture here which I read is the culmination of it all "And immediately, while he was yet speaking, the cock crew. And the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter". It was a love that would not let him go. The poet said:

'Tis that look that melted Peter,
'Tis that face that Stephen saw,
'Tis that heart that wept with Mary,
Can alone from idols draw'.

Beloved, the love of God is here tonight in a fulness that is without alloy, and which, as our brother says, is the life and atmosphere of heaven. In a world to come we will see the glory of a love that has come out in expression in our dispensation, indeed in all the dispensations, that has brought in persons from every part of His dealings, that will establish families on earth and in heaven from which there be a response to God for ever. How glorious it all is!

And that love is the love that will not let you go. May we respond to it, beloved. Our time is over, but might that love, 'so great, so full, so free' (hymn 341) touch you tonight and retain you for ever for His Name's sake.

MALVERN

29 August 1993

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Tom Munro

Romans 11: 21,22,32-36; Titus 2: 11-15; Jude 17-21

In the scriptures read there are, among other things, references to the goodness of God, the grace of God and the love of God. It is wonderful that these three great features which mark the blessed God are available to man in all his need. It is also important to consider that there has been a full display of these features in the Lord Jesus Himself when here on this earth. It is God's intention that you should be drawn to this Man tonight, drawn to Christ, not in your way but in God's way. Where do you stand in relation to Christ, friend? Are you a believer in Him or are you an unbeliever? It is an awful matter not to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and, if that is your situation, let me warn you, dear friend, that you are in a very perilous position. You could not be in more danger than sitting in your seat but not having put your trust and confidence in the finished work of Christ. We cannot assume anything in these preachings.

What I did notice in reading two of these scriptures was that they spoke of awaiting something. We move through this world and do our jobs as salesmen or painters or fitters but it is all going to end. It is going to come to an abrupt stop for every one who is in the position of not trusting and believing in the Lord Jesus and in what He has done. Friend, the prospect is awful to contemplate. So I desire that the word of God might come to us tonight because, if anyone is in that position you need to come to God, come to the Lord Jesus through repentance.

I refer to this first scripture as to the goodness of God. Hear in this epistle it tells us one thing about the goodness of God, that it leads men to repentance (see chap 2: 4). Now that is an amazing thing, that the goodness of God leads people to repentance. I would like to impress you, dear friend, about the goodness of God and how it is towards you, towards all men of course. That is the glory of the present time, that the gospel is not just for the forty-odd people in this room; it is for all. It is for the whole creation. The Lord said that

to His disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the glad tidings to all the creation", Mark 16: 15. He did not even say to men and women; He said "to all the creation", as if God's love and His attitude towards the whole creation is one of blessing, an administration of blessing. It is important to see the point of this, that it is towards all, because in the scripture I have read, Paul, the apostle, is writing to these people in Rome and telling them about the unique position that the Jew had. You know who the Jews are; you hear of the nation of Israel. They are Jews who have rejected the Saviour, they crucified the Lord of glory, but the Jews are a special nation who were set up before the Lord Jesus came in. Going right back before the Lord Jesus came into this world there was the Jewish nation and what a nation it was, and they were God's people. All the other nations were not God's people, and God marked these people out for blessing. He took them through the Red Sea, He opened up the Jordan and they went through. What a favoured people they were!

It is magnificent to consider the Jews! But after all that goodness that God showered upon them they finally crucified the Lord Jesus.

Of course we are all responsible for that, but they particularly so because He was the King of the Jews. He was the greatest Jew who ever lived. But He was the Son of God. He was beyond boundaries and nationalities. But they refused and rejected the Lord Jesus. They did not all reject Him. Thank God for that! But John had to write, "He came to His own and his own received him not", John 1: 11. Paul writing about the fact that God had rejected them because of their refusal of Christ, because they set aside His beloved Son who was the Heir. Because they set Him aside God has temporarily blinded them. It speaks of that in this epistle, that they are under divine judgment. They are blinded through unbelief.

Paul is speaking about the fact that, although the gospel is still for the Jew today, God through the incoming of the Lord Jesus has opened the door so that the gospel should be made available for the most vile sinner. Things are happening in the world which are very disturbing, frightening to think about. You wonder at persons acting in such a way towards their fellow creatures, but it just shows, dear friend, what is in the heart of man. Such is the heart of man as away

from God. But God in His goodness has come in to retrieve the situation, to recover man, and that is how His goodness has been towards man.

I wondered if we might see it in the Lord Jesus Himself when He was here. Peter, who was a Jew and chosen by the Lord, let the Lord down. He denied Him. Maybe, you might say, that was not a very grave sin. Peter had said he was prepared to die for the Lord, but the Lord says, "The cock shall not crow today before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me", Luke 22: 34. Peter went away and forgot all about what the Lord said and he sat down while the Lord Jesus was going on to the cross. When the Lord Jesus was before Pilate, Peter was in the background mixing with people who were Christ rejectors. Somebody started saying, What are you doing here? You are one of these persons, No, I am not. Then a lady said, I know that he is one of these. No, I am not. Three times he denied the Lord. And the cock crew. But the Lord did not turn away from Peter. It says, "And the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter", Luke 22: 61. Now if that had been you or me, we would have said, He has let me down again, I am finished with him this time. But, no, the goodness of God is expressed in the Lord Jesus. That is just an example, I know, but it shows that the Lord did not turn away from Peter at that point. Peter had let the Lord down terribly and the Lord looked at him. What kind of look was it, I ask you? Was it a look of scorn or of pity or of hatred? No, dear friend, it was a look of love, the goodness of God expressed in the person of the Lord Jesus. Peter went out and it says he "wept bitterly".

That is repentance. We might think that repentance is that I feel quite bad about my sins, but I think it is when we begin to realise that God's goodness is towards us, no matter what our condition or state is, or what we are as natural persons away from God. I think it is the realisation coming home to you, coming home to the conscience and penetrating the heart that, despite what I have been, God has acted for me. I think that that is the goodness of God, one of the things that lead to repentance - wonderful matter!

It says here, "Behold then the goodness and severity of God". As I have said already, it says "upon those who have fallen severity"

- that is the Jews. These persons have fallen away through unbelief; that is, the severity of God has been towards them. But it says, "upon thee goodness if thou shalt abide in goodness". I believe that is a very important thing, dear friends, to abide in goodness, to live in this area where we are in the enjoyment and the favour of God, that He has not only acted for us initially but He is for us now. God is for you. Paul says that again in this epistle: "If God be for us, who against us?" chap 8: 31. Wonderful matter that the eternal God has acted from His own side! Scripture says, "we being still sinners, Christ has died for us", Rom 5: 8. Does that not move the heart, dear friend, in repentance? That is what needs to be done by the sinner - to move towards God in repentance. What will you find?

Will you find a God who is against you? No, you will find a God who is for you. I just want to touch on this scripture in Titus which speaks about the grace of God - a wonderful matter to consider. It is expressed fully in our Lord Jesus Christ. I was thinking of the scripture in Corinthians where it says, Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ye know it. We know these things in our experience. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he, being rich, became poor", 2 Cor 8: 9. Is that not a wonderful movement of divine love in a Person who was rich in every way? Think of the Godhead glory that belonged to Him!

Think of the power that He had but He came into manhood and took up a position of poverty. He went the opposite way of every other man in this. Other men in this world are set for the exaltation of themselves and the building up of this world and all that that entails, but the Lord Jesus was marked by downward movements. It was a mark of Him that He was going down. That man on the road going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among robbers, the Lord Jesus went down that way to secure him. "He, being rich, became poor, in order that ye by his poverty might be enriched". That is the grace of God operating in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything is in Him. Our salvation and all our blessings are bound up with that blessed Man, believing and putting our firm belief and trust in Him.

So it touches on that here: "the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men". Wonderful matter, grace! It has been likened

to the waves of the sea and it is a good illustration. When the tide comes in there are waves, but when the tide is going out there are waves too. Sometimes you may feel things are against you, support seems to be going away from you and you feel alone and helpless.

Dear friend, the grace of God is towards you; you can count on that. These waves are constantly towards you.

I did not read about it but it speaks about the mercy of God. He has shut up all in unbelief - that is the position of man. There is nothing in your heart, nothing in my heart, that would naturally gravitate Godward because God has shut up all in unbelief. That is the situation of the human heart, that naturally unbelief is inbuilt into it; but God has shut them all up that He might show mercy to all.

The mercy of God is towards every one of us - wonderful matter! But grace is something else. I would like to borrow another phrase - we borrow some of these phrases - somebody has said, grace undertakes to do what mercy proposes. Mercy says, This man is going to be freed from death, he is going to be set free. But grace brings him into an area of blessing. Mercy can only take you so far, but the grace of God carries you into fullest blessing. Have you proved this, dear young friend? Do you know what it is to be saved, saved for time and saved for eternity? Or are you unsure about your present position before God? I would like to ask you, Are you perfectly sure? Salvation is what is presented in the gospel. How is it arrived at? By going to university and getting a degree in religious instruction? No, dear friend, salvation is only by placing your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the test for every man. I tell you again, there are many religions which speak quite freely about God, but you mention the name of Christ, that is the crux of the matter, who that Person is - Jesus! Who is it who came in? It was God. As was said by the angel: "the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God", Luke 1: 35. O, dear friend, the truth of the gospel is magnificent. It is far in advance of the ideals of men in this world, politicians and all the rest, and all the social ideals of the day. The gospel of God, the testimony of God, is wonderful, that God Himself has come in in the Person of Jesus, carrying with it

salvation for all men. Who are the people that know they are saved? Persons who realise that that One came in in all lowliness, taking a bondman's form, moving about in this world of sin and sorrow and confusion, available to the vilest sinner. There was no-one more approachable than the Lord Jesus Christ. Persons in all their sin, people that we would not look twice at in the street, the Lord Jesus could work with them, speak with them for an hour, and lead them in from being a sinner to a Person who could speak about praising God, worshipping God. That is what the Lord did. Such was the power and influence of this Person! O, dear friends, the Lord Jesus! Do you know Him? One could say,

"I know whom I have believed", 2 Tim 1: 12. It is important, dear friend, that you come and trust in Jesus, the One who died on the cross and shed His precious blood. It was not His life and the miracles that He did that will bring salvation to you. No, dear friend, as it says here, He gave Himself for us. What was that? It was the cross, "that he might redeem us from all lawlessness". Where was that done? At the cross, not in His life, great and wonderful as that was and an example and an inspiration to millions of people. What a life it was! Sent here. Men in this world, what do you see? What is marked by our own hearts sometimes? - self-centredness. That is what we are after the flesh and after nature, trying to get out as much as we can. We see that around us in the world today, men and women striving to get the best out of this and the best out of that. But the Lord Jesus was moving to the cross. There all my liabilities were met, my sinful condition and your sinful condition, dear friend. Do you realise that? Do you know why the Lord Jesus had to go that way, had to be put up between heaven and earth?

Because of your sins, because of your lawlessness which is inbuilt into you - born in sin and shapen in iniquity. There may be a measure of goodness, but the basic truth is that man is a fallen creature, needing redemption. He can go to all the colleges, he can sit under as much instruction as he likes but he is as bad as ever he was. improve his lot, take man and put him in any situation and what you will find is that the basic human weakness that he is a fallen,

guilty sinner will break out every time. The only remedy is to put your trust in the Lord Jesus, be converted, change your man, and realise that the Lord Jesus had to go by the way of death. If that had not been done, there could be no new way for you or me. That is the sad fact of the matter and how essential it is to put your belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It says here, "For the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared, teaching us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts". Notice these little inserts which bring up that there has to be a moral answer. It could have said, 'For the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared, teaching us that we should live soberly and justly, and piously in the present course of things'. It does not say that. It says "teaching us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts"; that is, there has to be some exercise that you and I have to go through to be maintained in the gain of these things because God is a moral Being. Things have to be right. The Lord Jesus in His Person is the Holy and the True; that is, that everything He said was upright and all the things that He did were perfect. God is a moral Being. I speak carefully in saying that because God is a Spirit and His nature is love, but He is intent that things should be right with you morally, and that means that we should know the practical gain of the denial of things which may hinder us as believers - impiety and worldly lusts.

These are exercises which relate to discipleship and are very practical and necessary and need dealing with by ourselves through the power and help of the Holy Spirit.

I just want to finish on the last scripture. This is very interesting because it speaks about the love of God. There are many scriptures, of course, that speak about the love of God, but this scripture brings out the very important matter of being maintained, that we keep ourselves. The apostle Jude is writing here and is saying, "keep yourselves in the love of God". How important it is that you and I, young people, keep ourselves in the love of God because, as you know, we can get away from it, we can get away from communion with divine Persons. It is quite easy to go on in an

outward line of things and really be at a distance from the Lord and not give place to the Holy Spirit. That is the character of things in this world: man wants to be independent of God. He does not want anything to do with Him. That can come closer home to me. If we have a void in our lives, in our hearts, it will be filled by something, but the divine intention is that it should be filled by the Lord. There is something in you that needs to be filled and only Christ can fill it.

But these words are the words of the apostle. We know the words of the Lord but this is "remember the words spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ that they said to you, that at the end of the time there should be mockers, walking after their own lusts of ungodliness". O that is the world we live in today. There has never been a time when Christianity - I am talking about the truths of Christianity - has been mocked and scorned as today. But you and I, dear friend, need to be preserved from that. We can be affected by that maybe more than we realise, and it is imperative that we all disown that kind of thing. The only way we can do it - we will never do it in our own strength - is in divine strength. So he brings in the importance of "building yourselves up on your most holy faith". What is that? It is what has come down through these apostles who were set up at the beginning and promoted this great truth of a risen Christ. It was not angels but men who were witnesses to these great things. It is a wonderful matter to consider the doctrine and fellowship of the apostles. They were the men who witnessed the crucifixion, who witnessed to the fact that the Lord had lain in death and that He was raised again. The way that they speak about things is remarkable. They do not exaggerate or anything like that. They speak about being with the Lord forty days after He was raised.

These were remarkable matters and that was what was set forth in power at Pentecost. Peter standing up with the eleven preaching to the very city that had crucified the Lord of glory. The gospel went out there. That was what issued forth from the apostles. But then Jude goes on to speak about "your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life".

I believe there is need for this myself, dear friends, to keep ourselves in the love of God. Love is His nature, I think keeping ourselves in it is the maintenance of things in a time of apostasy because that is what Jude envisages. That is the day that we are in. Supposedly Christian Britain is engulfed in darkness. This country has known the blessings of Christianity. There was never a country that has known such positive blessings; because it has allowed the liberties of Christianity, allowed the preaching of the gospel, and it is turning away from that. It is heading into darkness. As the Lord Jesus said, "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great the darkness!" Matt. 62 23. We need to be preserved from it.

Young people - I am sorry for you - do not rely on some of the things you hear at school. Be glad of these meetings where the truth can be spoken over, maybe in feebleness, but where the things precious to the Lord Jesus can be spoken over. That is how we can keep ourselves in the area of divine safety, keeping ourselves in this wonderful, preservative area. May we all be helped to do that so that we might be maintained. It is one thing to believe on the Lord Jesus initially. How important that is! I trust everyone has proved that experience for themselves. But then you discover after a little while that sin is still here. Sin can still operate if you let it. But we have to be here walking through the present course of things with all these temptations, all the attractions, all the things that men go after, and we have to say, Is that for me as a Christian? No, you have to decide for the Lord Jesus and be maintained in power and in life for His testimony. May we all be in the good of these things for His Name's sake.

1 May 1994