

SCRIPTURE TRUTH



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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Jesus’ Farewell Words

Part 3. John 14:15-31

Jeffrey Brett

“It is expedient for you that I go away” (John 16:7). These words of the Lord Jesus must have deeply puzzled His disciples. In this section of Jesus’ farewell words, we begin to see some of the great blessings which have come to us because He had to “go away”.

Introduction


The disciples in that upper room on that Passover night were deeply upset when the Lord Jesus told them that He was going away. For three years, He had been their guide, teacher and helper in every way. They had learned to love Him, even though they often did not understand His words. They had seen His wonderful acts of kindness and love. But now He was going to leave them!

His subsequent words, “It is expedient for you that I go away” (16:7) must have puzzled them even more. But here, in John 14, the Lord had begun to explain to them how that a living Christ in glory as a Man, and the Holy Spirit sent down to be in every one of them, was a far greater blessing than His actual bodily presence on earth with them.

In this chapter, the Comforter is sent by the Father (v.16), whereas in 15:26, the Lord Jesus sends Him. Here the Lord would assure His disciples, and us today, of the supreme place of blessing which is ours before the very presence of the Father. By the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, we may also be assured that Jesus is alive in heaven.

another Comforter

Firstly, in v.15, the Lord Jesus presumes that the disciples were real in their love for Him. That love would be confirmed by their keeping His commandments. Scripture is always practical. It is not sufficient just to say things; we must show in our lives that what we profess is real. It is from this basis that the Lord Jesus speaks of “another Comforter”. The word ‘Comforter’ literally means ‘One who stands alongside to help’. Of course, the Lord Jesus had been that when He was with them, but they would not lose anything by His going back to heaven. Rather, they would gain another Comforter, who would be not only *with* them but *in* them, something which the Lord Jesus, as Man, could never be. So the believer today has the Lord Jesus in heaven as “Advocate” (1 John 2:1 – this is the same word as ‘Comforter’ in the original) and the

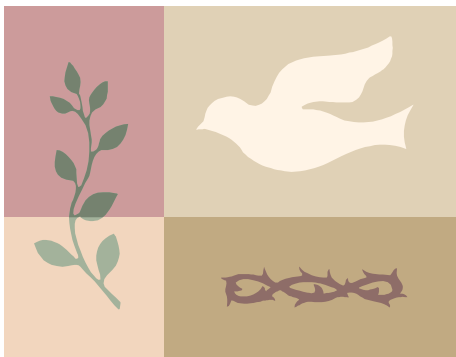


Not only *with*
them but *in*
them

Holy Spirit on earth as the Comforter. In this way, we begin to understand how the disciples would gain by His going away.

The Comforter is also the Spirit of truth (v.17). In v.6, the Lord had said to them, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". That is, the truth was seen in Jesus as an object of faith for them. He is the way into life, and He is also the truth concerning that life. But now the Comforter, as the Spirit of truth, was to be in the disciples. Not now the truth as an object of faith, but the truth being worked out practically in each one who believes. So we read, "the truth... dwelleth in us" (2 John 2). This could only be by the power of the Holy Spirit. The world does not share in this blessing; it knows nothing at all about it. The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit as it does not have a divine nature as being born of God. Only the believer has this.

All this was an assurance to the disciples that they were not going to be left "orphans". This is the real meaning of "comfortless" in v.18. Rather, His presence would be real to them, in the power of the Holy Spirit. We could



never have the comfort of the company of the Lord Jesus in our experiences of life here, apart from the Holy Spirit. We are completely dependent upon Him to realise and enjoy any blessing from God in our hearts. Without the Holy Spirit, we would have nothing at all; we would be orphans, alone in this world.

living and knowing

In v.19, Jesus says, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also." It is not difficult to understand the first part of this statement. The last time the world saw the Lord Jesus, He was hanging on the cross. After He died, loving hands took His body down and put it into the sepulchre. The world has never seen Him again. But His disciples saw Him, after He rose from the dead; they saw Him at least three times. This verse also tells us that the life He had taken up again, but now in resurrection, they also were going to have: "because I live, ye shall live also". So another wonderful blessing comes out of this discourse. They were going to have a new sort of life in company with Him, a life which death will never be able to touch. He was going to break the power of death, and to come forth in triumph over it, so as to be able to give His own a life which we shall share for ever with Him in heaven.

But it is not just a life which we shall have in the future; we have it now! V. 20 says, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." The day referred to here

Obedience is the proof of love

is the day when the Holy Spirit would come down and dwell with them and be in them. That actually happened on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts. But this is also true of every believer by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We know that the Lord Jesus is one with His Father, even though He is now a Man in heaven, and we are in Him. So we can share with Him that place of blessing in the presence of His Father. At the same time, He is in us, a living reality in our lives. How can these things be? Only by the Holy Spirit.

Because every believer has the Holy Spirit, there is not a single blessing which we cannot enjoy, in spirit now, but soon to the full in heaven. What a wonderful thing it is, then, to have the Holy Spirit in us! This could never have been had the Lord Jesus remained on earth. He had to die to put away everything in us which was offensive to God, to rise again and go back to heaven as a Man, and *then* to send down the Holy Spirit.

love and obedience

The next section of our chapter, vv.21-23, contains the question which Judas asked and the Lord's answer. The disciples, being godly Jews, had great difficulty in understanding so many of the words of the Lord Jesus, because they

had in their minds the public appearing of the Messiah. This will certainly take place in a coming day. But the Lord Jesus is speaking here about the day when the Holy spirit will be on earth and will introduce a spiritual life, a life which has nothing to do with our natural senses, such as seeing and hearing. So Judas could not understand how the Lord Jesus would manifest Himself unto them and not to the world.

The Lord's explanation opens out to us the new life which the believer has, so that we can enjoy even now the reality of the presence of the Lord Jesus, and the presence of the Father. However, once more we are confronted with a very practical matter. This blessing may not be enjoyed by every believer. If we are not walking according to the Lord's word, and keeping His commandments and sayings, we will not really enjoy His presence. Obedience is the proof of love. If I am disobedient, then I have to be disciplined, and then I cannot enjoy the sweetness of communion with the Lord Jesus and the Father. But if we walk in love and obedience, then we are assured of the presence of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in our lives. Can there be anything more blessed than this? The Lord Jesus, as a Man in this world, walking in daily communion with His Father, could lift up His eyes to heaven and say, "Father". If by faith I have received life from Him, yes, the very same life which He has in heaven, then I have all the privileges that He had when a Man in this world. If only we better realised the wonderful potential

we have in the power of the Holy Spirit! We do not know it well because we often are not keeping His word. The secret of a successful Christian life is obedience!

the work of the Comforter

Then we have another great truth: the Comforter would be the Teacher. The Lord Jesus when He was with them in flesh and blood had taught them many things. “*These things* have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you” (v.25). But in v. 26 we read, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you *all things*, and bring *all things* to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” Note the difference between “these things” and “all things”. The Lord Jesus did not enlarge to His disciples the heavenly blessings which would flow out from Him as alive in heaven, because they could not take them in. They had not then received the Holy Spirit. But the Lord Jesus here refers to that event, when the Father would send down in the Lord’s name the Holy Spirit, who would then teach them all things. Not only so, but the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all the things which the Lord Jesus had told them.

So we see brought out, in the writings of the apostles, the truth of the Church as united to Christ, its Head in heaven, and the truth of the family of God. None of these are contained in the Gospels in detail – “He shall teach you all things”. And then the Holy Spirit

would bring things to their remembrance. How else could the apostles have written the Gospels? They did not rely on their memories. Indeed, we do not know if Luke ever saw the Lord Jesus. By the time John wrote his Gospel, he was probably about 90 years old, and he records events which took place some 60 years earlier. No, we believe the Gospels, and the epistles, were written by men who were taught and guided by the Holy Spirit. How essential it is for us to believe this today. Christianity is not a concept of clever, intelligent minds; most of the disciples were simple fishermen. The New Testament is written by the Holy Spirit; men simply wrote down what He taught them. If the Lord Jesus had not gone back to heaven, the Holy Spirit would not have come, and we would never have had the New Testament.

My peace

V.27 speaks of a further blessing: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”. In departing, the Lord Jesus left peace with His disciples. This is the peace we have on account of His finished work on the cross. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). The world cannot give this peace: it knows nothing at all about it. The Lord Jesus leaves us this complete peace which can never be broken, because it is based on His death.

Not only so, He says, “My peace I give unto you”. This is not the same peace. When He was here on earth, He walked in perfect obedience to the will of His Father. He lived in perfect communion with His Father and so He had a peculiar peace which no other person had. But He gives this to us! In the power of the Holy Spirit, we can “walk as He walked”, and know that same peace which He had in His pathway. At this point, He repeats the words at the beginning of the chapter, “Let not your heart be troubled”. There is comfort, assurance and peace in His words.

Afterwards, they were going to experience much trouble and persecution, but nothing could alter the truth He gave them. He adds further, “Neither let it be afraid”. There is no fear with the apostles in the book of the Acts. They were bold, even when persecuted by dreadful men. How many Christians through the past 2,000 years have similarly found the truth of these words! In appalling situations, their faith stood firm; they were not overcome by their trials and they were not afraid. We need to prove these things in our own lives today!

time to go

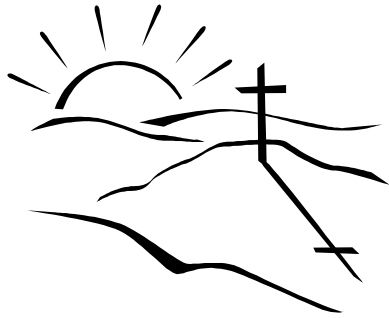
In v.28, the Lord Jesus seems to impress upon His disciples that His departure from this world was imminent. “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father: for my Father is greater than I.” For Him, there was the joy of going back to His



Father as a Man, having accomplished all that His Father had given Him to do. This was filling His heart; but He wanted His disciples to share it as well. If they had understood a little of what He had been telling them about the Comforter, they would have realised that their every blessing depended upon His going back to heaven.

But He assures them that He was coming to them. This was true for these eleven men; they would see Him again in resurrection. Primarily, however, this refers to the way that His presence would be known, not only to them, but to us also in the power of the Holy Spirit. The statement, “For my Father is greater than I,” does not refer to His person, but to the position He had taken in becoming a Man to carry out the purpose of divine love.

V.29 says a great deal as to why He was telling them these things. “And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.” At the time of His crucifixion,



His disciples naturally were overwhelmed. Mary at the sepulchre, the two going to Emmaus, Simon Peter – all these were so sad about everything which had happened. Yet afterwards, they were to remember the things He had said unto them, and this would bring the assurance of true belief. In His love, He would try to prepare them for what lay ahead. They were slow to take it in, as we often are. But when the Comforter had come, they remembered and understood all that He had said to them in these chapters.

the prince of this world

“Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (v.30). Using all the powers of darkness, Satan was about to take control of the hearts of men. This was to find full expression in the dreadful things which they were allowed to do to the Lord Jesus. What a picture the cross is of a world controlled by its prince, Satan himself. There is not a single good thing said about the world in these chapters. This is the reason; it is under the control of Satan and

the cross proves it. We may not like this, but it is true.

But Satan would find nothing in Him, because the Father found everything in Him! Unlike our forefather, Adam, who, when tempted by Satan responded to him, there was nothing in Christ. The Lord Jesus was absolute holiness and righteousness; Satan could find no point of attack. What a wonderful triumph!

At this point, it seems that they left the upper room and began the walk to Gethsemane. His words in chs.15,16 were probably spoken to them on that journey. But even this move was to express His love to His Father. “But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence” (v.31). Before the world was made, the Father had planned a marvellous story which involved the glory of His Son, that He should be supreme. He should have a bride to be beside Him for ever. His own heart should rejoice over those whom love had destined to glory. The cross was a necessary part of this plan. So the Lord Jesus went out into that dark night to accomplish His Father’s will.



The Eternal Son

Part 2

George Stevens

Seven times in His prayer to His Father in John 17, the Lord Jesus refers to His disciples as having been given to Him by His Father. This moving description of His own can only be enhanced as we appreciate that timeless, eternal love of the Father and the Son.

In part 1, we considered the teaching of the Old Testament concerning the eternal Sonship of Christ. We will now look at the teaching of the New Testament on this subject.

His eternal Sonship in Galatians

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (4:4,5).

Here Paul states four facts about Christ:

1. His divine relationship with God as Son;
2. His being sent forth from God;
3. His entrance into manhood – made of a woman; and
4. His being made under the law.

The results were twofold, namely, redemption and adoption. But note that it was the Son who was “sent forth”. This sending forth of the Son was not from Bethlehem, but from heaven. Just as the Spirit of God’s Son was sent forth into the world (v.6), so, too, was the Son.

His eternal Sonship in Mark’s Gospel

Here, as in Galatians, we find statements concerning a Son being sent. In 12:1-9, the Lord Himself is the speaker. In this parable of the vineyard, He tells us that the owner “had yet one, a beloved son: he sent him last unto them” (R.V.). Note the three facts:

1. The owner, in this parable a picture of God Himself, had ‘one’.
2. The relationship between the sender and the sent: “*having yet one son, his wellbeloved*”.
3. This beloved son was sent to the husbandmen and was expected to be shown respect because of his relationship to the owner.

Those who listened to this parable had no doubts in their minds that here the Lord Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God, sent from His Father’s side. So, in v.12, “they sought to lay hold on Him, but feared the people”. The Lord had no doubt that He was the only beloved Son with the Father before ever He was seen as a Man amongst men. He could point out to the people that the rejection of the son in the parable, and

His rejection, answered to the prophetic rejection of the Messiah (v.10; Psalm 118:22). He is the eternal Son of God.

His eternal Sonship in John's writings

Around the beginning of the 20th century, there were those who professed to have a fresh understanding regarding the Son-Father relationship in the Godhead. They insisted on the truth of the eternal existence of the Word, and believed in equality in the Godhead, yet they denied that the Word was the Son who existed eternally in relationship to an eternal Father. It is important to consider carefully some significant statements in John's writings which highlight the error of this teaching.

1. The Son's relationship to the eternal Word

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4).

In these verses, the One we know as the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to be:

1. The living expression of the nature and will of God (*the Word*)
2. Eternal (*In the beginning was the Word*)

3. A distinct Person (*and the Word was with God*)
4. God (*and the Word was God*)
5. An eternal and distinct Person (*The same was in the beginning with God*)
6. The Creator (*All things were made by Him*)
7. The Source of all life (*In Him was life*).

V.14 may be translated, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled amongst us". His glory was "as of an only begotten from (Greek 'para' – 'from beside') a Father". Now v.18 makes the relationship of this Son to the Father identical to the relationship between God and the Word in v.1: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". We have already seen that the words 'which is' must be understood to express a relationship and oneness of being without any particular regard to time. Indeed, they show us that there never was a time when this relationship began, nor was there ever a moment when it ceased to be. Just as Christ could say to Nicodemus, "even the Son of man which *is* in heaven" (3:13) implying truth regardless of time, so also in John 1:18, "the only begotten Son which *is* in the bosom of the Father" denotes His nearness and relationship to the Father – a relationship which is timeless.

Not only did He share the nature of the Father, but He was also the object of the Father's love – "the Son of His love"

"The Son of His love"

(Colossians 1:13). He is "the One being in the bosom of the Father". If we limit this to time, we deny the unity of the passage and the plain meaning of the present continuous tense of the verb 'to be' as it is used in Scripture regarding divine Persons (Philippians 2:6; Revelation 1:18). This verse describes a timeless, eternal and unbroken intimacy between the Father and the Son which was continued even in the days of His flesh. Note also that in John, the Creator is spoken of as the Word, but in Colossians as the Son of His love. Both passages speak of the same eternal Person.

2. The Son's relationship to the Father

In his Gospel, John speaks of the Son of God thirty one times. Only the Lord Jesus is called "*the* Son of God" (with the definite article and in the singular) in all the pages of Scripture. This is important in dealing with the cults of today. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses will state that He is *a* son. They simply believe Him to be the

highest created being. They do not understand Him to be God or the unique Son of God.

There is not a statement in the Bible to support the thought that at any time the Lord Jesus *became* the Son of God. The "This day have I begotten Thee" of Psalm 2:7, Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 are linked to His official glories and require His Manhood. Neither is there any suggestion that there was a time when God became the Father. God is unchanging and unchangeable in His essential being, nature and character (Malachi 3:6). There are no grounds whatever for the suggestion that the Father, who has been fully revealed by the Son, was unknown to the Son as the Father before Bethlehem!

It is worth repeating the truth found in John 1:18. There, the preposition *eis* implies more than the preposition *en* could convey. It means that He was not only in the bosom of the Father in essential union, but was able to respond fully to all the love of that intimate position. It should be noted that the writer is none other than the disciple who had leaned on the bosom of the Lord Jesus (13:23). He is described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". Hence, we might say of the One who was ever in the bosom of the Father, "the Son whom the Father loved". Furthermore, just as the love of Christ for John was reciprocated by that disciple, so is the love of the Father for the Son.

This love of the Father to the Son is one of the great themes of John's Gospel

(3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:10; 17:26). Supporters of the temporal Sonship have tried to say that the words of the Lord Jesus, “As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you” are limited to His Manhood. Such a theory is impossible to maintain in the face of the Lord’s words, “Father... Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (17:24). This prayer places the Father before the foundation of the world. The Father is eternal. The Son was loved before the world’s foundation by that same Father.

The Son’s statement, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30), caused the Jews to take up stones to kill Him, for they said, “Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God”. Again, when He said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (5:17), the “Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He...said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God”. The Jews believed in one God. Yet they recognised that by these statements Christ was claiming to be equal with God – namely, the Father Himself. A careful reading of John 17:11, 21 and 22 makes it clear that the unity of the Son with the Father is unbroken and unbreakable.

3. The Sent One

In many verses, the Father is identified as the One who sent the Son (3:16, 31-36; 4:34; 5:24, 30, etc.). This shows that He was the Son before His incarnation.

The Father and Son were together in heaven, and the Father sent the Son from His side. He came into the world knowing the Father’s affection and the Father’s deepest counsel. How else can John 16:28 be understood: “I came forth from (*exercomai, out of*) the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father”? It has been contended that “out of” here is origin and not relationship. However, the words which precede the Lord’s statement settle that question very simply: “I came out from (*para, from beside*) God” (v.27).

“I came forth
from the
Father...”

In John 10:36, the Lord Jesus is called the Son of God, and God is called the Father: “Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” Firstly, the Father sanctified i.e. consecrated or set apart, the Son. Secondly, He sent Him into the world. It was as the Son He was sanctified and as the Son He was sent. This is prior to His coming into the world.

The statement of the Lord Jesus, “I am the Son of God” is one of the hidden “I am”’s of John’s Gospel. Christ is the I AM – the God of the Old Testament. He

confirms this later, “Before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). However, the words above also show that He is the Son of God – in totality, we may say that He is Jehovah the Son of God! If this is the case, then the Son of God must be eternal. W.J.Hocking notes: “As a general distinction with varying shades of meaning, ‘Son of God’ appears to be in the name expressive of His coming forth from God, while ‘Son’ is the name expressive of His coming forth from the Father.”

4. The Son and eternity

The first purpose of John in writing his Gospel is to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:31). John tells us that He was subject to the Father’s will, but never inferior to the Father. Though the Father sent the Son, yet the Son came as an act of His own will and in love laid down His life for His own. Subjection was voluntary and did not involve inferiority (5:19-27; 15:13,14; 10:17,18).

Another scripture which indicates that the relationship between the Father and the Son is an eternal one is found in 1 John 1:2: “that eternal life which was with the Father”. The preposition translated ‘with’ signifies ‘movement towards’. It gives the idea of two distinct Persons, co-existent with and in communion with each other.

From v.2, we see that before the Eternal Life was manifested to men, that

Eternal Life was with the Father. So the Son is viewed in the quality and activity of the Life which has its source in Him. The Son was “with” the Father in the eternal communion of two Persons equal with each other. Hence, His eternity of being and equality with the Father are established.

Further to this, the Lord could pray, “And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was” (17:5). Here is the Son praying as dependent Man to the Father. He speaks of having had glory with the Father before the world was. This He had as Son. He now asks for it to be given Him as the Son in manhood.

By the vastness of this loving relationship between the Father and the Son we can begin to measure God’s love to us. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). This is the manner of love to which our hearts delight to respond. It was a love which made that most precious of all sacrifices: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” (3:16).

The Father gives His only Son.
The Lord of glory dies
For us the guilty and undone,
A spotless sacrifice.

A Help or a Hindrance: Which?

C.H.Mackintosh

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues...covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:28,31). Could there be a better gift in today’s church than that of being a help? This reprint of an article by a well known writer of the 19th century is still timely today.

Of the many favours conferred upon us by our ever-gracious Lord, one of the very highest is the privilege of being present in the assembly of His beloved people, where He has recorded His name. We may assert with all possible confidence that every true lover of Christ will delight to be found where He has promised to be. Whatever may be the special character of the meeting: whether it be round the Lord’s table, to show forth His death; or round the Word, to learn His mind; or round the mercy-seat, to tell Him our need, and draw from His exhaustless treasury – every devoted heart will long to be there. We may rest assured that anyone who wilfully neglects the assembly is in a cold, dead, dangerous state of soul. To neglect the assembling of ourselves together is to take the first step on the downward slope that leads to the total abandonment of Christ and His precious interests (Hebrews 10:25).

And here, at the very outset, we would remind the reader that the object of this brief paper is not to discuss the oft-raised question, “How are we to know what meeting to go to?” This is assuredly a question of the utmost importance, which every Christian – man, woman and child – is bound and privileged to have divinely settled ere he takes his place in an assembly. To go to a meeting without knowing the ground on which such a meeting is gathered, is to act in ignorance or indifference wholly incompatible with the fear of the Lord and the love of His word.

But we repeat, this question is not now before us. We are not occupied with the ground of the meeting, but with *our state and conduct on that ground* – a question, surely, of vast moral importance to every believer pro-



fessing to be gathered in, or to, the name of Him who is holy and true. The title of this article is our concern now. We assume that the reader is clear as to the ground of the assembly, and hence our immediate business with him just now is to raise the solemn question in his heart and conscience, “Am I a help, or a hindrance, to the assembly?” That each individual member is either one or the other is as clear as it is weighty and practical.

If the reader will just open his Bible and read, thoughtfully and prayerfully, 1 Corinthians 12, he will find most clearly established the great practical truth that each member of the body exerts an influence on all the rest; just as in the human body, if there be anything wrong with the very feeblest and most obscure member, all the members feel it, through the head. If there be a broken nail, a broken tooth, a foot out of joint, any limb, muscle or nerve out of order, it is a hindrance to the whole body. Thus it is in the Church of God, the body of Christ. “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (v.26). The state of each member affects the whole body. Hence it follows that each member is either a help or a hindrance to all.



What a profound truth! Yes, and it is as practical as it is profound.

And be it remembered that the apostle is not speaking of any mere local assembly, but of the whole body, of which no doubt, each particular assembly ought to be the local expression. Thus he writes, in addressing the assembly at Corinth, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (v.27). True, there were other assemblies, and had the apostle been addressing any of them on the same subject, he would have used the same language; for what was true of each was true of all; and what was true of the whole was true of each local expression. Nothing can be clearer, nothing simpler, nothing more deeply practical. The whole subject

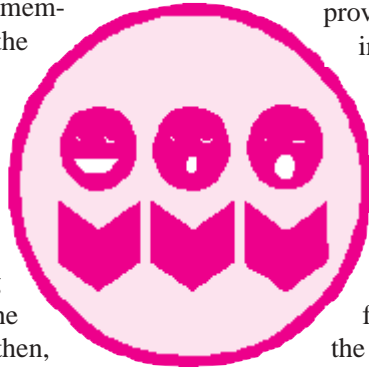
furnishes three most precious and powerful motives for a holy, earnest, devoted life – namely, first, that we may not dishonour the Head to whom we are united; secondly, that we may not grieve the Holy Spirit by whom we are united; and, thirdly, that we may not injure the members with whom we are united.

Can anything exceed the moral power of such motives as these? Oh, that they were more fully realised among God’s beloved people! It is one thing to hold and teach the doctrine of the unity of the body, and quite another thing to enter into and exhibit its holy formative power. Alas, the poor human intellect

may discuss and traffic in the highest truths, while the heart, the conscience and the life have never felt their holy influence! This is a most solemn consideration for every one. May we ponder it in our hearts, and may it tell upon our whole life and character. May the truth of the "one body" be a grand moral reality to every member of that body on the face of the earth.

Here we might close this paper, feeling, as we do, that if the glorious truth on which we have been dwelling were held in the living power of faith by all the Lord's beloved people, then, assuredly, *all* the precious practical results would follow. But in sitting down to write, there was one special branch of the subject before the mind; and that is, the way in which the various meetings are affected by the condition of soul, the attitude of heart, and the state of mind, of all who attend. We repeat, and with emphasis, all who attend – not merely all who audibly take part, but all who form the meeting.

No doubt a special and very weighty responsibility rests on those who take any part in the ministry, whether it be in giving out a hymn, engaging in prayer or thanksgiving, reading the Word, teaching, or exhortation. All who do so should be very sure that they are simply the instruments in the hand of the Lord for whatever they undertake to do. Otherwise they may do serious damage



to the meeting. They may quench the Spirit, hinder the worship, interrupt the communion, mar the integrity of the occasion.

All this is most serious, and calls for holy watchfulness on the part of all who engage in any branch of ministry in the assembly. Even a hymn may prove a hindrance; it may interrupt the current of the Spirit in the assembly. Yea, the precious word of God may be read out of place. In short, whatever is not the direct fruit of the Spirit can only hinder the edification and blessing of the assembly. All who take part in the ministry should have the distinct sense that they are led by the Spirit in what they do. They should be governed by the one commanding, absorbing object – the glory of Christ in the assembly, and the blessing of the assembly in Him. "Let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Corinthians 14:26). If it be not thus, they had better be quiet, and wait on the Lord. They will render more glory to Christ and more blessing to the assembly by quiet waiting than by restless action and unprofitable talking.

But while feeling and owning the gravity of all that has to be said in reference to the holy responsibility of all who minister in the assembly, we are thoroughly persuaded that the tone, character and general effect of public meetings are very intimately connected

with *the moral and spiritual condition of all*. It is this, we confess, that weighs upon the heart, and leads us to pen this brief address to every assembly under the sun. Every one in the meeting is either a help or a hindrance. All who attend in a devout, earnest, loving spirit; who come simply to meet the Lord Himself; who flock to the assembly as the place where His precious name is recorded; who delight to be there because He is there – all such are a real help and blessing to a meeting. May God increase their number! If all assemblies were made up of such blessed elements, what a different tale would have to be told!

And why not? It is not a question of gift or knowledge, but of grace and godliness, true piety and prayerfulness. In a word, it is simply a question of that condition of soul in which every child of God and every servant of Christ ought to be, and without which the most shining gifts and the most extensive knowledge are a hindrance and a snare. Mere gift and intelligence, without an exercised conscience and the fear of God, may be, and have been, used of the enemy for the moral ruin of souls. But where there is true humility, and that seriousness and reality which the sense of the presence of God ever produces, there you have what will most surely, gift or no gift, impart depth of



tone, freshness, and a spirit of worship, to an assembly.

There is a vast difference between an assembly of people gathered round some gifted man, and one gathered simply to the Lord Himself, on the ground of the one body. It is one thing to be gathered *by* ministry, and quite another to be gathered *to* it. If people are merely gathered to ministry, when the ministry goes, they are apt to go too. But when earnest, true-hearted, devoted souls are gathered simply to the Lord Himself, then, while they are most thankful for true ministry when they can get it, they are not dependent upon it. They do not value gift less, but they value the Giver more. They are thankful for the streams, but they depend *only* upon the Fountain.

It will invariably be found that those who can do best without ministry, value it most when they get it. In a word, they give it its true place. But those who attach undue importance to gift, who are always complaining of the lack of it, and cannot enjoy a meeting without it, are a hindrance and a source of weakness to the assembly.

And, alas, there other hindrances and sources of weakness which demand the serious consideration of all. We should, each one of us, as we take our places in the assembly, honestly put the question to our hearts, "Am I a help, or a hindrance?" If we come in a cold, hard,

careless state of soul – come in a merely formal manner, unjudged, unexercised, unbroken; in a fault-finding, murmuring, complaining spirit, judging everything and everybody except ourselves – then, most assuredly, we are a serious hindrance to the blessing, the profit and the happiness of the meeting. We are the broken nail, the broken tooth, or the foot out of joint. How sorrowful, how humiliating, how terrible is all this! May we watch against it, pray against it, firmly disallow it.

But, on the other hand, those who present themselves in the assembly in a loving, gracious, Christ-like spirit; who delight to meet their brethren, whether round the Table, round the fountain of Holy Scripture, or round the mercy-seat for prayer; who in their hearts' deep

and tender affections, embrace all the members of the beloved body of Christ; whose eyes are not dimmed, nor their affections chilled by dark suspicions, evil surmisings, or unkindly feelings toward any around them; who have been taught of God to love their brethren, to look at them “from the top of the rocks” and see them “in the vision of the Almighty” (Numbers 23:9; 24:4); who are ready to profit by whatever the gracious Lord sends them, even though it may not come through some brilliant gift or favourite teacher – all such are a divinely sent blessing to



the assembly, wherever they are. Again we say, with a full heart, may God add to their number.

If all assemblies were composed of such, it would be the very atmosphere of heaven itself; the name of Jesus would be as ointment poured forth; every eye would be fixed on Him, every heart absorbed with Him, and there would be a more powerful testimony to His name and presence in our midst than could be rendered by the most brilliant gift.

May the gracious Lord pour out His blessing upon all His assemblies throughout the whole earth. May He deliver them from every hindrance, every weight, every stumbling-block, every root of bitterness. May the hearts of all be knit together in sweet confidence and true brotherly love. May He crown with His richest blessing the labours of all His beloved servants at home and abroad, cheering their hearts and strengthening their hands, giving them to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in His precious work, in the assurance that their labour is not in vain.



Bible Words

1. Dwell

This is not meant to be raced through! Take time to think about each of these verses in turn. Let them move your heart to worship the Lord and to challenge you in His service. Practise ‘the lost art of meditation’.



from eternity

“For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: *I dwell in the high and holy place*, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirits of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).

in the tabernacle

“And let them make Me a sanctuary *that I may dwell among them*” (Exodus 25:8).

in the temple

“*But will God indeed dwell on the earth?* Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27).

on earth

“And the Word became flesh *and dwelt among us*, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).
“*For in Him dwells all the fullness* of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

the Holy Spirit in the believer

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that *the Spirit of God dwells in you?*” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Christ in the believer

“*that Christ may dwell in your hearts* through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (Ephesians 3:17-19a).

to eternity

“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, *and He will dwell with them*, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3 – last mention of ‘dwell’).



Man's dwelling place

away from God

“Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and *dwelt in the land of Nod* on the east of Eden” (Genesis 4:16 – first mention of ‘dwell’).

in defilement

“[The leper] shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, *and he shall dwell alone*; his habitation shall be outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:46).

two contrasts

“*Abraham dwelt* in the land of Canaan, and *Lot dwelt* in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom” (Genesis 13:12).

the believer's confidence

“I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, *make me dwell in safety*” (Psalm 4:8).

the believer's hope

“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek: *that I may dwell in the house of the LORD* all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple” (Psalm 27:4).

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *and I will dwell in the house of the LORD* forever” (Psalm 23:6).

brethren together

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is *for brethren to dwell together in unity!*...For there the LORD commanded the blessing – life for evermore” (Psalm 133:1,3b).

in God

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and *he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God*, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

Treasures of Love – Part 4

5. The love of believers

George Bell

It is reported that the world could look at 1st century Christians and exclaim in wonder, “See how these Christians love one another”. Would the world say these same words today in wonder or derision? The concluding part of this series is an important reminder that love for Jesus is the important spring of love for one another.

In preceding articles, we have considered

1. The Father's love to the Son.
2. The love of the Son to the Father.
3. The Father's love for His children.
4. The love of the Son for His own.

In this final part of this series, we shall look at the love of believers under two headings:

- (a) The love of believers for the Son.
- (b) The love of believers for one another.

Love of believers for the Son

“We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).


To speak of the love of believers for the Son immediately challenges each one of us. How little we dare say! We feel how inadequate is our response to the love of Christ! If only we had a deeper impression of it, perhaps our return to Him would be greater. The first verse quoted above contains a ‘because’ and so highlights the source of the believer's love. Nothing can compare with His love! His love comes first!

Before moving on, let's ponder that love for a moment. Often as we gather together to remember Him, we are reminded of

those words, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). We go on to think of the words of the hymn: “Thou for Thine enemies wast slain; what love with Thine can vie?”

1 John 4:19 is worth examining in more detail. In other translations, ‘him’ is omitted from this verse, leaving the object of our love open. It may refer to God, or the Son of God, or to one another. Whoever may be the objects, it is only that divine love shown to us which gives the vital impulse. The words of the Lord Jesus in John 14:15 still challenge us. They require little comment; love to the Lord is proved by obedience.

There are many passages in ‘The Song of Solomon’ where the bride expresses her love for her bridegroom. They are words which mirror the believer's love for the Son. An outstanding one is found in 5:10-16. The bride is absorbed with the one she loves. She describes the various facets of



His love comes first!

his person. She begins: “My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.” She ends: “His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” These are beautiful expressions of love which we do well to take to heart. So often we feel the coldness of our hearts. It may be that we find it difficult to express ourselves adequately. However, the Lord knows our hearts better than we do.

We turn, now, to the experiences of Peter, recorded at the close of each of the four Gospels. It ill becomes any of us to criticise any of the Lord’s servants, certainly not Peter. What happened to him is given as a clear lesson to us all. Each of the Gospels records Peter’s self-confidence leading to his denial of the Lord. God would have us all to be aware of the dangers of trusting in ourselves. That the flesh can contribute nothing in the service of the Lord is, indeed, a hard lesson to learn.

Peter’s self-confidence brought forth the Lord’s solemn warning: “Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice” (John 13:36-38).

There is no doubt that Peter meant what he said. He loved the Lord dearly. But he had to learn his weakness the hard way! The story of how the Lord’s words came true is well known. His three-fold denial

of his Lord is a reflection of our own hearts. Luke tells us of Peter’s deep sorrow and tears when the cock crowed, and how Peter then remembered his Lord’s words. The real cause of his sorrow was that, just as the cock crew, the Lord looked upon him. What kind of look was it? Was it resentment? No, it was a look of love, perhaps hurt love? But the Lord had only Peter’s restoration in view. What a wonderful Master we have! He’s just the same today! Long ago, David knew something of that same tender shepherd care: “He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3). Peter was brought down, almost to the point of despair; he was being sifted as wheat (Luke 22:31). How deeply grateful he must have been for the words of the Lord: “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not”.

Peter was fully restored. That restoration took place after the Lord had been raised from the dead. Luke records an incident which has a bearing upon Peter’s restoration. Two disciples had returned from Emmaus and found the company of disciples gathered together, saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34). Scripture is silent about what happened between the Lord and Peter. That was a very private inter-

“Lovest thou Me
more than
these?”

view. We can rest assured that the work of restoration was complete.

Subsequently, in John 21 we read of Peter’s public restoration. Peter was searched through and through. In that threefold searching, the words of the Lord thrust deeper each time. It began with the question, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” It is not difficult to see the Lord’s meaning. Peter would, no doubt, remember his boast, “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I” (Mark 14:29). Peter’s response to this first question was, “Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.” The Lord’s answer to this was, “Feed my lambs.” Peter was not only restored but also commissioned. As a result of this searching process, he was equipped to be an able shepherd. Peter’s epistles provide the evidence of how well he discharged that shepherd care.

There is a salutary lesson for us all in Peter’s experience. Any service we undertake for the Lord must spring from love for Him, and not from our self-confidence. Just as the Lord knew His servant Peter through and through, so He rightly assesses our love to Him. In the light of this, He will equip us to serve Him. We must distrust ourselves, and trust in the Saviour.

Love of believers for one another

So we arrive at the final part of this series on the subject, “Treasures of love”. We began with the Father’s love to the Son. Then we saw that we have become the objects of the love of both the Father and the Son. Now, in this final consideration, we are responsible, as loved by God, to

show this love to one another. We are all part of the family of God, all sharing the same life. Yet this area of loving one another is so often where we fail! That is why there are so many exhortations to this end. It will be convenient to look at these under six headings.

Discipleship

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34,35).

The commandments of the law were given to a people unable to keep them. A new commandment is now given. It is new in character, and is given to those who have been born of God. Because they have a new life, they have not only the desire to keep this new commandment, but also the power, as born of God, to do so. The Lord sets the standard for this love: “as I have loved you”!

An important aspect of this love to one another is that it becomes a testimony to all men. It gives a much louder and clearer sound than anything we could say. Our discipleship can be more easily recognised in this way. Love lies behind unity which, too, was meant to be a witness. So the Lord could pray, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*” (John 17:21).

This verse reinforces what has been said, that unity was to be a testimony. This is characteristic of Christianity. It is because of this that Satan has directed his efforts to destroy this unity. We all have our part

in this sad tale. So often the flesh has shown itself in its true colours and Satan has taken advantage of the situation to cause havoc. Love for one another will preserve the unity and advance the witness.

Love in the midst of hatred

“These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:17,18).

The Lord’s words here underline what He had already said. His command is repeated in v.17. The following verse gives us the dark background. The world hated Christ; it will hate those who love Him. In a world marked by hatred, we are to show our love to one another. This again emphasises the matter of testimony.

Love’s obligation

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to the the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9,10).

In these verses, the love of God in its wondrous giving is unfolded. V.9 reminds us of the more familiar John 3:16. There are two significant differences.

John 3:16 1 John 4:9

“For God so loved *the world*”

 “...the love of God *towards us*”
 ...but *have everlasting life*”

 “...that *we might live* through him”

In John 3:16, the scope of the love of God is the world. In 1 John 4:9, that love is more circumscribed. It is limited to us, that is, to believers only. John addresses

Christians to assure them that they were the objects of the manifested love of God. This was to have a practical impact on them.

In the second part of John 3:16, we see that God’s gift of His only begotten Son has in view that we should have eternal life. However, in John’s epistle, we see that God would have us to enjoy this life in a meaningful way now, and live it out in its fullness.



V.10 reminds us that, before there could be any possession of eternal life, there was the matter of sin to be resolved. So we have propitiation here, that is, the sin question has indeed been settled. On the cross of Calvary, the “Son sent” as Man became an offering of such value to God, and brought life to us. We cannot regard this lightly. For the Lord Jesus, it meant those atoning sufferings, of which we understand so little, but which, nevertheless, cause us to worship and adore.

But it is John’s challenging comment on vv.9,10 which particularly concerns us here: “Beloved, if God so loved us, *we ought also to love one another*.”(v.11). There is another reminder of John 3:16 here: compare “God *so* loved the world” with “Beloved, if God *so* loved us”. What a great obligation! May we respond to it!

God displayed

“No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).

It is interesting to compare this verse with John 1:18: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” What a wonderful truth! When the Son of God was here on earth, God was fully declared in Him. A full revelation was made! However, He has returned to heaven as Man forever. He is no longer on earth. The question might be asked, Where can God be seen today? The answer is in 1 John 4:12. He is displayed in those who form God’s family, as their love for each other is practised! It is nothing short of a miracle that believers of different nationalities, varying social status, even diverse cultures, are able to exhibit the love of God.

Love to God proved

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

This verse requires very little comment. It speaks for itself, and challenges us all. Loving God and loving one another stand together, and must not be separated! The closing verse of the chapter sums it up: “And this commandment we have from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (v.21).

Love practised

“Hereby we have known love, because he has laid down his life for us; and we ought for the brethren to lay down [our] lives. But whoso may have the world’s

substance, and see his brother having need, and shut up his bowels from him, how abides the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:16,17, JND trans.).

In v.16, another obligation is placed upon us. This is not optional. The lever for it is that He laid down His life for us. We are to lay down our lives for those who are in need. This does not necessarily mean that we literally lay down our lives for our fellow Christians. It may be so in extreme circumstances. It means that we are committed to do all we can to help those in adversity. Priscilla and Aquila did just this. Paul writes very highly of them: “Who have for my life laid down their necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:3,4).

V.18 carries on: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” Talking about loving the brethren is not sufficient! Action is needed! Otherwise, the question may rightly be asked, “How dwelleth the love of God in him?”

Conclusion

In conclusion, may these meditations encourage us to find our true joy in abiding in Christ. Fruitfulness will then be the result. There will also be the satisfaction of a true-hearted response to the Father who seeks worshippers. Soon we will be in that home of unchanging love, the Father’s house. The atmosphere of that home will be love. May we lay hold of His promise, “I will come again, and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

Patmos – an Island Speaks

Part 7 Conclusion

John Weston

“Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God” (Acts 10:33) are words which marked Cornelius’ readiness to listen to what God had to say through Peter. As we come to the final part in this telling series, may we be equally ready to hear the word of the Lord through these bygone churches to us today.

In Part 6, some general features of the seven churches in Revelation 2 & 3 were considered, viz.

1. The presentation of the Lord to each church.
2. The warnings of the Lord to each church.

One other general feature remains to be noticed.

The promises of the Lord to the overcomer in each church

It will be of interest to note the promise given to the overcomer in each church.

To Ephesus: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (2:7).



Ephesus

The keynote of this promise is *survival*.

To Smyrna: “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (2:11).

The keynote of this promise is *safety*.

To Pergamum: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (2:17).

The keynote of this promise is *sufficiency*.

To Thyatira: “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star” (2:26-28).

The keynote of this promise is *supremacy*.

To Sardis: “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (3:5).

The keynote of this promise is *sanctification*.

To Philadelphia: “ Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I

will write upon him my new name” (3:12).

The keynote of this promise is *standing*.

To Laodicea: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father in his throne” (3:21).

The keynote of this promise is *sovereign grace*.

A detailed exposition of these promises is not intended. This can readily be found in larger treatises on the book of Revelation. Some comments, however, in line with the general tenor of this series on Patmos, will follow.

At the outset, let us always remember that “all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20). The Lord is ever gracious. As He walks amidst the lampstands, He is fully aware of the spiritual warfare confronting those who have put their trust in Him. This, of course, was particularly true in the early days of the Church. These seven churches were surrounded by pagan nations who had for centuries worshipped idols and mythological gods. These nations were steeped in superstition. Now a new situation was developing, a new faith was being introduced. In this conflict, these new Christians discovered that the word of God abounded in glorious promises. These promises brought comfort and strength, as well as hope.

In retrospect, however, we realise something of the power of the enemy in that it took only 35 years for the believers in Ephesus to fall from the spiritual heights of blessing, as outlined in their letter from

Paul, to the sad situation which we have considered earlier.

In the darkness of the night, Abraham was told by God to lift up his eyes toward heaven (Genesis 15:5). There he saw that the night sky was filled with the light of countless number of stars, each star rep-



Smyrna

resenting a promise from God. So we also, during the night of this world as we await the break of day, can lift up our heads toward heaven and know that the night sky of the world is

alive with the promises of God!

So we can sing:

God’s promises come true.
Whate’er He says He will do.
My heart no doubt can hold
Of things He has told.

I know Your word is sure;
It is a rock secure.
What You say comes about,
This I can never doubt.

God’s promises are true,
Fulfilment will ensue.
My trust must e’er prevail;
His word can never fail.

Whate’er He says He will do;
His word is clear and true.
The waiting may be long,
'Twill end in triumph song.

(M.Basilea Schlink)



Pergamum

Five basic promises of God to the Children of Israel are encapsulated in Exodus 6:6-8. In a spiritual sense, we are able, through grace, to claim these same promises for ourselves.

They are:

1. I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.
2. I will rid you of their bondage.
3. I will redeem you.
4. I will take you to Me for a people.
5. I will bring you into the land.

Such promises as these must surely cause us to break out into songs of praise and worship. We can rejoice now in the salvation expressed in the first four; we await with joyful expectation the fulfilment of the fifth. Scripture abounds with promises for our earthly pilgrimage today. Our daily walk is garlanded with such promises. Well might we, then, sing:

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let His praises ring;
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.

However, in the letters to these seven churches, very specific promises are made to those who will be overcomers in the spiritual warfare. In each case, the promise given is particularly relevant to the conditions prevailing in that church.

Despite the failures portrayed in five of the seven churches, a word of encouragement is given to those within them who desire to overcome the worldly pressures around them. The mighty conflict being waged in the heavenlies against believers then, and today, can not be underestimated. The battle is fierce. Spiritual forces of darkness and evil are engaged in making every attempt to destroy Christian witness and to turn hearts away from God. Overcoming such forces will never be achieved through mere human strength or will-power. To be an overcomer needs divine strength. The whole armour of God, in fact, is essential for protection in this warfare (see Ephesians 6:11-18).



Thyatira

The girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness and the sword of the Spirit are all vital components of this armour. The shield, as mentioned by Paul, was not the small circular one which was sometimes used, but rather a long one which covered much of the body. In ancient wars, Spartan mothers told their sons as they left for battle, “Come back carrying your shield, or upon it (i.e. as a stretcher or a bier)”. It was a dishonour and a disgrace to be parted from one’s shield, whether in life or death.

We must keep like faith and use our shield “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (v.16).

Be valiant, be strong,
Resist the power of sin!
The fight is long, the foe is strong, but you shall win;
For through the power of Christ – the Stronger than the strong –
You shall be more than conqueror.
Be valiant, be strong.

The promises to the overcomers contained in these letters are not primarily connected to the daily walk of the Christian, but rather look on to the end result. They look forward, in the main, to the eternal day. In this way, they act as an encouragement to believers to press on. Paul could write, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

We can take courage in the fact that Satan is a defeated foe; yet we recognise, at the same time, that he is described as a roaring lion. So we must ever be sober and



Sardis

vigilant (1 Peter 5:8). Satan’s fiery darts seek to penetrate and to take advantage of our human weaknesses. He is only too well aware of our fallibilities!
The promises of Revelation

2,3 reveal so very clearly the love and grace of our Saviour. He loved the Church and gave Himself for it, and now, at its very inception, He sees so much failure creeping in. At times, there is the very denial of everything that He looks for. His longsuffering love goes out to those whose desire it is to respond to this love.



Philadelphia

It is to these, the overcomers, that the Lord offers such wonderful promises. He reveals the reward which will be theirs if, like Paul, they fight the good fight of faith.

To those at Ephesus, the promise is given of that which was denied to Adam in the Garden of Eden, that earthly paradise. Now in God’s paradise, they will be able to eat of the fruit of the tree of life.

The overcomers in the church at Smyrna, having experienced death and suffering, will be given the crown of life.

Hidden manna, a white stone, a new name – all these are promised to the overcomer in Pergamum. It is not at all clear what is exactly meant by the hidden manna. It could refer to what was placed in the Holy Ark (Exodus 16:33; Hebrews 9:4). It might even be an oblique reference to that part of the passover loaf, the afikomen, which was hidden during the passover meal. It was this hidden loaf

which the Lord took, announcing that it symbolised His body which was to be given in sacrifice. The white stone, too, has interesting possibilities. At the conclusion of a trial, the jury would hand to the judge either a white or a black stone, depending on the verdict. A white stone was also used to give right of entry to public festivals, or royal assemblies. It also symbolised victory in warfare.



Laodicea

Another, and rather beautiful, use of the white stone was a practice known as Tessara Hospitalis. Two friends, soon about to part, would split a white stone in half, each half bearing the name of the other. The halves would then be exchanged, and often passed down the generations. On a future occasion, should the halves be presented, each still bearing the name of the original friend, then a firm friendship would at once be acknowledged.

Highest of all the promises, surely, was that to the overcomers in the apostate church of Laodicea. No higher honour can be imagined. "To share my throne", said the Lord. Sovereign grace indeed!

As stated earlier, these churches provide us with a mirror reflecting the spiritual condition of church life in today's world. The different pictures in each highlight

specific recognisable scenarios in the church today. We need to give these serious thought. Should alarm bells ring, then we have, through God's grace, still time, albeit a very short time, to change course. The watchword is "Repent!" The night is far spent; the day is at hand (Romans 13:12).

A summary of the seven churches

- Ephesus coldness
- Smyrna crossbearing
- Pergamum collaborating
- Thyatira compromising
- Sardis corpseslike
- Philadelphia committed
- Laodicea Christless

These seven churches have now passed into history. Their modern counterparts, however, live on and are with us today. Let us look carefully into the mirror presented to us from this little island of Patmos, and ask ourselves, "What does the reflection tell us?"

As John's vision on this island came to an end, he wrote, "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (22:20,21). May His grace, His love, His Shalom, shine through us as we go forward on our pilgrim journey!

**To share
My throne**

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by

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The Volunteers

He led no conscripts in the field of faith,
But those whose hearts were bound to him as one,
Bondmen of nought but love. In David's day
Royal Adullam had but volunteers
Linked to their lord by stronger, better bands
Than ever bound a trembling caitiff to
His tyrant's will. These were true followers;
Men who were little Davids in their souls;
Reflections of the man who held their gaze.
They wore their uniform upon their hearts,
High courage living in each lucid eye;
Rugged and resolute. Stern hardships were
Their one exhilarating sport. Great men,
Brave-hearted heroes in the deadly fray,
They lived and died for their beloved lord—
Famous as David's mighty men they lived:
Fearless before his enemies they died.
Their soul-inspiring model was the youth
Who met Goliath with his sling and stone,
Who slew his lion and his bear; the man
Who found his foe asleep, and held his hand.

But who and what are we in this our day?
And who and what is He whom we would serve?
And what were David's deeds compared with His?
Shall we be less than they? Is not our Lord
Greater than theirs could ever be? Shall we
Be found less faithful in this hostile scene?
Love's lasting bands must bind our hearts to Him
Who faced our foe for us, who set us free,
Who bought us with a price, and such a price,
Paid in the furnace of the wrath of God.

I.Y.Ewan

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