

Words Of Peace & Truth

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WORDS OF PEACE & TRUTH

(*Esther 9:30; see also Zechariah 8:19 and Jeremiah 33:6*)

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Editorial

Every autumn, I plant a specific number of garlic cloves and then in the winter have great pleasure in seeing the little plants come through the soil. The last day of October 2020 I inserted forty-seven cloves in the ground and by early January we had that exact number of garlic plants standing erect. As I looked at them one day I thought with great pleasure of the day when, at the voice of the Lord Jesus, “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). ***Not one will be missed!*** “Jesus said to [Martha], I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes on Me, though he have died, shall live; and every one who lives and believes on Me shall never die” (John 11:26).

I thought too of the word in Isaiah 40 as to the wider creation: “Lift up your eyes on high, and see! Who hath created these things, bringing out their host by number? He calleth them all by name; through the greatness of His might and strength of power, ***not one faileth***” (*my emphasis*). The ensuing words are aimed at those who feel neglected and weary, that their strength might be renewed: “they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not tire; they shall walk, and not faint.”

Those of us who have been affected by the coronavirus have had a fresh experience of weariness, perhaps of both mind and body. Man boasts of his ability to overcome such interventions, leaving God out. God will deal with the pride of man in the due time; but may His unchanging character, His unfailing power, and His abundant love, mercy and grace, with the complete reliability of His word, sustain us all. G.S.B.

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THE* NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME

Philippians 2:9

SOMETIMES the question is raised as to what this name is; but whether it be the name of JESUS – as seems probable, if the amended reading be adopted – or not, its significance is very apparent.

A passage from the epistle to the Ephesians will explain this. In connection with the display of the exceeding greatness of God's power "to us-ward who believe, according to . . . His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead," the apostle proceeds, "and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, **and every name that is named**, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (chap. 1:19-21). Here the meaning evidently is that, whatever the exaltation or dignity of any of the heavenly hierarchies or intelligences, Christ as the glorified Man has been set above them all. Among the vast number of celestial beings He is absolutely supreme. The rendering "*far above*" (*KJV*) may not be exactly justified by the word used; but we cannot doubt that our translators seized its spirit in seeking to express that there was no second to the glorified Christ, that His exaltation is so unspeakable that all the highest gradations of angelic existences are far beneath His feet. Similarly in Philippians "the name which is above every name" will betoken the absolute supremacy in the whole universe of the glorified Christ as Lord. Nothing short of this will satisfy the terms of this scripture.

* (*Author's note:*) Some manuscripts read "the" instead of "a" name; and the *Revised Version* has adopted it. (*Editor:*) *J.N. Darby* gives "*the, or that*" in a footnote to his translation.

This will be more readily understood if we consider the place and connection in which these words are found. In a sense the passage from v. 5 to v. 11 is complete in itself. It grows out of previous exhortations; and herein is the marvel that all this blessed unfolding of the Person, of the character, of the incarnation of Christ, His humiliation and consequent exaltation, should be given to enforce the apostle's exhortation that the mind "which was also in Christ Jesus," seen in His coming "from Godhead's fullest glory, down to Calvary's depth of woe,"* should be before believers as their example! Let us then ponder upon it, for the more it is considered the more deeply will it impress itself upon our souls. In a past eternity§ He, who has been down here as the humbled One, was – subsisted – in the form of God. Such a statement, however far beyond the utmost range of all our thoughts, cannot signify less than His absolute and essential Deity. It speaks of His eternal existence as God, even as John says of the Word, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." On this blessed truth hangs the whole truth of revelation and redemption. To surrender it would be to lose the sun from the solar system, and thus to bring in darkness, chaos, and destruction. On this very account controversy has raged in all ages around the person of Christ. Now His humanity, and now His Deity, has been obscured if not denied. Faith meets all the arguments of man by the simple statements of the Word of God.

If, however, the Deity of our blessed Lord is here

**Quotation from the hymn "Brightness of th'eternal glory" by R. Robinson (1735-1790).*

§ *Eternity is, of course, outside of time and therefore has no past or future, so God "inhabits eternity" (present tense – Isaiah 57:15); but we have to speak in terms that are humanly understandable – Editor.*

introduced, it is but to magnify His grace and self-humiliation; for the assertion of it is followed immediately by words of transcendent importance. First, He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but,” secondly, “made Himself of no reputation,” or, more literally and exactly, “emptied Himself.” The first clause will mean that although He subsisted in the form of God, He did not use it for self-exaltation, “did not,” as one has translated it, “esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God.” It is, doubtless, a contrast to Adam, who fell into Satan’s snare of seeking to exalt himself, to be “as gods, knowing good and evil.”* Adam being a man sought to exalt himself; Christ being God humbled Himself. § How blessed the contrast! This was the mind which was in Christ Jesus; and the next clause – “but emptied Himself” – contains the first expression of that mind. It must be with unshodden feet (for the place is holy) that such a statement must be approached. Of what, then, did He who subsisted in the form of God empty Himself? It has been lately written that He emptied Himself of “divine prerogatives;” others have taught that the “emptying” included His divine attributes. Far be the thought! To admit it is certainly to becloud the essential truth of His Deity, and to open the door to rationalism in its worst forms. For what are attributes? They are the characteristics of Deity, so that to empty Himself of the former is to lay aside the latter. No! a thousand times, no! As another has said, “The essential being of Godhead cannot change...His emptying Himself applied to the form.”§

**How blatantly man is acting as if he were God today! This will have its climax in the Antichrist sitting down in the temple of God declaring himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4) – Editor.*

§ See the article by J.N. Darby, “The Humiliation of Christ,” Collected Writings Vol. 32 [Miscellaneous No. 1]; this is well worth reading – Editor.

The next sentences will make this plain, describing as they do the process and the effect of the emptying: He “took upon Him the form of a servant and was made (rather, “became” – it was His own voluntary, and, indeed, divine act) in the likeness of men.” It was as God He emptied Himself, and now these words present Him to us after He had done so; for we see Him in the likeness of men, and in form as a “bondsmen.” This includes the whole truth of the incarnation, and through it we are enabled to form some estimate, however inadequate, of the immensity of the descent from “the form of God” to “the form of a servant.” None but God was equal to such condescension and grace, for it was really the exhibition of divine love in the midst of sinners, and none but God could have made such a stoop, for man is limited to his own form and mode of existence. In the fact of the incarnation, therefore, we behold one of the glorious mysteries of redemption. And while unable to grasp its full and far-reaching significance, we yet learn that the lower Christ went down, the more brightly the effulgence of His divine glory shone forth! For God is light and God is love; and where do we behold this? Surely in Him who took upon Him the bondsman’s form. In every step of His pathway, in His words of grace and truth, in His works of power and mercy, light and love in all their perfection may be perceived by the opened eye; and the divinely instructed heart is constrained to exclaim, Lo! God is there.

As God, it has already been said, He emptied Himself, and now we learn that as man He humbled Himself. Indeed, the whole life of our blessed Lord as man is compressed into the words, “He humbled Himself;” for it is not, as in our translation (*KJV*), “*and* became obedient unto death,” but “*becoming*”^{*} so, that is, in humbling Himself: and then, to

^{*}*The Darby Translation and the R. V. (1881) have it this way – Ed.*

bring out the full character of the humiliation, it is added, “even the death of the cross.” It was a low place indeed He took when He assumed a bondsman’s form; but how much lower when, “being found in fashion as a man,” He went down to the shameful death of the cross! And let us again remind ourselves in our meditations, while we wonder and adore in the presence of such infinite condescension, that Christ is here presented as our example. The question may well be asked, in the beautiful language of another, “Are not our affections occupied and assimilated in dwelling with delight on what Jesus was here below? We admire, are humbled, and become conformed to Him through grace. Head and source of this life in us, the display of its perfection in Him draws forth and develops its energies and lowliness in us. For who could be proud in fellowship with the humble Jesus? Humble, He would teach us to take the lowest place, but that He has taken it Himself, the privilege of His perfect grace. Blessed Master, may we at least be near to, and hidden in, Thee.”

Such is the wondrous foundation on which the present exaltation of Christ is based. That there is a direct connection between the two is seen from the word “wherefore,” which also expresses to us the estimate of God’s heart of the self-humbling of Christ. Many grounds of the glory of Christ are given in Scripture. His worthiness, for example, is celebrated in Revelation 5, in virtue of the redemption which He had secured through His death, and through the efficacy of His blood. He Himself claims to be glorified in John 17 because He had glorified the Father on the earth and had finished the work which had been given Him to do. Here it is quite another aspect. It is God Himself stepping in, in the joy of His heart, in His delight in the One who had so humbled Himself, and raising Him to those heights of glory which He now occupies; and the act proclaims aloud throughout the whole universe that no other position would have been commensurate with His

deserts, that He who went down the lowest of all must have the highest place. Morally it is the exemplification of the principle, in all its perfection, which the Lord Himself enunciated – “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (*Luke 14:11 and 18:14*). It may then be said that His being highly exalted was but His meed and crown. The apostle in his epistle to the Ephesians touches upon another side of this great subject. There he tells us that He who descended into the lower parts of the earth is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things (Chap. 5:9, 10). While we may not be able to fathom this profound language, it cannot mean less than that, in virtue of the humiliation of Christ, and of the work He thereby effected for the accomplishment of the counsels of God, He will eventually flood the whole universe with His own redemption-glory. And this, and nothing short of this, will be God's answer to the humiliation of His beloved Son.

Returning to our Scripture, we learn that “the name which is above every name” is given Him as a part of His exaltation: nay, that it is God’s own estimate of what was due to the One who had humbled Himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It is thus the worthiness of Christ shown out by the place which God has given Him to occupy. We say, “given Him to occupy,” because the presentation here is that of His exaltation as Man, as the consequence of His perfect obedience and entire devotedness to the glory of God through the whole of His pathway on earth up to, and including, death. What “the name” is, or whether it is the name of Jesus, it has already been remarked, cannot be decided; and, indeed, it is the thing signified to which the Spirit of God would direct our attention. The significance, let it be repeated, is that, whatever exalted beings may surround the heavenly throne, the glorified Jesus is above, and beyond, them all. The name accorded to Him, in virtue of His humiliation, bespeaks a

dignity which far transcends the most exalted ranks of the celestial host, and tells, moreover, that He is supreme in all the worlds which constitute the universe of God. If then this position which He now fills is expressive of God's delight in the once humbled Christ, will it not also awaken the delight of God's people, as they contemplate Him in that state and glory? It is in the grace of our God we are called to share in His own delight in His beloved Son; and the enjoyment of this, however feeble its measure, is really the foretaste – the commencement – of heavenly joys, which, filling the heart, even while treading the sands of the wilderness, can only find an outlet through the channel of worship and song.

From the book of the same title by Edward Dennett (1831-1914)

The Temptation of the Two Adams

“The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a pleasure for the eyes, and the tree was desired to give intelligence” (Genesis 3:6).

“All that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

Adam, the first man, disobeyed God and brought sin upon all men after him. Jesus, called “the last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45-47), perfectly obedient to God, began again the history of man. He became, by His death and resurrection, the One who delivers from the power of sin.

Both were tempted by Satan. But:

- Adam was in paradise, a place of delights. Jesus was tempted in a desert.
- Adam had food in abundance: “every tree that is ... good for food” (Genesis 2:9). Jesus was tempted after having fasted for forty days (Luke 4:2).

- Adam lived among docile animals. Jesus was with the wild beasts (Mark 1:13).

Satan tempted both of them in seeking to make them doubt the word of God and His goodness (Genesis 3:1-5; Luke 4:1-13). He used the “lust of the flesh” (fruit good to eat; changing stones into bread), “the lust of the eyes” (a pleasure for the eyes; possession of the kingdoms), “the pride of life” (the desire to become intelligent; to show Himself invincible).

Adam doubted God as to what He had said and succumbed to temptation. Jesus remained faithful, because of His intrinsic perfection, in a complete confidence in God. He opposed Satan with Bible texts – “it is written” – before which Satan had to bow (Luke 4:13). Before commencing His public service, Jesus had thus demonstrated that He was perfect, “qualified” to lead us out of the way which the first Adam had taken, and us with him.

Translated from “La Bonne Semence; message for 10th March, 2021.

Extracts from the Letters of Lady Powerscourt (1800-36)

Promises

... but how kind of Him to afflict us to *try our faith*; we talk of promises, but how different to make use of them! How difficult to take Him at His word without an evidence; how merciful to be so let into the secrets of His love, that He does not suffer us to walk smoothly down the streams of time, but sends large and rough billows to dash us on the promises; sweetens our bitterness, and embitters our sweets. This should be the Christian’s elevation – *to walk on the promises*. The more we are forced to prove them, the more highly favoured, because our ideas of things are not according to this world. It

is a great thing really to trust Him *through thick and thin*; to believe our sorrow is our joy, our misery our happiness. He deprives us of provision for earthly affection (*this letter referred to a lady left a widow in India – Ed.*), that these affections, going in search of their object, may take a grand grasp of Him, the archetype, the fountain of every excellency; all love in comparison is but the rivulet to the ocean, one limited to the nutshell of a human heart; the other immense, as the infinite mind of Jehovah. Let us then use our privilege, dear friend, and launch our souls upon the promises of Him who means what He says. (1828)

Quoted in another letter of 1828:

“Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to His feet,
Lay me low, and keep me there.”

True Riches

I think there is much spoken of in Scripture of God’s riches, as if too much *for God* to contain within Himself; comprised in Him it cannot be witnessed, therefore has He set *us* apart, has “before ordained us,” from the beginning chosen us, “prepared us,” “even us,” as vessels of mercy, in which to show forth the riches of His grace, in the riches of His mercy now, and the riches of His glory hereafter. Sweet thought! Our being now vessels of mercy (because of the great love wherewith He loved us) evidences that He has set us apart, to display in us the riches of His glory! (1828)

The Coming of the Lord

My Dear Friend, Tell ----- with my love, that the people meditate a vain thing, and the rulers take counsel against the Lord (*Psalms 2*); for he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, and shall deride them, by setting His King upon His holy hill of

Zion. Nothing shall retard His approach and glory. Each event shall as surely hasten it, as days, and months, and years bring on eternity. (1829)

Christ our Guide

Alas! How slow we are in learning not to turn *from*, but to turn *to* Jesus in our extremities, as our hiding-place and guide. Satan's constant aim, I think, seems to be, to lead *from* the simplicity which is in Christ – Christ's to restore us *to* it, and to lead us in it. I believe we are only wise in giving ourselves up to His guidance, and in following *whithersoever* He leads. Followers of a crucified One, we must expect a thorny, though a trodden, path; but He will not leave till He has satisfied, yea *satisfied*, the hungry soul with goodness (*see Psalm 107:9*). His glory is bound up in us! *His name is in us!* (1830)

Trial and Affliction

How unspeakable and incomprehensible must be the weight of glory, when the Holy Spirit can call these light afflictions in comparison, not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. And does it not also teach us to sympathize with our dear Lord, in His sufferings, when we cannot even taste His bitter cup ... He could say, "I looked for some to have pity on Me, but there was none; for comforters, but found none" (*Psalm 69:20*). Alas! I believe there is even in the mind of the believer, something which disposes him to turn to things of time and sense, though his judgment is convinced of their insufficiency to make him happy. One thing after another must be cut off, which binds us to earth, and it may be, the strings of our heart [*are*] almost broken by the operation, but the Lord is determined to separate us from sin. I do believe He has purchased these afflictions for us, as well as every thing else...

Peace unspeakable can be enjoyed in the midst of tribulation; the soul is able to realise the joy hereafter, and pant for it, as at no other time; and he is made more acquainted with himself and his Saviour, which I believe is the only real happiness after all.

“He breaks our schemes of earthly joy
That we may seek our all in Him.”

(date uncertain)

Experience

That is very superficial which is only learned by rote; we must come into the school of experience, in order to learn by heart. Alas! What idolatry, what mockery, what mummery around me. May He quickly come, and set all things in order, for this confusion is the earnest of hell! (1830)

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GOD’S OBJECT, CHRIST, MUST BE OURS.

WHAT God intends to do at and after Christ’s appearing is perhaps more in the minds of many than what He is doing now in this the period of Christ’s absence, and the Spirit’s presence. The world has its plans and purposes, and also a corrupt Christian profession, which will, we know, all come to an abrupt termination and sudden destruction. This is a serious consideration for every one of us who seeks to walk with God, and work with Him. God doubtless intends that souls shall believe and be saved, that they shall have within an assurance of an indisputable title to heaven, and the bright hope of the Lord’s return to take us all together to be with Him and like Him for ever. Thank God, many are, by His grace, quite clear on all these things; yet these, and many other important things, are more to be regarded, I think, as means to an end, rather than the end itself.

Why is this world allowed to go on at all? Is such a state of things any pleasure to God? Why is a corrupted profession allowed to assert itself for so long a time with such impudent, nay, blasphemous, perversion of Scripture? There is just one paramount answer: God the Father has an Object, His beloved Son, in glorified Manhood, who is *all* His delight. Let us weigh these words well, and consider their import, and what they involve in regard to each and all. Think of the seriousness of refusing, rejecting, or neglecting a Person who is the Father's whole delight. How can we expect to prosper spiritually, we who have received such an One, when we allow persons or things, however good and right in their place, to be a definite object? The Father has one Object, His beloved Son, His whole delight. The Holy Ghost in us has one Object, the Son, whom He has come to glorify, and take of His things and exhibit them to our souls. So that it is clear that we cannot really please God the Father, or avoid grieving the Spirit, unless their Object is sincerely ours. All temptation tests us at this point. All circumstances are overruled and ordered of God to help us on this line. All the inward working of God is to this end, for God intends that His Object shall be universally *the* Object, and that all shall be subordinate to Him. Herein is the key of all the upset in the world, all the contention amongst Christians, all the disagreement and lack of power in our meetings, and in our testimony. God's Object is superseded in the affections, and neglected in private communion. Matthew 17 is very interesting and instructive in this connection.

(1) The Father's announcement: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: *hear Him.*"

(2) The effect of it on those who heard it: They fell on their faces – all of themselves brought to the ground.

(3) Jesus touched them and raised them by and in His power.

(4) The effect of being *elevated* by and in Him: they saw no one but Jesus alone.

All else, naturally or spiritually, falls into its proper place when the Son has His place. May we all be watchful and prayerful as to this, for “there is need of one” (*Luke 10:42*). And may we all have the anointed eye to see God's ways with us in the light of His blessed purpose. J. Doughty

Extracted from “Goodly Words” Volume III (1925).

GOD IS FAITHFUL

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Here we have another circumstance in which God is faithful; this time concerning temptation, which is probably better taken here as trials or sufferings. This verse therefore is of tremendous encouragement to all of us, particularly in our present crisis, when so clearly it is common to man.

We have to be careful when we come across the word translated “temptation” in the Bible, to distinguish who is initiating it and to what purpose. The root meaning of the Greek word alludes to a piercing, or test, or trial to see if something is genuine. The context needs to be examined carefully to determine whether it is (a) a trial with a good purpose e.g. divinely sent or allowed, (b) a trial intended to lead astray, e.g. of Satan, or (c) a challenge to God by men. I suggest that our verse 13 falls into category (a) as allowed by God, but in verse 9 it is clearly in category (c), by men. Of course, sometimes the trial may represent a combination of these factors, as when God uses the activity of Satan for our discipline.

Following the warning in v. 9 to the believers in Corinth, about tempting God, Paul goes on in vv. 11-12 to warn them not to

think that they could stand (firm in the faith, resisting temptations) in their own strength. These verses are intended as a warning to us too. A true believer is marked by confidence in God, and the simpler and more absolute that confidence is the better; correspondingly it is true that he or she is marked by no confidence in themselves, and the deeper this goes with each one of us the better. It is quite different when we have confidence that “God is able to make us stand” (Romans 14:4).

Here now in v.13, in a very lovely way, Paul goes on to point to the God who is faithful – a God not only able to make us stand, but who keeps a watchful eye upon us in His faithfulness, not permitting us to be tempted beyond a certain limit. What is absolutely certain, amidst all of the anxiety, suffering and questioning of this present crisis, is that God is faithful.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:” Whatever Paul is referring to we don’t specifically know; perhaps he is implying the general trials and sufferings of fallen humanity. Clearly in this there is no distinction between believers or unbelievers; so these trials were not peculiar to the believers at Corinth and neither to us today. The expression rendered “hath ... taken you” perhaps isn’t easy to translate accurately into English; it conveys the thought that something has happened and the effects of it are still present i.e. still troubling them.

“Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” ... a wonderful general promise, applicable to all Christians down the ages. This says to me that ultimately everything is under God’s control and that He knows for each of us individually what we can cope with and acts accordingly; what a merciful and gracious God we have!

The assurance Paul is giving is that the believers in Corinth should not think that such trials would completely overwhelm them, and nor should we when they arise. They are allowed by God, but

no further than he permits – which reminds me of what Job experienced. Each one of us has our own experience of these things and the burden of them can make us feel that our resources to cope have run out. I recall a desperate time like that, but someone pointed me to Paul’s words about his own sufferings and these were a lifeline to me (2 Cor. 4:6): “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;” Based on v.8 onwards, I then knew that that God would make a way through and praise His name, He did.

God makes a way of way of escape. What divine grace, mercy and power there is in all of this! We might, from these words, expect some way by which we may escape the temptation and trials altogether. The truth is that God always sees to it “that ye may be able to bear it.” He knows how much each one of us individually can bear, whether physically, mentally or spiritually. He knows our backgrounds, our inward fears and weaknesses and will not allow us to be destroyed by circumstances but provides every help and aid that “ye may be able to bear it.”

The faithfulness of God is our only source of security; and it is completely sufficient for every temptation. If we relied only on our own resources, we would be tripped up and fall in our Christian testimony. If we depend on the faithfulness of God, we will be secure. To my mind the sense of it is: not that God would keep us without any effort of our own; not that He would secure us if we succumbed to temptation; - but that if we use the proper means, if we resist temptation, seek His help, and depend on His promises, then He is faithful in not allowing the suffering to go beyond a

certain point. In His mercy and goodness, He will not let believers experience anything for which he has not prepared them.

The assurance to each one of us, whatever we may be going through, is that He has entire control of everything. He will adapt all trials to our strength, and will enable us to bear all that He allows. Temptation and trials may be like a long dark tunnel, but God is faithful; even when we don't feel we have that confidence at the time, there is always visible, however weak in our perception, the light of Day at the end – the light of the return of our Saviour. 2 Peter 1:19: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”

May these thoughts be an encouragement and blessing.

Edwin Rogers, 2020.

MARRIAGE

Relationships form the very essence of life. First and foremost is our relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself said to His Father, “This is the eternal life, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Indeed, the Bible has much to say to us about the relationships into which, through God's great grace, we are brought with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and about the privileges and responsibilities which flow from these relationships.

But there are also earthly relationships which are sanctioned by God and the Bible tells us how He desires us to fulfil these. We may be assured that what He enjoins upon us is not only for His glory but also for our blessing – God's way is always best!

From the beginning.

When the Lord Jesus spoke about marriage He reverted to what was “from the beginning” (Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6). As, therefore, we consider what the Holy Scriptures tell us on the subject, let us begin in the first chapter of the Bible.

In Genesis 1:27 we read that “God created man in His [own] image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” The Lord Jesus cited the latter words in His teaching (see the Bible passages just mentioned) and from them we learn that God distinguished between man and woman. The strong trend in the world today to minimise this distinction is clearly opposed to the divine intention. Man and woman were created to *complement*, not *duplicate*, one another, as we see in the account of the formation of woman in Genesis 2:18-25. Here we learn that the woman was intended as a helpmate, or counterpart, for the man. No doubt the apostle Paul had this account in mind when he wrote, “Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man” (1 Corinthians 11:9).

But God had *great* thoughts in mind in the creation of man and woman: He was looking on to the formation of the church, or assembly, which was to be the bride of Christ, His own dear Son. Paul lifts the concept of marriage when he writes, quoting Genesis 2:24, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31,32). In our marriages, therefore, we should keep before us the relationship between Christ and His assembly. This pattern has indeed been set before brides and bridegrooms through past centuries in the form of service provided in The Book of Common Prayer, which describes marriage as “an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man’s innocency, signifying unto us the

mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church.” How much do we husbands and wives keep this high and holy pattern before us in our marriages?

We may refer to Ephesians again later in this article but reverting to Genesis, and thinking now of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, it seems that Adam, in concurring in his wife’s decision as to eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6), failed to maintain the headship that belonged to his position. Satan clearly knew what he was doing when he made the woman, “the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7), the object of his wiles. One consequence of Eve submitting to his enticement is seen in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, where he writes, “I do not suffer a woman to teach, nor to usurp (*or ‘exercise’*) authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in transgression” (ch. 2, vv. 12-14). (This biblical teaching is being blatantly disregarded today in much of Christendom, which is following the world in its whittling away the God-designed difference between male and female.) Adam’s sin was of outright disobedience (Romans 5:19). Following the fall of man, God told Eve, “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16).

Entering into marriage.

Coming now to the entrance into marriage, Paul had to warn the Corinthian believers not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). In the first epistle (ch. 6) he points out the inconsistency of a believer, who is “joined to the Lord,” joining his or her body to that of an unbeliever. The Christian’s body (together with everything else he has) is to be held for the Lord (v. 13). In the next chapter also (v. 39) he writes of marrying “in the Lord.” It is noteworthy that he does not say ‘in Christ,’ or ‘in Jesus,’ but “in the Lord,” this title expressing

His authority. It is clear, therefore, that the apostle meant that bride and bridegroom should be together in submitting to the will of the Lord in the life that they are now to share. Besides, how can two people with quite different outlooks expect to arrive at common decisions regarding the practical issues of life? Sometimes the Christian, in contemplating marriage with an unbeliever, will proceed in the hope of subsequently converting the other one. God may in His mercy bring this about, but is it right for a Christian to ask God's blessing on a step that is plainly contrary to His revealed will?

The wedding ceremony.

We turn now to the wedding ceremony. Surely those marrying "in the Lord" would wish the Lord Jesus to have the central place in this, even though, depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary to have the legal element in some civic setting. But surely a Christian couple will wish to have the Lord Jesus effectively presented to them on their special day and to receive a message from Him; more than that, to have the whole occasion arranged so as to honour Him.

In this connection, we could pray about the outcome of the consultation recently conducted here in Britain by the Law Commission on regulations governing wedding ceremonies. This invited comment on a range of suggested relaxations so that, for example, prescribed words could be done away with and couples would be able to marry saying any words they choose – or none at all – as long as they express consent "whether orally or otherwise." Then again, marriages could be allowed to take place anywhere. The overall effect of such proposals would be to undermine the seriousness of the step being taken and of the commitment involved.

A serious, continuing commitment.

Moving on to the continuance of the marriage, the writer to

the Hebrew Christians says, “Let marriage be held every way in honour, and the bed be undefiled; but adulterers and fornicators will God judge” (ch. 13, v. 4 – Darby Translation). In 1 Corinthians 7:4 Paul tells us that husbands and wives should recognise the rights which each has over the body of the other.

Marriage is indeed an honourable institution and has been so regarded even among non-Christian people. In his book “The Early Days of Christianity” (published 1885) Dean Farrar says: “The epoch which witnessed the early growth of Christianity (*the first century A.D.*) was an epoch of which the horror and the degradation have rarely been equalled, and perhaps never exceeded, in the annals of mankind. ... Family life among the Romans had once been a sacred thing, and for 520 years divorce had been unknown among them. Under the Empire marriage had come to be regarded with disfavour and disdain. Women, as Seneca says, married in order to be divorced, and were divorced in order to marry; and noble Roman matrons counted the years not by the Consuls but by their discarded or discarding husbands.” Western society today is rapidly moving in a similar direction.

The seriousness of the commitment involved in marriage was emphasised by the Lord Jesus when He was asked about divorce; see again the passages in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. Having reiterated that the husband and wife “are no longer two but one flesh,” He said: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” I am sure that this applies to all marriages, whether between believers or between unbelievers. We are surely dealing here with God as Creator, not necessarily as our Heavenly Father.

Then the Lord went on to declare to His disciples God’s view of divorce: “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.” Adultery is repeatedly throughout the Scriptures deplored as sin;

see, for example, Exodus 20:14; Jeremiah 7:9,10; Matthew 5:27,28,31,32; Mark 7:21; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Hebrews 3:4. The Gospel of Luke is pre-eminently the gospel of God's grace – 'God's grace to men in a Man' as it has sometimes been described – but he too records the Lord's words on divorce in uncompromising terms; see ch. 16, v. 18.

God says "I hate putting away" (Malachi 2:16). The Lord disallowed divorce "except it be for fornication" (Matthew 19:9).

Conduct within marriage.

Let us now look at the Scriptures which instruct us as to conduct within a marriage. The three principal passages in the New Testament are Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 and 1 Peter 3 (instructions for younger women and men are given also in Titus 2). It is remarkable that in all these three passages the wife is addressed before the husband. In the book "The Christian Household" by Edward Dennett, published in 1877, it is observed that "all these exhortations, indeed, commence with those from whom submission is due." This is apparent from a simple reading of the relevant passages: wives are addressed before husbands, children before parents and bondmen before masters.

The idea of subjection is clearly repugnant to many people. Today people are increasingly insisting on their own independency and their own rights, denying the right of anyone to tell them what to do. This will shortly eventuate in the fulfilment of Psalm 2:3: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." What a contrast we see in the Lord Jesus, who, being in the form of God, emptied Himself, and being in the form of a bondman, "humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). What delight the Father had in Him! And after the Lord Jesus Christ has reigned (with His saints) for 1000 years and brought everything into subjection to God's will, "then the Son also Himself shall be placed in subjection

to Him who put all things in subjection to Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). Now God desires to see in the church in the present time the reflection of His own dear Son – what else could be pleasing to Him? Let us see the principle of subjection in this light.

The role of the wife.

So we come to the instructions given to the wife. Both Paul and Peter in the passages already mentioned exhort the wife to submit, or be subject, to the husband. We are told that the words “submit yourselves” in Ephesians 5:22 do not appear in all manuscripts; it is possible that the reading should continue straight on from verse 21. This would give “submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God (*or ‘Christ’*), and wives to your own husbands.” This variance has been used to propose that husband and wife should be subject to one another but this is an impossible construction. In any case, further on we read, “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.” (The words *‘let’* and *‘be’* were inserted in the King James Version, no doubt to improve the reading, but could well be omitted, as in the Darby translation.)

The words “as to the Lord” in verse 22 should not be overlooked (in writing to the Colossians Paul says “as is fitting in the Lord”). All that we do as Christians should be “as to the Lord.” “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). A woman may have an unreasonable and badly behaved husband but she submits to him in obedience to the will of the Lord to whom she belongs. (This does not, of course, sanction compliance in what is contrary to God’s word.) The apostle Peter enlarges on this aspect when he writes “be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they may also be won by the conversation (*or ‘behaviour,’ or ‘manner of life’*) of the wives” (1 Peter 3:1).

In writing to Titus, and addressing the younger women, Paul indicates that the home is the normal sphere of the wife's activity (ch. 2, v.5). In today's circumstances it is often difficult to 'make ends meet' on the income of only one bread-winner so that the wife also has to go out to work for economic reasons; but it is good to keep what is normal in God's sight before us.

Before leaving the role of the wife, it should perhaps be noted that her place of subjection *does* not mean that she is an inferior person; it is a question of the *place* she occupies. Think of this: we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews (ch. 2, v.7) that God made Christ "some little lower than (*or 'inferior to'*) the angels." In verse 9 we read that this was "for the suffering of death." Is Christ less than the angels? Far be the thought! As being Himself God, He created them and in chapter 1 we find that He is exalted far above them. In what sense, therefore, was He made "a little lower" than them? It is that He accepted, for the time, a *place* inferior to them, in order to die. Shall we not praise Him for this? In resurrection, the institution of marriage will no longer apply to us (Luke 20:35) and as with and like Christ there will be no male or female (Galatians 3:28); but in the present time, as the Scriptures plainly show, these distinctions are to be maintained, both in the family and in the assembly.

The role of the husband.

We come now to the role of the husband. In writing both to the Ephesians and to the Colossians Paul enjoins husbands to love their wives. This injunction requires some consideration of what it means to love according to God. Love must not be confused with lust. Lust seeks to gratify itself; love seeks the welfare of its object. True love is not a whimsical thing, depending on one's mood. Many years ago a man occupying high public office said that he could not help falling in love with the wife of a colleague. More recently, a wife who was a professing Christian left her husband, saying that she just didn't love him any more. If I am a true believing Christian, I have been given the Holy Spirit and have the power of self-control

– the last ‘face’ of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23, Darby, RSV, NIV, NKJV and ESV). So the husband is instructed to direct his love towards his wife.

Love is a settled disposition. Just imagine if God’s love were changeable! And we read of the Lord Jesus that He, “having loved His own which were in the world, loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). His love may not always be expressed so freely – when moving in a judicial capacity among the assemblies He is seen “girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle” (Rev. 1:13) – but it is always there.

It is noteworthy that he doesn’t exhort wives to love their husbands; some have suggested that this is because wives naturally find it easy to love, whereas husbands, in pursuit of their activities, may neglect to display love to their wives. (In writing to Titus, however, in reference to younger women, Paul does say that they should “love [*or ‘be attached to’*] their husbands.”)

In the Colossian epistle the apostle adds (ch. 3, v. 19) “and be not bitter against them,” no doubt because he discerned this tendency. Peter’s exhortation to husbands will help here: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). “According to knowledge” includes, I suggest, an understanding that men and women are different and often look at things in different ways. It is important that any friction between husband and wife is soon resolved (“let not the sun go down upon your wrath” – Eph. 4:26), so that our prayers are not hindered.

We have already referred to the exalted pattern set before us in Christ and His assembly and as husbands we may well think that to love our wives “even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered Himself up for it” (Eph. 5:25 – Darby trans.) is too high an objective. But God does not propose to us what is

unattainable. In Old Testament days Israel had a law set before them that was “holy, and just, and good” but they did not have the motivating objective before their hearts that we (believers in the Lord Jesus) have in Christ, neither did they have the inward power that we are given through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

We see in Christ the most tremendous love displayed both in the sacrifice He made to acquire His church and in His present service to her in sanctifying her, “purifying it by the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26). We see a picture of His obtaining His assembly in the merchant man who sought goodly pearls and “when he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:45,46). His present, continuing service was foreshadowed in His washing the feet of His disciples, saying to Peter, “unless I wash thee, thou hast not part with Me” (John 13:8). So husbands should take care of their wives morally and spiritually, as well as in material matters

Conclusion.

Marriage and the family, arranged according to the directions of the God who knows best, are the basic building block of society and we cannot tamper with these institutions without disastrous results. I also used to hear it said that the household is the bulwark of the assembly, which I believe: if the household is disrupted, this will surely have an impact on church life. May we all seek the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the help of the empowering Holy Spirit, to fulfil the exhortation of the apostle Paul: “Do all things without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation; among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” (Philippians 2:14-16 – Darby Trans.).

G.S.B.

The foregoing article has been written in response to the request of a reader.

POETIC PAGES

Rest

MY God, what perfect rest is Thine;
Thy rest is in Thy Son;
'Tis all unspeakable, divine--
Thy rest and mine are one!
Within the circle of Thy love
Joined to His life, I am above;
How sweet with Thee, my God, to share
The joy which is Thy portion there.

O Jesus, Lord, in Thee I rest,
Thou bidst me rest in Thee;
A welcome to Thy loving breast
Is Thy dear thought for me.
The peace which thus I have above
Rests in Thy deep unchanging love;
Then, ah, my soul, but rest the more,
Nor yield to sin nor Satan's power.

God finds, Thou spotless One, in Thee,
Where all perfections dwell,
All that His heart could wish for me,
All, all that tongue could tell.
He finds me ransomed, righteous, fair –
Where all His joys transcendent are –
He finds me perfect, for His praise,
His glory through eternal days.

Oh, strange that I should ever leave
Such place of rest in Thee,
That I should e'er Thy Spirit grieve,
Or from Thy presence flee.
To turn to creature joys for rest
Is but to wander from Thy breast;

Yielding to sin's enticing snare
But robs my sweet abidance there.

Oh, keep me then, most blessed Lord,
Abiding in Thee still!
In deep communion through Thy word,
Thy life in me fulfil,
Dark shadows here are all around;
I'm only safe as in Thee found ;
Soon, and for ever on Thy breast,
Shall be my sweet, eternal rest.

Lines written by J.B. Stoney about 1865.

-- o O o --

The Refiner's Fire

He sat by a furnace of sevenfold heat,
As He watched by the precious ore;
And closer He bent, with a searching gaze,
As He heated it more and more.

He knew He had ore that could stand the test;
And He wanted the finest of gold –
To mould as a crown for the king to wear,
Set with gems of a price untold.

So He laid our gold in the burning fire,
Though we fain would have said Him nay;
And He watched the dross that we had not seen,
As it melted and passed away.

And the gold grew brighter, and yet more bright;
But our eyes were so dim with tears,
We saw but the fire – not the Master's hand,
And questioned with anxious fears.

Yet our gold shone out with a richer glow,
As it mirrored a form above
That bent o'er the fire – though unseen by us
With looks of ineffable love.

Can we think that it pleases His loving heart
To cause us a moment's pain?
Ah! no, but He saw through the present loss
The bliss of eternal gain.

So He waited there with a watchful eye,
With a love that is strong and sure;
And His gold did not suffer a whit more heat
Than was needed to make it pure.

Author unknown

“Until He Come”

Ezekiel 21:26

REMOVE the diadem, take off the crown,
Exalt the humble and cast down the vain!
Till He appear, whose right it is to reign,
And every hostile power be stricken down
When He shall come.

Luke 22:69

He came, whose right it was. O fatal hour!
His own, to whom He came, would not receive;
The world, though made by Him, would not believe!
The Son of man, at the right hand of power,
Again must come.

1 Corinthians 11:25, 26

But till He come, there runs a golden line
Throughout the centuries. A supper spread,
His name announced, who lay among the dead,
By sacred symbol given – bread and wine –
Until He come.

Revelation 22:20

“Yea, I come quickly! ” ’Tis the Bridegroom’s voice,
To which the bride responds with her “Amen!”
Five who were wise, among the virgins ten,
With trimmèd lamps and glowing hearts rejoice:
Lord Jesus, come!

E.L. Bevir (1847-1822)

-- o O o --

Eternal One by man mistreated,
In our sin and pride, conceited,
“Crucify Him!” we entreated.
Obedient, suffering, Son of God.

Offering never to be repeated,
On Him the wrath of God was meted
Redemption’s work is now completed.
Perfect, saving, Son of God.

Death, the grave now lie defeated,
Our Great High Priest in heaven seated,
By His voice we’ll soon be greeted.
Glorious, coming, Son of God.

Iain Jamieson, January 2021.

NOTE

The Editor trusts that the selection and composition of material for this magazine has been undertaken with the Lord's guidance and that the contents are of moral and spiritual value and appropriate to present needs. The only infallible statement of truth, however, is found in the Holy Bible and the reader is, therefore, urged to follow the practice of the Bereans, who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The Editor is always happy to receive comments and inquiries, and to consider suggested articles for inclusion in future issues.