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Living Water

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By A. A. Elliott

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Recent Ministry

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS – CHAPTER 4

This chapter marks a turning point in the epistle. In chapter 2 we have the bringing together of the Jew and the Gentile as a result of the work of Christ which reconciled both to God in one body. Chapter 3 expands on this. Now we have the practice – how that unity is to be expressed and maintained.

The first exhortation of the apostle, in order that unity should be maintained, is for a spirit of meekness and humility. We have the Lord's word, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29) and that we are to come to Him and learn from Him; but it is rather striking that after three chapters that are devoted to spiritual and heavenly blessings, the working out of Christianity down here should begin with a humble spirit. It is because of the greatness of the calling and our own unworthiness for it that humility is a becoming attitude. Meekness and lowliness marked the Lord Jesus when He was here. They are similar features; lowliness is to be our view of ourselves and meekness is the spirit we should demonstrate to others.

Then, there is "long-suffering, bearing with one another in love". These are practical reminders, if we needed them, that we have not reached perfection yet and indeed the chapter goes on to show that there is a work proceeding that will bring us nearer to it - "Until we all arrive".

We should always hold that true unity is possible and was actually seen here in demonstration in the early days of the church's history. Paul brings forward three great bonds of unity here:

- There is one body and one Spirit
- There is one Lord
- There is one God and Father of all.

These bonds exist – our part is to apply them to our links together.

It is encouraging to know that there is the unity of the Spirit. Paul does not say produce it, he says keep it. So it should be amongst us, and we need to use diligence to keep it. We do not want to fail in it.

The unity of the faith (v 13) is something we arrive at as we make spiritual progress and the gifts are allowed to function. The unity of the Spirit has to do with recognizing that there is one Spirit and that

His service here is to glorify Christ, to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, and to bring about a united response on our part.

There is no denying that difficulties and problems arise on the way and believers are not always of one mind. Then comes the question of the spirit in which we approach matters of difficulty. We need to be regulated by the Holy Spirit in the attitude of our mind. The apostles had differences of opinions at times but underlying it all they all had an appreciation of the Lord Himself. That is what the Spirit would form in our hearts. There is an underlying unity, created by a divine Person actually present within us and we are to strive to keep it, to do all that we rightly can to ensure that a breach does not arise out of a difficulty.

The end of Galatians is helpful. It says in Galatians 5: "If we live by the Spirit, let us walk also by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). That would help us to keep what is right in our spirits. It is interesting that several aspects of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians are recorded here in Ephesians - ones we have already considered: meekness, long-suffering, peace and so on. Then we can learn by contrast by the last verse of chapter 5 in Galatians, "Let us not become vain-glorious, provoking one another, envying one another". That is the opposite of using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit.

These scriptures are a help to us in a day of breakdown. It is a great comfort to know that from God's viewpoint the unity of the Spirit remains, as it should be from our viewpoint too. This epistle gives God's view of things, as He sees them and the provision that He has made for the welfare of His people down here. The fact that not all Christians are of one mind is, and should be, a very great sorrow. It is a good thing to begin by seeking to work out the truth of this chapter with such as are immediately available to us. The Lord may graciously give more to be like minded.

"To each one of us has been given grace" (v. 7) reminds us that God would give us the power to act in accordance with what is set out here. None of us is entitled to say, 'I cannot do it'. because grace has been given to each of us for this very purpose. Then, "according to the measure of the gift of the Christ" (v.7) means that

We need to be regulated by the Holy Spirit in the attitude of our mind

every saint had something to contribute. Later in the chapter some very distinctive public gifts are spoken of but the apostle first reminds us that every one has grace as the Lord is pleased to give it.

The apostle goes on to speak of the gifts given to the church from the ascended Christ. The Lord has been victorious over every foe. He has led "captivity captive" (v.8). That is that He has overcome the great adversary, the devil, who would hold all persons in bondage. Having triumphed in such a way He has gone on high and as a result of that, gifts have been given. He ascended having first descended, not just descending as far as this world; He went lower than that. He has been to the lower parts of the earth. What depths He has been to, to secure this wonderful victory and that there may be fruit from men for God.

We get some idea too about the height of His ascent. He has "ascended up above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (v.10). That is the authority which accompanies the giving of gifts. The Lord's interest and power are truly behind the gift. He spoke to His own about their doing greater works than these, "because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). By the giving of the gifts He has demonstrated His continued interest in His own on earth. This is a wonderful view of the church as acted on by the gifts given from an ascended Christ and continuing until the rapture. The gifts were given by Christ and they remain here under the Spirit's hand to distribute as He pleases.

These services continue and it is a great mercy that they do because we have all in some measure benefited from them. They are given, "With a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ" (v.12). It is a present, continuous, edifying. That would encourage us in our day to look for good teaching, good encouragement, good building up in what is sound. "Have an outline of sound words, which words thou hast heard of me", says Paul (2 Timothy 1:13). Then we should pray for more to be made available; the Spirit still has all the gifts under His hand. Ministry and the gifts are for the whole church.

We are now exhorted here to "No longer walk as the rest of the nations walk in the vanity of their mind" (v.17). That is in the pride of man's understanding of his abilities and all that he is able to discover, to explore, naturally speaking. In Scripture it comes out notably in a man like Nebuchadnezzar. God committed rule into his hands and his kingdom

Man away from God becomes his own centre

was characterised by the pride of human greatness. We see this very markedly in the world around us today. Man away from God becomes his own centre. There is a cloud which obscures the reasoning mind from understanding the perfections of God's

thoughts. John 1 tells us, "the light appears in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not".

The antidote to vanity of mind for the Ephesians, and therefore for us, is what Paul says here,

"Ye have not thus learnt the Christ" (v.20). Learning "the Christ" means that we come to appreciate Him for what He is and the Holy Spirit would convict us that this is the kind of man that God would have us to follow and seek to be identified with. It would deliver us from all the glory of man. Paul adds, "If ye have heard him and been instructed in him" so that it was evidently possible for the Ephesians to hear the voice of the Lord even though they had never known Him after the flesh. So when we come together we should be able to hear the voice of Christ to us.

It might seem remarkable that the Ephesians needed to be told much of what is in chapter 4. We might think that the instincts of a person change automatically through conversion and everything of nature just drops away. A chapter like this shows that it is not like that. It is striking that the exhortation in verse 32 "be to one another kind, compassionate, forgiving one another..." should need to apply within the Christian circle. It reminds us that relations there may not always be as we would wish.

One key to spiritual progress is in recognising that our "old man" has been put off. It is an old saying, but well founded in Scripture, that we are never told to put off the old man but to recognize that we have done so. In the death of Christ the old man was put away from the sight of God and our need is to recognize that he is gone from our sight and from our way of life, and our way of thinking and acting. It is as well, therefore, to read these verses alongside the epistle to the Colossians where these issues are considered in more detail. This is an aspect of the gospel that bears on my life down here after I first came to the Lord. There can be no question in the true gospel of having

Christ for my sins but not for my Lord.

Then we are to see that the new man according to God is “created in truthful righteousness and holiness” (v.24). It is a new creation. From God’s standpoint we have put on the new man, “having put on the new man” (v.24). Whether we fully realised it or not, in coming to Christ we said farewell to the old man and became identified with the new. It may be a lifetime’s work to appreciate it fully but that is God’s view of the matter. He is not going on with the old at all. There is nothing feigned or pretended about the new man and it extends to the heart. It is possible to appear to act righteously but if it is genuine the heart will be identified with it. The Lord was righteous and holy from the heart. He could say that He was, “altogether that which I also say unto you” (John 8:25). Nothing of the old ever attached to Him, but we can learn Him as the great model for us (1 Peter 2:21).

In verse 18 there is a striking expression, “darkened in understanding, estranged from the life of God”. The “life of God” is a life according to God and we see some of the features of it here, for instance, “speak truth every one with his neighbour”. We should be a testimony to the power to carry our lives forward in purity, not adapting ourselves to the ways or the speech of the world. There is nothing complicated about what is said in these verses. The difficulty is a moral one. “Be angry and do not sin” is a perfectly clear instruction. The difficult part is to do it.

There is room for righteous indignation especially when the things of God are corrupted and one is entitled to feel and show some zeal. It strays into sin where my motives change to, for example, self defence instead of defence of the interests of the Lord. We get some guidance here, to help us. We are told to avoid all “heat of passion, and wrath, and clamour, and injurious language”. These are all emotions of the first man which were never seen in Christ Himself, but He was aroused as to certain cases of evil around Him. He was angry when He saw His Father’s house turned into “a house of merchandise” (John 2:16). Behind the anger was a deep sorrow at what had happened. Then there is a reference to the Lord, “looking round upon them with anger, distressed at the hardening of their heart” (Mark 3:5). It just brings out the inward feelings of the Lord in relation to that circumstance and how holy, righteous anger was found with Him. The more we feel

things and see things as God sees them the more we will be marked by right feelings and the more we will be in self judgement about how we react. In many cases it should turn us to prayer.

We are also tested with the second part of verse 29, "if there be any good one for needful edification, that it may give grace to those that hear it". It may be more difficult to bring something of needful edification to help build up. The earlier part of the chapter tells us that the work of the ministry is, "with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ". So the Lord sees where the edifying is needed and provides the word that will help that work forward.

Paul adds an important word here about the seriousness of grieving the Holy Spirit, "with which ye have been sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and heat of passion, and wrath, and clamour, and injurious language be removed from you, with all malice..." If those features are found with us, then the Holy Spirit is grieved. They are all features of the old man. Yet the grieving of the Holy Spirit does not alter the fact that He has sealed us for the day of redemption. That is the time of the redemption of our bodies at the coming of the Lord.

Based on Bible readings in Bromley, Kent, July/August 2008.

Poetry Selection

SONSHIP

It is through Thee, blest Spirit,
And in Thy power that we
Draw nigh unto the Father
In sonship's liberty;
For we by Thee are strengthened,
And filled with holy love,
Partake of feelings suited
To sonship's place above.

High unto Thee, our Father,
A song e'en now ascends
Which, sung by the Beloved,
All other songs transcends.
It is in holy splendour
Thy sons in worship bow;
With deepest joy we praise Thee,
Our God, Our Father Thou!

A. H. Griffiths

TRUSTING IN JESUS

**“He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.
Then are they glad because they be quiet: so he bringeth them to
their desired haven.”**

Psalm 107:29

– 30

I know, O Lord, though all around is dark
I need not fear;
Rough are the waves that toss my little bark
But Thou art near;
The stormy winds Thy word alone fulfil,
Their rage shall cease;
And when Thy voice shall give the charge, “Be still”,
All will be peace.

Yes, I shall see (soon as this storm has passed
Across the soul)
That He, who slumbers not, held every blast
In His control:
And though o’ershadowed by the present woe
My heart may quail,
Strong in the grace, the strength Thou dost bestow,
I shall prevail.

What though long cherished hopes like autumn leaves
All scattered lie
Knowing Thy love divine, this scarcely grieves,
For spring is nigh.
New hopes, God given, shall then unfold and bloom
In beauty bright:
Therefore in hope rejoicing, mid the gloom,
I wait for light.

Thou precious Saviour, by whose life I live,
Lighten mine eyes!
Let me not miss the lessons Thou dost give,
O make me wise!

Keep me, whilst tempest-driven on life's rough sea,
Close to Thy side;
There safely anchored by sure hope in Thee,
Let me abide!
Jesus, Thou art my all! What can I lose
Since Thou art mine?
Guide me, Thou best beloved, my portion choose,
For I am Thine:
To the desired haven let me come
In Thine own way:
There will be no more night in that fair home,
But endless day.

Hannah K. Burlingham

Testimony Section

“HE PUT A NEW SONG IN MY MOUTH”

(Psalm 40:3)

Back in the late 1980s Yazz was singing “The Only Way is Up”, a song that she now regrets for a transformation has occurred in her life. This is her own account of what happened.

After a breakdown and agoraphobia I found myself in bed at home and asked my mother for a Bible. She said we had one and that night I opened it and read. I don't know what I read and certainly I didn't understand it. But I remember peace falling over me like a river; warmth flowed through me, a sense of belonging. I remember lying down and placing the book aside. I wanted nothing but the warmth of the sensation to stay forever! I knew I had experienced what I had been looking for; a divine experience had occurred and it was something to do with the Author of that book.

I made the decision to visit a local church, which I did. After the service I remember putting my head down and thinking, “Mmm, no one spoke to me. It was cold and pretty sad there, perhaps God is not there”. Then I turned a corner and I met Bonnie, an old friend who used to bleach my hair, a woman once given to drink and drugs. I looked at her

and I saw another person, not physically so much, as internally – her eyes held a glow that was compelling.

Again I had that sense of safety and peace just standing in front of her. I had no idea who the Holy Spirit was at that time. During coffee I asked Bonnie what had changed her life, for she was changed. She explained to me that she had placed her life by faith into the life of Jesus Christ and that she was a believer. I couldn't believe it. Bonnie took me to her church that weekend and there I found my Lord and Saviour.

Yasmin

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THROUGH CHRIST ALONE

I grew up in Co. Laoise in Ireland and lived with my grandfather and aunt. My parents lived nearby in Co Kilkenny. I was baptised in the Roman Catholic Church, attended a Catholic school, received first communion and was confirmed. Well into my teens I believed wholeheartedly in the Roman Catholic religion and that it was the one true church.

When I left school at 14 I went to work for a farmer who was a Christian man with a Church of Ireland background. He was the first person who told me about my need of salvation and of a personal faith in Christ. The area was unique because there were a number of evangelical believers and the vast majority had been converted through the Faith Mission. A prayer meeting took place every Friday night. The farmer gave me his testimony, telling how the Lord had saved him. This had a great influence on me. After living for a while in England, I returned to Ireland and it was through the testimony of a young man in my home village, who had been an alcoholic and was converted, that I came to a personal faith in Christ.

Back then, if you did not go to church or left your religion for whatever reason it was really frowned upon. I was in my late 20s when I came to the Lord as a sinner and called upon Him for mercy and forgiveness, and I believe that at that moment I was saved. It was the turning point in my life. I started to attend the Faith Mission prayer meetings in Lugacurren village and shortly after that I left the Roman Catholic Church.

There was a lot of opposition from neighbours, in my own home, my own family and friends, and eventually I had to leave the district all together. People held to the teaching that if you left the Roman Catholic church there was no redemption. My grandfather was very concerned and said to me, 'Where are you going when you die? There is no salvation for you; there is no redemption outside the one true church.' But I had the assurance that the Lord had truly saved me, and I left to study at the Faith Mission Bible College in Edinburgh...

Some people would say that I have gone from one extreme to the other...but I am not anti-Catholic by any means. I do not believe in the Mass, confession, purgatory. I do not believe that salvation is by works, or our own efforts. I believe it is by faith in Christ alone. But I am certainly not opposed to the people in the Roman Catholic Church. My own brothers and sisters are still Roman Catholic and I have good relationships with them and see them regularly for which I am thankful. At the end of the day the Bible tells us that there is no difference, we have all sinned. There is no difference between the unconverted Protestant and the unconverted Roman Catholic, or any other group of people. All are in the same condition; all need salvation. We see from the Bible that there are only two classes of people – believer and unbeliever.

The fundamental question that people need to look at is, 'What is a Christian?' We must come to the Word of God to find out. The Bible is clear that we are all born with a sinful nature. Baptism does not make someone a Christian. The sinful nature has to be dealt with and that can only be by faith in Christ.

Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox were all converted from Roman Catholicism and they preached that man was saved by faith in Christ alone. I am a great admirer of the Protestant reformation of the 16th Century, for it was a movement that was basically back to the Bible. We live in a generation when it is thought that we have all good hearts, and we are all Christians – but the opposite is true. The Bible tells us that the heart of man is desperately wicked.

When a person comes to that realisation and a personal faith in Christ, then they are a Christian. That is the only way, through Christ alone.

Larry Power

*Edited extract from "The Belfast Telegraph", July 2008
Reprinted courtesy of The Belfast Telegraph*

A Voice from the Past

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

“And confessedly the mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh, has been justified in the Spirit, has appeared to angels, has been preached among the nations, has been believed on in the world, has been received up in glory.”

(1Timothy 3:16)

Introduction

There are several references in Scripture to the thought of mystery. The word “mystery” does not mean that the things referred to cannot be known, but rather the contrary. To men in general, Christianity contains many things that are a mystery, but believers are to be in the secret of these things.

Among the many references to what is mysterious is that of the mystery of godliness, or piety. Piety is the bringing of God consciously into all my life, so that I live and conduct myself in the fear of God, but this can only be as I know Him. He secures my confidence as I become acquainted with Him, and I trust in Him and pursue the path of life, as it says, “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11). What a path of blessedness this is—life, fulness of joy and lasting pleasures! How far removed from the pleasures of sin, which are for a season, and all the pursuits of men, which bring disappointment and sorrow!

Now to look at this verse in greater detail.

1 “God has been manifested in flesh”

The apostle says, “The mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh.” If we are to know God, it cannot be by any human effort; the truth is that He has come into the condition in which we are, “in flesh”: in us indeed, the flesh is sinful and subject to death, but in Him it was holy and pure. He came so near to us as in flesh, experiencing its weakness and weariness: as it is said, “Jesus, therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well” (John 4:6). What grace that would serve a poor outcast through sin—the healer of the broken-hearted, and the One alone who could feel according to God the pressure upon men, remove it, and thus become the Object of the

human heart! John tells us that He “became flesh” (John 1:14); it was His own act, that of a divine Person, stepping out of conditions of Deity and becoming flesh. There was no change in His Person, but He came into a condition that He was not in before. He became flesh, and adapted Himself to the needs of men—“full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Thus God is to be known through the great fact of the incarnation, and we would hold dear the truth in all its detail. He was born of the virgin, by the Holy Spirit. If this fact be surrendered, then the glory of His Person is given up, the truth of atonement abandoned, and there is no basis of salvation.

2 “...has been justified in the Spirit”.

How affecting to our hearts that our Lord was numbered with the transgressors and died under charge from men! To those who had eyes to see and hearts to understand, He was justified in the Spirit. When He emerged from His private life and appeared in public to take up the service of God, He was anointed by the Spirit, and the voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Did He not have the constant approval of God, and by the Spirit of God cast out demons? He was marked as having the Spirit of holiness, accompanied by power that could raise the dead, and He Himself was raised from among the dead, as Peter says, “Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). Though publicly rejected and then crucified, there was the constant evidence that God was with Him, and that all He did was by the Spirit of God.

3 “...has appeared to angels

At His birth an angel brought glad tidings to the shepherds and said, “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). What a sight for angels, to see God for the first time: their Creator, pillowing His head in a manger, the expression of human weakness and dependence! Yet He was there, God over all blessed for ever, and the One who upheld all things by the word of His power. If men disregarded the incoming of God in Jesus, angels praised and said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”.

4 “...has been preached among the nations”

If God came near to men in Jesus and light shone there, it could not be

confined to any nation or class: it was impartial. He was “the true light... which, coming into the world, lightens every man” (John 1:9). God would thus meet the effects of His own government, which originated the nations, by grace that stepped over all these boundaries to enlighten men with the knowledge of Himself. The feature of preaching is the expression of divine consideration, for it means that all that God is has been brought to us in testimony by men of like passions to ourselves, who have been themselves powerfully affected by the truth. The darkness in which the nations were, through their own sin in refusing to retain God in their knowledge, was met by Him who was full of grace and truth. Paul could say that he was “carrying on ... the message of glad tidings of God, in order that the offering up of the nations might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:16)

5 “...has been believed on in the world”.

The light shone for every man, and the result is that He has been “believed on in the world”. How great and universal have been the operations of God’s Spirit, so that faith has arisen in the hearts of men. The effect of this is seen everywhere in the many benefits which the light has conferred upon humanity.

6 “...has been received up in glory

If the pathway of Jesus was one of reproach and sorrow, even to the death of the cross, for man’s sake, the whole of heaven was sympathetic with His ascent into heaven. When we consider what entered into His life in flesh—shame, dishonor, being made sin and forsaken by God, but rising triumphant from the grave—how fitting it is that such a path of perfection should consummate in glory! The heavens were opened upon Him when He entered the path of service, and at the close He was received up in glory.

Conclusion

It is little wonder that a man coming to know God thus should be deeply affected and transformed in his life here, so that he should refer to God in everything. The marvellous way in which God has come down into our conditions, has produced results in our hearts, so that we are now lovers of God.

Christ not only tasted the weakness of our condition “in flesh,” but He entered vicariously into our sin and removed it by bearing the judgment

due to it. How great is the mystery of piety! It all finds its blessed spring in the full revelation of God in grace in Jesus. This is the reason why individuals, independent and resourceful in themselves, have been transformed and appear in the Spirit of Christ, finding their profound joy and happiness in God Himself. Their behaviour is entirely changed, and the works of the devil are undone in them. This lays a moral foundation in the soul for help in relation to all that is spiritual.

William Henderson.

A Word for Today

SIMON PETER: HIS LIFE AND ITS LESSONS

Part 3: Recovery and Service

We are now called to consider the intensely interesting subject of Simon Peter's restoration. In his fall we learn the frailty and folly of man; in his restoration we learn the grace, wisdom, and faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fall was, indeed, deep, terrible, and humiliating. The restoration was complete and marvellous. We may rest assured that Simon Peter would never forget either the one or the other. The grace that shines in Peter's restoration is the same which is displayed in his conversion. Let us glance at some of the salient points.

First let us look at the cause of it. This we have given us with peculiar force by the pen of the inspired evangelist Luke. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat." If Satan had been suffered to have his way, poor Simon would have been hopelessly ruined. But no; he was merely employed as an instrument, as he had been in Job's case, to do a needed work, and, when that work was done, he had to retire. He dare not go one hair's breadth beyond his appointed sphere.

It is well to remember this. Satan is but a creature—crafty, wily, powerful, no doubt, but a creature who can only go as far as he is permitted by God. Had Peter walked softly, had he humbly and earnestly looked for divine help, had he been judging himself in secret, there would have been no need of Satan's sifting. Thanks be to God, Satan has no power with a soul that walks humbly with God. There is perfect shelter, perfect safety, in the divine presence; and there is not an

arrow in the enemy's quiver that can reach one who leans in simple confidence upon the arm of the living God. Here our apostle failed, and hence he had to pass through a very severe process indeed, in order that he might learn himself. But, oh, the power and preciousness of those words, "I have prayed for thee!" Here assuredly lay the secret—here was the cause of Simon's restoration. The prayer of Jesus sustained the soul of His erring servant in that terrible hour when the enemy would have wished to crush him to powder. What could Satan do in opposition to the all-powerful intercession of Christ? Nothing. That wonderful prayer was the ground of Peter's safety, when, to human view, all seemed hopelessly lost.

And for what did our Lord pray? Was it that Peter might not commit the awful sin of denying Him? Was it that he might not curse and swear? Clearly not. What then? "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Can anything exceed the grace that shines here? That gracious, loving, faithful Lord, in view of Peter's terrible sin—knowing all he was about to do, all the sad forgetfulness—could actually plead for him that, spite of all, his faith might not give way—that he might not lose the sense of the eternal stability of that grace which had taken him up from the depth of his ruin and guilt.

Matchless grace! Nothing can surpass it in brightness and blessedness. Had it not been for this prayer, Peter's faith must have given way. He never could have survived the awful struggle through which his soul passed when thinking of his dreadful sin. When he came to himself, when he reflected upon the whole scene, his expressions of devotedness, "Though all should deny Thee, yet will I never deny Thee"—"Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee"—"I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death"—to think of all these words, and yet that he should deny the Lord with cursing and swearing, was overpowering.

It is a dreadful moment in the soul's history when one wakes up to the consciousness of having committed sin—sin against knowledge, and privilege—sin against divine grace and goodness. Satan is sure to be specially busy at such a crisis. He casts in the most terrible suggestions—raises all manner of questions—fills the heart with legal reasonings, doubts, and fears—causes the soul to totter on the foundation. Yet, thanks and praise to our God, the enemy cannot prevail. "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further". The all-prevailing intercession of our divine Advocate sustains the faith so sorely tried,

carries the soul through the deep and dark waters, restores the broken link of communion, heals the spiritual wounds, lifts up the fallen one, brings back the wanderer, and fills the heart with praise and thanksgiving. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." The prayer of the Lord was the cause of Peter's restoration.

Now, what was the means of Peter's restoration? When the erring, straying, sinning one had reached the very lowest point, then comes out, with heavenly lustre, the grace that shines as the means of his restoration – it was Christ's look. The prayer of the Lord was the cause and the look of the Lord was the means of Peter's restoration.

The prayer of the Lord was the cause and the look of the Lord was the means of Peter's restoration

"The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the Word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

Yes, here it is; "The Lord looked"—Peter remembered"—Peter wept—"wept bitterly". What a look! What a remembrance! What a weeping! What human heart can conceive, what tongue express, all that is wrapped up in that one look? We can well believe that it went right home to the very centre of Peter's soul. "Peter went out, and wept bitterly." This was the turning point. Up to this all was darkly downward. Here divine light breaks in upon the deep moral gloom. Christ's most precious prayer is having its answer, His powerful look is doing its work. The fountain of the heart is broken up, and penitential tears flow copiously forth, demonstrating the depth, reality, and intensity of the work within. Thus it must ever be, and thus it will ever be when the Spirit of God works in the soul. If we have sinned, we must be made to feel, to judge, and to confess our sin—to feel it deeply, judge it thoroughly, and confess it fully. It will not do merely to say, in levity, flippancy, or mere formality, "I have sinned". There must be reality, uprightness, and sincerity. God desires truth in the inward parts. There was nothing light, flippant, or formal about Peter in the hour of his fall and repentance. No, all was intensely real.

The prayer and look of the Lord displayed their precious results in Peter's restoration. Now the reader will do well to notice that the

prayer and look of our Lord Jesus Christ set forth, in a very striking and beautiful manner, the two grand aspects of Christ's present ministry as our Advocate with the Father. We have the value of His intercession, and the power and efficacy of His word in the hands of the Holy Spirit (that "other Advocate"). Christ's prayer for Peter answers to His intercession for us. His look upon Peter answers to His word brought home to us in the power of the Holy Spirit. When we sin—as, alas! we do in thought and deed—our blessed Advocate speaks to God on our behalf. This is the cause of our repentance and our restoration. But He speaks to us on God's behalf. This is the means of our restoration

I shall close this paper with a brief reference to two or three of the moral features of Peter's restoration—features which, be it well remembered, must be looked for in every case of true restoration.

In the first place there is the state of the conscience. Now, as to the full and complete restoration of Peter's conscience after his terrible fall, we have the most unquestionable evidence afforded in his after history. Take the touching scene at the sea of Tiberias, as given in John 21. Look at that dear, earnest, thorough man, girding his fisher's coat around him, and plunging into the sea, in order to get to the feet of the risen Lord! He waits neither for the ship nor for his companions, but in all the lovely freshness and liberty of a divinely restored conscience, he rushes to his Saviour's feet. There is no tormenting fear, no legal bondage, no doubt, darkness, or distance. His conscience is perfectly at rest. The prayer and the look—the two grand departments of the work of advocacy—had proved effectual. Peter's conscience was all right, sound, and good; and hence he could find his home in the presence of his Lord—his holy, happy home.

**the searching question,
three times repeated,
evidently relates to the
threefold denial**

Take another striking and beautiful evidence of a restored conscience. Look at Peter in Acts 3. There he stands in the presence of assembled thousands of Jews, and boldly charges them with having "denied the Holy One and the Just"—the very thing which he himself had done though under circumstances very different. How could Peter do this? How could he have the face to speak so? Why not leave it to James or John to prefer this heavy charge? The answer is blessedly simple. Peter's conscience was so thoroughly restored, so perfectly at rest,

because perfectly purged, that he could fearlessly charge the house of Israel with the awful sin of denying the Holy One of God. Was this the fruit of moral insensibility? Nay, it was the fruit of divine restoration. Had anyone of the congregation gathered in Solomon's porch undertaken to challenge him as to his own shameful denial of the Lord, I can easily conceive his answer. The man who had "wept bitterly" over his sin would know how to answer such a challenge. Not that his bitter weeping was the meritorious ground of his restoration; nothing of the kind, it only proved the reality of the work of repentance in his soul. Moral insensibility is one thing, and a restored conscience, resting on the blood and advocacy of Christ, is quite another.

But there is another thing involved in a true work of restoration, and that is the state of the heart. This is of the very utmost importance in every instance. No restoration can be considered divinely complete which does not reach the very depths of the heart. And hence, when we turn back to the scenes on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, we find the Lord dealing very closely and very powerfully with the state of Peter's heart.

I cannot attempt to expatiate, much as I should like to do so, on one of the most affecting interviews in the entire volume of God. I can do little more than quote the inspired record, but that is quite enough. It is deeply interesting to notice that there not the most remote allusion to past scenes, during that wonderful dinner, provided, cooked, and dispensed by the risen Lord! But "when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" Here Simon is recalled by the words of his faithful Lord to his self-confident profession. He had said, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I". Then the searching question, three times repeated, evidently relates to the threefold denial.

Peter's heart is touched—the moral root of the whole matter is reached. This was absolutely necessary in Peter's case, and it is absolutely necessary in every case. The work of restoration can never be thorough unless the roots of things are reached and judged. Mere surface work will never do. It is of no use to crop the sprouts; we must get down to the depths, the hidden springs, the moral sources, and judge them in the very light of the divine presence.

This is the true secret of all genuine restoration. Let us ponder it deeply. We may rest assured it demands our most solemn consideration. We are all too apt to rest satisfied with cropping off the sprouts that

appear above the surface of our practical daily life, without getting at the roots; and the sad consequence is that the sprouts quickly appear again, to our sorrow and shame, and the dishonour of our Lord's name. The work of self-judgment must be more profound if we would really make progress. We are terribly shallow, light, and flippant. We greatly lack depth, seriousness, and moral gravity. We want more of that heart-work which was wrought in Simon the son of Jonas on the shore of the sea of Tiberias.

**To confound grace
and government is to
commit a very grave
mistake indeed**

"Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me?" The knife of the divine Operator had reached the root of the moral disease, and that was enough. It was needful, but it was enough; and the grieved and self-judged Simon Peter has only to fall back upon the great fact that his Lord knew all things. "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." This truly is a real work. We have before us a thoroughly restored soul—restored in conscience, restored in heart. We see a servant restored to his work.

Some would say that if a man falls, he can never recover his position; and no doubt, under God's government, we must reap as we sow. Grace is another thing altogether. Government drove Adam out of Eden, and never replaced him there, but grace announced the victorious Seed of the woman. Government kept Moses out of Canaan, but grace conducted him to Pisgah's top. Government sent a perpetual sword upon David's house, but grace made the son of Bathsheba the wisest and wealthiest of Israel's kings. This distinction must never be lost sight of. To confound grace and government is to commit a very grave mistake indeed.

As to Simon Peter, we not only see him restored to the work to which he was called at the first, but to something even higher. "Feed My lambs"—shepherd My sheep—is the new commission given to the man who had denied his Lord with an oath. Is not this something beyond "catching men"? "When thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." Can anything in the way of service be more elevated than shepherding sheep, feeding lambs, and strengthening the brethren? There is nothing in all this world nearer or dearer to the heart of Christ than His sheep, His lambs, His brethren and hence He could not have

given Simon Peter a more affecting proof of His confidence than by committing to his care the dearest objects of His deep and tender love.

Then mark the closing words, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst, whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me". What weighty words are these! What a contrast between Simon, "young", restless, forward, blundering, boastful, self-confident; and Peter, "old", subdued, mellowed, passive, crucified! What a difference between a man walking whither he would, and a man following a rejected Lord along the dark and narrow pathway of the cross, home to glory!

I could not close without glancing, however cursorily, at the way in which Peter discharged his various commissions. We see him "catching men"; opening the kingdom of Heaven to the Jew and to the Gentile; and, finally, feeding and shepherding the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ. These are elevated services for any mortal to be called to, and more especially for one who had fallen so deeply as Peter. But the remarkable power with which he was enabled to fulfil his blessed service proved beyond all question the reality and completeness of his restoration. If, at the close of the Gospels, we see Peter restored in heart and conscience, in the Acts and in his Epistles we can see him restored to his work.

I cannot attempt to go into details; but a point or two must be briefly noticed. There is something uncommonly fine in Peter's address in the third chapter of Acts. We can only quote a sentence or two: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just". What a splendid evidence we have here of Peter's complete restoration! It would have been utterly impossible for him to charge his audience with having denied the Holy One if his own soul had not been fully and blessedly restored. Alas! he, too, had denied his Lord; but he had repented, and wept bitterly. He had been down in the depths of self-judgment and this is just where he desired to see everyone of his hearers. He had been face to face with his Lord; again, this is just where he longed to see them. He

had been given to taste the sweetness, the freeness, the fulness, of the pardoning love of God, to prove the divine efficacy of the atonement and the advocacy of Christ. He was pardoned, healed, restored and as such he stood in their presence a living and striking monument of that grace which he was unfolding to them, and which was amply sufficient for them as it had proved for him. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

Who could more distinctly and emphatically utter such precious words than the restored and forgiven Peter? If anyone of his audience had ventured to remind the preacher of his own history, what would he have said in reply? Doubtless he would have had little to say about himself, but much, very much, to say about that rich and precious grace which had triumphed over all his sin and failure—much, very much, about that precious blood which had cancelled forever all his guilt, and given perfect peace to his conscience—much, very much, about that all-prevailing advocacy to which he owed his full and perfect restoration.

Peter was just the man to unfold to others those glorious themes in which he had so thoroughly learnt to find his strength, his comfort, and his joy. He had proved in no ordinary way the reality and stability of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was no mere empty theory, no mere doctrine or opinion, with him. It was all intensely real to him. His very life and salvation were bound up in it. He knew the heart of Christ in a very intimate way. He knew its infinite tenderness and compassion, its unswerving devotedness in the face of many stumbles, shortcomings, and sins; and hence he could bear the most distinct and powerful testimony to the whole house of Israel to the power of the name of Jesus, the efficacy of His blood, and the deep and infinite love of His heart. "His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

How refreshing is the testimony to the peerless name of Jesus! It is perfectly delightful at all times, but specially so in this infidel day in which our lot is cast - a day so marked by the determined and persistent effort of the devil to exclude the name of Jesus from every department. Look where you will, whether it be in the domain of science, of religion, of philanthropy, or moral reform, and you see the same sedulous and diligently pursued purpose to banish the name of Jesus. It is not said so in plain terms, but it is so nevertheless. Scientific men, the professors

and lecturers in our universities, talk and write about “the forces of nature” and the facts of science in such a way as practically to exclude the Christ of God from the whole field of nature. Scripture tells us, blessed be God, that by the Son of His love “All things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist”. And again, speaking of the Son, the Holy Spirit says, “Who being the brightness of God’s glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Colossians 1, Hebrews 1). These passages lead us to the divine root of the matter. They speak not of ‘the forces of nature’, but of the glory of Christ, the power of His hand, the virtue of His Word. Infidelity would rob us of Christ, and give us, instead, ‘the forces of nature’. I vastly prefer our own beloved Lord and delight to see His name bound up, indissolubly, with creation in all its vast and marvellous fields. I vastly prefer the eternal record of the Holy Spirit to all the finely-spun theories of infidel professors.

To return to Peter’s discourse, having charged home their terrible sin upon the consciences of his hearers, he proceeds to apply the healing, soothing balm of the gospel, in words of power: “And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled”. Nothing can exceed the grace of this. It recalls the words of Joseph to his troubled brethren: “It was not you that sent me hither, but God”. Such is the exquisite grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, such the infinite love and goodness of our God.

“Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the time of refreshing shall come from (or by) the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all

the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindred of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." (Acts 3:19 – 26)

Thus did this dear and honoured apostle, in the power of the Holy Spirit, throw wide open the kingdom of heaven to the Jews, in pursuance of his high commission as recorded in the sixteenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew. It is what we may well call a splendid testimony, from first to last.

Now let us pass on, for a few moments, to the tenth chapter of Acts, which records the opening of the kingdom to the Gentile. Prejudice—that sad hindrance then, now, and always—stood in the way of the Gentile coming into the blessing of God and Peter needed to have his mind enlarged to take in the divine purpose in respect to the Gentiles.

To one trained amid the influences of the Jewish system, it seemed one thing to admit Jews into the kingdom, and quite another to admit Gentiles. Peter had to get further instruction in the school of Christ ere his mind could take in the "no difference" doctrine. "Ye know", he said to Cornelius, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation". Thus it had truly been in days gone by; but now all was changed. The middle wall was broken down—the barriers were swept away; "God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean". He had seen, in a vessel that came from Heaven, and returned thither, "all manner of four-footed beasts," and a voice from Heaven had commanded him to slay and eat. This was something new to Simon Peter. It was a wonderful lesson he was called to learn on the housetop of Simon the tanner. He was taught that "God is no respecter of persons," and that what God hath cleansed no man may call common.

All this was good and healthful for the soul of the apostle. It was well to have his heart enlarged to take in the precious thoughts of God—to see the old barriers swept away before the magnificent tide of grace flowing from the heart of God over a lost world—to learn that the question of "clean" or "unclean" was no longer to be decided by an examination of hoofs and habits (Leviticus 11)—that the same precious blood of Christ which could cleanse a Jew could cleanse a Gentile

also; and, moreover, that the former needed it just as much as the latter.

This was most valuable instruction for the heart and understanding of Simon Peter; and to see how far he took it in and appreciated it, we have but to turn to Acts 15 and read Peter's own commentary upon the matter. The Church had reached a solemn crisis. Judaizing teachers had begun their terrible work. They would bring the Gentile converts under the law. The occasion was intensely interesting and deeply important. The very foundations were at stake. If the devil could but succeed in bringing the Gentile believers under the law, all was gone. But, all praise to our ever-gracious God, He did not abandon His church to the power or wiles of the devil. When the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raised a standard against him. A great meeting was convened—not in some obscure corner, but at Jerusalem, the very centre and source of all the religious influence of the moment—the very place, too, from whence the evil had emanated. God took care that the great question should not be decided at Antioch by Paul and Barnabas. but at Jerusalem itself, by the unanimous voice of the apostles, elders, and the whole Church, governed, guided and taught by God the Holy Spirit.

At this great meeting Peter delivered himself in a style that stirs the very deepest springs of our spiritual life. Hear his words: "And when there had been much disputing" —Alas! how soon the miserable disputing began—"Peter rose up. and said unto them. Men, brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost even as He did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they." How grand it is! He does not say, 'They shall be saved even as we'. No, but "We shall be saved even as they"—on the same ground, after the same model, in the same way. The Jew comes down from his lofty dispensational position, only too thankful to be saved, just like the poor Gentile, by the precious grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How those words of the apostle of the circumcision must have

refreshed and delighted the heart of Paul as he sat at this meeting! The testimony of his beloved fellow-labourer was deeply interesting and welcome to the apostle of the Gentiles. We can only say, Alas! that there should have been aught in the after-course of that fellow-labourer in the smallest degree inconsistent with his splendid testimony at the conference. Alas! that Peter's conduct at Antioch should vary so much from his words at Jerusalem. (See Galatians 2.)

But such is man, even the best of men, if left to himself. And the higher the man is, the more mischief he is sure to do if he makes a stumble. I shall not, however, dwell on the sad and painful scene at Antioch, between those two most excellent servants. They are both now with the Lord and in all the ages of eternity each will have a sense of the great mercy that has reached them.

The Holy Ghost has thought proper to record the fact that Peter failed in frankness and integrity at Antioch; and further, that Paul had to withstand him to the face; but I am not going to expatiate upon it. We would profit by it, as well we may, for it is full of deep instruction and solemn warning. If such a one as the apostle Peter, after all his experience, his fall and restoration, his long course of service, his intimate acquaintance with the heart of Christ, all the instruction he had received, all his gifts and knowledge, all his powerful preaching and teaching—if such a one as this could, after all, dissemble through fear of man, or to hold a place in man's esteem, what shall we say for the ourselves? Simply this:

'O Lamb of God, still keep me close to Thy piercèd side;

'Tis only there in safety and peace I can abide.

When foes and snares surround me, with lusts and fears within,

The grace that sought and found me alone can keep me clean.'

May the Lord greatly bless to our souls our meditation on the history of Simon Peter!

May his life and its lessons be used of the Holy Spirit to deepen in our souls the sense of our own utter weakness and of the matchless grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Charles H. Mackintosh