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Living Water

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THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS — CHAPTER 6

Highlights of a Bible reading

As a background to this chapter, we need to see that chapter five, up to verse 11, speaks of the question of our sins and the way that they are dealt with. Christ has died and the question of sins for those who trust in Him has been dealt with once for all. Then, from the middle of chapter five through to the end of chapter seven Paul deals with the question of indwelling sin. ‘Sin’ is the principle of disobedience which is abroad in the world and has a place in all our hearts. ‘Sin’ is the condition; ‘sins’ are the actual acts that we do.

Chapter six therefore, in speaking of the root principle of wrong doing in our hearts, relates to our experience as christians. The passage shows what may be worked out in the believer who is cleansed and indwelt of the Holy Spirit and who is concerned to put an end in themselves to the order of man that God condemned at the cross.

One of the great questions raised in chapter six is whether sin or Christ is to be our master. The contrast is put pretty clearly. We are told elsewhere: “No man can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24) so we have to make a choice. This section speaks of our old man being crucified; it is quite a shock to us all after conversion, and with the consciousness of our sins being forgiven, when we realise that we have still got a sinful nature and desires which lead to sinful actions. That sinful nature is what Scripture means when it speaks of the “old man”. The “old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin”.

The choice that the apostle lays before the christians in Rome, and thus before us, is a stark one. We either continue in sin or we walk in newness of life. In chapter seven, Paul graciously illustrates from his own experience that he was not able to stand to that choice even though he desired to do so. That is why chapter seven is so personal and difficult. Paul puts himself forward as a man who had to make the choice and learned how to be maintained in it. This chapter is dealing with the condition in which a christian ought to be, and will be, if they are true to their baptism.

We read here that as christians we are both, “buried therefore with him by baptism unto death” (Verse 4); then, “our old man has been crucified with him” (Verse 6). There is an absolute end in burial and there is an end by way of death through crucifixion. The apostle is showing that God gives no credit to the “old man”. The “old man” is shameful and shown to be so. In grace, the Lord took that place of shame. In God’s sight Christ was made a curse for us and He was made sin. God condemned sin at the cross. We are therefore to see that, since it was for us that Jesus endured these things, we are to go out of sight. Being “buried...with him by baptism” follows on from that. The end in view is very

wonderful: that we should no longer serve sin and that we should walk in newness of life.

This is all very important and spiritually testing. As to fact, our “old man” was crucified when Christ was crucified but to see that for ourselves and recognise its practical bearing on our lives here is a separate, important matter. When we see that in the death of Christ God ended one order of man under judgment, we can begin to understand that we have to come practically into line with that judgment. Christ’s death was the finish, before God, of all that man was according to the flesh.

Our “old man” may have some very attractive features — charm, magnanimity, uprightness even, but we are not to be misled by this. Ephesians tells us that the old man “corrupts itself according to deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22). If that is so, it is hardly surprising that God wants done with it. The Lord has come in to meet the claims of God and the needs of man in regard of sin and sins. Because He has come in He is the beginning of the creation of God. If He is the beginning, then there is a new order of man altogether, so not only the worst of man but the best of man has been set aside. God is not looking for me to be free from sin and respectable in the sight of the world, but to be free from sin and have put on the Lord Jesus Christ, which is quite another matter.

Scripture makes a distinction between the flesh and the believer’s body. Paul says: “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell” (Romans 7:18). In the body we are to serve God, a matter developed in chapter 12, but the “flesh” is unredeemable. It corrupts itself. There is nothing that can be done to make it better or improve it. Elsewhere in Romans we are told that “the mind of the flesh is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7).

The epistle to the Ephesians tells us of the “new man” and, although Paul does not develop the subject in Romans, he gives some good pointers as to what marks the new man as taking character from Christ: “in that he lives, he lives to God”, and “so also ye, reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”. Those are great marks of the new man.

As being “buried therefore with him by baptism” we should have something new and living patterned upon Christ. In the practical application of this, verse 11 really is the key: “So also ye, reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”. It is a fact. I have to associate myself in the Spirit’s power with what God has already done. There are many references here and elsewhere to being “in Christ”. That is an entirely new position for man which goes beyond being delivered from the flesh: it is a place of positive favour. The blessings of the gospel go far beyond relief. It is one of the great joys of the light of God shown in Christ in the New Testament that all things are of God; all things are in Christ.

In verse 14 Paul comes back to the matter of grace. At the end of chapter five, Paul speaks of grace reigning. Here he says: “ye are not under law but under grace”. Grace is a channel of blessing. It is also a divine necessity in that there would be no means of pleasing God other than by grace. It was the love of God, by grace, that saved us and gives us a place before God. “Ye are saved by grace” (Ephesians 2:8).

The apostle carefully guards against any undercurrent of wrong thinking about grace. It is a very corrupting idea that if grace will meet my sins, then I can go on with what appeals to me after the flesh without hindrance. This, alas, is a very common idea with some christians today. The apostle does not just say that this is bad doctrine but that it could not possibly appeal to anyone who was really affected by the death of Christ and was taking their baptism seriously. As the chapter tells us we are buried with Christ in baptism. If He has dealt with sin, those that believe in Him are not to continue in it.

We are told here: “sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under law but under grace”. In writing to the Romans like this Paul is very honest about his own experience. He speaks very plainly in chapter 7 of how close he came to sin having dominion over him until he found the remedy. Sin not having dominion is the divine proposal but the experience through which he had to pass in relation to it is a matter which Paul deals with fully in the next chapter.

When we find ourselves mired in the spiritual tests spoken of in Romans chapter seven and find that “we delight in the law of God according to the inward man” but have another law in our members bringing us into captivity, the divine proposal is very comforting. Every true believer dreads sin and fears lest it should have dominion over him, but that is not to be. God takes care that it shall not.

The expression in the chapter in relation to the Lord, “death has dominion over him no more” is important. He has the keys of death and of hades. Death has no claim on Him. We read: “I lay down my life that I may take it again” (John 10:17). The death of the Lord and His rising again is a profound mystery but Paul does not develop that side here. He speaks of the Lord being raised by “the glory of the Father”. There is great feeling in that.

The consequence of Adam’s sin was that the whole human race was plunged into sin and death and the fact of death is not removed. If the Lord does not come in the lifetime of a believer then death has to be faced but the Lord Himself is there at the point of death to see us through. That is a comfort to us. There have been many christians who have passed out of this scene triumphantly. Death is God’s government, and His government remains, but to the believer it becomes a blessing.

Highlights of a Bible reading, Bromley, 26th June 2001.

WORLDLY CARES

Too much anxiety and care for the things of this world hinder the spiritual growth of a believer. We worry about the scholastic achievements of our children, our health, job security, economic and political stability as we are all affected by them.

This constant preoccupation with worldly pursuits deprives us of our communion and fellowship with God. Hence, there is little or no prayer nor feeding on His word, which is so vital in the christian life.

Our Lord Jesus Christ clearly warns us of the dire consequences of the care for things of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. Such worldly cares can be equated with the thorns that choke the gospel seed sown in our hearts and cause us to be unfruitful for the Lord (Matthew 13:22).

Mary and Martha provide us with an insightful lesson on this point. Both sisters loved the Lord. However their love was manifested in different ways; Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, was deeply engrossed with our Lord's teaching. Conversely, Martha was busy preparing a meal for the Lord. She had no time to feed on God's word. Martha's concern with the domestic cares then, and ours today with our family and career needs, are altogether legitimate preoccupations. However, in doing so, we ought to ensure that we will not, like Martha, be censured by the Lord that, "thou art careful and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41). Our Lord's desire for us is summed up in His reply to Martha, "one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42).

Despite our busy and hectic lifestyles, it is imperative that we maintain an intimate relationship with our Lord. We talk to our loving Father when we pray. He speaks to us when we read His word. Our love for God is only lip service and hypocrisy if the cares and concern of this world pervade our lives and usurp even the time we ought to have for God. We are bound by many needs and desires of both a legitimate and illegitimate nature.

Why should we be careful about so many things in this world? David reminds us that our life is brief even as a handbreadth (Psalm 39:5). We are strangers and sojourners in this world (Psalm 39:12). Our worldly achievements are nothing but a vain show (Psalm 39:6). Solomon confirms that worldly care is profitless. Pursuit and care for the things of this world are "sore travail" (Ecclesiastes 1:13). Nothing but "vanity and vexation of spirit" (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Our obsession with worldly cares is a sign of distrust in God's providence. We underestimate God's faithfulness and providence. He is a God who keeps His promises and He never forgets us. He is full of loving kindness and tender

mercies. His compassion faileth not. If God provides and sustains all His creatures, even the fowls of the air that do not sow (Matthew 6:26), surely He is able to supply all our needs abundantly according to the measures of His grace. For forty years, He faithfully sustained the Israelites in the wilderness with food and raiment that were not worn out even at the end of the journey!

The God who remembered the Israelites also knows our needs and the desires of our hearts. He is the same God: yesterday, today, and forever. Our faith would take on a new dimension if only we would believe. Only our mistrust fails us, and we think that God has failed us.

We should repose our trust in the Lord and remember His word to “take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on” (Matthew 6:25). God’s formula is that we should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all those things will be added to us.

Dearly beloved, are you anxious, afraid, weary and burdened with worldly toils and cares? Go to Jesus; focus your eyes on Him. He is on the throne. He remembers His own. He will never leave or forsake us (1 Peter 5:7). He is ever so near to help. He is our Guide and Stay, even to those within the valley of the shadow of death. Before His mercy-seat, all the cares of this world will grow strangely dim. Jesus will lighten our burden for only He is able to lift our heavy load. We must learn to trust in Him. If we do, His peace will preserve our sanity even through the most difficult times in our lives.

The biblical injunction to be careful for nothing subscribes to the assurance that God alone provides the solution. May we remember our daily appointment with God despite the cares of the world, for only in Him can we truly be blessed. It is good when we lift our eyes from the cares, circumstances and anxieties that often overwhelm us and focus on the already promised deliverance and providence of our Lord.

So brethren, may we in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:6-7). Amen.

Koh Kim Hiang

Reprinted from “Bible Witness” October-December 2001.

MARY AT HIS FEET

'Twas sitting at His feet she heard,
And from His lips drank in His word,
Until her very soul was stirred —
For Jesus.

'Twas at His blessed feet she fell,
When crushed with grief, she could not tell,
Save to the heart she knew so well
Of Jesus.

And when in service, still her place
Was at His feet, in lowly grace,
To do what time will ne'er efface
For Jesus.

For Mary's act of love doth fill
The House of God with fragrance still,
And ever shall; for such the will
Of Jesus.

Would'st you like her a "good work" do?
You first must choose the "good part" too,
And learn the heart so deep and true,
Of Jesus.

O blessed choice! Oh calm retreat!
Where in His presence, at His feet,
We learn the heart and service, meet
For Jesus.

Cenita Thompson (1822 – 1909)

FACE TO FACE

He is coming! He is coming!
I shall see my Saviour soon;
In the dawning, in the gloaming,
Be it night, or be it noon,
This my cheer, His coming soon!

I shall see Him! I shall see Him!
In His own transcendent place;
His, the joy that I am with Him,
Mine, to see Him face to face;
Top-stone of His wondrous grace.

Brightest glories may enfold Him,
Radiant hosts around Him shine,
But my Saviour! I behold Him!
Hear Him own in light divine
I am His, and He is mine!

He is waiting, I am waiting,
Soon the waiting will be o'er;
Now, a little while of patience,
Then, to see Him and adore
In His presence ever more.

Cenita Thompson (1822 – 1909)

BROUGHT TO GOD

Within His house, in light divine,
That place for me is won;
His God, my God, His Father, mine,
In Him the accepted Son.

Entranced, I find my portion there,
My Father, I adore;
He calls all heaven His joy to share,
A joy unknown before.

That home, the Father's! wondrous thought!
I, for His home made fit,
With rapture view what love has wrought,
And worship at His feet.

Let every heart break forth in praise,
Let every tongue proclaim
The perfectness of wisdom's ways
And bless the Father's name.

Angels are there, archangels, too,
With faces veiled they bow;
But I, with unveiled face can view.
His unveiled glory now.

They never knew the outcast's place,
Nor tasted of that woe;
The joy of one brought nigh through grace,
Is bliss the sons can know.

And many sons are with Him there.
A bright and glorious band;
Reflecting Him whose place they share,
And in whose beauty stand.

As higher still the strain we raise,
Unnumbered echoes ring
With shouts of joy and bursts of praise
As His blest name we sing.

Oh, holy, holy, holy One!
Eternal Light and Love!
Our theme as countless ages run,
Thy name, all praise above!

Cenita Thompson (1822 – 1909)

FROM DESPAIR TO DELIVERANCE

I was brought up without any religious background in a home where there was no place for God. It was a family where drinking and gambling was a way of life. At the age of 15 I started to drink and I thought that this was normal. Within a few short years I became an alcoholic. I was married at twenty one and divorced at twenty four.

Secretly I was disgusted at the kind of person I had become; I was deeply ashamed. I wanted a new life; I wanted a way out but I did not know where to find one. I was receiving medical treatment because I had serious withdrawal problems when trying to give up alcohol. My life was in a mess. At one point I was homeless. The doctor would give me tranquillisers and say, 'Look, if you take these they will ease the withdrawal symptoms'. I took the tablets but after a while they became another problem. Eventually I went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting; everybody admitted to having an alcohol problem but I did not find any hope there because they all said that we were just going to have this same problem for the rest of our lives. It made me feel absolutely hopeless. What could I do?

One day I was in the Preston Public Library; I was not religious but I was desperate. Drink was only a symptom of a much deeper problem, but I was concentrating on it. I knew that Muslims did not drink, so I thought that the Koran might help. I found a copy in the Library and opened it at random. What was the first name that I saw in it? It was Jesus. It mentioned Jesus the prophet, as they say. I knew that the Koran was written hundreds of years after the New Testament so I put it down and wondered if I should read the New Testament instead.

On my way home I got a copy of the New Testament and the Psalms in a second hand bookshop for 50p. I was living in a flat in Preston at the time and it was the most uncomfortable experience of my life. I came from a large family and I had always been used to having a lot of people all around me. In the flat I felt very alone and I had to face up to what I really was. What I saw in myself made me feel ashamed and guilty. As I read from the New Testament and particularly the Psalms, I became very conscious that in the sight of a holy God I was in a mess. I began to see that heaven and hell were real places and that I was on the wrong road. A great fear came upon me.

As I read the New Testament and the Psalms the words became alive to me and I felt very uncomfortable. I realised that I needed forgiveness from God but I did not see how to get it and I became desperate. I thought of going to see a Roman

Catholic priest. I was not a Catholic but I knew that Catholics confessed their sins to a priest and I thought that it might help. However, when I thought about it I did not think that such confession would meet the need, so I continued reading through the New Testament.

One day I came to John 6 verse 37. Jesus said, “Everyone that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out”. I read those words over and over again and thought about them. My great fear had been that if I came to Jesus He would tell me to go away because of what I was like. I had not understood that Jesus came to save sinners. I read the verse in John 6 again, then I got on my knees and claimed that promise for myself. I asked the Lord to receive me. I told Him that I was sorry for my rotten selfish life and that I wanted to give my life to Him. Even as I prayed I did not quite understand what was going on but I felt that God was accepting me.

My next thought was, ‘What shall I do?’ I did not know any Christians but I supposed that I should go to a church. There was a church just round the corner from where I lived so I thought that I would go there. The sermon did not seem real to me so I thought that this was not the place for me. I looked at the church services in the local newspaper; there was one that caught my eye. It said ‘Jesus is Lord! Come and worship Him’. I thought, ‘Yes, he is my Lord, I ought to worship Him’. I went to that church with great fear; I had hardly ever been in a church in my life before but I was determined. I wanted a new life. I wanted Christ. For the first time in my life I heard the gospel, how Jesus died for sinners so that we can be forgiven. It was only then that I had the assurance that Jesus died for me. I went out of that church as though I was walking on air. It was so wonderful what Jesus had done for me.

I felt the Lord was challenging me about my family. I realised that you cannot keep the good news to yourself; you have to share it. So I had a great burden for my family and I started to give them Bibles and to pray for them. Since that time some of the family have come to know Jesus.

I was saved in 1984; I have never drunk since and I have never gambled since. I have a new life. I was able to tell someone only last week that I had been in despair, I had been desperate. My friends and family, politicians, the world could do nothing for me, but Jesus could. That is my testimony.

Brian Eccles

Testimony given in Chester, November 2001.

TWELVE MARKS OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN

1. Acceptance

Renounce, once and for all, the legal thought that your righteousness and acceptance before God depend on anything you are, or can be, or anything you do, or can do. Christ in His Person and work, not your condition or your conduct, is the ground of your acceptance. God accepts Christ for you, and accepts you in Christ. (Romans 4:25; 5:1, 2; 8:1, 2; Ephesians 1:6, 7; Colossians 1:12-14.)

2. Acceptability

You are now a christian, — Christ's one. As such seek to walk worthy of "the calling wherewith ye have been called" (Ephesians 4:1; Acts 11:26; Ephesians 3:15; James 2:7). Someone has said: 'Christian should be written:— CHRISTian' The 'ian' part of the word, stands for 'I am nothing'. Look to Him then for grace to be nothing and to make Christ everything. Remember that to be "accepted" before God is one thing, but to be "acceptable" depends on your conduct down here (2 Corinthians 5:9).

3. Keep a good conscience

Be careful to have "a good conscience" — a conscience instructed by Scripture — pure and sensitive. Let conscience be like some finely polished mirror that is dimmed by the slightest breath of the tempter. If you sin, confess at once, not as a sinner to God, but as a child to the Father. (Acts 24:16; Hebrews 13:18; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2)

4. Let brotherly love abide

Be as lenient to the faults of others as you are hard on your own. Remember those three gracious F's- Forbear; Forgive; Forget. If you detect the smallest grain of malice in your heart toward another, do not rest while it is there. You cannot be happy with the Lord till it is gone. (Romans 12; Colossians 3:12-15; Philippians 2; Ephesians 4:1-3, 31, 32)

5. Let your heart expand itself

Keep a large heart as you tread the narrow way. By a large heart is meant a heart that takes in "all saints". The path of faithfulness in the last days is narrow, but a heart filled with the love of God expands and becomes increasingly large and inclusive.

6. Trust in the Lord

In any difficulty, let the Lord be your first resource. You have no wiser, kinder, nor stronger Friend. Whatever then be the care — in the home, in business, amongst believers, in the world, or the tiny circle of your own soul — go to Him about it. He delights to enter into our little concerns, and the simpler our faith the better it pleases Him (Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6, 7).

7. Pray frequently

Do not be content with praying, but grow in the school of secret prayer. It is a fact that the more you pray, the more you want to pray; and the less you pray, the less you want to pray. The principle found in Matthew 13:12 abides, and is very solemn! Depend upon it, when you feel least inclined for prayer, then your soul is most in need of it. Turn everything into prayer, and soon prayer will be to you a state as well as an act (Matthew 26:41; James 5:13-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

8. Prove all things and choose the right

Never refuse any ministry because it is new to you but never accept anything till you see it for yourself in the Word of God — till you get it divinely confirmed in the sanctuary. Inability to receive is not tantamount to rejection. Do not judge the doctrine of an address by the man who delivers it, or gauge the truth of an article by the initials or name at its close.

Be sure, though slow, in acquiring truth. All that is got from God is taught by Him in this way. Though you may get truth through a human channel, get it from God. Learn to learn at the Master's feet and then you will have no need to learn to unlearn (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21; Isaiah 28:10; John 16:12).

9. Study the Bible in private

In connection with private Scripture study there are five important things:—

Reading (1 Timothy 4:13).

Searching (Acts 17:11).

Finding (Psalm 119:162).

Meditating (Jeremiah 15:16).

Practising (James 1:22-27).

In 'reading' you skim the surface — a pleasant exercise. In 'searching' you let down your line into its depths. In 'finding' you bring up something which makes

you tingle all over with holy joy. In ‘meditating’ you feed upon and enjoy what you have got. In ‘practising’ you show it all in your life before others.

10. Beware of evil speaking

Beware of evil speaking, in all its multiplied and invidious forms. Prudently, kindly, and alone tell your brother or sister the fault, and speak to God about it, but do not whisper it to another. Evil speaking is a most prolific cause of sorrow, and always betrays a soul out of communion, as it always grates upon a soul in communion. If we come forth from the closet of communion, the atmosphere of evil speaking will be to us as the tainted air of some great city to one that has been breathing the fresh breezes of the seashore (1 Peter 2:1, 2; James 4:11; Ephesians 4:25, 26, etc.).

Seek grace to speak so as to help and not to hinder.

11. Rejoice in the gospel

Keep a warm gospel heart. Christian experience, according to Philippians, is full of the gospel. Paul was as hearty in gospel work at the close of his course as at the commencement. (Compare Acts 9; Philemon; and 2 Timothy.) Never deceive yourself by the thought that because you are getting on in higher lines of truth, therefore your interest in gospel work must flag. The joy of Father, Son, and Spirit in Luke 15 is essentially a gospel joy. Muse well on that word — “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth”. Take care not to follow in the wake of the elder son — “he would not go in”.

12. Keep your eye on Christ

Finally, never take your christianity from christians. If you want perfect christianity, get your eye on God’s perfect Christ. “Without Me ye can do nothing”, said He. Tell Him this, and seek grace so to abide in Him that you shall intuitively follow in His steps, and walk as He walked. Avoid asceticism — monkish piety — on the one hand, and worldly conformity on the other. View all down here in the perspective of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended; and live in sweet and present association with Him where He is. Let Him daily bring you, in spirit, into His banqueting house, there to feast and to commune under the shadow of His banner, Love. Thus others will take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus, and a gentleness of spirit, combined with all the outward activities of inward devotedness, will plainly mark you out as His.

Samuel Carter

GARMENTS IN WHICH CHRIST APPEARS

1. Swaddling clothes

The first reference to the garments of the Lord is to the swaddling clothes. The angels tell the shepherds: “ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2: 12). How many a time the Lord has drawn near to us like this, appealing in this diminutive way to win our hearts, to attract us to Himself. How far away from God must be a human heart that is not moved in relation to that Babe in swaddling clothes! In Luke 2 “the Babe” is come into this world clothed thus to dispel fear and to capture the heart for God.

The glad tidings are like that, the Lord coming through them so near to us as to win His way into even a child’s heart. Many are the garments in the wardrobe, of course, but how attractive these are to the youngest heart! There are times when He would present Himself thus clothed, figuratively, of course, to bring before us His own lowliness and attractiveness, what He was as wholly dependent here upon God, so that we might be affected. As our hearts are turned away from human greatness, the Lord becomes attractive to us in that light as “the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes”.

2. Shining Garments

Mark’s gospel speaks of the Lord’s garments on the holy mount; he says, “his garments became shining, exceeding white as snow, such as fuller on earth could not whiten them”. The Lord is seen there arrayed in this garb; it emphasises the heavenly purity of His vesture, a purity that is entirely unknown on earth. There is no fuller on earth capable of producing such whiteness as is seen in the garments of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. How the Lord loves at times to come thus to us, that we should see Him in the spotless purity that marked every motive, every action, and every word.

How unclean are the cleanest of garments in this world. The prophet says, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64: 6). When looked at in the sight of heaven they are such, but the garments of Jesus are exceedingly white as snow, and shining — radiating the pure light of heaven. Thus the Lord would present Himself to us; thus helping us to judge the uncleanness that is natural to us, and that marks everything in the world.

3. The purple robe

There is another robe that He has worn: the robe of derision, of mockery, of scorn, of contempt, that was put upon Him by men. They put on Him a purple robe but they did it in mockery, derision, and hatred. Sometimes the Lord has to call our attention to that when we would make friends with the world, when we begin to think highly of the wisdom of this world that comes to naught. When we tend to association with this world for gain, friendships with the world, the Lord may have to remind us of this robe and of the place He has in this world as despised and rejected.

Saul of Tarsus said, “Who art thou, Lord?” and He says, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest”. Not ‘I was’, but “I am” (Acts 22: 8). He is despised and scorned and hated here. In a spiritual sense Paul presented that robe at Corinth and in Galatia. He said, “O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you; to whom, as before your very eyes, Jesus Christ has been portrayed, crucified?” (Galatians 3:1). He presented Christ to both the Corinthians and Galatians in relation to the terrible scorn, hatred, and contempt of this world. How often the Lord has to remind us of that robe.

He would love to appear in other garments, but again and again He must remind us by the prophetic word of the meaning of the cross. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that a time would come when some would crucify afresh the Son of God, and tread Him under foot. So the purple robe still has its own meaning.

4. Clothed with a cloud.

In Revelation chapter 10 we read of a mighty angel who came down from heaven, clothed with a cloud, with a face like the sun. He put one foot on the earth and the other foot on the sea, and took possession of everything, crying with a loud voice as a lion. It is undoubtedly a reference to Christ, and speaking in this sense, under the figure of a cloud, of one of the garments in which He appears.

The cloud is the symbol in Scripture of the divine presence, the glory of God being behind it, but there in such a way that it is evident there is more than we can see. The cloud denotes there is something unseen, something more than appears to the eye. We can see the cloud, and we can worship as we see it, but it also tells us that there is more there than we can see. Those who love Him gladly accept the inscrutable character of the Person of Christ, that (besides all we may know and delight in) there is always something further. Indeed we are told that “no one knows the Son but the Father” (Luke 10: 22), and that He has a name written which no one knows. “Clothed in a cloud”, thus brings in the

divine presence with all its blessedness, or, maybe, with its warning, but we recognize that there is more than we can compass.

5. A garment dipped in blood

In Revelation 19 we read of Christ clothed in a garment dipped in blood. Primarily this passage refers to the question of divine judgment and vengeance corresponding with what Isaiah speaks of as stained garments of one who trod the wine press of God's wrath. Yet, it would also serve to remind us of the Lord's death. The Lord chooses at times to draw near to us with the token on His vesture of His death, with the reminder, in the garb in which He draws near, that He has died, and that evil comes under His judgment. Would we have it otherwise?

You may remember that in one of the offerings spoken of in Leviticus, two birds were taken; one was killed and the other bird was dipped in the blood then let loose in the open field (see Leviticus 14:1-9). One loves to think of the bird being liberated to go where it would without restraint. Such is the Lord, the heavenly One; He is gone where He would, and Peter says He is gone into heaven. It is His own act, in that way; He has gone there. But the living bird was dipped in the blood of the slain bird; the stain of death was upon the living bird as it went into the open field. I am sure the Lord loves to draw near to us in this sense, so that we should never lose sight of the fact that He has died. He has been into judgment, He has been into death. He is seen thus in Revelation 5 as a Lamb "standing as slain". It is not exactly something historical. The Lamb is seen in the midst of the throne as slain. Every part of the universe awakens in praise as the Lord appears as it were in a garment indicating death.

Revelation 19 tells us that on His garments and on His thigh He has a name written, "King of kings and Lord of lords". If anyone is to administer things for Christ rightly, they must be under the administration of the Lord of lords. How differently we would behave if we were conscious of the Lord being in this garb. There would be a different story to tell at times if we were conscious that the King of kings and Lord of lords was with us with this name on His vesture. He would disclose Himself to our hearts in this way. All rule and administration is centred in the One who has this garment on which there is the name written.

W J House

Extracts from an address, Wellington, New Zealand, 1936

THE HOUSE OF GOD

Romans 8:18-24, 29

1 Timothy 2:1-10

3:14-16

I want to say a few words this evening upon the house of God, because of its great importance at the present time. The house of God is here, for God is here in His sons. All who have the Spirit dwelling in them are amongst the sons of God, who make a dwelling place for God here where He can put Himself in touch with men; where what He is can be expressed and an immense service be carried on, because His representatives are here.

I read the passage in Timothy to show you one of the great characteristics of the house of God: it is a house of prayer for all the nations. We are meant to think of every one. God works where He pleases, and as long as we are here God would have us make it manifest that God is not the enemy of man, but that He would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. That is what is in His mind for all men. The Lord Jesus could not have a different mind from that, and so He gave Himself a ransom for all.

It is a wonderful thought that He gave Himself a propitiatory ransom on behalf of all. Any one may have it, and when he has it he finds that he has a Substitute; he finds that what the Lord Jesus actually did was to take up his cause before God and clear him for ever. But as a propitiatory ransom, He has given Himself on behalf of all. When you come to the substitutionary side, another thought is expressed by the Spirit — He came “to give his life a ransom for many”, but when you think of the other side, the universal side, this grand propitiatory ransom has been so given that anyone may come and take advantage of it, and whosoever does so will find themselves in the blessing.

Do not let us have limited thoughts in preaching the gospel, and in moving amongst men. We have nothing whatever to do with God’s election in the way of settling whom He has chosen and whom He has not. Nor has He so chosen as to make it useless to evangelise universally. He has kept these secrets to Himself — how the two dovetail He only knows, but they do. So there is no one, however unlikely, that you may not evangelise and encourage. You are here for that purpose.

Now, what is a son? We can never solve that question without looking at Christ. Christ came here and set forth in His own Person in becoming Man what it is to God to have a Son. But He did not remain alone. God had thoughts in eternity which He intended to work out in this time scene, and carry through into a future eternity. He had this thought of One becoming Man, and that blessed Man in the most holy liberty with God with the holy privilege of constant approach to God. Yet along with that is the thought of being His delight, for God has in Him His delight. In the whole creation God could not find such delight, but He found it in His Son.

Now, His thoughts could not stop there. The Son had to be made perfect, that is, reach the full thought of God as to man through sufferings. Why had He to suffer? So that God might bring many sons to glory. He would only have had one Son otherwise; but that He might bring many sons to glory, He made the leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Untold sufferings! No one could gauge those sufferings but God Himself and He so constituted the holy body which He prepared for Him that He could die. He is the same Person now, but in a new condition; in the condition in which He now is, death is impossible.

He was once here in flesh — God's dear Son was in touch with this groaning creation; and you may be sure that no one ever groaned like Christ. You may be sure that He had His own wonderful way of expressing the groans of this poor unhappy world to God. Yet His first thought was the pleasure God found in Him; and then that God should make Him perfect through sufferings, in order that He might have many like Him.

Now Christ is our study. What is He really like? What kind of life did He live? What were His thoughts? What were His ways? What was His spirit? Thank God, we have the four gospels that we may learn these things, and the Holy Spirit is to open them out. At the time God alone saw His true beauty, and He did so fully and perfectly. What satisfaction He brought to God. How wonderful to think of Him in the poorest circumstances, and yet always content; not a murmur escaping His lips from first to last. Blessed Lord! What a Son God had in Him! Then how trustworthy He was! There was nothing false or unreal in Him like we find in ourselves.

I might have turned to the story of Jacob for the thought of the house of God, for that side is needful. It was a long time before Jacob really came to Bethel (the house of God) so as to enjoy the thought of God's dwelling. He got the light of it the first night he slept away from home, but said, "How dreadful is this place" (Genesis 28:17). He was not then at home in God's house but he determined that, if God did this and that, then his father's and his grandfather's God should be his God; but Jacob does not speak of God being his God at that time. It was many a long year before he came to it, and he only comes to it after great disgrace had come upon his house, but he did come to it after the idols were put away. Then when he did come to it, oh! how God blessed him, and how grandly he came out for God as 'Israel', a prince of God!

Now that history is more or less true of all of us, in regard to our arriving at the thought of God for us, as to our being His house. We have to learn from the story of Jacob that we need the same God for our refuge as he did. Shifty, deceitful man that he was, going his own way to get things, there was nothing very much in his life at that time to admire, and many of us would say, 'Nor has there been in mine'. Younger ones sometimes think that older believers can look back with great satisfaction on their lives. I am afraid that many of us can look back and see clearly how like Jacob we have been. Yet we are not without hope, for we know that God's thought for us is Bethel, the house of God. He would have us find ourselves at home where He dwells amongst His sons, and realise that we are His sons. Oh it is very fine to arrive at the thoughts of God!

Think now, God had these thought about having many sons before the world was; then time came in and there was the fall of man, then the entry of Jesus into the world: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law, that he might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship" (Galatians 4:4-5). Now you see what God had in His mind, that there should be many like His dear Son — that is what He came for. Is it possible that anyone could be a pleasure to God as Jesus was? Yes, thank God, in our measure we may be — there was no measure with Him, of course.

But God is moving today, and the present moment, the present earth, is the grand ground for God's work. All over the world God is working, doing a magnificent work in the soul of every believer, not only preparing this one

and that one so that they can have the Spirit, but when the Spirit has come, moving their hearts with regard to Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sonship, and nothing in me that is not the spirit of a son will do for the Holy Spirit. He must reduce all that is contrary in me; He must break it down. He must make me refuse this and that; He will not have me in any way different from what a son should be; that is surely the work of the Spirit of God at the present moment and it is a most important work.

Many of us wish that we had given more attention early in life to that word, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which ye have been sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). The Spirit is very easily grieved — our foolish ways, our devoting ourselves to pleasure when we should be devoting ourselves to the Lord, and our allowing what is false and unreal — all that is a grief to the Spirit, and it results in a lengthening out of the time before we really come out as the sons of God. The sons of God, if they really come out in truthfulness here, come out in the likeness of Christ. That is why I spoke of prayer; I go back to it again now.

The house of God is the house of prayer, and men are encouraged to pray everywhere. A man may pray publicly everywhere. The woman, the sister, is to be more quiet in that way. The man can pray publicly in the meeting; the woman can follow the prayer, make it her own, and be in the spirit of prayer the whole time. No one can say what an immense advantage a silent sister is when she is in the spirit of prayer, when ministry is being given or when the gospel is being preached, yea, and when we are together in the prayer meeting. Brothers little know the help they get from prayerful sisters, though no sound is heard, except the ‘Amen’ they are encouraged to say to a brother’s prayers.

Now, seeing things are so, do let us be more earnest in prayer. Think of the vast numbers of young people that are on the way to committing themselves. What prevents them seeking fellowship? They feel their own weakness and sinfulness; many of them say, ‘Fellowship is not for me; I am such a poor feeble creature’. They need our prayers. Suppose we took to heart more the great temptations that the youthful amongst us are exposed to specially: who knows what victories might be the result for these young ones! How gladly they would say, ‘I too would like to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread! I feel the Lord would have me so to do’. When you are free in spirit,

you very soon find out that the Lord wants you to be with others who are free, and to remember Him in His death.

So the thought of prayer is a very far reaching one. We may pray for the gospel and for believers in all lands, the vast majority of whom are greatly hindered by their surroundings and associations. Yet the Lord has them where we might not expect to find them. It was delightful to me to find the other day a Roman Catholic, to whom I spoke. Whatever the darkness of his surroundings, he had this light, that there was no one for him really like Christ, and evidently he knew Him. Yes, and you may be sure there are many such hidden away, and we ought to find them. Is it not partly through our negligence that we do not find them? I know how negligent I have been, and it is sad, because, you see, I cannot begin life over again. Young people, beware of negligence! You little know what opportunities you have, and if the sons of God are in a place, it is to make God known there. God dwells in His house.

Then I would speak of the goodness of His house — oh, how wide the subject is. May the Lord guide me as to what He would specially call attention to. The kindest people ever known have been the sons of God. I learn that in Christ Himself; nobody was ever so kind as Christ. He brought kindness here amongst men in a way never known before in a man, and then He left it here in the Spirit, so that you and I might be kind to all, but specially so to the household of faith. “Let us do good towards all, and specially towards those of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Many an opening for the gospel has been made by the thoughtful act of some kind believer who, as a true son of God, showed that God is good, in a practical way, and that God is kind. Now this extension, so to speak, of God in the world is most important. I do hope that you will see the immense advantage of God’s sons being set here, but we must be careful that we do not misrepresent God. We do not learn in Jesus anything that belies God — the very opposite; His beautiful transparent spirit was most evident — He was “Altogether that which I also say unto you” (John 8:25).

Now nothing but that will do for you or me. The Holy Spirit is as transparent as Christ, and, if He has His way with me, He will allow nothing that is shady, nothing that is not truly transparent, because now is the time when not only are the sons being prepared for glory but the holy city is being built. You

know how transparency marks specially that holy city. How one knows one can trust the work of God.

Now, God will do nothing in heaven in the way of fitting us to be His sons; all the fitting morally for sonship is done here, for He has taken us up in grace because we are sons in the purpose and gift of God. He has given us His Spirit, but then the Spirit works, breaking down everything that is contrary and putting Christ there instead. The Holy Spirit will finish the work, but this earth is the place for the work of God. It is very fine what He is doing, and in that way we become representative of God. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5), and we learn to answer to that love. We love Him and we learn to love one another, and when we do, I think we get to that thought, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there" (Genesis 35:1). We know the house of God as we never knew it before. God dwells in us and we in God. When love has its way, how different we are in all our ways with one another; when we dwell in love, God can dwell in us, and does. In that way, though "no one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18), God becomes manifest through His own who walk in love.

So get the thought that God must have His sons on earth at this present time. He must be able to delight in us; He must find us delighting in Him. He would have us come near to Him every morning, then going out from His presence to express God in the world. Think of all the sons of God in Ireland going in to God every morning, and then coming out to show Ireland what God is. Who can tell what the result of that would be here, or in any country over the world? That is what God would encourage us to do, because His house is here, and we are learning what characterises it; what righteousness, holiness, and love is. We come into a house of peace. Wonderful peace belongs to God's house. The peace of God is there; the sons of God learn to walk in peace, to live in peace, and that is a wonderful testimony to the world around.

You may wonder why I read all that in Romans 8 but it is because of what is coming in. The day is coming when the sons of God will be revealed. What will be the effect of the revelation? Every groan will be hushed; creation will groan no more. It "expects the revelation of the sons of God". Could not some of those groans be hushed now? 'Yes, if we were more truly sons, they could'. If we were in great power here as sons of God, what comfort we

should bring to those around! Many a groan would be hushed, many a sigh would get its answer in the beautiful way in which a son of God moves and acts here amongst men. But this world is the sphere of operations; God is preparing you and me for that grand future when we shall come out of heaven to hush the groans of this troubled world. We shall soon come to it. When the world has come to it that it can live no more, when the state of things after the rapture of the saints is so bad that there seems to be no hope, no doubt many will be awakened to groan to God to do for them what men cannot. Then will come out the holy city, for then will come Christ out of heaven, and very soon the misery of this world will go, and instead of a groaning creation there will be a creation delighting in God. What a change it will be!

Now, if that is so, and it is, you see the importance of what God does in us now. Suppose there is confusion amongst us believers now, how are we going to remove the confusion in the future day? The church, as the holy city, is coming out of heaven to remove confusion, and it will do it. The world is a system of confusion — Babel. Do we add to the confusion by our naughty ways? May God deliver us if anything like that is amongst us. May God come in for every saint, so as to produce the blessed result that He has really got a son. “Israel is my son, my firstborn ... Let my son go, that he may serve me” (Exodus.4:22,23) was the word God told Moses to say to Pharaoh. God’s Son is here in us, the many sons. What does He want of us? He wants us to be free of every bit of bondage that might produce fear, to serve Him. No one ever served like a son. There is something very fine in seeing a business where a man has got his sons with him in the business, and he has got to old age and people are saying, ‘Oh, his sons are like him. He was trustworthy, so are his sons’. If God’s Son is no longer here, yet God has many sons here, and He loves to have trustworthy sons who can serve Him and be ready for any kind of work that He can give.

Then, too, there is a worshipping spirit about a son, and also the spirit of prayer. We learn that in Christ. Jesus was a Man of prayer, how constantly He was in prayer. That is what God looks for with us all, prayer in secret and prayer in public. I am reminded of an incident. Two boys, cousins, were together for the holidays, and one day one of them suddenly opened the drawing room door and finding the other there said, ‘Whatever are you doing here?’ ‘Oh’ was the reply, ‘I was only having a little time with God.’ The

influence of that word told its tale, till the cousin himself also delighted in God and in the service of God. Those moments of private prayer — you can take them anywhere, in the fields or anywhere that you can be alone — they are absolutely necessary if we are going to come into the thoughts of God in regard to a son. A son who does not pray is unthinkable! It is one of the first thoughts of a son, that he prays. You learn it in Jesus.

Then think of the wonderful way in which Jesus delighted in God from moment to moment. Not only that God delighted in Him, but whatever the sorrow here, He had His delight in God. Nobody ever passed through pressure like Christ, but all through the pressure up to Calvary, and even when forsaken of God, He never gave up His delight in God, even when He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1) If you read the psalm, you will find that the prophecy goes on to other thoughts that are not expressed in the New Testament. “And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel” (v.3). Christ, so to speak, appealed to God publicly to find any reason in Him for forsaking Him. Of course there was none. And it was uttered with a loud voice, in order that we might learn how holy that blessed One was. It was for us He suffered and was forsaken and drank to the last drop the cup of the wrath of God. It was all for us, that we might never know the wrath of God, but only enjoy His love.

May God help us to consider this great thought of the house of God here on earth and all the advantages of it. It is a house of piety. Pious people are not so very numerous. Pious people bring God into everything; piety makes room for God. Nobody was so pious as Christ. No wonder He was received up in glory, for He was the embodiment of piety. God was in that blessed One; God was in all His thoughts. Now that is open for us; whatever our thoughts may be, there should be no thought which is unsuitable to God or which will leave Him out. The Lord will help us and I believe the result will be a greater and brighter testimony all over the world, if we only rise up in the moral dignity that belongs to sons, all of us, as Gideon’s brethren, like the “sons of a king” (Judges 8:18) There has never been royalty like that which is found in Christ, and in the sons that God is bringing to glory.

Oh, the nobility that attaches to the poorest man if he is a son of God and walks accordingly. He may be breaking stones at the road side and aged (I have personally known such) and one has felt that if ever there was nobility in England, it was in those stone breakers. They knew how to go in to God with an intimacy that astonished me, and they knew how to come out from God and express Him in the villages they lived in. May God help everyone of us in these things, for Jesus Christ's sake.

H. D'Arcy Champney
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