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Living Water

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What is a Christian?

By A. A. Elliott

A reprint of 3 articles printed in recent issues of this magazine

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Recent Ministry

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS — Chapter 1 (Highlights of a Bible Reading)

This epistle dwells specifically on God's purpose — the heavenly calling of the church, which is "his body" as it records later in the chapter. We often speak of Christ's body as here on earth and the Head in heaven and this Epistle will help us to understand what this means.

Firstly though, Paul establishes his position in writing to them, reminding them that he is an apostle by God's will, to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. Then he goes on, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". Paul must have had a great sense of the way that he had been released from the bondage of the Jewish tradition into the liberty of the Spirit's power among those whom Christ had drawn out from that system.

Paul addresses the Ephesians as the "saints and faithful at Ephesus". "Saints" here means those that God has set apart for Himself — they are saints according to the calling of God. It appears that there was a state amongst the Christians in Ephesus to which the Spirit of God could open up great heavenly realities. That was not so in Corinth or in the Galatian churches, but in Ephesus there were those who truly were "saints and faithful" so the apostle could open up great and precious things. Perhaps we do not value or understand enough the privileges that we have been brought into. Yet it is God's desire that we should know them and that there should be a return to Himself, just as this little doxology here: — "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

God has set believers apart so that they might enter into the heavenly privileges that we get in the first three chapters of the epistle but privilege involves responsibility. That is what comes in through the last part of Ephesians where we get many practical exhortations as to our conduct.

Paul reminds the Ephesians here of the greatness of what they had

been called to. They were, “chosen... in him before the world’s foundation” (v.4). Later we read, “marked out beforehand for adoption” (v.5). Just as the twelve were given to the Lord by the Father, so we have been chosen and given as well. Each one that believes has been chosen in the same way.

There is a real link here between the teaching of Paul, John and Peter. Each rejoiced in what God had planned before the ages of time and accordingly each was able to go back before the question of sin to the purpose of God from eternity. Peter, in one of the earliest preachings, tells us that the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” delivered Christ up. The way was known in which Christ would have to go to bring us back to God. Then Peter speaks in one of his epistles of, “precious blood as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world”

**The thoughts of
God have not
been frustrated
by the fall of man**

(1 Peter 1:19-20). In that way Peter shows that God had redemption prepared, even before the need for it was apparent. Then we see the foreknowledge of God set out very attractively in the Lord’s prayer in John’s gospel: “They were thine, and thou gavest them me” (John 17:6). That is a most exalted view of the matter. These are things that we need to ponder. We come into blessing by way of the redemption through Christ’s blood but there was something that preceded that — the purpose of God. The thoughts of God have not been frustrated by the fall of man.

Our chapter reminds us that, “adoption through Jesus Christ to himself” was “according to the good pleasure of his will”. Except for the need of redemption it would be difficult to see how that could have come about. Adam in innocence was not in that relationship. We come into it because we are taken into favour in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and it was the good pleasure of God’s will that it should be so. Therefore we come before Him in the blessing of Sonship. That is the good pleasure of God! The chapter shows the great gain of the way of redemption. The hymn puts it:

*'For Thou hast brought again to Him
More than by man He lost;'*

All that is for the pleasure of God in the church (and indeed in Israel too) hangs on the incoming of Christ, His being revealed as Man, His taking that place before God.

It is very noticeable here, as in Colossians, when Paul draws attention to the great privileges into which believers are brought he prefaces it with references to redemption, the forgiveness of sins and the riches of His grace. We are never to forget the greatness of the work that Christ has done. God will never forget it and it will not be lost in heaven; it will be part of that great glory that belongs to Him. Without the precious shed blood of Christ, we could not possibly be before God on any right ground at all. It is a reminder to the Ephesians, and to us, that whatever we were has been removed completely and we can enter into this blessing of being taken into favour and the blessedness of knowing our place with Christ. We can enter into these things because everything against us has been settled perfectly.

Then all is to be headed up in Christ. There are two sides to that; the public display of all things being headed up in the Christ will be seen in the millennium, but He is Head to the church now. The distinction is shown in what we have in verse 10, where everything will actually be headed up in Christ; then in the last two verses of the chapter we read, "gave him to be head over all things to the assembly". That is the church in its proper place and recognising the Lord as supreme. It cannot be public, in the sense of the world acknowledging it, but it would be good if the world were to see that as the attitude of the church to Christ now. Where Christians are subject to Christ, that is a wonderful testimony. We have, through God's grace and His mercy, been taken up for the purpose of displaying the glory of Christ. That is a very wonderful privilege because God's thought is that Christ might be everything and in all.

In verse 5 we read that we have been "Marked out...for adoption through Jesus Christ" Scripture uses "adoption" to convey that believers are brought into all the blessing and favour of the family of God. "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to be

children of God" (John 1:12). According to Romans we have "not received a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye have received a spirit of adoption" (Romans 8:15). The word translated "adoption" there is the same word as sonship. Then in Galatians 4:5 we read, "because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father". Adoption brings us into a very wonderful relationship, to be associated with Him who is the Son of God. Then the Holy Spirit (who is the Spirit of adoption) is given to us that we might have the affections and feelings proper to the place into which we have been brought. It is the greatest calling that a person could have, for there can be nothing greater than to be taken into the family of God Himself. We are brought into association with the Son of God. Christ has a glorious distinction for He is anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions (Psalm 45:7, Hebrews 1:9) and yet they are His companions.

**"Wisdom and
intelligence"**

Ephesians shows that the apostle was a man of prayer and contemplation. If we are going to get the benefit of the privileges spoken of here we need to meditate and commune with the Lord and draw on the service of the Holy Spirit. That is one reason why the Spirit is spoken of as the earnest of our inheritance. He makes these things real in our hearts. That is one of the most blessed services that the Holy Spirit has come to undertake — to bring the greatness of Christ and what He has done and the greatness of God's love into our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who opens it up to us. We can read the most exalted things in the Scriptures or hear them spoken of but they will not affect us at all unless the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. "Wisdom and intelligence" (v. 9) is spoken of here. In the things of God that only comes to us through the service of the Spirit. It causes things to become real in our understanding. It causes us to see things even in the Scriptures that we perhaps never regarded that way before. It is light from God. It is the work of a divine Person and we can be very, very thankful for it.

We have the Spirit now as a seal because the redemption of our bodies has not yet come about. It is instructive the order in which

it is put, "in whom also, having believed, ye have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise". Sealed with the Spirit is God plainly marking the believer off as His property. That is a challenge as to whether God's mark on me is evident in my life and conduct.

It seems from verse 15 that faith in the Lord Jesus and love toward all the saints are a necessary foundation if we are to enter more fully into the greatest thoughts of God. Love towards all the saints is something that comes from the heart and would show itself in action and attitude one toward another. It is towards all the saints, not just those that may be known to us at any one time.

Sealed with the Spirit is God plainly marking the believer off as His property

The apostle wanted these Ephesian believers to grow and prosper in their own souls, that they should know, "what is the hope of his calling". We see that there is a day when all that God has had in mind in bringing us to Christ will be fulfilled. Presenting it as a "hope", as the apostle does here, means that it is something for us to look forward to and which is to form us now even while we are still on earth. The apostle, through the Spirit of God, was seeking to bring those to whom he wrote more into the light and enjoyment and conviction of what they had been called for. It is one thing to be delivered from sin and from Satan. It is a further thing to see why God did that at all. That is why there is the reference to the glory of His inheritance in the saints. It reminds us that God finds great pleasure in a real response to His love from those whom He has met in His grace. John chapter four is an illustration of that. The material there may not have looked very likely but the Lord spoke to the woman there of what the Father was seeking. That is the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

The measure of God's power is to be seen in His raising Christ from among the dead. It is "according to the working of the might of his strength, in which he wrought in the Christ in raising him from among the dead". The whole being of God, speaking reverently, was involved in this act. When creation was brought into existence God just spoke and it happened, but here a far greater

power was involved. It indicates that the whole interest of heaven was focussed on the resurrection of Christ.

Then, the effect of having raised Him from among the dead is that God set Him down at His right hand in the heavenlies “above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come; and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body”. That is, it is not simply raising Him from among the dead but the immense consequences that follow. Apart from His death and rising again there would be no church over which He could be Head.

“Above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion” (vv20 & 21) brings out the supreme place that God has given to Christ. The challenge is, ‘Do I recognise that? According to Hebrews He did it Himself, “set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high” (Hebrews 1:3). There, the emphasis is on His right to do that. Here, in Ephesians, it is God glorifying Christ. These are two sides of the truth that are of equal authority. Here we have God’s pleasure in raising Christ from among the dead and giving Him a place. But the Lord also said, I have authority to lay down my life and authority to take it again. This commandment I have received of my Father (See John 10:18).

This place on the right hand was reserved for a Man and the only Man that can fill it is Christ. In Isaiah we read, “set upon him all the glory of his father’s house” (Isaiah 22:24). That is Christ! Psalm five presents the question as to why God takes an interest in man. The New Testament answer to that is that He had one particular Man in mind and He is the One who is capable of fulfilling all God’s will and of filling all things. That was all part of God’s purpose.

The word “fulness” (v. 23) as used in Scripture conveys a complete expression of what is to be put on display, so that, in the church, all that is pleasing to God in Christ should come into expression. The church is very distinctly a creature—it is not part of the Godhead—but the view the apostle gives in this epistle is of one that is expressive of Christ. The working out of that day by day is very challenging but we should acknowledge that if we seek to walk by the light that Scripture gives about the church, one prime concern

**It is a mark of a
Christian that
they seek to
follow and be
like Christ**

is that we should rightly represent the Lord. So those four words, "which is his body" are very important because the body is to take direction from the Head and to be expressive of Him.

These things may be poorly expressed at the present time but we need to keep them before us as God's mind as to what He would have portrayed even

now in the church which is Christ's body. The day for its full expression will come but we should be concerned as to how far it is and can be fulfilled now. At the very simplest level, it is a mark of a Christian that they seek to follow and be like Christ. The whole company that makes up the body of Christ is to provide a right representation of Him.

Based on Bible readings at Bromley, March and April 2008.

Poetry Selection

HYMNS OF THE EARLY CHURCH – Part 2

Completing the selection started in the last issue

1. Christ the Sure Foundation

Christ is our Corner-stone,
On Him alone we build;
With His true saints alone
The courts of heaven are filled;
On His great love
Our hopes we place
Of present grace
And joys above!

Here may we gain from heaven
The grace which we implore;
And may that grace as given,
Be with us evermore,
Until that day
When all the blest
To endless rest
Are called away!

Translated by J. Chandler from "Angularis Fundamentum" (7th Century)

2. Christ is Risen!

Come ye faithful, raise the strain
Of triumphant gladness;
God hath brought His people now
Into joy from sadness;
Tis the spring of souls today;
Christ hath burst the prison,
And from three days there in death
As the sun, hath risen.

Neither might nor gates of death,
Nor the tomb's dark portal,
Nor the wrappings, nor the stone,
Hold Thee as a mortal;
But that day amidst Thine own
Thou didst stand bestowing
Thine own peace which evermore
Passeth human knowing.

John the Damascene (700 - 754)

Translated from the Greek by J. M. Neale (1818 – 1866)

John fled from Damascus as Mohammedanism swept through the Middle East and took refuge in the Greek monastery of Mount Saba. It was during his time there that he wrote this hymn.

3. Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid?

Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed?
"Come to Me", saith One, "and coming,
Be at rest"

Finding, following, keeping, struggling
Is He sure to bless?
Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer, "Yes!"

Stephen the Sabaite (725 –815)

Translated from the Greek by J. M. Neale (1818 – 1866)

These are the first and last verses of a hymn written by Stephen during his long stay at Mount Saba. He was taken there when he was ten years old by his uncle, John of Damascus, in order to escape persecution.

Each verse is in two parts, with a question and then an answer.

4. Endless Praise

In blissful antiphons we now rejoice
To render to the Lord with thankful voice
An endless alleluia.

Almighty Christ, to Thee our voices sing
Glory for evermore, to Thee we bring
An endless alleluia.

7th Century, translated from the Mozarabic by John Ellerton (1828 – 1893)

Mozarabs were Christians who lived under Muslim rule after the invasion of the Iberian peninsula of Spain in 711 by the Moors. Their language (Mozarabic) was a dialect of Spanish but borrowed many Arabic phrases and also retained some archaic Latin forms.

5. Jesus – One above all others

Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
Unfilled, we turn to Thee again.

Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those that on Thee call:
To them that seek Thee Thou art good,
To them that find Thee – all in all.

We taste Thee, O Thou living bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee the fountain-head,
And long our souls from Thee to fill.

Oh, Jesus, ever with us stay:
Make all our moments calm and
bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away
And fill us with Thy holy light.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1091 – 1153)

Translated by Ray Palmer (1808 - 1887)

Perhaps the best known of all Bernard's hymns is "Jesus, the very thought of Thee, With sweetness fills the breast", translated by Edward Caswell and which is included in many hymnbooks. The original poem from which this was taken had 42 four-line verses and the hymn given above is a translation of some of the other verses.

Bernard was a powerful and persuasive preacher. His eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs were reprinted in modern times but he is probably best known amongst Christians for his hymns.

Testimony Section

LETTER FROM AUGUSTUS TOPLADY TO MR. LUNNELL

Augustus Toplady (4th November 1740 – 11th August 1778) is best known for his hymn “Rock of Ages”. This letter is rather different and gives an account of the stroke that he had when he was only 26 and describes the way this caused him to learn to be dependent on the Lord.

Augustus Toplady appears to have corresponded regularly with Mr. Lunnell and begins the letter with a rather laboured apology for the long delay in replying to two letters. He fears that Mr Lunnell would think he was “neglected if not forgot...” The language at times is rather dated and in order to make the sense clear some minor changes have been made. Where this means that words have been inserted this has been made clear by the use of italic.

Frampton

25th January 1767

...To account however for my long silence (which would be apt to raise suspicion in any breast less generous than your own, I borrow an hour from sleep, though *tired* with the labours of the day.) I left Devon my dear Sir *at* the latter end of last August (1766) and having a call on business into South Wales went to London by way of Exeter, Bristol, Abergavenny, Gloucester and Oxford. I mention *this* so particularly because it will in part *explain* the time taken to acknowledge the receipt of your two kind and valuable letters which I was so happy to find on my return to town. Accept my thanks for the friendly intelligence they contain but above all for the important advice they convey. Indeed, my honoured and dearest friend, *were* you acquainted with the natural pride of my heart, you would know that I need all the admonition that you can give. I pray God to give me a humbling sight of myself and to make your kind directions a means of grace to my soul... To your wishes and advice, add your prayers...

I bless God that I trust I can say I was never so sensible of my own nothingness and my absolute dependence on Him, as since I wrote to you last. An alarming complaint has been, in the hand of divine grace, the means of this spiritual good. Nor, if I know my heart, would I wish the cause to be removed unless the effect was to continue.

A little before I set out for Wales I had a stroke which I apprehended to

be of a paralytic kind. It was on a Sunday morning while I was performing *the* service in one of my churches I was seized with a sudden impediment and faltering of speech attended with a numbness in my left hand and left leg. I was for some time on the brink of leaving off ... but was enabled, though in a broken manner and with great difficulty, to go on with the prayers ... My heart had recourse to God and He was merciful when I went into the pulpit. I was equally thankful and surprised that I could preach with almost as much strength as usual. But the numbness in my leg continued for several weeks and from that day to this I have not been so well, nor so much myself as before.

I trust my faithful God will render those impressions indelible which so unexpected a visitation has produced. I consider it as a call to look out from earth and to look up to heaven within the veil, whither Jesus my forerunner is entered. Until He takes me to Himself I desire to live solely on His fullness and to derive all my strength and consolation from His Spirit, His righteousness and His love. Worldly success and human favour are apt to draw aside the mind even of a *committed believer* from HIM, the centre of blessedness. It is wise, it is gracious of Him to drop wormwood on the earthly comforts and thereby attach us singly to Himself. Every application is a nail intended to crucify us to the world and be another blow to that *first* man, that degenerate self which is so deeply entrenched in every human heart.

May the infirmities of which my dear Mr Lunnell complains and those under which I also labour have their blessed effect in us both! And may we with thankfulness receive those dispensations which tend to detach our affections from created good and are designed by the gracious physician of souls to counter the poison of worldly satisfactions and thereby keep them from proving fatal to our spiritual interests.

My kindest respects attend Mrs Lunnell. Mr and Mrs Fenwick with Mr Manypenny share my best wishes. May the unutterable consolations be with my friend in life, in death and to eternity. So prays from his heart the unworthiest, though not the least grateful of those whom you honour with *your friendship*...

Augustus

The original of this letter is in the Somerset County Record Office.

LIFE STORY

I'd always had a vague sense that there was something there, but I did not know who or what God was. At university I took up the offer from a fellow student to explore what christianity was about, through discussions over coffee, listening to tapes and reading books. One that stood out was "Mere Christianity" by C. S. Lewis, whose arguments made such perfect sense to me as a mathematician.

I realised that the christian faith was not about doing your best and hoping that God would give you a pass mark if you had done well enough. I also understood for the first time that it was about getting right with God, not because of what I could do, but because of what He had done through Jesus' death on the cross. I was amazed to discover that God was offering me a new kind of life, like a heart transplant, so that I would begin to live His way.

My questioning took place over a period of eighteen months to two years. Although I was convinced intellectually, I was still reluctant to make a personal commitment to God that I knew was at the heart of the Christian faith. Then God brought me to the point when I knew I had to take a step of faith, and I became a christian.

To have a relationship with the God of the universe has given me a real sense of purpose and security about knowing who I am and where I am going. That sense of purpose pervades my whole life. As a mathematician, knowing that what I am doing is within the framework and design of the Creator makes it very worthwhile. It is also a great help to me to know that it is God who has given us minds and has made a world that is to be investigated and discovered. Another great joy for me as a christian is the sense of belonging to a family of people who accept and love me. It shows me that God's love is real.

Nigel Cutland

Nigel became a christian when he was twenty and still a student at university.

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A Voice from the Past

HOPE

How wonderful is the assurance of eternal bliss in God's coming world of glory, that assurance is possessed and enjoyed by those who have faith in God! What a contrast there is between the outlook of a believer in Jesus, who can look into eternity with the joyful and certain anticipation of blessing with Christ in heaven, and that of an unbeliever who is "without Christ ... having no hope, and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12), to whom the thought of the future can only be, "a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation" (Hebrews 10:27).

But God has revealed Himself as a Saviour-God, and in the death of Jesus, His beloved Son, God's love has been expressed and His righteousness declared; so that those who have believed in Jesus have this certain hope, based on the authority of the word of the living God Himself. The apostle could, therefore, write to the Christians in Rome, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

A Sure Hope

There are many beautiful features of the Christian's expectations, of which perhaps the most significant is that it is a sure hope. The blank despair of the unbeliever without hope in the presence of death, and the dread of "after this the judgment", are displaced by the quiet assurance known by those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Hebrews 6:18).

It is well that each should challenge his heart whether this sure hope is possessed. Is your eternal future all bright and certain? Can you face eternity with its tremendous issues in the knowledge that Jesus the Forerunner has entered in for you? The greatest hope that a person without God can cherish cannot reach beyond death, and is, therefore, of little value; for hope that is death-shadowed can give no true satisfaction.

On the contrary, a Christian, even standing by the open grave of a loved one, 'sorrows not as others, which have no hope' {see 1 Thessalonians 4:13}, notwithstanding that all earthly hopes concerning that one are ended. A believer can even say, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ", as the certain hope of resurrection sustains their spirit. Death cannot hinder the realisation of the believer's hope, which is based on the word, "Now is Christ risen up from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept".

A Living Hope

It is the pleasure of God that His children should be the possessors of a living hope, in contrast to the dying hope of the ungodly, so that the Christian says in an outburst of praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which ... hath begotten us again unto a lively [or living] hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

The children of God are not filled with the dread of judgment, nor the fear of an uncertain future, but in calm enjoyment can say, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... and rejoice in hope of the glory of God".

A trustworthy promise inevitably produces hope, and there is no promise more sure than the closing words of the Lord Jesus when He spoke to His own from heaven, "Surely I come quickly".

A Blessed Hope

Many who love Him today are waiting and watching for His return and are "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ". This is the joyful outlook for all those who believe, for Jesus is coming to gather His own to Himself, not by death, but by that quickening shout which will raise the dead in Christ and change the living believers into His own likeness.

A Purifying Hope

The effect of this upon the life and conduct of those who are watching for Jesus is very manifest, for "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure". This purifying hope will produce true separation of heart and ways from evil and defilement, so that we may "not be ashamed before him at his coming".

*O may this hope our spirits cheer
While waiting for our Saviour here,
He'll quickly come again!
O may our hearts expect that day,
And to His word responsive say:
'Come, Jesus, Lord, Amen.'*

F. S. Marsh.

THE PRAYER MEETING

The prayer meeting ought to be:

- the place of expressed need and expected blessing
- the place of expressed weakness and expected power.
- The place where God's people assemble with one accord to take hold of the throne of God; to get into the treasury of heaven and draw thence all we want for ourselves, for our households, for the whole church of God and for the vineyard of Christ.

Charles H Mackintosh

LIGHTS

Psalms	19: 1-4
Proverbs	20: 27
Jeremiah	13: 15-17
Jude	4 & 13
2 Corinthians	4: 3-6
Hebrews	4: 12-13.

I want to refer to the subject of 'Lights' in certain aspects:

- searchlights,
- warning lights, and
- floodlights.

Searchlights

When I first saw an x-ray of my hand, it reminded me of the Word of God as the "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). We seldom realize that there is nothing that is not open to God. That is a comfort to the believer, even if it exposes something that is out of order, but it is very uncomfortable to the unbeliever. Human words often just conceal our hearts, but God knows our hearts. He

knows our every thought, word, and deed.

It is astonishing how men can conceal from others what they really are but, "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord" (Proverbs 20:27). It is your conscience which tells you when you have done wrong. God appeals to your conscience. Conscience cannot give you light about God, but it does help you when you have done wrong; it is a light which searches our innermost being, like those men who, when standing before Jesus, were convicted of their own conscience (See John 8).

Men were allowed to put Jesus out of the world — they tried to put out the Light, but the Light now comes from heaven. So the Light of God shines out from God and you know that you are discovered, and you may not like that, but God does not expose you for any other reason than to bless you.

There are many false lights in the world. Jude speaks of "wandering stars". Satan, too, can transform himself into an angel of light. People are lighted by false lights! They tell you that Buddhism and such like religions are as good as Christianity.

Warning Lights

Lot's wife was a warning light—a pillar of salt, a warning light to those who love the world. One of my brothers was travelling by train from Damascus to Baghdad. The train stopped, and he saw only a board with the name "BABYLON HALT"— no beautiful walls and buildings that Nebuchadnezzar built, merely a few ruins; so the glory of this world turns to nothing.

Jerusalem, too, is a warning light. It says, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled", and so it is. We see many warning lights. Take heed! God sends these warning lights to save us from destruction. Then there are wrecker's lights, luring you on till you fall on the rocks. If I say there is nothing in this world to satisfy you, some of you will not believe me. You say, you want to try it for yourself. We want to do things apart from God, and Satan leads men and women on and leads them to utter disaster.

Floodlights

There was a Great Light that came into the world when Christ came, and now the light shines from a glorified Man in heaven. I would liken the four Gospels to floodlights, and they all converge on Christ. They show us what He is, and they show us God in Him.

In creation we see the floodlights that reveal God in creation and have done so from the beginning. Because the Greater Light has come the lesser lights have not disappeared. The light of creation is still here. People say that these things in creation have just come together by chance and that we are small compared to these great things. Well, there is a great Creator. But now comes the great floodlight, for Christ came — God's blessed Son. Every act of His spoke of God; all wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth; all wondered at His acts, raising the dead, healing the lepers. That is what His heart is. God has come to teach us what He is in grace in the life of the Lord Jesus, and how much more in His death.

When we know what He did, what can we say? What must not God be in grace! I doubt if any of us appreciate it sufficiently. Many would admit that God is great, but would put Him as far away as possible. Yet God came down in grace to meet humanity in all its need. Come to Christ and own that you have been quite mistaken in your idea of God! What about God's righteousness? Do those floodlights throw any light on that? Yes, they do. You could not connect God with unrighteousness. He is holy — we realise that when we come under the searchlights. God would not lower the standard of His righteousness one bit. The Lord Jesus suffered there at Calvary because God is holy. Look at the state of the world. Is that right? Nations, ambitious, every one of them, fighting over little bits of land that really belong to God. What would the searchlights reveal in the homes around us? Things cannot go on like this for ever.

We know God is a God of grace. We can come to know Him as a Saviour-God. If you did not have a true ground for forgiveness you would not be happy. If we trust in Christ for forgiveness, God admits us to His presence and there is nothing there inconsistent with His holiness. I would say to all, converted or not, are you perfectly happy with God? Do you welcome His presence? Many true believers are not happy and free with God. I cannot think that God would send His own Son to do a work which is not perfect. It does not need any touching up. Our foundation is that we rest happily in the work done. We trust in Himself and the work He has done.

Yet the blessed offer of grace so patiently gone on with since Christ died will have to end:

"Hear ye, and give ear, be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your

feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive" (Jeremiah 13:15-17).

This speaks of all that is coming once the church has gone to be with the Lord. It will be dreadful when the church has gone. People will look for light, and He will turn it into the shadow of death. There will be no ray of light then. They will stumble upon the mountains of twilight. They will look for light but He will turn it into the shadow of death and will make it gross darkness.

If I knew you were rejecting the gospel I would weep for you. I can only tell this warning to you with a weeping heart, if not weeping eyes. My heart bleeds for any who would reject Christ. Gross darkness will come over your soul. In my profession it is no use if a patient will not tell the doctor his symptoms. Sometimes he will not. God knows all about you but He wants you not to hide anything from Him but to confess it all and to trust in the Lord Jesus as the One who has met the need of the sinner. God wants to give you holy interest in Himself. The Holy Spirit will fill your soul with happiness. Instead of following the lights in the world, you will find definite happiness in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. C. C. Elliot

A Word for Today

SITTING

I want to speak of three persons found sitting.

Sitting clothed and sensible at the feet of Jesus (Luke 8:35)

Now the first of the three who are sitting according to God is the demoniac, or rather the man out of whom the legion had departed; he sets forth the first results of the teaching of grace. He had been brought into touch with the Lord Jesus. He is presented as an extreme case—one possessed of a legion of demons, but an extreme case is presented in order to show what the divine intention is, that each of us should be marked by the features that marked this man. They come and find this man sitting at the feet of Jesus. Obviously in a position of subjection, and now under a new control, he was clothed, and was now possessed

of certain positive characteristics that did not previously mark him; for previously he wore no clothes; he was exposed in his nakedness. Finally he was sensible—in his right mind.

Now it may be an elementary thing to say, but it is well to understand that none of us is a free agent, nor is it intended that we should be. Apart from the grace of God, whether men know it or not, they are the slaves of sin. In Romans 6 it says, “Thanks be to God, that ye were bondmen of sin, but have obeyed from the heart the form of teaching into which ye were instructed”—ye were the bondmen of sin. God’s way in grace to secure men and women for the church, which is the great object of God’s operations in this time, is to bring them under the sway of Christ. He has no other way. It is not God’s intention that anyone of us should be lawless or marked by self-will. His one way of delivering souls from lawlessness, and securing them for Himself, is to bring each one under the influence and sway of Christ.

Now this man was there; he was sitting at the feet of Jesus. It says in Romans 6 that we were the bondmen of sin, but “have become bondmen to righteousness”. Not to become free agents to do what you will, but you come under the sway of that principle—righteousness. The world is a great system of sin, where every kind of will and fancy of persons is catered for. Now the Lord Jesus has come in and died to sin once, in order that we might understand that God has set us free from the dominion of sin; grace entitles us to reckon ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”. He has died to sin once for all, “but in that he lives, he lives to God”.

God has brought in, by Christ, a Man great enough in His own moral excellence to transform everyone who is brought into touch with Him. Never was it more seen, I suppose, than in the case of the apostle Paul. He was taken up by God to set forth livingly the features of the truth. He was a pattern sinner, an insolent overbearing man, the kind of man that you would not find it at all easy to get on with. In addition, a blasphemer and persecutor who breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, but what does he become? We all know what Paul became. He says, “I myself, Paul, entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of the Christ”. They all knew well what his history had been, but he could now set himself before them and say, “I myself, Paul, entreat you by the meekness and gentleness

of the Christ". If Paul had not himself been marked by a spirit of meekness and gentleness, he would not have dared to say that.

I know this is basic truth, but I would urge it upon you, and young believers especially. Do not think, because you have trusted Christ, and received forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that that is everything. God has indeed forgiven your sins, and you are entitled to rejoice in His favour, for He is holding nothing against you, but has brought you into favour in Christ the Beloved. You can be in the enjoyment of the love of God, but He intends that you should understand that the One who has redeemed you is the One to whom you are to live. Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works". You notice, it says, "to himself". Henceforth the believer's attitude of mind and spirit is towards Christ. What a subduing and sanctifying effect that has. You begin to discover in you some element of self-seeking, perhaps seeking a reputation even amongst the people of God, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" but then we read, "I the Lord search the heart". Thank God He does! In faithfulness He discloses what is in our hearts, and at the same time freshly reminds us that He Himself went into death that it might be for ever set aside from before God. Our blessing lies in living to Him. As the element of self-seeking or wanting a reputation arises, the Lord speaks to us. He reminds us that He was in the form of God, that He is God; He did not think it robbery to be equal with God—"did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form".

The Lord reminds us of these things, counteracting what comes to light in our hearts by what is resident in Himself. This man was sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed. He had previously been naked; all the wretchedness of the flesh was openly manifest in him. They now find him sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed. What kind of clothing would you like to appear in? God wants His church to be composed of persons who have taken on the features of Christ and of no other.

This man in Luke 8 is found sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed and sensible. I do not think that supposes a large measure of intelligence, but that his mind is in the right direction. Previously his mind was

There is nothing to be ashamed of in being a bondman of righteousness, ... of Christ

entirely wrong, under the influence of evil. Romans chapter 6 is very much occupied with getting our minds in the right direction. You yield yourself to God, you take account of yourself as “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Grace having set us in that position as bondmen of righteousness we are yielded to that principle. A bondman is completely yielded

to the person to whom he is bondman. As yielding ourselves, our “members instruments of righteousness to God”, we become bondmen of righteousness, and then it says, “bondmen to God”. There is nothing to be ashamed of in being bondmen. Each of the five apostles who have been taken up to write to us, Peter, John, James, Jude and Paul, speaks of himself as a bondman, John in the Revelation, and the others in one or other of the epistles. There is nothing to be ashamed of in being a bondman of righteousness, a bondman of God, a bondman of Christ—“the freeman being called is Christ’s bondman”. To be bondmen is God’s way of completely delivering us and securing us for His pleasure.

Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to His word

(Luke 10:38 – 42)

When we come to Luke 10 we have an advance on chapter 8, and I believe intelligence is more particularly in view in this chapter. In chapter 8 it is a question of subjection especially, and as a result, taking on moral features that are pleasing to God, which are derived from Christ, but chapter 10 is a question of intelligence characteristically listening to the word of Christ. The chapter raises the question as to what the Lord looks for and finds in places where His people live. He does not find the same conditions in one place as He does in another. What kind of conditions He is going to find in this place or that?

The chapter begins with the Lord sending out seventy, two by two, “into every city and place where he himself was about to come”. That is a serious consideration! The Lord is coming to see what the result is, to take account of what is there as the result of the ministry that He has given. So He comes to this village to the house of Martha, and Mary. What does He find? He finds Martha and Mary and it says that

Martha “had a sister called Mary, who also, having sat down at the feet of Jesus, was listening to his word”. That is, it was characteristic of her. That is important if there is to be intelligence—we are to be habitually marked by listening to the word of Jesus; as in Colossians, “Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly”. “The Christ” is the anointed Head, the glorious Head of the Church, and He is always speaking to the church. Let us see to it that the ministry that He gives, that which is distinctively from Himself, has a definite place in our lives. I would urge this attitude of mind, listening to the word of Jesus in a spirit of subjection. Sitting at His feet should characterise us.

The word of Jesus comes to us, maybe through reading the scriptures, through ministry, through the local company, or through what is published, but the thing is, to be characterised by listening to His word. I do not think we can expect that God will have the pleasure that He desires from us if we are lacking in the knowledge of his mind. In Ephesians it says, “he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence: having made known unto us the mystery of his will”. How much do we know about the will of God? Epaphras laboured for the saints at Colosse that they might “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God”. Let us ask ourselves how much we understand of the will of God. Not so much His will in relation to our pathway, though that has its place, but how much do we understand of the will of God which really centres in Christ and the church! God desires that we should grow up in intelligence, and that can only be secured as Christ is livingly held, in our affections, as Head, and His word is recognized in that light.

Now the apostle, in writing to the Thessalonians, draws attention to that feature that was lacking in them, and says, “Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”. The feature that was marking the Bereans is the feature that the apostle specially mentions to the Thessalonians when he writes to them. So the epistle to the Colossians develops this thought of the headship of Christ, and the intelligence that is to flow from it. He warns the saints against “philosophy and vain deceit”, and then says, it is “not after Christ”. That is to say, everything that is presented is tested in that way—is it of Christ? Is it according to Christ? You notice the Lord commends Mary in saying, “One thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her”.

If in any degree we have become marked by the features of the man in chapter 8, let us see to it also that we seek to take on this feature of characteristically listening to the word of Christ, that we may become intelligent in the mind of God, for God has nothing less than sonship in mind:

These two features are to mark the church—intelligence and subjection.

and that involves affection and intelligence. A father and mother take pleasure in their young children and delight in their affection and simplicity, but they delight in seeing intelligence develop; they rejoice in the time when their children can converse with them intelligently and sympathetically. So God is like that: He wants His children not to remain babes, but to enter intelligently into His own thoughts and respond to them according to His mind.

Sitting before the Lord (1 Chronicles 17:16 – 27)

Now when we come to Chronicles we have depicted what is greatest. I can only touch on it for a moment, but it says, “David the king came and sat before the Lord”. It was a deliberate movement on his part. He had it in his heart to build a house for Jehovah, but God intercepted him through the prophet Nathan and told him that he was not to build it: it would seem that something was necessary before it could be built. David understands. What is in view now is the church as the great vessel of praise and worship Godward, the place where God is served. What a challenge it is that our gatherings together are to be worthy of God. Is our response worthy of the blessed God, is all that takes place in our gatherings suggestive of the church of God, the privilege, and dignity, and liberty, and intelligence of such a company? I believe intelligence and subjection are the two great features that should be seen publicly in the assembly as convened. Subjection should be seen in brothers as well as sisters; “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”. These two features are to mark the church—intelligence and subjection. In so far as they do, it is worthy of God.

Well now, David as having in his heart to build the house, but being told he must not do it, goes and sits before God. In doing so he sets before us that if we would develop in the ability to respond to God in a true spirit of worship we must learn to sit before God, and allow

God, so to speak, to become greater and greater before our eyes and hearts, as we take account of what He is going to do. Because, after all, God must be supreme; He must be greatest; and the more He becomes great before our eyes the more there will spring up in our hearts the spirit of worship. So God deflects David from the movements which would have occupied him with what he was going to do, and he goes and sits before God, and allows what God has said to sink into his mind and heart, and to be impressed with the fact that it is all what God is going to do.

When we apply this idea to ourselves, I have no doubt we find the answer in Ephesians. If the answer to Luke 10 is in Colossians, the answer to this is in Ephesians where we find the apostle in a spirit of worship; and what is causing the worship? He is really imbued, as he writes that epistle, with a sense of what God is pleased to do for His own pleasure and according to His own glory. "Paul", he says, "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God". Then he speaks of "the good pleasure of his will", and the One "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will". "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ: according as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the beloved".

What great thoughts they are, emanating from God Himself. Only God could have conceived them. They are not called forth by any condition of need on our part, for they were formed before the foundation of the world. God would display what He is in His greatness, but more than that He would set forth what He is in the blessedness of His own heart. Believers brought into the place of sonship; involving that a divine Person in fulness of time, should become Man, accomplishing redemption that we might be brought into it by the grace of God, and stand before Him as sons.

The glory of redemption has shone out—"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace". There is not only the glory of His grace, but the riches of

God's grace, and the incoming of sin has involved that God has shone out in a way that could never have been known otherwise. There has been a display of holiness, righteousness, grace; there has been a display of mercy and of power, in bringing in everything on the platform of resurrection, and we, as taken up according to divine purpose, are intended to sit down before God and let the sense of the greatness of God sink into our hearts, that there might be produced more real substance, more real intelligent appreciation of the blessed God, that there might be worship Godward that is worthy of Him.

I believe that is set forth in this chapter. David speaks in a real spirit of worship. He says, "Who am I ...?" and then verse 19—"according to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness"; and then in verse 20—"Jehovah, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee"; in verse 21, there is the thought of redemption, and how David glories in it; then in verse 24—All that God has said, "Let it even be established, and let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, is God to Israel". That is, He is not only the God of Israel, but God to Israel. Israel holds Him now in their affections in that regard.

That surely is our portion—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". He is God, He is that to us, so that as worshipping the Father in spirit and truth, what we come to is that the One we worship in this holy and blessed way, knowing Him as sons, is God, thus known, and He becomes the great theme of worship of His people. God becomes all in all. God would bring this about in the church now, that a greater sense of the grace conferred upon us, that we should be taken up to form part of the church, should be with us. We have everything in Christ and the Spirit to enable us now to seize every thought that God has in His mind for the church, and that we should be developed in our affections and intelligence, and learn to sit before Him, that the sense of His greatness might sink into our hearts. May the Lord help us to cultivate the spirit of sitting at the feet of Jesus, and sitting in the presence of the blessed God!

Alfred Gardiner