

new covenant Voice

*Gaze on that helpless Object
Of endless adoration!
Those infant hands
Shall burst our bands,
And work out our salvation:
Strangle the crooked serpent,
Destroy his works for ever,
And open set
The heavenly gate
To every true believer.*

Wesley

**But ye are come unto mount
Sion, and unto the city of the
living God, the heavenly
Jerusalem, and to an
innumerable company of angels
to the general assembly and
church of the firstborn, which are
written in heaven, and to GOD
the Judge of all, and to the
spirits of just men made perfect
and to JESUS the mediator of the
new covenant, and to the blood
of sprinkling, that speaketh
better things than that of Abel
See that ye refuse not him that
speaketh**

HEBREWS 12:22-25

ISSUE NO. 14

THE CRYING BLOOD

GEORGE W. NORTH

Abel - Gen 4:10. The Martyrs - Rev. 6:10, 2:13. Acts 7:59/60. Luke 18:1-7. Jesus - Luke 22:19/20. Isaiah 61:1/2. Hebrews 12:24. Leviticus 17:11. Matthew 27:25

WHAT DID ABEL'S BLOOD CRY?

Abel was not a vengeful man; neither is God a vengeful God. Why then should his blood cry out for vengeance? What did his blood cry? Did it actually cry 'Lord, avenge me'? Was he as blood-thirsty as Cain? These are some of the questions which come to mind with the thought of Abel's crying blood and Cain's punishment. When Abel's known history and fate is placed in the perspective of the other scriptures referred to above, a new understanding dawns about the whole matter of God's vengeance. We do not fully understand the meaning and implications of the statement by God in Leviticus 17:11 - 'the life (soul) is in the blood'. They must be of far greater importance than we know. The implications are that somehow, in a way beyond our grasp, God has caused the lives we live in the flesh to condition our blood. That the blood of our physical bodies is in any way affected by our morals and ethics is not an easy proposition for us to accept. Nevertheless, God has said that the soul is in the blood, so it is certain that in some mysterious way He associates blood plasma with life in more than a mere physical sense.

(goodness ... righteousness)

There is no doubt that man is an entity, and that all attempts to divide, analyse and categorize him are only artificial - he is indivisibly one. Therefore it is an utter impossibility to be sinful, or amoral in soul and not be the same in body and spirit. In the same way it is not possible to be righteous or moral in soul and not be the same in body and spirit also. Unrighteousness, although it may have manifestation through the body, is not a physical thing primarily. John gives us the clue to an understanding of this when he says, 'If we know that He is righteous, we know that everyone that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous'. Acts of righteousness proclaim that a state of righteousness prevails in the soul of the doer. It is quite impossible to be righteous and act unrighteously. For the sake of precision, we must distinguish that which is righteous from that which is good. There are many things which by comparison with evil are good, yet upon examination may prove to be quite unrighteous. Equally so, there is that which, although it is righteous in itself, would be quite a wrong thing to do. When Christ was crucified, on man's part evil was done; on God's part it was an act of righteousness. To put a good man to death was evil, yet from that evil act untold and untellable good has come.

In the beginning, when God created the world, He did not pronounce each day's work righteous, but good, and at the

conclusion of the work He said of the whole, 'very good'. This was because although He created in righteousness and with righteous intention, with the exception of man, righteousness was not inherent in that which He created. Man was created with superior moral faculties which enabled him to develop righteousness. Along with all the rest of the creation, he was very good. Tragically, when his goodness was put to the test, Adam was found to lack the moral fibre of righteousness. Consequently, that which God made originally good became evil. With the advent of evil, man, though still capable of that which (as compared with evil) could be called good, went from bad to worse. Multiplication of good achieves the distinction of being very good; similarly, multiplication of evil achieves the opposite distinction, so morality became immorality, and then amorality - depravity, implacability - as men rejected the strivings of God's Spirit with them.

(righteousness ... perfection)

In Genesis 6:9 and 17:1 a new word is introduced into the narrative. Whereas earlier the qualitative words 'good' and 'very good' were being used in reference to man, we now find God is substituting the word perfect for good - a wholly different word indeed. This is not done for the sake of grammatical variation, the word perfect is neither an exact or approximate equivalent of good. We are being introduced to something much higher for man than the original goodness of God's initial act. Righteousness is in view, and it is included in perfection. With the incoming of sin the opportunity to attain to perfection of goodness has presented itself. In Genesis 7:1 God, the Lord, is found saying to Noah, 'Thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation'. This follows the information that 'Noah (did) according to all that God commanded him'; therein lay his righteousness, which, according to Hebrews 11:7, was by faith. Noah, we are told in Genesis 6:9, was just, that is, rigidly righteous. Adam was never so spoken of by God; he was good, indeed very good (though undoubtedly he for a while achieved perfection), but was not perfect.

This is not to say that Adam was not a perfect specimen of a man, the best of God's universal creation; he was, but to show that God chooses His words very carefully; they are spirit and life. When He speaks, He speaks from His spirit and His life, not from anything outward. Being righteous Himself, God could not create anything unrighteous in itself, but until temptation came to Adam and the possibility of sinning was presented with guile and allurements to his soul so that his moral faculties were engaged and challenged, righteousness lay dormant within him. Therefore, it could not be imputed to him that he was righteous, for until that moment he had not had occasion to enter into moral conflict. It would therefore have been improper of God to have referred to Adam as righteous, for the man had no knowledge of what righteousness was. However, in the cases of Noah and Abram (and Abel before them both),

the challenge to faith was always present. In Abel's case it was in the family, in Noah's it was in the community, in Abram's in the country. Although these men were alone in the midst of evil, each stood the test and proved to be righteous. Because they did so, God uses the word perfect of them. His work was good; their works showed that they were perfect. In the case of Abram it is shown that the ability to remain perfect was in him and therefore perfection was expected of him; 'Walk (up and down) before Me and be thou perfect'. Of Lucifer it was said 'Thou wast perfect until ...' being created originally good, he perfected goodness by obedience to his creator until he fell from highest to lowest. What a tragic end for such an exalted being!

Thus we observe a progression from good to very good to perfect. The New Testament goes even further than this, using the word excellent and extending it by the comparative to 'more excellent'. Such is the wonder of our God and His provisions for us in grace. God in His high estate could not do anything that was not good and perfect by intention and design. Consequently, man in his low estate can do things which please God and so fit in with His original intentions that he can warrant the description 'perfect'.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS IN THE BLOOD OF JESUS

When a man characteristically does good and righteous things, thereby showing his moral nature to be holy and perfect, righteousness is imputed to his whole being. Spirit, soul and body, he is righteous; his very blood which carries oxygenated life to every part of his physical being is classified as righteous, and he is holy in God's sight. To be pronounced righteous by God means that a man is wholly so. The Lord Jesus said that the new testament was in His blood. It was in His heart, in His spirit, in His soul, His mind, in fact all of Him, but He chose to say it was in His blood, when still unspilt and flowing within His veins. His life, that is the quality of life He had lived and was then living in flesh, had imparted to the red plasma of physical life all the spiritual qualities and moral virtues of His daily living. How this happens in a human being is a mystery, but that it happened in Jesus Christ is without doubt. That is what gave it its value and redemptive power, His blood therefore became the most precious thing of earth and heaven. Surely such blood, wrongly shed, must be avenged. But Jesus did not plead for vengeance. It has been pointed out that in His reading from Isaiah 61, the Lord, stopping before announcing 'the day of vengeance of our God', closed the book and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue fastened upon Him. Why did He stop just there? They all knew the scriptures as well as He. Why did He not go on with the quotation and complete what the prophet so obviously connected with 'the acceptable year of the Lord'?

JESUS' BLOOD DID NOT CRY OUT FOR VENGEANCE ...

There are several reasons for this, one of which is that Israel associated the ministry of their Messiah with vengeance. Their heart-cry was, 'Avenge me of mine enemy'. To them neither preaching nor miracles were sufficient evidence that any man was their Messiah. Countless prophets had done as much; their Messiah must be their deliverer, their saviour from foreign

domination, their kinsman who would redeem them from Rome. Nothing less was considered by them to be proof of his claims, so they cried out for vengeance against Him for His claims to be their Messiah. It was in their blood. They did not know that they were seeking the wrong kind of deliverance-redemption-salvation, the kind He had not come to offer them. He was the one they needed, but not the one they wanted. Vengeance was not in His heart as He looked upon that congregation that day, nor was it in His heart in the days which followed, when he gazed upon the multitudes of poor and needy in their distress, and flew to their relief in His Father's name. Yet He had to warn them. Vengeance was sure to follow their rejection of Him. How could they slay God's lamb and not be punished? Later He 'parable-ised' to them the vengeance of God, 'He will miserably destroy', He said, as He unfolded the plan of God in the context of the truth of the vineyard. His blood, when it was outpoured, no more cried out for vengeance than it did whilst flowing in His veins. It cried for mercy, pardon, reconciliation, it was the blood of redemption. All that Jesus did He did as a man (the Man of God, from God) unto God, and unto God He leaves it. He offered no defence, begged no pardon, wanted no mercy, made no accusations, sought no vengeance. He came to give His life, not to save it; why then should He blame anybody for what He voluntarily did? He suffered and bled and died for love, but when He outpoured it and Himself by it, He did not do it as unto Himself, nor yet just in the eyes of men, but before and unto God.

...BUT IT MUST BE AVENGED

God judges; He is the judge of all. Could He allow that most holy and precious blood to be shed and take no action for ever? Should men murder His Son and He do nothing about it? They knew, those murderers, they knew. They understood, more perhaps than we know. 'His blood be upon us', they said, 'and upon our children'. They asked for vengeance but the hand of grace withheld for many years; in the end it came, though. As surely as day is followed by night and seed-time by harvest, the day of repayment came. Jesus never pleaded for it; His blood as of self-content never felt or knew to frame such pleas. It cried better things than even the blood of Abel, the righteous martyr, from the beginning. Even to this day, it speaks in the ears of God the judge, and before the face of Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant, and in the presence of the general assembly and church of the firstborn and the innumerable company of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. God, with all heaven's host, hears its voice, knows its value, sees its power, welcomes its effects; can He, shall He not avenge it? For the love of which it speaks, the mercy it implores, the righteousness it embodies, the grace it reveals, the holiness it displays, the sweetness it engenders, the glory it radiates, it must be avenged. Who can tread it underfoot and not be punished? For the very fact that He, that precious One who shed it, wanted it otherwise, it must be avenged.

The Lord knew, of course. He was well aware that their treatment of Him would end in disaster for them. Why, it was written in their Bible. Had He read on but a chapter or two that morning in Nazareth, He could have announced it in their ears: 'Who is this that cometh from Edom ... glorious ... righteous ... mighty ... red in apparel ... in anger? Their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments ... the day of vengeance is in my heart'. So one day He told them a story about a judge and a

widow. The judge, He said, was unjust, but the widow cried out to him for vengeance. He did not fear God, nor was he concerned about anybody else's opinions, but because she troubled him, he avenged her, said Jesus. Hear what the unjust judge said, 'I will avenge her'. If an unjust man will do that, how much more shall God the just judge avenge His elect, which cry unto Him day and night?

Vengeance must come - retribution is part of justice. Yet Jesus never sought it. Let widows cry and the elect pray, but He would never voice anything except love and pity. God the judge of all the earth does right, 'Vengeance is mine', He says, 'I will repay'. Punishment is not so much because of sin, as because of the treatment meted out to God's Son; it is God's vengeance. To the generation who requested His blood to be upon them it came, after a period, as the Roman General's rape of Jerusalem, to their children, whom they included in their wickedness. It has continued as persecution and pogroms, which will work themselves out as Jacob's trouble until finally the lake of fire is lit on doomsday. Repayment long withheld does not diminish. God bears long; grace is an age; but God does not deny that He claims His own with usury.

ABEL'S BLOOD DID NOT CRY OUT FOR VENGEANCE

The blood of Abel did not cry for vengeance, but God punished Cain because he had shed it; he was blood-guilty. Abel's blood was the blood of righteousness, as Jesus' blood was the blood of innocence. Bloodguiltiness was one of David's fears, and one of Jeremiah's more poignant accusations against the mothers of Israel was that without secret search, the blood of the poor innocents was plain to be seen on their skirts - they were blood-guilty. Whether or not the moral qualities of human beings are actually imparted to their blood, or whether they are only imputed to it and yet spoken of as though they are imparted, we do not know. We do know, however, that the blood Jesus shed was so wonderful that the whole of the new covenant was in it. We have to be washed in it, sprinkled with it, cleansed by it; we must drink it, count it precious, and be careful not to trample on it, for we have been redeemed by it. That we are neither washed in nor have to drink the actual purple stream which flowed from His veins at Golgotha does not mean that His blood does not accomplish all that the Bible claims for it. Somehow our Creator has associated the moral qualities of the soul with the material properties of the blood, deliberately identifying them by specific language; and who is to say there is not an as yet undiscovered common bond somewhere between them? Certain it is that the link is there in the heart of God, for He says so - 'The life (soul) is in the blood'.

It was for this reason that the Lord forbade Israel to eat any flesh with the blood in it. He would not have them partake of the souls of animals or birds. Fruit, grain, vegetables, herbs, nuts, have no soul content, and so may be eaten by them with impunity at all times (though not before the firstfruits have been offered to God). But of all which breathed and was given by God to them for food, not one drop of blood was to be eaten. Blood was only given to Israel upon the altar, which drank it up greedily for God for their atonement. No blood was to be drunk until Jesus' blood was shed. The clear teaching is that the children of God have no blood but Jesus' blood - they are breath and body without blood apart from Him.

That is exactly what God wants us to understand by this; we have and can have no soul acceptable to Him until we have the soul-life of Jesus. We may be sure that God does not do anything merely from an arbitrary point of view. He has a right to make demands and give commands just because He is the Lord. He could, by some standards, determine to have His own will and get His own way whether it is right or wrong, but not by His own standards. Everything He does is right. Therefore, when God linked soul with blood, it just had to be because there was no other thing to do. It answered and indicated something in Him. What it is or how He does it, or why it should be so, we do not know, but we do know that there is something mystically precious about blood in His sight.

ABEL'S BLOOD WAS THE BLOOD OF A MARTYR

So it was that when Abel's blood was shed, it cried unto God. It was the blood of a martyr. It carried the moral content of a life that was destroyed for righteousness' sake. The act of murder by which He was slain stemmed from and was in spirit part of the original attempt to unseat God from His throne. It was an ugly demonstration of the horrible fact that the disposition of sin is unalterable and therefore must be destroyed. The disposition and nature of God is unalterable, and so is the nature and disposition of Satan; there is no reconciling them. There is no reconciling man to God either unless the nature and disposition of sin be first dealt with in man. We have to experience and know with men like Paul that our old man was crucified with Christ. He was crucified because he cannot be reconciled to God. There never was any reconciling of Adam in the beginning. The breach between God and Adam was never healed. Abel's martyr blood did not accomplish it. God never intended that it should. Abel was never taxed with the task. He was an involuntary victim of the jealous nature, vicious disposition, and murderous action of Cain. Abel was a martyr, not a saviour. His blood held no redemptive qualities, and was not deliberately shed on his part in process of carrying through a planned operation of reconciliation. Nevertheless, God says it was righteous, and so He avenged it. He said to Cain, 'Thou art cursed from the ground', and He also put on him a mark so that he should not be slain. God did not want Cain killed as a punishment for killing his brother. Vengeance and retribution are reactions from nature, not calculated legal repayments.

The age of law had not commenced. Under law, strict justice had to be meted out, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', no more, no less. Scrupulous fairness governed the exacting of punishment under law, but even Moses had to make certain provisions and allowances where the avenger of blood was concerned and hot-blooded natural vengeance was involved. 'Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed', is God's fiat, but He prevented man from shedding Cain's blood by marking him out among men. He governed men's hot-headed or hate-filled responses to the murder or accidental death of a relative by creating cities of refuge and instituting rules of procedure which had to be strictly followed so that all should be dealt with in a spirit of strict impartiality by competent judges. Even He Himself did not immediately react against Cain with lethal power, but cursed him from the ground that had received the curse, for his father Adam's sake.

What the ultimate end of Cain on earth was, we do not

know. What we do know, however, is that Jesus, in a surprise statement to the scribes and Pharisees of His day, made it plain that the punishment which was shortly to be visited upon that generation, engulfing the nation and swamping Jerusalem with blood, would be retribution for the sin of murder. The vengeance exacted by God would be punishment because of their treatment of righteous martyrs over a period extending from Abel to Zacharias in the past, and including the prophets, wise men, and scribes He would send to them in the near future.

GOD WILL AVENGE HIS OWN

It would seem that vengeance is cumulative as well as punitive. Apparently the shedding of martyr's blood cannot be counterbalanced nor countermanded by slaying the murderer. Hatred against the victim is not so great as hatred of the truth of God for which he is slain. Abel, the pre-law man, raised no plea

for retribution, but Zacharias, the man who knew law did, saying 'The Lord required it'. Whether or not men cry out for repayment matters not - martyr's blood must be required. God will avenge His own. His answer to the souls that cry beneath the altar unmistakably reveals this. When they enquired, 'How long will it be?', His reply was 'Until their brethren are slain who should be slain as they were'.

Grace and patience mark the Lord's attitude during this time. Vengeance is deferred for the time being, but it will surely come. Meanwhile their souls, clothed in white, must abide under the altar, the place of their sacrifice for God. Martyrs indeed present their bodies as living sacrifices unto the Lord. Whether from Abel to Zacharias or Stephen to Antipas, their blood must be visited upon the world of men.

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THE GOSPEL PREACHED

NORMAN MEETEN

To preach the Gospel was the last command that Jesus gave to His disciples before He left the earth. 'Go ye into all the world; and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk.16:15).

In that this was the priority in the ministry of Jesus so it should be the priority of our lives. The Apostle Paul discovered it to be the great inevitable, irresistible constraint in his heart that must be outworked in his life. 'Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!' (1 Cor. 9:16). He preached it, 'not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance' (1 Thess.1:5) and 'not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls' (1 Thess. 2:8). Every atom of his being was involved in it from the day that he received the Holy Ghost.

'And straightway he preached Christ' (Acts 9:20). His declaration to the Roman church was, 'I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth' (Rom.1:15,16).

This wasn't just a theological thought for the apostle. It was a reality that he had discovered in his own life to the point that he was able to refer to the gospel as 'My Gospel'. His testimony was 'But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ'. (Gal. 1:11,12) For Paul there was no other Gospel - although he was aware that there were those who sought to preach 'another gospel': which is not another' (Gal.1:6/7; 2 Cor.11:4). The proof that we preach 'The Gospel' is that our manner of living - lifestyle - citizenship - conversation - becometh the Gospel of Christ' (Phil.1:27). The Gospel must become incarnate in our flesh - 'Written in the fleshy tables of our hearts' (2 Cor.3:5). The Word is made flesh to us so that what we are, by the grace of God, is what we speak and preach. 'What a man is in his heart is what he speaks'. It is this Gospel

that will transform, transfigure men and women into the likeness and image of Jesus Christ and so revolutionize mankind. It is this Gospel that will prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ.

'And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come' (Matt.24:14). The whole eternal purpose and destiny of God for man is interwoven into this Gospel. In the first chapter of Peter's 1st letter, he defines for us in some remarkable detail the nature of this Gospel.

1. A Gospel of Revelation (1 Pet.1:12)

'It was revealed ...'

To the natural man the Gospel is an enigma. Man can neither appreciate it nor understand it. He is as one blind: 'Having a veil upon their hearts.' (2 Cor.3:15)

'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit'. (1 Cor.2:9/10).

'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'. (1 Cor.2:14)

John Baptist said 'A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven' (Jn.3:27).

James in his letter likewise confirms this truth: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning'. (James 1:17)

Peter was able to speak with authority for there was a time when Jesus was able to say to him: *'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven'*. (Matt.16:17). But even he did not comprehend until the Spirit came, and made what, until that time, had been an external reality into an internal reality for him. He had a revelation of God 'to him', but like Paul he needed a revelation of God 'in him'. The former imparts information, the latter effects an inward revelation.

Paul's testimony was *'He revealed His Son in me'* (Gal.1:16). That made him a 'new creation'. The light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, has shined in his heart' and *'changed him into the same image from glory to glory'*.

Until that great metamorphosis takes place in our lives we have not properly understood or appreciated the Gospel.

This is not a truth for the wise and learned. Jesus said *'I have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes'*. It is all of God.

2. A Gospel of Redemption

'Ye were redeemed ... by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot' (1 Pet.1:18/19).

The currency of redemption is the blood of Jesus.

God has foretold this way back in time *'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin'*. The fundamental truth of the Gospel is redemption. Everything else is totally inadequate. The precious blood of the Lamb is sufficient. When God saw the blood of Christ, at the throne of grace, He was satisfied. We can add nothing to it - we dare not underestimate its value or take anything away from it.

Two main words are used in the New Testament EXAGORAZO which is 'a strengthened form of AGOKAZO - which means 'to buy' out of (EX for EK) especially of purchasing a slave with the view to his freedom'. (W.E.Vine).

LUTROS - means to set free on receipt of ransom. Jesus paid the ransom twice and thus He sets us free.

'There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in'

Mrs. C.F. Alexander

Man will only come to his realization of the need of redemption when he acknowledges that he can do nothing to improve himself. Jane Austen's character 'Mr. Darcy' in 'Pride and Prejudice' states it clearly, when he said: 'There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome'.

Oswald Chamber's, in 'God's Workmanship', says, 'The net result of the teaching of Jesus is to produce despair in me. If

it has never produced despair in me I have not heard it aright: but that despair brings me to the place where I am willing to come 'just as I am without one plea' and accept as an unmerited gift the salvation wrought out by Jesus Christ - REDEMPTION'.

3. A Gospel of Regeneration (1 Pet.1:23) - Resurrection (1 Pet.1:3)

'Being born again - not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever'.

The living word of God is the LOGOS - Jesus, the *'Word made flesh'*. The Words - REMA - spoken by Jesus are spirit and life. When the words of Jesus come to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, they effect in our lives what Jesus says, *'No word of God is devoid of power'*. This was demonstrated and illustrated for us perfectly at the Incarnation.

Mary said, *'How shall this be?'*

The angel said, *'By the Holy Ghost'*.

Mary replied, *'Be it unto me according to the word'* - REMA

The word - LOGOS - became flesh by the REMA being spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise the miracle of regeneration takes place in us and we are born again - word LOGOS is made flesh by the REMA of God being spoken into us - Spirit and life.

Jesus said *'You must be born again'*. This is not an invitation to respond - it is the Divine Imperative, which tells us there is no alternative - there is no other way.

Jesus alone is *'The Way'*.

'We are begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, revealing *'the power of an endless life'* is the Spirit that begets us again - quickens us, and thus brings us up into resurrection living.

'Ye are risen with Him through faith of the operation of God who hath raised Him from the dead' (Col.2:12).

'If ye then be risen with Christ' (Col.3:1)

'Christ ... is our life' (Col.3:4)

The Gospel brings us into the normality of life as God intended it before sin came. It was the life that Jesus lived as the Son of man. When we are born again *'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God'* (Jn.1:12/13).

The sons of God have power to live as the Son of man - regenerate - resurrection life.

The potential in that is boundless.

How many of us are realizing that potential?

4. The Gospel of Refining (1 Pet.1:22; 1:15/16)

'Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit'. God gives the Spirit to those who obey Him and with His Spirit comes the ability to live in the reality of that truth.

'For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness - He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit' (1 Thess. 4:7/8).

The Hebrew Epistle tells us: 'that without holiness no man shall see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14).

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount taught the same thing, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God' (Matt. 5:8).

S.C. Ryle once said the threefold ingredient of New Testament salvation is: Justification, Regeneration and Sanctification. If any one of these ingredients is missing then we haven't got New Testament Salvation.

Sanctification cannot be separated from justification or regeneration - it's an essential part of God so 'Great Salvation'. That is why the baptism in the Holy Spirit, whether it is interpreted along the line of 'holiness' or 'power for service' isn't a mere second blessing or spiritual extra - but an essential part of the whole.

To preach it as a 'second blessing' is to condone the preaching of an inadequate Gospel; that is responsible for leaving so many in bondage to sin with no ability to live in victory or power to live in that potential 'resurrection life': 'Be ye holy for I am holy' is a quotation from Leviticus 11:44. This has always been God's desire and purpose for man. He longs for a pure and holy people. We are to be a 'holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light' (1 Pet.2:9).

Or as Paul writes to Timothy, 'be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work' (2 Tim.2:21).

In the penultimate chapter of the Old Testament we are reminded of this vital theme.

'Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's, fire and like fullers' soap; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness' (Mal.3:2/3).

Paul reminds us that it was for this purpose 'that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:25/27).

In that great day - the ultimate - the same wonderful truth holds.

'The marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife has made herself ready' (Rev. 19:7). It is then that we shall stand before Him and see Him as He is. We shall be like Him. 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure' (1 Jn.3:2/3).

5. A Gospel of Reservation (1 Pet.1:4)

'To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you' (1 Pet.1:4).

There is something wonderfully sure and certain about the Gospel. It is as Psalm 119:89 puts it, 'For ever O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven'. Equally it must become settled in our hearts.

Jesus exhorted the disciples not to rejoice in that devils were subject unto them, but that their names were written in heaven. He has a great plan of love for every one of us. That is so wonderful. Even in the introduction of the Gospel (Eph.1:12) 'First hope in Christ'. It is a very certain thing. It is not like the natural, modern interpretation of hope - that may or may not happen. Hebrews 6:18/19 tells us of the true nature of Christian hope. It is 'as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast'. What God initiates He guarantees to perfect.

'He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it - perfect it - until the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil.1:6).

For those who respond to the Gospel, God has a perfect place reserved, and it is not only in a distant heaven - but even here on earth. 'He sets every member in the body. He bestows upon the least 'more abundant honour'. His promise is to keep us in order that He might 'present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy' (Jude 24). That is why Jesus at the beginning of John 14 speaks thus, 'let not your heart be troubled ... I go to prepare a place for you' (Jn.14:1/2). It is certain ... 'reserved in heaven for you', all so very personal.

6. A Gospel of Rejoicing (1 Pet.1:6)

In verse 8, Peter describes the by-product of the Gospel as 'joy unspeakable and full of glory'. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones once confessed to me that he believed that to be the real evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. After his death, his book on the Holy Spirit was published under that title. Joy is the answer to the prayer of Jesus, in John 17, 'That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves' (v13).

In John 15:11, we read, 'These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full'.

The evidence of Paul's relationship to the Gospel was his ability to rejoice in adversity. 'Rejoice, again I say, rejoice' (Phil. 4:4)

The Philippian letter is one of the greatest expositions of the joy of the Lord and its practical outworking in the whole of the New Testament. The word rejoice and its derivatives is almost as repetitive as the punctuation in the letter. And it was all written from the dreadful realism of a Roman jail. A similar testimony has accompanied many of the saints in their martyrdom down through the ages. It was one of the things that so

impressed me the first time I met Richard Wormbrant. Peter's letter was written to the suffering Church, which was experiencing 'the trial of its faith'. It was the reproduction of the life of the Spirit of Jesus being outworked in them. 'He counted it all joy to endure the cross' (Heb. 12:2). It is the proof of the effectual work of the Gospel. The fruit of the spirit is joy.

7. A Gospel of Reception (1 Pet.1:9)

'Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul'.

'Believing' in the New Testament is always unto receiving.

Jesus said, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink' - Receive (Jn.7:37).

He answered, 'Eat my flesh and drink my blood' - Receive (Jn.6:56).

Peter in his second letter puts it like this: 'We are partakers of the Divine Nature' (2 Pet.1:4).

The Gospel is not an intellectual exercise. It is not assent to a doctrinal creed or even the enjoyment of peripheral blessings - benefits - but the reception of the person of the Gospel - the Lord Jesus Christ. The living word of God must become engraven in my heart - incarnate in my flesh - out-

worked and lived in my daily affairs - so that I am what I preach and preach what I am.

'What a man is in his heart so he speaks'. 'For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh' (Matt.12:34).

That is the only Gospel that any man can preach with authority.

8. Finally - A Gospel of Readiness

Peter's final exhortation to us to be ready.

'Ready to be revealed in the last time' (1 Pet.1:5).

The common denominator in New Testament teaching concerning the coming of the Lord is 'to be ready'. It will not matter primarily what views we hold in that day - if we are not ready, all will be in vain.

We need constantly to remind ourselves of the five wise virgins and the five foolish. It is those 'that endure unto the end who shall be saved'.

The proof that I have heard, understood, and responded to the word of the Gospel, is that it continues and proves true unto the end.

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A - Z

SMALL BIBLE WORDS

EDITOR

K = KNOW

OT usage - Heb=Yada means to know (whether person or thing) perceive, learn, understand, have skill, and also in the wider sense of the meaning than our 'know', experience good or bad (including in the sexual sense Gen.4:1 etc.)

Knowledge for the Hebrews was not knowledge of abstract principles, or of a reality conceived of as beyond comprehension. Reality was what happened, and knowledge meant appreciation of this activity. Knowledge of God meant not THOUGHT about the Eternal Being or Principle transcending man and the world, but recognition of, and obedience to, one who acted purposefully in the world (Deut.11:2ff; Isa. 41:20)

To know God is the chief duty of man: Duet 4:39; 29:2-6; Isa.43:10; Hos.6:6; Ps.46:10)

In the New Testament

Dr. W.E. Vine in his book, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, well used by Bible Students points out that there are eight (8) different verbs translated Know, Known, Knowledge, Unknown, and (4) adjectives.

Briefly to summarize 5 verbs.

1. Gk=GINOSKO signifies to be taking 'IN' knowledge, to come to know, recognize, understand, or to understand completely, eg John 13:12; 15:8; 2 Cor.8:9; Heb.10:34; 1 John 2:5; 4:2; Phil.3:10. Vine indicates that this Greek verb, frequently indicates a relationship between the person knowing and the object known: in this respect, what is known is of value or importance to the one who knows, hence the establishment of an inward heart relationship ... 1 Cor.8:3, 'If any man love God, the same is known of Him' Gal.4:9.

2. OIDA to see, is a perfect tense with a present meaning, to have seen or perceived; hence, to know, to have knowledge of, whether absolutely, as in Divine knowledge (Matt.6:8,32; John 6:6,64; 2 Pet.2:9; Rev.2:2).

3. EPIGINOSKO suggests generally a directive, a more special, recognition of the object known (Rom.1:3, 1 Tim.4:3; Col.1:6).

4. PROGINOSKO to know beforehand is used a) of Divine foreknowledge concerning believers Rom.8:29; Israel Rom.11:2, Christ as the Lamb of God 1 Pet.1:20. b) of humans previous knowledge of a person (Acts 26:5; 2 Pet.3:17).

5. GNORISO = to come to know, to discover. Phil 1:22

MEDITATING IN THE SCRIPTURES

GEORGE W. NORTH

Thoughts on Doctrine in Mark's Gospel

The section in Chapter 15:1-9 is a most important statement in which vital things are gathered together by the writer and placed in just a position for our enlightenment and learning. 'Doctrine' is here placed in context with 'tradition' v2, 'worship' and 'commandments' v9. Extending into chapter 16 we find Christ warning of the 'doctrine' v 12 (leaven' v6) of the Pharisees and Scribes. Immediately following He deliberately introduces the most vital subject of all - Himself - 'Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?', in other words - the doctrine of Christology v13; and from this and as a natural corollary of it, the doctrine of the Church - 'I will build my Church' v18

It is very enlightening to see the way the Lord places tradition, worship, doctrine and commandments together. But a moment's thought convinces the heart of the rightness of it. When men's doctrine is given as commandment to people (this is what I/we believe and this is what is done here and only that is allowed) a tradition is set and worship is affected. Elders set the tradition of a church by their doctrine and commandments, they also set the pattern of worship for that people. It is a most onerous responsibility; the life and work and example of an Elder have far reaching effects.

It is therefore better for an Elder to advise and counsel rather than command. Commandments produce conformity.

THE LIFE

The Life = The Seed - Galatians 3:16; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9
The Life = The Flesh |
The Life = The Blood | Ephesians 5:30; John 6:53,58
The Life = The Bones |
The Life = The Spirit - Romans 8:9
The Life = The Mind - Philippians 2:5
The Life = The Bowels - Philippians 1:8
The Life = The Person - 2 Corinthians 2:10; Galatians 4:14
The Life = The Words - 2 Corinthians 13:3; John 6:63;
1 Corinthians 2:13
The Life = The Hands - Acts 4:28,30; 3:6/7; 11:20/21
The Life = The Face - 2 Corinthians 4:6; 3:12/13/18
The Life = The Image - 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4
The Life = Christ our Life - Colossians 3:4

THE VEIL

In the Tabernacle/Temple Ex. 26:31-35
On Moses face 2 Cor. 3:13
On the heart 2 Cor. 3:15
Jesus' flesh Heb.10:20
Within the Veil Heb.6:19

The fixed disposition of God's heart - GRACE

2 Cor. 8:9 The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
John 1:14-17 Grace and truth come by Jesus Christ
Eph.3:2 Dispensation of the Grace of God
1 Pet. 1:10 The prophets prophesied of His Grace to you
Gal.1:6 The Grace of Christ to another gospel
Rom. 3:24 Justified freely by His Grace through the redemption
Eph. 2:8 BY Grace are ye saved THROUGH faith.
Eph. 1:7 Forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace
Rom.11:5/6 Grace is Grace and works are works
Rom.5:17 Receive abundance of grace
Rom.5:20 Where sin abounds there grace much more
Rom.5:21 Grace reigns through righteousness
1 Cor.15:10 By the grace of God I am what I am
2 Cor.6:1 Receive not the grace of God in vain
Gal.1:15 Called by His grace to reveal His Son in me
Tit.2:11-14 The grace of God hath appeared ... teaching us ...
James 4:6 He giveth more grace ... to the humble
Heb.4:16 Come boldly to the throne of Grace
1 Pet. 4:10 Good stewards of the manifold grace
Eph.3:7/8 The gift of God's grace..to me..is this grace given
Eph.4:7 To each one of us is this grace given
2 Cor.12:9 My grace is sufficient for thee
2 Cor.9:8 God is able to make ALL grace abound
1 Pet.1:13 The grace to be brought at the revelation
1 Pet.5:10/12 All grace ... true grace, wherein you stand

The response

of man's heart to that disposition - FAITH

Heb.12:2 Jesus the author and finisher of our faith
Gal.3:23/24 Before faith came ... kept ... shut up unto the faith
2 Thess.3:2 All men have not faith
Mark 4:40 How is it that ye have no faith?
Heb.11:2 Faith is the substance of things hoped for
Rom.3:27 The law of faith
Rom.10:17 Faith comes by hearing - by the Word of God
2 Pet.1:1 Obtained like precious faith with us
Luke 17:6 If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed
2 Thess.1:3 Your faith groweth exceedingly
Matt.14:31 O thou of little faith
Eph.2:8 By grace are ye saved through faith
Rom.3:28 Justified by faith
Rom.1:17 The just shall live by faith
Gal.2:20 I live by the faith of the Son of God
Acts 6:7 Obedient to the faith
Mark 2:5 Jesus saw their faith
Mark 5:34 Thy faith hath made thee whole
Acts 15:9 Purifying their hearts by faith
1 Cor.2:5 Your faith ... in the power of God
James 2:22 By works is faith made perfect
1 Cor. 13:2 Though I have all faith so that I could ...

FAITH ACCORDING TO PETER

- 1 Pet. 1:21 You who by Him do believe in God
1:21 God raised Him and gave Him glory that your faith
1:9 The end of your faith the salvation of your souls
1:7 The trial of your faith being much more precious than gold
1:8 Yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable
1:5 Kept in the power of God through faith ready
2:7 Unto you which believe is the preciousness
5:9 Whom resist steadfast in the faith

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

1. Fulness - Acts 2:4; Eph.5:18
2. Flood - Rom. 5:5
3. Flowing - John 7:37-39
4. Fruit - Gal.5:22
5. Freedom - 2 Cor.3:17
6. Following - Rom.8:14
7. Function - 1 Cor. 12
8. Fellowship - 1 Jn.1:3

JESUS IS GLORIFIED

1. 1 Peter 1:11 The gospel is not only of grace but also of glory
2. Acts 3:13 God hath glorified His Son
3. John 17:24 The will of Jesus expressed - we may behold His glory
4. John 7:39 Jesus being glorified - the Spirit is given - we may glorify
5. 2 Cor. 4:6 The basic revelation of glory - the answer to John 17:4
6. 2 Cor. 3:18 Beholding His face we are changed from glory to glory
7. 1 Pet. 4:14 We are given GRACE to endure sufferings and reproaches and the GLORY comes as we triumph in and over them. Thus the change takes place.
8. John 1:14 Manifest in the flesh - they beheld His glory as He manifested forth His glory 2:11 so that He could pray as in 17!

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Emmaus Print Ministries, Warrington have now taken over the distribution of the blue hymn book 'Hymns of Eternal Truth' - a selection of hymns written by the Wesley brothers.

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OUTPOURING

G.W.North

It would be true to say that all over the world men and women taught of God wait and pray for an outpouring of the Spirit. This is an account of one such outpouring on a local church some 30-35 years ago. From it sprang one stream of what has been called the House Church Movement in this land. Its impact therefore is still with us and its effects are being felt in many lands.

It is not easy to trace the beginnings of the movements of God's Spirit. To be very doctrinal - perhaps even dismissive, though obviously correct - it could and should be said that it all began with God. Taking that as being indispensably true, it is also true that there are human reasons for, if not sources of, heavenly blessings. This article is an attempt to show what these were and to publish some facts connected with the outpouring.

The people who were granted this favour were a very small company drawn together from different parts of a certain northern city, and gathered in hired premises down-town. The theme of ministry among them at the time was entire sanctification wrought in them by the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire, resulting in holiness of life in all its breadth and length and depth and height. This was the desire of everyone, and the experience of some. Above all else people wanted to be rid of sin; everyone felt he or she must come right through into what God wanted them to be in Christ. There can be no doubt that this is one of the main reasons for the outpouring; the second reason is the volume and intensity of prayer which accompanied that longing.

Something in the people made them pray. Asked for a reason, they probably would not have known precisely what to say, they just prayed. Had they been asked, 'Are you praying for revival?', they might have said, 'Yes'. 'Do you pray for souls?' - 'Yes, of course'. But to have said what was the specific purpose of the prayer meetings would have been beyond anyone's power. They prayed because they wanted to. They did not pray because they believed in prayer - they came together for that purpose and loved it, and they prayed as though they could not help it, they were a people and they just prayed as though possessed of a power and under an urge they could not resist. Perhaps the most correct description of that praying is 'outpouring': there is no better word to describe it, nothing less would do it or them justice.

SPIRIT OF PRAYER AND OF SUPPLICATION

These people were seeking the outpouring of the Spirit of God: to gain it they poured out their own spirits. In this act they did: not all at once though, nor yet immediately; they poured out day after day, week after week, month after month. Hours upon hours - how many, only God knows. Surely it must be that before He poured out as they were seeking Him to, God first poured out upon them the spirit of prayer and of supplication - all glory must be His. But praise be to them also, that they were big and determined enough to sustain the burden and scriptural enough to give themselves to such prayer and supplication so constantly for so long.

Occasions for prayer were multiplied. As one heart the little band gave themselves over to God for His will to be done. It seemed they could not get enough prayer together, no price was too great to pay, they spared themselves nothing. Special rubber pads were made to protect knees during long hours of hard contact with the floor; hours would fly past, they were without weariness in the loved communion. The

communion of their spirits with God and each other was beyond time and discomfort. The secret of David became their secret too, they poured out their hearts before the Lord and found such one-ness as they had never before known. There is no other way of prayer than this, no church can find one-ness until it learns to pray together. Praising together will not do it, it will accomplish something, but not that. Togetherness in such actions as singing and dancing does not signify one-ness in spirit. Outpourings of hearts concerned about the outpouring of the Spirit will accomplish one-ness, nothing else will, for nothing else can.

TEACH US TO PRAY

Oh, how greatly the churches need to ask and plead with the Lord - 'teach us to pray'; every human being needs to be taught to pray by the Lord. The men who first made the request had seen and heard the Lord praying and had been mightily moved, they knew they had witnessed a most wonderful and indescribable thing. No-one even records, leave alone describes, that prayer. 'Oh teach us', was their heart's cry, 'Make our beings pray like Thine'. What an exercise is prayer - not an exercise in words, but an exercise of life - of the whole being, spirit, soul and body. Later these men were to witness prayer in its greatest form - a man on His face in a garden, pouring out His heart to His Father till sweat ran from Him like blood. Prayer was to Him an exercise of the whole man, all of it, spirit, soul, body, mind, heart, strength, blood: His words were few, almost nil, and He took an hour to say them. Let every man know that which causes the outpourings of the Spirit must be the praying of the whole being, because the one who obtained that outpouring for man gave His whole being for it - everything must be in it, nothing less. All desire, all emotion, all the will, all affection, all imagination, all power, all purpose, the whole man. The entire being must be handed over in total abandonment to the Spirit to be led into it by Him. There must be no formulas of words called prayers, no quotes, no copying other peoples ideas about this; it must be the fixed purpose of the heart to abandon to God without resource but Him. Theories, formulas, must be forsaken for however appropriate and beautiful they may seem to be, they imprison the spirit, set limits for the mind, and fetter the soul. There must be neither prescription nor proscription - abandonment to the uttermost degree is the requirement for outpouring; that is the only proof to God of the perfect trust God requires of a man. He required it of His Son ere He could pour out the Holy Spirit, and to this abandonment the Lord led that little band those years ago, and their praise is that they gave themselves over to it with love and joy and zeal. I suppose it is true to say that the result was inevitably a foregone conclusion.

GOD DID TREMENDOUS THINGS

Suddenly one day God poured out His Spirit upon them. That's the way it happened, and it was wonderful; happy are all they who witnessed and experienced it. In the instance they lived and continued to live in the fire and glory of it. Overwhelmed, they continued in prayer and the outpouring came as recurring waves of the sea, three in all, over a period of time. The first, then a lull, He came again, then once again like three great inflowings of the mighty ocean. During that period of time (it extended over some months) God did tremendous things. One result was that the prayer band increased, men and women came and joined with the others on their faces before God. They were wonderful times - will they ever be repeated? That group discovered

the secret that all may discover, and without which the great outpouring cannot be.

That is how it happened in the very beginning. For ten days, from the day of the Lord's Ascension to Pentecost, they were praying together. They weren't told to organize a ten day prayer meeting, neither were they told to pray and certainly not what to pray, they were just told to tarry. What if it had been ten months? Would some have failed to keep trust? God did not fix a date with them, neither does He now, He has everything fixed in His calendar of course, but He doesn't fix a date for you and me. What He wants to know is, are we concerned enough to wait upon Him, do we really want the outpouring? These are the tests He puts to us, but are we made of the right stuff? When it happens, all the period of waiting seems as nothing, it was pure joy and sufficient reward of itself! The thrill and blessing of pouring out their hearts was so wonderful that those people would have felt it all worthwhile even if there had been no results. Perhaps they ought to have been more expectant, but no one said he or she was. They had not been praying for revival particularly, they wanted souls saved into purity of heart and fulness of the Spirit, it was sheer joy of prayer that drew them together and held them. They had discovered new realms of prayer and might have been content with that. Perhaps God poured out His Spirit because He was pleased with them. But whatever it was, this they discovered - when God pours out His Spirit, it is bliss.

MAN CANNOT CHOOSE

There was nothing that was wrong that was not put right, it was amazing how these people were knit together. All sorts came and were met by God, things that they had formerly thought were important to their lives just disappeared. A complete new set of values came, almost everything seemed new. It was simply glorious. If only those days of lying before God had never ceased. Of course when the outpouring comes, God prepares His vessels by it that through them He may do His will in the earth. Man cannot choose, but to this day many of the group could wish those days to return again. They would gladly give up all preaching and travelling round, all reading and writing, if only they could drink again at that wonderful stream and sink 'neath the powerful wave. All who are stationary in the fellowships have the golden opportunity to hand if only they will grasp it. If only people would do the thing they can do and not long for anything other than that, there would be such a response from God.

Just get before Him and lie there on your face. Lying on the face before the Lord is a wonderful position for prayer, and absolutely right. It wasn't the enforced rule in those days, but it was nothing to look around after a couple of hours or so and see some on their faces, or somebody doubled up with his head between his knees. Others would be sitting down with their backs against the wall, somebody else would be kneeling, and somebody else walking around praying. Once a man, intense in prayer, lost his false teeth - they came out of his mouth and shot across the floor. Undeterred, he kept praying and walked after them, with a swift movement he re-inserted them with hardly a break in the flow. Oh, how God used to work!

WORDS WEREN'T NEEDED

The great Wesley hymns were fundamental to many people's experiences, they used to sing them over and over again, rejoicing and glorying in God; choruses also had a part, but a less significant one. The sound of rejoicing saints is more wonderful when the Spirit of God is working. The church was on the busiest road in the city, the traffic noise scarcely broke, yet on occasions people walking down the road hardly heard the buses for the noise of the people shouting. God used to so move them that it seemed a wonder the roof was left on the place. This was balanced at times with great quietness; it descended upon all, a stillness when every breath was stilled and when no-one moved - the presence of the Spirit was so real that no-one wanted to anyway. Spiritual awareness was unspeakably profound. Words weren't needed,

to sit on chairs in the glory of the Lord's presence was all anybody wanted or needed. Sometimes that would go on for the best part of an hour: it was breath-takingly glorious - everyone appeared to stop breathing, no-one even said, 'Jesus', though to hear the Name was electrifying, as many confessed.

From that time and occasion came all the ministry anyone of that company received. During that time God laid foundations. He opened His treasure stores of love and wisdom and knowledge, and taught souls, storing them so full of the Holy Ghost, and they became so used to God. His ways and works and words were laid deep inside, mines of treasure inexpendable and inexhaustible. All the revelation of the New Covenant and the new birth, and the true baptism in the Spirit came out of those days, the church rejoiced in truth. Knowledge of these things does not automatically come with the baptism in the Spirit; that blessed baptism is just a gateway. God intends everyone to go in that way, but do not make the mistake made by so many, namely that to retain the baptism you must keep up the original feelings you had when you were baptized. Just go in and in, and on and on with God. Let Him teach you and show you all these treasures of wisdom and knowledge, they are for you.

PRAYER RISES FROM GOD WITHIN THE HEART OF MAN

If you have never been in such meetings or experienced the blessings of God's presence and power, know that all these things are laid up for you, but you must apply yourselves to it. Find out how many in your group spend one clear solid hour in prayer in one week. What if it were two hours? Remember the group that used to spend hour upon hour upon hour with the Lord. Not that revival, or whatever you want to call it, is a reward for sticking it out on your knees: it isn't that. That group did say once that they would never have conferences unless they were prayer conferences. But they wondered whether if they advertised a week of prayer anyone would come. Would you? They had so learned what prayer and waiting on God could do, that they felt that everybody should just come together and pray, that was all. To ask what makes a man pray is to almost dumbfound him, a praying man cannot tell you what it is that makes him do it, it just rises within. A certain amount of discipline is necessary, but it is not that. Prayer rises from God within the heart of man and anyone who sets out on a life of prayer without that is sure to fail. Unless it is something in your heart from God, it cannot be the prayer God inspires.

FREE FROM SELF

What is this prayer life? Among that group, very few people ever prayed for themselves, or if they did it was not for long. When they first came into this tremendous atmosphere of prayer, some did ask God to do something for them, but only because they realized they were not in it. Once they got in that was the end of prayer for self. Free from self, prayers and outpourings abounded for anything, anyone, any situation anywhere. There never was a list for prayer, nobody ever stood up and said: 'now we'll pray for so and so'. No directions - nothing. It became the rule that nobody brought their Bibles either, people who attended were expected to pray, not read their Bibles. The general approach was, 'they didn't have Bibles on the day of Pentecost, did they?' The Bible says they continued in prayer, and says nothing about Bible reading. It is an amazing thing that many people can't pray unless they have their Bibles open in front of them. After a man has been pouring his heart out for half an hour, it is very dispiriting to look up and find people around bending in a holy attitude, reading their Bibles. You could stay at home and read your Bible. It was the same with the hymn book. Nobody ever got up and announced a hymn, or anything like that, yet if anyone started a chorus of spontaneous praise, it wouldn't be long before everyone joined in. Beloved, do you really pray? And do you pray in a realm and in a way far removed from your own needs, or what you think your needs are? Financial; domestic or personal? Are you liberated from your self yet? No-one is liberated from self until self is right. A right self is a self liberated from self.

Always. This is the reason Jesus could say, 'I've come to do My Father's will': He was completely clear of self. It's glorious to be free, without feeling condemnation or need in your spirit in the presence of God. It is completely impossible to describe this to others, only those that are there know it.

Such worship, such language, unknown before, fills the heart and lips. One day a man from the firm next door to the church premises asked if the purpose was to turn the church into a New Testament church. 'That's right' was the answer - but what made him ask a question like that? Somehow he knew! In the end, New Covenant Fellowship became the name that church took up. Such was the power and presence of the Spirit that never a weekend passed but 10 or 20 people sought the Lord. Souls were met in their needs, bodies were healed, devils were cast out, all sorts of things happened; things that ought to happen regularly in every church as the norm. People unknown used to come in and it didn't matter what their needs were, they were met. Sometimes they used to call out for mercy or salvation while the preaching was in progress. Some even fell off their chairs. The Spirit of God was working, everybody was centred on that, you see, grown ups and youth, everybody, seemed to live for that only. The young people used to be there so much that some of their parents objected, and said, 'It's a wonder they don't take their beds down to that place'. They were just young people in their early teens, but they were there; on their knees praying, pouring out their hearts unto God. Hallelujah. Moving on to heights of glory. It's a glorious sight to see youngsters mixing with grown ups, eager to be with them, but that's how it should be. It IS when God pours out His Spirit.

GET INTO BATTLE WITH GOD

One of the great things about the Salvation Army in the early days, was 'knee drill'. The fire came and swept through them. Have you ever heard of a book called, 'What Happened at Azusa Street'? Years and years of prayer. They just went on and on, and that's what God will do with you if you let Him. But do you want Him to? Many are baptized in the Spirit, they speak of being sanctified, and have the gift of tongues, but so what? It is not God's will that anyone should just rest in the baptism and sanctification and tongues, that is only just the beginning. You cannot spend the rest of your life just coming together and singing and praying in tongues, can you? How monotonous that would be. We all must get into the battle with God. Get right down there on your face with God, and pray and pray, and wait on Him: let the Spirit exercise you. Sometimes He will take you up to heaven, sometimes He will bring you right down on the floor and smash you: and beloved, that will probably be the most blissful experience of your life. It sounds strange, doesn't it? It isn't though, not when God really gets holds of you and exercises you, and carries you out in the Spirit. Then there will come a time when you stop praying and look at your watch, and say, 'An hour and a half? Two hours? Where has all the time gone?' Where have you been? You've been in heaven. That's what God wants for us. Not the boring daily exercise of grinding through this, that and the other, but joyous meeting with the Lord. He is waiting for you to wait upon Him; it's you He is waiting for - you. Do you remember that great text, 'If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land' (2 Chron. 7:14). When God's people really seek His face, He begins to do big things. He pours out the Spirit, He meets great needs. Oh, it's so marvellous.

WHEN GOD IS MOVING EVERYTHING CHANGES

One night when God was really moving among the people, someone stood up to sing, and the next moment was down on the floor. Some of the people there had not seen much like it before, and one man rushed over to pick the lady up. 'Leave her alone', came the command. She crawled along the floor to the front, like a serpent, the preacher leaned over the pulpit, took hold of her hands and laid her

elbows and arms on a chair, and there she stayed until God put her right. When God is at work there is no need for counsellors. People fell down or got right down on their knees, and were told to stay there until they had the witness of God in their heart that the work was done. 'When you have got the witness of God in your own heart that it's done, go and sit down'. God used to do it all: no counsellors, no props, no-one but the Lord. Everybody who responded was dealt with there, right in front of the congregation. It was wonderful. When God is moving everything changes. Even the way people get saved is changed, so is the way they get healed. It really is amazing, everything changes when a church is really in the Spirit. God wants you to expect it. He wants you to hunger for it, thirst for it, move into it.

Are you ready to move into this? Then let nothing stand in your way. There are certain things which are duties. Do those, but keep them down to the bare minimum - more and more reduce everything to basic necessities, and give the rest of your time to the Lord. Let Him get right hold of you. Don't rest in the fact that you're a son of God, or in the fact that you're a Spirit-baptized person, or that you have this gift, or you hold that office. Do not rest in anything like that, go right through with God: prove that you're worthy of holding the office, if you have one. Lead the people on into this, set them the example. That is what God is requiring of all leaders, let the older ones teach the younger ones. We all have a responsibility in this. Are you ready to bear yours? That is the kind of atmosphere in which things happen.

One Sunday night, an elderly lady came out to the front - she was nearly 80. The next Sunday night her grandchild, who was nearly 8, came out. That's the way the Gospel works over the whole age range. It was not a children's message that week, or a granny's message the week before, it was the same Gospel preached in the same way. Everybody understands when the Spirit is working. It is an amazing thing.

REAL PRAYER IS LIKE A BURNING FLAME

It is a marvellous privilege to hear a real man or woman of God praying in the Spirit: men and women have to recognize that until then they do not know what prayer is. A Church of England curate, holding a responsible position, and in line for top offices, came into a meeting where a few were gathered for prayer. It frightened him to death nearly, he had never heard people pray like that before in all his life. On his own confession he didn't know where to go and hide himself. Oh, to learn to pray. Prayer, real prayer, beloved, is like a burning flame, a furnace - prayer is a spirit alive and alight with God. To hear a man or a woman really praying is to hear the voice of God speaking, for prayer is not prayer until God engages with God. That is how the Spirit was outpoured in the first place: God went and engaged with God. God the Son engaged with God the Father, and God the Father poured out the Spirit. That is the kind of praying we must have, until we reach that position, beloved, it will not happen. No man can drag himself in by his sweat, or by his own hair, the Spirit has got to get hold of you: you've got to get possessed, and nobody gets possessed who doesn't open up to be possessed. This must be thoroughly understood. A man must open himself up to God deliberately. Whether young or old, it must be done and it's the easiest thing in the world. Young people can get into it so easily, but Mums and Dads are so stiff. Once in a prayer meeting a man was moving along in his spirit with the others, and then all of a sudden, God opened his mouth. His daughter was at that prayer meeting, and said to him, 'You prayed for 25 minutes Dad'. So he had, and when he had finished, two men were on the floor. How can you pray like that and have that effect? Who can say? Something gets hold of a man, and he becomes abandoned to the Spirit. This man went upstairs with one of those men afterwards; 'I must see you', he said. As soon as they were upstairs, he said, 'What did you come here for? We were all right until you came here'. He couldn't stand up and say it, either, he fell down. Praying exposed the devil. Prayer is like opening the door of a blast-furnace. Prayer is a man getting hold of God, by the Holy Spirit. And God exposing Himself for the grip: wanting it. He cannot do this for some, because they do not know what

prayer is, not really. When they heard Jesus praying, men said: 'Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples'. And John, you know, was a bright and shining light, he must have been pretty hot, and pretty bright and clear for the Lord to say that of him. But when God really gets hold of you ... Oh Hallelujah! ... some of you who have never shouted in your lives will shout so loud you'll probably make people ashamed of you. But if you're too decent to let Him get hold of you like that, you'll never shout of course. Prayer. This kind of prayer never takes place until a man gets beside himself. You never received Christ until you got beside yourself. You were never baptized in the Holy Ghost until you got beside yourself; and you can't pray, and you can't preach, man, until you get beside yourself. All this is to do with the consuming fire, that burns and burns.

One of our elders, a dear Yorkshire man, used to shout with a shout so loud that the wicked used to tremble. One day he said, 'Brother, if I don't shout, I don't seem to be able to get hold of God'. You wouldn't have thought he was shouting though, there was no strain about it. Do you understand that? There's shouting and shouting. Noise and noise. You understand that, don't you? Noise for noise sake is useless. But when God baptized men in the Holy Ghost in the beginning, there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind. You know what caused the sound of the mighty rushing wind, don't you? The fire was coming. You've heard a fire roaring? It is caused because the fire is consuming the oxygen out of the atmosphere. When fire comes, roaring, consuming, all the oxygen is burned out of the atmosphere. The lesson of Pentecost is that man has to live by God. When did you learn it? Did you never have this baptism of fire?

A HEART FULL OF HOLY PASSION

If anybody has got the fire, he or she will make a noise at times, and you may not like it, because you're one of these nice quiet decent people. God knows that you love Him; nobody's questioning that. But I'm telling you that there's a place beyond yourself and you have to reach it if you want God's best. Man, woman, youngster, elder, it doesn't matter who you are, high or low, you must get there. This is not a nice quiet drawing room event, not this. Consuming fire is what the Book talks about. You say, 'Really?'. You may be wanting to disagree with me now, but you'll know when you're through. When you're consumed. When your heart is full of holy passion. When fire for God really takes hold of you, then you will know that somehow the poor, flickering torch that we sing about, has passed into the eternal fire and is burning in one great consuming glowing flame with God. Remember that fire begets fire. Some men act so self-contradictorily in these things. When a man is in sin, the strongest passions of him burn like fire. They are fire, they must be or else a man is not a human being.

Behold then that when God gets hold of a man and switches all over onto the Spirit, all the fire is of God. Oh, the beauty, the glory and the purity of it. Oh, the wonder of being extended for God, given right over, gone beyond yourself. Gone beyond time, gone beyond limits to the place where outpourings of your own heart, through your own mouth, shake you to the very foundations of your being. Whether it be preaching or praying, or prophesying, there must be that glorious quality about it that comes right through from the fire of God. Have you ever been consumed by the fire of God? You can't get there by closing your eyes and rolling up your eyeballs, thinking that will help you to be carried away into God. It is not that. It is going with purpose, to set yourself aside for God; the giving over of yourself; the gathering of yourself together for it. There is nothing so tremendous for the church, nothing that will make the fire of holy love burn more in every member, than that the church should get together on their knees and on their faces before God. It will do far more good for the church than all the sermons and all the prophesyings, and all the tongues speaking, though they all have their place. That New Covenant Fellowship group would speak in tongues, and interpret and prophesy, all the gifts would function, but it wasn't that. This is that which cannot be defined, or detailed, it is that which either you know or you don't know, it is that which a man, though he might never have experienced it, knows is right.

GOD WILL TEACH ANY MAN TO PRAY

Some time ago two men were talking together, two very well-known men. The conversation got round to prayer, and when one said what prayer could accomplish, the other said, 'I've done more without prayer than you've done with it'. Oh, God, what a boast. This is a leader in the new move. Another man said he's discovered he could do without his quiet time and waiting on God. He also was a leader. Jesus did not think He could do without it. Who then is the leader and where are people going? Beloved brothers and sisters, praying or not praying is an indication of your life with God, a very basic one. It is not what is achieved by prayer - that is not the most important thing. The disciples recognized that: they did not say, 'Teach us how to pray so that we can do this, or that', they just said, 'Lord teach us to pray'. Remember God's words, 'When My people who are called by My name HUMBLE THEMSELVES and pray'. God will teach any man to pray, He will not teach them not to pray. When a man prays, God gets hold of that man and that man gets hold of God, the result will be tremendous blessings.

A GREAT CIRCLE OF PRAYER

The early church did not have a Bible to read or study, but they knew how to pray (see Acts chapter 4). Prayer was before the Bible was: pray. Do you? If you have to choose between doing this, that, or the other, pray, give yourself over to do it, let it become habitual. Beware of the 'blessing' mentality, which bargains with God - 'If I pray I'll get the blessing'. That is like saying, 'I will tithe so that God will bless me'. Too many people approach it from that angle, but that is not the way: pray from urge. Have you ever handed yourself right over that God should take you over until the flame burns unashamedly in your life, burning through all your restraints and respectability, and restrictions? The Amalekites were beaten when Moses lifted up his hands. The Amalekites were the most persistent foe of all, but Moses' uplifted hands were more persistent: Aaron and Hur saw to it that they were. Those three men knew that the only way to beat the foe was the constancy of the upheld hands. Do you understand that? People have no power and go down to defeat because they fail to sustain prayer. The disciples were promised that they would receive power after the Holy Ghost had come upon them to be witnesses unto Christ, and when it happened this is how that power manifested itself. Three thousand gladly received what the apostles said and were baptized and continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers. They had power to pray, you see; power to continue steadfastly. That is how power came to them in the beginning: they continued with one accord in prayer for ten days BEFORE Pentecost, and AFTER Pentecost they continued steadfastly in prayer: this time with teaching and fellowship and breaking of bread. Do you see? It's a circle, a great circle of prayer. For lack of this, a church, though baptized in the Spirit, has no real power. People sometimes say, 'I've been baptized in the Spirit', but when asked to show their power they cannot do so. They are blessed without doubt, and that is lovely, as it should be. This is like a present or a reward for being a good boy or a good girl. But where is that power? They continued steadfastly. That means they set their beings in one direction. The baptism in the Spirit makes a man steadfast; doubt your baptism if you are not steadfast. They went on and on and on ... they continued, and became witnesses unto Jesus Christ. God make you all giants of prayer, men and women of intercession. God make you princes in power with God.

Celebrate His victory. And when He's conquered you, and can do as He likes with you, that's the time to celebrate another victory. When you see Him conquering and conquering and conquering, that's the time to go on and on and on. When you experience difficulty after difficulty, enemy after enemy, being destroyed and overcome, when you see these wonderful things taking place, go on and on and on praying. Amen.

SOME PARENTHESES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

BERNARD HULL

A parenthesis is a word, phrase, sentence or even a paragraph inserted into a passage that is grammatically complete without it. Brackets (like these) placed around it denote such a parenthesis. So, a parenthesis is an insertion. It is not necessary but is additional to the main content of the passage. It can be a comment, a word of additional explanation or provide some context and background colour.

The Holy Spirit caused the writers of the New Testament to use parentheses from time to time. These additions and comments are deserving of thought and meditation, for every word of God is profitable to the heart of man. Some of them seem slipped in by the writer just to give additional explanation, others appear to emphasise some feature of background. They have their place and interest to us; they contribute something extra to the passages where they are found. Here are a few New Testament parentheses briefly considered.

THE PARENTHESIS OF PERSONAL PAIN

'Yea, and a sword shall pierce thine own soul also' Luke 2:35

The scene is the temple in Jerusalem. The young couple Mary and Joseph have brought their first born Son to present Him to the Lord. The Babe is six weeks old and as they fulfil the prescribed ritual, there comes a divine interruption. An elderly man, resident in Jerusalem, makes his way into the temple. By revelation of the Holy Spirit, he recognises the Babe in the arms of Mary and Joseph, and proceeds to prophesy in an ecstasy concerning the child. The things said are marvellous and are all concerning the little child and what will eventuate involving Him. Just as the prophet is in full flow, he speaks directly to the mother of the effect of this child upon many in Israel, and her thoughts are doubtless of her Son. Suddenly, there is a parenthesis concerning His effect upon her own self, a piercing in her own soul, some content of pain which would be inward, and a result of her closeness to the child.

No-one can bear Jesus in their life and be closely associated with Him without this parenthesis in their life. The victory is present through Him. He brings salvation in. Many thoughts are revealed where He comes. All fall, and some rise again, where He is seen and known, but those close to Him are pierced with pains of rejection by others. Perhaps the sword which pierced Mary down through the years lay in not always understanding her Son, and yet knowing, intuitively, the pains of His life. There are those called to bear the Son in particular intimacy - they correspond to His mother. As the processes of collapse and rebuilding, the end of the old life and the beginning of the new, take place in lives about them, they themselves know the piercing pains of patient spiritual labouring, the fellowship of His loneliness, the misunderstandings of many.

This parenthesis is part of the saints' experience. Let us consider particular instances in Mary when the sword was felt in her soul - she was 'most blessed among women', and knew the pain of blessing too.

Early Piercings

This sword, with its strange pain, had begun to pierce her soul from the moment she knew that the child had been conceived in her. There was the early misunderstanding of her espoused husband who had decided to reject her, thinking the worst of her. The stigma of seemingly having conceived a child out of wedlock was to go with her all her days. Jesus Himself was reminded of His apparent beginnings by callous antagonists (John 8:41). Mary had to learn to live with this sword in her soul.

Mary also had to make her home in Egypt for a time. While Herod slew with the physical sword many a child in Israel, she, in the meantime, knew the suffering of living in a place which was not home. To the godly Jew, to be away from the homeland was a shame. Even the Jews displaced from their homeland, known as the 'Diaspora', longed for the homeland.

And again how did she feel when it seemed her Son was lost, on the journey from Jerusalem to Galilee? The answer He gave to His parents' remonstrations must have seemed strange to her ears. She knew Him to be beyond explanation, not really hers, a gift in trust, far greater than all that had gone before. Something of the sword was in this too. And what shall we say of His going forth and leaving the home place? How did this affect her? His apparent cool response at the wedding of Cana when she sought to help His cause? He called her 'woman' - tenderly no doubt, but the message was there, the reassertion that 'He must be about His Father's business', and directed of Him only.

Later Pain

Later, Mary, along with her other offspring, suffered another seeming rejection from her Son. Verses at the end of Matthew chapter 12 tell us the story. It seems that blood ties mattered little to Jesus. He enunciated the tie of true kinship, as He received it. He appeared to disown publicly His mother and brethren after the flesh, except they fulfil His condition: 'whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother'. Surely the sword was felt by Mary then. She knew He was right, of course, but the pain of the subservience of the natural and good to the spiritual and best must nevertheless have been very real.

How deeply the sword must have pierced her soul as she watched her Son move towards His ultimate rejection! With breaking heart, she was near Him in those last days in Jerusalem. We find her with some other women who also had

loved and stood with Him - their hearts full of love, and full of pain too. They stood around the cross in the gathering darkness. He spoke to her. There again, it was that word 'woman', and she knew that He was finally leaving in the flesh, as He gave her into John's care. (He was a relative, her nephew in fact.) Such pathos and suffering were in her heart - the ever-present sword.

Mary's days had been those of mingled joy and sorrow, and she was to know more of these, but in a different way. She received the Spirit of the Son into her heart at Pentecost. Then she knew Him in an entirely different way. From then on, we may be sure, Mary knew more of joy than pain, but the sword would still have been present. The sword always is, in the lives of those who will be intimate with Jesus the Lord. It is a necessary and inevitable parenthesis as long as this age shall last.

THE PARENTHESIS OF PRECIOUSNESS

'It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick' John 11:2

Here is most blessed notoriety. At the time of Lazarus's sickness and death, Mary had not yet performed this act of love, though according to Jesus' own comment she had been keeping the ointment by, against the day of His burying. How she loved Him from the very first. As love is ever thoughtful and master-minds numerous ways to show itself, so Mary had laid aside this most valuable of ointments, just for Him.

Jesus said later of Mary that wherever the gospel was preached, she would be mentioned and this act that she had done for Him. In this parenthesis John is fulfilling that very word, mentioning her as 'that Mary', the one who had anointed Jesus. There were other Mary's which were among the Lord's people: five other Mary's are mentioned in scripture including the mother of the Lord, but John wants us to know which one had the sick brother.

The Bethany Family

There is something peculiarly precious about this Bethany family. Two sisters, both so different from each other, and Lazarus their brother, none of whose words are recorded in scripture - a silent lover of the Lord and the object of the most mighty miracle Jesus did. There was ever a welcome at the home of these three for Jesus. It was a sanctuary for Him - so near to Jerusalem, yet so different from that city in which He was unwanted. Jerusalem typifies the decay of institutional religion, whereas Bethany shows the vibrant freshness of true church life.

Martha

Why should we not covet this distinction of Mary's? It is a state of life into which we should all grow. Her sister Martha is remembered for her serving the Lord. Her service drove and cumbered her in earlier days, so that she missed the vital things of keeping her heart in repose at Jesus' feet whilst serving. However, later, we find her serving Him without tensions and turmoil: she apparently had learned to serve from the place of rest.

Lazarus

We know little of Lazarus, save what is told us in this section of John's gospel. He appears on the page of scripture sick. It is true that we know Jesus loved him. We then find him dead (though Jesus said he was asleep), and then raised up and loosed. Finally, we note that he is reclining at table with Jesus (John 12:2). Here is a great testimony for others to come and see, and through which to believe on the Son. Scripture specifically records that many came to see this 'new' and raised up man Lazarus, and many believed on the Lord because of Him (John 12:9-11). God wants us all to have this testimony. Once we were sick in spirit and soul though loved of Jesus. Then we were allowed to pass into death that the sickness may be terminated, and Jesus, who once permitted the death, raised us into newness of life, a 'loosed' life in which we recline with Him in heart-rest and eat of His meat.

Mary

Now we come to 'that Mary', she who exemplifies the high peak of spiritual life. The natural outpourings of adoring worship, the whole self bestowed upon Jesus, despite the murmurings of those colder hearts who yet own His Name! 'Why this waste?', they cry. But they dwell on a lower plane of spiritual life, and are yet limited by material considerations, knowing little of the things which are appropriate to the spirit, and the need of the hour.

Love had saved the ointment for His burial. Now love had penetrated far further, knowing intuitively that there would be no body to anoint after death! Lazarus's raising had shown Mary that. She had heard that Jesus was 'the Resurrection and the Life', and she anointed Him with her poured out life while she could, while He was there. Availing herself of the moment when it came, she broke open the alabaster box - the symbol of her own life. All intactness had to go in order that the fragrance of her adoring affection should refresh Him in the hour of His sorrow. The word translated 'anoint' used here in scripture is not the one referring to sacred anointing, but a word meaning 'to refresh'.

Progression in Spiritual Life

Much more could be said of these things. We are called on to be those who serve, as Martha did; to rest with Jesus and eat, as Lazarus did; and to come yet further in and worship, as Mary did, bestowing all upon Him. She was transfigured as she worshipped. Her hair, the glorious covering of natural beauty, became inglorious, matted and dishevelled, but the inner beauty of spirit shone through, doubtless imbuing her eyes with fire of devotion and adoration. While she anointed Him, Mary herself was anointed upon her head. She was crowned with the fragrance herself, it rebounded upon her as she magnified Him. She herself was refreshed as she refreshed Him, though she did not have anything of self in mind as she bestowed herself upon Him. All the house was filled with the odour of the ointment, fragrance filled the air. Mixed responses filled the watching hearts.

Remember

Mary's act of love forever stands - a memorial for all.

This parenthesis concerning her is introduced at the beginning of a chapter on the death of her beloved brother. It stands at the head of an account in which she found her Lord Jesus did not respond as she thought He perhaps would. Possibly she thought that her special devotion to Jesus would exempt her from some forms of grief and pain; maybe she knew that the Lord was able to do among those who loved Him things that He could not do among those who loved Him more feebly. It is possible that those of us who love Him much, and have saved up things most precious for Him, may find He leads us into the shadow of death, of loss and the darkness of strange times. But He will come as He came to her and gave her, not words, but His tears, that she might later rise to greater heights of outpouring love to refresh Him forever and fill the heavens with the fragrance - and the earth too.

THE PARENTHESIS OF THE PRE-EMINENT

'Though I speak ... but the greatest of these is charity' 1 Cor. 13:13

It may be thought strange to say that first Corinthians chapter thirteen in its entirety is a parenthesis. Something slotted in, complete in itself, adding details to the main drift of the narrative. But this is exactly what it is! It is true that there are no parenthesis brackets marking it thus, but in our minds we may insert them.

In our two earlier parentheses we have written of two ladies, Mary the mother of the Lord, and then Mary of Bethany. Now we find the pre-eminent chapter in scripture and note that the female is here too. 'Charity ... seeketh not HER own,' it says. So we continue in the feminine, which is perhaps interesting to the thoughtful heart. Both the Mary's we have considered were great lovers of Jesus. It seems that we men may well need to take note, that tenderness of the native air in which God dwells, which air comes from the bedrock of His nature, and He chooses the truly feminine to show us the way.

No Chapter Thirteen?

The letter of first Corinthians need not contain chapter thirteen! Its reasoning and argument are not disturbed by removing that chapter. Paul is considering the subject of spiritual gifts in the twelfth chapter, in particular seeking to make clear that there is One Head over all, and One Spirit who is to work all those diversities. He concludes the chapter by saying 'and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way', and that way is mentioned in two phrases in chapter fourteen verse one, 'Pursue (this is the force of the word) after charity and desire spiritual gifts ...' This exposition does justice to the flow of thought in Paul's mind.

It seems that Paul could not tell these Corinthians to follow after charity without writing the most sublime declaration of what love is, having pointed out how empty spiritual life and service is without it. How the Corinthian saints needed this parenthesis, this definition! It is complete in itself. O that he had only needed to write this to them! That their hearts had been so in tune with God that all other queries, questions and malpractice might have been met and answered by these words concerning love.

One wonders concerning Paul's mind as he had been dictating this long letter. How exercised in heart, how grieved and broken he must have been, as he heard news of the state of affairs in Corinth! Then their letter had come with its honest and searching request for help on certain matters. So much seemed so wrong there. He moves through, point by point, the things he has to answer, and loves to say, 'The rest I'll set in order when I come' (11:24). Now, at last, he can come on to more positive spiritual things, the wonderful truth of the body and its glorious Head, and as he speaks and his amanuensis writes his words, his heart is filled with the wonder of the complete answer to all - charity. He speaks personally, a man most deeply taught of God, certainly from life's experiences, things painful and difficult and those of joy and fulfilment. Though I speak, though I have, though I bestow, though I give. He had come through it all. He had spoken, prophesied, known, bestowed and given, but unless pure, holy charity inspired the whole, it all amounted to nothing.

Fourteen Things

Did Paul realize as he wrote that he speaks of fourteen things in his definition of charity? Most certainly he knew that he was speaking of that which defies any full analysis. Greater than all words, larger than all measurement. We know that in scripture the number seven speaks of spiritual perfection, and that fourteen in scripture means double spiritual perfection. Two sevens. In our lives we have that which is in ourselves and that which makes up our relationships with those around us. In verses four to eight we have the qualities of love itself, and the statement of seven things in which charity moves out in relationship to others. Here is the double spiritual perfection of the life that dwells in love. Its own inward states are sublime, and its relationships with all other things and persons are rooted in love.

It appears that the following are seven things which love is in itself - it suffers long and while it does so, it is kind. It does not envy but is properly self-content. It does not lift itself up for public display, but is wonderfully discreet. It does not behave in an unseemly way to cause offence, nor seek a selfish place for itself. Finally, it is not provoked. The word 'easily' does not occur in the original. There is a docility about love which defies provocation. Now we come to love's thoughts. No evil lies in the loving mind, its attitudes towards iniquity are full of grief, and as regards truth, it leaps with gladness when it hears it. Love's inclination is ever to spare and cover things where possible, and it believes all things without foolish naivety, hoping in God working in all things. Love is able to endure, and at the end is that which does not break down.

Permanency of the Pre-eminent

Now Paul speaks of this charity that shall never cease, whereas all these laudable gifts and powers will certainly fade away. It is as though he desires to contextualise all difficulties besetting the Corinthians by this statement of the greatest thing. How issues of 'greatness' had gripped their hearts! Was Paul greater than Apollos, or Peter greater than both? What were the greater gifts? Heads were swollen with self-seeking. Sometimes, for the glory of God, some may seek position and greatness. James and John were like that at one stage - 'We want to sit one at your right hand and one at your left', they said

to Jesus. They desired it for His glory and for the use of authority for His sake! Perhaps some in Corinth were like that. Most certainly Paul himself had had such an attitude, but he had grown out of spiritual infancy, putting away childish things. He now knew where true greatness lay - in loving with the divine love. There may even be times when faith and hope burn low, but love is the greatest and will not die out.

This jewel-like chapter was given to a muddled and

dishevelled church. They were in danger of going right back to the mire. It seemed that in sending them this parenthetical chapter God was giving them a glimpse of that which was possible for them, of that unto which they could rise. This chapter comes down to us, those who are seeking to move forward in gifts and church life. Here is the heart of all. He who seeks greatness (and do we not all desire to achieve and be great?) - note deeply where it lies.

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THE AXE IS LAID - PART THREE

GEORGE W. NORTH

The issue of baptism is a very important one in scripture. As previously pointed out, John Baptist, when speaking in this connection, used the figure of a tree being cut off from its roots. John was radical. He never spoke of bending the tree, or training it, or pruning it, nor had he anything like that in mind. Many modern religious teachers appear to be advocating this method for salvation, but not John. He made it clear that God's demands for men could not be met except by a completely fresh start. This was later confirmed by Jesus Himself, and by the rest of the New Testament writers. John was a man filled with the Holy Ghost and had been so from his mother's womb: with the exception of Jesus, there was not another in the whole world of whom that could be said. God was crying out in the wilderness through that one man. One - just one, there was nobody else out there but him, and he spoke differently from everybody else in the land. When God speaks as clearly as that, it is vital to shut the ears to all other voices, especially if they are contrary.

PREPARE THE WAY

Though John's experience and ministry were so wonderful, he remained a humble man. He never let it go to his head. John knew positively well what his ministry was, because it had been defined for him by Isaiah, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord', the prophet had said, so John did just that. He preached the baptism of repentance, without wavering. Thereby he pointed out that the very first step everyone must take in preparation for the coming of the Lord is repentance. This accomplished, a man is ready for baptism, which is then permitted him. Baptism is the way of the Lord: He took that way personally and He insists upon it for all His people.

Baptism is the way. God sent John to practise it because it is the method He Himself uses. John PRACTISED water baptism in order to define the method, and thereby prepared the way for the Lord. This is at least one of the reasons why the Lord was Himself baptized by John. It was a righteous thing for Him to confirm His servant's work. It would prepare the way for Him and the greater baptism to which He was committed. John's business was to make people understand by means of a visible element, that they were baptized in an invisible element, namely the Holy Spirit. It is vital to every man, at this point, to understand that before either of these baptisms (water or Spirit) may be administered to him, he must know that baptism

which must precede them in his experience, namely the baptism of repentance. Apart from this initial baptism, he may not be baptized.

It should be realized that baptism in water was introduced by God through an Old Testament prophet. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah, not the spirit and power of the Lord Jesus. Elijah and John belonged to the Old Covenant, great men though they both were, they did not belong to the New Covenant. This means that water baptism was a legal administration. It was practised under law, and could only be applied by law. The law governing the practise of water baptism was the spiritual baptism of repentance. Baptism in water was not otherwise permitted. God administers the baptism of repentance, man cannot do that. Man administers baptism in water, God does not do that. Though John did not use any baptismal formula, it is probable that he baptized in the name of God. Certainly he was God's representative. John preached the baptism of repentance. At no time did he PREACH baptism in water, he practised that without exception. When he did this, he did so with the full knowledge that it was quite secondary to the two other baptisms he preached, namely: the baptism of repentance and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Baptism in water typified both. When a man was baptized in water it was his confession that he had already been inwardly baptized with repentance. John absolutely insisted upon this, demanding that the people brought forth the fruits of repentance. Nobody was baptized just because he believed John, or because he wanted to be baptized, he must first be visited by God. A great inward conviction of his own sin must come over a man's soul. He must feel the weight of it, the wickedness of it, the uncleanness of it, and cry out to be rid of it all. This must be shown by his life, and if it is, he may be baptized in water as an illustration of what has gone on in his soul. 'I indeed baptize you with water', said John, 'but He that cometh after me is mightier than I. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.'

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN

The Bible records that when God began this present creation, the water and the Spirit were together in very close connection: the Spirit was moving upon the face of the waters and over the deep. Not surprisingly then, we discover that the apostle John records Jesus saying to Nicodemus that if a man

wishes to become a child of God he must be born of water and of the Spirit. John Baptist was saying, 'Look, this baptism of mine is all about Jesus coming and baptizing people in the Holy Spirit'. John fully realized this. It was such a powerful thing in his heart that when Jesus came asking to be baptized in water, John forbid Him, 'I have need to be baptized of Thee', he said. John was already filled with the Holy Spirit, and had been since he was born, yet he knew he needed to be baptized in the Holy Spirit by Jesus. To some this may come as a staggering realization. It was a most astonishing conversation when it took place, we all need to take it to our heart. John was most certainly conscious of a tremendous lack; and in view of that, we may all feel like crying out, 'What lack I yet?' Baptism in water is a right and proper thing in its place. It illustrates many precious truths to the understanding mind, but it highlights many limitations also. Every man who administers that baptism demonstrates that both he and it has many limitations, because neither he or it is God. He is but a man. He has to use the sea, a lake, a stream, or a bath. Wherever it is, or whatever it may be called, it is only water, not the Holy Spirit. John and his ministry was limited. The truth he taught was wonderful; the figure he used was good; his insistence was exemplary, but he was only a man.

Though he ministered on the threshold of the New Testament, John and his message and ministry came very far short of the true New Testament ministry of the Lord Jesus. These Old Testament worthies, from Moses onward, taught that upon confession of sin, provided a man brought the appropriate sacrifice, he could repeatedly find and obtain forgiveness of sins. It was a gracious ministry, but so very far short of what Christ had to teach. Not one of them ever said, 'You must be born again', and most certainly no-one thought of offering himself for sin. It would have been blasphemy to have let it even cross the mind. Jesus had to come before this could be said to man. He could talk about the necessity of new birth, because He could speak of offering Himself for sin. Though forgiveness of sins was available to all, new birth from God was not available under the Old Covenant. John was the last of that great line of Old Testament prophets, who spoke of remission of sins. He was a miracle man, almost unique. God wrought a miracle so that he could be born. It was not the same kind of miracle He wrought in Mary for the birth of His son, but a miracle nonetheless. His mother Elisabeth had been barren all her life. It was quite impossible for her to bear a son, so to introduce the new order which was about to dawn, God gave her a son. In every way; in his person; in his birth; in his preaching; in his ministry and baptism; John was inferior to Jesus. There are those who make baptism in water the 'be all and end all' of everything. They do not seem to understand though, that it is only a picture. There is nothing of substance in water baptism, it is only a parable, it implies far more than it can impart. John's message was uncompromising. He fearlessly taught that there must be an end to the old manner of life; and to this day, unless people are wanting this, they ought never to be baptized in water. John's ministry in this respect was to bring the axe and lay it at the root of the tree. The Lord Jesus he presented, and who followed him, cut the tree down.

DEATH TO THE OLD

God's purpose with the old life is to cut it down, bring it to death, lay it flat, and burn it up. Baptism is not a method of fulfilling a denominational idea, or of joining a church. In God's

heart it has nothing to do with that, there was no church to join. God was crying out in the wilderness, drawing attention to something new, in order to introduce something newer still, and blessed are all those who do not seek to invest water baptism with ideas of their own but will listen to Him. God's intention by baptism is not to train us up or knock us into shape. It is utter destruction with a view to total newness of spiritual life, and unless we want that, we are only playing around with Bible ideas and practices. Men never really get anywhere with God unless they come to a place of self-aborrence. Except this place be reached, we can never know uttermost salvation, and God, and His purposes for us in His new creation.

I wish somebody had told me all these things before I was baptized in water. I never knew them, and when I did learn them later, I wished to get baptized all over again. Natural and reasonable though the desire was, it was misplaced. It doesn't matter how many times a person is dipped in water, the meaning of it can only be the same. When I was baptized in water I only had very little knowledge of the meaning of it, and very little experience of that. There was an occasion when a man asked to be baptized; 'I've been baptized before', he said, 'but I want to be baptized again. Sensing the possibility of confusion, he was asked why. 'When I was baptized the first time I wasn't saved', he said, so consent was given. When his turn came to be baptized, before going down into the pool, he stood on the steps and said, 'I want to testify to you that this will be my second baptism in water'. Everyone listened in silence, wondering - perhaps he was confusing infant sprinkling when a baby. 'The first time I was baptized I went down into the pool a dry sinner and came up a wet one', he said. A murmur went round the congregation. They understood him perfectly. Some of them had been in the same position themselves. Before, it was just a rite, this time it was real. Soon afterwards he was out working for God in another land. He really meant what he did; death to all his former life; death to England; death to comforts; death to nice homes; death to hot and cold water; death to 'fridges; death to washing machines; death to cars; death to the lot, because he was dead to self. Oh, not by water baptism, but by the death it symbolizes. I'm not saying that everybody ought to do what he did, but I do say that everybody ought to know the same spiritual experience and to be prepared to do as that man did. He was getting on in years - how sad, and yet how beautiful. I guess he felt that what scrap of life he had left, he wanted to invest for God - totally.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

This allows a question: were you baptized in order to devote yourself entirely to God, and are you confessing you are doing so, or are in the condition to do so? Is your old life dead, so dead that it has no more power over you, and that this world in which you live holds no more attraction to you? Are you saying, 'I don't want the world or my old self any more, it has gone from me'? If you are dead and buried with Christ, you are ready for water baptism. This is not what John taught because he did not know these things. Baptism is far more than what he was able to teach, good though that was. John's teaching was limited simply because he was only the fore-runner of Christ. It was great and effective, but in his day the greater truth had yet to be revealed. Paul, who explained and knew the truth of Christ far better than John, took the initial truth of baptism, which John preached, much further. Paul preached the truth of

repentance and forgiveness and added to it, death to sin, and resurrection into a new life. John could not talk about new birth, and of crucifixion of the old man, and of death and resurrection, because he did not know what these were. Had he known them he would have preached them as fearlessly as he had preached his limited Gospel. Paul experienced them though, so taking up the same figure of washing away sins and conversion from a former way of living, he added to it new truth and put baptism into fullest perspective for us. John said that one mightier than he was coming after him, who was preferred before him, and who would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire. If asked which of the two persons you would prefer to baptize you, John or Jesus, who would you choose? Which baptism do you prefer? Surely the answer must be 'Jesus and His baptism'. We are living in the days of Jesus' ministry - not John's.

It is most illuminating to discover that there is nothing in scripture about 'following the Lord in baptism'. This phrase is so beloved of men because they invented it entirely. There is very little ground in scripture for this invention though. It is undoubtedly connected with Jesus' baptism in Jordan, but He was only baptized there to be pointed out to the nation as the Christ. His baptism in water was a unique occasion. We cannot follow Him in that. The flowing water did not signify the washing away of His sins, He never had any. Nor did it signify the death of His old man, He never was one. Nor did it signify His baptism in the Spirit, He did not need it. John said, 'He shall baptize YOU with the Holy Ghost and with fire'. John did not mention water in connection with the baptism wherewith Jesus baptizes. He did speak of wind though, 'His fan is in His hand', John said; wind and fire. Knowing this, how can we think of anything other than the happenings on the day of Pentecost? What a day! It was the day of the sound of the wind and the appearance of fire, which sat on the head of everyone in the room. John is really telling us quite plainly of the grand birthday of the Church on earth. It was a glorious baptism. All the great activities, powers and glories of God were concentrated in one, for that baptism. The Holy Spirit is God, and in Him are gathered and concentrated all that God is and has ever done. As in Christ all the fulness of God dwells bodily, so in the Holy Spirit dwells all the fulness of God. What Jesus wrought at Calvary in history, is now in the Holy Ghost eternally. Redemption in Christ Jesus is now in the Holy Spirit. All is in Him. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God and all of each is in every one of them. We do not understand this mystery. Mere mind cannot take it in. We simply read what scripture says and believe it.

DEATH TO SIN

Approaching Romans chapter six with this in mind, the doctrine of baptism is at once clear. This letter, like so many of Paul's letters, is almost entirely given over to doctrine. He would have written very little had he not written doctrine. His letters may not be systematic expositions of theology, but that matters very little, they set out doctrine, and in this particular chapter, the doctrine of baptism.

The first thing to notice is that this baptism is a spiritual one. There is no water in Romans 6. It commences, 'What shall we say then, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid'. When speaking of this baptism do not ever entertain the thought, or the suggestion, of personal continuation

in sin. You and I are not to continue in sin. Here is the truth: do you see that tree? it is to be cut down! How then can it continue its former life? If it is cut off from the roots it cannot live that same life any more. 'God forbid', Paul says, 'How, tell me how it can be done? Please do not think or say anything so ridiculous. The idea is so absolutely opposite to faith and common sense'. It cannot be done says Paul. Grasp this with all your heart. You cannot be baptized in Spirit and go on living in sin. 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death'. Plainly that cannot be baptism in water. No-one is buried into death by water baptism, common sense tells us that. By the same token, baptism in water cannot end sin. Baptism in the Spirit is burial into Christ's death to sin, that is its prime purpose. People can never pass into this great new life of freedom from sin until they are baptized in the Spirit, where there is no sin.

I'm ever so glad that God did not whisk away His Son into heaven without dying. If He had done so there would have been plenty of ground for pleading for sin. From the moment of our baptism we have to walk in newness of life, like Christ, who was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father. Father's glory is to beget children in the likeness of Christ. Therefore Jesus baptizes us into death, His death. There is no greater death than that. It is the all powerful death created by God. John could only talk about cutting down the tree as a future event, but Christ took the whole matter further - He has cut it down. It is done. But do not only think about what you have been cut off from. Think about what you are rooted in now for the future. All the spiritual inheritance from the past is destroyed. When you are cut off from your roots, you do not need a psychologist to analyse you, and sort you out. He only seeks to analyse situations, and find roots and causes. Do you believe in this drastic work of God, or are you all for taking spoonfuls of the soft soothing religious syrup? God's treatment is drastic. It has to be, the situation is critical. Let no man or woman think he or she can ever be pleasing to God in the old state. That is impossible. God has decreed that it must be buried. Let everyone believe that when this baptism is fully wrought within, it is possible as well as desirable to live pleasing to God.

BURIED WITH CHRIST

Dead and buried with Christ into His death by baptism. Hallelujah, what a gospel! There is no gradual easing into this, it is an act complete in itself. The approach to it may be progressive and long, but it's a great crisis when it happens. Face it. Be real. Yield to Christ utterly, and be dead, and say, 'I'm dead, by Your baptism I'm a dead man Lord. Your death is now mine'. This is that baptism to which John referred, saying of Jesus the baptizer, 'He is to be preferred before me'. Everyone must prefer Jesus Christ above and beyond John or anyone else. He, with this baptism, is all a man needs. No man can have life till he is prepared to die. You can be a hanger-on. Of course, many are doing just this, going along, joining this, doing that, but everything turns on whether or not you and I have received, and have been included in the death of Jesus Christ. Everyone must let the blessed risen Christ get His hands on him and baptize him. This is God's great answer to all man's problems, beloved, I promise you, in Jesus' name. It may seem beyond believing, but it is not. You have to believe. God has

put it in that domain. It will only take place in the believing heart.

Now all this is in the Holy Spirit, He came for this. Jesus is now operating in the Holy Spirit, moving and working by Him, and we also must live and move in the Holy Spirit. But there is no way into the Holy Spirit except through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whether or not we grasp and understand this, you and I must experience it.

All inanimate plant life draws its life from the soil in which it is planted. Yet to pick up that soil and look at it makes us wonder how anything can get life from it. Plants do though, no rose would produce roses if it was just hung on a wall, it has to be in the soil. It is inexplicable to us. How can it be? A botanist may tell us about nitrates and oxygen and all the nutrients in the soil, but we do not know, neither can he tell us how those things got there. We do know why that death is so nutritious though, and what that nutrition is, and how it got there. The Lord Christ put it there. When He died He established His life in death; He took all His virtues into death with Him, awaiting our planting in them there. No man can die the exact death Christ died; no-one is asked to; praise God no-one has to. He only could do that; we are planted in THE LIKE-NESS of that death. In man's eyes He was crucified through weakness, but in God's eyes He was crucified in His mighty strength, and dying, infused all His virtues and powers in death for us. Some try to die, they moan and groan to die, pray to die, but all the time they are groaning, praying, struggling to die, they are not dead. It is not by self-effort, and many prayers, and hopes, and struggles, that a man gets rid of his old self. Only God can separate old Adam from a man; it is a miracle of grace and power. A man can step into the water and be baptized, but only Christ can immerse the man, spirit, and soul, and body in the Spirit.

DEAD INDEED

This is why so many people are so long before they get through into Christ's life. Dear people, they do not realize the hopelessness and helplessness of struggling. The words 'Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace, foul I to the fountain fly, wash me Saviour or I die', express their state perfectly. When He sees in the heart nothing but a pure desire to die away, plus perfect trust in Him to do it, it will happen. A strong faith must rise in the heart, not a struggling faith, but a faith you will not even know is faith, the real faith of you, the person. The trouble with many people is that they do not know what faith is. They have their own ideas of faith. When this faith comes you will not know what it is, it just happens. Always remember that wonderful verse in Acts 15, in which Peter declares that God knoweth the heart and gives the Holy Ghost, purifying hearts by faith. They didn't know what faith was - something rose within them; a calm confidence in God; a blessed assurance of heart; an ascendance of the whole being; a knowing. Faith is harmonising with God's word; an assistance from heaven. It is not just a result of believing all the right things. It is being cast on the mercy of God without a grumble or a groan. These things may precede it, but faith lies beyond them and that is all God requires. He does the miracle then. He will baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire; bury you in that death; plant you there. You will then know you have been included in it. This has always been in God's heart for you.

Suddenly you will come to the realization that it is done, it will dawn with complete certainty upon the understanding. Explanations may come more slowly to the mind, but inward knowledge is immediate: you will know God has done it.

Knowledge that the old man is crucified with Christ is granted to every child of God personally. The body of sin is destroyed, (rendered powerless or ineffective, however you may want to say it), that henceforth we should not be the slaves of sin. Unless a man or woman is perverted in mind, the thought of slavery to sin is abhorrent. People like to think they can sin if and when and as they want, that is how dead they are. If they were told they were slaves of sin they would say, 'I'm nobody's slave, I please myself'; so strong are the bonds that bind the soul, and so deceived is the mind. But God insists, there is no mistaking Him; this chapter is a positive death-knell to sin. To trace the various phrases through the verses is to discover the truth so vital to know. 'Shall we continue in sin?: dead to sin: we should not serve sin: freed (justified) from sin: dead INDEED (not theoretically, mark you) to sin: let not sin reign in your mortal body: sin shall not have dominion over you: we were slaves of sin: made free from sin: being made free from sin: the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Eternal life is free from sin. This chapter is all about that death to the old nature, to that set of the desires, to those terrible bondages of the will, and the fixed habit and disposition to commit sin, this death is the destruction of it all.

BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT

The miracle is effected initially in only one way, namely being baptized in and into the Holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows what His death and resurrection and all His works are, what they are for, and why He did them. He also knows that no man can get at and experience them unless he is baptized in the Holy Ghost. Of himself, a man, though he pray for them all his life, cannot experience them, yet they are free beloved, free for all. But remember that because they are free, they are not cheap, they are free, like the air we breathe, but we cannot treat lightly. There must be serious preparation for this. True repentance is a wonderful beginning but that certainly is not the end. John was only preparing the way of the Lord. The Baptist was sent to get men ready for the real baptism. His preaching and practice was designed to make men understand that eternal life is by spiritual baptism. His business was to make straight the paths of God in peoples understanding, and level out hills and valleys in their hearts. Men are devious. They try other ways, they go up and down, they will climb the highest hills and penetrate the deepest valleys, they go this way or that way: they wander about anywhere, everywhere. That is why John took his stand right on the edge of the wilderness and the border of the promised land, and said 'I am here to show you the straight and narrow way of the Lord. This is good news to every man, for everyone knows that the straight, smooth, level road, is the quickest road. Come and be baptized', he said, 'I'm putting you on the right road, the mightier than I is coming. He is going to baptize you with the reality, with the Holy Ghost and fire'. According to John, man should go straight from one baptism to the other. This could not happen then though, because some three or four years had to elapse before the true baptism could be administered: Christ had not died and risen and returned to heaven. Nevertheless, under John's ministry people were put

on the straight narrow way. By demonstration John was saying you must put yourselves entirely into the hands of the Lord Christ. Let Him take hold of you, all your manhood, all your womanhood, all you are, a thinking, feeling, needy person. He loves you. Let Him get hold of you and do His will for you. It will be like coming home, passing into the promised land.

How many really desire that? Face up to it. Make your choice, you will never be forced into it. The choice you must make is to let Him do it; you know you cannot baptize yourself.

You can jump in a river and come out again, but that's not water baptism. Somebody, in the name of the Lord, has to do it for you. Baptism in water, right and proper though it is, is not the most important thing, eternal life does not depend upon that, you must be baptized into the Holy spirit. John did not say that baptism in water was the way in. He said that repentance was the way in. Baptism was the chosen symbol of the way, that is all. The way is by baptism in the Spirit, at the hands of Jesus Christ.

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BIBLE STUDY

ROGER SHUTTLEWORTH

THE SONG OF SOLOMON - PART TWO

Ch. 2:8 - 3:5 Deepening the Relationship

In the first of our studies in the Song of Solomon, we have seen how the Lord brings the soul into the first experiences of communion with Himself. Beginning with the sense of need that arose in her heart, the Lord has brought His beloved through times of great joy and bliss. Yet there is still a great deal of ground to cover; the love-relationship between Christ and Christian, as depicted here in the relationship between the king and his beloved one, has to be deepened and broadened. He ever leads us on to higher heights and deeper depths; He wants us to be 'able to comprehend ... the length and depth and breadth and height, and to know the love of Christ'.

There are a number of obstacles to this deeper communion which the Lord has to deal with in our lives, and this He will graciously do as we follow on with Him.

We left our last study with a vision of blissful communion (ch.2:4-7) and the joyful cry of the bride, 'I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem ... that ye stir not up, nor awake love, till it please'. The present study will lead us to the repetition of that cry, this time from a place of greater understanding and better insight.

1. The Call Received - ch.2:8-15

The initial 'honeymoon' experience of the soul united to Christ is not the end, or even the beginning of the end (to borrow Churchill's phrase); it may be the end of the beginning. Our love for Him has to be pure and strong, free from any taint of selfishness or sentimentality. In these verses we see how the Lord calls the maiden out of herself and the contemplation of her own blessedness.

vv.8,9. Far from the private, intimate scene that we have left in the previous verses, we now see the bride and her beloved separated by a wall, windows and a lattice. The call which now comes to her is a call outwards.

She knows His voice, and it thrills her heart. He calls her to be with Him where he is. We see Him as the Risen Lord, full of life and vitality, ever youthful (Acts 4:30), having

surmounted all obstacles - death, hell, sin and satan are all vanquished - and there is no reason why she should not be able to respond. Inward communion is vital, but it is not the whole story. The Lord, as well as being within, is also outside in the world of men, the world of sorrow and suffering, the world of real life. 'Our wall' may be for some of us a wall of thinking that the inner communion is all there is. It is this kind of thinking which leads to the cloister, or at least to the complacent contemplation of our own blessing, let the world perish as it may. The Lord will have none of this.

vv.10-13. To the soul that has withdrawn from the world into its own world of inwardness, the Lord comes with His wonderful call; 'Rise up, my love!'. The memory of bitter experience, contrasted with the joy of fellowship with Him, may lead to a fearful desire to have nothing to do with the world any more. Yet the heart that has withdrawn, hurt, from the world, must learn to face it again as an overcomer, to see that it need no longer be a threat. There is a warfare to be waged and, to quote Churchill again, 'Wars are not won by withdrawals!'. So the Lord gives His own wonderfully positive account of the power of Resurrection Life. One is reminded of poor Mary Magdalene as she stood outside the tomb on the Resurrection morning. Her 'winter' was about to be turned into glorious spring! The winter and its rain are over and gone. That which shut the soul in is finished. Flowers appear where there were none -

Flow'rs worthy of Paradise ...
Poured forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain,
Flow'rs of all hue and, without thorn, the rose.

Jeremiah tells us that the turtledove (v.12) was a migratory bird (Jer.8:7), and its voice was the harbinger of spring. The green figs are ones that have remained on the tree throughout the winter and are quickly ripened in the spring. So the character that is worked in us during the harsh times of life bears its fruit in its season - see Hebrews 12:11.

The Lord repeats His invitation to her, v.13. He wants her to see the world not as a threat, but as an opportunity to demonstrate the quality of that life that He gives; for the world, Paul says, is ours! (1 Cor.3:21-23).

vv.14,15. One could place the emphasis in v.14 on the 'my'. The Lord reassures His people even as He calls them out. The

guarantee of His presence accompanies His great commission (Matt.28:19,20). The dove represents the timid heart, as it hides in the clefts of the rocks and in the crevices of the steep places (translated 'stairs'), out of sight and out of danger. To such a soul His call comes. The Cross has to be lived out, it cannot be hidden away.

The call is also a call to self-commitment. 'Show yourself!', He says, 'Speak the word of faith, and it shall be so. You have heard My voice; now let Me hear your voice!'. The heart must respond, 'I can, therefore I must, therefore I will'.

It is in the 'rough and tumble' of life that we really discover ourselves, and our spiritual 'airs and graces' are put to the test. There are reactions and attitudes discovered there that we never knew existed. We would prefer to be hidden away where nothing disturbs, where there is no jarring note to upset our repose - but that is not life, it is unreality. The Lord wants these things to be revealed so that He can deal with them. Sanctification is a crisis leading to a process; grace has to 'well refinery heart', and the soul that will not give attention to these things will bring no fruit to perfection - see 2 Peter 1:5-9.

2. The Call Refused - ch.2:16,17

The Lord has given His clear call; the maiden, however, does not respond wholeheartedly. There are shadows, she admits; there are things that perhaps should not be as they are - but let us continue in that happy fellowship that we have known and enjoyed before. Note the all-revealing primary emphasis - He is MINE. There is still a preoccupation with the 'I, my, mine'. Compare Phil.2:19-21.

The Lord truly seeks our worship, and if worship brings us blessing, as it surely does, that is still no sufficient motive. We are to worship Him because of who and what He is, not because it is blessed to worship. Many people unfortunately approach their relationship with Christ on a completely wrong basis because their underlying motive is, 'What can He do for me?'. He has to educate us beyond all that and bring us to the place of complete and utter self-abnegation. The maiden therefore has to learn a strange but necessary lesson.

3. The Complacent Rebuked - ch. 3:1-4

v.1 There is a ring of utter complacency about the first few words of v.1 - 'By night, on my bed'. He had called her to rise up (ch.2:10,13). 'I sought Him'. And why should she not expect

to find Him as she had always done? We gain an insight here into those strange times when it seems that the Lord, in spite of all His promises, has apparently forsaken the soul. Only He understands, nobody else, what He is doing. He will give us the treasures of darkness (Isa.45:3) as well as the treasures of the light. Reader, if this is your experience, then take heart and learn from these things, for the Lord will as surely bring you out as it is He that has brought you into this position.

v.2 Now she says, 'I will arise'. She is jerked into activity. For the 'broad ways', see Matthew 7:13. Her seeking is not yet directed aright, as she stays in the safe, familiar streets of the city - and yet He is not there either.

v.3 Watchful friends, counsellors, elders, please take note. There are ways that some souls must tread, along which only the Lord Himself is able to conduct them. Those who watch for souls (Hebrews 13:17) do not always have the answer, and it is certain that formulae will not help. We shall see this again in chapter 5. And yet she is wise to seek help, and we see that the answer is not very far away.

v.4 She did not utterly forsake the watchmen and go away disillusioned and embittered. It was but a little way that she passed from them, out of the city and into the wide world. Often the liberating word comes quickly. Sometimes it comes as we forget about ourselves and come face to face with the needs of others. Many a man would find his problems halved, if not completely solved, if he were to go and love those worse off than himself. However the answer came to her, it came quickly and she found her Beloved. See how now she is all activity - 'I found Him, I held Him, I would not let Him go'. Again one is reminded of Mary Magdalene. 'I brought Him' - compare ch.2:4. We now see the synergy that is to be between the working of His will and the directing along the lines of His will, she has become interested in the things in which he is interested. See John chapter 5, especially v.17; John 7:17; Phil.2:13.

4. The Charge Reiterated - ch.3:5

Now we see that the communion that she enjoyed before has been restored to her, but it is now changed, freed from the element of selfishness that was there before. She has learned to trust her Lord even when not conscious of His presence, to walk by faith and not by sight or by feelings. And she has found that it is in serving others that her relationship with the Lord truly deepens. Her heart is becoming more aligned with His.

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

It has been decided that the circulation of the New Covenant Voice magazine will be produced by Issue numbers only, rather than a seasonal quarterly basis at present. We will endeavour to maintain a production of four issues each year.

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